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This house is not a home: residential care for babies and toddlers in the two Germanys during the Cold War

Abstract

This paper examines the history of infant homes for babies and toddlers in the two German states after World War II. Peak capacity of these institutions was not reached in the immediate post-war years, as one might suppose, but in the early 1960s. At that time in socialist East Germany one in forty children under the age of three lived in an infant home, while the rate was about half as high in capitalist West Germany. Thus, these institutions impacted the lives of more children than previously assumed. From a comparative perspective, divided developments become clear: In East Germany, socialist legislation and media promoted the infant home; in West Germany, the expansion took place in the shadow of the capitalistic welfare state. Criticism of the homes was articulated in both states at about the same time, following publication of British psychoanalyst John Bowlby's early attachment theory. His WHO report *Maternal Care and Mental Health* from the year 1951 served as a reference point for the work of several pediatricians and psychologists in both German states. It appears that Bowlby's theory — stressing the importance of exclusive maternal care and so far described as highly impactful for Western Europe and the USA — also met with approval under East German state socialism in the 1950s. However, it had different implications: In West Germany, scientific criticism of infant homes was acted on by the authorities, who quickly disbanded the institutions from the mid-1960s onwards. In East Germany, political intervention favoring maternal employment prevented this, which is why numerous places in infant homes remained available for babies and toddlers until the end of the socialist state in 1989.

Keywords: residential care, Cold War, Germany, comparative history, attachment theory

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1. Introduction

Historical research on residential care of children has been confined to national perspectives, e.g., by tracing how cruelly children and young adults were treated in infant homes in Switzerland (Hausse et al., 2018), in Canada (Regan, 2010), in Ireland (Ferguson, 2007) or in East Germany (Laudien & Sachse, 2012). The history of childhood in foster families is also explored with a view to state frontiers, recently for Poland (Czepil & Karpenko, 2019) and Australia (Musgrove, 2020). This is based on the idea that different societies over time have developed different concepts of whether and how children should be brought up outside their families of origin. Therefore, the systems of infant homes and foster families follow country-specific logics of how to raise and care for children.

This concept is not doubted hereafter, but it will be expanded. In this paper, I will try to compare the development of infant homes in two countries with a joint history and culture, but with different political systems: the capitalist Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR). The starting point for my considerations is that at the end of the Second World War, residential care for children in the two parts of Germany hardly differed. Both states emerged from the German Reich after the defeat of National Socialism in May 1945; it can be assumed that their populations and institutional structures started with similar economic, social and psychological conditions into the post-war period (early and path-breaking Kleßmann, 1993; recently updated with a gender focus by Hagemann et al., 2019). Therefore, Germany is a unique example for separating structural similarities from political and discursive differences.

A comparative design inspired by Kleßmann (1993) was chosen to seek for three developments during the post-war era: division, continuity and simultaneity. Division would occur if the two residential care systems evolved differently over time. This may be caused by political decisions or — over a longer period of time — by social change in general, which increasingly distanced the two societies from each other and also influenced residential care for children. Continuity would be observed if residential care remained unchanged over a longer period. Such constants indicate unchanged fundamental attitudes — e.g., common moral concepts — which are not captured by the changes in politics. Simultaneity would be observed if changes in the two residential care systems occurred in parallel. Such developments may be based on external influences, e.g., from scientific findings received in both parts of the country.

I will focus on residential care for children under the age of three. Historical research on institutions for this age group is scant, although this article will show that they were of considerable importance. Infant homes still exist in many countries, heavily criticized by psychological research which shows that young children in long-term institutional care suffer from delays in cognition, attention, brain growth, and physical growth (Van IJzendoorn et al., 2020). From a historical perspective, this issue is important in two ways. On the one hand, childcare institutions tend to forget the dark side of their own history (Oelkers, 2017). On the other hand, the memories of former infant home children rarely reach back to their first three years of life. Although research cannot close any biographical gaps here, it can at least shed light on the history of these institutions. It is therefore a question of confronting both institutional and personal oblivion.

The development of these institutions will be linked to a topic from the history of knowledge, the resonance of psychoanalyst John Bowlby's early work. In particular, Bowlby's publication *Maternal Care and Mental Health* from 1951 served as a starting

point for research by doctors and psychoanalysts in both German states. Thus, it becomes clear that Bowlby's assertion of the lifelong importance of exclusive maternal care in the first three years of life had a large impact on child-rearing not only in Great Britain and the USA (Shapira, 2013; Vicedo, 2017; Duschinsky et al., 2020), but also in Germany. For East Germany in particular, this is surprising because research to date has claimed that Westernized attachment theory was not accessible in the Soviet hemisphere (Dozier et al., 2011).

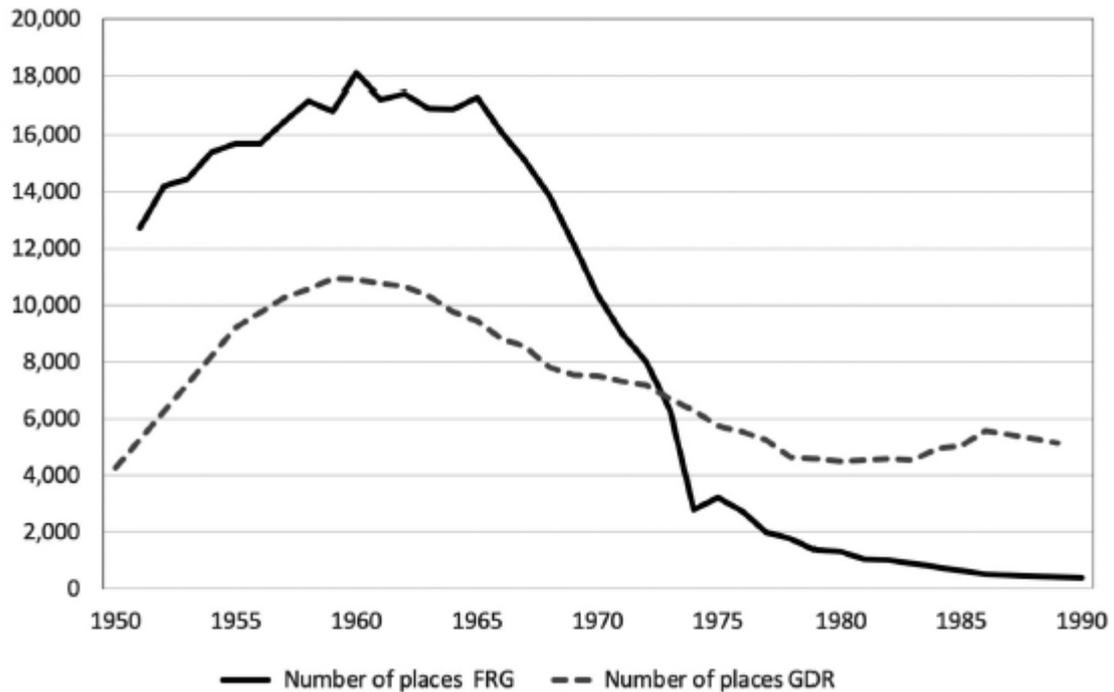
The paper initially uses quantitative data to estimate the extent of residential care for infants and toddlers in the FRG and GDR (Chapter 2). I then consider East and West German laws and regulations, contemporary contributions from various academic disciplines, unprinted sources from the Federal Archives and texts from the media. I use this material to outline the basic political developments and the discourse on this subject (Chapter 3) and compare the reasons for placements in infant home in the two countries (Chapter 4). The subsequent description of the care practices in infant homes is based on first-hand reports by trainees, staff, and journalists (Chapter 5). This is followed by an examination of scientific discourses on Bowlby's early theory in East and West Germany (Chapter 6), which was relevant to the dismantling or continued existence of infant homes in both countries (Chapter 7). The structure roughly follows the chronology after 1945, starting in Chapter 3 with post-war developments and ending in Chapter 7 with German reunification in 1990. East-West comparisons are made within each chapter.

