

## Childhood in Times of Political Transformation in the 20th Century: an introduction

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In the past years, the so-called East German ‘Children of the Transition’ [*Wendekinder*] have come to raise the question of how 1989 and its aftermath affected children’s lives in the past and how their memories still shape their individual and collective biographies up to today.<sup>1</sup> This new perspective on the years of postsocialist transformation allows for the reading of the history of ‘1989’ through a historical exploration of children’s past experiences. As Jan Kubik and Amy Linch pointed out in 2016, it is no longer of much use to approach the ‘postcommunist transformations as a straightforward, uniform, linear, and easily generalizable “progress” from totalitarianism to democracy and from command economy to market economy’, as it was initially proposed by the so-called transitologists of the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Neither is it any more helpful to continue centering our attention on single years like ‘1989’ as markers of abrupt and dramatic political and economic change. Historians such as Gregor Feindt have ‘challenge[d] 1989 as a clear-cut break’, and proposed instead to ‘study the long transformation of state

1. S. Rennefanz, *Eisenkinder. Die stille Wut der Wendegeneration*, München 2012; J. Nichelmann, *Nachwendekinder. Die DDR, unsere Eltern und das große Schweigen*, Berlin 2019; M. Hacker / J. Enders / A. Lettrari, *Dritte Generation Ost: Wer wir sind, was wir wollen*, Berlin 2013.
2. J. Kubik / A. Linch, *Postcommunism from Within: Social Justice, Mobilization, and Hegemony*, New York 2016, 6.

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socialism'.<sup>3</sup> Back in 2003, Lynne Haney considered it a 'prevailing mythology' to perceive 1989 as a 'grand historical marker', a rupture in terms of the welfare systems.<sup>4</sup>

Instead, it has become the dominant agenda of recent historical scholarship to broaden the scope and examine the historical rupture of '1989' as a reflection of a long process of transformation.<sup>5</sup> Herein lies the 'ambivalent nature of 1989', which manifests itself in the fact that it is understood and examined 'both as an event and as a convenient label for the roughly decade-long process of political, social and economic changes that followed the demise of the late-socialist regimes'.<sup>6</sup> In that vein, Florian Kühner-Wielach and Sarah Lemmen suggested to focus on those processes of adaptation rather than solely on the dialectic relationship between continuities and discontinuities.<sup>7</sup> Recent research attempts to capture the diverse individual responses to the postsocialist transformation. In 1999, Katherine Verdery and Michael Burawoy called this period an 'Uncertain Transition',<sup>8</sup> that was 'not a unilinear one of moving from one stage to the next [. . .] but a combined and uneven one having multiple trajectories'.<sup>9</sup> Twenty years later, Jill Massino speaks of 'Ambiguous Transitions',<sup>10</sup> stressing the importance of capturing people's 'complex and ambiguous' responses to the postsocialist transformation, which were 'shaped by their experiences of both past and present and the disconnect between expectation and reality'.<sup>11</sup>

Keeping this complexity in mind, children's encounter with 1989 can also serve as a magnifying glass onto the longer period of political rupture and transformation. Beyond serving as a container for individual and collective experiences, the label '1989' captures well the simultaneity of rapid political and social change<sup>12</sup> as well as the longer process of political and social transformation of political systems and social practices. In this double function '1989'—as an abrupt caesura and a reflection of long-term social negotiations—manifested itself in the everyday life of children. Massive privatization, high unemployment, new housing and living conditions/standards, migration to the West, and new pedagogical ideas of children's care and education brought about fundamental changes to children's upbringing. But how unique was '1989' in terms of its short- and long-term impact on children's lives, when compared to other political watersheds of the twentieth century, such as both World Wars and their aftermaths? And in what way can the history of childhood contribute to a better understanding of periods of political and social transformation in the twentieth century?

Starting from these two fundamental questions, this double special issue approaches the history of childhood as a means to scrutinize how periods of major political transformations of the twentieth

3. G. Feindt, 'Making and Unmaking Socialist Modernities: Seven Interventions into the Writing of Contemporary History on Central and Eastern Europe', in: P. Terhoeven (ed.), *The Other Side of Terrorism*, Munich 2018, 133–153, 136.

