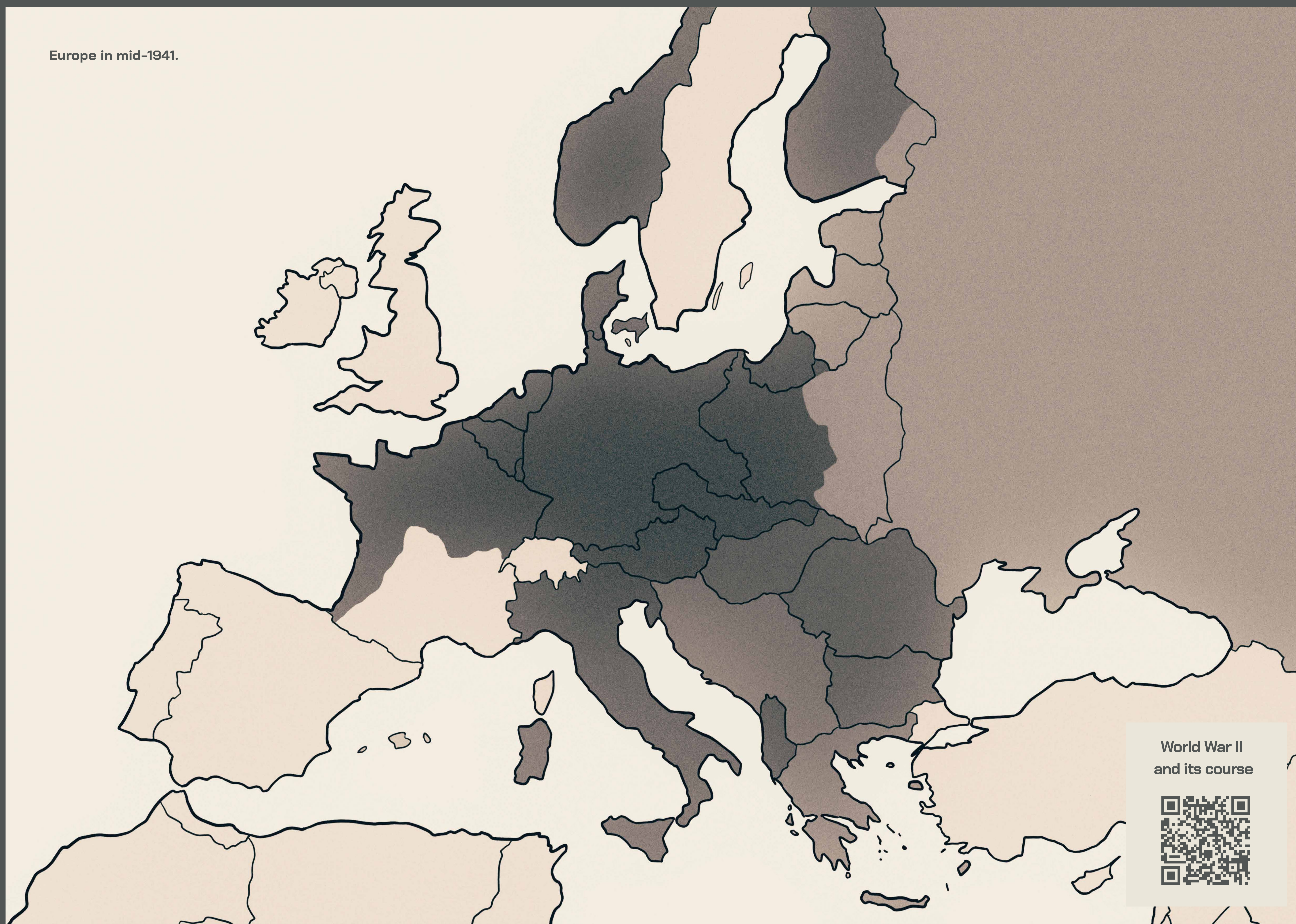


Stolen Uprooted



The greatest war in history

Europe in mid-1941.



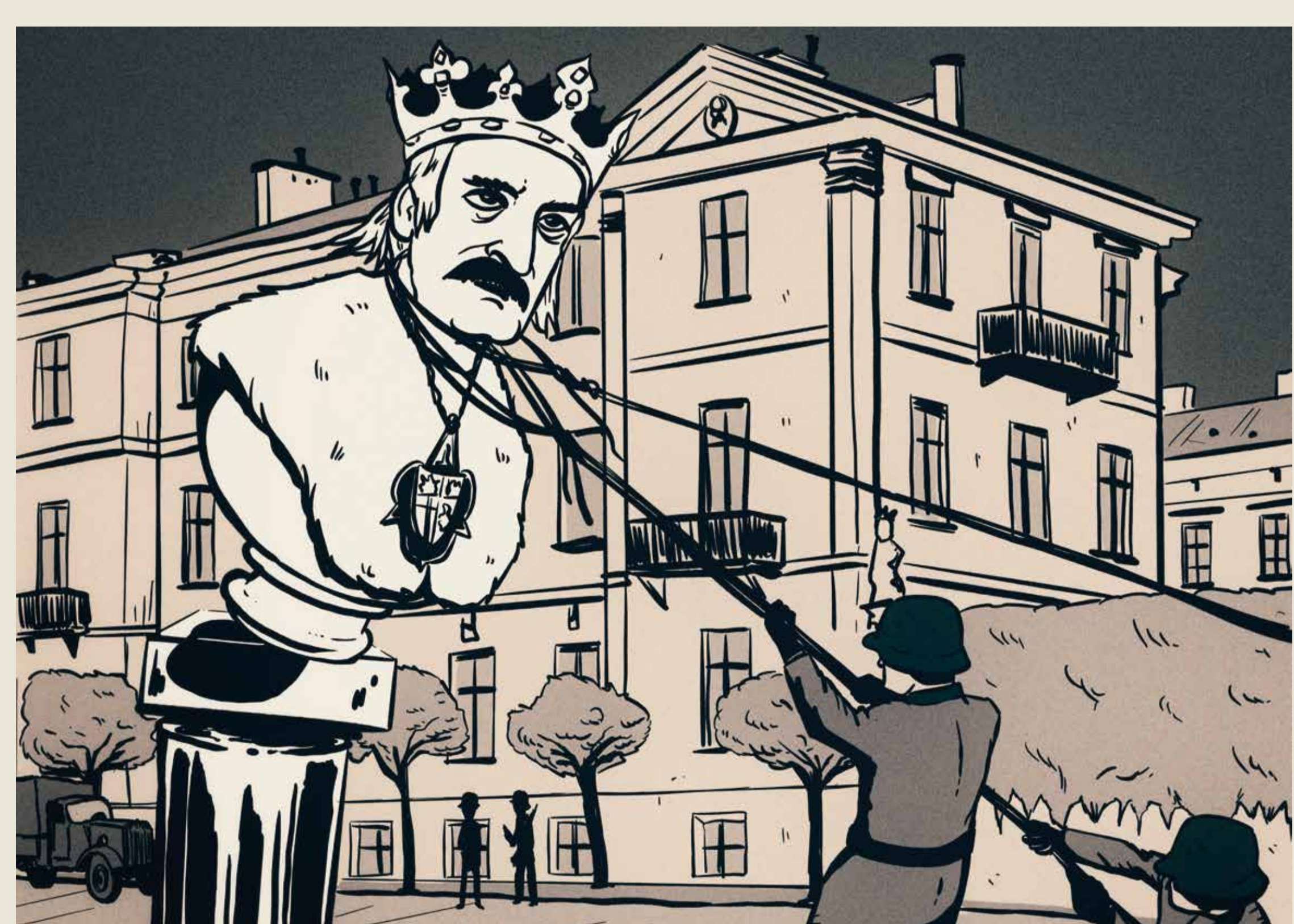
On 1 September 1939, Nazi Germany attacked Poland. This attack marked the beginning of World War II, the greatest and bloodiest conflict in the history of mankind. Germany had already occupied Czechoslovakia and Austria. By 1941, Germany and its ally Soviet Union had conquered a large part of Europe.