2. Infant Homes in the Two German States: Quantitative Developments

The importance of a welfare state institution to a society can be initially assessed with quantitative data. For my subject, the first step is to clarify how many babies and toddlers were placed in infant homes over time. The official data from the FRG and the GDR are

based on officially-stipulated full surveys of all institutions, in West Germany from 1951 onwards, for East Germany from 1955 onwards. Zwiener (1994) additionally provides information for the GDR in 1950 (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Places in infant homes for babies and toddlers, FRG and GDR, 1950/51–1989/1990, absolute numbers



Sources: Statistisches Bundesamt, Statistiken der Jugendhilfe, various editions / Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, various volumes / for GDR 1950: Zwiener (1994). Own presentation.

In both German states, the number of places in infant homes increased until 1960, followed by a much faster reduction in the West than in the East. The absolute figures do not reflect that at that time there were almost three times as many children of this age living in West Germany as in East Germany. Nor do the numbers of places correspond to the number of children actually being looked after. To calculate the latter precisely, we would have to know how much time the children spent there on average; from this we could charge

how often one place was occupied on average each year, e.g., by three children per year or only one.

The official statistics of neither the FRG nor the GDR provide any information on the children's length of stay, so it is necessary to fall back on estimates available from contemporary studies, which were conducted only in West Germany. According to Hartung and Glattkowski (1965), 45 percent of children in Frankfurt/Main left the homes after three months; Pechstein (1968) found an average length of more than half a year in a countrywide West German study. Therefore, we assume with some caution that each place in an infant home was occupied twice a year.¹

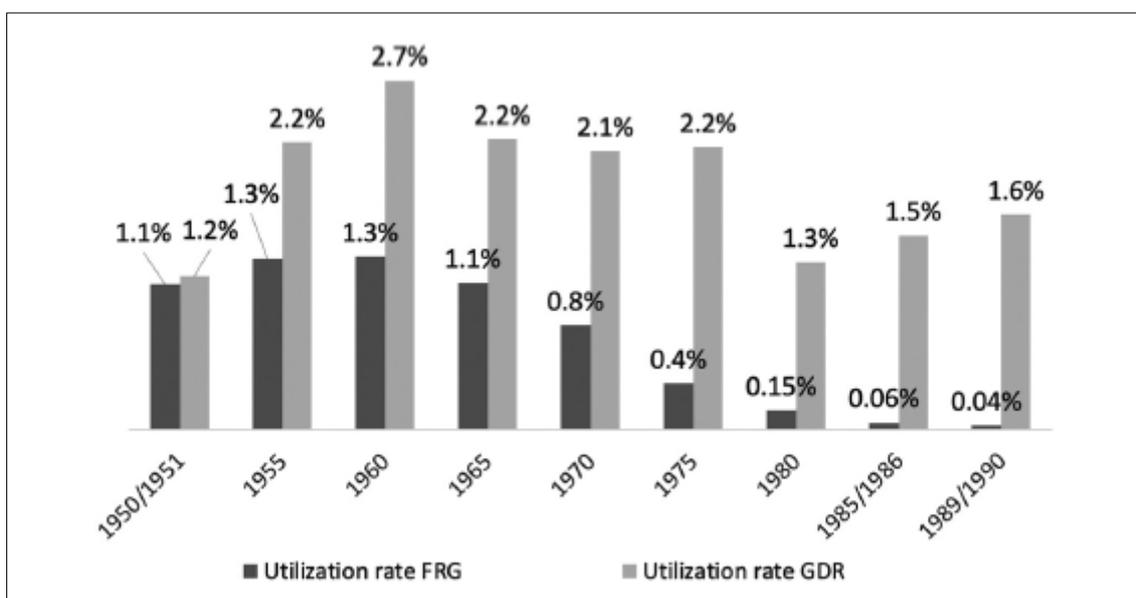
For East Germany, the records do not provide any indication of length of stay. But oral history conducted by Satjukow and Gries (2015) indicates that the infant home was often a temporary solution, as long as, e.g., a single mother could not find an apartment or as long as the authorities were looking for a foster family. Given the fact that in the East as well the length of stay differed from a few weeks up to many months or even years, we assume the same occupation rate of two children per place and year. With this cautious assumption, for the peak in 1960 we calculate that around 36,000 children (FRG) and

¹ This bold assumption can be checked by comparing it with data from official National Socialist publications. Different from the statistical reports produced by the FRG and the GDR, these also the calculated average length of stay in infant homes. In 1938, it was 94 days per child, corresponding to an average placement time of slightly more than three months (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1942, p. 134). If this had still been true in the 1950s and 1960s, the total number of children affected in East and West Germany would have been twice as high as claimed here. However, the studies mentioned here from West Germany (Hartung & Glattkowski, 1965; Pechstein, 1968; and Lukas & Schmitz, 1977) indicate that the length of stay gradually became longer. Therefore, I assume – rather conservatively – two children per place and year.

22,000 children (GDR) were looked after in an infant home during a at least part of their early childhood.

Whether these children were the great exception or whether infant homes were rather commonplace in the two German societies can be determined by relating the number of children in the institutions to the size of the population, i.e., in this case the total number of children under three years of age. This allows us to estimate utilization rates for West and East Germany (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Utilization rates of infant homes for babies and toddlers, FRG and GDR, 1950/51 to 1989/1990, in five-year steps, in percent of all children of the same age, weighted (two children per place and year)



Sources: Statistisches Bundesamt, Statistiken der Jugendhilfe, various editions / Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, various volumes / for GDR 1950: Zwiener (1994). Own calculations.

We can now see clear differences between the FRG and the GDR:

- In West Germany, utilization rates rose slightly in the 1950s and then fell at an accelerated rate from 1960 onwards. At the peak in 1960, 1.3 percent of all children

under three years of age were living in an infant home for a certain period of time, according to the rather conservative assumptions of the calculation. This corresponds to about one in seventy children. In the early 1960s, these homes began to disappear, more rapidly after 1965. By 1980, the infant home no longer played any role in the West German welfare state.

- In East Germany, utilization rates grew more markedly in the 1950s than in the West; the maximum was also reached in 1960. At that time, 2.7 percent of all children lived there for some time. This means that an estimated one in forty children under three years of age in the GDR spent some time in an infant home. To put it graphically: in every East German school class in the 1960s, the teacher could assume there was one child with experience of infant residential care among her pupils. It is striking that the rates in East Germany remained relatively high until the mid-1970s. Only in the 1980s is a slight decline discernible. However, even when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, the infant home in the GDR had not yet disappeared. According to this estimate, one in every 60 children under three years of age was still living in an infant home at that time.

The quantitative data indicate that infant homes remained institutions for only a small proportion of children and therefore did not play a central role in the welfare state systems of either country. However, nor were these institutions completely meaningless: if more than one (FRG) or almost three (GDR) out of one hundred infants and toddlers — on conservative assumptions — grew up in an infant home for a certain period of time, this is not part of the normal childhood biography, but gives a hint to a statistically perceptible minority.

3. The Expansion of Infant Homes until 1960: Political and Public Discourses

There appears to be some evidence that the growth of institutional childcare can be explained by the consequences of World War II. According to an estimate by the International Red Cross, at the end of the war, around 13 million children living in Europe had lost at least one parent (Brosse, 1950). In Germany, there are said to have been around 1.6 million orphans (Münchmeier, 1991). It appears logical that numerous new institutions and places for caring for these children were created at that time, as Zahra (2011) shows with a Polish example.

