

UPROOTED

(HI)STORIES OF STOLEN CHILDREN
DURING WORLD WAR II



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Editor
Tomasz Skonieczny

Translation
Owain Davies, Dmytro Kushnir, Lingbart, Stephan von Pohl, Linda Stegmann

Proofreading
Konrad Krämer, Lingbart, Stephan von Pohl

Graphic design and typesetting
Adam Kolenda

On the cover
School visit. Children in the classroom. Source: National Digital Archives (Poland)

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INTRODUCTION

World War II was the most tragic event in the history of the 20th century. Nowadays, over seventy years after it came to end, it would seem that generations of historians have provided us with valuable and, on many occasions, very valuable knowledge about this period. However, the history of World War II also consists of those elements, about which we consciously or almost institutionally forget as a state, and push them towards oblivion, believing that these are not moments to which we want to return nor on which we want to build our identity. No country in Europe can deny this, claiming to be an exception.

However, there are events in the history of each country which have never been the subject of deeper interest on the part of researchers, and thus it is a vain effort to find studies or popularising publications dedicated to them. They have not become a permanent part of the collective memory – i.e. our collective idea of the past. It is not true, however, that these are unknown, undescribed events to which not even a monument or a commemorative plaque has been dedicated. On the contrary, over the seventy years that have passed since the end of the war, they have been referred to and commemorated many times. They have simply never become an integral part

of the stories told about World War II by the next generation, each time anew.

One such unremembered element of World War II is the story of the thousands of children from Central and Eastern Europe who were taken from their parents by the German occupying authorities and handed over to German families and educational institutions. Children who, according to the racist ideology of the leaders of the Third Reich, had good – Aryan – blood, and who, if subjected to Germanisation, could join the ranks of the master race. This criminal practice of the Nazi authorities ended in 1945 with the defeat of Germany in the war, but it had long-term consequences that continue to this day. Despite the efforts made by the authorities of the respective countries, the Allied authorities and the Red Cross, only a few children (it is estimated that it was 10-15%) ever returned to their homeland, to their biological families. Provided, of course, that their parents or relatives survived the war. The vast majority of these children remained with their adoptive German parents. Their birth certificates were falsified and any documents proving their true parentage destroyed. Only a few, as adults, many years after the war, learned the truth about their origins

For many years, the story of the stolen and uprooted children was pushed to the margins of our knowledge and interest in World War II. Over the last decade, the fate of these children has, fortunately, been brought to light in Germany and Poland, thanks in part to the involve-

ment of journalists from both countries, who discovered that many of the stolen children were still alive and ready to share their stories. It was also revealed that there is virtually no public awareness of this issue.

In order to continue this work of popularisation, we would like to offer you this publication, whose aim is to present the history of the stolen children from Central and Eastern Europe. It consists of texts written by authors coming from Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic and Ukraine. They present the policy of the Nazi authorities, the process of capturing and Germanising children and, by showing the fates of particular people, how strong a mark these events left on them. The presentation of these issues from the perspective of authors coming from these four countries is also an opportunity to see how the contemporary memory of these events has been shaped in different ways.

We hope that these texts will become a pretext to (re)address this topic, as well as to reflect on other cases of violation of human rights by the authorities of totalitarian states and undemocratic regimes. The policy of taking children away was neither an invention of the Nazis, nor did this criminal practice end in the 20th century – it is still being carried out even today, for example by Putin's Russia, which, just as the Nazis did in the past, steals Ukrainian children and gives them to Russian families to raise.

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Texts included in this publication are also available in the native tongues of their authors. They can be found on websites of partner organisations of the project:

- Kreisau-Initiative e.V. (Germany) www.kreisau.de
- Krzyżowa Foundation for Mutual Understanding in Europe (Poland) www.krzyzowa.pl
- Post Bellum (Czech Republic) skoly.pametnaroda.cz
- Tolerspace (Ukraine) www.tolerspace.org.ua

Isabel Heinemann

THE FORCED GERMANISATION OF CHILDREN FROM POLAND, THE SOVIET UNION AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE DURING WORLD WAR II – HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, PRACTICE, CONSEQUENCES

During World War II, tens of thousands of children fell victim to the National Socialist policy of forced Germanisation. These children, who as a rule were not German citizens, were torn away from their parents and relatives or removed from children's homes in occupied countries in order to be brought up as Germans in the German Reich. Most of them were from Poland, but some came from the Soviet Union, from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia*, and from Slovenia. It was the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, who bore overall

* *Editor's note:* former Czechoslovakia.

responsibility for this scheme. He himself had come up with the idea; the registration, abduction and forced Germanisation of the children was carried out under the auspices of the relevant SS offices. It represented a major dislocation in the lives of the children affected and was experienced by most of them as an act of extreme violence. They were torn from their families and the lives they had been living and taken from one place to the next until eventually arriving in Germany where, ideally (from a National Socialist perspective), they were to be adopted by a German family that was loyal to the regime. The children who were subject to this process of forced Germanisation were made to learn German and were given German names and new identities – as *ethnic German orphans*, for example – in order to hide their real origins. Decades after the war had finished, many of them were still searching for their original families, trying to recover a central part of who they were. This was an often painful and by no means always successful process.

