

Dvodnevna mednarodna konferenca
A two-day international conference

ZAMIŠLJANJE OTROKOVEGA UMA

Program konference in povzetki referatov

IMAGINING THE CHILD'S MIND

Conference programme and abstract booklet

LJUBLJANA, 29.–30. JANUAR 2026



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Uredili / Edited by

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Organizacija konference / Conference organisation

Ana Cergol Paradiž, project leader / vodja projekta

Organizacijski in programski odbor / Organising and Programme Committee

Ana Cergol Paradiž, Ana Antić, Petra Testen Koren

Prelom / Layout: Jure Preglau

Jezikovni pregled / Language editing: Karry Close

Slika na naslovnici / Cover photo: Povojni otroci v Pliskovici / Children in the village of Pliskovica after the Second World War. Source: Kamra.

Založila / Published by: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani (University of Ljubljana Press)

Izdala / Issued by: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani (University of Ljubljana Press, Faculty of Arts)

Za založbo / For the publisher: Gregor Majdič, rektor Univerze v Ljubljani / rector of the University of Ljubljana

Za izdajatelja / For the issue: Mojca Schlamberger Brezar, dekanja Filozofske fakultete / Dean of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana

Ljubljana, 2026

The conference and this publication are funded by the European Commission (MSCA project) within the project *Retrochild: Children, trauma and political violence in Italo-Slovene Borderland (1945-1960) – University of Copenhagen*, and the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS) within the project *Motherhood and Reproductive Politics in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (J6-4602). / Konferenco in programsko knjižico sta sofinancirali Evropska komisija (projekt MSCA) v okviru projekta *Retrochild: Otroci, traume in politično nasilje v italo-slovenskem obmejnem prostoru (1945–1960) – Univerza v Copenhagnu* in Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije (ARIS) v okviru projekta *Materinstvo in reprodukcijska politika v 19. in 20. stoletju* (J6-4602).

First e-edition. Digital copy of the book is available on:

<https://ebooks.uni-lj.si/ZalozbaUL>

DOI: 10.4312/9789612977672

Kataložni zapis o publikaciji (CIP) pripravili v

Narodni in univerzitetni knjižnici v Ljubljani

COBISS.SI-ID 266086147

ISBN 978-961-297-767-2 (PDF)

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INTRODUCTION

In the period following the Second World War, several (international) initiatives brought the issue of children's mental health to the forefront. The political will to address this area – undoubtedly shaped by an awareness of the war's impact on new generations – was accompanied, affirmed, and in some respects even anticipated by developments in various academic and scientific fields that took on the task of understanding, guiding, and treating the “child's mind.” Notably, the “psy” disciplines, pedagogy, criminology, social work, sociology, and anthropology entered into a shared and evolving dialogue on this subject. Child psychiatry established itself as a distinct medical discipline. Psychological perspectives contributed to a shift in the paradigm of childhood and suffering, partially supplanting earlier frameworks focused on morality and education.

The following decades witnessed an explosion of research into childhood mental disorders, their diagnosis, and classification – developments that certainly did not take place in a political, social, or cultural vacuum. Since both the concept of mental health and that of childhood – individually and in their interrelation – are historically, culturally, and socially constructed, the definitions and strategies used to address issues in relation to children's mental health have differed across contexts and over time.

The conference aims to deepen our understanding of these distinctions through insights from researchers in the fields of history and related disciplines, with particular attention to the dynamics of change after 1945. The conference papers will explore how definitions of and responses to children's mental health were shaped by the legal and institutional frameworks of individual states and international organisations, and how these definitions were subject to more or less explicit forms of political (mis)use. To what extent did the Second World War – and other major political transformations – constitute a turning point in shaping policies and practices related to children's mental health across different contexts? How far were these measures and approaches determined by state authorities, and to what degree were they also influenced/shaped by various actors within the system – medical professionals, parents, and even children themselves? The papers will also encourage reflections on the ways in which scientific paradigms reflected, reproduced, or transcended ideological divisions between the Socialist and Capitalist states.

PROGRAMME

DAY 1: Thursday, January 29, 2026

09:00–09:15	Registration
09:15–09:30	Welcome speeches / Introduction
9:30–10:30	Children between environment, heredity and politics, I Filippo Masina: Relief, Care, Re-education. Childhood and the Containment of “Deviance” in Post-War Italy, 1945–1968 Matteo Perisinotto: Public Opinion and Juvenile Delinquency in Trieste during the Two Post-War Transitions (1915–1918 and 1945–1949)
10:30–11:00	Coffee break
11:00–12:00	Children between environment, heredity and politics, II Anna Toropova: Children’s Trauma in Late Stalinist Psychiatry and Culture Anne Oommen-Halbach: Child Aggression Research in the Shadow of War
12:00–13:00	Lunch
13:00–14:30	Child guidance and the “maladjusted child” Veena Roshan Jose: Art and Play as Windows to Trauma: Visual Narratives in Post-War Child Guidance Clinics Krittapak Ngamvaseenont: The Making of the “Modern Child”: From the Child of the Future in the Second World War to the Nervous Child in Cold War Thailand Shilpi Rajpal: Making Good: Childhood, Maladjustment and Mental Hygiene in India
14:30–15:00	Coffee break
15:00–16:30	Institutional care and abuses Jelena Seferović: Youth with Mental Challenges in Croatia at the Crossroads of Support and Punishment in 19th–20th Century Heiner Fangerau: “Improving the Pedagogical Scope?” The Medical Abuse of Children in the Federal Republic of Germany after the Second World War Laura Schettini: Between Abandonment, Business, and Criticism: Institutions for “Subnormal” Children in 1960s and 1970s Italy

DAY 2: Friday, January 30, 2026

09:00–10:30

Institutions, reforms and activism

Marina Dal Cin: Child Mental Health and the Making of Care in a Border City: Evelina Ravis and the Medical-Pedagogical Institute of Trieste (1928–1954)

Jesper Vaczy Kragh: Deprivation and Reform: Child Psychiatry and Institutional Care in Post-War Denmark

Niamh Cullen: The 1968 Moment and the Liberation of Children among Anti-Authoritarian and Feminist Activists in Italy

10:30–11:00

Coffee break

11:00–12:30

Research and the future citizen

Kristen Loutenstock: Metaphors of Productivity: Diagnosing Autism and the Creation of the Child-Product

Boontariga Puangkham: The Making of the Cold War Child Psyche. A Transcultural Perspective on Child Psy-Sciences in Thailand, 1950s–1970s