However, ten or fifteen years later, the situation in Germany — like in other European states — had changed. In 1955, and even more clearly in 1960, the post-war crisis with its often dramatic living conditions for families was long gone. There were no longer food shortage, and many bombed-out houses had either been renovated or replaced by new buildings. In terms of social and economic history, the late 1950s and early 1960s were a period of growing prosperity. In West Germany the period was even called the ‘Wirtschaftswunder’ (‘miracle years’). Orphans who had lost both parents were extremely rare in Europe; the number of ‘half orphans’, who had lost one parent, was also much lower. World War II had been over for more than a decade, and maternal mortality had also fallen significantly (Van Lerberghe & De Brouwere, 2001).

Nonetheless, residential care institutions for small children — now no longer called orphanages, but infant homes — greatly expanded until about 1960. In this process, the legal situation, the public portrayal of politics and the media coverage in East and West Germany divided.

The Visible Institution of the GDR

In East Germany, the law on mother/child protection and women’s rights set massive

expansion targets for infant homes in 1950. Between 1951 and 1955, children's homes for infants with a total of 60,000 places were to be created. The ambition becomes clear if one considers the total number of children under three years of age in the GDR at that time, which was about 700,000. If there had actually been 60,000 places for these children in 1955 — in reality, the state had created just under 10,000 by then — the children's home would have become a very commonplace institution for babies and toddlers. The socialist state under the leadership of the Stalinist Walter Ulbricht did not make a fundamental distinction between crèches for daycare and residential infant homes, regulating both by the same laws, controlling them by the same departments of the administration, describing them with the same goals.

At the heart of the matter was the desire to encourage and enable mothers to work (Harsch, 2007; Kittel, 2017). This resonated with the ideas of Karl Marx, for whom even the communist paradise was characterized not by leisure but by work. At the same time, the state sought — at least for the area of employment — to implement concepts of equal rights for men and women as developed by the German socialists August Bebel (1879) and Clara Zetkin (1929). Perhaps most importantly, a high female employment rate was necessary for the rapid transformation of traditional agricultural to labor-intensive industrial states envisioned in the Stalinist Eastern Bloc (Landsman, 2005), which in the case of the GDR was further complicated by the strong labor migration to West Germany. All of this added up to the central goal of pushing maternal employment at all costs. In other areas, no progressive gender norms developed: Most women remained solely responsible for the household and the children, and men had hardly any care responsibilities in the first decades of the GDR. Socialist ideas on emancipation and progressive family lives from the 1920s did not interest the GDR authorities. The state followed the idea of the prewar bourgeois family, 'except that the (...) version would have an employed wife' (Harsch, 2007, p. 199).

In 1953, one of the architects of the law on mother/child protection and women's rights, activist Käthe Kern praised the state's generosity in the rapid expansion of crèches and infant homes, which had both contributed to 'relieving the burden on working women and mothers'² (Kern, 1953). This benevolent view was widely reflected in the state-controlled press. Three important GDR newspapers presented the infant home as part of a social policy friendly to the people, especially to women. In only slightly different wording, the texts listed infant homes, crèches, and kindergartens as a means to enable women to enjoy equal rights — or more precisely, to be part of the workforce. The most important daily newspaper of the GDR, *Neues Deutschland*, proudly reported on the realization of socialism in a mining region, which also included 'company kindergartens, infant homes and modern shower rooms for the mine workers' (Kumpel vom Erzbergbau, 1952). Showers for miners, infant homes for children — those were the hopes of East German socialism.

This narrative appeared quite often. Newspaper reports from Eastern bloc countries mentioned an agricultural collective with an 'infant home, clubhouse, and library' in the Soviet Union (Heidenreich, 1949), a progressive development of the Polish capital Warsaw with 'infant homes, crèches, elementary schools, etc.' (Stadler, 1950) and 'administrative buildings, the houses of the party, several kindergartens and infant homes, a school' in the Hungarian Sztálinváros, Stalintown (Sindermann, 1951). Not concerned with reporting the reality of these institutions, these articles at the core promoted a 'modern' social policy, thus conveying the normality of this institution. The children's perspective was not mentioned.

² All further translations from German are mine.

The Concealed Institution of the FRG

The legal development as well as the political and media discourse in West Germany differed significantly from this. In the 1950s, the German government of the conservative Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, the state administration, most courts, and Christian churches largely rejected maternal employment. Young mothers were expected to be the sole caregivers for their children, while in this male-breadwinner model the husband left the house in the morning and returned to the set table in the evening. It was not a clandestine principle, on the contrary: West German politicians emphasized the advantages of this idea in sharp distinction to East German socialism (Moeller, 1997). In 1959, for example, the FRG's first family minister, Franz-Josef Würmeling, claimed that 'actions of housewives and mothers in the family are of unparalleled greater importance for the common good than is the economic usefulness of factory or office work' (quoted in Schissler, 2007, p. 364).

This meant that childcare outside the family was also suspect. The 'Reichsjugendwohlfahrtgesetz' ('Youth Welfare Act of the German Reich'), which in its version from 1922 was reintroduced soon after the end of the war (Sachße, 2018), did not contain any specific expansion requirements or plans for childcare facilities, regardless of whether they were kindergartens, crèches or infant homes. Nor did it contain any legal rights of parents to extra-familial childcare. From this perspective, public childcare was 'emergency assistance', which municipalities were only to grant if mothers or parents were unable to look after their children for whatever reason.

The infant home was not a secret institution in West Germany. Occasionally, it was mentioned in public,³ e.g., in an intense debate of the early 1950s about where the ‘occupation children’ — children of a German mother and an Allied soldier — should grow up. Raising them in infant homes was seen as one possibility among others, as related, for example, in the successful 1952 West German movie ‘Toxi,’ in which a little girl of color is passed around between her mother, the potential adoptive family, and the infant home (Satjukow & Gries, 2015, p. 227). But the focus of this debate, which was conducted especially in West German magazines, was not the many ‘normal’ children in infant homes or the institutions themselves, but only those children with an Allied soldier as their father.

Finally, politics also showed little interest in these facilities. Not a single discussion took place in parliament before the mid-1960s, and at most local actors from the social administration were occasionally concerned with the issue. The infant home was not a taboo, but part of a normality that was not questioned. Thus, it seems reasonable for the 1950s to distinguish between the visible institution in East Germany and the hidden one in West Germany. In the socialist GDR, the expansion of infant homes was flanked by political objectives and media coverage; the young state demonstrated its pride in these facilities. In the conservative FRG, the homes were expanded without much public discussion. They were a grubby corner of the welfare state: existing, but hidden.

³ West German newspapers cannot be examined in databases as easily as the East German ones. A search in four archives (press documentation of the German Bundestag, *Der Spiegel*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) yielded only 39 hits for the period 1945 to 1990, 11 of which were published prior to 1965. However, an under-recording can be assumed because the (paper) archives are pre-sorted and do not allow full-text searches in the digital material.

4. Reasons for Placements

Why were babies and toddlers placed in an infant home? Are there similar reasons for placements in East and West Germany, or can some division be observed? An attempt to investigate this faces four problems. Firstly, I only found three contemporary scientific contributions from West Germany (Dührssen, 1958; Stier, 1963; Hartung & Glattkowski, 1965) and one analysis from the East German Ministry of Health.ⁱ Secondly, all of these contributions work with monocausal category systems, which is unlikely to cover the social situation of many mothers/families because, e.g., the placement reason ‘young single mother’ may exist parallel to the reason ‘poor domestic circumstances’ or ‘shift work involving Sundays’ⁱⁱ. However, a monocausal categorization automatically suppresses the latter reasons. Thirdly, each system of categories is based on often unexplained assumptions as to what, e.g., ‘poor domestic circumstances’ are. And fourthly, each of these category systems contains implicit statements about what could justify an infant home admission at all.