Forced Germanisation and National Socialist Race Policy

The forced Germanisation of children of *good race* from occupied Poland, Ukraine and Belarus as well as several regions of Southeastern Europe was a central plank in National Socialist race and resettlement policy. It was initially put into practice in occupied Poland

in 1940 and was extended to the occupied parts of the Soviet Union in 1941. The starting point was Heinrich Himmler's notion of taking away the enemy's *racially valuable* children and youth in order to prevent them from developing a new generation of *leadership* material. Himmler described his programme of child abduction and forced Germanisation in particularly vivid terms to SS and police leaders (in German: *SS- und Polizeiführer*, SSPF) in Ukraine in September 1942:

*Our task is to seek out that which is of good race. (...) These children would be a remarkable addition, both in terms of numbers and, above all, in terms of racial quality, to the Russian nation, which at this point has suffered a huge loss of blood. (...) The racially valuable children will be taken from their mothers and brought to Germany, or, if the mothers are of good race and healthy, we will take them too. We will leave the children of poor race behind.**

As head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler had the means at his disposal to put such measures into practice, not only in the occupied Soviet Union but throughout Europe. In addition, at the very start of the war, Hitler had appointed him Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood (in German: *Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*, RKF) with the task of ensuring the Germanisation of the territories occupied by Germany. This was to be

* Heinrich Himmler on *racially desirable* children from the Soviet Union, speech by Himmler on 16.9.1942 to his SS and Police Leaders (*SS- und Polizeiführer – SSPF*) in Russia South. Bundesarchiv (BArch) Berlin, NS 19/4009, p. 178.

achieved through a combination of forced migration and resettlement. In Himmler's *Germanic Europe*, there would only be a place for those who could satisfy the racial standards demanded of the German ethnic community, namely those who had *good blood*. The overwhelming majority of people in the occupied parts of Eastern Europe were to be used as forced labour, resettled to remote regions in the East, or murdered. The murder of the European Jews was regarded as the foundation stone of this *new racial-political order*, but their fate was to be shared by other groups of *undesirables*.

Assessment of an individual's *racial value* was the responsibility of the race experts from the SS Race and Settlement Main Office (in German: *Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt*, RuSHA). Many of those who as children had been forcibly Germanised later recalled the racial examinations and how disturbing they found them. During the early 1930s, SS race experts were already coordinating the racial selection of SS candidates and their wives. In the autumn of 1939, they began to apply their elaborate assessment procedures to *ethnic Germans* from Eastern and Southeastern Europe who were migrating to the Reich and the territory it had occupied. In 1940, the focus of the race experts expanded again to include non-Germans who had been selected to be *Re-Germanised*, and it was this group to which the forcibly Germanised children belonged. A total of 21 anthropological features, including eye colour and the shape of nose and cheek bones, were precisely documented on a *race card*, then reduced to

a *race formula* and processed using modern punch-card technology. By this method, people were sorted into racial categories, numbering I to IV (roughly speaking, from *Nordic* to *ethnically alien*). Anyone who received a positive racial assessment was regarded as having German blood to a greater or lesser degree and was seen as a suitable candidate for “Re-Germanisation”. This verdict, which the SS race experts awarded to only a vanishingly small proportion of people from Poland, the Soviet Union, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and Slovenia, could nevertheless mean deliverance from forced labour, dispossession, forced migration or even murder. For forcibly Germanised children, it meant violent separation from their parents and relatives.

The project of forcibly Germanising children developed by stages. As early as May 1940, Heinrich Himmler, in his infamous *Reflections on the Treatment of Peoples of Alien Races in the East*, a document expressly approved by Hitler, urged that Polish children in the *Generalgouvernement*, the occupied region of Central Poland, be forced to undergo racial assessment and that those of *valuable blood* be sent to German schools in the Reich. This was soon followed by plans to forcibly Germanise Polish children from the annexed regions of Western Poland, particularly in the newly established *Wartheland* administrative division, or *Warthegau*. In June 1941, Himmler instructed the governor of the *Warthegau*, Arthur Greisler, of the need to register small children of particularly good race from Polish families and to have them brought up in *special*, not excessively large nurseries and

children’s homes. After a total of one year, one should think about arranging for such children to be adopted by childless families of good race. Soon afterwards, these plans became official policy. In February 1942, through the notorious Order 67/I, the RKF regulated the *Germanisation of children from Polish families and Polish orphanages*, noting succinctly: *Children recognized as valuable bearers of German blood should be Germanised*. The process of registration began in the *Warthegau*. The SS operated on the assumption that the Poles had systematically Polonized orphans whose parents had been *ethnic Germans*. These children were now to be identified and brought up as German children in SS boarding schools or German foster families:

