

Embellyshing Pictures, Gifting Welfare. Mapping Contemporary Pregnancy Photography between Popular and Municipal Uses in Vienna

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English abstract: “Belly pictures” have become part of public and commercial use as well as of domestic visual and material culture. Our combination of ethnographic and historical perspectives locates such photographs between the desire of the women who ordered them to generate beautiful memories of their pregnancy today, and healthcare strategies of the Vienna municipality, which began to materialize welfare for infants as a gift for mothers in the interwar period. We flag out a photo voucher as a link between the realms of reproduction, family life, and citizenship: Belly pictures have continued and renewed the convention of visualizing the bourgeois variant of a happy family since the late 19th century. In the meantime, they literally familiarize the medicalization of pregnancy, which in this local variant encourages to take a belly picture. Such images circulate between individual pleasure, the welfare state’s biopolitical dimensions, and consumerism.

Introduction

Embarking on a research on “Doing kinship with pictures and objects” in Vienna,¹ we came across belly pictures in two different variants: We found them as a commercial service offered by professional photographers, who displayed belly pictures in their shop windows [Fig. 1] and who announce: “In former times, mothers to be wore a maternity dress. Today they present the BABY BUMP proudly ... and demand to get it’s picture taken.” (<http://nelson.at/bildergalerien/kinderfotos/>, accessed 19.01.2020, our translation, emphasis in the original). And we saw them on a voucher presented within a gift by the Vienna municipality for every newborn in town [Figs.

1 Within the 18 months of fieldwork the research team did 30 interviews with photographers, photo-studio clients, call-shop owners and customers as well as with residents of a retirement home, focusing on social, material, and visual practices of doing kinship. This article is based on our research with photographers and clients who had pictures taken of their bellies during pregnancy.



Fig. 1: Shop window of a photographer, Vienna, 8th district, 2019.

2a and 2b]. To investigate this, we drew on the ethnographic principle to “follow the thing” (Marcus 1995, 106–108) and established a twofold route. This journey brought us to quite different destinations. One of them is situated in present times, namely the domestic sphere of mothers who showed us the prints of their bellies during pregnancy, which they had ordered from professional photographers and then stored and viewed at home. The other one is down to the past, namely interwar Red Vienna, when the Social Democratic government between 1919 and 1934 invested massively in social housing and social reforms, whereas among the latter the invention of a layette gift for mothers is still famous today: a parcel, initially containing underwear and clothes for the newborn. Today, too, in revised form this parcel is donated as a municipal healthcare gift from the city administration, and it is present in the digital platform vernacular² of pregnant women and mothers in the city.

2 In their case studies on #funeral, Gibbs et al. (2015) used the term “platform vernacular” to characterize the specificity of Instagram, which enables and calls for blending the production, commentary and circulation of pictures by different users and producers on a shared thread. The concept of “platform vernacular” avoids the focus on a single posting and its reading as product of an individual person, but opens a larger view on the issues that surface beyond all these occasional instances. We take up this useful concept to designate the digital habitat and appearance of the diaper backpack in online forums.

The central aim of our Viennese travelogue is to consider how a combination of ethnographic and historical perspectives enriches the investigation of a popular imagery, namely pregnancy photography. To map pregnancy photography this way elucidates the entwined dynamics of a global and in the meantime local popular, visual and material, public and commercial as well as domestic culture of reproduction. Research from a wide range of disciplines and fields has analyzed family and photography as twins of visual culture in the modern era. With the Kodak camera, the Eastman Company met the Fordist economy's demand of mass production by addressing mothers as camera buyers and photographers, thus making "family snapshot [...] part of women's domestic work" (Goc 2014, 27; Rose 2003; Rose 2004) and photography "the family's primary instrument of self-knowledge and representation" (Hirsch 1997, 6). For more than a century, family photography has articulated "real fantasies" (Johnston 1997 on the framework that arose between the Eastman company and photographer Edward Steichen; cf. on this also Hirsch 1997, 48). The commercial, public and popular uses of family photos yielded "the familial gaze" (Hirsch 1997, 51), which recognizes a view as a "family", and therefore "photography as an old reproductive technology" also works out to familiarize the latest reproductive technologies (Bouquet 2001). Family photography became a generic practice of nostalgia (West 2000), it has been used within but also against and beyond bourgeois and colonial limits (Kuhn/McAllister 2008). On the one hand, the material uses of family photography transcend the visual dimension and challenged the reading of photographs as mere "indexical reference" analytically and theoretically (Edwards 2012; Hirsch 1997, 6). On the other hand, the genre has been identified as a popular hub of this truth effect, because different from other artistic means of production, in photography "a piece of reality [underlies] the creation of the record": "In the everyday experience of normal citizens and nuclear families, one should not underestimate the influence of the technical recording of children and childhoods on the emergence of index aesthetics." (Diederichsen 2017, 9–10, our translation) Pregnancy photographs have extended familial expression. Views of religious feasts with the family, trips to the countryside, birthday parties or the school enrolment are now accompanied by belly pictures, shot by professionals or amateurs. Pregnancy photographs thus became a new component of visualizing the family in particular and within everyday photographic practices in general (Tyler 2011, 24; Wexler 2011, 314).

While the research that focuses on the global dynamics of pregnancy imagery has illuminated its intersections with celebrity culture and fashion, other case studies have elucidated how the latest digital uses show varying forms and dynamics, which can relate to national welfare regimes and more local gender orders (Tiidenberg 2015 on Russia, Jeskanen 2014 on



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Fig. 2a: Photo voucher from the municipal layette gift, Vienna, 2019.