4. L. Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary*, Berkeley 2003, 165.

5. K. Brückweh / C. Villinger / K. Zöllner, *Die lange Geschichte der Wende*, Berlin 2020.

6. M. Conway, 'Introduction', in: M. Conway / P. Lagrou / H. Rousso (eds.), *Europe's Postwar Periods 1989, 1945, 1918. Writing History Backwards*, London, New York, Oxford 2018, 1–8, 5.

7. F. Kühner-Wielach / S. Lemmen, 'Transformation in East Central Europe: 1918 and 1989. A Comparative Approach', in: *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 23 (2016) 4, 574.

8. C. Verdery / M. Burawoy, *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*, Lanham et al. 1999.

9. *Ibid.*, 14.

10. J. Massino, *Ambiguous Transitions. Gender, the State, and Everyday Life in Socialist and Postsocialist Romania*, New York 2019.

11. *Ibid.*, 2, 367.

12. Some scholars also refer to the social dimension of the long process of political transformation as 'social change'. C. Leccardi et al., *1989: Young People and Social Change after the Fall of the Berlin Wall*, Strasbourg 2012.

century affected the everyday lives of children. Our incentive is that the study of political transformations throughout the twentieth century has grown extensively,<sup>13</sup> but the experiences of children and young people in the turmoils remain less researched.<sup>14</sup> Against this backdrop, the contributions to this double special issue offer to shed light on three major political ruptures and the longer term transformations these entailed in the twentieth century, including their impact on notions and everyday realities of childhood and youth: World War I and its aftermath, World War II and its following years, and ‘1989’ as the end of the Cold War and the beginning of postcommunism.

While Martin Conway considered a comparison of 1989, 1945, and 1918 a ‘rather awkward triple jump across the 20<sup>th</sup> century’,<sup>15</sup> he and his co-editors still ventured to provide an entangled comparison of these three watersheds. He felt that such a comparison could be historically volatile as ‘modern European wars [. . .] have ragged ends, and to seize upon a specific endpoint of these conflicts risks neglecting the after-wars that were such a prominent element of all three conflicts’.<sup>16</sup> Taking up Conway’s proposal, this special issue goes one step further and approaches the historical moments 1918, 1945, and 1989 not as isolated political ruptures or caesuras. Instead, it explores these key moments as symbolic markers of longer historical processes of political and social transformation.

Against this backdrop, the contributions scrutinize how these abrupt ruptures and the longer processes of political and social transformation could become visible in children’s lives. We approach the two World Wars, the Cold War, and their respective aftermaths as long(er) transformation periods that could affect and/or alter children’s everyday lives. The articles assembled here encourage us to study what it meant for children that the ‘transition from war to peace’ and from state socialism to postsocialism ‘was rarely clear-cut’.<sup>17</sup> One Polish Jewish child survivor of the Holocaust felt that ‘the war began for me after the war’.<sup>18</sup> Joanna B. Michlic argued that for Jewish child survivors in Poland, the ‘early postwar period was still very much a turbulent era full of magnitude of messy and confusing events.’ These events were so decisive for determining ‘the future of these children and how they were to develop, both as individuals and as members of national and cultural communities.’ Children’s social identities were in the early postwar period still ‘fragile, fluid and exposed to many shifts’.<sup>19</sup> Not only the children’s identities were fluid in the postwar, but so was the transition from war to peace.

With this in mind, this double special issue pursues three major aims. First, it proposes to take up the contention that not only the two World Wars and the Cold War ‘provided a defining framework for the shape of the century’; their aftermaths and the subsequent ‘transitional periods’, during which important ‘new structures of power and of organizations became apparent, also had similar effects’.<sup>20</sup>

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13. P. Ther, *Europe since 1989*, Princeton 2018; M. Diewald / A. Goedicke / K. U. Mayer (eds.), *After the Fall of the Wall. Life Courses in the Transformation of East Germany*, Stanford 2006.
  14. See S. Audoin-Rouzeau, *La guerre des enfants*, Paris 1993; M. Honeck / J. Marten, *War and Childhood in the Era of the Two World Wars*, Cambridge 2019; I. Silova / N. Piattoeva / Z. Millei, *Childhood and Schooling in (Post)Socialist Societies: Memories of Everyday Life*, Cham 2018.
  15. Conway, ‘Introduction’, 5.
  16. *Ibid.*, 5.
  17. *Ibid.*, 3.
  18. J. B. Michlic, ‘“The War Began for me after the War”: Jewish Children in Poland, 1945–49’, in: J. C. Friedman (ed.), *The Routledge History of the Holocaust*, London 2012, 484–499, 484.
  19. Michlic, ‘The War’, 484 and 485.
  20. M. Conway / P. Lagrou, ‘Conclusion’, in: Conway / Lagrou / Rousso, *Europe’s Postwar Periods*, 193–198, 193.

