Juvenile Delinquency in 19th and 20th Centuries: East-West Comparisons

Veranstalter: Heather Ellis, Centre for British Studies, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin; Lily Chang, Faculty of History, University of Oxford
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Bericht von: Heather Ellis, Centre for British Studies, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

The two-day conference, 'Juvenile Delinquency in 19th and 20th Centuries: East-West Comparisons', held at the Centre for British Studies in Berlin, was organised by Heather Ellis (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) and Lily Chang (Oxford) and was generously sponsored by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, Cologne. The conference brought together junior and senior scholars from a wide range of institutions and disciplinary backgrounds to discuss the different ways in which juvenile delinquency has been constructed historically in the cultural fields of East and West. The central aim of the conference was to encourage dialogue amongst scholars to move beyond conceptualising the subject of juvenile delinquency from an exclusively national perspective. The majority of papers addressed individual aspects of juvenile delinquency in schools, families, courts, prisons, the world of science, and in relation to the state, but many of them also stressed the comparative and transnational elements of their findings to a broader audience.

The keynote speech was delivered by BARAK KUSHNER (Cambridge). In his talk, entitled 'Empire's Little Helpers: Juvenile Crime and the State in East Asia, 1900-2000', Kushner highlighted many of the key themes of the conference, in particular, the crucial relationship between the construction of juvenile delinquency and the processes of state formation as well as the complexities of defining concepts of youth and childhood using the terminology of 'east' and 'west'. Kushner drew especial attention to the ways in which discourses of juvenile delinquency may be developed and deployed by state institutions and agencies in order to pursue political goals. This raised, he argued, crucial questions about the agency of youths and children in the construction of 'delinquent' behaviours in situations of political instability and war. He also argued for the ability of studies of juvenile delinquency and its relationship with state structures to shed new light on traditional topics of social and political history. He pointed in particular to the important role which children and young people have often played in determining the course of events in well-studied historical developments such as the rise of Japan to the status of an imperial power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The first panel of the conference examined the various ways in which juvenile delinquency has been conceptualised in different places and time periods. In her talk, KATE BRADLEY (Kent) considered the cultural construction of delinquency in post-war Britain and sought to provide a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which the concept of delinquency was developed and solutions for the problem proposed in this major period of economic, political and social transition. One of the precepts of juvenile justice reform in Britain before the Second World War, she argued, had centred upon the question of material deprivation as leading to depraved behaviour. The advent of the welfare state, however, appeared to remove this cause for misbehaviour, as increasing numbers of children and young people – indeed adults – came before the courts in the post-war period despite the existence of welfare provisions ensuring, so many at the time believed, that no child grew up any longer in conditions of extreme poverty. She demonstrated how, under these changed circumstances, explanations came to focus increasingly on the nature of the family and broader culture as causes for delinquency.

The relationship between schools and delinquency was the focus of the second panel. Here, a particularly interesting paper was presented by KRISTIN WILLIAMS (Harvard) on the construction of notions of 'delinquency' and 'misbehaviour' relating to schoolboys in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Japan. As sources she drew on a little-studied illustrated book of poems and board games designed to teach good behaviour to Japanese school children. She argued that the poems and pictures suggest a

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tension between the aims of the adults and the desires of the children. The poems extol frugality, discipline, and respect, while the illustrations show boys thoroughly enjoying their disobedience: drawing graffiti, eating snacks behind the teacher's back, and putting on a play in the teacher's absence. In particular, she argued that these rare, early depictions of Japanese schoolchildren – both good and bad – provide a glimpse of the Japanese vision of childhood misbehaviour prior to the increased Western influence of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The third panel comprised papers examining legal constructions of juvenile delinquency in a variety of 'east' and 'west' contexts. In her talk, NAZAN CICEK (Ankara) explored the 'Turkish' conception of childhood in the early to late twentieth century through an analysis of official documents, scholarly debates and popular newspaper articles dealing with the question of the establishment of a system of juvenile courts in Turkey. She asked what the establishment of such courts could tell us about the conception of childhood in modern Turkey, a country whose identity has often been debated in terms of the perceived division between East and West. In particular, she argued that the introduction of children's courts was seen by Turkish policy makers as a necessary step to claiming a fuller membership of the modern 'western' world.

The connections between family, generation and delinquency was the subject of the papers making up the fourth panel. In a thought-provoking talk, ELIZABETH WHITE (Ulster) drew on archival material, émigré newspapers, and writings by émigré children themselves to recover and reconstruct the fate of some of the thousands of Russian children who arrived in or were born in Europe between 1920 and 1939, typically as a result of their families leaving Russia after the end of the Civil War. White focused in particular on the Russian communities in Bulgaria and Estonia in the interwar period. She outlined attempts by émigré organizations to deal with the legacy of crime and violence which many children had witnessed or participated in during the Civil War period. In the course of her paper, she used this material to examine Russian ideas about the 'ideal' Russian childhood, one which they initially sought to give their children even in difficult conditions. She went on to interrogate understandings of childhood in late Imperial Russian society and to show how these differed from other national ideas about childhood.

