

Children of the Enemy or the Future of Socialism? Being a Child of an American Soldier in Socialist Czechoslovakia

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Deti nepriateľa alebo budúcnosť socializmu? Čo to znamenalo byť dieťaťom
amerického vojaka v socialistickej Československu?

Abstract: After the US Army liberated Czechoslovakia and consequently left the country at the end of 1945, local women started to give birth to children fathered by American soldiers. As a result of their multifaceted origin these children had to face various challenges in post-war Czechoslovakia. Not only did the perception of their fathers change from liberators to enemies of socialism. Being illegitimate, children of US soldiers also challenged traditional social values. In the case of mixed-race children, their different physical characteristics (e. g. skin color) could make them targets to manifestations of racism in Czechoslovak society. Based on an analysis of available archival sources, this study asks whether there was a specific state policy towards children of American soldiers. Furthermore, with the help of oral history interviews the study also examines the impact the various aspects of these children's origin had on their everyday life.

Keywords: children born of war; socialism; illegitimacy; racism; liberation of Czechoslovakia; US Army

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Introduction

When in spring 1945 the US Army entered Western and South-Western Bohemia they were greeted as liberators from Nazi occupation [*Fischer – Kodet 2013: 141*]. However, the perception of the US military presence on the territory of Czechoslovakia changed throughout the post-war years [*Volf 2018: 242–259*].¹ The cause in this shift in the interpretation of historical events was the Communist party of Czechoslovakia's (KSČ) assumption of power in February 1948. In order to consolidate power in the country and justify its own actions, political, social and economic changes were followed by alterations in the narratives of the past and the introduction of images of the enemy [*Volf 2018: 242–243*]. Moreover, the negative portrayals of the US and others supposedly threatening Czechoslovakia as well as socialism served the communist party to legitimize their own system of values [*Palivodová 2012: 39–53; Nečasová 2020: 11*]. In comparison to other images of the enemy in socialist Czechoslovakia such as those of the clergy or bourgeoisie, the hostile view of the US was most present in official public discourse [*Nečasová 2020: 161*]. As the main enemy of socialism, the negative image of the US was predominantly based on the country's contrast to the ideal of a socialist society. Concrete accusations included

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¹ For the image and perception of the US on the official level in socialist Czechoslovakia see also Volf 2017.

that of nationalism, racism, the exploitation of society as well as imperialism prevailing over democracy and personal freedom [Nečasová 2020: 233–234]. As a consequence, the US was no longer portrayed as liberators. Instead, their actions were characterized as anywhere between opportunistic and hostile towards Czechoslovakia.² Even though the US was, in fact, an external enemy of socialism, it became closely intertwined with the notion of an internal foe [Nečasová 2020: 161–162]. An inseparable part of the image of the enemy in state socialism is its counterpart, the “new socialist man” [Nečasová 2018: 31, 72–73; Nečasová 2020: 11]. This officially propagated ideal was meant to help individuals find their place within society, give them the feeling of being part of a bigger community and promise a brighter future [Nečasová 2018: 231]. Because of the US and other foes of state socialism, however, the purported bright future as well as the “new socialist people” themselves were in constant danger [Nečasová 2020: 11]. Although the images of the enemy were not firmly defined and also changed over time, they always served the communist party to create a clear distinction between “us” belonging to the socialist society and “them” fighting to overthrow it [Nečasová 2020: 12–13]. To protect the “us”, people perceived as enemies were persecuted, discriminated against and marginalized [Pažout – Portmann 2018].

When it comes to the stance of the US army liberating Czechoslovakia in 1945, they did not view the local population as enemies, as was the case in Germany or Austria [Fritz 2015]. This meant that private contacts between soldiers and local women were not prohibited. American soldiers organized dances, where the presence of local women was so desired that they were for instance even invited to travel to Austria to join a dance party in Linz, where the contact between US soldiers and local women was prohibited at the time [Peleška 2013].³ Such contacts could form the basis for intimate relationships and marriages.⁴ Thus, several months after the departure of the American troops from Czechoslovakia in November 1945, Czechoslovak women were giving birth to their children. As neither official nor unofficial statistics exist, it is impossible to determine the number of children fathered by US soldiers in post-war Czechoslovakia.⁵ Based on the available sources an educated estimate lies somewhere in the hundreds.⁶

² Following this logic, the aim of the US in 1945 was to make Czechoslovakia its dependent colony. Continuing the same rhetoric, American soldiers were said to have refused to help the Soviet army liberate Prague and instead intentionally caused destruction [Nečasová 2018: 194–195; Nečasová 2020: 163–165].

³ Additionally, e. g. the newspaper *Cue Em* published in Pilsen by the US army offered its reader a short Czech-English dictionary with phrases like “How about swimming with me this Sunday?” or “Do you mind if I keep you company?” See Conversation for two, *Cue Em*, 23 July 1945, p. 2.

⁴ Cf. Seznam žen provdaných za americké příslušníky, 3 September 1946, fond (f.) Národní výbor města Plzně, Archiv města Plzně. Of course, not all of the relationships between US soldiers and Czech women were of romantic nature. The author of this study came across only one reported case of a Czech woman raped by an American soldier. This by no means signifies that it was the only such case, but it suggests that it was not a common phenomenon on the Czechoslovak territory liberated by the US army. Cf. the case of Jana S., karton (k.) 153, USA spisy, válečné škody, f. Národní výbor města Plzně, AmP. On sexual violence committed by the US soldiers during and after the Second World War in Europe see e. g. Gries – Satjukow 2015; Roberts 2013.

⁵ In 1946 and 1947 the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare asked local offices of youth welfare for a list of “illegitimate children of members of the allied armies” from their districts. However, neither the final list nor the responses of the local youth welfare institutions could be localized in the records of the ministry and various district youth welfare branches. Cf. Hlášení nemanž. dětí příslušníků spojeneckých armád and Soudní nemanželských dětí příslušníků spojených [sic!] armád, 7 October 1947, k. 24, inventární číslo (i. č.) 218, f. Česká zemská péče o mládež Brno (G110), Moravský zemský archiv (MZA).

⁶ According to the annual statistics of the Society for International Legal Protection of Youth in Czechoslovakia in Brno, which was the contact point for mothers trying to find the fathers of their children abroad and

Even though these children were born as children of liberators, their fathers' country of origin soon became the main enemy of socialist Czechoslovakia. At the same time, however, as children they presented a valuable asset to state authorities. After the KSČ assumed power in Czechoslovakia the socialist regime positioned itself in the tradition of modern nation states perceiving children as their symbolic capital [Korhel 2018].⁷ Thereby, children in general were perceived as a "national treasure".⁸ In the eyes of the KSČ children represented a new generation that was not affected by capitalism and would present the basis for power legitimization in the future [Knapík – Franc et al. 2018: 37–38]. As such they were to be brought up as "new socialist people" [Knapík – Franc et al. 2018: 37–38].⁹ Therefore, while the children of US soldiers had a direct connection the enemy of Czechoslovakia and state socialism as such, as children they also belonged a generation that would be brought up as the future of the new socialist society. Moreover, being born of a relationship with a US soldier did not only mean having a connection to the US or being of transnational origin. The origin of these children also had other aspects such as illegitimacy and race.