This allows us to not only juxtapose the impact of the two World Wars and the Cold War on childhood but also integrate the aftermath of these conflicts into a diachronic perspective on longer processes of political and social transformation.

Second, it aims to test the usefulness and applicability of the notion of ‘transformation’ for describing not only the processes that accompanied the postsocialist period but also those that surrounded the watersheds of the World Wars. As ‘radical system or regime changes’, which occurred in 1918, 1945, and 1989, ‘only take place in a crisis after the prevailing weakening of the ruling regime’<sup>21</sup>, an analysis of political transformation needs to consider the preceding wars and/or the Cold War, the regime changes during 1918, 1945, and 1989, and their long aftermaths. We also engage with the question as to how the two World Wars, 1989 and their aftermaths brought about a social transformation, which left an imprint on the everyday lives of children. Here we examine how these periods of transformation became tangible in children’s lives. We are curious to investigate how they transformed family ties and children’s relationships, children’s upbringing and education, and children’s welfare.

And third, this double special issue uses the lens of childhood to provide a diachronic exploration of the relationship between political and social transformation processes and their implications for children’s lives in the twentieth century. Judith Szalai argued in a United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report in 1992 that ‘One can hardly find more sensitive indicators of the well-being of a given society than those measuring the living conditions and future prospects of the children in that society’.<sup>22</sup> As modern notions of childhood considered children to be innocent, vulnerable, pure, dependent, and ignorant, children were to be protected, cared for, and should enjoy special freedoms. For that reason, as the childhood historian Paula Fass stressed it, modern states were ‘committed to withdrawing them from certain adult spheres like war and sexuality’.<sup>23</sup> But if, despite such utopian visions, wars and political crises invaded children’s private lives, their everyday lives reflect well the gravity and scope of political and social ruptures as well as of political and social transformation. As children’s everyday concerns were (and still are) fundamentally tied to and dependent on the overall functioning of societies, their lives mirror how political crises and transformations affected societies in general. In so far as states also considered children a ‘political tabula rasa’<sup>24</sup> or a ‘blank slate’<sup>25</sup> that could be used to revolutionize contemporary and envision future societies, children also came to gain particular value in processes of transformation. Children’s new role and reinvented education, their new position vis-à-vis the state, and their altered everyday lives literally embodied the respective systemic change and the longer transformation process.

This double special issue offers a range of thematic contributions that tackle selected historical case studies of (post)war and (post)socialist childhoods. Whereas employing the case study approach offers the opportunity to detail childhoods in their specific historical settings, gathering them in a double special issue allows readers to detect similarities and differences among children across time and space and support a thinking of the twentieth century through the lens of ‘transformation’. The papers combine a top-down perspective on children (focusing on child policies and on how adults treated children) with a meticulous unraveling of how children

21. R. Kollmorgen / W. Merkel / H.-J. Wagoner, *Handbuch Transformationsforschung*, Wiesbaden 2015, 19.

22. J. Szalai, ‘Social Policy and Child Poverty: Hungary since 1945’, October 1992, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/eps32.pdf> (accessed 11 February 2021).

23. P. Fass, ‘Is There a Story in the History of Childhood?’, in: P. Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, London 2015, 6.

24. M. Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire*, Cambridge 2004, 213.

25. L. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917–1932*, New York 2001, 162.

experienced their upbringing in times of political rupture(s) and political and social transformation. Just like the lives of adults, the lives of children were influenced by such events and changes. Indeed, children not only experienced situations differently from adults but also often faced other horizons of experience. Young children, for example, were often less politically informed and, as a result, did not understand or share the opinions of adults.<sup>26</sup>

