

International Conference

Childhood at War and Genocide:

Children's experiences of conflict in the 20th and 21st century – Agency, Survival, Memory
and Representation

Date: 24-26.10.2022

Location: Center for Holocaust Studies at the Leibniz Institute of Contemporary History (IfZ),
Munich, Germany

Children are the primary victims of wars, armed conflicts, and genocides. They perish first and in disproportionately large numbers. Wars and genocides also destroy the family and family bonds, and that is so strikingly visible in the case of child survivors who are impacted for life with painful memories of the loss of parents, childhood, and community, and of displacement. Thanks to the last two decades of historical, sociological, anthropological, literary, and ethnographic research, scholars now know much more about the world of thinking, being, and feeling of Jewish and non-Jewish European children and youth, alongside their daily experiences, both during and in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The mass of scholarly works on Jewish and non-Jewish child survivors and youth of the Nazi era, and the studies of the ways young survivors were treated by relatives, adoptive parents, social workers, medical staff, and respective states in the aftermath of the Second World War, is constantly growing. However, large research gaps remain, especially concerning the German war in the East. Similarly, specific histories of child survivors of other genocides in the twenty century and beyond are lacking. But thanks to the recent endorsement of child-centered historical methods and interdisciplinary approaches, the experiences and memories of child survivors of the post-1945 wars and genocides have also begun to be investigated. This offers us a new and vital opportunity for systematic and focused comparative studies of timely topics such as the role of a child's gender and agency as well as different social groups and resources that enabled the children to survive; family status, gender, and adoption of orphaned children in the aftermath of war and genocide; and the child survivors' official state status, rehabilitation, education, and displacement, among others.

One of the main goals of the two-and-a-half-day international conference is to shed light on those topics and others, through comparative and transnational lenses. Our aim is not only to seek similarities and differences among cases but also to use one set of phenomena to understand the other. The conference organisers are interested in innovative contributions which tackle various historical and contemporary case studies of children and war and genocide. The organisers have three objectives. First, while the initial focus is on the Holocaust and the occupied European territories during the Second World War, we are also interested in taking a more global outlook at the experiences and representations of children who experienced, witnessed, and survived war and genocide during the twentieth and twenty-first century. Second, to explore similarities and differences in the experiences and life stories of displaced, orphaned, and also physically and mentally disabled young survivors of the Holocaust, and the genocides in Armenian, Rwandan, Cambodian, and Bosnian, among others. And third to examine the effect of war and genocide on children and childhood: on children's emotions, needs and social identities; children's social relations within family and friendship and long-life ties; and their role in the reconstruction of family in the aftermath of war and genocide.

The spectrum of possible topics is deliberately broad to allow room for newer approaches and new questions.

We especially welcome papers that relate to the following four thematic blocks:

1. The spaces of experience, agency, and survival of children and adolescents in wars and genocides.
2. The ideological wars against children: genocidal policies and practices and other forms of persecution of children by various political governments and state agents.
3. Similarities and differences in dealing with retrospective experiences of war and genocide. To what extent was it possible to inscribe and process what had been suffered in one's own biography? To what extent were people sensitive to traumatic experiences of their children, and if so, which ones? What other ways and means of processing (film, literature, associations) exist? To what extent do states legally punish crimes committed against children? And which crimes and charges were in the center of attention? Finally, what consequences does the

treatment of childhood in wars and genocides have for today's culture of remembrance in the respective states?

4. Sources and testimonies: Children hardly leave any sources behind. The aim is to explore which sources and methods can be used to grasp and tell the story of childhood in war. We welcome ideas about hitherto little-known and unused sources. Limitations and methodological weaknesses can and should also be discussed.

To Apply:

We are seeking proposals for 15-20 minutes presentations in English. Applicants should send the title and abstract of their presentation (max. 350 words), a short biography (max. 200 words) including contact information, institutional affiliation, and a reference to 2-3 selected publications to zfhs@ifz-muenchen.de by 31 March 2022.

Invited participants will be notified of their acceptance in the first half of May 2022.

Further information:

Travel and accommodation costs for invited participants will be paid for by the Center for Holocaust Studies. The organisers hope that the conference will take place at the Leibniz Institute of Contemporary History, Munich, Germany. Given the uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic, we may also consider a hybrid or online format, or the potential postponement of the conference. A decision about this will be made in due time.

Organisers:

Joanna Michlic, UCL Centre for Collective Violence, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, IAS (UCL-ISA)

Yuliya von Saal, Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History (IfZ)

Anna Ullrich, Center for Holocaust Studies, Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History (IfZ)

Tobias Freimüller, Fritz Bauer Institute (FBI)

The conference is hosted by the Center for Holocaust Studies at the Leibniz Institute of Contemporary History in cooperation with the Fritz Bauer Institute and the Institute of Advanced Studies at University College London.