

## The Hitler's Children: Testimonies of a Manipulated Generation

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**Abstract:** This review describes and analyzes *The Hitler's Children*, by Guido Knopp, through historical facts, documents and reports of a seduced and indoctrinated generation according to the Nazi ideology. It further approaches the process of these children's formation, especially regarding the role assumed by the leisure activities, sport and gymnastic in the Aryan education.  
**Key-words:** Children. Education. Sport. Leisure.

Guido Knopp, Doctor in History, Professor of Journalism, Writer, Publicist and TV presenter, was born in 1948 in the city of Treysa. He started his professional life as a newspaper editor. In 1978, he assumed a television program about historical facts, winning great audience. He created several TV movies and some of them are prize winners. He is the author of several books, among which *Die Deutsche Einheit* ("The German Fate"), *Der verdammte Krieg* ("The Unfortunate War") and *Entscheidung Stalingrad Top-Spione* ("The Stalingrad Mistake").

In the five chapters, **Seduction, Devotion, Cultivation, War and Sacrifice**, the author elucidates how the Hitler's children have been seduced and indoctrinated, taking to their lives the mark of a history that they could not realize in its entirety. Their bodies were manipulated, where the sport and leisure were used as instruments for such action. The new world order desired by Hitler converted children and young people of that time into "servants of the home-land". Over one thousand

children of long ago speak like adults in this book. Soul-stirring testimonials of members of the Hitlerian Youth and unpublished, official and private documents put us close to the historical true of the national-socialist youth, illustrated by the voice of who experienced it – “the Hitler’s children”.

In **Seduction**, Knopp reveals the mechanisms used by Hitler to build a generation directly linked to the *Führer* through the creation of Povo Jovem – PJ (Young People - PJ), whose entrance occurred at the age of 10, and Juventudes *Hitlerianas* – HJ (Hitlerian Youth - HY), with the entrance at the age of 14, being constituted by the workers’ children, former-bourgeois, business people, workers, peasants and others. The initial mobilization occurred through attractive speeches (like the one about death for the home-land) and advertising campaigns with the collaboration of states, cities, teachers and local HJ leaders.

Every youth education should occur within the family environment, at school and at the HJs in order to serve the German people and build a national community. A sophisticated school system has been created to prepare leaders, being closely connected to Hitler’s national-socialist party. The body was a priority in that system. In the Hitler’s words: “[...] the State [...] must direct its work and cultivate bodies full of health. Only ranking second is the formation of the intellectual capabilities, and ranking last, the scientific teaching”.

The seductions occurred intensively by sports and leisure provided by summer camps, in which attractive entertaining activities like singing, music, drama interpretations, romanticism around bonfires, motorcycle rides and regattas were promised to the youths, experiences of which were not always

possible to occur in the German youth's family life. The national-socialism model was the professionally able, disciplined, non-inquisitive and dictatorship-enthusiastic youth. In addition to that, this youth should become "[...] stylized and slender, as skilful as a greyhound dog, as curried as leather and as hard as steel". It was Hitler's desire that the youth were willing to strengthen their body and mind due to the obligation to serve the German people and, therefore, their time was completely controlled. A youth from that time commented:

Twice a week we were on duty and, as I was the leader, there was much more service for leaders on Monday, and on Sundays, we practiced shoot or went somewhere by bike or paraded. [...] We didn't have time to ponder about what we actually did. There always came the next activity, it was a non-stop action.

The chapter **Devotion** focuses on the Hitlerian determination about the German girls, especially those that were loyal to the system, who performed self-sacrifice and got prepared to assume the role of mothers of the future soldiers. The girls' formation at the BDM's – German Girls Alliance – should occur according to Führer's ideology and included trips through the field, board games, songs and modern gymnastics outdoor presentations with apples and balls (shootings show a large number of young people practicing gymnastics, following the example of the program on the Olympic Games or the Party's congresses). The BDMs had a challenging character for the bourgeois society and manifested themselves against the old-fashioned family moral concepts of that time. Beside the body exhibition in the gym suits and through the gymnastic

movements, the girls had the possibility to travel to camps without their parents.

The testimonials reveal that most of the youth didn't come to know about the atrocities committed by the government and show difficulty to accept the direct relation between what they lived at the BDMs and what was unveiled at the end of Hitler's government. Some girls even came to offer their bodies to conceive children with the great governor. More important than accumulating knowledge was to become strong for the condition of mother of the future soldier. Thus, the most part of the girls' activities consisted in body strengthening.