A brutal occupation was introduced in the conquered countries. The populations were subjected to repressions and ruthlessly bloody punishment for any resistance.



The Nazis looked down on the people living in the eastern part of Europe with contempt. They even regarded the Slavs as “sub-humans”. This is why the German occupation in the east of the continent was much more brutal than in the west.



People belonging to the elite of the nations of Central and Eastern Europe were murdered or sent to concentration camps. The others were deprived of their right to education and culture. In this way, they were to be turned into slaves of the German “master race”.



The European Jews, whom the Nazis particularly hated, suffered the most terrible fate. They were murdered en masse in ghettos and death camps. The Roma, despised by the Nazis, also became victims of genocide.

UPROOTED

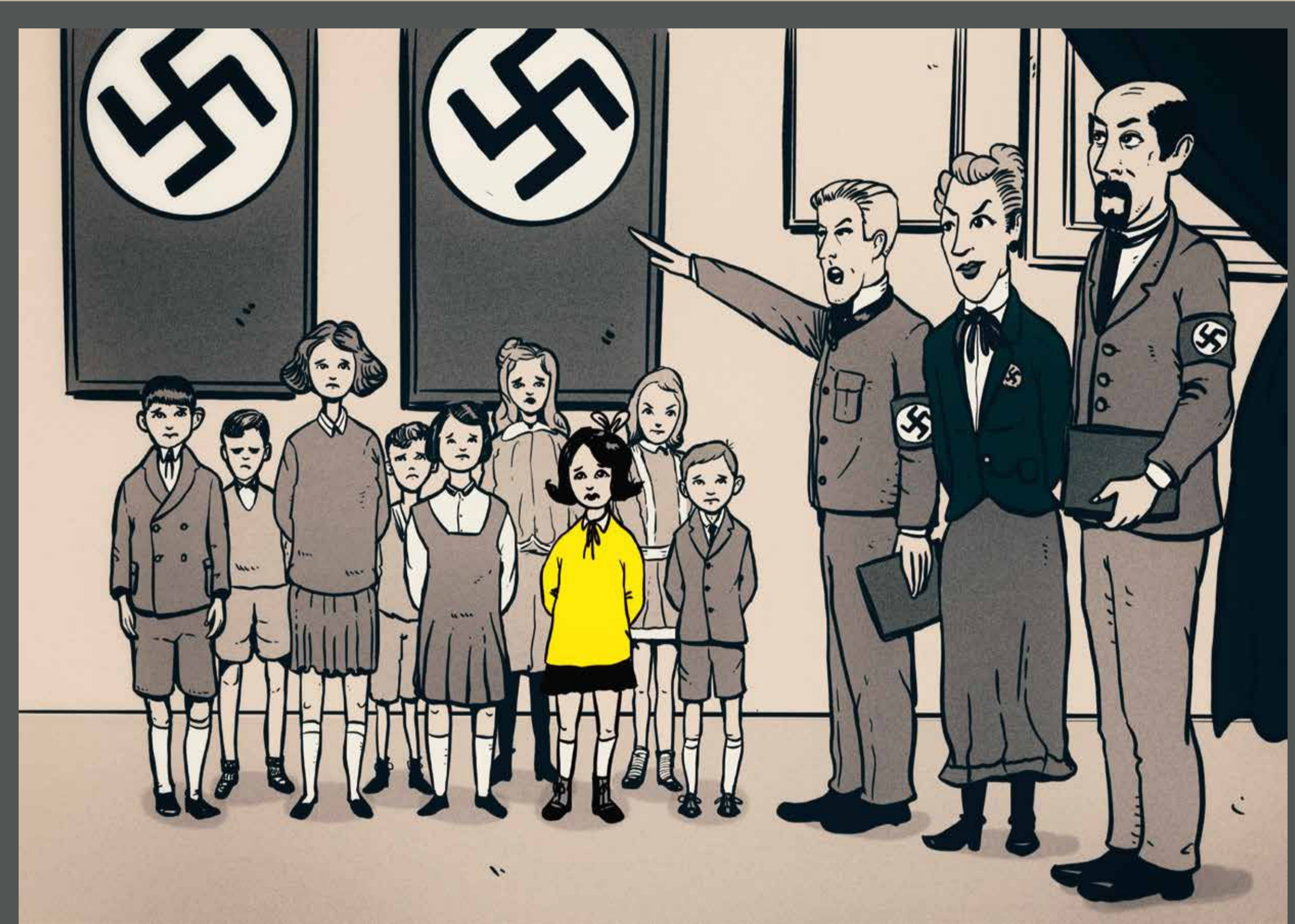
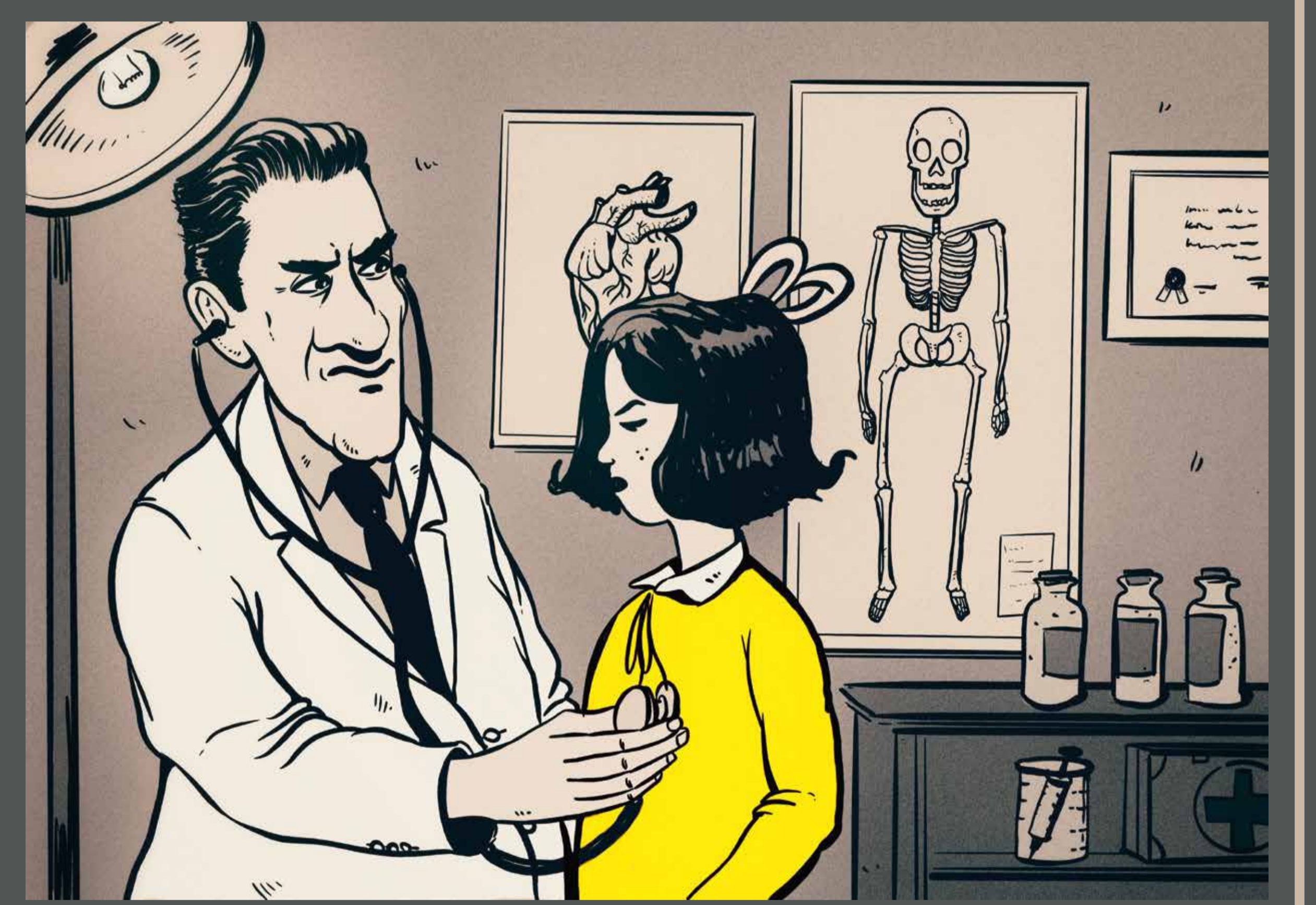
(H)STORIES OF STOLEN CHILDREN
DURING WORLD WAR II