Michael Pettit: Head Start or False Start? Great Society Social Programs and the Development of the Competent Child

12:30–13:30

Lunch break

13:30–15:00

War narratives through children's eyes

Shivender Rahul: The Witnessing Child: Memory, Trauma, and the Politics of Post-War Mental Health, 1945–1970

Marilia Fotopoulou: “I Would Never Capture Migrants”: Rethinking Children’s Resilience through the Collections and Practices of the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo

Anna Di Giusto: When Institutions Fail: A Teacher’s Response to Unaccompanied Ukrainian Minors in Italy (2022–2024)

15:00–15:30

Final discussion

ABSTRACTS & AUTHORS

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The 1968 Moment and the Liberation of Children among Anti-Authoritarian and Feminist Activists in Italy

Although important developments in psychoanalysis, including the work of Anna Freud, John Bowlby and Donald Winnicott in England, brought a new understanding of both the mother-child bond and the inner life of the child after 1945, this paper suggests that in Italy, 1968 represented a more important moment of rupture when it came to think of children as people who deserved autonomy and liberation. The paper will begin by outlining Italian left-wing and feminist activist thought regarding children, including the rejection of the family and institutions. Although the anti-psychiatry of Franco Basaglia and the closing of the asylums in early 1970s Italy is now well documented, less attention has been paid to the closing of orphanages, and the “liberation” of the child residents, for example in Parma in 1973.

The main focus of the paper will be the analysis of Italian feminist thinking about children. I will make use of 1970s feminist texts, including *Effe* magazine as well as unpublished manifestos, statements, reflections and collections of personal writing by feminist collectives held at the Fondazione Baracchio in Milan, in order to outline how feminist activists understood and reflected on the experiences and rights of children and their place in a broader project of liberation and collective living. In calling for collective childcare and well-designed spaces for outdoor play, feminist groups were thinking carefully about the welfare of both mothers and children. Their deeper explorations of the contradictory and confused manner in which mainstream society addressed the expectations of mothers and children also suggested deeper ways in which the rights and duties of parents and children towards each other might be reconsidered, as feminists attempted to balance care work with the need for autonomy, and began to disentangle it from gendered expectations.

This paper draws on my British Academy funded research project, *Radical Parents: Protest Politics and New Ideas about Parenting and Children in the Long 1970s* (2026–2027) as well as building on my previous AHRC network grant (co-held with Dr Katharina Rowold, University of Essex) *Institutions and Infant Care: Foundling Hospitals and Residential Homes for Babies in Twentieth-Century Europe* (March 2024–May 2025).

Niamh Cullen, PhD, is a senior lecturer in modern European history at Queen's University Belfast where she specialises in the history of social and gender history as well as the history of the family in twentieth-century Italy. Her most recent book is *Love, Honour and Jealousy: An Intimate History of the Italian Economic Miracle* (Oxford University Press, 2019; Italian trans. Francoangeli, 2024). More recently she has contributed chapters to the Bloomsbury and Routledge Handbooks on the history of emotions, on romantic love from a global perspective, and love in families. She has also published articles in *Historical Journal* (with Katharina Rowold) on breastfeeding advice in twentieth-century England and Italy and on feminism and the family in *Effe* magazine in *Modern Italy*. She was co-investigator on the AHRC network grant (co-held with Dr Katharina Rowold, University of Essex) *Institutions and Infant Care: Foundling Hospitals and Residential Homes for Babies in Twentieth-Century Europe* (March 2024–May 2025). She currently holds a British Academy mid-career fellowship for the project *Radical Parents: Protest politics and new ideas about parenting and children in the long 1970s* (2026–2027).

Child Mental Health and the Making of Care in a Border City: Evelina Ravis and the Medical-Pedagogical Institute of Trieste (1928–1954)

This paper analyses the transformations in the definitions and practices of child mental health management in Trieste from the interwar period onwards, with particular focus on the years between the Second World War and the city's return to Italy in 1954.

The research draws upon the work of neuropsychiatrist Evelina Ravis, who served as head of the women's ward of the provincial psychiatric hospital from 1914, and subsequently as director of the "Barone Paolo de Ralli" medical-pedagogical institute from 1928 to 1938 and again from 1945 to 1957. Through her professional and political activities, as well as those of the institutions in which she worked, it is possible to understand how psychiatric categories relating to childhood were mobilised in relation to phenomena such as war trauma, economic marginalisation, deviance, mental illness and psychological distress. In the post-war period, Ravis' involvement in the Auxiliary Committee of the Juvenile Court and the establishment of the Soroptimist Club of Trieste – a women's association dedicated to supporting traumatised children and promoting education – facilitated the convergence of the institutional and associative dimensions in establishing a particular focus on child care. The interweaving of disparate dimensions – medical-institutional on the one hand, associative and civil on the other – enables the analysis of not only the strictly medical responses to the issue of "abnormal" childhood, but also the forms of intervention emanating from women's and citizens' networks that interacted with public institutions.

The objective of the present study is to analyse a variety of sources – including administrative documents, medical records, Soroptimist Club records and materials preserved in the State Archives of Trieste – in order to highlight continuities and specificities that characterised the Trieste context. As a border territory, a place of transit and cultural hybridisation – marked by its Austro-Hungarian legacy, Allied administration and post-war refugee flows – the city of Trieste provides a unique vantage point from which to observe how so-called "abnormal" childhoods became the focus of a privileged observatory for investigating how childhood deemed "abnormal" became the focus of medical, educational and welfare interventions.

The case study provides insight into an environment that is significantly influenced by Viennese psychoanalytic thought and, conversely, by a more organicist Italian psychiatric tradition. The research also underscores the intricate relationship between the conceptualisation of childhood and female care practices – encompassing both medical and associative domains – and the potential for action in a city grappling with the aftermath of the Second World War, particularly the influx of refugees, and which was formally under Allied administration. The intertwining of care for disabled children, education and control of their family and social backgrounds is also central. Ultimately, this study aims to demonstrate how Trieste functioned as a site of mediation between disparate scientific approaches and social needs through an analysis of Ravis’ professional and political activity. This will contribute to the construction of a particular perception of vulnerable children as objects of care, protection and discipline.

*

Marina Dal Cin is currently a PhD student in Historical Studies at the University of Padua and Venice with a research project entitled *Le professioniste della follia. Psichiatre e manicomio dai primi del Novecento alla legge n. 180 del 1970 (Professionals of Madness. Women Psychiatrists and Asylums from the Early 20th Century to Law No. 180 of 1970)*. Her research interests include women’s and gender history, the history of medicine, and the history of labour. She holds a master’s degree in Historical and Oriental Studies from the University of Bologna with a thesis on Laura Conti and women’s health, which was among the winners of the ICU Ecology Thesis Award for the 2024 edition.

