

*Tabubruch und Entgrenzung: Kindheit und Sexualität nach 1968*. Edited by Meike Sophia Baader, Christian Jansen, Julia König and Christin Sager. Cologne: Böhlau Verlag. 2017. 330 pp. €40.00 (softcover).

How one should talk about the sexuality of children and youth and whether one should talk about it at all – these are highly contested and potentially divisive issues in contemporary debates. All the more welcome and timely is this edited volume that discusses, in a laudably unagitated fashion, the shifting and often conflicting ways in which childhood sexuality was talked about and dealt with ‘after 1968’. The volume, which originates from an international conference on childhood sexuality in the so-called sexual revolution at the University of Hildesheim in 2014, neither condemns this period as facilitating various forms of sexual exploitation, nor does it fail to seriously consider the problematic dimensions of sexual liberation.

The terms *Tabubruch* and *Entgrenzung* in the volume’s title already point to the moral compass that guides the discussion. In a nutshell, breaking taboos and confronting the embarrassed silences around childhood sexuality are viewed as positive effects of the 1970s’ efforts at recreating sexual lives and cultures. Yet the transgression of the boundaries that separate the sexuality of children from the sexual world of adulthood and the refusal to accept a legally defined age of consent that protects children from adult desires are rejected as dangerous strategies employed by paedosexual pressure groups. These often very well-organized groups, the volume argues, used the emphasis on openness and liberation prevalent within the West German Left ‘after 1968’ to promote their perilous requests. The introduction clearly and helpfully defines these terms and outlines this argument. It thus convincingly establishes the ground on which the following sixteen chapters build.

While the editors’ suggestion to highlight transnational connections is unfortunately only picked up by David Paternotte’s contribution on the International (Lesbian and) Gay Association’s discussions about paedophilia, several chapters follow the innovative proposal to emphasize media historical perspectives. Jan-Henrik Friedrichs does so most impressively in his chapter on the Nuremberg *Indianerkommune*. This formation involved two adult men cohabiting with children and teenagers who, according to the author, joined the ‘commune’ in much smaller numbers than is often assumed. Friedrichs admits that he finds it difficult to integrate his assumption that the ‘commune-leader’ was having serious mental health issues into the analysis. In spite of this he shows convincingly that the group’s strategy of incoherent argumentation and all-encompassing opposition generated little but noise in the press and other media. The *Indianerkommune* should not therefore be given undue prominence when discussing sexual politics in the 1980s. Much more influential, though much less known, were the numerous paedosexual pressure groups that operated from within academic communities, emancipatory movements and political parties. As Claudia Bundschuh shows in revealing detail, these groups employed scientific ‘evidence’ to promote their claims about the possibility of non-abusive and non-detrimental sexual relationships between adults and children with less and less success until as late as the year 2000.

Another valuable insight that the volume as a whole brings to the debate is the claim that shifts in the understanding of childhood shaped the contemporary history of sexuality in decisive ways. In this vein, Meike Sophia Baader revealingly discusses the departure from traditional norms and from inter-generational hierarchies that generally characterized pedagogical discourse in the second half of the twentieth century. Along similar lines, Christin Sager’s chapter on sex education shows how

new conceptualizations of childhood allowed approaches to emerge since the 1970s that emphasized pleasure rather than control and wanted to strengthen children's ability to navigate their own sexual desires.

The emphasis the volume puts on the history of knowledge and on how different scientific discourses affected the discussion around paedosexuality proves to be revealing in other respects too. Detlef Siegfried shows how Ernest Bornemann's interest in psychoanalysis and his research on nursery rhymes enabled him to devise innovative perspectives on childhood sexuality that masked the problem of sexual violence in specific ways. In a very instructive chapter, Dagmar Herzog reconstructs struggles against and research about a moral code perceived of as oppressive that led Eberhard Schorsch and other representatives of West German sexology to claim in the 1970s that sexual relations between adults and children could under certain circumstances be not harmful and maybe even beneficial for the child.

As with most edited volumes the quality of the individual contributions varies considerably. Harry Willekens' chapter on legal developments for example remains notably vague and fails to discuss exemplary court cases that would prove his highly questionable point that shifts in the penal law since the 1970s have ultimately failed to guarantee children's freedom of choice in sexual matters. Much more precise and convincing is Stephan Klecha's analysis of how the proposal to discard the legal age of consent altogether was discussed within the Green Party up to the 1990s. Referencing simultaneous debates about more severe punishments for rape, the author shows that paedosexual demands were ultimately defeated by feminist arguments that viewed the law on sexual offences not primarily as a 'means of oppression', but rather as a tool to protect vulnerable populations.

As it contains a number of such illuminative chapters, the volume as a whole will hopefully receive the attention it undoubtedly deserves, among an expert as well as a broader audience. It succeeds in bridging the gap between academic and other publics primarily by combining a wide range of perspectives. Thus, the volume comprises autobiographically-inspired reflections like Christian Jansen's chapter on how childhood sexuality was negotiated and navigated in an alternative pedagogical project in Heidelberg around 1980, as well as research-inspired chapters that offer a good entry point into general debates around paedosexuality and childhood sexuality. Furthermore, the host of contributions that focus on contemporary history are accompanied by a chapter on early modern child witch trials. Here Julia König reads the collapse of the boundaries between adulthood and childhood sexuality as generally indicative of historical moments in which an established sexual regime is crumbling and a new order is not yet in place. Other contributions focus on present-day concerns instead, like Sophinette Becker's chapter on current debates about paedosexuality and sexual as well as sexualized violence.

In sum, the volume offers a timely re-assessment of the benefits and the problems, and of the openings and closures that the so-called sexual revolution engendered. Some authors tend to exaggerate the problematic dimensions, like Sven Reichardt in his chapter on the leftist and alternative milieu when he blames its representatives in a wholesale fashion for thoughtlessly inflating sexual liberation with political hopes for redemption. Other contributors offer a more balanced and adequate account, however, by emphasizing as does Dagmar Herzog, how proponents of homophobia and a Christian moral code have used the 'paedophile scare' before and after 1968 in order to promote a more restrictive sexual regime. From this perspective paedosexuality and childhood sexuality come into view as multi-layered phenomena that need to be discussed with the

necessary degree of diligence, taking into account both beneficial *Tabubruch* and perilous *Entgrenzung*. This approach affords a welcome critique of 'sexual liberalization' that does not prematurely discard the historical merits and the political potentials it entailed, and continues to entail.

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