Marysia's story



I was 5 years old when the Germans killed my dad and took my mum away somewhere. A man in a uniform led me to some building. I remember that there were a lot of other children there.

The doctor examined me, checked my eyes, ears and hair and measured my head. Then I was taken to an orphanage. At night I cried a lot. I missed my parents.



There were many other children from my country there, but we were forbidden to speak our language. They taught us German, beat us a lot and shouted at us.

They changed my name and surname, and gave me to a German family. They told me to call them mum and dad, but I couldn't. However, after some time I grew to like them. They were good to me.



Racial ideology of German Nazis

Janek's story



I was born in Germany. My parents died during bombings of the city by the British.



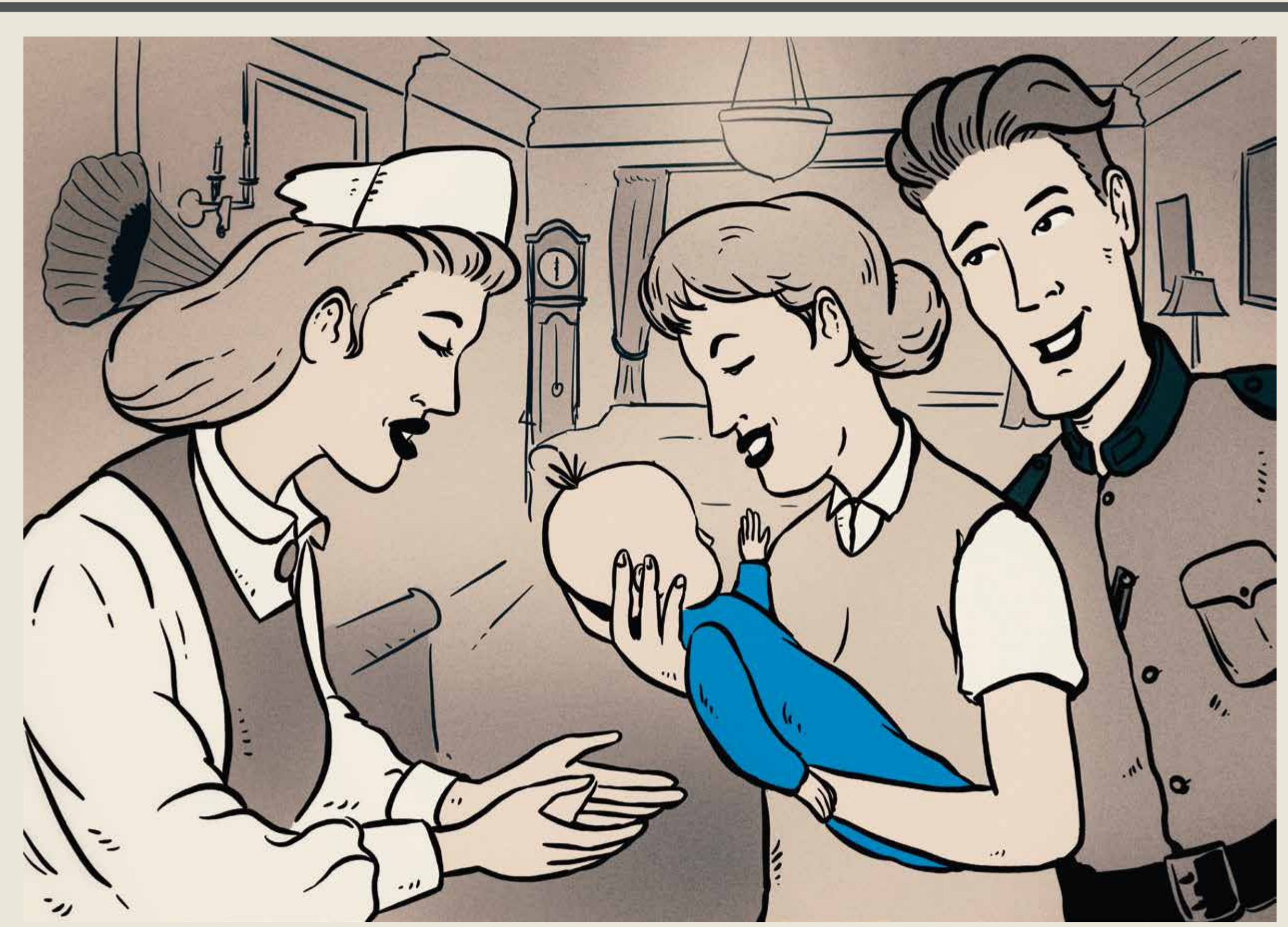
I did not have any family; there was no one to take care of me.