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When Institutions Fail: A Teacher's Response to Unaccompanied Ukrainian Minors in Italy (2022–2024)

In 2022, two Ukrainian orphans from Kyiv enrolled in my secondary school in Italy following the Russian invasion. Despite their status as vulnerable minors bearing significant pre-war trauma, regional and municipal authorities classified them as “temporary migrants” rather than “unaccompanied minors” – a designation that would have granted them psychological support, legal guardianship, and specialised integration services. This administrative choice – driven by overly optimistic assumptions about a swift end to the conflict and perhaps by a desire to project bureaucratic competence – left the children in a precarious institutional void. Both girls carried profound psychological wounds predating their displacement: one had experienced parental abandonment; the other had witnessed a parent’s suicide. Yet, due to their misclassification, no mental health assistance was provided. As their teacher, I found myself assuming responsibilities well beyond my professional remit, effectively taking on the roles of psychologist, social worker, and cultural mediator. This paper analyses the two-year pedagogical and relational work undertaken to respond to this institutional failure. I designed classroom strategies to foster inclusion among Italian students, created activities that highlighted the girls’ artistic strengths, and sought out projects that offered them visibility and recognition within the school community. This improvised “laboratory of care,” while successful in supporting their integration and well-being, relied entirely on individual initiative rather than systemic support. The case study exposes critical gaps in how European institutions address the mental health needs of displaced children in times of crisis. It shows how administrative categories can obscure rather than respond to children’s real circumstances, shifting the burden of care onto frontline educators when systems fail. In twenty-first-century Italy – a nation with well-established frameworks for child protection – such institutional abdication should be unthinkable.

This experience invites reflection on the intersections of migration policy, mental health support, and educational practice, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated responses that prioritise children’s psychological wellbeing over administrative convenience.

*

Anna Di Giusto is an independent researcher and secondary school teacher based in Florence, Italy. She holds three master's degrees – in Philosophy, Cultural Anthropology, and Contemporary History –and two postgraduate diplomas in Multicultural Diversity Management. She has actively contributed to the *QuaMMELOT-Erasmus+ project* at the University of Florence and currently participates in the *European initiative PoEmS – Promoting Emotional Intelligence at School*.

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“Improving the Pedagogical Scope?” The Medical Abuse of Children in the Federal Republic of Germany after the Second World War

(Research co-authored by Silke Fehleemann and Sylvia Wagner)

Between 1949 and 1975, an estimated 700,000–800,000 children lived in care institutions in West Germany. The medical approach to these children was influenced by the views of German child psychiatrists and educators during the Nazi regime. Children in need of care were viewed as deficient. The war experience was not helpful and potential traumas were overlooked. When new psychotropic pharmaceuticals were developed and marketed in the 1950s, they were quickly tested on these children. Those who witnessed this period often remember drug treatment as violent. Since the early 2000s, former institutionalised children, historians, and politicians have initiated historical research into the suffering and injustice endured by these children, in order to gain an understanding of the extent of medical child abuse in West Germany during this period.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the abusive use of pharmaceuticals in institutions for children and young people in Germany between 1946 and the 1980s. Drawing on archival analysis and contemporary literature, the study defines abuse as the use of medication that violated human dignity or the ethical, legal or medical norms of the time. The findings reveal that abusive medication practices were widespread across various institutional types, including welfare homes, psychiatric facilities, residential institutions for disabled children, and sanatoria. This indicates that it was a systemic phenomenon. Depending on the definition used, 10–25% of children and adolescents in institutions were affected, with rates rising markedly after 1960. Identified practices included questionable medical indications, deliberate overdosing, experimental treatments without consent, using medication for non-medical purposes, using hormonal pregnancy tests despite known risks and using medication in contexts of sexualised violence and other forms of abuse. Abuse was often embedded in coercive environments and interwoven with multiple forms of physical and psychological violence. Institutional and supervisory failures by state, municipal, and church authorities facilitated and obscured systemic mistreatment. Survivor testimonies highlight ongoing trauma, uncertainty surrounding personal medication histories and the need for ongoing truth, accountability and structural recognition. The paper concludes that

the long-term invisibility of pharmaceutical abuse in Germany reflects persistent cultures of silence within the medical, administrative, and political spheres long after the end of Second World War.

*

Heiner Fangerau, Prof. Dr. med., Dr. h.c., ML, is chair and director of the Department of the History, Philosophy and Ethics of Medicine, Heinrich-Heine-University Duesseldorf. He held chairs in the history, philosophy and ethics of medicine in Ulm (2008–2014) and Cologne (2014–2015).

He has been president of the European Association for the History of Medicine and Health and the German Society for the History of Science. He is a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of the History of Medicine and the Allied Sciences* and the *European Journal of the History of Medicine and Health*. In 2017 he was elected as a member of the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina.

His main research fields are history and ethics of psychiatry and neurology, history of the life sciences, child and adolescence psychiatry, medical diagnostics and historical network analyses.

“I Would Never Capture Migrants”: Rethinking Children’s Resilience through the Collections and Practices of the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo

Contemporary museums are increasingly called upon to move beyond their traditional roles of documentation and exhibition, incorporating narratives and practices that actively contribute to the shaping of civic values, the protection of community well-being, broader inclusion and public engagement with pressing societal issues. Within this expanded civic role, the ways museums construct representations of marginalised groups – particularly children affected by armed conflict and forced displacement – become especially significant. Children in these contexts are frequently framed through humanitarian discourses of innocence, vulnerability, and trauma, in which “deservingness” of care and protection becomes contingent upon demonstrable suffering. Such frameworks, dominant in Global North representations of refugeehood, often obscure children’s roles as knowledge-holders, political subjects, and historical agents.

