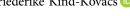CrossMark

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Rethinking Childhood and War in the Twentieth Century

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Nick Baron, ed., *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915–53: Ideologies, Identities, Experiences* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 295 pp. (hb), €138.00, ISBN: 9789004175303.

Mary Cox, *Hunger in War and Peace: Women and Children in Germany, 1914–1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 402 pp. (hb), £86.00, ISBN: 9780198820116.

Mischa Honeck and James Marten, eds., *War and Childhood in the Era of the Two World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 310 pp. (hb), £78.99, ISBN: 9781108478533.

Sabine Lee, *Children Born of War in the 20th Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 312 pp. (hb), £85.00, ISBN: 9781526104588.

Lynn Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests: Unaccompanied Children in American-Occupied Germany, 1945–52* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 480 pp. (pb), $51.00, ISBN: 9781487521943.

On 7 March 2022, Catherine Russell, UNICEF executive director, and Filippo Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, demanded that 'unaccompanied and separated children fleeing escalating conflict in Ukraine must be protected'.[1] They insisted that children should, once they crossed Ukraine's borders, be immediately registered, offered safe spaces, reunified with their families, and receive emergency care.[2] Under no circumstances should children who came with their families be separated, and everything should be done to protect children from exploitation, trafficking and gender-based violence.[3] However, since then, countless children from Ukraine who have crossed the borders unaccompanied have become victims of human trafficking and exploitation. Tens of thousands of children in Ukrainian state institutions or who had been orphaned prior to the war could not be protected. They were deported to Russia, many were interned in reeducation camps, and many were forcefully adopted by Russian families or moved into foster care.[4] Since the war started, children have again become a means of warfare. The current war against Ukraine once more demonstrates how vulnerable children can become when they are separated from their families. Children have, once again, become targets of massive human rights violations and of crimes against humanity.

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[1] 'Unaccompanied and Separated Children Fleeing Escalating Conflict in Ukraine Must Be Protected', United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 7 Mar. 2022, https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/3/622619a24/unaccompanied-separated-children-fleeing-escalating-conflict-ukraine-must.html.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] 'Russia Placed Thousands of Ukrainian Children in Camps for Reeducation, Report Says', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 15 Feb. 1923, https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-children-reeducation/32272143.html; Deborah Amos, 'Russia: Russia Deports Thousands of Ukrainian Children', Human Rights Without Frontiers International, 20 Feb. 2023, https://hrwf.eu/russia-russia-deports-thousands-of-ukrainian-children/.

At the same time, the war against Ukraine makes it painfully clear how little can be done to protect children once territories are occupied, even if recognised standards were developed in response to prior wars to secure children's protection and further guarantee their safety when exposed to war, violence, hunger and displacement. Why is it so difficult to protect children during wartime? Let us have a look at children during the twentieth century. Not only in Ukraine but in most wars of the past century, children have been exposed to violence, hunger and malnutrition, to expulsion, migration and displacement, to fragile (physical and mental) health and spreading epidemics, to social fragmentation and disintegration, to the discontinuation or disruption of education, the loss of and separation from parents and siblings. Save the Children states on its homepage that 'every war is a war against children'.[5] Yet periods of war not only reveal children's particular vulnerability. They often also encapsulate the notion of children's particular needs, and of the individual, local and state responses to those needs.

This is where this review essay moves in a different direction, surveying a handful of recent academic works that tackle the history of childhood and children in times of warfare and its aftermath in the twentieth century. According to the editors of one of the volumes, Mischa Honeck and James Marten, it was the twentieth century when 'the scope of [children's] engagement soared with the scale of the global conflicts'.[6] Hence, to understand these global conflicts it is vital to explore children's instrumentalisation and experiences during the wars of the twentieth century. Pursuing this objective, this essay proposes to read these works together and offer an exploration of how wars mobilised children and affected their lives, as well as existing notions of childhood. It will identify signs of children's particular vulnerability during war, as well as their particular resilience in processing wartime experiences. It will then move towards identifying strategies and means to rescue and safeguard children during wars and their aftermaths. And lastly, it will use these works to raise the question of how children's age-appropriate upbringing and physical and emotional well-being was secured when wars disturbed everyday certainties and social circumstances, as it has recently again in Ukraine.

While various works in the past have dealt with children during specific wars, these five books are a major addition to the field of the history of childhood as they complicate our notion of children at war. They use different methodological and topical approaches – ranging from displacement, hunger, play and education, to medical experimentation, sexual violence and children's relief – to look at children during war and its aftermath. They show how essential children were for the various war efforts, how often they were used as a means of warfare, and how they came to be 'the first to receive relief in times of distress'.[7] If we pursue this line of thinking, children and their history emerge as key to our understanding of modern wars. Marten and Honeck understand their primary mission as historians of childhood to 'not simply add another social group [children] to an already existing canvas of past events but repaint that canvas altogether'.[8] They consider it essential to understand children's place, role and experiences in times of war and to prioritise children's own voices in our studies in order to gain a new understanding of war in the twentieth century.[9] Engaging with children's manifold experiences during war thus becomes key to the study of modern history. The question is: how do these five volumes advance our understanding of children and war?

When taken together, all five volumes centre on different aspects of children's experiences of war. Nick Baron assembles in his edited volume, *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915–53*, fascinating case studies on various types of displacement, such as child evacuations, adoptions, exile and deportations in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as researching various places in

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[5] 'Millions of Children are in Danger', Save the Children, https://www.savethechildren.net/what-we-do/emergencies/ukraine-crisis#.