As children are ‘historical actors with their own ideas, intentions and identity-forming experiences [. . .] [and not only] [. . .] mere objects of adult design’<sup>27</sup>, we aim to engage with children’s own subjectivities and their social agency,<sup>28</sup> their actual reactions, their own wishes, and their resilience. Julia Grant accentuates children’s agency with the following words: ‘Children are unruly, unpredictable, complex and cannot easily be encapsulated in a historical narrative’.<sup>29</sup> Zsuzsa Millei observed that the socialist period of children’s everyday life ‘could not be easily reduced to the dichotomies of official and unofficial, the public and the private, the state and the people’.<sup>30</sup> Taking children’s perspective into account, we have assembled exemplary case studies that explore displaced, orphaned, uprooted, unaccompanied children, borderland children, young survivors of forced migration, Jewish child survivors of the Holocaust, and children of the postsocialist transition. Through examples of how these children were treated, as well as the experiences of these children, we engage with changing conceptions and practices of children’s upbringing and institutional care in orphanages and in displaced persons’ camps. Engaging with case studies from Lithuania, Russia, Poland, France, Hungary, Ukraine, and Estonia, the authors investigate various notions and everyday realities of childhood through the prism of transformation.

## I. World War I and its aftermath: transforming childhoods

The Great War and its often long and troublesome aftermath had a decisive influence on the way in which children were approached by adults in the political entities that are discussed in this double special issue, as well as on how they experienced childhood. However, these turning points took on different forms for different children.<sup>31</sup> Many families and children were facing the absence and death of soldier fathers, the loss of one’s home and house, migration and displacement, and their new responsibilities. Even though studies often only address childhood during war, 1918 as the war’s official end did not end children’s encounter with this violent conflict. The postimperial condition of Central and Eastern Europe translated itself in children’s everyday lives in the following ways: it caused high infant mortality rates, the spreading of diseases and epidemics, the decline in birth rates, the interruption of children’s education and care, and the massive abandonment, neglect and displacement of children.

While children’s experiences with the war and its troublesome aftermath were as complex as the conflict itself, they were instrumental in paving the way toward the international recognition that children should be better protected. Before the war, children’s protection was mostly dependent on

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26. M. Venken, ‘Introduction: Borderland Studies Meets Child Studies. A European Encounter’, in: idem (ed.), *Borderland Studies Meets Child Studies. A European Encounter*, Frankfurt am Main 2017, 11–41, 18.
  27. M. Honeck / J. Marten, ‘Introduction: More than Victims: Framing the History of Modern Childhood and War’, in: idem, *War and Childhood in the Era of the Two World Wars*, Cambridge 2019, 1–14, 6.
  28. M. Winkler, *Kindheitsgeschichte: Eine Einführung*, Göttingen 2017, 228.
  29. J. Grant, ‘Children versus Childhood: Writing Children into the Historical Record, or Reflections on Paula Fass’s ‘Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society’’, in: *History of Education Quarterly* 45 (2005), 471.
  30. Z. Millei / I. Silova / S. Gannon, ‘Thinking through Memories of Childhood in (Post)Socialist Spaces: Ordinary Lives in Extraordinary Times’, in: *Children’s Geographies* 2019, 1–2.
  31. H. Stekl / C. Hämmerle, ‘Kindheit/en im Ersten Weltkrieg – eine Annäherung’, in: H. Stekl / C. Hämmerle / E. Bruckmüller (eds.), *Kindheit und Schule im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Vienna 2015, 7–44.

the family and on religious associations. As the war and its aftermath exhibited children's particular vulnerability, it brought about the evolution and expansion of children's protection and of child welfare institutions. Child relief also became an issue of international concern and activism.<sup>32</sup> In the postwar period, new international relief organizations, such as Save the Children, were established and posited children as the 'principal victims of war' who were meant to be rescued and whose relief was considered the 'best way of investing in peace and promoting international cooperation'.<sup>33</sup> Save the Children was instrumental in pushing for the recognition of children's rights. The 1924 Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child was the internationalist response to the suffering that the war and the postwar years had brought to Europe's children. The declaration demanded that the hungry must be fed, the orphan must be sheltered, the child shall be the first to receive help, and it should receive an education to help itself.<sup>34</sup>

With that in mind, Andrea Griffante focuses on the way that Lithuanian state formation was experimented with through child welfare during the World War. The political rupture of the German occupation established in 1915 yielded a transformation in child relief initiatives. The Lithuanian elite saw an unprecedented chance to include the lower social strata into its ranks and proliferate its ethno-national discourse. Not only did their initiatives now privilege displaced, destitute, and/or abandoned children above other social groups, such initiatives were also organized on a massive scale for the first time. Lithuanian elite members believed that isolating the young into children's orphanages-hostels was the appropriate solution to execute hygiene control and ensure consistent education in the Lithuanian language and what were considered to be Lithuanian norms and values. Interestingly, the hosted children remained largely unaffected by the sanitary catastrophe that led to the death of 9% of the city population of Vilnius in 1917.