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Fig. 2b: Photo voucher from the municipal layette gift, Vienna, 2019.

the US and Finland). Starting with two vouchers for a reduced “belly picture” that Viennese parents-to-be now get within a present from the municipality’s health department, we tracked down the historical as well as the present infrastructure of these pieces. In the following two chapters, we will first demonstrate how a belly picture came to be among the welfare benefits of a metropolitan municipality and how this local gifting practice began in the demographic competition of welfare regimes during the interwar period. Second, we will outline women’s and mothers’ production, use and views of such pictures today. Our conclusion argues that the specificity of this visual gift could only be unpacked by a combination of historical and ethnographic inquiry.

A municipal gift with a history since the 1920s: a belly picture-voucher in the Vienna diaper backpack

Pregnant women resident in Vienna can receive the “diaper backpack” (*Wickelrucksack*) from the MAG ELF (City Council department 11: children – youth – family).³ The history of this municipal gift began in the founding years of the social-democratic welfare regime called “Red Vienna” in the interwar period. A free *Säuglingswäschepaket* (a layette package with diapers and clothes for the infant) was given to mothers for the first time in 1927.⁴ In this year, the reigning Social Democratic Workers’ Party in Vienna faced difficult election campaigns. On the national level, the Christian Social Party since 1923 reigned in a coalition with the Greater German People’s Party. In 1927, the conservative and right-wing parties, among them the Christian Social Party, run against the Social Democratic Workers Party in a single list for the national election as well as for the local/state election in Vienna. Their election campaign heavily attacked the Social Democratic government in Vienna, especially the high taxes with which social housing and social policy has been financed. The Social Democrats countered this with a gift for female voters in their heartland:

About four weeks before the election day, on March 17th 1927, under the title “How Vienna takes care of its littlest citizens. The red box at the puerpera’s bed” (our translation), the social democratic *Arbeiter-Zeitung* on page 8 announced the first such donation for April 4th 1927:

“That day, municipal social workers/nurses will bring the municipal newborn’s outfit at the confinement of the puerperas [...]. As a present of the municipality, each Viennese mother gets for her child an outfit as beautiful as hitherto only well-off mothers were able to prepare with careful selection.”

3 MAG ELF supports families and gives: “shelter to children and youth. At the same time, it is understood as a service agency for families and offers comprehensive consulting.” <http://www.wien.gv.at/menschen/magelf> (our translation.). The information cited is from: MA 11 – Wiener Kinder- und Jugendhilfe (ed.): Wiener Dokumentenmappe 2018 (this Dokumentenmappe is part of the diaper backpack, version 2019).

4 One of these parcels, dated 1927/1930, can be found in the collections of the Wien-Museum (Modesammlung, Inv.-No. M 18.952/1). It seems as there was only one similar invention in the interwar period, namely the Finnish *äitiysavustas* (maternity box or baby box), issued for the first time in 1937/38, in the founding year of Kela, the tax that financed the Finnish public social security agency. Like the Viennese piece, it became famous among parents and even a sort of national symbol for the Finnish welfare regime until today (Patosalmi 2011, 103f; Jeskanen 2014, 52).

The party called the layette package “Vienna’s biggest welfare project ever” (ibid., our translation). Mothers had to apply at the Youth Welfare Office of the municipal district where they lived. This initiated a visit from a female social worker:

“The doctor or the midwife who attended the delivery send the confirmation of birth document to the Youth Welfare office, only few hours later the doorbell rings and the female social worker with the municipality’s gift for the new citizen arrives, carrying the red parcel under her arm.” (Our translation.)

It was made quite explicit that this visit figured somewhere between a handing out of presents and education or control: “ ‘We do not only want to help’, says city councilman Tandler, ‘by this initiative we want to teach the mothers of our children a more efficient infant care.’ ” (Our translation) Consequently, the gift was also labeled “*learning material*” for the mothers (ibid., italics in the original.) This announcement concluded: “Und vor allem soll im roten Wien kein Kind mehr in Zeitungspapier gewickelt werden” / “And above all, in red Vienna *no child will be swaddled in newspaper any more*” (our translation, emphasis in the original).

The announcement of the new gift ended with the claim to lower infant mortality to catch up with the Nordic states, namely Denmark, Sweden and Norway, which are said to have cut infant mortality to eight deaths per 100 newborn children already in the last year of the First World War. The striking metaphor with the *newspaper* later became the general claim of this gift: “Kein Wiener Kind darf auf Zeitungspapier geboren werden” / “No Viennese child must be born on newspaper” headed a municipal advertisement in 1932.⁵ [Fig. 3] It continues: “as stated the Social Democrats when they assumed the Viennese municipality. Therefore, the social democratic administration put diapers in the cradle of every newborn.” This is followed by a list that summed up “53.000 Säuglingspakete” (sic!, literally: infant packages) that have been donated in the past five years.

This literally and figuratively red gift thus worked out as a midwife for a complex infrastructure of mothers, infants, domestic space, the municipal welfare administration, reconfigurations of citizenship during the 20th century, reproductive education in the Viennese variant of the interwar period and the political chromatics of social-democratic eugenics, personalized by Julius Tandler, the physician and municipal councilor. Tandler intensively adapted Darwin’s theory of evolution to the local welfare reform utopia. Furthermore, he aimed to replace the until then mainly volunteer

5 Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Inv.-No. E10/494, Plakat für Sozialpolitik der Stadt Wien, 1932.

Kein Wiener Kind darf auf Zeitungspapier geboren werden



erklärten die Sozialdemokraten, als sie die Verwaltung Wiens übernahmen.

