A Review of MIRJAM GALLEY, *BUILDING COMMUNISM AND POLICING DEVIANCE IN THE SOVIET UNION: RESIDENTIAL CHILDCARE, 1958–91*. Philadelphia: Routledge, 2020, 240 pp.

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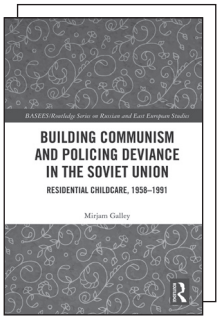
Abstract: Mirjam Galley's monograph, devoted to the history of boarding schools in the USSR from 1958 to 1991, fills a significant gap in the historiography of Soviet boarding establishments: there was practically no detailed description of this phenomenon across the whole post-Stalin period until the appearance of this book. The monograph sets out the reasons for the establishment of boarding schools, and their way of life and everyday routine — which the author strives to present as unchanging for thirty years — are recreated. There is also an attempt to reconstruct the personal experience of the teachers and pupils of the boarding schools. However, the author's main interest is concentrated on the principles of government of these institutions, stemming, on the one hand, from principles of strict economy, and on the other, from an almost total indifference both to the schools themselves and to their pupils on the part of the officials at various institutions, despite a supposed high level of care and concern. The author shows how a task of national importance — the education of future workers — in fact depended on the personal will of individuals, and equally on their ability to present the results of their work in the best light on paper.

Keywords: boarding school, orphans, bureaucracy, social policy, USSR.

To cite: Altukhova A., 'A Review of Mirjam Galley, Building Communism and Policing Deviance in the Soviet Union: Residential Childcare, 1958–91. Philadelphia: Routledge, 2020, 240 pp.', *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, 2024, no. 20, pp. 200–208.

doi: 10.31250/1815-8870-2024-20-20-200-208

URL: http://anthropologie.kunstkamera.ru/files/pdf/eng020/altukhova.pdf



A Review of **Mirjam Galley,** *Building Communism and Policing Deviance in the Soviet Union: Residential Childcare, 1958–91*. Philadelphia: Routledge, 2020, 240 pp.

Mirjam Galley's monograph, devoted to the history of boarding schools in the USSR from 1958 to 1991, fills a significant gap in the historiography of Soviet boarding establishments: there was practically no detailed description of this phenomenon across the whole post-Stalin period until the appearance of this book. The monograph sets out the reasons for the establishment of boarding schools, and their way of life and everyday routine — which the author strives to present as unchanging for thirty years — are recreated. There is also an attempt to reconstruct the personal experience of the teachers and pupils of the boarding schools. However, the author's main interest is concentrated on the principles of government of these institutions, stemming, on the one hand, from principles of strict economy, and on the other, from an almost total indifference both to the schools themselves and to their pupils on the part of the officials at various institutions, despite a supposed high level of care and concern. The author shows how a task of national importance — the education of future workers — in fact depended on the personal will of individuals, and equally on their ability to present the results of their work in the best light on paper.

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It is great good fortune when a book is published about which one could only have dreamt, or else cast everything aside to try to write it oneself. Mirjam Galley's book about Soviet boarding schools [*shkoly-internaty*] (and different forms of boarding establishments in general), and about the changes that could have occurred in the system, but did not, since it was set up in 1958 until the collapse of the Soviet Union, is just such a book. There were, of course, works that touched on the history of boarding schools and orphanages in the USSR even before Galley's book was published. Above all there were Maria Mayofis's articles [Mayofis 2015; 2016], but also other research in which the main focus was not on the history of Soviet orphanages, or which was about other periods of history or particular forms of boarding institutions[1] [Kelly 2007; 2008; Smirnova 2012; Kalinnikova, Trygged 2014; Galmarini-Kabala 2016; 2018]. It may therefore be said that this is the first book that concentrates wholly on the history of boarding schools in the USSR, and

[1] I am not concerned here with boarding schools in other socialist countries.

therefore it is astonishing that so little notice was taken of its publication in 2020 — only a few reviews [Grant 2022; deGraffenried 2022], and little interest on the part of researchers. One cannot agree with everything that Galley writes, but the book is worth reading not only by those interested in orphan-related issues, but by a much wider circle of readers.

