Conference:

Children, Dependency, and Emotions in the Early Modern World, 1500-1800: Archival and Visual Narratives

12th-14th September 2024, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies.

Call for Papers

Children in the early modern world were dependent upon caretakers in many ways: physically, socially, and emotionally. Children could also be subjected to and negotiated social and economic dependencies, including conditions of serfdom, indentured labour, servitude, slavery, and family ties. Highly mobile, children were traded and trafficked between households, across cultural boundaries, and over land and oceans. These experiences could be exacerbated through considerations of gender and (premediated) sexuality. Wedged between these intersections of power, space, and (in)visibility, children have frequently been neglected in history writing, with their limited traces in archives contributing to this marginalisation. Following recent calls for praxeological approaches, global history, and the history of material culture, their silences are beginning to break.

We wish to foreground children's representations, articulations, and their experiences in archival and visual narratives as modes of overcoming their assumed absences in the historical record. Children shaped dependent relationships, not least in their capacity as future adults. A child's entry into strong asymmetrical dependencies may have been involuntary but they needed to adapt. Processes of adaptation, negotiation, and rejection, in turn, stabilised and destabilised dependencies. Under strong and enduring forms of asymmetrical dependency (i.e. chattel plantation slavery), enslaved children were paradoxically first treated as incomplete units of labour, but upon reaching physical maturity encountered a state of permanent infantilisation through calculated deprivation by enslavers. Accounting for both the violence of strong asymmetrical dependency and its archives, while recovering children's agency, is a challenge for historians.

It is the aim of this conference to conceive of children not as isolated, 'minor' subjects in history but as seminal agents. We welcome papers that:
- Explore the experiences of dependent children in the early modern world through novel approaches, particularly that of the history of emotions and/or microhistory;
- Consider the gendered dimensions and gendered disparities of childhood experiences;
- Interrogate institutional frameworks of slavery, dependency, serfdom, capitalism, and the family from the ground up;
- Investigate archival and visual sources that recover child-authored narratives and early modern discourses about children, childhood and infantilisation; and
- Interpret how these narratives may have reinforced or challenged dependent relationships, communities, and spaces.

The conference probes the possibility of an integrative global approach to the history of children in the early modern world. We welcome examples of research on all world regions, including indigenous studies and the history of borderlands. We also encourage interdisciplinary contributions and creative theoretical engagements.

We welcome submissions from advanced doctoral students, early career researchers, and senior scholars. Please submit your abstracts of ca. 300 words along with a short biographical note to earlymodern@dependency.uni-bonn.de by 1st December 2023. The conference will take place in person in Bonn and limited travel funding may be available for speakers. Please indicate in your submission if you require funding. Successful applicants will be notified by 30th December 2023.

This conference is organised by the German-Australian DAAD-Universities Australia collaborative project Child Slaveries in the Early Modern World: Gender, Trauma, and Trafficking in Transcultural Perspective (1500-1800) of early career researchers from the Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences of the Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, and the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies at the University of Bonn.

We look forward to reading your submissions!

Joseph Biggerstaff, Susan Broomhall, Kristie Flannery, Claudia Jarzebowski, Jessica O'Leary, and Lisa Phongsavath.