Therefore, I was taken to an adoption centre.



The system of child theft in countries occupied by Nazi Germany



Fortunately, I quickly found a new family who loved me as if I were its own child.



Why did they do it to us?

"Whenever you happen to find good blood, you must obtain it for Germany or you have to make sure that it will no longer continue to exist".

"Any good blood ... you meet somewhere in the east, you can either win it or you have to kill it".

"The children recognised as racially valuable are to be Germanised".

"I think it would be right if particularly good-breed little children ... were gathered together and brought up by us in special ... children's homes... After ... one year, we should think of placing such children ... into childless, good-breed families".

What does it mean "good blood"?



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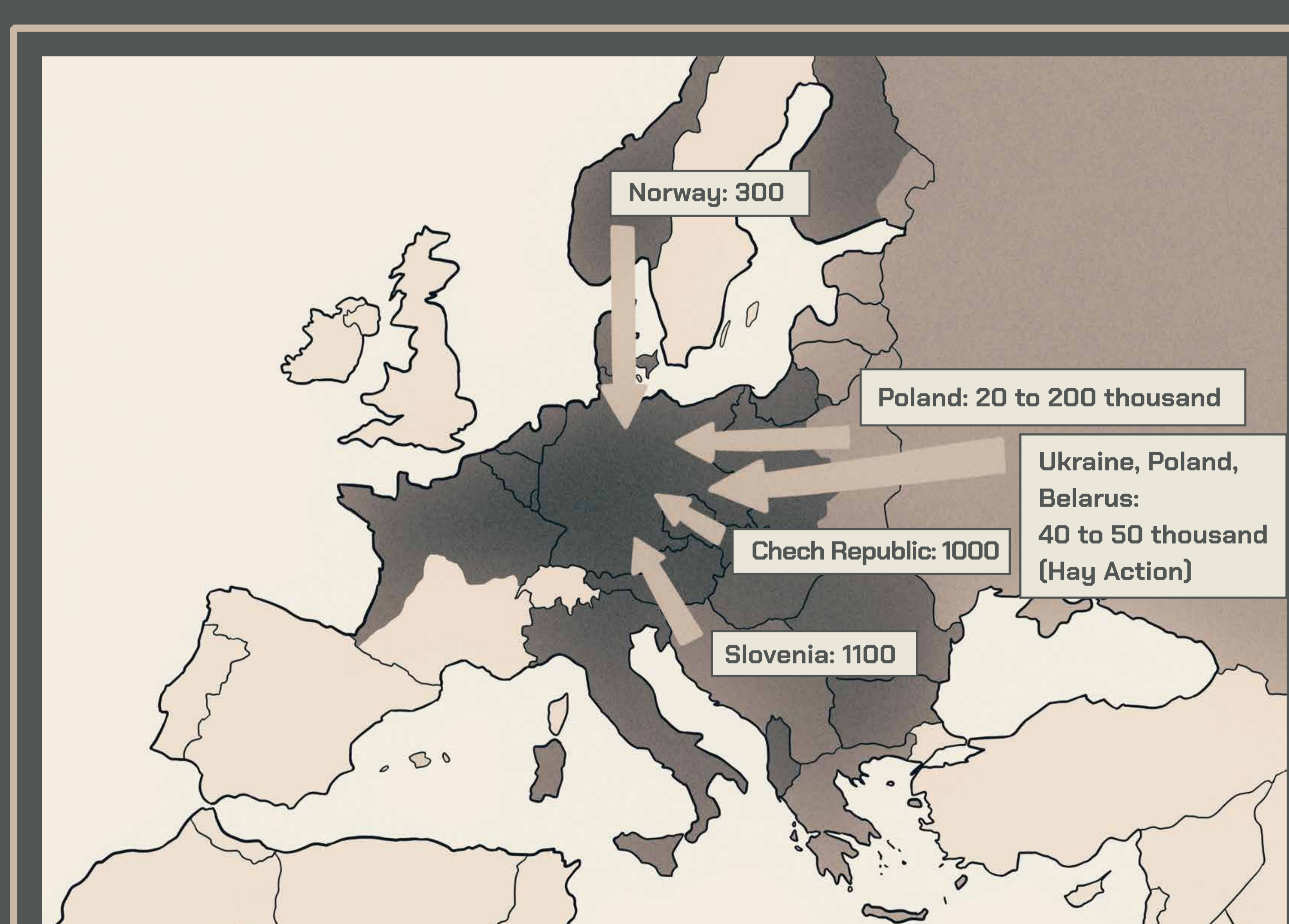
(H)STORIES OF STOLEN CHILDREN
DURING WORLD WAR II

There were tens of thousands of us



A fate similar to that of Marysia and Janek befell tens of thousands of children plundered by the German Nazis from the countries they occupied. Many of them never found out that they had been taken from their parents and lived their entire lives in lies.

What was Lebensborn?



The perpetrators falsified and destroyed documents, so we do not know the real extent of the child theft operations by the occupying German authorities. Shortly after the end of the war, the Polish authorities reported that 200,000 children had been stolen from Poland alone. Although the majority of historians believe that this figure was greatly exaggerated, this does not make the dramatic fate of the children and their families any less true.

Some returned...



The war came to an end. Some men came to tell me that I had been stolen, but now they have found me and will take me home. My real mother is dead, but my grandmother is waiting for me. I don't want to go back. I hardly remember that other house. This is where I have my parents.



I can't get along with my grandmother. She doesn't speak German and I don't speak Polish. I miss my home in Germany. Grandma screams that the Germans killed my parents, but after all, I am German.



My grandmother could not take care of me. I ended up in an orphanage. There are children there whose parents were killed by the Germans. They tease me because I'm a "little German" and I hardly speak Polish.