This research article builds on my master’s thesis project that critically examined the aforementioned issues by focusing on a particular example, the War Childhood Museum (WCM) in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. My goal was to specifically explore how the WCM represents refugee children and how its archive and methodologies could be reimagined to enable more complex and politically grounded forms of representation. While the thesis foregrounded the museum’s reliance on a universalised war childhood framed through victimhood and resilience – serving broader reconciliation and national unity agendas – this article, to be published in the *Journal of the History of the Human Sciences* (Special Issue on Resilience, 2026), will further complicate the conceptual deployment of children’s “resilience” within WCM’s representational practices. Drawing on refugee children’s testimonies and objects collected by the museum’s researchers between 2018 and 2024, as well as interviews with employees and repeated visits to the museum’s exhibition and archive in Sarajevo (2024–2025), the concept of children’s resilience emerges as a central organising logic in the museum’s narratives. Resilience operates ambiguously: on the one hand, as a counter-discourse that challenges the figure of the traumatised refugee child; on the other, as a psychologised lens through which children’s play, creativity, and everyday

practices are framed as coping mechanisms detached from the structural conditions that produce conflict and displacement in the first place. However, if one more closely examines the testimonies, they will discover complex modes of thinking, historical awareness and political consciousness that do not entirely fit the “resilience” category that the museum adopts to comprehend children’s diverse responses to their circumstances. To capture the historical and socio-political significance of these testimonies – produced by a group long marginalised as historical actors – this article finally argues for moving beyond the trauma–resilience framework. Instead, it emphasises attending to children’s own words, relational practices and forms of resistance, recognising their suggestions for alternative ways of acting as grounded in the specific historical events and contexts that shaped them.

*

Marilia Fotopoulou has an interdisciplinary background in Psychology (BSc, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece) and Migration Studies (MA, University of Copenhagen, Denmark). Her current research interests expand in the field of archival studies and its intersections with representations of marginalised communities and the transmission of difficult heritage. This has been a natural progression since she completed her academic internship at the Centre for Culture and the Mind (UCPH) in 2024, where she engaged with critical medical humanities scholarship that problematised conventional notions of childhood and the “traumatised refugee child” figure, particularly in post-conflict contexts. Afterwards, she worked as a research assistant at DIGNITY’s physical archive in Copenhagen, where she had the opportunity to support the collections’ re-structuring and develop an ongoing project on the history of the torture rehabilitation movement in Denmark and Greece. Beyond academia, she is involved in feminist collectives and performs with musicians from the Greek community in Denmark.

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Art and Play as Windows to Trauma: Visual Narratives in Post-War Child Guidance Clinics

In the decades following the Second World War, child guidance clinics became pivotal spaces for understanding and addressing the psychological impact of war and displacement on children. This paper investigates the role of art and play as therapeutic and diagnostic tools in post-war child guidance clinics, analysing how these practices provided critical insights into children's experiences of trauma between 1945 and 1970. In the aftermath of the Second World War, child guidance clinics emerged as important institutions for addressing psychological suffering among children affected by war, displacement, and social disruption. Within these settings, drawing, painting, and structured play were not simply recreational activities but essential methods for mediating communication between children and professionals, enabling clinicians to access emotions and memories that were often inaccessible through verbal expression. The study employs a historical methodology grounded in archival research and discourse analysis, drawing on case records, clinical reports, and pedagogical literature from clinics operating in Socialist and Capitalist contexts. It examines how visual and performative expressions were interpreted by psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, and how these interpretations reflected broader ideological frameworks and scientific paradigms. By situating these practices within the political and cultural dynamics of the post-war period, the paper highlights the ways in which art and play shaped understandings of trauma, resilience, and normalcy in childhood. It argues that these visual narratives reveal more than individual pathology; they illuminate the sociocultural and political dimensions of mental health care during a period of reconstruction and ideological contestation. Anticipated findings aim to contribute to scholarship on the history of childhood mental health by foregrounding the agency of children and the epistemic significance of creative practices in shaping psychiatric knowledge, while also challenging Western-centric frameworks by incorporating comparative perspectives from diverse geopolitical contexts.

Veena Roshan Jose holds a Ph.D. in Medical Law and Ethics and an LL.M. in Human Rights Law and Environmental Law. With over sixteen years of academic experience, her research explores the intersections of law, medicine, and human rights, particularly in relation to bioethics, mental health, and child protection frameworks. She has authored four books and over twenty-four research papers in reputed journals and edited volumes, including works addressing ethical and legal responses to medical practice and human vulnerability. She serves as a Legal Expert Member in Institutional Ethics Committees and contributes to national policy consultations on medical and ethical governance. Her work engages with the socio-legal dimensions of childhood, bodily autonomy, and well-being.

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Metaphors of Productivity: Diagnosing Autism and the Creation of the Child-Product

In this paper, I will use qualitative analysis and methodology from film studies, disability studies, and cultural studies to re-examine how Leo Kanner centred notions of productivity, advertising, and the economic values of the post-Second World War economy in his popularisation of the diagnosis of autism. Looking at his original scientific papers, his writing in popular forums, and his pop-psychology work *In Defense of Mothers: How to Bring Up Children in Spite of the More Zealous Psychologists* (1941), I argue that Kanner framed the child as not merely an extension of the parents but as a product. In particular, his casting of the mother as a gasoline station attendant reduces the child to a car, an object to be controlled, perfected, and maintained. The child's mind, then, is an engine, a feat of engineering that requires specialised care and attention, particularly in the form of psychological care and expert knowledge. Kanner's work moved the mother from expert to worker and the psychologist from peripheral to central in the perfection, fine-tuning, and maintenance of the child's mind. This set the stage for the battle over the child's mind in American culture, with mothers in particular set up as needing to regulate and tend to the delicate mechanism of childhood mental health.

*

Kristen Loutensock received her PhD in Film and Media from the University of California, Berkeley, where she wrote a dissertation titled *Narrative Disorder: Autism and Genre in American Popular Culture*. She works between and across the fields of history of medicine, disability studies, health humanities, film studies, and gender and sexuality studies, and her current book project focuses on the representation of medicine in American film and television. Presently a lecturer in the Honors College at the University at Albany, she has previously held appointments in gender studies, disability studies, American studies, and film studies, and was the Mellon Postdoctoral Scholar in Health Humanities at St. Lawrence University.

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Relief, Care, Re-education. Childhood and the Containment of “Deviance” in Post-War Italy, 1945–1968

After the Second World War, Italian society had to confront one of the most complex issues of the reconstruction period – the provision of assistance and education for impoverished and war-affected children.

Hundreds of thousands – perhaps even millions – of children found themselves in need of relief and care: orphans, amputees, disabled children, the displaced, those suffering from psychological trauma, or simply impoverished as a consequence of the war (which had exacerbated an already widespread condition of poverty). Often coming from families lacking the material and cultural resources to ensure a dignified life, these children entered the welfare circuits dedicated to childhood, operated by the State and by numerous private organisations and associations, many of which were religious in nature.