The first panel on the second day of the conference was dedicated to exploring racial and colonial constructions of delinquency. In an interesting talk which provoked much discussion, ANNELIEKE DIRKS (Leiden) examined the changing policies dealing with juvenile delinquency in the Dutch colony of the Netherlands Indies between 1910 and 1942. Her research looks at both Indo-European and indigenous minors who were considered criminal offenders under colonial law. Race (as defined by white colonials at the time) and religion, she argued, were crucial factors in the shaping of a racially separated reform system. A system of forced, state organized re-education came into being in 1917 and complemented (and partly took over from) the longer-existing private philanthropic initiatives that dealt with troubled youths of mostly Indo-European descent. She argued that it was the increasing concern about the behaviour and allegiances of indigenous youth that lead to the development of state-run institutions and an approach to juvenile reform that differentiated sharply between ethnic groups.

The next panel examined the diverse interconnections between constructions of juvenile delinquency and discourses of science. One of the most interesting papers in this panel was given by KATIE WRIGHT (Melbourne) who looked at the establishment of child guidance clinics in Australia in the broader international context of the guidance approach to the prevention and treatment of delinquency. In doing so, she considered the transatlantic and transpacific circulation of ideas about problem youth, and Australia's engagement with these international dialogues. In addition, her paper examined the construction of juvenile delinquency in the Australian press during the interwar years. Representations of delinquency in the popular media not only shed light on how the problem child was constructed, she argued, but also reveal how Aus-

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tralia was influenced by, and embedded in, international preventative mental health initiatives for children during the interwar years.

The penultimate panel focused on what proved to be a popular theme of the conference as a whole, namely constructions and understandings of juvenile delinquency in soviet and communist contexts. A striking paper was presented in this panel by LEO GORETTI (Reading) on the ways in which the Italian Communist Party dealt with the issue of juvenile delinquency in the late 1950s. He showed that in this period the Italian columnists recurrently voiced their concerns about the spread of anti-social and criminal behaviour among young people, and in particular the emergence of the so-called „Italian teddy-boys". In the discourse of mainstream newspapers and magazines, he argued, this label (originally developed in Britain) was attached to a wide range of youth subjects and behaviours which did not conform to the values and precepts of the older generation, ranging from vandalism and violent drunkenness to wearing blue jeans and playing pinball. Among the solutions proposed by conservative pundits and politicians was the introduction of special laws envisaging the infliction of corporal punishment on alleged teddy-boys and their reeducation in so-called 'work camps'.

The final panel comprised papers looking at the relationship between juvenile delinquency and violent forms of behaviour. In her paper, SUSANNE HOHLER (Heidelberg) presented part of her doctoral research which examines the city of Harbin (Manchuria), founded by Russians on Chinese soil in 1898, when the Chinese-Eastern Railway was under construction. From its inception, she argued, Harbin was a multicultural city inhabited mainly by Chinese, Japanese and Russians, especially after the Bolshevik takeover in 1917, when the city became the centre of Russian emigration in the Far East. Her presentation focused on constructions of juvenile delinquency in the 1930s, when Harbin was part of the Japanese puppet-state of Manchukuo. This period, she argued, witnessed soaring levels of juvenile crime and violence from Chinese and Russian youth alike, ranging from theft, vandalism to criminal assaults, robbery and murder. Focusing on the perception and representation of youth violence in the most important local Russian newspapers, she asked what, if any, connections were drawn between the level of youth crime and life in exile and whether juvenile delinquency was judged and explained differently if the offender was Chinese?

One of the main aims of the conference was to interrogate the ways in which the terms 'east' and 'west' are used in the discussion of juvenile delinquency in the past. In particular, speakers were invited to consider whether 'juvenile delinquency' is an inherently 'western' concept or whether we may use the term accurately to describe concepts of child and youth behaviour developed in non-western cultural spaces. Several of the papers that focused on non-western case studies such as China, Japan, India, Indonesia, and Turkey underscored the universality of delinquency not only as an idea that was imported from the west but which could also be found in different cultures, historical contexts, and social norms. These papers (and indeed the broader discussions which took place during the conference as a whole) demonstrated that although a direct translation or application of the term 'juvenile delinquency' cannot be made seamlessly, the concept itself (or ideas sharing many similar assumptions) existed in other contexts and cultures. These points of comparison provided a unique opportunity to complicate the way in which we think (and write) about juvenile delinquency in the past and revealed the considerable potential of future research in this direction.