Children identified through the racial and psychological selection process as being capable of Germanisation will, therefore, be sent between the ages of 6 and 12 years to boarding schools and between the ages of 2 to 6 years to families arranged by the Lebensborn organization.

In practice, this proceeded as follows: Child Welfare Offices reported the children to the Governor of the *Warthegau*, who instructed the Łódź / Litzmannstadt branch of the RuSHA to carry out the racial examination. The SS race experts filtered out those children who were classified as *racially valuable*. Finally, the children were medically examined by representatives of the Health Office and then sent to the regional children’s home in Bruczków / Bruckau in the district

of Gostingen in the *Warthegau*. Following a transitional phase during which the children were observed, forced to learn German and given a Germanised name, the SS *Lebensborn* organization assumed responsibility for them. The younger children were offered for adoption or fosterage to German families who were loyal to the regime; the older ones were sent to National Socialist boarding schools (girls mainly went to the one in Achern and boys to the one in Niederalteich). Not long afterwards, the same procedure was introduced in the administrative division of Danzig-West Prussia and the region of East Upper Silesia.

In the *Warthegau*, in addition to the *Lebensborn* home in Bruczków / Bruckau, there were children's homes in Puszczykowo / Puschkau in the district of Posen and in Kalisz / Kalisch. There was a further one in Pogrzebień / Pogrzebin in Upper Silesia. Many of the forcibly Germanised children who had been born in Poland passed through at least one of these homes, and most of them went to more than one. As a rule, the homes had their own police registration office, which is where the children's names were changed and their new personal documents were forged. This was done with the intention of making it impossible for the children's relatives to find out where they were. The creation of new identities also served to deceive potential foster or adoptive parents about a child's origins. Many of the children who had been in the care of the SS *Lebensborn* organization went to German foster or adoptive families. Historical testimonies make clear that this

was, more often than not, a rather arbitrary process: German couples would come to one of the homes and choose a child, or they could apply for a child to be allocated to them. Sometimes it was childlessness that motivated them, but it could also be the loss of their own child through disease, a fatal accident or death in war.

Child abduction as a Europe-wide phenomenon

However, it wasn't only in the occupied areas of Western Poland that children were removed from their families by force by the SS, examined by race experts and taken to Germany. Systematic child abduction by the SS, which led to the charge of *Kidnapping of Children of Foreign Nationality* in the eighth Subsequent Nuremberg Trial (1947-1948), also took place in the *Generalgouvernement*, in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, in Belarus, in Ukraine, in Slovenia and also, to a lesser extent, in the occupied states of Western Europe. It is difficult to provide exact figures for the number of children abducted; however, the available (fragmentary) documentation would appear to me to allow a reasonably plausible estimate of around 50,000 children in total (20,000 from Poland, 20,000 from the Soviet Union, 10,000 from Southeastern Europe). Official Polish estimates give a figure of 200,000 children who, as a result of the policy of forced Germanisation, were taken from Poland to Germany and the annexed

regions. This total is based on the important investigations done by Roman Hrabar. However, it appears to me to be, on the whole, an overestimate which is not justified by the available figures relating to those children who were taken from Poland and those who were repatriated from Germany after the war.* Another problematic aspect of the official Polish total is that it includes the children of people who were engaged in forced labour.

Another indication of the Europe-wide dimension of organized child abduction for the purpose of forced Germanisation is evidence relating to the listing and selection of supposed *partisan children*. Between 1942 and 1944, in Poland, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and Slovenia, thousands of children belonging to alleged *partisans* were taken by the SS and placed in children's homes in the Reich and with German families. The best-known example of this is the case of the children of Lidice, whose village was destroyed in an act of vengeance following the assassination attempt on Reinhard Heydrich, Reich Protector and Head of the SS Reich Security Main Office. After Heydrich's death in June 1942 from the injuries he sustained during the attack, the SS shot dead the 199 male inhabitants of the village and deported 184 women to the Ravensbrück con-