The monograph *Building Communism and Policing Deviance in the Soviet Union: Residential Childcare, 1958–91* grew out of a thesis with a very similar title[1] defended at Sheffield University in 2019, and the book came out a year later, in 2020. Therefore, it is not surprising if a reader familiar with the text of the dissertation will not find many differences between them. Even the Soviet paedology (*pedologiya*, child psychology) glossed in the dissertation as "*Pediatriya*" (pediatrics) [Galley 2019: 72] has migrated unchanged into the book. Still, I must admit at once that paedology is only discussed in the text in passing, which is fully explained by the period of history in which Galley is interested. Therefore, this inaccuracy should not deter readers, though, understandably, it may put them on their guard. However, Galley, who worked in several archives and extracted from them an outstanding quantity of historical evidence about the state of things in boarding schools in the Latvian SSR and the Sverdlovsk and Chelyabinsk regions, gives no grounds for doubting her historical accuracy in any other questions.

The book is divided into four chapters: the first two are concerned with the historical context, by examining which Galley both explains the genesis of the boarding schools and indicates the reasons why the Soviet boarding system was as it was. In these chapters the author relies mainly on the materials outlining methods published on this subject in the USSR. The latter two chapters are focused on the description of certain aspects of life in these institutions, which Galley reconstructs on the basis of archival data and interviews conducted in the course of a different project (more detail on p. 12 of the book). Without belittling Galley's achievements in any way, the monograph *Building Communism* may be seen as the long-awaited continuation of Maria Mayofis's research on how the system came into being [Mayofis 2016]. Galley portrays the history of boarding schools until the end of the Soviet Union (a period which has in principle been neglected by historians interested in Soviet orphanages, the problem of neglected or abandoned children and other questions connected with the problem of "delinquent" children). Furthermore, the author develops and enhances many of Mayofis's theses, entering into direct dialogue with them.

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[1] 'Builders of Communism, "Defective" Children, and Social Orphans: Soviet Children in Care after 1953'. It must be said that in my view this title is more precise than that of the book.

In the first chapter, 'Policing deviance: Criminalizing poverty through residential childcare in the post-Stalinist USSR', Galley shows the basic ways in which children were institutionalised. She tries to prove that the boarding system, which began to expand after the education reform of 1958, was no more than an answer to a whole series of social problems, such as poverty, the spread of alcoholism among the population, problems of recruitment and domestic violence. It might at some point seem to a reader who is familiar with Mayofis's publications that this chapter resembles the Russian researcher's theses, substantially expanded, but, still, recast for the English-speaking reader; however, this is not altogether the case.

Although the similarity between both authors' basic vectors of attention is more than close — the state placed the main blame for children's problems (or "problem" children) on the parents and the family as a whole, and this is what the boarding schools were intended to deal with (pp. 26–28) — Galley adds new senses and contexts to her considerations. She shows, furthermore, how exactly this "blame" was created. Thus, she writes that since there were no social workers as such in the USSR, their functions were fulfilled by various "volunteers" (an unexpected word in this context, but more of that later) or public organisations [*obschestvennost'*] — a whole series of institutions that exercised control over the family as they saw fit and according to their own understanding of what needed to be supervised and how the situation could be improved. According to Galley, the category of "volunteers" included the units of the police dealing with young offenders, the district executive committees, the building committees, the Soviet housing bureaus [*zhilkontora*], and many other civil bodies that could take an interest in a child's fate and take a decision about his or her removal from the family and sending to boarding school (p. 38). At the same time, and already in this chapter, Galley begins methodically to note those instances when a decision was taken (by one of these commissions or by a concerned group of citizens) but not carried out, for example, because the prosecutor for juvenile affairs noticed that the commission was intending to send a two-year-old child to a reformatory (p. 40). In subsequent chapters the attention paid by the author to such incoherences, delays and lack of co-ordination in the actions of various Soviet institutions (institutional laziness — p. 41) becomes much more intensive, but in the first chapter this subject is more of a teaser, inviting the reader to consider why the Soviet system of care for children was so contradictory.