The fall of fascism opened entirely new avenues: the centralisation imposed by the regime, which had concentrated welfare responsibilities in a small number of strictly controlled institutions, gave way to the initiatives of a far greater number of actors. Poor and vulnerable children quickly became an object of political competition: in Cold War Italy, the values around which they were to be educated were considered a crucial stake in shaping the nation’s future.

This paper aims to reconstruct the ideological frameworks and mentalities of the personnel working within welfare institutions, focusing in particular on the concept of “deviance,” which led to the identification of children’s behaviours deemed potentially antisocial and therefore harmful to a society in the process of reconstruction. For several years, continuities persisted with the child psychiatry of the Fascist period, itself influenced by the wartime psychiatry of the First World War. These remnants were visible in the childhood behaviours that provoked alarm and, consequently, called for educational correction: restlessness, lack of respect for authority (parental, scholastic, and adult authority more broadly), precocious and unsupervised familiarity with the opposite sex, inattentiveness, and inadequate academic performance were all considered symptoms of “deviance.” Similarly, the growing popularity among children and

adolescents of forms of entertainment regarded as “corrupting,” such as comic books and cinema, elicited anxiety and censorship initiatives.

The educational project articulated by these welfare structures was directed toward the formation of the “good citizen”: law-abiding, respectful of authority (civil, military, and religious), patriotic, diligent, and disciplined in the workplace. Properly educated in this way, these children would supposedly grow into adults safeguarded from the most immoral and harmful behaviours, including alcoholism, prostitution, gambling, and vagrancy.

Drawing on archival documents and publications produced by several welfare organisations (the Ministry of the Interior’s Child Service, the Don Gnocchi Foundation, the National Organisation for the Orphans of War, and the National Agency for the Moral Protection of Children), this paper seeks to illustrate the theoretical premises, methods, and institutional structures of assistance and education for needy children in Italy during the first two decades of the post-war period, up until the watershed moment of 1968.

*

Filippo Masina, PhD, is a historian of the contemporary age. He has carried out research appointments at the University of Siena and collaborates with various research institutes on a range of topics, including: veterans’ associations, post-war welfare and relief, the victimisation of civilians in wartime, the history of childhood, the Italian Resistance, the history of the Alpini and their association, the Cold War and Détente, and maritime borders. He is the author of several books and publications, among which *L’infanzia vittima di guerra in Italia dopo il 1945. Esperienze, cura, rieducazione* (Viella, 2025).

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The Making of the “Modern Child”: From the Child of the Future in the Second World War to the Nervous Child in Cold War Thailand

This paper examines the role and impact of the psy disciplines on child development projects in Thailand from the Second World War to the early Cold War. It draws largely on the unexplored personal collections of Thailand’s first psychiatrist, Luang Vichien Patayakom. In 1929, the Rockefeller Foundation sent Patayakom to study under Adolf Meyer and other pioneers of the mental hygiene movement in the United States. Following the 1932 Siamese Revolution, he began promoting mental hygiene and child development projects by appropriating ideas from Meyerian psychiatry and behaviourism. His aim was to modernise the Thai mind to keep pace with developed nations. He rejected traditional child-rearing practices and proposed new methods to train the child of the future. The rise of the Thai fascist government during the Second World War allowed his ideas to flourish. At the height of his influence, the government established a committee to investigate techniques for training the mind, which largely embraced Patayakom’s concepts of child development rooted in mental hygiene, psychology, nationalism, and fascism. During the Cold War, the expansion of international organisations created new grounds for child development in Thailand. The aim shifted from modernising the Thai mind to protecting it from the negative consequences of modernisation. Phon Sangsingkeo, later regarded as the father of Thai psychiatry, proposed a new framework. In his view, the child had become nervous and vulnerable as a result of urbanisation and industrialisation. His ideas combined social psychiatry, family ties, and maternal deprivation syndrome. These new approaches, together with the establishment of child guidance clinics and the expansion of the mental health network from the 1950s, marked a significant shift in child development in Thailand. This paper argues that the appropriation and localisation of the psy disciplines shaped child development projects in Thailand, transforming the image of the child from a self-governing figure of the future during the Second World War to a nervous figure requiring preventive strategies against the rapid social and economic changes of the Cold War.

Krittapak Ngamvaseenont graduated with a BA in History from Chiang Mai University. As a historian, his academic interest lies in the history of risk and medicine. He later trained as a medical sociologist and earned an MSc in Medicine, Science, and Society from King's College London. During his time in the UK, he developed his academic interest in the sociology of psychiatry and neuroscience. Upon returning to Thailand, he worked as a researcher on a project titled *Changes in Thai 'Rural' Society: Democracy on the Move* for a year. He now holds a full-time teaching position in the Department of History at Chiang Mai University. As a lecturer, he has led two research projects: *Depression: A Key Challenge for Thai Society in the 21st Century*, and *The History of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Behavioural Economics: From Aaron T. Beck to Richard Thaler*. The latter was published as a book in 2022. Currently, he is a PhD candidate at the Centre for the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine at the University of Manchester. His PhD project focuses on the transformation of psychiatry in Thailand during the Cold War.

Child Aggression Research in the Shadow of War

In the late 1940s, international child mental health experts showed an increased interest in the origins of child aggression, which was reflected in the second *International Conference on Child Psychiatry in London*, 1948. The widespread violence of the Second World War brought the question of the origin of human aggression into sharp focus: war and violence on a macroscopic level drew attention to aggressive behaviour on an interpersonal level. Since children's aggression was considered more natural and unadulterated, children served as naive research objects who, moreover, could be more unobtrusively observed than adults. The assumption that children are malleable was linked to the hope of controlling aggression and thus securing peace and democracy in the future society. Based on the approaches of the child guidance movement, attachment theory, and the rise of child analysis in the 1940s, the phenomenon of child aggression in Anglo-American child psychiatry was seen primarily as part of normal child development and the normal child.

In German post-war child psychiatry, however, this debate was delayed and narrowed onto psychiatric approaches that consider mental illness as being rooted primarily in inherited psychopathologies. Beyond the textbooks, in which the old concepts lived on until the 1970s, a slow convergence with Anglo-American concepts can be seen at the grassroots level under international influence.