[6] Mischa Honeck and James Marten, 'More than Victims: Framing the History of Modern Childhood and War', in James Marten and Mischa Honeck, eds., *War and Childhood in the Era of the Two World Wars*, Publications of the German Historical Institute (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3.

[7] Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, Geneva 1924, http://www.un-documents.net/gdrc1924.htm.

[8] Honeck and Marten, 'More than Victims', 10.

[9] Ibid.

Central and Eastern Europe and beyond, including Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Spain, Constantinople and Poland. In *Hunger in War and Peace: Women and Children in Germany, 1914–1924*, Mary Cox investigates 'how the war influenced the nutritional status of women, children, and the poor in Germany'.[10] With their edited volume, *War and Childhood in the Era of the Two World Wars*, Mischa Honeck and James Marten strive to complicate our understanding of children's experiences in wartime. Assembling a series of case studies on China, Germany, the Soviet Union, the United States, Spain, Sweden and Japan, they argue that 'although the history of modern childhood and war has to be framed globally', the history of childhood has shown that 'war was never a unifying global experience'.[11] It mattered very much in which family, class, community, ethnic environment and country a child was born when war broke out and fundamentally disrupted everyday lives. As Baron argues for the history of children's displacement, Eastern Europe particularly showcases how 'ideas and practices of child displacement and re-placement were given greater force and urgency by revolutionary visions of social change', which gave great significance to children's upbringing.[12] In contrast to many Western European states in the early twentieth century, where the parental home was judged to be the ideal home for children, the Soviet Union propagated children's displacement as it was 'the most explicit in its pronouncement on the political significance of children'.[13] But when it comes to post-Second World War attempts to reunite children with their families, it was Germany in particular which witnessed massive child search operations and which was confronted with comprehensive claims by various national governments to return 'their' children.[14] Hence, place and time played and still play a great role when it comes to children's encounters with war and its repercussions.

Despite these geographic and temporal specificities, the history of Europe's major wars and their aftermaths in the twentieth century share important commonalities when it comes to children's place, role and experiences. In her monograph, *Children Born of War in the Twentieth Century*, Sabine Lee contrasts various violent conflicts and wars on different continents across seventy years to uncover structural patterns both of gender-based violence towards women and of its impact on the children born of war (CIBOW). Lynn Taylor's monograph, *In the Children's Best Interest: Unaccompanied Children in American-Occupied Germany, 1945–52*, moves beyond wartime and investigates the everyday handling of 'unaccompanied children' who had been separated from their parents or orphaned during the war and who found themselves in the US Zone of Germany. She seeks to understand the battle over children seen as national property who were meant to be brought 'home', and the 'sometimes fierce international debate over their fate'.[15]

Independently of children's specific experiences, the wars of the twentieth century expose the often-ambiguous attitudes of parents and states towards children in times of war. Honeck and Marten touch on this ambiguity, which expresses itself in the fact that on the one hand 'modern societies . . . imagine childhood as a space of sheltered existence', which requires preventing children's exposure to violence and warfare, while on the other hand often mobilising them for war, using any means and media to instil in them the war's mentality and to involve them in the home front. Wars always challenge normative notions of childhood, disrupting fixed concepts of children's origins, their home and social environments, their upbringing and education. As Baron convincingly demonstrates for the Soviet Union, the 'modern child' was defined 'by identification with specific sites', such as its proper home, and, 'by implication, with rootedness "in place"'; for that reason the 'displaced child', as one possible type of war child, 'is seen to have foregone childhood, to have grown up prematurely, to exhibit "unchildishness"'.[16] Here war, violence and displacement become antagonists of

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[10] Mary Elisabeth Cox, *Hunger in War and Peace: Women and Children in Germany, 1914–1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[11] Honeck and Marten, 'More than Victims', 5.

[12] Baron, 'Placing the Child', 30.

[13] Ibid., 31.

[14] Lynne Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 322.

[15] Ibid., 5.

[16] Nick Baron, 'Placing the Child', 23.

childhood. If we look at children in the past who lived 'out of place', acted too maturely or participated in actual fighting, they were usually considered as having been bankrupted by war and deprived of their 'real' childhood. Yet, such judgements about supposedly unchildlike children uncover the changing notions of childhood throughout the twentieth century, of children's appropriate place in wars and of the relief of children, which again perfectly reflect the evolution and transformation of modern states. Baron points out that discourses about and policies directed towards the displaced child demonstrate how modernising states were 'working on themselves and reworking their relationship with citizens' and thus allow us to draw broader conclusions about 'modern statehood and social relations'.[17] Whereas the First World War brought about the dissolution of various empires in Central and Eastern Europe and paved the way towards the making of various nation-states, its troublesome aftermath witnessed the expansion of child relief efforts which then led to the professionalisation of child welfare. Triggered by the observation that children were key to nationalising efforts and that their physical and mental well-being were necessary for the 'future of the nation', their protection and welfare came to be seen as important components of the modern state.

Children's Mobilisation

Before war gets ugly, states preparing for war or in its initial stages invest much time and effort in gaining the support of children and involving them in the war effort. Prior to the Second World War, for instance, the Japanese government developed a program for the involvement of schoolchildren in the war effort. With the so-called Pioneer Youth Corps, as Halliday Piel observes, they sent adolescents as farmers to Manchuria and Mongolia during school vacations, mobilising these schoolchildren for the war effort and its imperial project.[18] In pre-Cultural Revolution China, children's politicised leisure, through the employment of military toys and playthings, was also used for children's mobilisation. As Honeck and Martin point out, 'one of the ways that children integrate war into their lives is, naturally enough, through play'.[19] Against this backdrop, as Valentina Boretti uncovers, politicised leisure 'did not necessarily imply outright belligerence' but was instead meant to encourage 'patriotism, discipline, political and technical competence, physical and moral strength, and determination' and to train children 'to resist rather than attack'.[20] During the Second World War defence service training was introduced in Swedish schools, which involved training schoolchildren in sports, games and safety education aiming to prepare them for war. While children were theoretically meant to be kept out of war, adolescents were often considered valuable and ready to support the national war effort.