* According to information from the Polish Red Cross dated 30.06.1950, 3,404 Polish children had by then been repatriated from the Western zones of occupied Germany, 83 were waiting to be repatriated and documentation was in the process of being compiled for 1,440. For figures see R. Hrabar, Z. Tokarz, J. E. Wilczur: *Kinder im Krieg – Krieg gegen Kinder. Die Geschichte der polnischen Kinder 1939-1945*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1981, pp. 241–242, 333–335.

centration camp. Another fate awaited the 98 children, depending on the decision of the SS race profilers: three children were picked out on the spot by officers from the Prague branch of the RuSHA as being *suitable for Germanisation* and seven babies were placed temporarily in a children's home in Prague. 88 girls and boys between the ages of one and 15 years were taken by the SS to Łódź where officers from the local branch of the RuSHA selected seven children for *Re-Germanisation*. They were placed with German foster families via the children's home in Puschkau. The remaining 81 children, who were categorized as *racially undesirable*, were murdered in the Chełmno extermination camp on the orders of the SS. Not long afterwards, a similar fate awaited eleven children from Ležáky, another Bohemian village that was destroyed after the death of Heydrich; there, six children were selected for *Re-Germanisation*.

However, the children of Lidice and Ležáky were not the only *partisan children* who were considered *suitable for Germanisation* and ended up in the hands of the Germans. Between the summer of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, at least 860 children from Lower Styria and Upper Carniola in what is today Slovenia, the offspring of supposed *partisans* who had been shot or imprisoned, were racially selected and then Germanised.

In the *Generalgouvernement*, children, whose parents had been classified as being of *German origin* but had refused to let themselves be

entered in the *Deutsche Volksliste* and thus be recorded as “ethnic Germans”, were also taken away and brought to the Reich. Finally, in the Zamość district, children of *good race*, whose parents had been forced to migrate, murdered, or imprisoned in the Majdanek concentration camp, were taken to Germany. Hitherto, there is evidence pointing to at least 4,500 cases of this sort.

All of this shows that, in *partisan* areas – such as Lidice, Zamość and Slovenia – where the SS, the Wehrmacht and the police engaged in remorseless campaigns of murder and civil repression, the focus was on the children. The SS took them, assessed and sorted them, and sent those who qualified as *racially valuable* to be adopted by German families or to SS boarding schools. Any *undesirables* were murdered or left to their fate.

Investigating life histories – using the Child Search Index of the Child Search Branch of the International Tracing Service (ITS) from the Arolsen Archives

A systematic analysis of the fates of forcibly Germanised children and the motivations of German foster parents is made very difficult by a lack of sources as well as the efforts that were made to conceal the identities of the children, who were mostly very young and unable to remember

very much at all about where they had come from. Until now, it has mainly been individual studies and the accounts of historical eyewitnesses that have provided the basis for understanding this subject.

However, information about the lives and fates of these children can also be found in the files of the Child Search Branch of the International Tracing Service (ITS) in Bad Arolsen, which by now is known as the Arolsen Archives. From 1945 onwards, information about *unaccompanied children of undeclared* nationality in the three western zones of occupied Germany was recorded in the Child Search Index. The ITS’s Child Search Branch was the successor to the Child Tracing Bureau run by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA, 1945-1947) and was itself under the aegis of the International Refugee Organization (IRO, 1947-1951). Its files and indexes are these days open for access in the Arolsen Archives.* The collection comprises more than 55,000 files dealing with a total of around 61,000 unaccompanied non-German children who were found post-1945 in the western occupied zones. Initial studies carried out by my Münster working group have established that they included many victims of forced Germanisation and abduction, alongside the children of Holocaust victims and people subjected to forced labour.

For example, a detailed study by Franziska Thole of 20 children who had been born in Łódź / Litzmannstadt showed that the index of the Child

* <https://digitalcollections.its-arolsen.org/060102..>

Tracing Service did indeed contain a larger number of forcibly Germanised children. Additionally, the files enabled an exact description of the procedure of forced Germanisation to which children from the *Warthegau* were subjected. One important discovery was that, even towards the end of the war, almost all of the children were placed with a German family and only a few were left over in camps and homes, which was a break with the hitherto usual practices of National Socialist Germanisation policy. This is an indication of how seriously the SS and the relevant authorities regarded the *Germanisation* of the children, and also shows that there was a *market* for these handpicked children, *capable of Germanisation*, among German couples and families.