Deshalb legt die sozialdemokratische Gemeindeverwaltung Wiens jedem Neugeborenen Windeln in die Wiege.

Bisher

1.272.000
Windeln

318.000
Hemdchen

318.000
Jäckchen

53.000
Tragkleidchen

Insgesamt

53.000
Säuglingspakete,

in denen überdies Badetücher, Flanelle, Gummieinlagen und alles, was der Säugling bedarf, find, wurden den Wiener Müttern für ihre Neugeborenen

gespendet

3

Fig. 3: The Viennese municipality advertises the layette gift, 1932.

welfare, rather provided as alms from private and/or religious charitable associations, by a public, professional, standardized service for every citizen (Byer 1988; McEwen 2012: 35–42, Nemec 2015, Saage 2012, Sieder 1985, Wolfgruber 2013).

This gift package is more than a footnote in the local history of a modern welfare state competing within the interwar horizon of international eugenics and social reforms. It still remains a vital object today, mobilized by the Vienna municipal administration as well as by the local population. During the 20th century, all local authorities also expressed their societal horizon in relation to this package, and its modifications reflect broader changes in the reproductive cosmologies of a social democratic welfare regime in the 20th century. In its official news agency, which goes back to a printed version in the 1860s, the municipal administration also continually informed about the changes to the famous *Säuglingswäschepaket*.⁶ This source on the history of this welfare gift thus not only conveys its material transformation, but also its changing and stable place in an infrastructure of social democratic welfare, citizenship, family life, education, infant-subjects and reproduction. During the Great Depression and because of critics who found fault with donating it not only to the needy but to all mothers, in 1933 the government introduced means testing and denied the package mothers who could afford clothes for their newborn themselves. Contrary to what is stated in the Social Democrat municipality's own historiography, it seems that the Austrofascist state before and after the Anschluss did not completely stop the project, but modified it by combining it with a basket with equipment for home birth that expectant mothers could borrow from the Nazi party's *Mütterwerk*. (Neuigkeits-Welt-Blatt No. 131, 7.06.1940, p. 4). After a three-year period when the American Red Cross provided it, on July 7th in 1948 the socialist⁷ municipal council reintroduced the package, but excluded women without permanent residence in Vienna and/or without Austrian citizenship. In March 1976, the gift was differentiated into two variants, for newborns or for toddlers, additionally it was now also available for adopted children. In that year, the municipality changed the recipient: while hitherto *women and mothers* or *new citizens* had figured as the

6 The following overview is based on the Rathauskorrespondenz of the City of Vienna (literally: the city hall's correspondence). This news agency began as a commercial service in the 1860s and was transformed into a governmental one by the Socialist municipality in 1922 (<http://www.wien.gv.at/rk/historisch/>, accessed 05.09.2019, see also Grillenhofer 1988). All cited messages are available online there in detail: "Start für den neuen Wickelrucksack", 7.03.2011; „Hunderttausendster Wickelrucksack an Wiener Mutter übergeben“, 07.12.2007; „Der Wickelrucksack bekommt Nachwuchs“, 29.03.2006; "Wickelrucksack ergänzt beliebtes Wäschepaket der Stadt Wien", 2.10.2001; „Aus dem Wiener Gemeinderat“, 26.03.1976; „Bürgermeister Jonas überreichte das 80.000 Säuglingswäschepaket – Feierliche Übergabe in der Semmelweislinik“, 10.1.1956; „Wieder Säuglingswäschepaketaktion der Stadt Wien“, 6.7.1948.

7 From 1945 to 1991 the Social Democrats in Austria called their party the Socialist Party of Austria.

beneficiaries, now for the first time *parents* were addressed. In 2001, the package was literally mobilized by adding a backpack to it that equipped the parents to change their baby on the move. Furthermore, that year for the first time the father was explicitly named, by promoting the renewed gift as “essentially more functional for the mobility of mother or father and baby”. And, last but not least, the municipality also added a voucher from a local savings bank and a free sample of *babyfein* skin-care from the Nivea products of the Beiersdorf company. In 2006, the local government coined the new edition with the label “counseling” and in the meantime marked off the founding box of the 1920s as an issue of “poverty”. The “counseling” was specified by the offer of a free consultation by a municipal “social worker, social pedagogue, professional psychologist and physicians” in the municipality’s parent-child centers. As the mayor stated, parents especially demand open lectures on “Grenzen setzen / setting boundaries for your child”, “sleeping”, “toilet training” or “Umgang mit kindlicher Gewalt / dealing with violent behavior in children”. In 2007, the authorities announced the distribution of the 100,000th diaper backpack. In 2011, the diaper backpack changed again. The number of vouchers increased (now including vouchers for photographers whose services included photographing pregnant women, babies, children, families and wedding ceremonies) as well as the number of free samples. As part of this renewal, the municipal administration specifically stressed the new material concerning reading: booklets from the local public libraries on how to help small children learn to read and a voucher for a book. This component is somewhat surprising, since the other content, such as diapers and baby clothes, addresses babies who are far from being able to look at a book, not to mention read one.