Beyond children's physical mobilisation, it was also a key objective of states and governments to convey the right messages about war to the future generations. In First World War Germany much effort was invested into 'transforming the war into a positive educational experience' by controlling children's media consumption and preventing their exposure to the wrong stories through harsh censorship.[21] Censorship, as Kara L. Ritzheimer demonstrates, was not just used to prevent children from consuming the wrong literature but also to offer them proper narratives that 'induce useful qualities, namely patriotism, loyalty, and selflessness'.[22] Children were imagined as the unspoiled future generation with 'the potential to revitalize nations and rededicate societies to a common purpose'.[23] Adults

[17] Ibid., 9–10.
[18] L. Halliday Piel, 'Recruiting Japanese Boys for the Pioneer Youth Corps of Manchuria and Mongolia', in *War and Childhood*, 53–70.
[19] Honeck and Marten, 'More than Victims', 8.
[20] Valentina Boretti, 'Patriotic Fun: Toys and Mobilization in China from the Republican to the Communist Era', in *War and Childhood*, 33.
[21] Kara L. Ritzheimer, 'Forging a Patriotic Youth: Penny Dreadfuls and Military Censorship in World War I Germany', in *War and Childhood*, 35–52.
[22] Ibid., 52.
[23] Mischa Honeck, 'Good Soldiers All? Democracy and Discrimination in the Boy Scouts of America, 1941–1945', in *War and Childhood*, 130.

considered their children as 'portents and harbingers of their families' and their societies' futures'.[24] New states promoting modernisation, comprehensive ideological reorientation and collective regeneration 'saw children as the makers or breakers of fundamental change'.[25] While states during the First World War already massively targeted children to support the war effort, it was the scale of warfare, violence and suffering of the Second World War which caused the comprehensive mobilisation of children. As Julie K. deGraffenried uncovers for the Soviet Union and the United States, war was meant to become the determining factor in the 'child's world', relying on 'the use of normative, politicized text and images' to convey the various messages to the young.[26] During wartime especially, children's education remained 'a dearly held and fiercely defended ideal'.[27] For that reason, materials and practices of children's wartime education offer a revealing insight into 'differing adult constructions of childhood, reflective of divergent wartime needs, preexisting ideologies, and systems of cultural production'.[28]

But these educational ideals did not automatically produce the desired outcomes. Parental expectations about children's education and mobilisation did not necessarily mean that the children behaved accordingly. Honeck, for instance, observes that the motivations behind participation in American Boys Scouting between 1941 and 1945 were diverse and manifold, concluding that 'the war did not meld American boyhood into a homogeneous fighting force for democracy'.[29] Similarly, participating in the German youth movement during the First World War did not bring about a coherent and united response. Antje Harms observes how contradictory children's response to the war could be. 'Young men and women', she notes, 'responded to the Great War in extremely different ways', with adolescents who either 'enthusiastically embraced it or opposed it'.[30] The diverse responses of adolescents to wars and propaganda suggest that adolescence – as the period of transformation from childhood to adulthood – carried the danger of undermining efforts to create political cohesiveness and obedience among the members of this generation. Yet adolescents' ambiguous feelings about the war nevertheless show how central the idea of youth was in reinforcing attitudes that were necessary to ground the war mentality and the ongoing war effort.

Beyond targeting children's hearts and souls in the war effort, adolescents were often also actively involved in actual warfare. In that case, wars rapidly diminished the distance between childhood and adulthood, triggering children's often imminent transition to the adult world. Wars accelerated the process of growing up. Especially boys who became involved in warfare as child combatants were 'catapulted into a man's world where childhood notions of manhood were often shattered'.[31] Experiencing violence, facing dangers, and seeing the horrors of war ended many children's childhood. War's immediate side-effects, such as displacement, not just from a specific country or state but also 'from the child's normative "places" of comfort – home, family, and childhood itself', often functioned as an 'initiation into the adult world'.[32]

Children's Encounter with Violence

Even if not directly involved in warfare, children were – and still are – confronted with diverse forms of physical violence, of destruction, of bombings and the loss or wounding of parents and friends.

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[24] Mischa Honeck and James Marten, 'Adapting and Surviving', in *War and Childhood*, 149.

[25] Nick Baron, 'Placing the Child in Twentieth-Century History', in *War and Childhood*, 30.

[26] Julie K. deGraffenried, 'Learning More than Letters', in *War and Childhood*, 109.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Honeck, 'Good Soldiers All?', 131.

[30] Antje Harms, 'Bellicists, Feminists, and Deserters: Youth, War, and the German Youth Movement, 1914–1918', in *War and Childhood*, 190.

[31] Kate James, 'Combatant Children: Ideologies and Experiences of Childhood in the Royal Navy and British Army, 1902–1918', in *War and Childhood*, 69.

[32] Tomas Balkelis, 'Ethnicity, Identity and Imaginings of Home in the Memoirs of Lithuanian Child Deportees, 1941–53', in *Displaced Children*, 272.

