

### **Beyond 1989: Childhood and Youth in Times of Political Transformation in the 20th Century**

**Veranstalter:** Friederike Kind-Kovács; Machteld Venken; Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) Budapest; Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies, Technische Universität Dresden

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**Bericht von:** Orsolya Réthelyi, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) Budapest / Huygens ING, Amsterdam

The international and interdisciplinary conference „Beyond 1989: Childhood and Youth in Times of Political Transformation in the 20th Century“ took place at the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) in Budapest from 5 to 7 June 2019. This academic event was co-organized by Friederike Kind-Kovács, at the time Senior Botstiber Fellow at the IAS, and Machteld Venken, at the time Imre Kertész Kolleg Jena/Vienna University. The three-day conference was a cooperation between the IAS and the Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies at the TU Dresden.

The conference – with contributions from Lithuania, Switzerland, Russia, Austria, Germany, Italy, Romania, the US, Poland, France, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Finland, and Estonia – was organised with the goal of acting as a platform for discussion in an international and interdisciplinary context about the impact of the political transformations of the 20th century on the lives of children, as well as the ways they can be studied. After some opening words from NADIA AL-BAGDADI (IAS CEU), the organisers of the conference established the framework, the central themes, and the key concepts of the conference in their introductory papers. FRIEDERIKE KIND-KOVÁCS began by drawing attention to the main focus of the conference. Providing examples from three periods of political transformation, namely the First and Second World Wars and 1989, she addressed the question of how these political ruptures affected and altered children's lives. MACHELTD VENKEN outlined the central question of the conference: how does the history of childhood contribute to a bet-

ter understanding of the social implications of political ruptures and transformations? The main questions to guide the discussion during the conference were: How did political ruptures and transformations alter and affect children's lives? How unique were certain political transformations in terms of their short- and long-term repercussions on children's lives? What do children's adaptability, resilience and resistance tell us about the quality of the political rupture and transformation itself? And finally, in what way does the history of childhood contribute to a better understanding of political transformations?

Three papers followed the introduction in the first panel about 'Children's Institutional Care'. ANDREA GRIFFANTE (Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania) opened the panel with a discussion of how Lithuanian orphanages in the 1915–1918 period became the focal point of nation-building processes, with a system exerting total control over children, including alphabetisation, linguistic and moral education. He argued that wartime orphanages remained the model for interwar child assistance facilities, constituting as they did an ideal laboratory for discipline and normalisation. Using letters („Eingaben“) sent to the Health Ministry as a source, MICHEL CHRISTIAN (University of Geneva, Switzerland) presented the discussions about the role of infant care facilities („Kinderkrippen“) in the GDR in the years 1989 and 1990. In this period, democratisation processes made it possible to discuss subjects previously under restriction, such as pedagogical programmes, wages, and work conditions. ANNA KOZLOVA (European University, St. Petersburg, Russia) showed in her talk how a sense of continuity existed between the Soviet and post-Soviet eras in the two most famous pioneer camps in the Soviet Union, Artek and Orlyonok, the mission of which was ideological education. Based on more than fifty in-depth interviews with employees from these camps, she argued that, according to the counselors, 'non-totalitarian and apolitical pedagogical techniques' were used long before the collapse of the Soviet Union, rendering it unnecessary to make vital changes in 1991. As a discussant for this panel, TILL KÖSSLER (Halle University, Germany) raised questions about

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the role of the educators in institutional care in Central and Eastern Europe in a global perspective, the reliability of documents recording the views of educators, and the necessity of developing specific methodologies for this type of research.