The offspring of US soldiers and women from the countries they liberated can be classified as "children born of war" (CBOW), a research area established at the beginning of the 2000s.¹⁰ Enhancing the understanding of CBOW and the challenges they experienced in the past this field of research aims at contributing to normative discussions and policies helping to (re)integrate CBOW into post-conflict societies [Mochmann 2017a: 340–341].¹¹ The different groups of CBOW are often perceived by states and/or society as "children of the enemy" because of their link to foreign and often also enemy soldiers in (post-) conflict scenarios [Lee 2017: 1–20; Mochmann 2017b]. Their association with a perceived enemy puts them at risk of having adverse experiences in different contexts of their lives, be it their family, their community or society at large.¹² However, research on CBOW in Eastern and Central Eastern Europe and in socialist countries in general is relatively scarce [Heidenreich 2017].¹³

Against this background the current study aims to examine what it meant for children in a state socialist country to be a child of an American soldier. The concept of CBOW

potentially getting them to pay alimonies, in the years between 1946 and 1949, the Society dealt with 90 cases regarding the USA. These numbers provide an incomplete picture as they do not include such women who did not seek to contact their children's fathers. Also, this kind of "investigation" was possible only if at least the father's name was known. For various reasons not all women confessed to having a child with a soldier of a foreign army. Therefore, the estimated number of these children is most certainly higher. Cf. Výroční zpráva za rok 1946, 1947, 1948 a 1949, k. 1. unprocessed inventory, f. Spolek pro mezinárodní právní ochranu mládeže v ČSR, MZA.

⁷ For children as symbolic capital in general see Winkler 2017: 102–108.

⁸ *Protokol IX. rádného sjezdu komunistické strany Československa: v Praze 25.–29. května 1949*. Praha: Ústřední výbor KSČ, 1949, p. 323.

⁹ On the concept of the "new socialist man" in Czechoslovakia see Nečasová 2018.

¹⁰ The definition of CBOW refers to a group of children born as a result of armed conflicts (usually) between local women and foreign soldiers. In the course of the last decade the definition of the category of CBOW was refined and adapted to the ongoing changes of warfare [Mochmann 2017a: 321, 324–325; Mochmann 2017b].

¹¹ See also CHIBOW Research Network (online). Available at: <<https://www.chibow.org>>.

¹² In post-conflict societies violations against their rights are common, as is their exposure to stigmatisation, discrimination, isolation as well as different forms of physical violence and psychological abuse [Lee 2017: 21–50; Mochmann 2017a: 337–339; Mochmann 2017b].

¹³ Some exceptions here are e. g. works of Barbara Stelzl-Marx [Stelzl-Marx 2017] and Maren Röger [Röger 2015]. Additionally, research is currently being conducted on CBOW in post-WWII Poland and the Soviet Union (focusing on Latvia and Lithuania) in the context of the CHIBOW Research Network.

together with the strongly negative portrayal of the US and therefore the fathers of these children in socialist Czechoslovakia can raise expectations of a rather negative perception of children fathered by US soldiers. Analyzing archival material from the Czechoslovak government as well as local authorities¹⁴ this study asks whether the Czechoslovak state followed a specific policy aimed at dealing with these children. Did their connection to the US have an impact on the way in which they were perceived and treated by state authorities? Moreover, with help of oral history interviews¹⁵ the lived experiences of children fathered by US soldiers will be examined. This not only allows for a differentiated analysis of the significance of various aspects of their origin such as illegitimacy or race,¹⁶ but also sheds light on the role of the social environment in their everyday lives. Finally, analyzing the treatment of children of American soldiers in socialist Czechoslovakia as well as their life stories allows to explore the perception of children in general as future citizens in state socialism.

As this study focuses on children born in the direct aftermath of the Second World War and their childhood, the examined timeframe is predominantly limited to the 1950s. Official sources regarding children of American soldiers, and generally regarding CBOW, in Czechoslovakia are rather scarce. This could be an indicator either of a problematic transmission of sources, or of the “ordinariness” of this particular group of children in the eyes of state authorities. In any case, it increases the importance of oral history interviews for the purpose of this study. It uses semi-structured interviews conducted by the author of the study. The personal accounts by children of US soldiers used as sources in the current article were created long after the events, when the authors were adults. While some doubts have been raised as for the authenticity of the “voice of children” collected from the memories of adults,¹⁷ studies working with oral testimonies about long-ago childhoods have been quite successful [*Michlic 2011: 484–499; Röger – Venken 2015: 199–220; Wolf 2007: 26*]. Nevertheless, dealing with this type of source, discretion is advised. It needs to be taken into consideration that adults use a different language than children when describing the same situations or experiences [*Röger – Venken 2015: 204; Wolf 2007: 26*]. Also, the process of remembering means a continual transformation and interpretation of experiences based on the author’s changing knowledge and environment [*Röger – Venken 2015: 204; Stephan 2004*]. The interviewee’s perception of their life stories could further have been affected by the change of political system in 1989 and their assessment of their own position within socialist society.¹⁸ Therefore, every personal account will be critically assessed in the contemporary context and compared with other personal accounts within

¹⁴ As it becomes apparent in the current study, the sources regarding children of American soldiers, but also generally regarding CBOW, in Czechoslovakia are rather scarce. The few documents dealing explicitly with CBOW originate predominantly from the records of local branches of the youth welfare [Okresní péče o mládež].

¹⁵ The author would like to thank Veronika Bednářová for arranging contacts with contemporary witnesses. In accordance with research ethics, in all of the interviews conducted by the author of this study the interviewees signed an informed consent.

¹⁶ In order to stress the differences between some children of American soldiers (born to soldiers of Afro-American, native American or Hispanic origin) and the majority of the Czechoslovak population in physical characteristics such as the skin color, this study intentionally uses race as a category of origin and not ethnicity.

¹⁷ E. g. Ludmilla Jordanova denies the existence of an “authentic voice of children” [*Roberts 2004: 425*].

¹⁸ On post-communist life story narratives in Central Eastern Europe see Mark 2010. For further information on Oral History and Society in Czechoslovakia after 1989 see e. g. Vaněk 2009: 10–17.

the same group. During the interviews it became clear that the negative experiences reported by the interviewees were not necessarily caused by their origin as children of American soldiers. Factors like e. g. the political persecution of parents¹⁹ need to be taken into consideration when analyzing the life stories of CBOW in the context of a socialist political system. Negative experiences reported by the interviewees that could be clearly linked to their persecution as children of political prisoners or people persecuted as so called “inner enemies” (e. g. members of the bourgeoisie, clergy and the so-called “kulaks”) of the communist party [Nečasová 2020: 11–12, 203–205] were not examined in the current study.