Invasions, occupations and approaching armies, which accompanied for instance the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, created, according to Rachel Faircloth Green's observation in her chapter, conditions through which 'millions of children became lost, abandoned, orphaned or fugitive'; these unaccompanied 'street' children mirrored the state of the war's 'fluid and mobile population'.[33] The loss of parents was perhaps *the* most life-changing experience for children who lived through war. The death of a parent, most frequently of the father, was often the trigger for children's displacement and the cause of 'the trauma of refugee life', as Aldis Purs observes.[34] Often it was also, as Elizabeth White identifies in her chapter, the dispersal of families, triggered by approaching armies or occupation, or the spreading of epidemic diseases, which caused children's separation or removal from their families.[35] White observes that other war-related traumas were brought about by 'displacement, material deprivation, bereavement, separation, being witness to or victim of violence, exposure to armed combat, physical injury, and participation in combat, including killing or inflicting injury'.[36]

Marten and Honeck draw attention to the ways in which wars, even when they have ended, particularly shape the lives of the young who are more dependent on parental protection and thus more vulnerable.[37] Many Russian children, whose family ties had been disrupted and who had been displaced, experienced 'a life-long tension between belonging and alienation', which expressed itself in their inability to construct a coherent and meaningful 'account of the self'.[38] Baron and Kaznelson speak of children's life-long suffering from their 'dispossessed childhoods', for which, as adults, they were trying to achieve restitution.[39] Other displaced children, such as the Soviet-Spanish *niños* whom Karl Qualls explores in his chapter, were challenged throughout their lifetime by the 'hybridity' of their identities, forcing them to navigate back and forth between their Spanish and Russian identities.[40]

Once children's suffering from the war manifested itself in the public realm; it often became the object of public outcries over the degeneration of the next generation. Adult anxieties found their way into the visual depictions of children's suffering during war. Images of children's physical and emotional suffering were often instrumentalised to spark larger social debates. Robert Jacobs researched the ways in which children who had been affected by the nuclear attack on Hiroshima in 1945 were portrayed in American media. He observes that the children of Hiroshima were 'almost entirely without agency' and were depicted as 'signifiers . . . of the power – the horror – and the vulnerability inspired by nuclear weapons' and 'as celebrity victims, or as martyrs', serving as 'a screen on which Americans projected their own relations to the weapons'.[41] The child victims of Hiroshima were not taken seriously in their own right, but their visual representation was used as a 'warning for all humankind about the apocalyptic violence our species had conjured'.[42] The suffering of Japanese children from the nuclear attacks developed in the United States into a far larger philosophical debate which centred on the possibility that 'such weapons would bring an end to civilization' as a whole

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[33] Rachel Faircloth Green, 'Making Kin Out of Strangers: Soviet Adoption during and after the Second World War', in *Displaced Children*, 159.

[34] Aldis Purs, 'Orphaned Testimonies: The Place of Displaced Children in Independent Latvia, 1918–26', in *Displaced Children*, 50.

[35] Elizabeth White, 'Relief, Reconstruction and the Rights of the Child: The Case of Russian Displaced Children in Constantinople, 1920–22', in *Displaced Children*, 78.

[36] Ibid., 91.

[37] Honeck and Marten, 'More than Victims', 12.

[38] Michael Kaznelson and Nick Baron, 'Memories of Displacement: Loss and Reclamation of Home/Land in the Narratives of Soviet Child Deportees of the 1930s', in *Displaced Children*, 114 and 124.

[39] Ibid., 128.

[40] Karl D. Qualls, 'From Hooligans to Disciplined Students: Displacement, Resettlement, and Role Modelling of Spanish Civil War Children in the Soviet Union, 1937–51', in *Displaced Children*, 154.

[41] Robert Jacobs, 'Attacking Children with Nuclear Weapons: The Centrality of Children in American Understandings of the Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki', in *War and Childhood*, 269–70.

[42] Ibid.

and that 'the generation of children . . . might well be the last generation of children ever'.[43] In this case the experience of Japanese children was used to imagine what it would mean if such a threat was posed to American society. But more generally we can observe that the widespread visual victimisation of children was often used to pose essential questions about possible dangers to societies at large.

Children were also subjected to other forms of physical violence that were not directly connected to the fighting. In her study, Birgitte Søland explores how during the Second World War poor, orphaned or abandoned children in the United States became involuntary research subjects used by scientists and doctors for medical experimentation, exposing them to vaccines which had never been tested before in adults.[44] Beyond the immediate physical impact of these experiments, her research reveals the long-term psychological repercussion of these involuntary tests on children who struggled 'to come to terms with information about their early lives'.[45] Yet, even if back then 'some of the nation's most vulnerable children became victims of adult interests', any conclusions to be drawn need to be tested against the former children's own recollections. Søland emphasises that such ethically problematic experiments on children were not always taken as such by the children themselves and could 'carry different meanings than anticipated', highlighting 'the importance of listening to the voices of the subjects we study'.[46]

Mary Cox's monograph focuses on a less immediate form of violence on children's bodies. She identifies the quantitative scale of the impact of the economic blockade on the nutritional deprivation of Germany's civilian population.[47] Cox uses anthropometric data of bodily measurements that were collected in Leipzig and German Strasburg to quantify how the naval blockade altered children's bodies quite literally, namely by affecting the height and weight of German civilians and in particular of German children. Cox also goes beyond the quantitative approach and uses a mixed-method approach, including qualitative sources, to analyse the effect of food relief strategies on children's caloric intake and bodily recovery after Germany surrendered. She concludes that German 'children suffered deeply from blockade-induced food shortages', while also emphasising that the food relief supplied by Germany's former enemies saved many of the starving children and 'gave them hope once more for a meaningful life'.[48] What is particularly fascinating about Cox's research findings is the observation that working-class children profited most from the food relief system. Their height and weight increased substantially between 1919 and 1924, in contrast to children of the better off classes.[49] Cox explains that class belonging played a major role in children's access to food aid, as it was primarily the children in greatest need who were to receive relief. In this way, *Hunger in War and Peace* demonstrates that anthropometric data can not only be used to determine nutritional deprivation but also to 'provide evidence of the success of one of the earliest instances of large-scale international philanthropic aid'.[50] Children's physical bodies, their heights and weights, thus tell a larger (economic and social) history of the First World War and its aftermath.