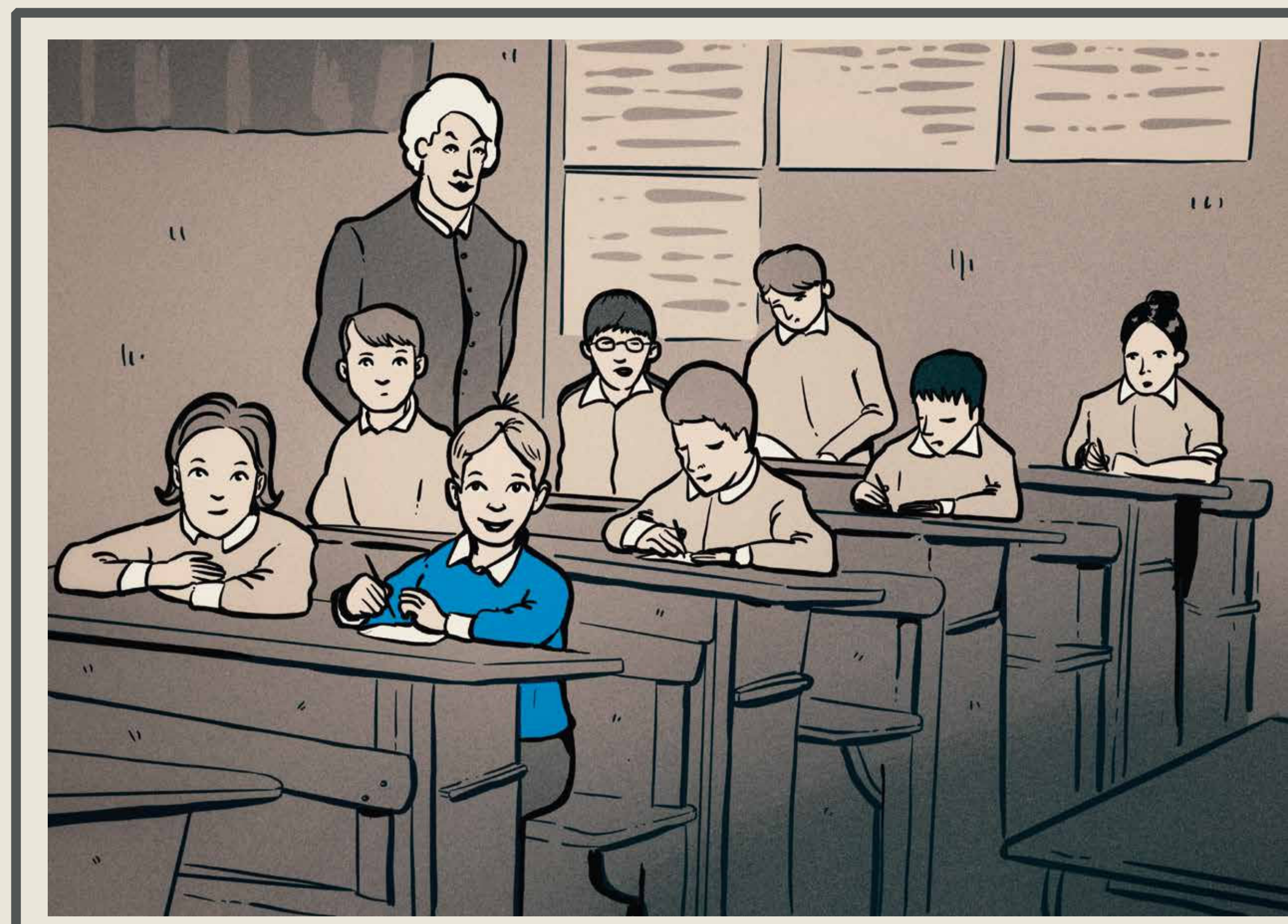


Despite everything I managed to find a husband and live my life well. However, I never decided to have any children.



Sometimes I think about whether my life could have been different.

... others stayed



The war came to an end.
I went to a good school.

I found an interesting and well-paid job.



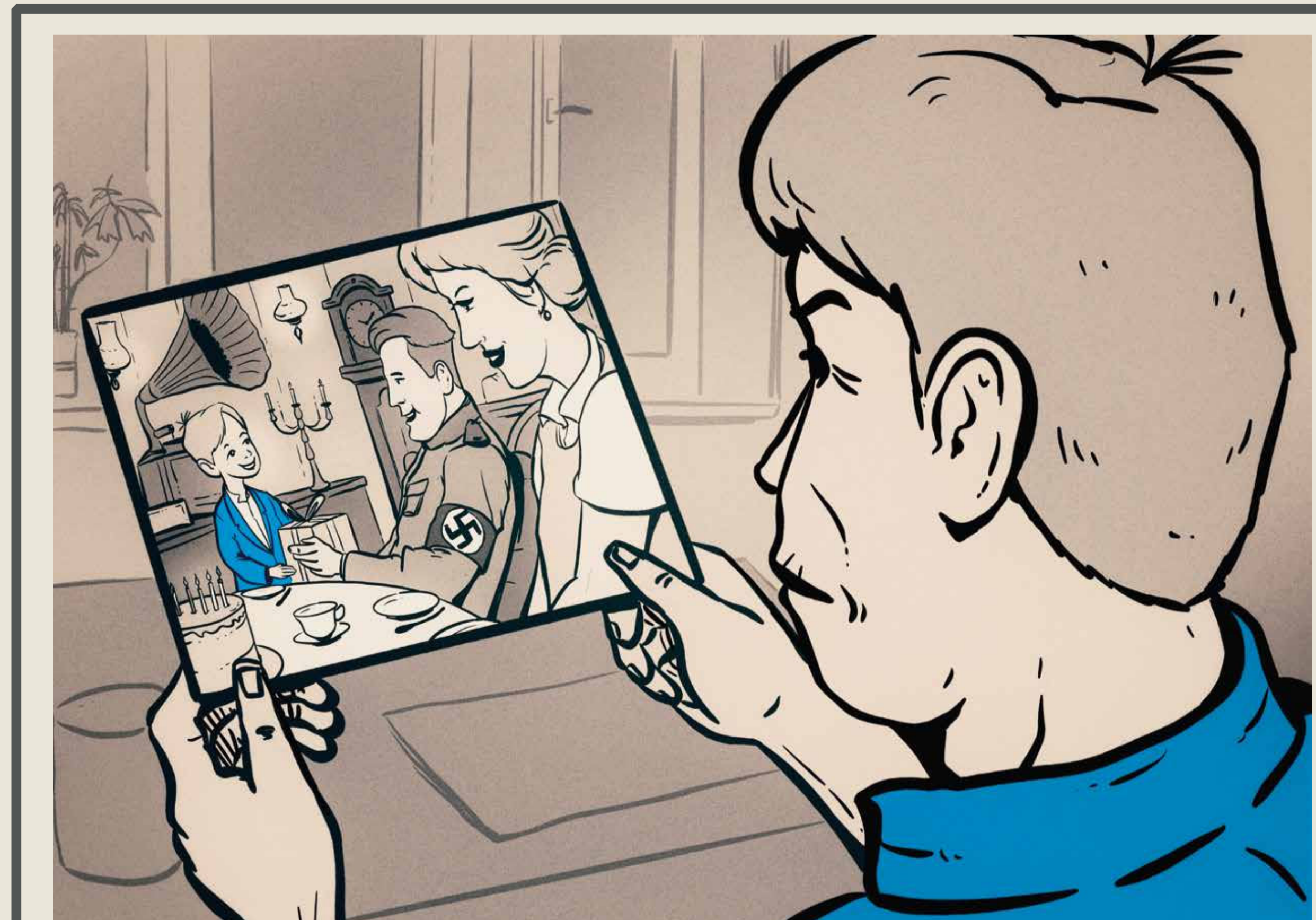
When ordering the documents of my parents
after their death, I came across correspondence
with the Lebensborn organisation.