On the second day of the conference, LISBETH MATZER (University of Cologne, Germany) opened the second panel, which was concerned with 'Borderland Childhoods'. She discussed the role played by the Hitler Youth in the highly contested border region between today's Austria and Slovenia during the Second World War, in what was perceived as a 'civilizing mission'. Crucial in this respect were 'Germanness' (categories such as athleticism, character, language, attitude to nature), which individuals qualified as being 'German', and what kind of strategies were employed to teach 'Germanness' (e.g. reminding Slovenes of their forgotten 'true nature'). This was followed by OLGA GNYDIUK (European University Florence, Italy), whose paper analysed reports of individual children and the social workers of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the International Refugee Organization (IRO), investigating the resettlement from the Polish-Soviet Borderlands after the Second World War. The sources showed that the welfare workers and Anglo-American occupation authorities were lenient in applying the regulations and did not insist on returning the children to the home region after the region of Eastern Poland was annexed by the Soviet Union. The resettlement therefore was just as much a political as a humanitarian and a logistic question. CĂTĂLINA MIHALACHE (Romanian Academy, Iași, Romania) presented in her paper an oral history research project conducted by historians from Romania and the Republic of Moldova about life on both banks of the Prut River. Their questions addressed the memories of childhood from the 1960s to the 1990s, and how they affected images of 'the other' and the self. MURIEL BLAIVE (Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes – ÚSTR, Prague, Czech Republic), who served as a discussant for this panel, posed questions about the methodology of the case studies. She proposed to set the research results in

a more comparative perspective, such as the research of Tara Zahra on Czech-German nationalist competition over children in the borderlands. She furthermore emphasised that the fall of communism in 1989 could no longer be seen as recent history, and that it should not be treated as such. The discussion that followed touched on methodological issues, such as the possibly flawed nature of field research commissioned by the state authorities of one of the states of the disputed borderline. The need for human capital after the Second World War, as discussed in the first two papers of the session, was compared. The term 'desirable citizens' was also debated in the context of the case studies, and further examples were given of the decisions of states to either re-educate or repatriate citizens. The morning session ended with the keynote lecture given by JOËLLE DROUX (University of Geneva, Switzerland) titled '1989: Just another (r)evolution?'. The lecture gave an overview of the genesis and development of 'children's rights' in Europe from the policies developed at the end of the 19th century, the progress made after the First World War and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924, up to the UN's International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), with special emphasis on the agency and participation of children at different stages of this process.

The third panel, dedicated to 'Changing Visions of Childhood,' commenced with a paper by KATHARINA FRIEDLA (Polish Institute of Advanced Studies PIASt/Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland), who talked about the deportation of Polish Jewish children and their families from Germany in October 1938 using the evidence of archival materials, memoirs, and interviews. After their expulsion from Germany to Poland, many families were forced to move to the Soviet-occupied eastern parts of Poland, and later deported further to the interior of the Soviet Union by the NKVD, being classified as 'class enemies or politically undesirable elements'. With close attention to individual case studies, the role of language and culture in shaping ethnic and national identity was described. In the second paper, LAURA HOBSON FAURE (Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris, France) shed light on how 350–450 Central European

Jewish children were sent to France in the 1940s through *Kindertransporte*. The children were received in collective children's homes in the Paris region, which were run by Jewish organizations such as the Union OSE (Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants) and under the auspices of the Baroness de Rothschild. Using archival sources, children's contemporaneous writings, and later testimonies, she showed how refugee children were given agency by the practices in these homes and by the ideological background of the educators. These predominantly left-oriented educators established children's republics for the children in the homes and encouraged children to express their opinions. JAKUB GAŁEZIOWSKI (University of Warsaw, Poland/University of Augsburg, Germany) discussed in his paper how political calculation and demographic losses as a consequence of the war spurred communist authorities in Poland after the Second World War to take as many orphaned and unaccompanied children as possible into state care, with the intention of bringing them up as Polish citizens. Many children repatriated to Poland from Germany and Austria regardless of their nationality were brought up by Polish orphanages and foster families, where they were raised to be Poles and were taught the local language. He emphasised how, in times of political rupture, children were instrumentalised by the state for the purpose of nation building and creating 'model citizens'. As a respondent to this panel, JILL MASSINO (University of North Carolina, US) raised questions about the psychological dimension of children's instrumentalisation by the state. She questioned how children's republics influenced children's resilience. The question of how gender was expressed in the children's contemporaneous autobiographical writings was also discussed.