Based on the published documentation of the London conference and related reports in the child psychiatry trade press as well as on contemporary textbooks of child psychiatry, the paper examines the delayed medicalisation of aggression in German child psychiatry and compares it with contemporary Anglo-American approaches. Focusing on the post-war years up to 1970 the article reflects the struggles of German child psychiatry between professional isolation and adherence to traditional pathological concepts on the one hand and reconnecting within a growing international attempt at addressing "difficult" or "maladjusted" children with interdisciplinary approaches on the other. While there are signs of convergence with international approaches at the policy level, traditional doctrines in German child psychiatry textbooks indicate a continued adherence to and insistence on primarily hereditary pathological concepts.

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Public Opinion and Juvenile Delinquency in Trieste during the Two Post-War Transitions (1915–1918 and 1945–1949)

This paper examines how the Trieste press addressed the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency during the transitional periods following the two World Wars. These post-war transitions differed significantly, particularly with regard to the strategies adopted by military and civilian authorities to manage emergencies and criminal activity. At the same time, public opinion toward crime – especially juvenile crime – underwent notable changes.

During the first postwar period (1918–1922), Trieste transitioned from Austro-Hungarian to Italian administration amid a severe deterioration in living conditions, particularly among the poorest segments of the population. Many families were left without a father figure, while women, who had already assumed the role of primary breadwinners during the war, continued to support their households. In families that were often large, with four to five children, older siblings contributed to household survival by engaging in illegal street vending, especially the sale of tobacco. As adolescents, many of these youths began frequenting taverns, where they developed patterns of alcohol abuse and came into contact with members of criminal organisations who drew them into illicit trafficking, while young girls were often introduced to prostitution.

Juvenile delinquency thus became one of the most intensely debated social issues in the city, prompting the establishment of a committee dedicated to addressing the problem. This body brought together Italian authorities, magistrates, physicians, and representatives of organisations working with minors and the poor.

By contrast, in the second postwar period (1945–1949), policies implemented under the Anglo-American occupation substantially curtailed juvenile delinquency, rendering it a marginal phenomenon, at least in terms of public perception.

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Head Start or False Start? Great Society Social Programs and the Development of the Competent Child

Scholars have documented the centrality of “emotional intelligence” to neoliberal theories of child development and social inequality. Here emotional intelligence refers to a cluster of social-cognitive skills (such as self-regulation and the delay of gratification) that render the developing child competent to handle life’s hardships. Previous histories have charted the concept’s roots in neo-colonial ventures, such as psychologist Walter Mischel’s research in Trinidad on household composition and racial differences as predictors of delay of gratification (Staub, 2018), and its subsequent uptake in the charter school movement (Moreton, 2014). In these settings, emotional intelligence eclipsed IQ as “the measure of merit” (Carson, 2007) reinscribing “race” after its supposed scientific demise.

Neglected in these prior accounts is the apparent “failure” of *Project Head Start* as the historical pivot in this reorientation of child development in the United States of America. Launched in 1965, *Head Start* was one of the most ambitious early childhood intervention programs of the post-war era and a pillar of Lyndon B. Johnson’s “war on poverty.” Grounded in liberal notions of “cultural deprivation” among the poor (Raz, 2013) and a USian reading of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget emphasising the potential for “cognitive growth” through proper experience, *Head Start* promised to boost the educational performance of the country’s poorest children through a brief enrichment curriculum offered prior to their entry into grade school. This promise would materialise in the form of IQ scores increased through early intervention.

Head Start aroused opposition from across the political spectrum. Like with other Great Society programs, conservatives saw in it a dehumanising socialisation through impersonal institutional care, which they associated with the excesses of real socialism (Morawski & Martin, 2011). However, soon the controversy swirled around *Head Start*’s efficacy. The Office of Economic Opportunity, as directed by newly elected president Richard Nixon, commissioned the Westinghouse Learning Corporation to evaluate the validity of *Head Start*’s dramatic claims. The Westinghouse study famously showed the failure of this short-term intervention to permanently boost IQ scores (Williams & Evans, 1969).

My presentation will trace the variety of responses to this seeming policy failure using academic papers, government reports, and media coverage. Psychologist Arthur Jensen famously argued (1969) scholastic achievement could not be improved through early intervention because scores reflected genuine, hereditary differences in intelligence. The failure led Urie Bronfenbrenner to consider the “ecology” of development, starting with a comparative study of childhood in the United States of America and the Soviet Union (Bronfenbrenner, 1970). However, most developmental psychologists took a different approach (Smith & Bissell, 1970). Invoking the demands of an ever changing “technological” society, they argued static intelligence would play a decreasing role. Instead, dynamic and flexible “cognitive” coping and problem-solving would underwrite a child’s later success (Hunt, 1967). *Head Start* programs may not directly improve test scores in the near future but instead instilled the social and cognitive skills poor children needed over the course of their lives. Learned competence through self-control was crucial to this new temporality for developmental psychology coming out of the 1970s and its vision of the “at risk” child.

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Michael Pettit, PhD, is a professor in the Historical, Theoretical, and Critical Studies graduate area in the Department of Psychology at York University (Toronto, Canada). He is the author of two books: *Governed by Affect: Hot Cognition and the End of Cold War Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 2024), and *The Science of Deception: Psychology and Commerce in America* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), as well as about twenty articles on the history of the human sciences.

The Making of the Cold War Child Psyche. A Transcultural Perspective on Child Psy-Sciences in Thailand, 1950s–1970s

This paper explores the transnational construction of childhood and the child’s mind in Thailand during the Cold War (1950s–1970s). It highlights the circulation of knowledge about child development and how this knowledge became part of constructing the child psyche, national identity, and the broader project of global citizenship. This work aims to deepen the understanding of children’s psychological well-being in both the global and local contexts as shaped by the geopolitics of the Cold War. It draws upon a variety of sources, including cross-cultural studies, published monographs, government policy and archival documents related to child psychology from both national and international institutions.

After the Second World War, global mental health frameworks emphasised children’s well-being as a key to promoting peaceful societies and cultivating world citizenship. Global narratives propagated the image of a universal childhood that is happy and mentally healthy. These ideas were interpreted into local practices and influenced childhood discourses in Thailand. This also led to an effort to create a global universal child psychology, resulting in the aim to understand how cultural differences shape children’s psychological development. During the 1950s, Thailand became a site for the exchange of psychological knowledge about Asian children. The collaboration between the Thai government and UNESCO led to the establishment of the International Institute of Child Study in Bangkok. This institution was vital for transnational knowledge networks linking Western theories and local discourse. It also allowed Thai experts to share local insights and contributed to dynamic networks of knowledge about childhood development in Asia.