The changes of the Viennese layette from the initial red box in the interwar period to a diaper backpack today reflects the entangled choreography of welfare regime, citizenship, childhood, gender, family and consumer society created by the Vienna municipality. It began with the bare necessities in 1927, on the one hand to fight infant mortality. The related Viennese aim to catch up with the Nordic countries by the *Säuglingswäschepaket* demonstrates how the Social Democrats contributed to abominating population decline in the situation of the reorganization of the European nation states after the First World War. After the Second World War, in the late 1940s, this national accent was renewed again by limiting the gift to mothers who were resident in Vienna and/or had Austrian citizenship. Taking into account the postwar situation, where refugees, displaced persons, and expellees were a major social question, the Viennese municipality thus excluded the most needy. This decision can probably be interpreted as part of the socialists’ successful strategy to bridge the (Austro-)fascist period and reestablish their dominance by re-establishing their patronage (Berg

2014) – which only works if the beneficiaries have the vote, which was not the case for the migrants in the city. The change in the 1970s results from multiple forces: the differentiation of the gift into two versions indicates a heightened and intensified attention on (early) childhood, and the naming of adoption while skipping the mother as the explicitly addressed receiver of the layette gift reflects the entwined discourses on adoption and mothering in the 1960s and 1970s (Chodorow/Contratto 1992, Yngvesson 2004). Only the 2001 changes brought in the father for the first time. Together with the accent on mobility (backpack instead of box) and the first commercial vouchers, now the young family is prepared for leaving their home and going to the market, figuratively headed by the father as the breadwinner. Since this is part of a public gift, here the municipality issued care and reproduction as a mixture of public benefits and consumer goods for families as citizens-to-be – a process that has been observed for all welfare regimes in the Fordist era (Taylor et al. 2004). In 2006 the change involved one major issue, namely *counseling*. This conveys the message that, regardless of whether it involves a newborn or a small child, proper parenting needs advice. Subsequently, the last relaunch, in 2011, included the voucher for a belly picture among the increasing range of vouchers and free samples, accompanied by *reading* as a new theme. Learning, knowledge and education are thus merged with healthcare and family photography, and again this public gift equates parenting and citizenship with consuming.

Similar developments have been observed for the 20th century in the biopolitical strategies that the modern welfare state exerted on reproduction, parenting and consuming elsewhere. But in the case studied here, locally specific dynamics appear. In the 2010 Vienna election, when the still ruling Social Democrats feared the loss of their outright majority because of the rise of the right-wing Freedom Party (FPÖ), which called this election a “duel for Vienna”, they again chose a strategic gift to gain women’s votes: this time they donated free kindergarten care for all under-six-year-olds. Finally, they succeeded, but only with a bare majority, while the FPÖ doubled its vote, also pushing the conservative People’s Party (ÖVP) into third place. It is telling that in their election campaign the Social Democrats linked this to the interwar past of their government, with an explicit reference to the *Säuglingswäschepaket* gift from 1927, citing the initial slogan *no child must be born on newspaper* again (Timm 2010, 322). Such references to the interwar years seem to indicate the Vienna social democratic municipality’s ability to “reinvent ‘Red Vienna’ after 1945” (Berg 2014), whether by diversifying and continuing a traditional milieu beyond the shifting economic ground of their patronage politics (ibid., 632), or by referring to their famous past, i.e. a patriarchal, social democratic welfare regime.

However, the municipal or party offices of the Vienna Social Democrats are not the only habitat of the diaper backpack. It also can be found in local hospitals. When pregnant women register for delivery with one of the clinics in city (in Austria they have to do this right at the beginning of the medical administration of their pregnancy), they get a *Schwangerschafts-Fahrplan* (literally: pregnancy timetable). In its 2009 variant this document lists five numbered points at the top:

“1. Ultrasonic nuchal scan, 2. Ultrasonic organ screening, 3. Information meeting on epidural anesthesia, 4. Registration for the diaper rucksack, 5. Cardiotocogram at the expected date of delivery.” (our translation)

On the same sheet, under the title *unsere Zusatzangebote* (literally: our additional offers) there is the following unnumbered list:

“visit to the delivery room,
antenatal classes by midwives for couples,
antenatal classes by physiotherapists,
antenatal acupuncture,
FEM clinic for parents.”⁸ (our translation)

This two-part list is instructive in several respects: it combines contested diagnostic treatments of the unborn, such as the nuchal scan and organ screening, with the registration for a municipal gift of baby clothes, advice leaflets and commercial vouchers. This combination and the title “timetable” obscure the fact that the diagnostic tests listed are not obligatory in Austria. Considering the history of the diaper backpack, it furthermore positions antenatal testing and epidural anesthesia as generous municipal gifts for parents, like the rucksack. Additionally, all physical and psychological obstetric support for a woman in labor is categorized as *Zusatz* / “addition” or “supplement.” Since the timetable is produced and distributed by the hospital’s *Abteilung für Gynäkologie*

8 FEM is an acronym for Frauen Eltern Mädchen / women parents girls and the name of a healthcare center with a wide range of psychological, social, and medical counseling and therapy, which is financed by municipal and state authorities and by public health insurance companies. Also today, the obligatory (and controlling) visit of a midwife or a social worker alongside counseling and therapy classes is a common settlement in the welfare state’s intersection with pregnancy (e.g. Miller 2004 and Papen 2008 as (auto-)ethnographic studies on that). As the autoethnographic approach used by Papen (ibid.) proves, the dynamics of such visits are not so much disciplinary ones – this effect probably dominated in the interwar period in Vienna – but become effective as a shift from outer to inner control, an internalization of the “inspecting gaze.”

und Geburtshilfe / “department for gynecology and obstetrics”, this hierarchy is rather surprising. It seems as if pregnant women are not going to the delivery room to give birth to a child but to get gifts. This “pregnancy timetable” therefore comes between and relates old and new reproductive technologies. It transfers the voucher for pregnancy photos as a stowaway in the numbered list’s point 4.: diaper backpack. Thus, the diaper backpack relieves the strong medicalizing dynamics of the Vienna pregnancy timetable, but conversely the pregnancy timetable medicalizes its content, i.e. activities like dressing an infant or taking photos.