Being aware of the limited number of witness testimonies²⁰ this article should be understood as a case study. It aims to offer an insight into the life experiences of children fathered by American soldiers as well as processes and patterns that accompanied these children’s lives in socialist Czechoslovakia. Analyzing the state’s policy towards children and their experiences at the same time this study also attempts to shed more light on the impact images of the enemy had on individuals and their social environment in the context of socialist Czechoslovakia. Not least, by examining the situation and life experiences of CBOW in post-war Czechoslovakia this study also contributes to the understanding of CBOW in a little explored geographical and political context.

1. Children of American Soldiers as Future “Progressive Citizens”?

After the end of the Second World War the population of the re-established Czechoslovak state became the subject of nationalization²¹ with the aim of creating a nationally homogenized society of solely Czechs and Slovaks. This aim resulted in the forced expulsion of nearly three million German nationals from the country.²² Similarly to other European countries, children became an important part of Czechoslovak society’s post-war reconstruction.²³ As the example of children of mixed Czech-German origin shows, children in early post-war Czechoslovakia were exposed to a nationalization campaign and the question of their origin became crucial.²⁴ However, the plans to increase the population forced Czechoslovak officials to partially give up the ideal of a nationally homogenous

¹⁹ The research on political prisoners in socialist Czechoslovakia shows that political persecution was aimed not only at the regime’s opponents, but was also transmitted to their spouses and children [Halamová 2014: 15–19, 88–89; Kaplan 2005: 107, 113; Nečasová 2018: 231]. In the context of post-war Czechoslovakia, Jana Roubíková-Švehlová [2011] explored the fates of daughters of political prisoners.

²⁰ This study examines personal accounts of eight contemporary witnesses. The group of CBOW in general is considered to be a so-called “hidden population” [Lee 2017: 3]. Due to sensitive aspects of its members’ behavior or difficulty in distinguishing its members from other people it is complicated to locate the target population [Salganik – Heckathorn 2004: 194–195].

²¹ This study uses the term “nationalization” as an umbrella term for political as well as social efforts aiming at strengthening people’s identification with the nation-state [Venken 2014: 223].

²² In the course of the politics of “national cleansing” [národní očista] with the help of a newly established system of courts and tribunals foreign (most of all German) elements were to be removed from civil service positions. At the same time, it also targeted and excluded Czechoslovak citizens who were considered to be traitors or collaborators [Frommer 2005: 2; Spurný 2011: 11–12; Staněk 1991: 59–61; Zahra 2011: 196].

²³ While fighting the high mortality rates of newborns state authorities strived to repatriate as many children of Czech (or Slovak) origin who had been lost during the war as possible [Zahra 2011: 180, 187].

²⁴ In spite of initial disagreements among Czechoslovak state authorities children of mixed Czech-German origin were eventually considered to be Czech nationals and were to be treated as such [Korhel 2021; Zahra 2011: 174–175, 184–188].

society [Zahra 2011: 185–186, 197]. In practice this meant that while e. g. unaccompanied minors of solely German origin had to leave Czechoslovakia, children of nationally mixed Czech–German origin could stay together with their families [Staněk 1991: 171, 322]. Accordingly, children fathered by American soldiers in Czechoslovakia were born to a society where a child's national origin would decide about its fate.

Even though in the first post-war years Czechoslovak authorities did not approach children fathered by US soldiers as a separate group, in official sources these children appear as part of the group referred to as “illegitimate children of members of the allied armies”²⁵ As was the case for all children in early post-war Czechoslovakia, the legal status of children of US soldiers also depended on their nationality and citizenship status. Because most of the children fathered by US soldiers were born out of wedlock, they automatically received the nationality and citizenship of their Czech (or Slovak) mothers.²⁶ If their parents were married, however, the children received the husband's citizenship.²⁷ This was also the case when they were born to Czech (or Slovak) mothers and US soldiers beyond the border of Czechoslovakia, namely on the territory of occupied Germany and Austria.²⁸ Czechoslovakia aimed to repatriate as many Czech (or Slovak) children from occupied Germany as possible [Zahra 2011: 180]. Children born out of wedlock to Czech (or Slovak) mothers were therefore eligible for repatriation to Czechoslovakia. The cases of Kamila G. and Henriette V., who were both born from a relationship of a Czech mother and an American soldier in post-war Germany confirm that the above-mentioned practice was also implemented for children of US soldiers. Both children were later repatriated to Czechoslovakia²⁹ and considered to be Czech (or Slovak) nationals and Czechoslovak citizens.

²⁵ Hlášení nemanž. dětí příslušníků spojeneckých armád, 29 August 1946, k. 2, i. č. 41, signatura (sig.) II A/2, f. Okresní péče o mládež České Budějovice (A26), Státní okresní archiv (SOKA) České Budějovice. As Czechoslovakia was liberated not only by the US army, but also by the Soviet, Romanian and Polish armies, it can be assumed that there were also children born of relationships between the soldiers of other armies and local women. In the eyes of the Czechoslovak authorities all these children were addressed as one group.

²⁶ Cf. Ústavný zákon 236/1920 Sb. ze dne 9. dubna 1920, kterým se doplňují a mění dosavadní ustanovení o nabývání a pozbývání státního občanství a práva domovského v republice Československé, *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého* 46, (1920): 527–530; Ústavný zákon 152/1926 ze dne 1. júla 1926 o udelení štátneho občianstva československého niektorým osobám, *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého* 70, (1926): 639–640; the case of Luděk M., k. 8, sig. II B/1, f. Okresní péče o mládež České Budějovice (A26), SOKA České Budějovice; the case of Věra V., k. 539, i. č. 529, sig. 444, f. Okresní národní výbor Český Krumlov (39), SOKA Český Krumlov; the case of Manuela V., Okresní péče o mládež Kaplice, unprocessed inventory, f. Okresní národní výbor Kaplice (42), SOKA Český Krumlov.

²⁷ Accordingly, children fathered by US soldiers, who married their mother received father's US citizenship. Cf. e. g. the case of Alena Tycová (Alena Tycová, interview by Michal Korhel, 16 July 2019).