After 1945, a significant number of the children included in this sample wanted to remain with their foster families in Germany, because they were now German-speakers and felt at home with their foster parents. Forced Germanisation showed signs of *success*, then, or perhaps some of the children genuinely had found a caring home. Only four of the children (20% of the sample) were repatriated, although attempts were nevertheless made by Polish relatives to trace eight of them. These figures shed light on the immense difficulties of balancing conflicting interests when working through National Socialist Germanisation policy. The interests of the Polish state with regard to repatriation, the responsibility of the ITS for establishing the fates of those missing in war or the victims of National Socialism, the plans of the international community relating to returning

the victims of forced migration, child welfare, and, finally, the interests of the children affected, their birth parents and relatives, and the foster parents – all of these were often diametrically opposed to each other. The regional Child Welfare Officers of the Child Search Branch acted here as mediators between differing interests in a complex web of attempts to process the consequences of war, action to protect human rights and economic pressures. Each decision to send a child back was only taken after repeated visits by the Child Welfare Officers to the child in question over an extended period of time and, ultimately, was made on an individual basis.

Conclusion

The recollections of those affected, repatriation files and recent research all demonstrate how much the lives of forcibly Germanised children were marked by the loss of their original families, the trauma of time spent in camps, the experience of getting to know what were often even friendly and loving German (foster) families, and the return to a country of origin that was now alien to them. Many of them suffered from a double loss of identity. First, each was robbed of their identity and taken from their original family. Then, after 1945, many experienced the same thing in relation to their acquired German identity and their German adoptive or foster family. Frequently, they began

to feel that they didn't belong anywhere – not in Poland, Ukraine, Slovenia or Czechoslovakia, where their relatives and next of kin had often died as a result of the National Socialist policies of occupation and extermination, but not in Germany either, where they had been brought by force and then forced to leave when they were repatriated after 1945.

Henryk Kowalczyk from Kielce, the son of a Polish forced labourer, who had been born in Dachau in 1940 and grew up there as a *German child* in a German family until he was repatriated to Poland in 1946 put it this way: he had felt all his life *as though I was alone in the world*. Because his parents were dead and no other relatives could be found, his life after repatriation was spent in a children's home. His words can be taken as representative of the feelings of many who experienced forced Germanisation. However, also those who only found out as adults that their German families weren't their only relatives and that they themselves had been the victims of abduction and forced Germanisation experienced deep uncertainty, an often desperate search for their original families, and – as a result of the National Socialist policy of secrecy and concealment – a gap in their own life histories that could not be filled.

Recommended publications:

- M. Brüntrup, *Verbrechen und Erinnerung. Das 'Ausländerkinderpflegeheim' des Volkswagenwerks*, Göttingen 2019
- I. Heinemann: *'Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut'. Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas*, Göttingen 2003
- I. Heinemann, *'Until the Last Drop of Good Blood'. The Kidnaping of 'Racially Valuable' Children and Nazi Racial Policy in Occupied Eastern Europe*, [in:] A. Dirk Moses (ed.), *Genocide and Settler Society. Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian Society*. Oxford / New York 2004, pp. 244–266
- I. Helbing, *Polens verlorene Kinder. Die Suche und Repatriierung verschleppter polnischer Kinder nach 1945*. Dissertation, Faculty of Cultural and Social Sciences, European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder) 2015. <https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-euv/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/290/file/Helbing+Iris.pdf>
- I. Hopfer, *Geraubte Identität. Die gewaltsame 'Eindeutschung' von polnischen Kindern in der NS-Zeit*, Wien 2010
- R. Hrabar, Z. Tokarz J. E. Wilczur, *Kinder im Krieg – Krieg gegen Kinder. Die Geschichte der polnischen Kinder 1939-1945*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1981
- E. Karpińska-Morek, A. Waś-Turecka, M. Sieradzka, *Als wäre ich allein auf der Welt. Der nationalsozialistische Kinderraub im Polen*, Freiburg 2020

- Cz. Madajczyk, *Zamojszczyzna-Sonderlaboratorium SS. Zbiór dokumentów polskich i niemieckich z okresu okupacji hitlerowskiej*. Vol. 1, Warszawa 1979
- *Quellen zur nationalsozialistischen Entnationalisierungspolitik in Slowenien 1941-1945*, Maribor 1980
- D. Schmitz-Köster, *Raubkind. Von der SS nach Deutschland verschleppt*, Freiburg 2018
- G. Schwarze, *Kinder, die nicht zählten. Ostarbeiterinnen und ihre Kinder im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Essen 1997
- J.-D. Steinert, *Deportation und Zwangsarbeit. Polnische und sowjetische Kinder im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland und im besetzten Osteuropa 1939–1945*, Essen 2013

Dorothee Schmitz-Köster

TAKEN AWAY TO BE MADE INTO GERMANS. THE FATE OF CHILDREN ABDUCTED FROM EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE UNDER THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST REGIME

Five children between nine/ months and ten years of age. They lived in Łódź and Rogoźno, in Rogaška Slatina, in Lidice, in Alnova. After their countries had been taken over by German troops, their lives were radically and brutally changed. This was due to self-proclaimed *race specialists* who followed in the wake of the Wehrmacht and subjected the occupied populations to close examination. Even children – Polish, Czech, Ukrainian and Slovenian children – fell into their hands. Among these children were Barbara and Czesław, Erika, Marie and Aleksander.