Obviously, the diaper backpack became firmly established in the local cosmology of reproduction that is materially equipped by different variants of the municipal welfare policies. Its adaptability through history is impressive. It is also viable in the digital space. On sites addressing parenting as well as on individual blogs there is a lot of “platform vernacular” where women and mothers debate the diaper backpack in words and pictures: what it contains exactly, where and when to get it (before or after delivery), how it has changed in recent years, who is entitled to receive it, whether it is for all or only for the needy, etc. This platform vernacular emerges within the paradox dynamics of a social democratic welfare state going to the market: hosted in the Austrian digital marketplace for commodities and professional advice around pregnancy and infants,⁹ these expressions indicate not only commodification and medicalization. They are also evidence of how goods of mass consumption “become the key means, in contemporary society, of negotiating the increasingly complex process of ‘making’ a baby” (Clarke 2004, 59). But as ethnographic research on pregnancy, motherhood, and parenting has discovered, this expresses itself not

9 The most popular sites with forums for registered users are: www.parents.at (run by the Wirtschaftskammer Österreich/WKO (Austrian Chamber of Commerce) and the Österreichisches Hebammengremium/ÖHG (Austrian Board of Midwives); www.babyforum.at (run by the publishing company Fokuskind Medien, Vienna); www.netdokter.at (run as a digital publishing company and via its CEO Eva Dichand linked to Heute, a free tabloid newspaper in Austria, edited by her since 2004/2005). All three sites combine counseling (with invoking “experts” like midwives or physicians), user-generated content /discussion forums, classified ads, and commercial advertising. For examples of individual blogs discussing the current content of the diaper backpack in detail with a precise list of all 43 vouchers for free samples or commissions (among them four from local professional photographers), see <http://loveablebaby.blogspot.de/2015/03/wickelrucksack-als-geschenk.html>, accessed 19.01.2020, and <http://www.beautygossip.at/der-wiener-windelrucksack/>, accessed 19.01.2020 – because of the enthusiastic depiction of the trademark of one free-sample group in the rucksack, at least for the latter blog it can be assumed that its author receives some payment for her blog. However, since there she equally tells the story of this gift since 1927 as the municipality’s welfare lore has it, it would be wrong to regard such a blog as merely commercial.

as a crude commercialization or commodification of reproduction (Clarke 2007, Taylor 2004). In the Viennese case, we additionally observed that the paternalistic dynamics within this welfare gift is understood very well by the women. After having collected this public gift personally in one of the nine municipal parent-child centers as the procedure wants, under the headline “diaper backpack as a gift” one user not only lists the different “gifts” in the backpack but also comments on the content and the gifting rule:

“The map with documents as such is well-intentioned, however it also contains a lot of basic information that a pregnant woman eight weeks before delivery should already know or even already had to submit [to register for delivery]. [...] Also the woman who wanted to counsel us in the parent-child center very much gave the impression of preparing us basically for a pregnancy. To tell the truth, we felt a little bit out of place, since the little mite will come into the world in the next few days/weeks [...]. We also found her miserable attempt to motivate us to meet a social worker completely wrong. Although this might sound harsh, we both had the impression that this backpack with the lots of gifts, vouchers and discounts is possibly intended to attract socially needy families to then inform them on procedures, visits to authorities etc. concerning all issues around delivery. [...] I found the information on the five obligatory pregnancy check-ups, that in any case have to be done to get family allowance, especially absurd – to inform us about that now, eight weeks before the delivery, since these check-ups cannot be made up for then.”¹⁰
(our translation)

Since such postings mostly are combined with individual photos of the gift and a detailed list of its free samples, this platform vernacular combines the popular-public heritage that comes down from the interwar Social Democratic welfare state with the habitat of babies in a consumer soci-

10 The municipal website of the diaper backpack gifting procedure <https://www.wien.gv.at/menschen/kind-familie/baby/wickelrucksack.html>, accessed 19.01.2020. The full posting from 16 March 2015 is accessible here: <http://www.mamakatzefel.at/wickelrucksack-als-geschenk/>, accessed 19.01.2020. The fact that this generalized public gift principally transforms all citizens into recipients of public benefits has been a debated issue from its very beginnings, see the narratives from the related parliamentary debate in the (quite apologetic) biography of the layette inventor Tandler in 1927 in Sablik 1983: 284f. Its proponents tried to alleviate this by calling it “birthday present” for the mother, and by pointing to its “shiny red carton” package (Paradeiser 1927). As oral history research from 1980s revealed, also the interwar recipients of the layette developed smart strategies to counter the disciplinary effort and nevertheless to make the most of it (Sieder 1985).

ety of today: “Weleda, MAM, Nivea baby, IKEA, BIPA, MyLove, Hipp” [ibid.]. Thus, the welfare strategies of municipal public authorities, but also popular culture, place pregnancy, parenting and citizenship in the middle of consumer goods.

A personal view without history: post-producing a beautiful pregnancy today by looking at belly pictures

The anthropological research on family photography has long ceased conceptualizing them simplistically as documents or representations, but investigates them also as produced objects-in-use, as “photographic acts”, as vehicles for the production of memory and meaning (Kuhn ([1995]/2002); Kuhn/McAllister 2008). Digital formats have triggered this again, since their application on the one hand supported given photographic formats around family life (Murray 2008), on the other hand shifted the public/private line (Matthews/Wexler 2000: 102), and, furthermore, in the format of “personal photography”, as Van House (2011) categorized it, proved the popularity and viability of the sociotechnical system that emerged around Kodak’s invention in the 19th century. Since the 1970s pregnancy photography has entered family albums, which is seen as a counterpart of the public presentation of the fetus that took off with the famous color photograph by Lennart Nilsson on the *Life* cover in 1965 (Matthews/Wexler 2000: 104).