The transformation in child welfare initiated during World War I could, however, not be implemented fully due to the inadequate supply of the necessary means, such as foodstuffs and medical equipment, and the insufficient capability of the elite to negotiate the everyday practices in orphanages-hostels with the children. Griffante's analysis of children's voices provides us a deeper insight into the quality of that transformation, by bringing to the fore that the young protested against the living conditions, the isolation from social life outside the hostels, and even refused to speak Lithuanian. As a result, when Lithuania appeared as an independent state on the map of Europe following a next political rupture, the wartime hostels became the model for how to 'discipline and normalize prototypical Lithuanians' (Griffante). However, given the fact the disciplining and normalizing ideals had already been hypothetical during the war, these were not converted into a convincing set of real practices once that war came to an end, leading to the long-term repercussions of the transformation being rather moderate, in comparison with, as the author indicates, neighboring Poland. To conclude, by shedding light on child relief initiatives, practices, and discourses during the war and its immediate aftermath, Griffante's article points to the crucial role that the Lithuanian elite envisioned children to play for its nation-building, as well as that elite's unfamiliarity in negotiating a *modus vivendi* with the latter.

Also Friederike Kind-Kovács's article concentrates on emerging child welfare during and after World War I, but the lens of her analysis is put on the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and on the constitution of the independent Hungarian postwar state. She points to the

32. R. Barbry et al. (eds.), *Naar school, zelfs in oorlogstijd? Belgische kinderen lopen school, 1914–1919*, Ypres 2014.

33. E. White, 'Relief, Reconstruction and the Rights of the Child: The Case of Russian Displaced Children in Constantinople, 1920–22', in: N. Baron (ed.), *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915–1953: Ideologies, Identities, Experiences*, Leiden 2017, 70–96, 71–72.

34. Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, Adopted 26 September 1924, League of Nations, <http://www.un-documents.net/gdrc1924.htm> (accessed 15 February 2021).

emergence of 'war orphans' as a new category of victims, and, similar to Griffante, to the transformation of child welfare through its gradual professionalization as well as the installation of an infrastructure, which remained in place once the war had come to an end. War orphans became publicly visible as threefold symbols. Through their destitute or physically harmed appearance, they embodied the violence of the war. In addition, they personified a transformation in their society's attitude. Their parents were no longer blamed for inappropriately bringing up their children, but acknowledged for their participation in the war, and the societal need to take care of their children was recognized.

At the same time, children were considered to symbolize the future, in which they as young adults would carry their country's reconstruction on their shoulders. This way of thinking provoked the emergence of wartime welfare initiatives in which one experimented with how a future postimperial Hungarian nation-state would and should look like. Although gathering war orphans from different backgrounds was meant to overcome ethnic nationalism, tensions between Hungarian-speaking, German-speaking, and Jewish children still filled the papers in 1917. A deep contrast also arose in the depiction of female war orphans and orphans' mothers. Whereas beauty contests were organized to provide girls with a scholarship and remind 'readers of the country's well-being and future' (Kind-Kovács), mothers of (half-)orphans were negatively stereotyped as being motivated by greed. The fear was articulated that the mothers' transformation into breadwinners within the wartime economy would have long-term repercussions on gender roles in postwar society, a fear that nourished conservative pronatalist policies in the years after the Great War.

Machteld Venken's article concentrates on the transformation of elite education once the state borderlines of the European continent had been redrawn in the aftermath of World War I. In Polish Upper Silesia, the change in state sovereignty from German to Polish meant a rupture in the political scene, but not all the implications for elite education turned out to be disruptive. Venken finds the transformation phase to have been characterized by highly contested power relations and frequently changed school curricula. She also uncovered that radical changes in the schools' clientele were a feature of Polish-speaking schools in the area, while German-speaking schools could continue to educate the traditional bourgeois strata of society as long as the League of Nations executed supranational control. The author aims for a better understanding of the multidimensional interwar everyday life in Polish Upper Silesia, which in recent historiography has often been analyzed with the help of the analytical category of national indifference. By dissecting the practices of local decision-makers within a sequence of transformative events that inevitably led to a compliance with social norms, and within a space considered to be of crucial interest to Polish nationalists, the article demonstrates that placing oneself outside of the imagined national community, or dictating its meaning, was no longer an option.