Besides hunger and material deprivation, displacement was another cause of children's suffering during war. Often violence and persecution triggered children's forced displacement or separation. Baron demonstrates for the Soviet Union that 'violence was the context, catalyst and condition of the children's displacement and itinerancy'.[51] Sometimes it was not just the threat of imminent violence which triggered children's displacement, but also the attempts to rescue children through evacuations from the site of warfare and conflict. During the First World War Ottoman orphan boys,

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[43] Ibid.
[44] Birgitte Søland, 'The Dark Side of the "Good War": Children and Medical Experimentation in the United States During World War II', in *War and Childhood*, 248–66.
[45] Ibid., 250.
[46] Ibid., 265–6.
[47] Cox, *Hunger in War and Peace*, 2.
[48] Ibid., 15.
[49] Ibid., 337.
[50] Ibid., 337.
[51] Baron, 'Placing the Child in Twentieth-Century History', 16.

as Nazan Maksudyan elaborates, were sent to Germany to work as apprentices in craft trades, mining and agriculture.[52] This long-distance child displacement abruptly altered the lives of the children affected. Children's experiences included their longing to leave the crowded orphanages back in the Ottoman Empire, their challenging travels to Germany and their reception by and lives within the German households where they were employed.

More than a decade later, during the Spanish Civil War (1936–9), when thousands of Spanish children fled to the Soviet Union, their departure from war-torn Spain was depicted in the Soviet print media as a uniform 'escape from a dark life of fear, loss, and hopelessness' and their welcoming reception by the 'new [Soviet] homeland' where they were 'comforted by abundance and good care and filled with hope, purpose, and opportunity'.[53] However, children's experiences of displacement were more complex and ambiguous. Karl Qualls observes that for many Spanish children, evacuation from their home country went hand in hand with 'feelings of loss and fear', as it 'forced children to leave behind everything they knew'.[54] Other Spanish children expressed 'relief, hope, and wonder at their treatment and new opportunities in the USSR'.[55]

When it became apparent to parents and states how profoundly wars compromised children's 'proper' upbringing, fears of degeneration and of the loss of the next generation were voiced publicly. Honeck and Marten conclude from the various case studies in their edited volume 'how unreliable and fragile the ideal of a protected childhood was in times of total war'.[56] Adult norms regarding children's appropriate lives were fundamentally challenged. When war caused children's abrupt displacement and uprootedness, as Baron uncovers, the appearance of children on the street triggered massive social fears. Street children in the Soviet Union provoked anxieties about the children's 'perceived loss of rootedness and lack of self-restraint and social accountability', and put into question 'the myth of childhood as a stable, situated life-stage of naivety, passivity, and subordination'.[57] Instead of living a supposedly child-like life, these uprooted and displaced children who were lacking parental or institutional care were seen as embodiments of social degeneration and chaos. Children living 'out of place' were also taken as evidence that the childhoods they lived were 'out of place', as they were 'dis-placed from normative sites of child-rearing and socialization – home, school, club – to the margins of the established social order'.[58] Street children who were no longer restricted to a life at home and lived according to their own order and their own norms manifested a pivotal 'contestation of adult values' regarding children's proper upbringing and protection.[59] Such fears of children's uprooted and socially unacceptable lives didn't only shape public opinion in the Soviet Union. Up until today, street children are still often portrayed and perceived 'as displaying socially unacceptable attributes which place them outside mainstream society'.[60] Yet when war or destruction are the causes of children living in the street, empathies arise that seek to offer the 'street children' a 'proper home'.

Children who – because of war, occupation and violence – were born out of wedlock also challenged social norms regarding children's proper upbringing and their designated place in society. Sabine Lee investigates various aspects of the experiences of such children 'born as a result of intimate encounters of local women and foreign soldiers during wars and civil wars'.[61] She explores how children born of war (CIBOW), regardless of the specific war they lived through, faced common adversities, and developed common strategies to cope with them. She analyses the everyday struggle of

[52] Nazan Maksudyan, 'Boys Without a Country: Ottoman Orphan Apprentices in Germany During World War I', in *War and Childhood*, 206–28.
[53] Karl D. Qualls, 'Defining the Ideal Soviet Childhood', 80.
[54] Ibid., 74.
[55] Ibid., 77.
[56] Mischa Honeck and James Alan Marten, 'Inspiring and Mobilizing', in *War and Childhood*, 15–16.
[57] Baron, 'Placing the Child', 25.
[58] Ibid., 7.
[59] Ibid., 24.
[60] Sérgio Luiz de Moura, 'The Social Construction of Street Children: Configuration and Implications', *The British Journal of Social Work*, 32, 3 (2002), 353.
[61] Lee, *Children Born of War*, 6.