²⁸ Cf. Czechoslovak Children, Nationality Status and Repatriation, 21 September 1945, Dětský referát, k. 846, f. Ministerstvo práce a sociální péče – repatriace (1146), Národní archiv (NA) and Pátrání po dětech – otázka národnosti, 16 March 1946, *ibid.* The mothers of these children worked in Germany and Austria during the war as forced laborers or went there with evacuation transfers in the last months of the war. Children of forced laborers are not considered to be CBOW [Mochmann 2017a: 324–325]. Seen as this study examines the situation of children of American soldiers in post-war Czechoslovakia and many children born to Czech (and Slovak) nationals on the territory of the occupied Germany were later repatriated to Czechoslovakia, for the purpose of this study they will be considered as a one group. For an example of a woman of Czech (or Slovak) nationality coming to German with an evacuation transfer see e. g. Zápis o výpovědi sepsaný s Alžbětou M., 7 November 1953, inventární jednotka (i. j.) 466212, sig. TS-466212 MV, Archiv bezpečnostných složek (ABS).

²⁹ Cf. Henriette V., Child Tracing Division, Report of additional information, 1949, 6.3.2.1 / 84581888, ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen and Kamila G., Child Tracing Division, Report of additional information, 1947, 6.3.2.1 / 84234185, ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

Legally, being born to Czech (or Slovak) mothers insured children of US soldiers the same treatment by the authorities as children whose parents both were of Czech (or Slovak) nationality. In practice this meant that they were also eligible for social support from the authorities. As stated in the official directive of the Provincial Commission for Youth Welfare from March 1947, “illegitimate children of members of the allied armies are (...) to be considered as half-orphans after the father and are eligible for orphans’ pensions.”³⁰ Various cases of children fathered by American soldiers from South-Western Bohemia registered by the district youth welfare indicate the implementation of the above directive in practice.³¹

Children fathered by US soldiers need to be considered in different categories, according to their mothers’ citizenship. Children born out of relationships between US soldiers and women with German nationality on the territory of Czechoslovakia were to be considered based on the nationality of their mother and therefore as German nationals.³² As a consequence, Czechoslovak authorities decided that these children would be resettled together with their mothers. Because of their German nationality these children were excluded from any further support by the state.³³ In late 1946, however, the Ministry of Interior gave local authorities more leeway how to treat the CBOW (among them also children fathered by US soldiers) born to German mothers on the territory of Czechoslovakia.³⁴ Even though they had to respect the legal measures against German nationals in Czechoslovakia, the youth welfare authorities were now given the option to treat these children as Czechoslovak citizens as long as they believed the children were being raised “as Czechs”.³⁵ The more generous tone of the directive can be explained by the fact that it was issued at a time when the main phase of the “organized” resettlement of German nationals had already come to an end [*Staněk 1991: 228–229*]. In conclusion, children born to German mothers and American soldiers in Czechoslovakia were connected to the war-time enemy – in this case Germans. The figure of the American father did not affect their negative perception by Czechoslovak authorities.

While in the first post-war years children of US soldiers appear in official correspondence between central and local authorities together with children fathered by other allied soldiers, after the assumption of power by the communist party in 1948 they completely disappear from official sources. A similar development can also be observed in the case of other “children of members of the allied armies” as well as Czech-German children. The new Czechoslovak constitution of May 1948 offers a possible explanation of this

³⁰ Nemanželské děti příslušníků cizích armád, 3 March 1947, k. 2, i. č. 41, sig. II A/2, f. Okresní péče o mládež České Budějovice (A26), SOKA České Budějovice.

³¹ Cf. The case of Luděk M., SOKA České Budějovice, the case of Věra V., SOKA Český Krumlov and the case of Manuela V., SOKA Český Krumlov. The same records usually also include the name of the father – the US soldier. It is, however, not clear, whether the father officially acknowledged the paternity, or whether it was the mother who gave the father’s name to the authorities.

³² Cf. Nemanželské děti německých matek s vojiny spojeneckých armád, 17 July 1946, k. 168, i. č. 552, f. Česká zemská péče o mládež Brno (G110), MZA.

³³ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁴ Cf. Nemanželské děti německých matek a příslušníků spojeneckých armád – státní občanství, 21 December 1946, k. 162, i. č. 524, f. Česká zemská péče o mládež Brno (G110), MZA.

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.* The directive does not specify what it means “to be brought up as a Czech”. Based on the state’s policy towards Czech-German children in post-war Czechoslovakia it can be assumed that it means speaking Czech, attending Czech schools and having a positive attitude towards Czech nation [*Korhel 2018*].

phenomenon. Establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat had led to a change in the official party line. So-called “proletarian internationalism” prevailed over nationalism, which had dominated the country as well as the KSČ in the first post-war years [Rychlík 2018: 19–22; Spurný 2011: 157–158]. Therefore a child’s national origin was not supposed to be an obstacle in its everyday life or a cause of persecution by state authorities. Thus, the new constitution guaranteed children special protection and care regardless of their origin.³⁶

In comparison to the years directly after the Second World War, when state enemies were defined by their nationality, in socialist Czechoslovakia the enemy was now defined on political and ideological grounds [Mrůčka 2015: 194–195; Zavacká 2013: 245]. It does not seem that this change of course altered the way in which Czechoslovak authorities perceived the children fathered by US soldiers. That said, there were no systemic measures aimed at dealing with children fathered by US soldiers. This is particularly noteworthy considering the hardening image of the US as enemy of Czechoslovakia. It was in the 1950s when the negative propaganda towards the US reached its peak [Volf 2018: 252–253, 255].³⁷ The hostile image of the US was based not only on the contrast to socialism [Nečasová 2020: 166–176]. Official propaganda also transferred the negative image of the war-time enemy thus far reserved for Germany to the US [Nečasová 2020: 163; Zavacká 2013: 251–253, 259]. Allegedly, the US had secretly supported Nazi Germany and pursued fascist politics even after the Second World War [Nečasová 2020: 207]. This re-writing of official history took place, for example, in children’s literature [Nečasová 2020: 207]. Thus from a young age children were told about atrocities that were allegedly committed by the US army throughout Europe [Zavacká 2013: 251–252]. Moreover, after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Czechoslovak visual propaganda used the conflict to dehumanize the Americans, for example by depicting them as being violent towards children [Volf 2018: 255]. Although for the communist regime the US were the main enemy, the same authorities did not introduce any systemic measures towards children fathered by American soldiers in Czechoslovakia, nor, in fact, did they pay any particular attention to this group of children.

The only context in which the children of partly American origin attracted the attention of Czechoslovak authorities were their applications for emigration. As the children of US soldiers usually had fathers and other relatives in western “capitalist” countries per their origin, they were directly affected by the strict travel and emigration policy of socialist Czechoslovakia [Rychlík 2007: 46–64].³⁸ In regard to children the correspondence between

³⁶ Cf. Ústavní zákon ze dne 9. května 1948 (online). Parlament České republiky. Poslanecká sněmovna. Available at: <http://www.psp.cz/docs/texts/constitution_1948.html>. As the official document states, further legislation was supposed to provide details on how children’s origin was not supposed to put them at a disadvantage.