Thus, such systems are strongly influenced by the interviewers’ views on ‘normal’ life (Laudien & Sachse, 2012), and the differences between East and West — which will become apparent — sometimes say more about the interviewers’ worldviews than about the living conditions of the families concerned.

Therefore, in the following I will look at two contemporary articles and their category systems, first separately and then in a careful comparison. The East German report on the infant home in Güstrow from 1967 was written in the GDR Ministry of Health and was not to be published; the West German paper (Hartung & Glattkowski, 1965) appeared in a journal for pediatricians focusing on psychiatric and psychological issues.

Frankfurt/Main: ‘Incomplete Families’

The pediatricians Kurt Hartung and Hildegard Glattkowski were senior staff members of the Frankfurt/Main Health Office. Between 1961 and 1963, they investigated the reasons for admissions to two institutions in Frankfurt, one of which was a classic infant home. In the latter, they determined the placement reasons for 208 infants, using 12 categories (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1: Reasons for placements in an infant home in Frankfurt/Main (FRG), 1961–1963, contemporary terms.

<i>Infant home Frankfurt/Main (FRG)</i>		
	number	rate in %
Incomplete families	93	45%
Child for adoption	32	15%
Illness of the mother	31	15%
Economic and social reasons for married couples	36	17%
Abandoned child	6	3%
Holidays of parents or foster parents	4	2%
Quarrel of parents	2	1%
Death of child’s mother	1	0.5%
Parents reject the child	1	0.5%
Mother in prison	1	0.5%
Tuberculosis vaccination of the child	1	0.5%
Total	208	

Source: Hartung & Glattkowski (1965, p. 298).

According to this survey, almost half of the children came from ‘incomplete families’. This referred to unmarried working mothers who could not leave their child with relatives or in another institution while they were at work. ‘Incomplete families’ was a somewhat morally charged term that contrasted with ‘complete families’ where nothing seemed to be missing.

Three more reasons each applied to about 15 percent of the children. In the first group, the reason was an adoption procedure, probably preceded by various problems which the categorization kept silent about; in the second group, the reason was ‘illness of the mother’; in the third group the placement was said to have been for ‘economic and social reasons for married couples’, which meant both parents were employed and without access to childcare facilities, the parents lived in small or separate apartments, or the landlord refused to permit children in their accommodation (which apparently still occurred at that time).

All other reasons were rare, with less than 3 percent mentioned. None of the 208 children had lost both parents, i.e., were actually orphans; only one child’s mother had died. It was extremely rare, but nevertheless occasional, that parents took their child to an infant home so that they could go on holiday. What today would be considered child protection cases were also surprisingly rare: ‘child abandoned’ or ‘parents reject the child’ was almost never identified as a placement reason (although it cannot be ruled out that neglect or abuse were among the cases categorized differently).

The overall picture for a West German city in the early 1960s is that the majority of admissions were related to the employment of the — often unmarried — mother, who could not find daycare for her child, neither in crèches nor with relatives. It is also striking how much emphasis was placed on whether a child was born in or out of wedlock. West German authors used this as a pre-sorting of categories; the category ‘incomplete family’ basically meant the same as ‘economic and social reasons for married couples’, with the only difference that the former referred to unmarried persons, the latter to married ones.

Güstrow: ‘Shift work involving Sundays’

At about the same time, a debate was going on in East Germany, not in public but partly

published in GDR professional journals. The starting point was the criticism by an official that babies and toddlers were admitted to infant homes too frequently and without adequate legal justifications by the health authorities (Nissel, 1966). The criticized Ministry of Health then undertook to record the reasons for placements in two average infant homes. The accusations were justified: ‘Of these 31 children, only one was there because parental custody had been revoked, the others had no distinct justification. Among these justifications were the housing conditions, social situation, etc.’ⁱⁱⁱ Obviously, this was the opposite of Teutonic thoroughness. This infant home muddled through without caring about the legal situation or administrative rules, which was probably only conceivable on the fringes of a social system where hardly anyone looked.⁴

The second infant home examined, an institution in the town of Güstrow near the Baltic Sea, was considered exemplary. Reasons for admission could be given for all 164 children. In their analysis, the Ministry of Health formed three main categories: Children who absolutely belonged in an infant home, children who only belonged there to a limited extent and children who had to live there due to a lack of crèche places. This subdivision already indicates how the infant home was assessed by the authorities: as a facility that children could leave, provided that it seemed possible, e.g., thanks to a crèche place (Tab. 2).

⁴ Such a disinterest in bureaucratic correctness was not only found in East German infant homes.

In the West German city of Münster, a new head of the Youth Welfare Office found in 1976 that more than ten percent of the files for 315 children in the infant homes showed no placement reasons; for 15 children it was not even possible to determine how long they had been institutionalized. In contrast to East Germany, however, media reported the scandal and parliament discussed it (Wieschen, 1976).

Tab. 2: Reasons for placements in an infant home in Güstrow (GDR), 1967, contemporary terms

<i>Infant home Frankfurt/Main (FRG)</i>		
	number	rate in %
Incomplete families	93	45%
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Death of child's mother	1	0.5%
Parents reject the child	1	0.5%
Mother in prison	1	0.5%
Tuberculosis vaccination of the child	1	0.5%
Total	208	

Source: Bundesarchiv, DQ1 2004, Bericht über den Operativeinsatz im Säuglingsheim 'Prof. Dr. Stolte' in Güstrow am 10.1.1967.

In Güstrow, 'shift work involving Sundays' (which certainly referred to the mother) was the most frequently mentioned reason with 15 percent of cases. However, maternal employment in this system was recorded in a differentiated manner with additional categories. If one adds up all cases of working parents bringing their child into an infant home for lack of other childcare, this results in 85 cases, i.e., just over 50 percent.

Placements, which from today's point of view would probably be described as child protection cases ('parental custody revoked, 'child's mother in custody', possibly 'juvenile single mother'), numbered about twenty in Güstrow, which corresponds to a rate of a good ten percent. The proportion of ongoing adoption procedures was low at one percent; the reason 'mother's illness' was mentioned for 10 percent of the children. In this home, too, no child was an orphan; here too, the mother of only one child had died.

The overall picture for this East German town in 1967 is that the majority of admissions were related to the employment of the — often unmarried — mother, who could not find care for her child in crèches or with relatives. Once again, it is striking that a child's illegitimacy was taken into account in detail in the category system: It also served the East German authors in part as a pre-sorting of categories; obviously this was the first thing the investigators paid attention to.

Similar Rationales

For an East-West comparison, the categories from the two different investigations have to be slightly redefined. Four common causes of admissions can be summarized: Employment of the mother, child protection cases, adoption, and mother's illness:

- *Employment of mothers/parents while lacking daycare:* By far the most common placement reason in both parts of Germany, the rate was just over 50 percent in the East and just under that in the West. We can assume that about one in two of the babies and toddlers were in an infant home because the mother or parents were working but lacked grandparents, neighbors, or a place in a crèche. This high rate seems realistic because part-time work was rare in both parts of Germany in the early 1960s; institutional daycare in crèches hardly existed in West Germany, in East Germany it was only gradually established.

It is noticeable that the rates were similar, but the category systems were divided: In West Germany with its conservative family policy, the nebulous but slightly pejorative term 'incomplete family' was used to describe the employment of an unmarried mother; linguistically speaking, the fact of employment remained invisible in the phrase. In East Germany, mother's employment was explicitly

mentioned and differentiated in several categories, reflecting again that the employment of all mothers was a primary political goal.