## 2. World War II and its aftermath: rehabilitating childhoods

While World War I and its aftermath had invaded family lives extensively, Tara Zahra judged World War II as having 'destroyed the family as completely as Europe's train tracks, factories, bridges and roads.'<sup>35</sup> However, the end of the war 'did not mean that children's lives ceased to be uprooted. Many had lost close relatives during the war and would grow up within other family set-ups than before' as Machteld Venken and Maren Röger observed.<sup>36</sup> Not just the war itself 'took a

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35. T. Zahra, 'The Psychological Marshall Plan': Displacement, Gender, and Human Rights after World War II', in: *Central European History* 44 (2011), 44.

36. M. Venken / M. Röger, 'Growing Up in the Shadow of the Second World War: European Perspectives', in: *European Review of History* 22 (2015), 201.

far greater toll on civilians than the Great War',<sup>37</sup> but also the war's aftermath continued to cast, for many children, a more intense or longer shadow over their further lives.

Yet, the postwar period also captured a new international moral consciousness and the dedication to the public protection of children as one particularly vulnerable social group. When comparing relief in Central and Eastern Europe after the World Wars, we can detect a shift of attention from children's bodies to their souls. The period after World War II was invested in the social and psychological recovery of those children that were harmed by the trauma of the war and the Holocaust. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25, claimed in 1948 that 'motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection'.<sup>38</sup> Here we also observe a new public obligation to provide long-term social protection to all those children and their mothers who were in need.

Set against this background, two articles analyze the lives of children on the move during World War II, while placing spatial reconfiguration center stage. The children being brought to France through Kindertransport, Laura Hobson Faure argues, 'established their own chronologies of war' (Hobson Faure). Through an analysis of the diaries written by Jewish refugee children, the author demonstrates how political and personal rupture could relate in different ways and puts forward the thesis that a transformation of children's everyday reality took place through subsequent political and personal ruptures. Political and personal rupture could follow each other, such as in the case of child diary writer Heinz Löw lamenting the separation from his loved ones when his train departed in the spring 1939, on which his grandmother had put him after the occupation of Austria in 1938.

Personal rupture could also coincide with watersheds on the global scene, such as the outbreak of World War II, which incited this young diary writer to articulate his feelings in writing, while his friend illustrated the diary for him. Afterwards, more Jewish refugees arrived in France, and children with different ideological profiles were put together in children's homes, a development that provoked, sharpened, or transformed their political awakening. When the German army invaded France in 1940, the Jewish refugee children were transferred southwards to France's unoccupied zone. They found shelter in a predominantly French-speaking environment for the first time. Later, when the Vichy regime started raids against Jews, the children had to flee or go into hiding.

These frequent political ruptures influenced the work of the left-oriented educators who had founded progressive Children's Republics in children's homes upon the arrival of the Jewish refugee children. While the majority of the children survived Nazi persecution, others perished. By bringing us closer to the inner world of the Jewish children experiencing the turmoil of war, Hobson Faure points to the adaptability of children to take over the role of a parent in times of distress.

Another group of children on the move, as Katharina Friedla postulates, were 'Polish-Jewish children, born or raised in Germany, who survived World War II in the Soviet hinterland (. . .)' (Friedla). Like the Kindertransport children, the journey of these children started before the outbreak of the war. In the autumn 1938, they were transported to Poland after the Polish state had revoked their Polish citizenship. When the German army occupied the Western part of Poland, many of these refugees escaped or were transported to the East, eventually reaching Siberia. In 1941, when the Polish-Soviet agreement was signed, many embarked on a journey to Central Asia, and up to 1000 children later joined the Anders' Army to Palestine. After the World War, many returned to Poland, but almost all left and traveled overseas within the following years. Like Hobson Faure, Friedla sees a profound transformation of children's lives emerging as a result of

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37. T. Zahra, 'The Psychological Marshall Plan', 39.

38. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR\\_Translations/eng.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf) (accessed 15 February 2021).

the rapid sequence of political ruptures. By the time they had reached Central Asia, these children had taken up the responsibility for their own survival. The author also found testimonies of former children who admitted that they had left their parents and had joined an orphanage to receive food.