CIBOW with the 'walls of silence' surrounding their biological origin and with the question of identity as the 'single most significant issue' affecting their lives.[62] Children's identity struggles, their experiences of marginalisation in and rejection by their social environment, and their lack of a sense of belonging were primarily caused, so she argues, by the stigma and experience of the absent or unknown father. The experience of the absent father was, however, not exclusive to children born of war. Living without a father was an experience that was shared by children in most war-affected countries, as fathers were deployed for war combat or were captured or killed. Despite children's exposure to their fathers' absence in many countries, children experienced the lack of a parent very individually. These experiences depended on multiple factors that varied between families, countries and individual children, dependent on the mothers' ability to cope with the situation, the financial situation of their families and the state's attitude towards soldiers' families. Again, in today's Ukraine 'nearly all children are coping with the absence of their fathers, older male siblings or uncles as nearly all men between the ages of 18–60 are mobilized for the war effort'.[63] What this absence of fathers does to Ukraine's children today we can hardly imagine.

Be it in the past or present, war disrupts family ties and social relationships. During most wars responsibility was shifted from fathers to mothers. In her fascinating monograph, Sabine Lee is particularly invested in understanding how mothers who gave birth to children of foreign soldiers, especially those who had experienced sexual violence, dealt with social and economic hardship such as single motherhood, discrimination, stigmatisation and social exclusion, or challenges to their physical and mental health.[64] Lee's book is a comprehensive and successful attempt to uncover how children's experiences during wars impacted their postwar identities and life courses. When it comes to gender-based experiences during wars, and the children born as a result, Lee argues that 'whether sexual violence is a by-product of war or whether it is an integral part of war tactics or war strategy, [it] is likely to have an effect on how the victims of such violence and their children are being treated in post-war communities and is thus of significance for our analysis'.[65] The challenges to the identity of children born of war was often aggravated by the mothers' association of the child with maternal trauma and the resulting dissociation, rejection or emotional apathy.

Children's Resilience and Subjectivity

Yet once they were adults, children born of war developed strategies to come to terms with their past.[66] CIBOW were not alone in this. As Honeck and Marten argue, children in wartime were in most instances 'more than victims', demonstrating their resilience and their ability to 'endure sacrifices, and shortages, contribute to family survival and community economies, and exert agency by choosing to take part in their countries' conflicts'.[67] Even when facing violence, displacement and emotional stress, children developed their own coping strategies to survive. Notwithstanding the immensely challenging circumstances children find themselves in, they both directly and indirectly contribute to the fact that some 'semblance of normality remains', as they 'play, draw, make up stories, and read books . . . go to school, squabble with siblings, and sulk after being scolded'.[68] Researching children's displacement, Baron makes the important observation that historians 'witness not just children's terrible suffering but their resourcefulness, courage and capacity to survive'.[69] Herein lies the potential to write children's complex and often resilient experiences back into modern history.

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[62] Ibid., 245.
[63] Two months of war in Ukraine creating 'a child protection crisis of extraordinary proportions' – UNICEF Geneva Palais briefing note on the situation of children in Ukraine, 6 May 2022. https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/two-months-war-ukraine-creating-child-protection-crisis-extraordinary-proportions.
[64] Lee, *Children Born of War*, 245.
[65] Ibid., 7.
[66] Ibid., 6.
[67] Honeck and Marten, 'More than Victims', 11.
[68] Honeck and Marten, 'Adapting and Surviving', 149.
[69] Baron, 'Placing the Child', 11.

Children's resourcefulness and their ability to remain children are often best captured in their own words and material culture. In her chapter on childhood during the Holocaust, Patricia Heberer Rice argues for the value of children's subjective sources to understanding their interpretation of and attitude towards the surrounding world. While acknowledging that children's writings and drawings are deeply embedded in the adult world and that 'the testimony of adults still often frames the conversation', she considers them essential to prevent an imbalanced narrative and to 'let the youngsters speak for themselves'.[70] By centring attention on the manifold ways in which children sought to cope with the Holocaust 'through their own eyes and words, and through their elemental daily activities', we can better understand how children and adolescents learned 'to transcend the physical and emotional traumas they experienced'.[71] Incorporating children's own subjectivities adds another dimension to the history of childhood. Honeck and Marten consider it both possible and necessary to try to understand children as 'historical actors with their own ideas, intentions, and identity-forming experiences' and not just as the product of adult choices.[72]

Another means to get a glimpse of how children experienced war are their material testimonies. Children's drawings of war or its aftermath that we can encounter today were often prepared during class or were commissioned by relief organisations. When the First World War broke out, as Manon Pignot explains, 'drawing had become part of elementary school curricula across Europe', which is why many teachers encouraged their pupils to draw their experiences and imaginations of the war.[73] As school teaching was highly politicised during wartime, children's art also followed a set of 'visual guidelines' which, for instance, 'systematically equate[d] . . . the enemy with a distinguishing characteristic'.[74] When drawing the enemy or their imagination of combat, children demonstrated what Pignot describes as 'the undeniable internalization of the codes of childhood war culture'.[75] Children's art thus becomes the connecting link between the war outside, their interpretation of the available war propaganda and their own imaginations and thoughts. But this art was not a simple mirror of the children's surrounding world or their parents' influence. Instead, it mirrored children's negotiation between their environment and their inner world, demonstrating both the efficacy and the limitations of official war discourses.[76]