- *Child protection cases*: At a good ten per cent, the rate in Eastern Germany was higher than in Western Germany, which was around five per cent. However, no far-reaching conclusions should be drawn from this. Since both category systems were monocausal, it is quite possible that child protection cases vanished behind other categories. Therefore, this does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the different frequency of child abuse in the East and West.
- *Adoptions*: The East German rate was very low (1 per cent), the West German rate significantly higher (15 per cent). The difference seems so huge that it cannot be explained by the category systems. It is plausible that it reflects different views on family and social policy: In West Germany, adoption was regarded as a desirable solution to taking children out of families that were considered problematic on the one hand and to providing childless married couples with children on the other (Pechstein et al., 1972). In East Germany, adoption was a secondary possibility; the infant home appeared to be a better alternative (Händler, 1966).
- *Mother's illness*: In East Germany, this reason was named in 10 percent of cases, in West Germany in 15 percent. The dimension is quite comparable and seems plausible.

Except for adoption, which was assessed and handled differently in East and West Germany, we see similarities in the reasons for institutionalization. In most cases, babies and toddlers were sent to an infant home because their mothers would otherwise not have been able to continue in employment. The appraisal of the contemporary investigators about this social reality, however, was divided between East and West.

Mothers between Observation and Omission

In this comparison, the situation of mothers giving their children to an infant home remains rather unclear. Little is said in the two contemporary analyses of placements about the women's biographical background, their education, their family resources (and the children's fathers were hardly of interest anyway). Several further studies from West Germany investigated these questions in more depth, leaving aside income or the receipt of social assistance payments. Nevertheless, these studies outline that the mothers who gave away their children often lived in highly precarious circumstances: a quarter of them had grown up in homes or foster families (Stier, 1963); most of them had hardly completed their education; at best they had low-paid jobs (Weidemann, 1959). For about 20 to 30 percent of them, the files, or they themselves named prostitution as their occupation (Dührssen, 1958). One-third of the mothers were described as homeless (Lukas & Schmitz, 1977). In half of the cases, the fathers of the children in the West German homes were unknown or were not named by the mothers, and about one in six of the fathers known by name had been imprisoned (Stier, 1963). The thesis formulated in the literature that the majority of the mothers could hardly rely on support — e.g., from grandparents — and was socially isolated to a great extent seems plausible (Eckensberger, 1971). All in all, it can be stated that these were mostly mothers on the outermost fringes of society, whose reality nobody in West Germany was concerned with, except a few experts.

In East Germany the social reality of these mothers — apart from marital status — was not even recorded. Although various scientific studies were carried out in infant homes (see chapter 6 for the results), they all ignored the parents' social background to a great extent. Neither their educational level was surveyed, nor were possible delinquency or their biographical history recorded. Obviously, the researchers followed an unspoken taboo: the self-perception of the GDR was that of a state that had overcome class antagonisms or was

at least on the way to doing so. If mothers brought their children to an infant home because they could not cope or because the authorities blamed them for prostitution, this indicated a persistence of social problems that should not have existed under socialism. These reasons for admission in the GDR can only be assumed, not proven.

5. Institutionalized Violence, Continuous Neglect

Those who grew up in an infant home rarely remember it; some only learned about it as adolescents or adults because it was a taboo in their families. This is why autobiographical sources about the living conditions in infant homes for babies and toddlers are rare and not very precise. On the other hand, reports about these homes are rather heterogeneous: Tales of joyful idyll are found next to descriptions of rigid nursing practices, bodily harm and psychological cruelty committed against the children. For this reason, the following analysis of the children's living conditions in East and West German infant homes takes several characteristics of the sources into account: How close were the documents to the observed system — were they formulated from an external or internal perspective? How high was the degree of professionalism of the observer, and how well did he or she know the institutions?

The Consternated Observers

From an outside perspective, residential care for small children often looked terrifying. Women coming to the homes for professional training, who were not yet used to what older staff considered to be immutable, described horrible situations. In 1957, an article by undisclosed young students of infant nursing appeared in the West German professional journal *Unsere Jugend* (Frühkindliche Erziehung in der Praxis, 1957). In East Germany, two student infant nurses contacted the health authorities in 1963 about the conditions in

an infant home in Blankenburg, and several women from a woman's association, who also had access to the home as supporters, agreed with them.^{iv} Both perspectives, similar in their distance to the institutions, reveal a similar picture of institutionalized violence and continuous neglect.

The children in the infant homes were sometimes beaten by the staff; food was often given to them by force ('Children who eat badly are held with their noses closed and food is simply stuffed into them', reported a student infant nurse from West Germany; *ibid.*, p. 102). They did not have their own toys, nor did they have their own clothes; sometimes they were addressed by the staff not by their first names, but by derogatory nicknames. At night, some children lying on their backs were tied to their beds with straps; during the day, they often remained tied to their potties for long periods.⁵ Overburdened staff were observed in both East and West Germany ('It is perfectly clear to us that a nurse who has to look after 16 or more children cannot cope with the work with children of this age', the East German student infant nurses wrote). At the same time, the students gave an impressive account of an atmosphere in which the humiliation of small children was an everyday occurrence.

The reports agreed that the children were lagging behind in their cognitive development and often could hardly speak even at the age of two. The only difference between the West and East German descriptions can be found in the area of hygiene. While the West German students reported meticulous cleanliness, which the staff was much more focused on than on the children, the GDR home in Blankenburg was so filthy that the students and the patrons from the women's association were frightened ('The smell (...)

⁵ Meierhofer and Keller (1966) show photos from this practice. However, the copyright of these photos could not be clarified.

made one lose appetite for the meals (...). We investigated this smell and found out that the mattresses in the little beds were totally contaminated by feces and urine').^v In West Germany, the hygiene principles, increasingly established in children's institutions of all kinds since the turn of the century (Bakker, 2012), had apparently already been widely implemented, but not in the East, at least not in this institution.

In the records there is even a report by the GDR Prosecutor General from 1964/65 listing several cases of death, neglect and abuse in infant homes and crèches, including through force-feeding.^{vi} Sources from other years concerning violence inflicted by the staff do not exist, which should not be read as an indication of better living conditions for the children, but rather as a lack of documentation.

Based on these descriptions, the East and West German infant homes can be characterized as total institutions according to Goffman (1961). In such facilities, the inmates are deprived of their individuality by more or less violent rules. All aspects of life are conducted under the same single authority and in the same place, with high barriers to social intercourse with the outside world. Admittedly, Goffman's sociological view aimed primarily at total institutions for adults, such as psychiatric hospitals, prisons, barracks, and convents. He only incidentally mentioned infant homes. Nevertheless, many practices from his ethnographic descriptions can also be found in the residential institutions for young and very young children: admission procedures, such as weighing, undressing, bathing, disinfecting, issuing institutional clothing, sometimes even the loss of one's name. The degrading uncleanliness of rooms and objects were observed in some infant homes, as well as the compulsion to eat, answered with violent feeding if refused. Such 'direct assaults on the self' undermine any conception of identity, Goffman (p. 35) concluded.

Mechanisms of Repression

Staff members gave different assessments. Some mentioned problems in a more abstract way (e.g., Neef, 1955), some even described the infant home as an idyll for children. In 1953, a West German nun wrote in a specialist journal about everyday life with ‘her’ babies and toddlers:

Everyone walks, laughs, chats, plays, reaches for everything they see, comes to the Sisters with confidence (...). You only have to see it once, how the little company sings, dances and acts at the spring festival or how they sit on the floor in front of the Christmas tree in the evenings before going to bed, close together and nestled against the Sisters. (Meinzolt, 1953, p. 285).