Other than Hobson Faure, Friedla also pays attention to the 'emotional transition' of the children caused by the pain and trauma of their migrations, which remained with them later in life as they found it difficult to articulate their memories (Friedla). On one hand, child survivors refused to identify as survivors of the Holocaust and compete with Holocaust memory because their stories 'only' consisted of forced migration, humiliation, and starvation, instead of mass extermination. On the other hand, since child survivors only remembered fragments of what they had experienced or witnessed through children's eyes, they held the generation of their parents responsible for constituting the collective memory of the Polish Jews who lived, were born, or raised in interwar Germany.

The article of Olga Gnydiuk concentrates on displaced unaccompanied minors and their caregivers in the early aftermath of World War II. The author puts her lens of analysis on the fate of Polish-Ukrainian displaced children in the post-1945 world, who saw themselves cut off from their home grounds when these shifted sovereignty from Polish to Soviet sovereignty. This rupture was accompanied by 'political transformations', as the author defines: 'a gradual process that embraced the continuities of the war period but also reached out in time to have longer-lasting effects (. . .)' and took the form of 'a change of policies, humanitarian approaches and social practices, as well as crumbling diplomatic relations' (Gnydiuk). Gnydiuk's article provides an example of how child welfare activities after the World War II did more than provide children material support. Out of a belief that war had caused emotional damage, welfare workers were concerned with restoring victims' social and psychological health. While welfare workers followed the official principle of international relief, that is, to act in 'the best interests' of children, that principle, as Gnydiuk argues, appeared malleable enough to provide the opportunity to ignore the repatriation dictate to the Soviet Union included in the Treaty of Yalta in 1945, and thus led more children emigrate to Western countries. That child protection takes precedence over the rights of an individual country over 'its children' was an idea developed and practiced in the early postwar period, an idea that would pave the path to further developments of children's rights later.

### **3. The long transformation of '1989': individualizing childhoods**

The third political rupture and longer transformation process that we center our attention on and which left a particular imprint on children's lives, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, accompanied the year '1989'. From its very inception, state socialism had pushed for an increasing shift from parental care to institutional care. Children's everyday lives had turned into a territory of intervention by state authorities, and institutionalization was believed to help bring up ideal versions of future generations. This conviction was fundamentally questioned by the political rupture in 1989. The collapse of state socialism translated itself in processes of liberalization, deregulation, and privatization. As most of children's care had been outsourced to state institutions, children had been highly dependent on the quality of care in kindergartens, orphanages, and childcare institutions, which had not always been a given. It had become apparent that the socialist type of comprehensive child welfare had not only been too expensive, but that it was often lacking in quality. The economy of shortages had visibly affected childcare provisions and institutions.

The year 1989 witnessed the beginning of a process of deinstitutionalization; yet it also witnessed with the signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international agreement demanding that all states 'shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent

authorities'.<sup>39</sup> In contrast to the earlier child right declarations, this declaration called upon the signing states to secure the quality of public childcare. What followed in 1989 was an increasing 'individualization of life situations contra the prior ideal of collectivism and clear-cut conception of a normal biography'.<sup>40</sup> This also comprised a shift from a collective to a more individualized conception of childhood and children's upbringing and care. In the early postsocialist years, the state increasingly withdrew from children's public childcare.

Yugoslavia's last generation experienced the postsocialist transformation as 'marked by a deep sense of uncertainty and instability, as everything could be, and oftentimes was questioned'.<sup>41</sup> Beyond the top-down political transformation, the period was marked by an 'inner dynamics of transformation', and this 'transformation of the official rhetoric, politics and practices' could be studied from 'within the institutional youth sphere' where it also 'unfolded'.<sup>42</sup>

The various postsocialist countries shared these experiences of an uncertain transition, which was shaped by the tension between socialist legacies and neoliberal policies. Much of what children had considered as eternal before 1989 either vanished into thin air or was abruptly devalued.<sup>43</sup> The change of school curricula and pedagogic reforms, the closure of state (and factory) kindergartens and nurseries, as well as parents' loss/change of their workplace, housing insecurities, and processes of increasing social stratification triggered insecurities, lack of social integration, and feelings of loss.