Their long history and their current routes have therefore been of equal concern for analysis. To apply this approach, we began our ethnographic work by questioning Viennese photographers who offered pregnancy photography [see Fig. 1] and then went ahead by interviewing women who commissioned these photographers for a belly picture. We thus interviewed three professional photographers (among them one who offers a price reduction voucher in the current diaper backpack) and three of their clients. The clients had professional pregnancy photographs taken and were amateur photographers themselves.¹¹ Two of the professional photographers (both male) work in studios, the third describes herself as a mobile photographer – for the shootings she usually visits her customers in their homes. One of the male photographers has owned a studio since the 1980s, the other is in his early twenties and when we did the interview had been working in a studio for about a year. All the interviewees were white middle class, in their thirties and living in a heterosexual relationship with both partners employed. All interviews

11 Interviewees’ names were changed for anonymization. All interviews were conducted in German; the parts cited in this article have been translated by the authors.

started with initial questions addressing the specific practice of ordering pictures by a professional photographer and then went on to other uses of photos in that specific family. As we will show, the empirical material itself suggested we should leave the local context (which for a long time has been the epistemological ground of ethnography), since the interviewees explicitly related their own photographic practice to a specific picture that has spread worldwide, namely Annie Leibovitz's photo of the pregnant Demi Moore on the 1991 August title of *Vanity Fair*. Thus, our research not only led us back in time to the Viennese welfare regime of the interwar period and its resonances as digital platform vernacular today, where locality paradoxically is rearticulated digitally by debating the diaper backpack's content, but also to the personal appropriations of a worldwide imagery. The photo of the pregnant Demi Moore on the cover of *Vanity Fair* in summer 1991 is well known among women who wish to produce a belly picture (Tyler 2011, 24). Also, our interviewees in Vienna mention it as a point of reference. Wilson McKay and Denise Baxter (2007, 54) consider this picture to be "the most notorious contemporary photograph of the pregnant body".¹²

Within the strong linkage with celebrity and consumer culture, the belly pictures again are subjected to a regime, namely biopolitics as "ethopolitics" (Rose 2001, 17), meaning here "an optimization of one's corporeality to embrace a kind of overall 'well-being' – beauty, success, happiness,

12 Tyler (2001, 33, n. 5) even calls it "the iconic origin" of pregnancy photography. This image not only has been appropriated in popular culture, but also very intensively in analyses of visual culture (Carr 1995, Dickson 1999, Stabile 1992, Tyler 2001, Wexler 2011). Obviously, it is not the first time that pregnancy photography has been presented in the broad field of art, elite culture and style, Matthews/Wexler (2000: 195–218) interpret it as the visual hub from "fetal icon" (L. Nilssons Life-cover from 1965) to "pregnant icon". Edward Steichen in his famous exhibition *The Family of Man* (starting in the MOMA in 1955 and then touring around the globe) already showed some pictures of pregnant women (Steichen 1983, 18–21), but all of them are wearing clothes – with the telling exception of a Black African woman whom the caption locates at "Kordofan" (i.e. Kurdufan, Sudan), and who is pictured in the tradition of classical kinship studies in British social anthropology that Bouquet (2001, 99–106) deconstructed. The fact, that the visualization of the unborn with the fetal sonogram became part of popular and public uses (Taylor 2008) is seen as trigger to the use and variation of pregnancy photography in feminist contexts, art and the domestic sphere since the 1980s (Matthews/Wexler 2000: 100f.). As Wilson McKay and Denise Baxter (2007, 59) state in their short 'Visual Representation History of the Pregnant Body', a discussion of these expressions of the unborn and/or the belly in relation to the Christian motif of *Maria Gravida* is pending. On this motif in painting and on *Vierges Ouvrantes* in sculpture see Katz 2009 and Lechner 1981. As a new contribution that bridges the Christian *Madonna lactans* motif and the secular – here the United Nations' – invoking of the family by Edward Steichen see te Heesen 2016.

sexuality and much more". This transformation has also already been observed for the pregnant body. Concerning clothes advertising, a development from the veiling of the pregnant body by large, loose-fitting clothes or the presentation of pregnancy clothes by rather slender models in the 1950s to a garment designed to set off the belly, e.g. a belt that highlights the belly with colors and in shape has been observed (Matthews/Wexler 2000: 171–186). Maternity-clothing stores as part of the articulation of kinship and family through consumption are a growing market for "fertile fashion" or "pregnancy chic" (Tyler 2011, 24 et seq.). Latest research interprets this new "pregnant beauty" as a "disciplinary figure" (ibid., 28), which gained specific power by including feminist claims to open the public sphere for women and mothers (Dworkin and Wachs 2004). Detailed analyses show that these disciplinary dynamics are even at work in parodic efforts and with queer pregnancy photography, and that therefore a decontextualized picture as such cannot be judged either as emancipative or as affirmative (Gallop 1999; Longhurst 2000; Wexler 2011). The arrangement and production of belly pictures in the Viennese case can be understood as a specific ethopolitical practice which visualizes motherly care by accentuating it as part of a *globally decipherable, healthy and beautiful* life as a national citizen that profits from public welfare. As our interviews showed, taking a photo here changes from a technology in order to picture something into an ethical vehicle for the production of "beauty". Interestingly, this "beauty" is not narrated as a copy of the Demi Moore title, but as a memory and feeling towards one's own pregnancy. However, to begin with, belly pictures, like family photographs in general, usually leave out elements that do not seem to be representative in the family-constructing photographic narrative of happiness (Goodsell and Seiter 2011, 328; Lutrell 2003; Lustig 2004, 175, 179–184; Pauwels 2008, 44). Pregnancy photography emerges within this frame. As one photographer observed: "When people came to have photos taken during pregnancy, then they mostly come back with the baby. [...] Firstly, pregnancy photos, secondly, baby photos, thirdly marriage photos."¹³ As our interviews unearthed, within this, the belly pictures¹⁴ correspond to the women's reported wish to remember their pregnancy as something "beautiful". How do they realize this?