³⁷ First articles depicting a negative role of the US army in the Spring and Summer of 1945 appeared in the journal *Tvorba* in 1951. In the same year they were put together into a brochure and published by the *Svoboda* publishing house in edition of 50.000 copies. Further editions appeared with supplements in Slovakian (Pravda, 1951), Russian (Orbis, 1952) and Hungarian (Szikra, 1952). The second enlarged edition used in this study was published in 1953. See also Bartošek, Karel – Pichlík, Karel [1953]. *Američané v západních Čechách v roce 1945*. Praha: Mladá fronta, p. 4.

³⁸ See also the correspondence between the US embassy and the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the early 1950s, e. g. Žádost velvyslanectví USA o výjezdní povolení pro manželky a děti pěti amerických stat. příslušníků, 1954, k. 21, USA, f. Teritoriální odbory – tajné, 1945–1955, Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí (Archiv MZV).

the Czechoslovak Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior shows that this policy followed the principle that “if possible (...) children who can be potentially brought up to become progressive citizens are not supposed to leave Czechoslovakia for capitalist foreign countries.”³⁹ The discussion between the two mentioned ministries followed an intervention of the American embassy in Prague petitioning to grant the wives and children of US citizens their requests to leave Czechoslovakia.⁴⁰ Such interventions took place only if the parents were legally married. As cases of other children of transnational origin and their families have shown, the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs was hesitant to issue departure permits for family members of foreign nationals fearing that they would not return to Czechoslovakia.⁴¹ Of course, children with partly American origin were not the only children who were being prevented from leaving the country. The fact that the communist regime wanted to keep them in Czechoslovakia indicates their equality with their peers in the eyes of state authorities. Moreover, the abovementioned quotation shows the authorities’ belief that these children could be brought up to be a valuable part of socialist society. This points to the importance of a child’s upbringing in the regime’s approach towards children, which was reflected in state policies in 1950s Czechoslovakia [*Knapik – Franc 2018: 67*]. As the example of Czech-German children shows, the authorities would intervene when they considered a child’s upbringing to be endangered [*Korhel 2018: 17–22*]. What was significant for the authorities was not only children’s social or ethical education, but also their patriotic upbringing that would prevent unwanted influence from family members, in this case German [*Korhel 2018: 17–22*]. The communist authorities followed the principle that “children are always supposed to be brought up in a way which would not need to be later corrected”.⁴²

In contrast to other European countries Czechoslovak authorities did not pay any particular attention neither to children of American soldiers nor to CBOW in general after the Second World War. In the early post-war years, when these children were born to mothers of Czech (or Slovak) nationality, they were treated equally to their Czech (or Slovak) peers. However, when their mother was a German national, they were treated the same as the rest of the German speaking population and consequently expelled from Czechoslovakia. The fact of having a US soldier as a biological father did not affect the way in which these children were perceived or treated by the state authorities. After the KSČ assumed power in the country, a child’s origin was not supposed to have any impact on its everyday life. Despite the strongly negative image of the US in socialist Czechoslovakia, children of American soldiers were not exposed to any adverse systemic measures. Just like their peers, children fathered by US soldiers were kept in the country to be brought up to become the “new socialist people”. Therefore, in state socialism children regardless of their national origin were considered to be a new generation brought up under the supervision of the communist party, a generation that would ensure the party’s future position of power.

³⁹ Žádost amerického velvyslanectví o výjezdní povolení manželkám a dětem pěti amerických příslušníků, 14 April 1954, k. 21, USA, f. Teritoriální odbory – tajné, 1945–1955, Archiv MZV.

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴¹ Cf. Kateřina S. – žádost o povolení cesty do Velké Británie, 1955, k. 6, Velká Británie, f. Teritoriální odbory – tajné, 1955–1959, Archiv MZV and Otázka t. zv. britských manželek, 8 July 1955, *ibid.*

⁴² File no. 476, k. 1290, f. Ministerstvo vnitra (dodatky) (1075/6), NA.

2. Anti-American Tenor and Children's Social Environment

As mentioned before, the 1950s was a period of the strongest anti-American propaganda. Nevertheless, the previous section of this study has shown that communist authorities did not perceive children fathered by American soldiers as enemies or a potential threat to Czechoslovak society. However, oral history interviews conducted with ten "children" fathered by US soldiers offer a different perspective, one that includes insights into children's social environment. With the exception of Ivan Štampach, who had been adopted as an infant,⁴³ all the other nine interviewees recall negative experiences from their childhood that can be related to their origin. The current section examines the possible link between these children's negative experiences in their social environment, their partly American heritage and the anti-Americanism propagated by Czechoslovak authorities.

In order to ensure children's positive attitude towards the new regime child-rearing became of major interest to state officials and school education was considered to be an essential part of the system [*Knapík – Franc 2018: 67*]. School as an institution controlled by the state was supposed to teach and propagate the values and ideas set out by the state [*Pinkas 2014: 208*]. As a consequence, at school children of American soldiers, like all other children, were exposed to the communist perspective on the US and its role in the events of 1945.⁴⁴ It was also at school that children fathered by US soldiers report to have experienced adverse treatment because of their partly American origin.⁴⁵ Mrs. Tycová, born in Prague, recalls that her schoolmates called her "American cow".⁴⁶ The case of Mrs. Tycová is exceptional in that her parents were married. Consequently, she held US citizenship while living in Czechoslovakia with her mother after her father returned to the US.⁴⁷ The verbal abuse that she was reportedly exposed to was therefore evidently based on her connection to the US. According to Mrs. Tycová's testimony her classmates as well as her teachers knew about her origin and American citizenship.⁴⁸ Allegedly her classmates reproached her for paying less for the lunch as an American. As Mrs. Tycová further explains, she did have to pay less for the lunch in the school canteen. However, it was not because of her different citizenship, but rather because of her living only with her mother after her parents got divorced.⁴⁹ When compared with other testimonies of children fathered by US soldiers who do not recall similar experiences, it was Mrs. Tycová's US citizenship making her "different". Mrs. Tycová remembers to have experienced other forms of ostracization that she felt were linked to her being "different". In her first years at school she could not become a member of the pioneer movement,⁵⁰ which changed only after one

⁴³ Cf. Ivan Štampach, interview by Michal Korhel, 10 July 2020.

⁴⁴ Cf. e. g. Róber Bešta, interview by Michal Korhel, 21 November 2018, Aleš Kučera, correspondence between Aleš Kučera and Michal Korhel, 6 March and 3 April 2018, Tycová, interview and Manuela Valentová, interview by Michal Korhel, 6 March 2018.

⁴⁵ Two of the interviewees recall negative experiences at school that can be linked to the political persecution of their parents. Cf. Ludvík Kubík, interview by Michal Korhel, 6 July 2020 and Kučera, correspondence.

⁴⁶ Tycová, interview.

⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵⁰ According to the statutes of the pioneer movement, every boy and girl aged between 9 and 14 years could become a member of the movement. A special commission consisting of members of the relevant pioneer

of her teachers intervened.⁵¹ Moreover, Mrs. Tycová suggests in her testimony that after finishing elementary school her educational possibilities were limited.⁵² As Mrs. Tycová remembers that she was one of the best pupils in her class, there is reason to believe this discrimination was a systemic measure used by state authorities for children of political prisoners [*Roubíková-Švehlová 2011: 110–111*].

Jiří Lenc recalls a similar experience when his origin as a child of a US soldier limited his educational possibilities.⁵³ Planning to become a pilot, he applied to a relevant school, where the admission process consisted of various examinations. Mr. Lenc passed the first round. Leaving after the second round on the way back home he overheard a conversation. According to Mr. Lenc a military officer was saying: “Well there was one [applicant] here at the examination, who achieved the seventh best result. However, his father is an American, so he did not get in.” At that moment Mr. Lenc knew it was him. He assumes that it was the local national committee from his home town which informed the school.⁵⁴ As a different example of a child of Czech-German origin indicates, such “assessments” were a common part of the school admission process in socialist Czechoslovakia. The same example, however, also shows that local officials sometimes acted arbitrarily against the regulations established by the authorities in Prague [*Korhel 2021: 222–223*]. Consequently, the limitations of educational possibilities in the testimonies of Mrs. Tycová and Mr. Lenc should not necessarily be understood as systemic measures against children of American soldiers, but rather as a proactive initiative of local authorities affected by anti-American propaganda.

With the exception of Mrs. Tycová and Mr. Lenc there were no other testimonies clearly indicating a link between children’s negative experiences and their partly American origin. Even when these children challenged the official state narrative regarding the liberation of Western and South-Western Bohemia by the US army, they did not suffer any negative consequences. Róbert Bešta, who is the son of an Afro-American soldier, for example, recalls how his teacher, “said that we (in Pilsen) were liberated by the Russian army (...). I could not stand it anymore and I said: ‘And who am I, then?’”⁵⁵ Children of American soldiers in Czechoslovakia questioned the official narrative by their sheer existence – and in the case of Mr. Bešta, whose father was Afro-American, his heritage was undeniable. In other testimonies similar situations are described of a child of partly American origin openly disagreeing with the state supported perspective on the end of the Second World War in Western and South-Western Bohemia.⁵⁶ The teachers’ response to children challenging the official communist narrative varied. In the case of Mr. Bešta, the teacher apologized to him in front of the whole class.⁵⁷ In another case the mother was called to school.⁵⁸ However, none of the interviewees remembered any repercussions from

group assessed membership applications before deciding applications in a public vote. See *Ustanovení Ústředního výboru ČSM o pionýrské organizaci*. Praha: Ústřední výbor ČSM, p. 6.

⁵¹ Cf. Tycová, interview.

⁵² Cf. *ibid.*

⁵³ Cf. Jiří Lenc, interview by Michal Korhel, 17 November 2018.

⁵⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Bešta, interview.

⁵⁶ Cf. Kučera, correspondence and Tycová, interview.

⁵⁷ Cf. Bešta, interview.

⁵⁸ Cf. Tycová, interview.

the side of the school for questioning the official party-line on such an important topic as the liberation of Czechoslovakia.⁵⁹ One interviewee even states that the teacher ignored the official party version and taught them openly about the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the US army.⁶⁰

The re-written version of history was problematic in that there was proof of the actual events. However, in the majority of the examined cases, the anti-American tenor did not show its presumed effects. Only in the case of Mrs. Tycová the verbal abuse clearly referred to the child's partly American origin. This was also the only testimony of a "child" who received American citizenship after her parents got married. In comparison to the majority of other testimonies state authorities also treated her differently by limiting her educational possibilities after elementary school. Therefore, it could be assumed that the official anti-American tenor may have affected only those children fathered by a US soldier who also received their father's citizenship. At the same time, it needs to be stressed that these experiences are almost exclusively related to the ideologized environment of the school in state socialism and it was only a single interview suggesting the link between negative experiences and foreign citizenship. Outside of school, none of the children of American soldiers recalled any adverse experiences in public.⁶¹ One can conclude based on the limited amount of personal accounts this study works with that most of the children of American soldiers were not perceived or treated differently from their peers. However, the one mentioned case of negative experiences at school as a consequence of their American citizenship suggests that in particular contexts such as the school environment or a different citizenship, that adverse experiences could occur, if seldom. Moreover, it shows the necessity of further research based on a bigger sample of personal accounts.

3. Challenging Traditional as Well as Socialist Values

The assumption of power in Czechoslovakia by the communist party meant a major political change for the country. When the new regime started to shape society according to its ideology and concepts⁶² not only the structure of society, but also social values changed [Kaplan 2007: 5, 30]. Socialist society was progressive in that it regarded people as equal regardless of their gender or origin [Lišková 2018: 31], though those who did not fit in with the image of the new socialist society were persecuted relentlessly [Lišková 2018: 63–65]. In the context of family and children the new family law introduced the same rights for both parents and equalized legitimate and illegitimate children [Lišková 2018: 32–33; Wagnerová 2016: 93]. These changes were of great relevance for children of American soldiers, because as mentioned at the beginning of this study the origin of these children also had other aspects such as illegitimacy and race. These could affect children's everyday life and challenge the newly enforced system of values that was supposed to improve their situation.

⁵⁹ Cf. Kučera, correspondence and Tycová, interview.

⁶⁰ Cf. Štampach, interview.

⁶¹ Cf. e. g. Jiří Langmajer (sr.), interview by Michal Korhel, 13 February 2018, Lenc, interview and Tycová, interview.

⁶² In many contexts the political and social development in Czechoslovakia after 1948 can be seen as a continuity of processes that started already in the first post-war years [Spurný 2011: 337–340].

While not remembering any negative experiences related to their origin as a child of a US soldier one of the interviewees recalls being stigmatized, because of being an illegitimate child: “Can you imagine that someone tells you [as a child] that you are inferior? Today when an illegitimate child is born, it is considered to be normal. But before the war and shortly afterwards it was an awful shame.”⁶³ As they add, it were not only peers, but also adults within their community, who treated them this way.⁶⁴ Current research as well as contemporary sources indicate that similarly to other post-war societies in Europe, conceiving a child out of a wedlock in post-war Czechoslovakia challenged existing societal norms [Rákosník – Šustrová 2016: 159–164].⁶⁵ Even though the official perception of illegitimate children had improved since the end of the First World War [Rákosník – Šustrová 2016: 159], after the Second World War they still often met the disapproval of the community and were in fact disadvantaged because of their origin.⁶⁶ In Czechoslovakia there were discussions on governmental level about the equalization of legitimate and illegitimate children since the first post-war years.⁶⁷ As mentioned above, the legal status of children born out of wedlock was improved first in 1949 with a new family law. However, as there is only limited research on the situation of illegitimate children in post-war Czechoslovakia [Rákosník – Šustrová 2016], it is not clear what was the impact of this law on children’s everyday experiences.