This special issue contains two articles breaking new ground on the long-term impact of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc on (former) children and their caregivers. Raili Nugin examines how the communicative memory of what she coins the 1970s age cohort in Estonia presents the collapse of communism as a process rather than a political rupture. The author investigates people who enjoyed childhood during Soviet times and experienced their coming of age during the 1990s in Estonia. Other than their parents, who considered the collapse of communism a political rupture, the age cohort born in the 1970s experienced the late 1980s and 1990s as a period of transformation in which a change happened 'on both personal and social level' that was accompanied by 'a certain sense of moving forward and asking questions about identity' (Nugin).

The author argues that the way in which individuals of this age cohort communicated their memories of coming of age in the public sphere provoked the development of a generational consciousness. They indicated that their Soviet memories mobilized them later in life to value freedom and independence, and bestowed them with a specific cultural capital (such as the capability to understand certain jokes) and the knowledge of hardship. This symbolic resource formed the basis for the cohort's generational discursive capital. In addition, Nugin analyses the interesting discourses of those who were too young to have been potentially able to play a decisive role during the Singing Revolution, due to which they discursively stretched the time period of the emergence of political culture in Estonia to the first decade after the country's independence. In this way, they molded their personal memories into a discursive tool enabling them to (falsely) claim a crucial social role for themselves during this process of change.

Anna Kozlova builds the argument of her article around the observation that former counselors of the two most prominent Soviet pioneer children's centers did not remember the exact time when the Soviet Union collapsed, and stressed the continuity of the centers' activities instead. Since the

39. Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text> (accessed 15 February 2021).

40. Translation by author. G. Leidecker, 'Kinder und Jugendliche erleben die Wende'. Zeughaus Berlin, 26. März–15. Juni 1993, [https://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/lebensstationen/leidecker\\_1.htm](https://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/lebensstationen/leidecker_1.htm) (accessed 15 February 2021).

41. L. Spaskovska, *The Last Yugoslav Generation: The Rethinking of Youth Politics and Cultures*, Manchester 2017, 23.

42. *Ibid.*, 7, 39.

43. A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton 2006.

Thaw in the second half of the 1950s, counselors in these pioneer camps had learned to detach rituals from their propagandistic meaning, and to bestow these with a self-appropriated understanding that was derived from humanistic pedagogy. During the later stagnation, inspectors representing the Soviet regime were not capable of erasing these seeds of progressive ideals from the minds and practices of individual camp counselors. This meant that the system's change in the early 1990s did not significantly affect the camps' working. By that time, indeed, these camps had come to function as semi-autonomous institutions constituted by the agency of their counselors, who gladly reactivated or intensified humanistic practices. On the basis of oral history interviews, the author unravels individual counselors' transformation, that is, how they supported and developed humanistic pedagogy by means of their daily practices, and in this way tried to give meaning to how they had co-shaped the camps' profiles and activities from the late 1980s into the 1990s and up until today.

#### 4. Exploring twentieth-century transformations through childhood

Gathering a number of exemplary case studies of children's experiences in periods of transformation, this double special issue recommends an understanding of the twentieth century that reaches further than a central focus on the political ruptures of both World Wars, as well as the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989. First, the contributions follow Tony Judt's observation that the century was characterized by the rise of state involvement.<sup>44</sup> Second, they put children, who had been posited as a distinct social group for receiving support from the state throughout Europe in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, at the center of the historical analysis. In this way, they aim to demonstrate how these three political ruptures were intertwined with political and social transformation. Taken together, the contributions engage with the various ways in which political rupture and political and social transformation related to one another in different time periods and how they impacted children in different or similar ways.

The various articles detail these implied personal rupture(s), transformation(s) of the care provided to children, and changes in the practices, thoughts, and emotions of (former) children. What emerges from these readings is that an understanding of transformation cannot be reduced to a clearly defined period after a political rupture. Instead, a political and/or social transformation could start before (e.g. Nugin, Friedla) and continue during and after a political rupture, and that its duration depended on the historical context (e.g. Venken). Throughout the twentieth century, thus, political and social transformations were contingent, possessing a time frame that could shrink and expand depending on the circumstances at the time. With this investigation of the policies for and practices of children and their caregivers in a variety of local settings during political ruptures and political and social transformations, the special issue includes more experiences and voices in the study of our contemporary past.

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44. T. Judt / T. Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century*, London 2013, 386.