This ultimately compelled the junta government to cultivate a generation of mentally healthy and well-educated children who would grow up to be productive citizens of the nation. The government established the National Research Council Act to investigate the normal and deviant patterns of children’s emotional, intellectual, and psychological development within the specific Thai culture. This led to the categorisation of children as “good” or “bad” based on their behaviour and intellectual assessments. During this time, the state policy aimed to cultivate mentally healthy and responsible

citizens through education, discipline, and psychological intervention. This study demonstrates the importance of interconnectedness of knowledges and expertise in shaping the psyche of children during the Cold War, and how this knowledge was understood, internalised, and enacted within the Thai sociopolitical context. Ultimately, this study also explores the implications of these influences on the formation of national character and the development of world citizenship.

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Her previous work examined the relation between women and madness in Thailand – how psychiatric knowledge and power shaped Thai women’s self-identity during the 1950s and 1970s. She is currently working on two projects; one is an essay exploring the making of the Cold War child psyche, which examines the co-production of child psychological development and mental health in Thailand and Southeast Asia. It highlights the interconnectedness of transnational psy-sciences and national identity. The other investigates how depression and mental illness are perceived and understood within Thai culture, emphasising how Buddhist beliefs influence perceptions and societal views of mental illness.

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The Witnessing Child: Memory, Trauma, and the Politics of Post-War Mental Health, 1945–1970

This paper examines how the figure of the “witnessing child” shaped post-war understandings of childhood mental health between 1945 and 1970. It explores the intersections of memory, trauma, and political contexts across diverse geopolitical settings, analysing how definitions of child mental health and trauma were constructed and contested within legal and institutional frameworks of individual states and international organisations such as UNESCO and the World Health Organization. The study investigates whether the Second World War and subsequent geopolitical transformations marked a decisive turning point in policies, practices, and discourses related to child mental health. Using a comparative historical approach grounded in archival research and discourse analysis, the paper draws on medical case files, policy documents, psycho-pedagogical literature, and institutional reports from Socialist, Capitalist, and postcolonial states. It highlights how scientific paradigms and political ideologies influenced the classification and treatment of childhood trauma and examines the roles of medical professionals, parents, and children themselves as actors shaping or resisting dominant psychiatric and pedagogical narratives. The paper argues that the “witnessing child” became a central figure through which post-war societies negotiated psychological suffering and social reconstruction. Western frameworks often universalised trauma within individual pathology models, whereas Socialist and postcolonial perspectives emphasised collective resilience and political renewal. The child’s position as both subject and agent in psychiatric discourse reveals complex dynamics of power, memory, and agency, illustrating how political uses and misuses of mental health knowledge unfolded amid Cold War ideological divisions. Anticipated findings aim to move beyond Western-centric approaches by illuminating diverse geopolitical experiences and interdisciplinary perspectives on childhood mental health after 1945. The study underscores the entangled nature of medical, legal, and political discourses and offers new insights into the sociocultural construction of childhood trauma within global post-war history.

Shivender Rahul, Phd, is currently serving as Assistant Professor at Department of Humanities at Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur, India His research interests include the intersections of language, law, and society, with a growing focus on the historical and cultural dimensions of mental health discourse. He has presented at international conferences and published in peer-reviewed journals on topics spanning healthcare communication, forensic linguistics, and interdisciplinary humanities. His work engages with questions of trauma, memory, and institutional frameworks, reflecting on how narratives shape policy and practice. He has also translated a poetry anthology, edited a book on climate change, and delivered invited lectures at global universities (Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Management). His works combine archival inquiry, discourse analysis, and critical theory to explore sociocultural constructions of identity and well-being.

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Making Good: Childhood, Maladjustment and Mental Hygiene in India

The mental hygiene movement in India was intimately entwined with colonial structures, personnel, and ideas. The necessity of mental health policies and mental health infrastructure was often elaborated and articulated by the British psychiatrists who worked in the mental hospitals in India. This research focuses on how British psychiatrists and colonial psychiatry characterised and stereotyped “Indian-ness” in scientific, penological and medical discourses. The attempt here will be to understand the impact of psychiatric racialisation on institutions of care and confinement.

This paper is based on the *Quarterly Bulletin of the Indian Association of Mental Hygiene*. Owen Alexander Berkeley Hill remained the solo editor of the journal and he was single-handedly behind the workings of the mental hygiene movement in India. Hill was at the vanguard of expounding the need for policy making at medical, educational, and penological levels. Hill’s ideas on varied meanings of morality, delinquency and the anti-social characters will be explored here.

This paper investigates how the significant psychological theories on children’s and adolescents’ emotional adjustment were racially remodelled to fit into the colonial milieu. It also focuses on the use of psychiatric and psychological knowledge in the Children’s Aid Society and after care institutions such as Borstal in India

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Shilpi Rajpal, PhD, is primarily a social historian of psychiatry at the Centre for Culture and the Mind at the Department of English, Germanic and Romance Studies at the University of Copenhagen. Her project *Decolonising the Mind: Birth of the Global Mental Health Movement in India, 1920–1980s* traces the local, national and global histories of psychiatry in colonial and post-colonial India. Her book *Curing Madness? A Social and Cultural History of Insanity in North India, 1800–1950s* was published in 2020 by Oxford University Press. It focuses on both institutional and non-institutional histories of madness in colonial North India. In her work, the terms “madness” and “cure” are explored as shifting categories, which travelled across cultural, medical, national, and regional boundaries, thereby moving beyond asylum-centric histories.

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Between Abandonment, Business, and Criticism: Institutions for “Subnormal” Children in 1960s and 1970s Italy

Starting from the 1960s in Italy, the issue of minors’ institutionalisation conditions, particularly those then defined as wayward and subnormal, became a pressing concern for public opinion and authorities.

This paper examines a series of scandals, including the 1965 incident at the Prato orphanage, the 1969 “concentration camp for the subnormal” in Grottaferrata (Rome), the 1970 case involving the medical-pedagogical ward Villa Azzurra (Turin province), and the 1975 scandal of children hospitalised in the Palermo mental asylum. Using journalistic sources and interventions by lawyers like Bianca Guidetti Serra, who paid close attention to this issue, the paper aims to discuss key aspects of the history of psychiatric treatment of minors during two crucial decades of criticism against institutional mistreatment.

Alongside analysing the social and class dimensions of institutionalisations, the relationship between families and institutions, and the therapeutic neglect of the institutionalised, the paper also investigates the business of institutionalising “subnormal” minors. It examines the network of private institutions – both secular and religious – to which public institutions (such as provinces and municipalities) entrusted children in custody.