Conference Overview:

Introduction: Heather Ellis (Berlin) / Lily Chang (Oxford)

Panel 1: Conceptualising Juvenile Delinquency
(Chair: Jutta Schwarzkopf, Berlin)

Kate Bradley (University of Kent)
Becoming Delinquent in the Post-War Welfare State: Britain, 1945-1965

Lily Chang (University of Oxford)
The Emergence of the 'Problem Child' in Early Twentieth-Century China

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Simon Heap (Oxford)
A Southern Comparative: Histories and Theories of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria

Panel 2: Schools and Delinquency
(Chair: Heather Ellis, Berlin)

Howard Lupovitch (University of Western Ontario, Canada)
No Child left Behind?: Jewish Schools and the Challenge of Delinquent Children

Kristin Williams (Harvard University)
The ABCs for Mischievous Schoolboys in Late Eighteenth-Century Japan

Nicola Sheldon (Institute of Historical Research, School of Advanced Studies, University of London)
Truancy, the Raising of the School Leaving Age and the Emergence of Anti-Social Behaviour since 1945 in the UK

Panel 3: Legal Constructions of Delinquency
(Chair: Lily Chang, Oxford)

Nazan Cicek (Ankara University)
The Delinquent Child, Children's Courts and the Conception of Childhood in Turkey (1940-1980)

Juliane Brauer (Max Planck Institute for Human Development: Centre for the History of Emotions, Berlin)
Youth Subculture in the GDR: Between Nonconformity, Opposition and Delinquency

Sarah Bornhorst (Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer)
Juvenile Delinquency during the First World War: A Micro-Study

Michael Krause (Potsdam University)
Naming and Shaming on Police Websites: Recent Constructions of 'Persistent Offenders' in England

Panel 4: Family, Generation and Delinquency
(Chair: Barak Kushner, Cambridge)

Nina Mackert (Erfurt University)
All about Adults: Juvenile Delinquency and the Governmentality of Families in the USA of the 1940s to 1960s

Elizabeth White (University of Ulster)
Save the Children: Russian Émigré Children and Family Breakdown in Interwar Europe

Heather Ellis (Humboldt University, Berlin)
Generational Conflict and Student Identity in Early Nineteenth-Century Oxford

Panel 5: Racial and Colonial Constructions of Delinquency
(Chair: Leo Goretti, Reading)

Stephanie Olsen (Max Planck Institute for Human Development: Centre for the History of Emotions, Berlin)
Adolescence and the Moral Empire: Dangerous Boys in Britain and India, c. 1880-1914

Annelieke Dirks (University of Leiden)
Juvenile Delinquency and State Re-education Policies in the Netherlands Indies, 1910-1942

Donna Murch (Rutgers University)
Living for the City: Rethinking the Politics of Juvenile Delinquency in Postwar Cities

Maureen Gallagher (University of Massachusetts Amherst)
Racial and Gender Transgressions as Juvenile Delinquency in British and German Youth Literature

Panel 6: Delinquency and Science
(Chair: Caroline Fricke, Potsdam)

Miroslava Chavez-Garcia (University of California, Davis)
'Defective Delinquents' or Tragic Heroes?: The Suicides of Benny Moreno and Edward Leiva at Whittier State School (California), 1939-1940

Pavel Vasilyev (Saint Petersburg Institute of History, Russian Academy of Sciences)
„There should be no child addicts in the Soviet State": Medical Science, the State, and the Construction of the Juvenile Drug Addict in Early Soviet Russia

Katie Wright (University of Melbourne)
'Treating delinquency at the source': International Influences on the Establishment of Child Guidance Clinics in Interwar Australia

Keynote Address
Barak Kushner (Cambridge University)
Empire's Little Helpers: Juvenile Crime and the State in East Asia, 1900-2000

Panel 7: Communist Constructions of Delinquency

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(Chair: Nicola Sheldon, IHR, London)

Caroline Fricke (University of Potsdam)
From Deviance to Delinquency – Juvenile Delinquency in the GDR

Gleb Tsipursky (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)
A Soviet Moral Panic? Youth, Delinquency and the State, 1953-58

Leo Goretti (University of Reading)
Violent Teddy-Boys or Revolutionaries in Disguise? The Debate on Youth Delinquency in the Italian Communist Press in the 1950s

Panel 8: Youth Violence
(Chair: Bernd Weisbrod, Göttingen)

Niall Whelehan (National University of Ireland, Galway)
Youth and Collective Violence in Ireland in the Late Nineteenth Century

Dagmar Ellerbrock (University of Bielefeld)
Gun-Games: Between Adolescent Practices and Juvenile Delinquency

Susanne Hohler (University of Heidelberg)
„Slack reins make for hooligan slackers" Chinese and Russian Juvenile Delinquency in the Manchurian City of Harbin, 1930-1940

Final (Plenary) Discussion and Closing Remarks
Heather Ellis (Berlin)
Lily Chang (Oxford)
Bernd Weisbrod (Göttingen)
Barak Kushner (Cambridge)

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