13 Note the change in the temporal order of the Fordist family, which is mentioned here in passing. Since there is no research available, we again can only hint at other changes in the albums that relate to the change of the status of marriage: e.g. the missing engagement notice, which is no longer a popular practice.

14 The photographers we interviewed called these products "baby-belly pictures" and not "pregnancy photographs". The most often mentioned German word of the women we interviewed was *Bauchfoto* (belly picture), other terms used by them were *Babybauchfoto* (baby-belly picture), and, less frequently, *Schwangerenfoto*

In our field research we came across a heterogeneous stock of material objects that are used as props in pregnancy photography. They include accessories (e.g. a red rose, baby shoes, a wedding ring, angel figures, angels' wings, a teddy bear), clothes (e.g. a veil, underwear, a dress), scenery/setting objects (e.g. furniture, wallpaper, artificial plants). These objects already have a history in family photography, namely in wedding pictures (red rose, marriage ring), and a history in the objects that linked childhood with consumption and that relate to the coming baby (angels' wings, angel figures, teddy bear)¹⁵. A third group of objects is related to nude photography (veil, dress, underwear). Thus the material culture of a staged pregnant belly is a mix of different visual heritages, a hybrid collection of objects hitherto known as requisites for picturing babies, wedding ceremonies and nudes. This blurring of the "familial gaze" (M. Hirsch) also coins other elements of the belly picture production: (digital) techniques from nude photography (e.g. the lighting effects such as the spotlight, subdued lighting, mist) are combined with customs from private family photography, namely the use of the client's flat and its furniture. As one of the photographers interviewed said: "It's nice when I can incorporate some of the elements of the customer's apartment into the picture" (mobile photographer). As the same photographer explained, the use of private rooms is also important to protect the clients from possible feelings of shame and from tension, which would distract from the aim of producing a "natural photo". Such strategies and semantics ("naturalness") ensure narratively, that the picture will not be an erotic one, although a naked body is shown. In detail, a frequent technique is the staging of the female body by cutting off body parts, zooming in on the belly, taking the picture from a specific angle that makes the belly more visible (a "belly portrait" e.g. from the side or from below). Thus, the woman's whole body is obscured by focusing on the pregnant belly. As one interviewee emphasized:

"Of course, the belly must be the focus otherwise they would not be pregnancy photos. [...] My face should either not be the focus or not be visible at all, because I know that it is my belly and that it's me anyway." (customer).

Some photos include the partner/father of the imagined content of the belly in the photo setting. While the belly is usually the eye-catcher, other parts of the couple's bodies are at the edge: e.g. the pregnant woman

(pregnant woman's picture/gravidic picture) or *Schwangerschaftsfoto* (pregnancy photo).

15 These objects are similar to those that Layne (2000) found in her analysis of the material culture of pregnancy loss.

holding her belly with both hands or with one hand, hiding her naked breast with the other arm (thus citing the famous Demi Moore picture from 1991). When the man appears in the picture there are different positions: e.g. the partner embraces the woman from behind putting his hands on the woman's belly, holds her hands in his hands on her belly, leans his head on it, kisses it, or both partners lean their bellies against each other. We think these motifs have a crucial position in the creation story with belly pictures: they stage the belly as a romantic version of the Fordist, male-breadwinner family imagery (a heterosexual couple with children and a committed, tenderly caring male partner).

As our interviewees often mentioned, in order to achieve a "beautiful" picture the right point in time for the photo shooting is essential. The woman should be in an advanced stage of pregnancy – the interviewees mentioned about one month before birth. The women should be "nicely pregnant, in order to capture the beauty of that specific stage" (photographer). However, it is rather tricky to choose the right point to capture the belly photographically. One of the women told us that she was afraid her belly photos would not succeed, because at that (very late) stage in pregnancy she did not feel well. Afterwards, she was very happy to have the photos, because in her opinion they now visually represent exclusively the "beauty" of that part of her life. This detail is especially telling concerning research perspectives on these popular photos. The place of pregnancy photos/belly pictures in family photography would not be described correctly if they were only interpreted as an indexical reference to some given motif that they visualize or document. For the women, the visual consumption of these pregnancy photos creates pleasant memories alongside unpleasant ones: "as years pass by the photos become nicer" (customer). A beautiful picture does not document, but rather produces beautiful memories. But it is also important to know that these new, post-produced memories do not replace the other, more unpleasant ones: they are not visible, but the women know them and use them – as in our interviews – alongside their ideal images, and the women remember the unpleasant memories without pictures. The discrepancy between the pregnancy itself and the photographic image of it is recognized by the women when they talk about the process of selecting the photos and about looking at them after pregnancy and delivery:

"I tend to look for the perfect photo in order to present my perfect life, which is not perfect because life just is not perfect. [...] That [photo] which is not beautiful, which does not look so nice, is taken away, will nowadays not be developed at all."