Children fathered by US soldiers were mostly born out of wedlock. As the following additional examples show, their illegitimate origin had a strong potential to affect the perception of these children within their families and was often the cause for negative treatment. Manuela Valentová remembers how her grandmother forced her to pray for one hour every morning and evening with the explanation that her mother was “a whore”.⁶⁸ While she was praying, she had to put her hands together and hold them upwards in an uncomfortable position. This experience was so strong for Mrs. Valentová that during the interview she stated she could still feel how her hands had hurt at that time. She further described that while her relationship with her mother was good, that both her and her mother’s with her grandmother was strained. This culminated in physical abuse she suffered as a child at the hands of her grandmother.⁶⁹ Before Mrs. Valentová’s birth, her grandmother together with other relatives had tried to persuade her mother to give the child (Mrs. Valentová) up.⁷⁰ In her interview Mrs. Valentová mentioned that except for her mother, grandfather and an uncle the majority of her relatives did not like her. It is not clear what the background of this collective aversion was: the fact that her father was a US soldier or that she was born out wedlock. As research shows, being born out of wedlock could have a negative impact on a mothers’, but also children’s experiences. In

⁶³ NN, interview by Michal Korhel, 31 October 2021.

⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁵ For contemporary literature see also Pražák, František [1948]. *České dítě*. Praha: Melantrich, p. 16; or Svátek, Jan [1954]. *Komentář k zákonu o právu rodinném*. Praha: Orbis, p. 24.

⁶⁶ Cf. Pražák 1946: 16.

⁶⁷ Cf. Stenoprotokol 13. schůze, 2. října 1946 (online). Parlament České republiky. Poslanecká sněmovna. Available at: <<https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1946uns/stenprot/013schuz/s013004.htm>>; Stenoprotokol 27. schůze, 12. prosince 1946 (online). Parlament České republiky. Poslanecká sněmovna. Available at: <<https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1946uns/stenprot/027schuz/s027028.htm>>.

⁶⁸ Valentová, interview.

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

extreme cases the mother's violation of societal norms through engaging in premarital sexual relations culminated in stigmatization, which could be transferred onto their children [Lee 2017: 85–86; Rákosník – Šustrová 2016: 159–164].

Another interviewee, Jiří Langmajer (senior), experienced a similar situation. In his case, however, his origin additionally affected his relationship with his mother. She, in Mr. Langmajer's own words, "felt he had destroyed her life".⁷¹ As he remembers, other relatives made him feel like he did not belong to the same family. When Mr. Langmajer's mother later got married, his step-father did not accept him.⁷² In the interview Mr. Langmajer expressed sadness about not knowing his biological father and lacking a father figure in his life. He was treated differently from his step-brother and was even called names within his family such as "somebody else's brat".⁷³ He personally attributed this treatment to the supposedly negative perception of the affair his mother had had with his biological father. As they lived in a village, such a behavior was considered public nuisance.⁷⁴ In smaller villages there was less anonymity than in bigger cities such as Pilsen, the center of Western Bohemia. Accordingly, the experiences of illegitimate children born in urban settings can be different as the ones presented above.

The personal accounts of Manuela Valentová, Jiří Langmajer and the anonymous interviewee show that some of the experiences of children of American soldiers go beyond this particular group. The fact of being born out of wedlock exposed them to adverse experiences even within their own families. Although legitimate and illegitimate children were legally equalized in socialist Czechoslovakia, in their everyday lives they still faced negative treatment based on their illegitimate origin.

In 1966 a book called "We had a black classmate" (*Měli jsme ve třídě černouška*) was published in Czechoslovakia.⁷⁵ It tells the story of Pavel and his classmates depicting their joys and troubles at a Czech elementary school. Pavel stands out from his classmates because of his skin color, and is exposed to ostracization and verbal abuse from his peers. They call him "negro"⁷⁶ and tell him that he does not belong because of his being "black"⁷⁷. When Pavel comes home crying, his mother reveals his origin to her son: His father was a US soldier of Afro-American origin who had come to their town as a prisoner of war.⁷⁸ When Pavel returns back to school his classmates realize their misbehavior with the help of a teacher. They become a community, join the "pioneer movement", and go through the typical experiences of children under state socialism together.⁷⁹ The book ends with an appeal: "When you meet (mulattos like Pavel) at work, be friendly to them, help them if they need it, do not humiliate them, trust them and care about them. Our republic is their home, too. (...) And here we are all equal!"⁸⁰ While the book explicitly criticizes the US as

⁷¹ Langmajer (sr.), interview.

⁷² Cf. *ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Cf. Vobrubová, Anna G. [1966]. *Měli jsme ve třídě černouška*. Plzeň: Západočeské nakladatelství.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 16–18.

⁷⁹ Celebrating International Worker's Day or listening to an elderly miner talking about the benefits of his profession. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 52–57.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

being racist, it tries to show that Czechoslovakia is different in this regard, using Pavel's story as confirmation.⁸¹ At the same time, the request with which the book closes hints at the fact that mixed-race children of US soldiers could indeed face negative treatment from their social environment.

While the families knew about the circumstances of these children's conception, in public most of them could not be distinguished from their peers.⁸² There were, however, children of American soldiers whose origin was visible to their environment – soldiers of Afro-American, native American or Hispanic origin. Two of the subjects that were interviewed are not just of nationally mixed, but also mixed-race origin: Róbert Bešta is the son of an Afro-American and Manuela Valentová the daughter of a Mexican US soldier.⁸³ Contemporary official sources from Czechoslovak deny the existence of racism in socialist Czechoslovakia (and in state socialism in general) [Holečková 2013: 169]. In fact racism was a major factor stressed as negative characteristic of the American way of life in comparison to a state socialist society [Nečasová 2020: 171–175]. However, the experiences of exchange students from African and Arabic countries living in Czechoslovakia in the early 1960s indicate the opposite. Official reports also document racially motivated attacks or other negative treatment of these students within Czechoslovak society [Holečková 2013: 167–168; Holečková 2019: 166–170].⁸⁴ In analogy to the situation of foreign students in the context of the Czech part of socialist Czechoslovakia the negative perception of mixed-race children of US soldiers can be related to the ideal of national homogeneity from the early post-war years. The implementation of this ideal caused that everything non-Czech was perceived as suspicious [Holečková 2019: 174].