As wars transformed and affected children's lives, playing and drawing served as means to both imagine their ideal war and their place in it, and to process their daily experiences. Honeck and Marten describe these strategies as an 'escape into a world of imagination', helping children to survive and to come to terms with 'the miseries of hunger, fear, and deprivation' and enabling their 'emotional insulation from the surrounding reality'.[77] Yet children's artworks were also testimonies of their understanding of their imagined and actual surroundings. Be they in the form of children's play, art or writing, material testimonies can serve as a lens to understand children's past experiences and imaginary worlds. Baron considers it essential to 'attend closely to the words and voices of the displaced children themselves' to be able to reconstruct and understand 'how they conceived of themselves in relation to the tumultuous worlds in which they lived'.[78] Tackling the issue of the historical 'truthfulness' of children's sources, he proposes to not approach these sources as documentary but rather as 'poetic' in so far as 'they decontextualize and essentialize impressions or intuitions of the past' and as their meaning 'derives as much from affect, imagination and impulse as from any "authentic" past experience'.[79]

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[70] Patricia Heberer Rice, 'In Their Own Words: Children in the World of the Holocaust', in *War and Childhood*, 231.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Honeck and James Marten, 'More than Victims', 6.

[73] Manon Pignot, 'Drawing the Great War: Children's Representations of War and Violence in France, Russia, and Germany', in *War and Childhood*, 172.

[74] Ibid., 176.

[75] Ibid., 184.

[76] Pignot, 'Drawing the Great War', 173.

[77] Honeck and Marten, 'Adapting and Surviving', 149.

[78] Baron, 'Placing the Child', 4.

[79] Ibid., 16.

Children's Relief

Like the ambiguous attitude of states towards children's war mobilisation, postwar periods also witnessed fluid attitudes towards children whose bodies and minds showed signs of the war's impact. The early Soviet state, for instance, pursued contradictory practices towards displaced child, 'vacillating between the impulse to exclude and punish and the desire to rescue and redeem' the children in need.[80] However, when states, communities, institutions or individuals decided to help, the twentieth century witnessed a great variety of measures to relieve children's post-war suffering and respond to their particular vulnerability. Mary Cox hints at the paradoxical character of the First World War when it comes to children's suffering. While on the one hand the naval blockade and the food crisis in Germany caused massive harm, recognition of this harm led to steps to prevent enmity and to provide relief to children in need.[81] Especially after the Holocaust, public awareness was raised to relieve the suffering of Jewish children. The Jewish child, as Gabriel Finder argues in her contribution, 'ranked high, if not highest in the community's hierarchy of victims of the Nazi genocide', as they served on the one hand as a proof of the unprecedented 'scale, violence, fury, and moral depravity' of the Holocaust, and on the other hand as a promise that, despite these horrors, the Jewish people had a future.[82]

In her monograph, Lynn Taylor investigates the child search operation after the Second World War which, modelled on American social welfare principles, sought to locate, identify, reunite or repatriate Europe's unaccompanied children.[83] Taylor shows that the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) was driven by the wish to reunite unaccompanied children with their birth families. The child search operation was based on the conviction that a child could flourish best 'in the bosom of a loving family', ideally their birth family, even if the child had been separated from that family and found a new home.[84] Central and Eastern European governments shared this conviction, driven by the desire to get back 'their' lost children. If the search for the children's relatives was unsuccessful, the children were to be returned to their countries of birth. Post-Second World War Soviet Russia, which had to care for millions of abandoned, lost, orphaned or unsupervised children, demonstrated on the other hand a 'new enthusiasm for adoption as an institution for the creation and restoration of families', using it as a strategy for 'rescuing, physically rehabilitating and socially re-integrating the displaced and orphaned children'.[85]

In postwar Germany, the discourse and approach to unaccompanied children demonstrated that 'nationality [still] lay at the heart of the question of what to do with those children' who had been separated or orphaned.[86] Tara Zahra observes that after the Second World War 'renationalizing children who had been brought up in a different language or culture' due to displacement during the war and its aftermath was considered crucial to children's rehabilitation. This rehabilitation was a particularly complex process as it involved 'recovering lost identities', both metaphorically and literally, which was essential to children's psychological healing process.[87] But Taylor observes that organisations such as the UNRRA and the IRO faced difficulties in determining children's nationality amidst territorial shifts and the struggle over ethnic and national identities in postwar Central and Eastern Europe. The core challenge was to figure out where to place those children whose nationality could not be clearly determined, triggering questions such as 'who would speak for the child, who would determine its ultimate fate, and to whom did the child "belong"?'[88]

[80] Ibid., 17.
[81] Cox, *Hunger in War & Peace*, 15.
[82] Gabriel N. Finder, 'Child Survivors in Polish Jewish Collective Memory after the Holocaust: The Case of Undzere Kinder', in *Displaced Children*, 221.
[83] Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 327.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Green, 'Making Kin Out of Strangers', 186.
[86] Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 44–5.
[87] Tara Zahra, 'Lost Children: Displaced Children between Nationalism and Internationalism after the Second World War', in *Displaced Children*, 205–6.
[88] Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 280.