A review by an East German nurse, who ran an infant home from 1958, was similar. In 1999, she remembered that in her institution, babies

felt their neighbors in their cots very closely because there were bars where they could see through. A friendship, as stupid as it may sound, developed many things. They reached through the bars or exchanged toys. (...) Then the children went to the toddlers’ group, the 1- to 2-year-olds, and the friendship was strengthened (...). It was charming when one of them cried (...), then the others went to him and comforted him and gave him something to play with or gave him a piece of bread or a biscuit. (Ms A, quoted in Plückhahn, 2000, pp. 152-153).

The first text, certainly carefully formulated for publication, uses an elated language. The verbs tumble cheerfully, and if one did not know that there was talk of an infant home, one could assume that it was a review of an amateur drama group. However, both texts pose various questions: How can 15 or 20 small children snuggle up to a single nurse? Can such a large group of children be ‘very quiet’? And if so, what methods were used to ensure this silence? In the second text a nurse reported that babies and one-year-olds exchanged toys through the bars of their beds — but how often did this happen? And when a one- or two-year-old cried, his peers came to comfort him — but could this also be the memory of an

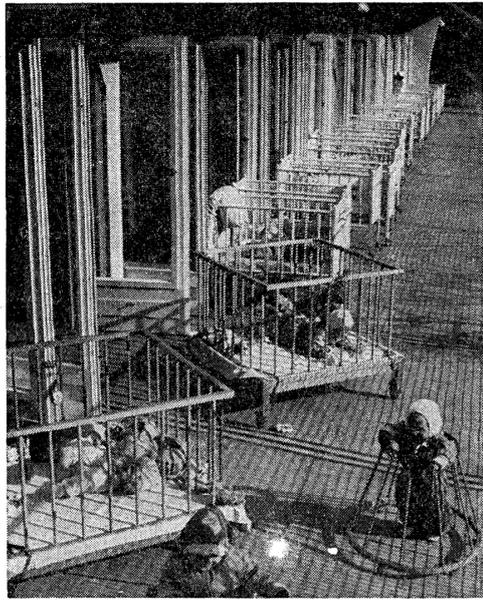
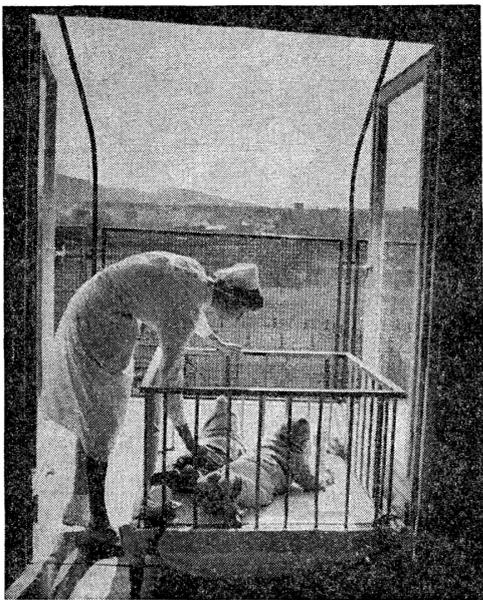
individual case that was painstakingly sought in her memory? Finally, her assessment reads brutally that it was ‘charming’ when a child cried. The reality of suffering children briefly emerges, with the witness giving it a cheerful meaning immediately. Probably the early observation of a psychoanalyst that nurses and pediatricians in infant homes perceived a different reality from his own applies to such statements. With these mechanisms of repression, the professionals denied the grief of the children: ‘Defences had built up in them against the painful recognition of the extent to which young patients are unhappy.’ (Robertson, 1952, p. 11).

Some Naïve Journalists

Another variant of whitewashing is found in the media of both countries in the early 1960s. Several reports focused on the ‘perfect’ hygienic conditions in the infant homes, which would ensure that the children grew up in the best possible conditions. In 1961, the renowned *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published a text entitled ‘One lives healthy and merrily in a “baby hotel”’ (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Clipping from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 4, 1961

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Sonne und frische Taunusluft: davon können die kleinen Insassen des Säuglingsheims nicht genug bekommen, und jedesmal, wenn es das Wetter erlaubt, rollt tagsüber die lange Kolonne von Bettchen und Laufstülpchen hinaus auf die breite Terrasse des „Babyhotels“. (Fotos: Lutz Kleinhaus)

Man lebt gesund und lustig im „Babyhotel“

Kleine Gäste mit großem Appetit / Die Rolle der privaten Säuglingsheime / Liebhaberei wurde zum Beruf

f. J. Wer den Weg nicht kennt — zuhauf flatternde Windeln, blaue und rosa Liliput- | allem zeitraubende Arbeit in den ersten Lebensmonaten des Kindes abgenommen wird. | ordnung, sorgfältig ausgebauten Richtlinien, die sowohl das Personal und erst recht der

Source: Archive of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. The title of the article says ‘One lives healthy and merrily in a “baby hotel”’. The caption of the photos starts with: ‘Sun and fresh air from the hills: The small inmates of the infant home cannot get enough of this.’

The reporter came from outside, so she was not a professional with repressive tendencies. Nevertheless, during her presumably short visit, she did not doubt the perfect world she was shown. The language of her report was similarly cheerful as the text by the Sister from 1953; it described the highest degree of cleanliness, maximum calm and regular inspections by the authorities. It was a paradise in which small children ‘crawl and slide, swing and — a matter of temperament — tenderly push each other’ (f.j., 1961). Aggression appeared to be a friendly gesture towards another child; again we find an attempt to reinterpret children’s suffering.

Only a few months later, a report from an infant home, this time in Güstrow, also appeared in *Neues Deutschland* (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Clipping from the *Neues Deutschland*, October 28, 1961



Source: Staatsbibliothek Berlin. The title of the article says ‘Where they are at home’. The text starts with: ‘A house where only children live emanates its special atmosphere. The walls are bright and colorful. The floor shines like a mirror’.

Here, too, a ‘hygienic idyll’ was described, in which children could develop in the best possible way. This contribution also began with references to nature (‘It smells of apples and fresh autumn leaves.’) and formulated a praise of cleanliness:

As we say goodbye to the friendly house, peace returns. The little ones sleep in the autumn sun. The older ones trudge through rustling leaves. They look for colorful leaves, for their room, for the home, where they are at home. (Niemann, 1961).

All in all, the East and West German text were similar in their cheerful language, in their emphasis on hygiene and their assumption that children in these homes were well cared for. However, this was soon to change, in different ways in East and West Germany.

6. Cold War Bowlby I — Parallel Expert Discourses

John Bowlby’s *Maternal Care and Mental Health* was first published in 1951, after the

World Health Organization (WHO) commissioned the British doctor and psychoanalyst to research the situation and prospects of children, ‘who are orphaned or separated from their families (...) and need care in foster homes, institutions or other types of group care’ (Bowlby, 1951, p. 6). If Bowlby had followed this guideline, he would have produced one of the countless reports gathering dust on the bookshelves of international experts.

However, linking distant scientific topics, Bowlby presented a first version of what would later be called attachment theory: a theory of mother-child relationships and personality development. With his ‘ability to extend the implications of research from abnormal to normal children with ease’ (Shapira, 2013, p. 205), Bowlby drew on research on short- and long-term stays in institutions, on the condition of children in hospitals, on neglect at home and the biographies of delinquent adolescents. He put all this in the context of the lack of exclusive maternal care in the first years of life, which he saw as the cause of the manifold psychological problems of children (and adults) later on. Bowlby had responded to a small question with a comprehensive concept.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, this book had an enormous influence on scientific debates and on common ideas about family and early childhood, as Vicedo (2013) and Shapira (2013) have shown. In Germany, according to historical research to date (Gebhardt, 2009; Moisel, 2017), Bowlby arrived late or not at all. The first translation of *Maternal Care and Mental Health* appeared in the FRG in the early 1970s (Bowlby, 1973), and it was around this time that the theory of attachment gradually became known to a broad West German public. In the GDR, Bowlby’s absence from public discourse was even more apparent. His work did not appear at all in East Germany. Until 1990, his name was not mentioned once in the three most influential newspapers.