Łódź / Litzmannstadt 1942

A few days after the Reich Commission for the Consolidation of German Nationhood (in German: Reichskommissariat für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums, RKFDV) had enacted Order 67/I, Barbara was summoned to the local Child Welfare Office (in German: Jugendamt), where she was to undergo an examination. Following the death of her mother and the disappearance of her father, the four-year-old girl had been living with her grandmother in Łódź / Litzmannstadt, the main centre of the National Socialist policy of resettlement and *Germanisation*. After the examination was finished, the grandmother returned home by herself. Her granddaughter had to remain behind.

Children like Barbara were kept under supervision by the Child Welfare Office. The German *race specialists* took advantage of this situation to gain access to them, and it was among orphans, foster children and children born out of marriage that their search for *scattered good blood* began. The colour of hair and eyes, the shape of the skull, and general physical build were supposedly indicators of whether someone was to be categorized as Slavic or *Aryan* – the latter meaning that they were *worthy* enough to be *Germanised*.

Barbara was taken to a transitional children's home where she was examined again, measured and photographed. The experience was beyond her comprehension and left her deeply distressed.

The grandmother managed to find her granddaughter one more time and had a few furtive words with her through the fence. The little girl answered with *ja* rather than *tak*.^{*} Even here, the children were forced to use German, a language they weren't familiar with at all. Any of them who spoke their mother tongue were punished. The process of *Germanisation* had begun.

The next time Barbara's grandmother came to look for her, she was no longer there, and the old woman couldn't find out where she had gone. At a later date, documents became available that enabled Barbara's journey to be reconstructed. At the end of May, she was living in the regional children's home in Bruczków / Bruckau, an *assimilation home*. It was here that her Polish identity was erased: the family name *Gajzler* became *Geisler*, her Polish parents were now ethnic Germans, and, although she had two grandmothers as well as a sister (who wasn't *Germanised*), she was recorded as having no living relatives. In Bruczków / Bruckau, she was also psychologically assessed: the children needed to show by their behaviour that they were suitable for *Germanisation*. Whoever demonstrated obedience and conformity was approved to be sent on to the German Reich. Older children were placed in National Socialist boarding schools, and children under six years of age went to *Lebensborn* homes. The four-year-old Barbara ended up in Bad Polzin / Połczyn-Zdrój, in the *Pommern* home.

^{*} *Editor's note:* this is German and Polish for yes.

Barbara's earliest memories go back to Bad Polzin / Połczyn-Zdrój. She knows that she was there with other children, that they didn't play, didn't laugh, didn't speak. She remembers the beatings given out when one of the children had wet the bed, remembers the injections and how afraid she was of them. Most of all, she remembers waiting for someone to come and take her home.

In September 1942, towards the end of the month, someone actually did come to take Barbara home with them. It was the Rossmanns, a teacher and his wife from Lemgo in North Rhine-Westphalia. Their little girl had died a few months earlier and Barbara was now going to take her place, as Bärbel Rossmann. It wasn't an easy role to step into, but, despite this, Barbara felt at home and well-looked-after. Her foster parents loved and cared for her, their *little German girl*, their *German orphan*, as the *Lebensborn* people took care to assure them. The *Lebensborn* organization was still officially Barbara's guardian.

Five years later, the war had ended, and the foundations of Barbara's sense of identity were shaken for a second time. Around this time, United Nations refugee organizations turned up at the Rossmann home. They were able to establish that Barbara was being looked after well by her foster parents and, therefore, allowed her to stay with them – until they received a tracing request from her Polish grandmother. After that, there was no way that she wasn't going to

be sent back to Poland. Barbara was, by now, ten years old and felt very attached to her foster parents. She couldn't recall ever not having lived with them and could no longer speak Polish. None of this was considered important. Poland wanted its children back, and Barbara had a family back in Poland that wanted to take her in. That was what counted.

Initially, Barbara went to live with an aunt who had learnt a bit of German when she was doing forced labour under the National Socialist regime. However, she missed her old life and felt German. She also became a scapegoat for all the misery that the Poles had endured during the war and the Nazi occupation. After that, Barbara lived with her grandmother for a while, but she later went to live in a children's home of her own accord, because nobody really wanted her.

After ten years and many failed attempts, the Rossmanns finally managed to make contact with their former foster daughter. For Barbara, that marked the start of a life spent between two worlds. The Rossmanns invited her to live with them, but Barbara had long before decided that she was going to be a good Pole. After each visit to Lemgo, she returned to Łódź.