This topic, scarcely explored by Italian historiography, allows for a reflection on the privatisation of care for “subnormal” minors during a historical phase when public institutions, primarily mental asylums, were subject to strong criticism.

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Laura Schettini, PhD, is a researcher in Contemporary History at the University of Padua, where she also teaches Women’s and Gender History. She is an active member of the Italian Society of Women Historians and, since 2022, has been a scientific consultant for several projects of the Treccani Italian Encyclopaedia Institute. Her research focuses on the history of justice and mental hospitals, migration, sexuality

and male violence against women. Her publications include the books *Il gioco delle parti. Travestimenti e paure sociali tra Otto e Novecento* (2011), which won the 2012 SISSCO Junior Award, *La violenza contro le donne nella storia. Contesti, linguaggi, politiche del diritto* (edited by Simona Feci and Laura Schettini, 2017), *Turpi traffici. Prostituzione e migrazioni globali (1890–1940)* (2019, trans. *Obscene Traffic. Prostitution and Global Migrations from the Italian Perspective (1890–1940)*, Routledge, 2023), which won the 2020–2021 Gisa Giani historical book prize; *L'ideologia gender è pericolosa* (2023) and *L'autodifesa delle donne. Pratiche diritto, immaginari nella storia* (edited by Simona Feci and Laura Schettini, 2024).

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Youth with Mental Challenges in Croatia at the Crossroads of Support and Punishment in 19th–20th Century

This paper covers the period from 1879, when the Royal Institute for the Insane in Stenjevec, the first Croatian psychiatric hospital, was established, until the beginning of the First World War. It is based on an analysis of psychiatric patient records of young individuals aged fifteen to eighteen who were hospitalised at the institution. Although these cases involved mental health difficulties, this study focuses exclusively on the parenting of individuals with mental illnesses who were not affected by disabilities or neurological disorders. The dynamics of parental care for young people with mental disorders at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century in rural Croatian villages, from which most patients originated, can be described as complex and contradictory. This care was characterised simultaneously by understanding and misunderstanding of changes in the children's mental state and behaviour, acceptance and rejection of their difference, as well as by tangible life circumstances that determined the possibility or impossibility of providing care. The aim of this paper is to elucidate how cultural conceptions of illness, familial responsibility, and solidarity in rural communities during the examined period shaped parental care for young people with mental health challenges.

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Jelena Seferović obtained her PhD in 2017 from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, within the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology. Since 2021, she has been employed as a Research Associate at the Institute for Anthropological Research in Zagreb, and since 2022, she has been working as an Assistant at the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana. From 2018 to 2020, she participated in the ERC Advanced Grant project, *Post-war Transitions in a Gendered Perspective: The Case of the North-Eastern Adriatic Region* – EIRENE. Her research interests include the history of psychiatry and disability, women's history, and the anthropology of dying and death.

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Children's Trauma in Late Stalinist Psychiatry and Culture

Childhood traumatisation was a thriving topic of research in early Soviet psychiatry. The rise of the mental hygiene movement and the growth of “minor psychiatry” had seen specialists mapping a direct link between the “traumatising” conditions of a child’s surrounding environment and the development of mental health conditions. Indeed, the prominent Soviet psychiatrist, V. A. Giliarovskii contended in 1929 that the child psyche was as vulnerable to the conditions of its environment as a developing foetus. While psychiatric ideas about the leading role of exogenous factors in shaping children’s mental well-being were dampened by the rise of constitutional explanations in the 1930s, these ideas regained their primacy during the Second World War. Child psychiatrists such as M. P. Simpson and G. E. Sukhareva developed a formidable body of research on the traumatic conditions (“psychogenic reactions”) impelled by children’s wartime hardships. Exploring how psychiatric languages of trauma intersected with vernacular expressions of mental distress, the paper will explore how a series of films on children’s wartime experiences, including *There Once Lived a Girl* (Eisymont, 1943), and *Simple People* (Kozintsev and Trauberg, 1945) echoed the medical interest in the impact of war on the child’s mind. My discussion of the production history of a 1948 drama of heroic Komsomol exploits, *The Young Guard* (Gerasimov, 1948), will explore the shift towards stoic narratives of resilience in Soviet medicine and culture by the end of the 1940s. The thorny debates over the representation of children’s trauma in post-war Stalinist cinema show how the figure of the child traumatic was used to insist on the unrecoverable tragedy of the war experience at a time when public emphasis had shifted onto the “healing of wounded souls”.

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Anna Toropova, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in History at the University of Warwick. Her research explores interchanges between the psy-disciplines and cultural production in the Soviet Union. She is currently finishing a monograph on early Soviet cinema and medicine, and leading a Wellcome Trust funded project on medical and cultural frameworks of psychological trauma in the USSR, 1917–1953. She is the

author of the book *Feeling Revolution: Cinema, Genre and the Politics of Affect under Stalin* (Oxford University Press, 2020), and co-editor (with Claire Shaw) of *Technologies of Mind and Body in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc* (Bloomsbury, 2023). Her articles on Soviet psychiatry, cinema and spectatorship have appeared in *Isis*, *Social History of Medicine*, *Journal of Contemporary History* and *Slavic Review*.

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Deprivation and Reform: Child Psychiatry and Institutional Care in Post-War Denmark

In postwar Denmark, the mental health of institutionalised children became a growing concern, prompting new collaborations between child psychiatrists, childcare professionals, and state authorities. This paper examines how the concept of deprivation emerged in Danish child psychiatry and led to reforms in early childhood institutions, such as orphanages and nurseries.

The starting point is Karen Margrete Simonsen's 1947 doctoral thesis, *Examination of Children from Children's Homes and Day-Nurseries*, the first academic study of institutionalised children in Denmark. While Simonsen's recommendations were limited, her work laid the foundation for later critiques. By the early 1950s, child psychiatrist Hedvig Jacoby identified what became known as deprivation syndrome. Drawing on her experiences in orphanages, Jacoby initiated reforms in collaboration with childcare professionals, aiming to create more nurturing environments.

Using archival records from the Danish National Archives, this paper explores how psychiatric knowledge, institutional routines, and state policies intersected in shaping responses to children's mental health. It argues that the Danish case reflects broader postwar shifts in the understanding of childhood vulnerability and the role of psychiatry in redefining the child's mind.

The study contributes to the history of child psychiatry by showing how scientific paradigms and institutional practices evolved in response to postwar concerns about child welfare. It also highlights the interplay between medical expertise, political will, and professional care in shaping mental health strategies for vulnerable children.

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