However, his first book did resonate in the East and West German professional worlds of pediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists and educators. As early as 1953, the

West German medical doctor and psychoanalyst Annemarie Dührssen⁶ published a comprehensive summary of the WHO book (Dührssen, 1953) in the journal *Praxis der Kinderpsychologie und Kinderpsychiatrie* (Practice of Child Psychology and Child Psychiatry), which she had founded. This triggered an intense debate in pediatric and educational journals, concentrated on the findings from infant homes. In East Germany, the pediatrician Eva Schmidt-Kolmer⁷ ensured from the mid-1950s that Bowlby was noticed in the medical discipline. Thus, she had a text by Bowlby's colleague James Robertson printed in the East German *Zeitschrift für ärztliche Fortbildung* (Journal for Medical Training) (Robertson, 1957), which was widely read by doctors. In the same issue, Schmidt-Kolmer praised the WHO volume as an 'excellent overview' (Schmidt-Kolmer, 1957, p. 897). Even in a text in the party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* (Schmidt-Kolmer, 1958), she emphasized the necessity of 'creating a strong bond between every child and adults' (without, however, mentioning Bowlby by name; presumably this would have been too much knowledge imported from the West).

⁶ Annemarie Dührssen (1916–1998) grew up in Berlin in an upper-class family, studied medicine, trained as a psychoanalyst and from 1949 worked for a research institution of the West German health insurance. In the 1960s, she played a decisive role in ensuring that the costs for psychotherapy were covered by health insurance funds (Rudolf & Rüger, 2016).

⁷ Eva Schmidt-Kolmer (1913–1991) stemmed from a wealthy Viennese family, became involved in communist groups early on and emigrated to London in 1938. After World War II she went to the GDR where her husband became director of the East Berlin radio station. When he was deposed in 1949 because of unpopular and non-antisemitic comments, the couple was forced to move to the provincial town Schwerin, where Schmidt-Kolmer had her first contacts with infant homes as a doctor in the health service. In 1956 they were allowed to return to East Berlin, where Schmidt-Kolmer could conduct research at the Humboldt University. She set up an 'Institute for Hygiene in Childhood and Adolescence' which she headed until 1982 (Arndt, 2001).

Having read Bowlby, Dührssen and Schmidt-Kolmer started their own research in infant homes. Their monographs, published almost simultaneously (Dührssen, 1958; Schmidt-Kolmer, 1959), are therefore well suited for a comparison of Bowlby's reception: Was there a specifically West German view of Bowlby's findings that differed from an East German view? And what assessments of infant homes did this give rise to on both sides of the Iron Curtain?

Both authors held Bowlby in high esteem. Dührssen (1958, p. 6) judged his book to be 'now world-famous' in specialist circles, and in Schmidt-Kolmer's book he is the author most frequently quoted (although this privilege in GDR research was usually granted to Soviet scientists). If one picks out quotations, it is difficult to assess whether they stem from East or West Germany:

Every child needs a close emotional relationship with one or at most two to three adults in the first three years. However, this relationship can only develop if the child receives loving care from the trusted adult. (...) The interpersonal bond is therefore a prerequisite for any educational influence.

This passage was actually written by the East German pediatrician Schmidt-Kolmer (1959, p. 132). With the term 'bonding' she relied on a concept rather unusual in socialist psychological and pediatric science. Moreover, even the concept 'hospitalism', introduced by Bowlby's US analyst colleague René Spitz in a prominent essay as the 'evil effect of institutional care on infants, placed in institutions from an early age' (Spitz, 1945, p. 53), appeared in the East German publications with similar impartiality as in the West German ones (e.g., Schmidt-Kolmer, 1957). Obviously, a scientist could rely on the ideas of Bowlby and Spitz in the GDR in the 1950s.

Even methodologically the authors proceeded similarly, presumably without knowing about each other. Their focus was to investigate the development of small children

depending on where they lived. The West German psychoanalyst distinguished between the settings of the family of origin, foster family and infant home; the East German pediatrician looked at the institutions of day crèche, week crèche and infant home. As similar as the comparative design is, the differences in details are just as clear: Under Socialism, the researcher excluded pure family care because she thought some kind of institutional care was necessary for small children. In West German capitalism, the crèche was not monitored because it was considered unnecessary and hardly existed at all.

However, parallels can be found in the results. Both studies came to the conclusion that the infant home for babies and toddlers was the worst environment for children to grow up in. Two examples for their similar findings:

A higher percentage of children in infant homes stood out for their sluggishness, apathy, indifference, and even resistance to performance requirements. (Dührssen, 1958, p. 143)

Children from infant homes have difficulty concentrating, they are very skittish. Their hands tremble slightly when they have to do something more complicated. They tire quickly. (...) They are uncontrollable and often have phase states (e.g., sleep with their eyes open, lack of responsiveness alternating with irritability), outbursts of anger and affect and stereotypical movements (rocking, banging their head). (Schmidt-Kolmer, 1959, p. 131)

Their findings were also similar concerning learning processes, which they observed to be extremely delayed in infant homes; they also assessed the causes of this retardation, similarly noting an ‘extreme impoverishment of emotional involvement and stimulus impressions’ (Dührssen, 1958, p. 142) and ‘activity-killing monotony’ in infant homes (Schmidt-Kolmer, 1959, p. 138). Along broad lines, the East German work resembled West German work. If the two women had met at that time — something that is not referenced in the literature or in the files — they would probably have strengthened each other’s views.

They might have had different opinions on maternal employment, but would probably not have waged a war over family ideals.

7. Cold War Bowlby II — Reactions to Scientific Knowledge

Initially, public discourses in the professional world took a similar course. In West Germany, the infant home was continuously problematized in educational and psychological journals (e.g., Krause, 1957; Maußhardt, 1962), and in East Germany, too, a cascade of research papers by pediatricians on residential facilities for small children appeared (e.g., Kiehl & Petermann, 1959; Korff, 1959; Steinitz et al., 1959). However, in 1962 the GDR saw an intervention at the highest level. The Minister of Justice, Hilde Benjamin⁸ wrote a letter to the Minister of Health, criticizing Schmidt-Kolmer's work sharply and directly:

Her views are in stark contrast to the needs arising from women's employment, and in particular the needs of women in management positions (...). A woman who holds a position of responsibility in the state or in the economy and fulfills her social duties corresponding to that position cannot keep her eyes on the clock from 4.00 p.m. or 5.30 p.m. in order not to be late to take her child out of the crèche.^{vii}

Therefore, Benjamin demanded an 'ideological clarification by the doctors' to 'secure' the equal rights of women. This letter from the Justice Minister to the Health Minister also marked the end of the scientific debate in the GDR on infant homes: After 1962, no more pediatric essays on this subject were published. Eva Schmidt-Kolmer now turned

⁸ Hilde Benjamin (1902–1989) was Vice-President of the Supreme Court of the GDR from 1949 to 1953. She reacted with Stalinist severity to a popular uprising against the government in 1953. She then took over the office of Minister of Justice from Max Fechner, who was imprisoned for three years because of his moderate reaction to the revolt. Benjamin remained Minister of Justice until 1967 and advocated tightening criminal law (Feth, 2002).

exclusively to crèches where she tried to achieve better conditions for the children. The infant home was now taboo in East Germany; the name Bowlby no longer appeared in scientific texts. This conflict and the resulting taboo was maintained by Eva Schmidt-Kolmer herself even 30 years later: She did not mention the intervention of the Minister of Justice in a review of her own work (Schmidt-Kolmer, 1989).