I conducted a private investigation and discovered
the truth. My parents were not Germans who had
died under British bombs.



What country do I come from? What is my real
name? Who were my parents? Do I have any
siblings? It's really terrible not to know the
answers to any of these questions.



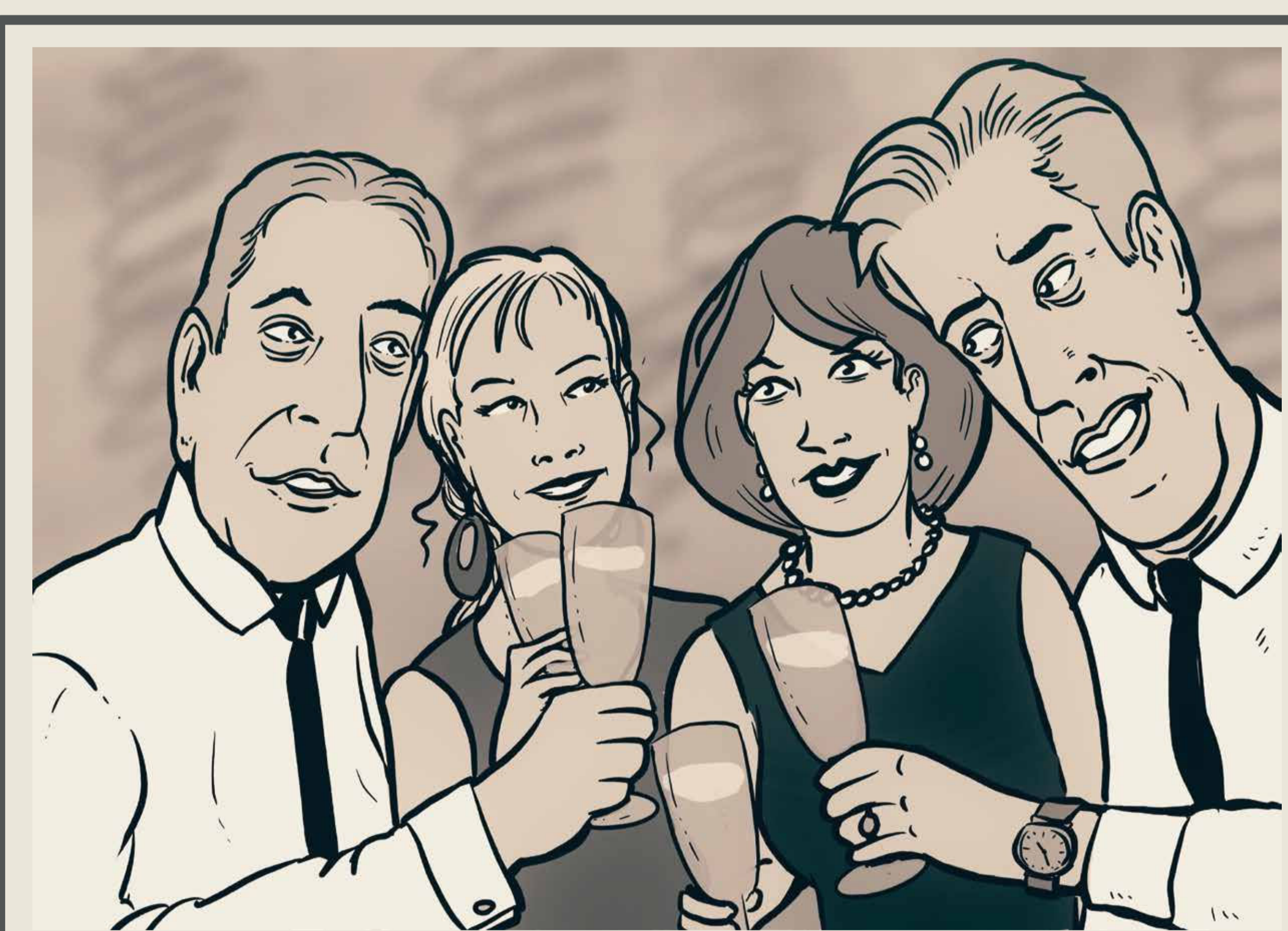
Crime without punishment



Some people responsible for the theft and Germanisation of the children were brought to trial in Nuremberg in 1947.