She became a textile designer, married, had two children – and was widowed after eight years of married life. Now she had to deal with everything by herself, which tested her to the limits of endurance.

Forty years after their repatriation, Poles who had been abducted as children by the National Socialists founded the *Zrzeszenie Dzieci Polskich Germanizowanych przez Reżim Hitlerowski* (in Polish: Association of Polish children who were Germanised by the Hitler Regime). Barbara took over the role of Chair, fought for recognition in Polish society and helped others who shared her fate in carrying out research. She left it to others to shed light on her own story – due to a lack of self-esteem, she didn't consider herself worthy of the effort.

Rogoźno 1943

The tragedy that marked the life of Czesław / Klaus can be traced back to 1943, but it took 70 years for the details to come to light.

In 1944, when Eva and Johannes Schäfer came to collect the five-year-old boy from the *Lebensborn* home in Bad Polzin / Połczyn-Zdrój to take him home with them, they told him he was an orphan from Dresden. The story was that his mother had died after giving birth to him and his father had fallen in the war. Klaus B., as he was to be known, accepted this version of events for decades, although he could never quite rid himself of the feeling that something wasn't quite right with it.

From the *Lebensborn* perspective, Eva and Johannes Schäfer were ideal foster parents. He was a high-ranking SS officer and she was a dedicated National Socialist, which was an almost certain guarantee that the boy would receive an appropriate upbringing. And indeed, even after the war was over, the Schäfers made sure that all of their children, both their four birth children and their foster son, were exposed to the ideas in question. They also made sure that Klaus grew up with his faked identity. In 1949, when children living in homes, foster children and adoptive children were registered in the three Western zones of occupied Germany, the Schäfers not only repeated the tale of the orphan from Dresden but also kept quiet about the fact that he had come from the *Lebensborn* home in Bad Polzin / Połczyn-Zdrój.

As far as the German Red Cross was concerned then, they were dealing with a German child, although the International Red Cross pointed out on a number of occasions that Klaus B. was identical with the Polish child Czesław Brzostowski. By chance, as it were, the German Red Cross also managed to misplace several documents that pointed to a Polish identity, so Klaus stayed where he was.

In reality, he was born in 1938 in Rogoźno, a small town in western Poland. His mother, Marta, was unmarried, and she and the baby lived with her parents. In the summer of 1943, the Child Welfare Office instructed Marta to bring her son to be examined in the next town. Afterwards, they returned home together. Not long after that,

she was told to take him to the railway station. The boy's grandfather had a bad feeling about the whole thing and hid his grandson in the attic. The house was searched, and the five-year-old, who couldn't stay still for very long in his hiding place, was found and taken away. The family never saw him again.

First, Czesław was taken to the regional children's home in Kalisz / Kalisch. Later, he was transferred to the *Lebensborn* home in Bad Polzin / Połczyn-Zdrój. It was here, at the latest, that he was given a German first name and family name and a false birthdate.

After the war, his mother and his grandfather got in touch with the Polish Red Cross and made a tracing request, but efforts to find the boy were in vain. Fifteen years later, they tried again, with similar results. This can be attributed to the Schäfers adherence to the lie about the orphan from Dresden and their silence about Klaus' having come from the *Lebensborn* home, as well as a lack of effective cooperation between the various tracing services.

Klaus came to terms with his feeling that something wasn't quite right. At the same time, because he didn't know where he came from himself, he made the radical decision to never have any children.

It wasn't until a few years ago, when a journalist afforded to research his story, that he finally decided he wanted to know what had happened.

Shortly afterwards, a file was found in the Arolsen Archives that proved beyond all doubt that Klaus B. was originally Czesław Brzostowski. And that wasn't all. The file also contained the two tracing requests that the Polish family had made. The Polish Red Cross used these as a starting point for finding any surviving relatives – and found three half siblings, who had known even as children that they had a brother who had been *taken away by the Germans*. This was their careful choice of words to describe his abduction.

Since then, Klaus' two sisters have visited him in Germany. For his part, he has chosen not to undertake the journey to Poland, for fear that a visit to the grave of his mother might prove to be emotionally overwhelming. The repressed trauma might be released. These days, however, he often signs his letters *Klaus / Czesław*.

Rogaška Slatina 1942

As far back as she can remember, Ingrid has known that was originally called Erika, Erika Matko. That's the name on a vaccination certificate, which was the only document that was given to her foster parents in 1944 as they collected the *ethnic German* girl from the *Lebensborn* home in Kohren-Sahlis in Saxony. Erika Matko, born on 11 November 1941 in Sankt Sauerbrunn, is what it says.