While in the early 1950s the infant home in the GDR media was seen as part of a progressive socialist policy and then in medical journals in the late 1950s as a dangerous institution, it was now neglected. The aggressive pro-infant home propaganda in the media vanished in the 1960s. Sometimes, youth welfare authorities warned against placing too many babies and toddlers there (Nissel, 1966), and some records indicate attempts to make the facilities more like kindergartens, less like hospitals. However, this did not greatly change their importance: the number of places in infant homes in East Germany declined only slowly. But because fewer children were born in the 1960s and early 1970s, until the end of the GDR in 1990 the utilization of these institutions remained at a high level.

In West Germany, on the other hand, attention to the infant homes continued to grow. The Federal Government's first youth reports — regular and critical stock-takings of the situation of children and youth — addressed the infant home with an increasingly warning tone (BMFJ, 1965; BMFJ, 1968; BMJFG, 1972). The media in the FRG, which during the student movement of 1968/69 was frequently concerned with the placement of young people in residential care, described the situation in infant homes as highly problematic for children (e.g., Rau, 1971). At the same time, knowledge of attachment theory gradually reached the public.

Renowned West German pediatricians presented Bowlby's work in widely circulated journals (Hellbrügge, 1967). Dr. Benjamin Spock's guide to benevolent, psychoanalytically based early childhood educational ideas, which sold millions of copies

in the USA following its publication in 1946, slowly reached the German book market (Spock, 1957, and further years). Finally, Bowlby's monograph from 1951 was also translated into German (Bowlby, 1973). By the mid-1970s at the latest, the term 'hospitalism' had become part of general West German language. The view that infant homes were highly problematic institutions had gained acceptance.

In the 1960s, the first cities in West Germany reacted on the conclusions from the debate. For example, the Stuttgart authorities built hostels for young mothers ('Mütterwohnheime') to prevent their children from being placed in infant homes (Scholl, 1960). In Mannheim, educational counselors drew up recommendations to avoid placing babies in residential care (Hiemenz et al., 1964). In Braunschweig and Salzgitter, the authorities set the goal of 'preventing the inhumane, albeit hygienically impeccable, assembly-line care of so many small homeless children' (Andriessens, 1966, p. 333). In many cities, such local initiatives led to a change in social policy, which was reflected in the official data some years later: At the federal level, West German statistics show a rapid decline in the number of places in infant homes in the decade from 1965 to 1974.

These developments make the quantitative changes in the number of places in the 1960s more understandable. In East Germany, infant homes were still a taboo. Following the political intervention, pediatricians turned their attention to daycare facilities. On the other hand, in West Germany, experts continued to discuss the situation in residential care, even reaching the media and initiating a change in the path of local politics. Here, the dismantling of infant homes resulted from the interplay between professional debate, media discussion and political action. In the 1970s and 1980s, these different paths were maintained: In West Germany, the few remaining places disappeared completely; in East Germany, the numerous places were kept until the socialistic state collapsed. With reunification in 1990, the West German youth welfare system was exported to the East,

which led to the closure of the institutions within a few months — a transformation outside the period observed here and not yet investigated.

8. Conclusion

Did the residential care systems of East and West Germany develop differently after World War II? The historical comparison provides some evidence for division. In the 1950s, infant homes were highly important to the socialist state because they could facilitate mothers' employment. This was reflected in the state's legislation and in articles from state-run GDR newspapers. In the West, on the other hand, the infant home remained an institution on the fringe of the welfare state, only available to mothers if they were unable to bring up their children themselves or if the authorities suspected them to be unfit to do so. If social policy-makers in East and West Germany had been asked about residential care for babies and toddlers in the early 1950s, their answers would have been very different.

However, there is some continuity to be observed, mainly regarding the role of the infant home in the social order. In this sense, the reasons for placements showed broad agreement. In both parts of Germany, babies and toddlers most frequently came to the institutions because their single mothers had to work and could find no other form of care for their children. In West Germany, moreover, these mothers often lived in highly precarious conditions, whether because of their illnesses, because of illegal employment as prostitutes, because of their isolation within their own family of origin and the like. (The mothers' social backgrounds were not recorded for East Germany, so that continuity can only be assumed here.)

Contemporary perceptions of these institutions were also similar. Student nurses working in residential care for longer periods expressed their horror at the children's living conditions, which in the West could be published in a professional journal, whereas in the

East it found its way only into internal documents of the authorities. As some kind of continuity, everyday life in the infant homes was similarly terrible in both parts of Germany. But professionals on both sides of the Iron Curtain tried to gloss over the situation and suppressed the perception of suffering children. Journalists in the East and the West published astonishingly similar reports on the supposed idyll in the institutions.

A parallel development appeared in the scientific debate, which was strongly influenced by John Bowlby's first major publication *Maternal Care and Mental Health* in 1951. Both East and West German pediatricians, psychologists and educators read the early work on attachment theory and developed critical views on this basis. In the history of science, it is striking that Bowlby, a Briton deeply rooted in the West, was also read in the Eastern Bloc where he triggered a series of publications on babies and toddlers in infant homes. The reception of attachment theory, as this article also seeks to show, did not stop at the Iron Curtain. However, this only applies to the GDR of the 1950s, not to that of the 1960s. After the construction of the inner-German wall in 1961, discussions inspired by attachment theory were no longer perceptible in East Germany. As the East-West conflict grew more acute, East German academics had less access to Western publications, and papers with references to Bowlby had become impossible in the socialist part of the country.

Furthermore, this became important for the divided development of the institutions. Among West German scientists and professionals a discussion developed about the abolition of infant homes for babies and toddlers, strongly inspired by Bowlby. The authorities noticed this debate and started winding down the institutions from around 1960 onwards, and from 1965 the institutions were abolished at a rapid pace. Knowledge generated by early attachment theory thus had consequences for West German society. On the other hand, in East Germany, the research stop was followed by a stagnation of these

institutions. Infant homes for babies and toddlers were marginalized. Hardly ever were they spoken about in public, neither in scientific nor in media discourse. The number of places was reduced slightly, and because the number of newborns in the GDR also fell during this period, infant homes remained relevant for a small group of children until German reunification in 1990.

To sum up, the parallel developments and continuities can be found more clearly in the 1950s, when the two German states were not yet separated by the Wall. At that time, bloc building was less advanced and, in particular, scientific knowledge could spread more easily beyond borders. In the 1960s, different development paths became apparent. The western part of the country abolished infant homes, while in the eastern part they were retained and forgotten.

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9. Declaration of Interest

The author reported no potential conflict of interest.

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ⁱ Bundesarchiv, DQ1 2004, Bericht über den Operativeinsatz im Säuglingsheim 'Prof. Dr. Stolte' in Güstrow am 10.1.1967.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bundesarchiv, DQ1 2490, Zusammenarbeit zwischen den Dauerheimen für Säuglinge und Kleinkinder und den Referaten Jugendhilfe, 1966, March 16.

^{iv} Bundesarchiv DQ 1 6369, Bericht der Studentinnen der Pädagogischen Schule für Kindergärtnerinnen 'Friedrich Fröbel' in Bln. Pankow über ihr dreiwöchiges Praktikum im Kdh. Blankenburg, 1963, October 23.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Bundesarchiv, DQ1 1994, Auswertung des Berichtes der Generalstaatsanwaltschaft über Strafverfahren, 1966.

^{vii} Bundesarchiv, DQ1 13585.