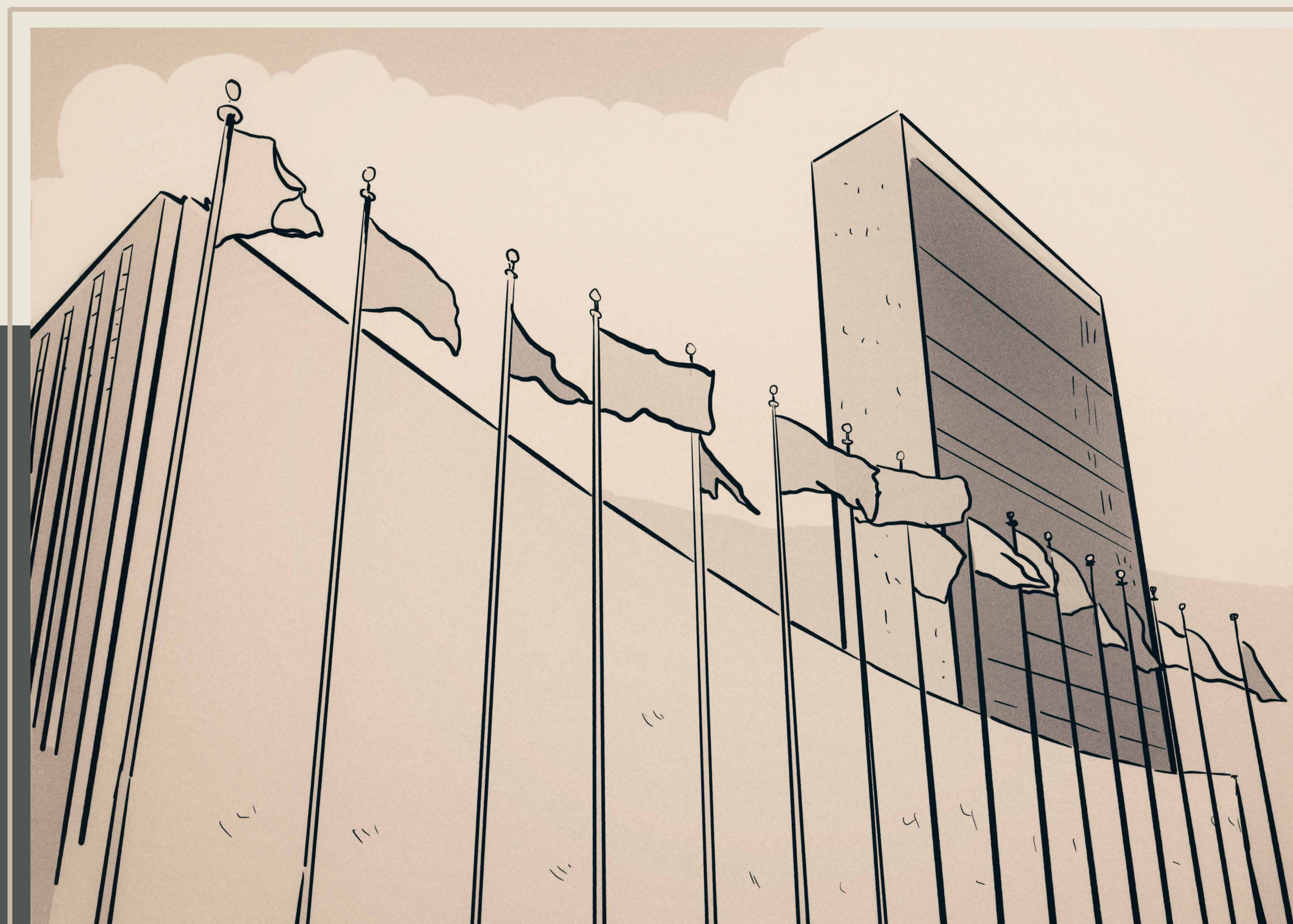


Most of them were only sentenced to short penalties of imprisonment and actually not for stealing children but for other crimes.



“For lack of evidence” a significant number of those involved in the child theft and abuse were never punished. Many of them enjoyed social respect and lived in abundance after the war.

Impunity
of criminals



In 1948 the United Nations adopted the “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide”. For instance, it considered the “forcible transfer of children of group members to another group” to be such a crime. However, this did not bring any consequences to those people responsible for the German crimes during World War II, because war criminals were not subject to the provisions of the Convention retrospectively.

Head against the wall



When I found out that I was a “stolen child”, I wanted the country where I lived, my country, to plead guilty and recognise me as a victim of Nazi crimes.



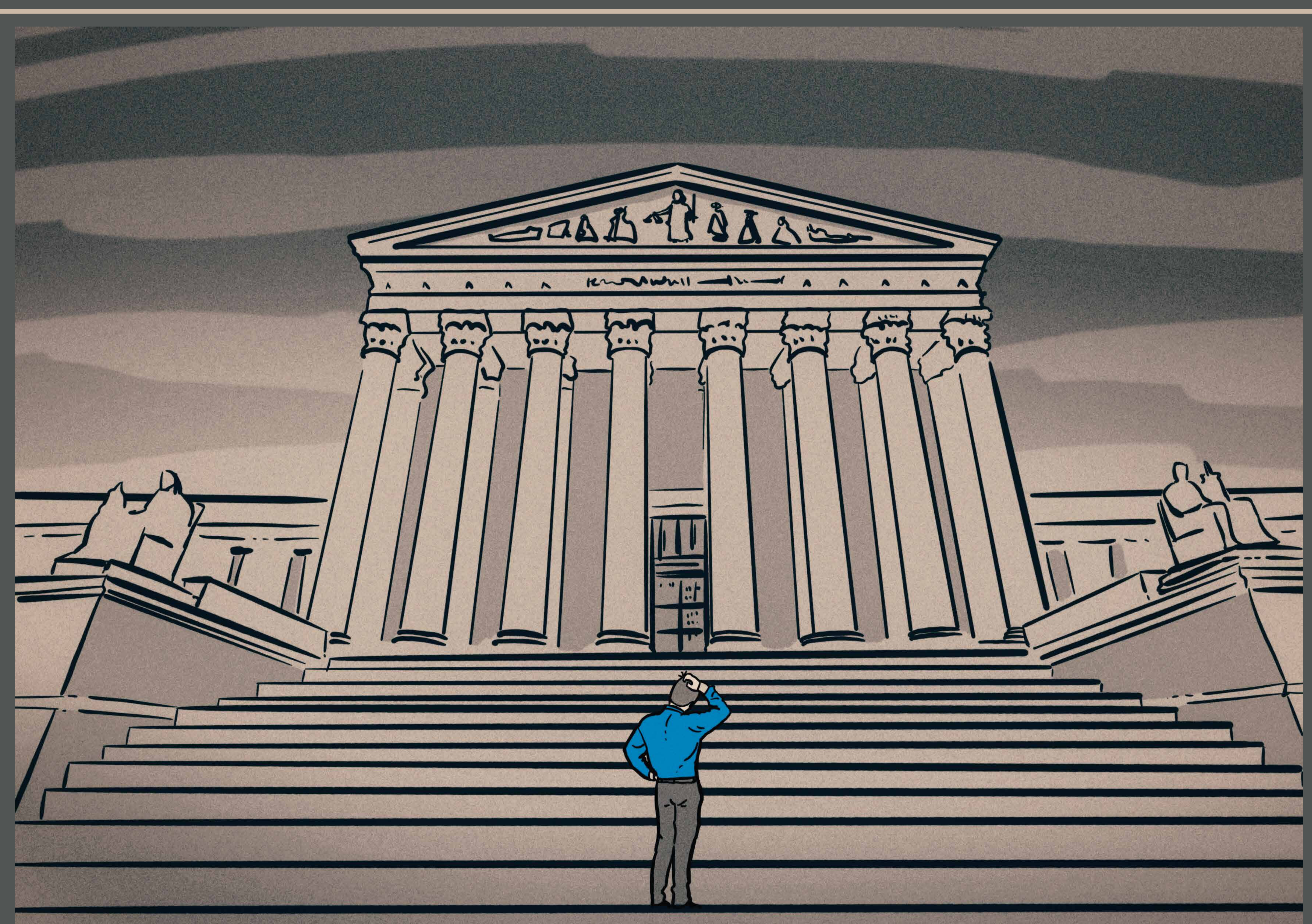
Above all, I turned to the office that was involved in the handling of such requests.



