

From Trauma to Protection: the twentieth century as the children's century

A conference to be held at the University of Warwick, 19-20 April 2018

Keynote speaker: Dr Manon Pignot (Université de Picardie-Jules Verne)

CALL FOR PAPERS



Image: War damage, AD/14 5Fi 6/14, Archives Départementales du Calvados

Of all centuries, the twentieth is perhaps the one which most deserves to qualify as the 'children's century' for the way in which the focus of social and political concern increasingly alighted on the figure of the child.

The period from the end of the nineteenth century witnessed a series of international developments affecting the discourses articulated around children's rights to physical protection, health and well-being: from the multiplication of laws to protect them in the public and private spheres, to the rise of non-governmental organisations and associations to bring them relief from trauma, insecurity and maltreatment. At the same time, the

twentieth century went hand-in-hand with increasing opportunities for children to experience such tragedies; and in both domestic settings (abuse or neglect) as well as wider geopolitical manifestations of violence (war and genocide) such anxieties have influenced the form and nature of the above responses.

This conference seeks to interrogate these two mutually-dependent themes and to explore the historical interactions between them. Firstly, by providing a forum to take stock of the current state of academic literature on childhood studies and by inviting contributions from a variety of scholarly fields and specialisms. Interest in the place and perspectives of children has been developing over a number of years in literature, history, sociology and anthropology, and we are seeking to bring together these different scholars and methodological approaches to discuss and identify new interdisciplinary possibilities for the field. Secondly, and related to the former, the conference aims to critically evaluate these possibilities. In historical disciplines especially, the rise of interest in childhood has been marked by a desire to analyse discourses of childhood and about children, and to recovery children's own cultural productions, agency and voices. We aim to bring these divergent approaches into dialogue.

Lastly, for the historian, as much as for the student of other disciplines, working with children and their historical traces poses the twin problems of ethics and analysis. Records are doubly problematic when they treat children's victimhood, and varying confidentiality laws and customs between countries make transnational comparison difficult. Even where such sources do exist in easily-accessible form, they are often of the non-traditional type (children's drawings, toys, etc) and require unconventional methods on the part of the historian to derive meaning from them. The notion of 'children's culture' (*culture enfantine*) developed by the French anthropologist, Julie Delalande, will be at the heart of the conference, and the use of child-produced sources such as drawings, letters, diaries, or material culture like toys will be promoted. These approaches have been expounded by such scholars as Manon Pignot

(*Allons enfants de la patrie*, Éditions Seuil, 2012), who have attempted to decentre adult-focused histories by exploring children's conceptions of their worlds, but much remains to be done. One goal of the conference is to ask how we can develop these two approaches in the future and how we can reconstruct children's experiences in the long twentieth century. We hope to provide a forum in which to both debate these methodologies and proactively identify opportunities for the history of childhood to engage fruitfully with contemporary debates.

The conference will consequently endeavour to be at the crossroads of several historiographies: military and war scholarship, social and political history, gender history, global history, medical history, history of the emotions and the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*). Papers from all of these fields, as well as others not mentioned, will be welcome. The definition of 'children' will likewise be considered in the broadest possible terms: comprising both infants and teenagers and taking account of the different social and cultural norms attached to specific ages or stages of development in varied geographical and temporal contexts.

We particularly welcome, but not exclusively, papers touching on the following themes. Submissions by postgraduate or early-career researchers are equally encouraged:

- Historical constructions of notions of trauma, maltreatment and resilience as they relate to childhood in the long twentieth century;
- Historical and other perspectives on the development of children's rights, and analyses of their related discourses;
- Efforts to bring aid to children, and the responses proposed by adults to children's trauma or violence; from state social workers to NGOs like the UN, Red Cross or Save the Children; particularly as these organisations seek to move from theory to practice;
- Evidence for children's agency in navigating these experiences;
- Methodological approaches for exploring and retrieving children's agency, experiences and presence in relation to histories of rights, trauma and maltreatment;
- The interactions of the familial and domestic to the political and social spheres.

TIMELINE AND ORGANISATION

Scholars are invited to submit abstracts of no more 250 words, including the title, for papers of 20 minutes. Please send these to childrenconferencewarwick@gmail.com by no later than **30 September 2017**.

We hope to be able to waive registration and accommodation fees for speakers in order to encourage postgraduate participation but are not currently in a position to offer transport bursaries.

CONVENORS

Andrew Burchell (doctoral candidate, Centre for the History of Medicine, University of Warwick)

Camille Mahé (doctoral candidate, University of Warwick and Sciences Po, Paris)

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