"I am so happy I took those photos because for me they show a nice aspect of the whole [pregnancy], which at that time I did not

sense like that. So I love those photos because for me they show that my pregnancy was like that and viewed in this light it was beautiful, wasn't it? Even though it was not beautiful for me. But looking at it that way, it is the beauty pictured." (customer)

"It's like a miracle, because it is not real, yes? But nevertheless it brought back to me something I have not felt before. So I am extremely happy that I took those photos, because if I did not have these pictures, I would have nothing of this pregnancy." (customer)

"Beauty" and the joy of it arises in the moment of looking at the photo, and this looking-at-the-photo replenishes and enlarges the experience of the pregnancy. Listening to these stories of post-producing a beautiful pregnancy in visual and emotional terms, we doubt whether the "distorted" judgement (Goc 2014, 45) really describes the relation between family life and family photography. Our interview evidence rather suggests that mothers themselves order professional photographs not distort, but supplement unpleasant or painful experiences of their pregnancy with pleasant ones. Unlike categories like distortion, nostalgia or sentimentality prompt, the happy views of family photographs are not a snapped selection of beautiful moments each at a present time, but the production of personal stock images to supply the individual production of beautiful memories in the future. These pictures in fact function as "a tangible link to the past" (Goc 2014, 45), as "relational objects" that connect people and things to one another (Edwards 2005) – however, in our case: to a past that never existed but only comes into being as an emotional post-production by mothers viewing the photographs.

Conclusion: Embellyshing Pictures in Popular and Municipal Uses

For our case study we combined two analytical approaches: one that documents a contemporary use of belly pictures with one that tracks them down in history. To realize this, we furthermore had to transgress a separation of material from visual culture as well as a separation of mediated expressions such as the platform vernacular from face-to-face encounters e.g. between the photographer and their customers. And, finally, we were not convinced to cut "history" off the pieces in question from their topicality. This approach yielded more detailed and more nuanced understanding of the Viennese belly pictures, and it avoids depicting the popular culture of reproduction and family as separate from the state (Thelen and Alber 2018).

Concerning the production and use of these pictures by the women and later mothers, they are a vehicle for realizing a “beautiful” pregnancy. For them they are a visualization of a passing experience, which furthermore enables them to produce, to keep and to express feelings and wishes around their pregnancy that would otherwise be pointless for them. The women’s explanations of their belly pictures are telling: they do not produce or use them as a reference to a temporarily or logically preceding experience. A clear distinction between the women’s “experience” and these pictures would continue a problematic ontology of “physical experience.” The use of the pregnancy photos by the later mothers demonstrates that in fact they are visualizations and realizations of feelings that the women longed for but missed during those nine months. We do not think it is necessary to judge the women’s longing for pleasant memories as false consciousness or as an effect of an ideology. It is in fact this very lacuna between the picture’s view and the women’s memory of the “unpleasant” feelings that constitutes this case of belly pictures as an ethopolitical variant of medicalization: leading not only a healthy life, but also a beautiful one. As outlined above, “beauty” here is expressed by a popular visual art of combining the photographic frames of wedding, family and nudes. This popular visual art supports a “beautiful” pregnancy as a rite of passage (but without festivity), as coveted (but not too sexual), and as familiar (but with relatives out of sight).

Following the other trace of these pictures, namely the voucher distributed within the municipal gift, we are confronted with the fine art of the modern welfare state: how the Viennese authorities include the belly picture in their traditional parcel for mothers-to-be, how they welded this together with the medicalization of pregnancy on the one hand, and how this again coalesced with consuming. The Viennese case of the photo voucher in a package that was first donated by the municipality to needy parents in the interwar period proves that these references have links going back to the crises of municipal social democratic welfare politics in the 20th century. We therefore locate the Viennese belly pictures at the intersection of contradictory forces: they are gifted, distributed, received, used and produced within maternal care strategies and highlight new forms of governmental logics which urge people to be responsible, beautiful, creative, consumerist citizens and submissive to the welfare state that reminds them to lead a healthy life (including all antenatal visual diagnostic of their fetuses), all at once.

The vouchers for a photo shooting in the Viennese diaper rucksack unfolds as a relay object within the dynamics around pregnancy, unborn children, women, mothers, consumer goods, families and citizenship that goes far beyond the intentions of the municipal department MAG ELF (‘children

– youth – family’). Surely, the inclusion of vouchers for belly pictures in the public layette gift proves how they are part of the “repressive pole” as well as of the “honorific pole” that Sekula (1986) described as the dynamics and setup of the modern photographic archive. But the retrospective viewing of belly pictures by the later mothers develops these constraint images into pleasant emotional prints of their pregnancy. As case studies e.g. on the contraceptive pill yielded against an older, too simple top-down concept of biopolitics (Roesch 2018), also embellyshing pictures does not completely work out as a tribute to normalization and medicalization. The popular uses of these pictures equally unfold as a popular aesthetics and as an aesthetic practice of visual and material culture whose further investigation is required (Sandbye 2014), especially concerning its power to span “from home to nation” (Kuhn [1995]/2002: 147–169), and from personal desire to the state (Williamson 1994).

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al. 2012; Dankl and Mimica 2013; Dankl et al. 2013; Nieradzick/Timm 2014; Timm 2014. We thank the editors and the anonymous reviewers of *Body Politics* for their helpful critique.

Credits

Fig. 1: By courtesy of Petra Lehner.

Figs. 2a and 2b: Municipality of Vienna, MAGELF Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, book of vouchers “Zusammen klappt’s”, issued with the diaper backpack, 2019. By courtesy of MAGELF, municipality of Vienna.

Fig. 3: By courtesy of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna (Inv.-No. VGA E10/494).

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