As children without a clear nationality were considered a 'serious conundrum', Taylor demonstrates, the UNRRA and the IRO tried to ensure that the children would obtain a legal status in one country.[89] Once it had become clear that determining children's nationality could be more complicated than expected, relief organisations agreed 'to not repatriate anyone against their will'.[90] While initially children's national identity and ethnic belonging were considered the main criteria for their repatriation, it increasingly became paramount to provide unaccompanied and often stateless children instead with 'citizenship', 'legal security' and a 'legal identity' in a state which would then be responsible for their care and education.[91] Children's physical security, which included their feeding, shelter and care, was initially considered most essential; yet, with time, the focus shifted to children's emotional security and well-being, which was thought to be best achieved through reunification with their birth families. But as the destiny of the children became an object of fierce political struggles, unaccompanied children's emotional needs and their own interests were rarely taken comprehensively into account.[92] The children's 'best interests' were 'determined by the values, needs, and expectations of the person or entity doing the determining'; they rarely reflected the children's real and subjective needs.[93] In this way, Taylor's story of the search for unaccompanied children demonstrates how complex and difficult it was to apply any fixed notion of nationality and belonging in postwar Europe.

Conclusion

Taken together, these volumes touch on four major issues: (a) the (assigned and changing) role of children in wars; (b) the immediate impact and the long-term implications of war on children; (c) the changing notions of childhood; and (d) the diverse attempts of societies to care for children affected by war. But what is the added value of an exclusive exploration of childhood and children during wartime? Why, as Thomas Belkelis provocatively asks, should we 'study the forcibly displaced children separately from the parents with whom they were dispatched into exile?' And can we really understand war, displacement or hunger 'in some different way by focusing on the experiences, actions, and testimonies of children instead of those of adults?'[94]

One answer is that war affects children more profoundly and more lastingly than it affects adults. Mary Cox illustrates this through the ways hunger affects children's bodies, not just during the war but throughout their lifetimes. 'Children are more sensitive to changes in nutritional status', she argues, as in contrast to adults, 'nutritional deprivation will impact their growth and stature in an immediate way'.[95] Even if children manage to catch up on growth at a later moment, hunger, and nutritional stress 'express themselves throughout the lifespan as an increased risk of disease and likelihood of mortality'.[96] Beyond the immediate impact of war on children's well-being, everyday lives and familial social relations, it also offers a distinct perspective through which to understand children and the history of childhood. Honeck and Marten understand wars as a lens through which we can see children 'at their most vulnerable, their most frightened, their most adaptable, their most responsible, their most resourceful'.[97]

The relationship between childhood and war is not just relevant for better understanding childhood but also for better understanding the making of states and the role of children within them. In the twentieth century, children played an essential role as the embodiment of a particular notion of the future nation for which wars were fought. Honeck and Marten capture the significance of children in wars. They argue that 'modern warfare would not have been possible without modern childhood',

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89 Ibid., 339.
90 Ibid., 282.
91 Ibid., 318.
92 Ibid., 339.
93 Ibid., 343.
94 Balkelis, 'Ethnicity, Identity and Imaginings of Home', 249.
95 Cox, *Hunger in War and Peace*, 173.
96 Ibid., 174.
97 Honeck and Marten, 'Adapting and Surviving', 149.

as children were not only considered as quintessential victims but also 'as future citizens, as future defenders, as one of the objects about which wars were fought, and as one of the resources for fighting them'.[98] Children occupy an essential place in times of war, offering a compelling vision of the future for which to fight. Baron is driven by a similar objective, that is to identify the 'nexus between displacement and the modern state' by approaching 'the displaced child as a "site" of state building'.[99]

Furthermore, children's actual involvement and their response to wars also affect the wars themselves. Honeck and Marten observe that 'the politics and culture of a country are inevitably shaped by the ways that its children respond to war and its aftermath'.[100] Children's diverse responses to war offer an insight into the overall social composition and functioning of their respective societies. Their wartime roles and experiences – which are always relational to their upbringing, their ethnic, national and religious identities, their class, their education and their social environment – reflect the very same states in which they are growing up. Whether 'children and youth wound up as victims, eyewitnesses, willing executioners, or subversive actors . . . depended on local circumstances and contingent forms of socialization'.[101]

Reflecting jointly on the reviewed volumes, I would like to conclude that the diverse historical case studies they examine complicate our notion of children's experiences and roles during wars. They help us to understand that there does not exist *the* one childhood experience of war. Children's experiences during war are as complex, diverse and unpredictable as wars themselves. Yet their diverse responses and their different roles allow us to draw larger conclusions about states and societies at war. Both in the past and today, children were and are a key element of wars. Just as we are currently seeing again in the war against Ukraine, children's experiences during war and in displacement reflect the particular importance children have as the imaginary future of postwar states. In Ukraine, children experience air raids and have to shelter in basements and subway stations; some are wounded, many are separated from their families, many have to flee their homes and leave behind their fathers who were drafted. Children of Ukraine have been orphaned – many lost family members or friends, and many were deported to Russia and adopted by families against their will, as they are used for Russia's brutal and inhuman nationalising mission. They are exposed to stress, experience anxiety and have trouble coping with the emotional challenges the war poses to them.

At the same time, the war has also triggered massive relief for children. Children and mothers are hosted by families in Poland, Romania, Hungary, Germany, Moldova; children with cancer were evacuated; child orphans found temporary homes in Scotland. And most importantly, Ukrainian children are not mere victims. They have also exhibited an amazing resilience in dealing with loss, trauma and separation, both in Ukraine and in the receiving countries. Yet it is deeply troubling that again today, more than a hundred years after the First World War, we are seeing massive harm inflicted by war on children in Europe. We can only hope that we have learned enough from former wars and conflicts to know how to best relieve children's suffering once the war is over.

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[98] Honeck and Marten, 'More than Victims', 14.
[99] Nick Baron, 'Violence, Childhood and the State: New Perspectives on Political Practice and Social Experience in the Twentieth Century', in *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915–53*, 274.
[100] Honeck and Marten, 'More than Victims', 12.
[101] Ibid., 5.