The **Cultivation**, that means, the selection and co-optation of the German children and youth generation in the Hitlerian period is dealt with in the third chapter. The author focuses especially on the Institutos Nacionais Políticos de Educação – NAPOLAS [National-Political Institutes of Learning – NAPOLAS], schools that should be the German equivalent to the “Harvard or Cambridge's elite educational centers”. However, the NAPOLAS were considerably contradictory, because they had the purpose to prepare the system's future directors, which should have critical sense, as long as it didn't affect their loyalty to the System. They gave priority to teaching paramilitary games, sports, civic teaching and racial theory.

This combination of seduction and discipline developed in students a blind optimism and some were even sent to war in its final episodes. The survivors had to live with traumas and deceptions, wondering how they could be manipulated by Hitler and desire to die for him and their

homeland. However, Knopp was amazed with former-students from the NAPOLAS, who showed a successful adult life, being tolerant and critical people.

In the fourth chapter, **War**, the author reports experiences occurred between the first and the Second World War. He shows that the German youth understood the contentions as a reason of pride and happiness. The politics used by them was to accept war in a natural manner and never remember how peace was like. The youth sought and took care of the wounded, buried the dead and rank risks, because in order to keep the morale, the Germans kept the false appearance that everything was fine. At the camps, uncivilized tactics were used so that the youth became strong and hard-hearted. Music was unwelcome for several reasons: it came from the USA, written by the Jew and sung by black people. This brainwashing carried out along years prevented the reflection on their practices, where fulfilling orders was the only thing to be done. The youth unified by a preliminary work of years, instructed, homogenized and educated to submission would be converted into a sweet-tempered instrument for Hitler.

The children, at that time, stayed in hostels, hotels and camps, separated from their parents who, although they didn't want to separate from their children, they ended up consenting, under the discourse that all together and under the government's shelter, they would be more likely to survive and have a better future.

In the fifth chapter, called **Sacrifice**, the author describes the young soldiers' trajectory. The initial age for recruitment was 25 years old, decreasing until 12 years old in

the last weeks of the war, pointing that the children's sacrifice was one of the last criminal chapters triggered by Hitler. Some young people believed in the conquest and paid with their own lives because they knew that who renounced the war would be considered as a deserter and, others, for having the unconditional mood of being young soldiers. With the defeat, Hitler's enemies burned the young soldiers' uniforms and, disarmed, they were converted into new children – they passed from a generation of “Hitler's youth” to “youth without a homeland who could not bid farewell”.

Knopp, at the end of the work, reaffirmed that the war legacy is something undesirable, and works as a lesson for a different civilizing action along history. He concluded that the end of war is the milestone of a new age for the survivors that will carry the memories of their childhood. This generation's memory, as he affirmed, is a valuable legacy, “a necessary calling against oblivion”. Therefore, the work takes us, in a didactic manner well-grounded in its sources, to understand the barbarism lived by thousands of children and young people under the yoke of a totalitarian system in which sports and leisure were used for ideological purposes. It is didactic, exactly, not because it shows the localized and explicit barbarism as the blood running, the dilacerated body, the shouts of pain could maybe be, but because it reveals how the youth were seducingly indoctrinated through the body practices.

It is impossible to read his book without wondering about the mechanisms used today to make the child's and the youth's time desirably busy and for their bodies manipulation. How have we educators discussed these themes with the

education subjects? Where do such doctrinaire messages come from, what do they lead to and, mainly, which mechanisms do they use to make the youth willing to integrated them?

Considering the characteristic of detailed explicitness of so many aspects of children and youth's life during the Nazi system, and the mechanisms used to engage this population in the ideological contest, we understand that the work may undoubtedly concern a wide public and overall teachers. The education subjects – children, adolescents, youths and adults – supported by the critical analysis from teachers, can help with this work content the reflection on their daily practices in search of the recognition of today's standardized and doctrinaire mechanisms, especially in relation to the political and ideological use of sports and leisure. It is unquestionably a book that makes us read the past thinking and feeling the present and the future. Finally, our adult's responsibility is kept in check by this reading provided by Guido Knopp.

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**Los niños de Hitler: retrato de una generación  
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**Resumen:** Esta reseña describe y analiza *Los niños de Hitler*, de Guido Knopp, partiendo de hechos históricos, documentos y relatos de una generación seducida y adoctrinada en el seguimiento de la ideología nazi. Atenta al proceso de formación de la niñez y de la juventud, especialmente en todo lo que se refiere al papel asumido por las actividades recreativas, el deporte y la gimnasia en la "educación aria".

**Palabras-clave:** Infancia. Educación. Deporte. Recreación.

**REFERENCE**

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