The second chapter, 'Productivity and "defectology": From a criminalization to a pathologization of deviance', tells how children who had entered the boarding system were moved about in it as a result of their "defectological" classification. After a brief outline

of the pedagogical roots of the idea of bringing children up apart from their families, Galley proceeds to consider why the large-scale project of extending boarding schools to the whole Soviet Union could not, and never did, acquire the features envisaged for it. To a large extent this chapter supplements a thesis that had already been expressed by various authors: the distinctions between the categories with which the Soviet institutions dealing with children and their placement operated were vague. Therefore, children were removed from their families or their schools more by reason of their "difficult", "problem", or inconvenient behaviour (and also the marginal status or poverty of their parents) than for anything else. As a result, many were unfairly labelled or diagnosed and sent to special institutions (see: [Zezina 2001; Kelly 2008; Schmidt 2009: 66; Smirnova 2012: 18–21; Galmarini 2015: 122–126; Galmarini-Kabala 2018]). One must do justice to Galley, who goes into detail regarding the diagnosis of "mental retardation" applied to hundreds of children, and demonstrates its social and institutional nature. This second chapter could be extremely useful to researchers who are concerned with this topic. The author does not use the term "intersectionality" in her work, but I will point out that this book could be regarded as having been written from this perspective and be included among other research in which invalidity, deviancy or "inadequacy", defined in medical terms, are closely interwoven with other social categories such as "race", for instance (see: [Metzl 2010]). Galley explains the many years of arbitrariness in ascribing categories and the unfulfilled plans for scaling up the boarding system by economic reasons, or rather by reasons of economy; Mayofis has also written on this [Mayofis 2016]. However, while Mayofis views economy simply as a historic necessity, a measure forced upon them, Galley sees a particular pragmatics in it: the boarding schools functioned the way they did in order to achieve maximum efficiency for minimum expenditure (p. 64). Galley views this as a manifestation of Foucault's *biopouvoir* and connects it with the *Verwissenschaftlichung des Sozialen* [Raphael 1996]. The reader may already experience here a certain alarm at the thought of how chaos in the ascription of categories is combined with *Verwissenschaftlichung*, but I shall leave the discussion of this till later.

The third chapter, 'Managing residential childcare: A strategy of containment', is envisaged as a detailed description of the mechanisms whereby this *biopouvoir* is attained. To this end, Galley presents an impressive array of archival data: the reports of various inspections at boarding schools (215 institutions) in the three regions indicated over the three decades. It must be said that many researchers have used such reports as their main source of information on the functioning of boarding schools — Maria Mayofis, and Andrew Stone, who wrote his dissertation on children's homes in the 1920s

and 30s, and Elena Khlinovskaya Rockhill, who published a book on boarding schools in the post-Soviet period [Rockhill 2010; Stone 2012; Mayofis 2016]. As a rule, the information recorded in such documents provided evidence that the institutions were dreadfully badly supplied, and that children's homes and boarding schools did not have enough beds, tables, clothing, shoes, etc., and also that violence of various kinds was rife. Mirjam Galley also cites these data, but she uses them not only to describe the children's nightmarish living conditions and lamentable state. She directs her attention rather to when and by whom these reports were compiled and how the boarding schools and local authorities reacted to them, considering the place occupied by orphanages among the other institutions connected with education and social policy, which in the final analysis says more about the principles directing the state's attention and the arrangement of communications between the various departments than about the problems of the boarding schools. And this is Galley's book's chief merit.