In the afternoon, ELIZAVETA ZHDANKOVA (European University, St. Petersburg, Russia) presented the first paper in the fourth panel on 'Changing Visions of Childhood', addressing the role of cinema in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. The researcher discussed the various ways in which the new regime used the popularity of cinema among children and young people for ideological purposes. She showed how

the films shown in the cinema for adults were perceived by educators as a potentially dangerous, inappropriate form of 'useless leisure' and how a politicised children's repertoire was gradually developed. IRYNA SKUBII (Petro Vasylenko Kharkiv National Technical University of Agriculture, Ukraine) engaged with testimonies that had been recorded with survivors of the Holodomor, the Ukrainian famine in 1932–1933, investigating children's survival strategies. In her multidisciplinary approach she combined consumption history, history of material culture, children and famine studies. She focused in her paper on the material aspects of survival, through which she described children's agency in the famine and argued that their image can be redefined from victims to active social actors in the social and public space. In the final paper of this panel, EKATERINA PEREPROSOVA (Paris Descartes University, France) talked about the transformation of Soviet-type state residential care institutions into small group homes with fixed educators in Russia in the early 2000s. She presented her research findings from a two-month observation in residential care institutions and family support centres in Moscow and Irkutsk and the evidence of ethnographic interviews with institutional actors (social services professionals and NGO representatives). She argued that the turn towards a more individualised conception of childhood could be broken down into the elements of the neoliberal ethos accompanying *glasnost*, which brought about a shifting responsibility of NGOs and a paradigm change in the old processes of educating a new type of citizen. BARBARA KLICH-KLUCZEWSKA (Imre Kertész Kolleg Jena, Germany/Jagiellonian University Kraków, Poland) responded to the papers by emphasising the necessity for a more universalised approach to the various case studies. She raised several general questions in response to the case studies. What is the status of the 'single child'? To what extent are they considered as individuals by administrators? Is the agency of the 'single child' like that of an adult? Can one talk about a difference between children and adults in investigating the materiality of hunger and suffering?

The final session on the last day, bearing the title 'Remembering Childhood', was kicked off by a paper by IOANA TÎSTEĂ (University of Tampere, Finland), who used an intentionally subjectivist auto-ethnographic methodology to reflect today as an adult on her childhood memories of growing up in Romania in the 1990s. She inter-referenced her own memories with those of three members of her family born in the 1950s, her mother and two aunts. The concept of the 'metaphorical border' and challenging gender and sexuality norms, as well as ethnic and religious racialisations and racism, played an important role in this process. Meanwhile RAILI NUGIN (Tallinn University, Estonia) shifted the focus to questions of generational consciousness and distinctive identities, based on in-depth and focus group interviews with representatives of people born in the 1970s in Estonia, combined with material from articles in the mainstream media. The aim of the paper was to show how the memories from the Soviet time and social transformation in the 1990s shaped the generational consciousness of this age group. In the last presentation of the session, HANNA HAAG (University of Applied Sciences G rlitz/Zittau) investigated the question of how knowledge concerning the political and social change of 1989 is transmitted through commemorative practices in East German families. Through the close analysis of a number of interviews taken in multigenerational families from the former East Germany, she demonstrated the role of the 'Post-Wende-children' within the familial discourse on the changes of 1989 and how this influenced the continuities of shared knowledge. She emphasised the different roles children can play in these processes. The panel's discussant, LIBORA OATES-INDRUCHOVA (University of Graz, Austria), raised questions about the concept of 'age-cohort' and methodological aspects of the research in all three cases, such as the necessity of consulting the post-socialist scholarship of Central Europe beside the results of Western scholarship. The ensuing discussion led to an exchange of views, for instance on how experimenting with subjectivist auto-ethnographic narratives and poetry could be applied as a post-academic mode of research, and what

the risks of such methodologies might be.

In the final discussion session, 'Towards a European Network „Children of/and Transformation“', the results of the main themes involving children's displacement, children's care and relief, and the memories of childhood were discussed. Further studies were called for on the history of childhood for a better understanding of the social implications of political transformations in the 20th century. It was concluded that an international and interdisciplinary framework, such as this conference, is needed to compare the situation in different countries and to investigate how unique the various political transformations were in terms of their short- and long-term repercussions on children's lives. Such comparative investigations enable reductive national views to be challenged and new insights to emerge into how the everyday realities of childhood were understood in these societies in the past and how they are remembered today.