Even though the situation in socialist Czechoslovakia cannot be compared to the systematic racial discrimination in the US at that time, racism in Czechoslovakia could affect the everyday life of mixed-race children, including children of US soldiers. As the testimonies of Mr. Bešta and Mrs. Valentová indicate, having a different skin color made them both targets to verbal abuse from their peers at school.⁸⁵ They were called names like “half-breed”⁸⁶ or “negro”⁸⁷ that were evidently based on their racial origin. Mr. Bešta states that manifestations of racism accompanied him his whole life.⁸⁸ Their complexion also made their partly different origin visible to the public at large. In his interview Mr. Bešta additionally explains his classmates' antagonistic behavior towards him through the influence their parents had on them. According to him, their parents would have been afraid

⁸¹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 102–103.

⁸² Not all of the children of US soldiers knew about their biological father from early childhood. Rather, some contemporary witnesses learned about their origin only during youth or adulthood. We can assume that others may never have known about their biological fathers. Cf. e. g. Langmajer (sr.), interview, Kubík, interview, Kučera, correspondence and Štampach, interview.

⁸³ Cf. Bešta, interview and Valentová, interview.

⁸⁴ A similar situation can be observed at the same time in the Soviet Union, where the first African students arrived in 1959. On an everyday basis they were subjected to racially motivated maltreatment, some of which can be categorized as hate crimes. In contrast to Czechoslovak officials, Soviet authorities did not deny the existence of racism as such. However, they tried to marginalize it as a rare occurrence and related this kind of criminal behavior to the pre-socialist period [Hessler 2006: 35–39, 62].

⁸⁵ Cf. Bešta, interview and Valentová, interview.

⁸⁶ Valentová, interview.

⁸⁷ Bešta, interview.

⁸⁸ Cf. Bešta, interview.

of potential negative consequences that a friendship between their children and a child of visibly American origin (dark skin color) could entail.⁸⁹ Another interview partner, Jarmila Chromiaková, recalls how her schoolmate, a US child of mixed-race origin, was treated by her peers in Pilsen. Allegedly, she was called “negress” and other children threw stones at her.⁹⁰ Interestingly, Mrs. Chromiaková herself was a child of a US soldier as well. However, at that time she did not know about her biological father. This shows that most of the children of American soldiers could stay hidden within Czech post-war society, while mixed-race children did not have that possibility and could face negative treatment from their community. It is not always clear what was the motivation behind the negative treatment of children fathered by US soldiers. E. g. in the case of Mr. Bešta, who was exposed to verbal abuse at school and perceived ostracization in class, it most likely was a combination of racism and socialist anti-Americanism.

Children fathered by US soldiers were not only of nationally mixed origin. They were often born out of wedlock and sometimes from a mixed-race relationship. Both these factors could challenge norms of a traditional society where “otherness” raised suspicion. With the socialist government coming to power, a new system of values was enforced in Czechoslovak society, which was supposed to entail the equal treatment of its members. While the government had control over the legal implementation of these values, traditional ideas of morality often prevailed within Czechoslovak society. Consequently, these children could be marked by social stigma causing further negative experiences within children’s social environment. An illegitimate or mixed-race background was, naturally, not limited to the group of children fathered by US soldiers. Thus the experiences of children fathered by American soldiers offer an insight more generally into the childhood of disadvantaged groups in socialist Czechoslovakia.

Conclusion

When the new political system was introduced in Czechoslovakia by the KSČ in February 1948, the communist party needed to consolidate power in the country and legitimize its actions. In order to do so the KSČ made use of propaganda images of a supposed enemy threatening the country, its people and the whole state socialist system. The most dominant of these hostile images was the one of the US, thus portraying it (and everything linked to it) as the greatest danger for Czechoslovakia. While spreading fear and distrust within Czechoslovak society, state officials at the same time propagated the ideal of the “new socialist man”, promising a better future under the new leadership. The nationalization campaign of the first post-war years aiming at a nationally homogenized society as well as the propagated dichotomy of good and evil in socialist Czechoslovakia strengthened the negative image of the “other”. Children fathered by US soldiers were “different” in a number of aspects resulting from their origin. Being born from relationships between American soldiers liberating Czechoslovakia and local women after the Second World War these children were of nationally mixed origin. In those cases in which the parents

⁸⁹ Cf. Bešta, interview.

⁹⁰ Cf. Jarmila Chromiaková, interview by Michal Korhel, 3 December 2021.

married the child received US citizenship. Otherwise, as illegitimate children, they got their mother's nationality and citizenship. Depending on the race of their biological fathers, children's physical characteristics such as skin color could differ from the ones of their peers. Not least the authorities' perception of their mothers, step-fathers or other relatives could make these children the "other" in their social environment.

In socialist Czechoslovakia and state socialism in general the children were to be brought up as future "progressive citizens" – the "new socialist people". In accordance with the new constitution, this process was not supposed to be affected by children's origin. Correspondingly, state authorities perceived and treated the majority of children fathered by US soldiers in the same way as their peers. The fathers of these children as well as the negative perception of the US had no impact on authorities' stance towards these children. Czechoslovak officials in fact did not even develop any particular policy in dealing with these children. Absent US soldiers as fathers had no impact on the way how their children would be brought up in Czechoslovakia. As the symbolic capital of the country and the communist party at the same time children were a fundament of the future socialist society. The authorities' treatment of various children of US soldiers in different ways shows the authorities' belief in the success of socialist upbringing. Therefore, not children's origin, but their upbringing constitutes a dominant factor affecting childhood in state socialism.

Even though, according to the authorities' stance towards children fathered by American soldiers, the majority of them were not supposed to experience any negative consequences due to their origin, in practice they could be exposed to verbal abuse and ostracization because of various aspects of their origin. The available sources suggest that their perceived link to the US as the main enemy of state socialism surprisingly did not have any negative repercussions on the everyday lives of these children. At the same time, however, there could be context-dependent exceptions such as in the case of children with American citizenship. These could experience negative treatment at school, an ideologized state institution. Therefore, state propaganda and in particular notions of the enemy affected the children's social environment and set the conditions for their maltreatment.

As the sources, in particular the personal accounts of children fathered by US soldiers, further show it was not the link to the "enemy" of Czechoslovakia or state socialism in general that made children of US soldiers probable victims of maltreatment. As some of these children experienced, other aspects of their origin like illegitimacy or race challenged the norms of Czechoslovak society in the 1950s and beyond. Although in theory in a socialist society neither of these two aspects was supposed to cause any negative consequences, for these children illegitimacy as well as race could become a social stigma resulting in abuse and ostracization.

Being a child of an American soldier in socialist Czechoslovakia meant to have multiple aspects of origin that distinguish an individual from the society's majority. Every single aspect of these children's origin presented in this study could lead to adverse experiences in their contemporary context. Not all of these aspects, however, are limited only to children of American soldiers. As such the phenomena described in the current study indicate further research topics regarding the "other" children missing in the official discourse of socialist Czechoslovakia.

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