Then I went to court.



Finally, I filed an appeal against the judgement.



Everyone claims that I am not a victim of Nazi persecution. Do these people have no conscience? Do they care less about our misfortune? I will not give in. I will file a complaint with the Court of Justice of the European Union. But will I live long enough to see justice?

The stolen children – forgotten victims



The world has not learned its lesson



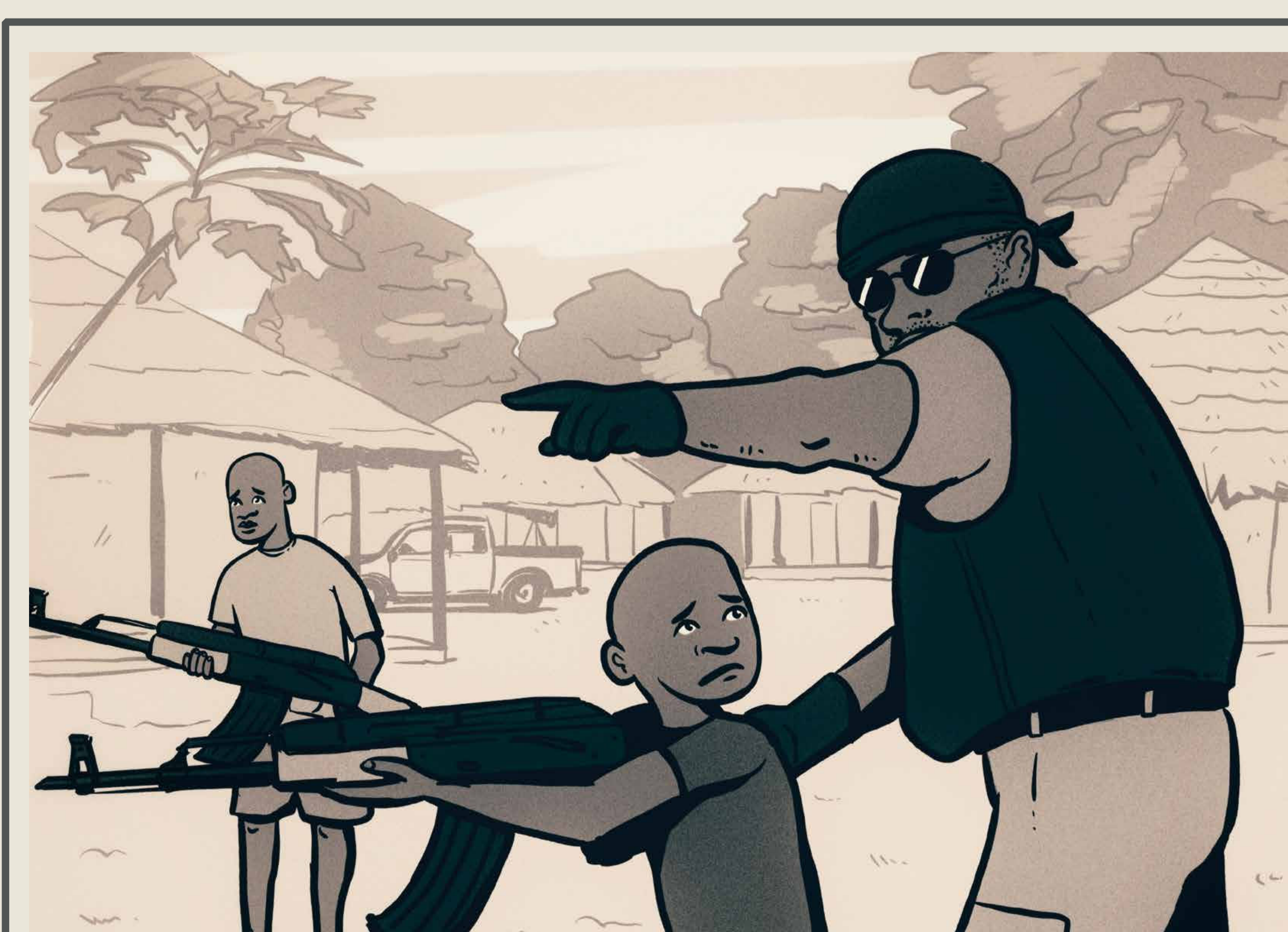
The Nazis were not the only ones who stole children. This happened in Canada and Australia, among others, where the authorities took away tens of thousands of children from indigenous people to raise them as “civilised, white people”.



After World War II, child theft was still practised in many countries, for example in the German Democratic Republic, where children were taken from hundreds of people critical of the communist authorities. This continued until the late 1980s.



Similar practices are still used today by the Belarusian authorities. In 2006, the president there, Alexander Lukashenko, signed a decree which allows children to be taken away from families described as “immoral”. This regulation is applied against opponents of the regime.



Tens of thousands of children around the world, mainly in Africa and Asia, are kidnapped from their homes, indoctrinated and then used in armed conflicts. They kill, die or become crippled.

A story with no happy ending



After Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, international organisations repeatedly raised the alarm that thousands of Ukrainian children were being deported to Russia.



The theft of Ukrainian children is a crime, with the hallmarks of genocide that is unfolding before our eyes.



The exhibition “Stolen. Uprooted” has been prepared within the framework of the “Uprooted – (Hi)Stories of Stolen Children during World War II” project.

It is an educational project implemented in Germany, Poland, Czech Republic and Ukraine, thanks to the support of the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future (EVZ) and the Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF).

Project of the Education Agenda NS-Injustice

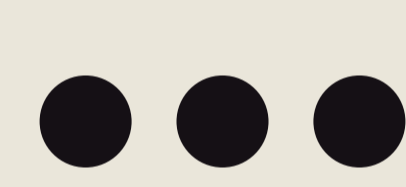
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of the Bundestag

This exhibition does not represent the opinion of the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future (EVZ) or the Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF). The author bears responsibility for any statements contained herein.

The project partners are Kreisau-Initiative e. V. (Germany), Krzyżowa Foundation for Mutual Understanding in Europe (Poland), Post Bellum (Czech Republic) and Tolerspace (Ukraine).



Post Bellum



The exhibition is accompanied by a website www.uprootedchildren.eu

It contains educational materials, historical essays as well as lesson and workshop scenarios that introduce the stories of children from Central and Eastern European countries who were deported to Germany and subjected to Germanisation during World War II.

The website is available in English, German, Polish, Czech and Ukrainian language versions.

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