#### **Conference overview:**

*Welcome and Opening: Childhood in Times of Political Transformation*

Nadia Al-Bagdadi (Institute for Advanced Study at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary)

Friederike Kind-Kov cs (IAS, Budapest / Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies, Dresden)

Machteld Venken (Imre Kert sz Kolleg, Jena/ University of Vienna, Austria)

#### *Panel I Children's Institutional Care*

Chair: Friederike Kind-Kov cs (Budapest / Dresden)

Discussant: Till K ssler (Halle University)

Andrea Grifante (Vytautas Magnus University): A Nest for New Lithuanians – Orphanages, Discipline and Nation Building in Ober Ost, 1915-1918

Michel Christian (University of Geneva): Infant Care Facilities (Kinderkrippen) and the End of the German Democratic Republic

Anna Kozlova (European University, St. Petersburg): 'The Ideological Husk fell off, and the Humanism Remained': Why Pioneer

Camps Survived the Collapse of the Soviet Union

*Panel II Borderland Childhoods*

Chair: Machteld Venken (Jena / Vienna)

Commentator: Muriel Blaive (Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ÚSTR), Prague)

Lisbeth Matzer (University of Cologne): 'German Blood' and National Belonging. The Hitler Youth's Role in the Germanization of Upper Carniola and Lower Styria

Olga Gnydiuk (European University Florence): Resettlement and Repatriation of The Uprooted Children from the Polish-Soviet Borderlands After World War II

Cătălina Mihalache (Romanian Academy, Iași): Growing up so close to the Border during Socialist and Postcommunist times

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*Keynote Speech*

Chair: Friederike Kind-Kovács (Budapest)

Joëlle Droux (University of Geneva): 1989: just another (r)evolution?

*Panel III Children's Displacement*

Chair: Thomas Lindenberger (Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies, Dresden)

Commentator: Jill Massino (University of North Carolina)

Laura Hobson Faure (Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris): 1939/40: The Meanings of War to Central European Jewish Refugee Children in France

Katharina Friedla (Polish Institute of Advanced Studies PIASt/Polish Academy of Sciences): 'From Nazi Inferno to the Soviet Hell' – Polish-Jewish Children and their Trajectories of Survival during the Second World War

Jakub Gałęziowski (University of Warsaw / University of Augsburg): „'All the Children are Ours' – Policies towards Unaccompanied Children in the Post-War Polish State“

*Panel IV Changing Visions of Childhood*

Chair: Marsha Siefert (Central European University, Budapest)

Commentator: Barbara Klich-Kluczevska (Imre Kertész Kolleg Jena / Jagiellonian Uni-

versity Kraków)

Elizaveta Zhdankova (European University, St. Petersburg): Child at the Cinema: the Contradictions of Children's Leisure in the USSR in the 1920s

Iryna Skubii (Petro Vasylenko Kharkiv National Technical University of Agriculture): Childhood and Hunger: the Holodomor and Children's Survival Practices

Ekaterina Pereprosova (Paris Descartes University): Deinstitutionalization as the Symbol of a Changing Conception of Childhood

*Panel V Remembering Childhood*

Chair: Jessie Labov (Central European University, Budapest)

Discussant: Libora Oates-Indruchova (University of Graz)

Ioana Tîstea (University of Tampere): Thinking from the border towards envisioning differential subjectivities

Raili Nugin (Tallinn University): Childhood Years as Generational Capital: The 24 Narratives of the 1970s Cohort

Hanna Haag (University of Applied Sciences Görlitz/Zittau): The narrative Wind of Change – On commemorative Practices in East-German Families

*Final Session*

*Small Group Discussions: Towards a European Network „Children of/and Historical Transformation“*

1. *Children's Displacement, Migration and Life at Borders*

Chair: Machteld Venken (Jena / Vienna)

2. *Children's Care and Relief: Between the Family and the State*

Friederike Kind-Kovács (Budapest)

3. *Visions, Subjectivities and Memories of Childhood*

Chair: Till Kössler (Halle)

Tagungsbericht *Beyond 1989: Childhood and Youth in Times of Political Transformation in the 20th Century*. 05.06.2019–07.06.2019, Budapest, in: H-Soz-Kult 23.10.2019.