Although the Soviet leadership's interest in boarding schools waned somewhat after the cost of bringing such a large-scale project to life had become apparent (pp. 73–74), there was little change to the rhetoric. According to that, these institutions were carrying out a task of national importance: they were bringing up and providing the country with a workforce, and therefore the leadership promised to be attentive to their requirements and needs. The reports that Galley worked with show the reverse: the fulfilment of this task of national importance depended, on the one hand, on the will of particular persons on the ground, who pushed the interests of the boarding schools into the background, leaving them woefully undersupplied (p. 106), and on the other, on how well their directors could cope with such conditions (p. 138). In the end, this policy led to these establishments turning into a sort of "sewage collector" [*otstoinik*], where there was a chronic shortage of staff and equipment and where children accumulated in vast numbers, since higher-ranking officials took little interest in the boarding schools' capacity (pp. 115–122).

As the author shows, it was still necessary to portray this forge of future workers in a presentable light: the directors of the boarding schools had to create the appearance of wellbeing on paper, until visited by a commission or by the aforementioned "volunteers". However, the boarding system only deserved the close attention of the authorities in extreme cases: absconsions that caused disturbances in towns, suicides of pupils, or violent fights that ended in the death of one of the children in hospital (pp. 137–138). "Deviancy" that went beyond the limits that had been set for it required taking steps and finding those responsible, while in all other cases the state of affairs in the boarding schools did not cause

the authorities any desire to intervene. Galley proposes to explain this "paradoxical" state of affairs by an unexpected inversion of Goffman's concept of "total institutions": the closed nature of the institution means not so much that its inmates are excluded from the rest of the world and locked up within the walls of the boarding school, as that the directors of such institutions try to conceal what happens inside, and the higher authorities want to hide within the boarding schools everything that should not meet the eyes of the "ordinary" public.

The final chapter, 'Life in care as a way of life? Children's institutional experiences and the difficult afterlife of care', in which the author reconstructs the experience of boarding school pupils and their teachers on the basis of archival data and personal interviews, is the perfect complement to this history. Galley shows how the principle of economy of resources handed down from above often led to pupils getting out of control and forming their own rules of behaviour, which the author compares to *dedovshchina*. Incidents of violence among the children, beatings, thefts and deaths were not a rarity. As in all other cases, when information about this did not leak out into the outside world, no one was interested in these problems (p. 177).

While the author is struck by the paradoxes of Soviet boarding schools, the reader, as she learns more and more about life within them, is more and more surprised by the paradoxical connection between the data presented and the theories and concepts whereby they are explained. While one can get used to the word "volunteers" as applied to representatives of housing offices and youth offending teams, bewildering though it is to the Russian-speaking reader, it is hard to get past Foucault's *biopouvoir* and the inversion of Goffman's "total institutions". There came a point when I wanted to ask the author, in the style of C. Fred Alford, who doubted the truth of Foucault's judgments about prisons [Alford 2000]: perhaps the work of Soviet boarding schools, which could hardly make ends meet and were not interested in the fate of their pupils, and sometimes even of those who absconded (p. 128), should not be explained by Foucauldian *biopouvoir* and "total institutions"? Perhaps these data speak of some completely different form of management? I suggest that it would be more meaningful here to speak of "thoughtlessness" in Hannah Arendt's sense [Arendt 2006] than of efficient and rational management and the disciplining of subjects, as Galley insists on doing (p. 130): in this system individuals have no significance or value, and therefore no one even thinks of them in this manner.

Nevertheless, in spite of possible theoretical quarrels, this book, thanks to the materials that it brings to light, opens the way to a view

of Soviet social policy that is by no means familiar. Instead of individuals who create groups and associations and try to assert and defend their interests in the face of a state that had promised to take care of them [Galmarini-Kabala 2016; Shaw 2017], we see boarding school directors, low-level officials, who not only do not use the discourse of rights, but on the whole do not care much whether the advertised programme is carried out. Historians who dealt with questions very far removed from boarding schools have more than once remarked that in the Soviet Union there was a special attitude towards the law, and towards the letter of the law, which proved nothing more than empty sounds (see, for example: [Hendley 1996]). Here we see how this principle of ignoring the law operated not only within the judicial system. Therefore, having left concerned society and the different kinds of volunteers far behind, by the end of the book the reader is faced with the yawning void of Soviet social responsibilities against a background of a detailed depiction of the machinery of indifference towards human needs, and towards major state requirements.

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Translated by Ralph Cleminson