Andrea Griffante, *Children, Poverty and Nationalism in Lithuania, 1900–1940*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Pivot, 2019. 148 p. ISBN 978-3-030-30870-4 (eBook)

This monograph explores the development of care for orphaned, destitute and poor children in Lithuania in the first half of the 20th century. It looks particularly at how nation-building agendas influenced the discourse and practices of private associations for children's welfare. Andrea Griffante emphasises the ways nationalist elites influenced the emergence of private networks of care and the intrinsic ethno-national character of child rehabilitation efforts. In this, he argues that it was the competition between Lithuanian and Polish efforts that augmented the nationalist dimension of child rehabilitation in this period.

Griffante engages with a wide array of documents, with a focus on Lithuanian and Polish material. He investigates state sources, organisational documents, private papers and newspapers, as he explores the development of a civil society working towards the rehabilitation of children, and the ways nationalist elites contributed to these efforts.

The monograph is relatively short, and it is divided into four core chronological and thematic chapters (besides the introduction and final remarks). Chapter 2 is the first section that delves into the main theme of the book, as it contextualises the emergence of children's care within a framework of nation-building in Lithuania at the turn of the 20th century. Here, Griffante argues that the social changes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the growing attention of assistance towards poor and orphaned children in Lithuania. Chapter 3 highlights the relevance of the humanitarian crisis of the First World War, and the crystallisation of the ethno-national profile of private initiatives to rehabilitate children. Chapter 4 describes the negotiations, tension and collaboration between national child care associations and foreign (i.e. American and British) humanitarian organisations in the aftermath of the First World War. Lastly, Chapter 5 points to the change in method and discourse regarding child care; here, Griffante argues that the interwar period saw the waning of attention paid by associations to foundlings and poor and destitute children, and a growing focus on preventive health and hygiene measures and the education of indigent mothers.

The book adds to the ever-growing literature that shows the nexus between childhood and state reconstruction in 20th-century Europe. In general, this extant literature focuses primarily on Western Europe, with recent attention given to East-Central Europe. However, the scholarship has sidelined what we now know as the Baltic States, a gap that this book addresses persuasively. In exploring the connection between child care and nation-building in Lithuania, this study is best when it delves deeply into the agendas and practices of institutional actors, primarily privately funded, in the first half of the 20th century.

Griffante's detailed care for primary sources comes alive in the book's treatment of the development and nationalist discourse of associations. The tensions between Lithuanian associations and Polish institutions in particular are expertly described; here, Griffante uses the lens of institutional conflict, as he shows how non-state actors infused the political aspirations of nation-building into child care in the first half of the 20th century. The book deftly explores and highlights Lithuanian elites' discursive projection of the ways the future of the nation relied on the interdependence between children's physical and moral development. Taking these elements into consideration, the monograph is a good introduction to the ways Lithuanian nationalists posited their agendas of nation-building in relation to the children's state of mind and bodily development. Thus, it shows the ways the aspirations of a strong nation-state translated into the making of a formal civil society, concomitantly with political tensions caused by the collapse of the Russian Empire, the First World War, the German occupation, and the continuous battles for Lithuanian independence.

In general, the book makes a significant contribution to the literature, and its methodological and thematic approaches are pertinent. However, the narrative could also have benefited from further clarification of the context, an expansion of the scope, and further archive work.

First, the book needs a more careful exploration of nation-building in the Lithuanian context. In general, it quickly transitions through key chronological moments mirrored in the monograph's structural crafting. However, the contextual backdrop suffers, as Griffante chooses to focus on the detailed investigations of the discourse and practices performed by various actors (institutional and individual) involved in child care. The often-diffuse contextualisation of Lithuania's political and social turmoil in the first half of the 20th century renders the connection between nation-building and children's lives nebulous. Furthermore, it is rather unclear what nation-building meant, who its core architects

were, and whether their visions changed (or did not) over the course of the 40 years covered by the narrative.

Second, the book would have benefited from a widening of its scope. The Lithuanian story deserves to be situated in the broader story of the relationship between nation-building and social policy for children in East-Central Europe or in Europe in general. How did the Lithuanian story compare to what was happening in Hungary, Romania or Yugoslavia, for example? A further analysis of what was happening in Poland would have been especially useful, as the book explores the presence of Polish poor children's institutions in Lithuania.

Third, some more archival work could also have sustained the expansion of its scope. This is particularly relevant for Chapter 4 and the focus on international humanitarian aid. This analysis could have engaged with more American and British sources on various organisations involved in Lithuania. I commend the author for uncovering original material on humanitarian organisations in various national and local archives. It is precisely for this reason that a more in-depth exploration of organisational archives would have given a more layered analysis of the tensions and choices made by local actors when interacting with foreign humanitarians. There is no mention of the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee or use of the organisation's archives. Indeed, in general, the story of the Jews and Jewish children is treated rather episodically in this chapter, and in the entire book in general.

Despite these lacunae, the book certainly adds to the growing historiographical interest in the relationship between children's care and nationalists' agendas in new European states that emerged after the collapse of empires in the era of the Great War. Griffante's detailed account merits attention, as he uncovers the localised efforts to alleviate poverty and need among children, the tensions and collaborations between child care associations, and the shifts and turns within an arguably new civil society in Lithuania.

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