Erika Matko was renamed Ingrid von Oelhafen by her foster parents. She was a child who was often in the way and got shoved around a lot. For many years, she lived in a boarding school, then with her father, and eventually with her mother. She constantly sought affection and conformed to the expectations of others. Although she had originally had other ideas about her future career, she became a physiotherapist, as her mother wished, and eventually took over her mother's practice. Later, she followed her own path and devoted herself to children who needed therapeutic help. She didn't have any children herself.

Now and again, she made an attempt to find out who her biological parents were, but this never brought anything, and she gave up quickly. Shortly before her sixtieth birthday, things finally began to happen. The Red Cross contacted her to ask whether she was still trying to trace her parents. They knew a historian who could help her with her enquiries. He, in turn, informed Ingrid that she was originally from Slovenia, from Rogaška Slatina, which was known as Sankt Sauerbrunn during the German occupation. On top of that, she found out that she was a *bandit child*.

Bandits was the name that the National Socialists had given to the partisans who had fought against the occupation of their country and who had been brutally persecuted for doing so. This often led to the population of whole villages and towns being destroyed: the men

were shot dead, the women were taken to concentration camps, and the children were brought to processing camps, where they were *racially* screened and certified. Children in *race categories* I and II were taken by the *Lebensborn* organization, whereas those in categories III and IV became the responsibility of the Coordination Centre for Ethnic Germans.

Rogaška Slatina was among the places that had been subjected to punitive action by the National Socialists, as a result of which Erika, who was only nine months old at the time, had ended up in the hands of the German occupiers. First, she and other children were transported to Frohnleiten in Styria, Austria. After that, they were taken to Werdenfels in Bavaria, and finally to Kohren-Sahlis in Saxony, to the *Lebensborn* children's home.

This journey and the whole selection process had been described by witnesses at the Nuremberg Trial against the SS Race and Settlement Main Office (1947-1948) – during which the name Erika Matko was also mentioned. As a result of this, it was included on the list of Slovenian children who had been abducted and taken to Germany.

Now Ingrid knew where and how to continue her search. She wrote to Rogaška Slatina with a request for papers – and learnt, to her great dismay, that there was already an Erika Matko living there, who had the same birthdate as her. She was shocked. The only certainty that

she had had up to that point no longer seemed so solid. She travelled to Rogaška Slatina and met the other Erika's relatives – or were they her relatives? The other Erika refused any sort of contact with her and was not prepared to do a gene test. However, some other members of the family proved samples of saliva. The result turned out positively for Ingrid. She had found her people – and they were big-hearted people. They welcomed her into the family. Now they had two Erikas, Erika 1 and Erika 2.

Since then, Ingrid travels regularly to Slovenia, is trying to learn Slovenian, and meets up with other former abducted children who had suffered a similar fate but returned to Slovenia after the war. However, there's one question that keeps nagging her. Why didn't her parents look for her? Hadn't they noticed that they were bringing up the *wrong* child?

Not long ago, Ingrid received an initial answer to this question: her mother knew that the other Erika was the *wrong* child. But she had accepted this child. Why?

Lidice 1942

Marie was also the victim of a *reprisal operation*. She was ten years old at the beginning of June 1942 when Lidice, the Czech village she

came from, was razed to the ground. She was old enough at the time to be able to remember this – and to relate what happened to her, to the other children and to the adults.

On 27 May 1942, Czech resistance fighters made an assassination attempt on Reinhard Heydrich, Head of the Reich Security Main Office and Acting Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. A few days later, he was dead. On 9 June, men from the Gestapo, SS intelligence and the Reich police marched towards the villages of Lidice and Ležáky, which had supposedly been harbouring resistance fighters. The Germans rounded up the locals, shot the men – including Marie's father – dead, and took the women and children to the school in Kladno. Three days later, the women – including Marie's mother and grandmother – were transported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. In the meantime, the children were subjected to *racial* assessment. Each child had their result noted on a piece of paper which was then hung around their neck. After that, they were taken to a factory in Łódź / Litzmannstadt.

Marie remembered that they had to sleep on the floor in their clothes, without any sort of mattress or blanket, that they were hungry, that they got lice. There were 88 children in all. The youngest was 13 months old. The oldest was 15. After two weeks, men came and went around inspecting the children. Six girls and one boy were picked out and brought to another camp. Marie was one of them – even though

she didn't even have blonde hair. The men sent the remaining 81 children to the camp in Chełmno / Kulmhof – to the gas, to their deaths.

In the new camp, Marie was given a straw mattress, a blanket and new clothes, and she could have a shower as well. A short time later, her journey continued – to the *assimilation home* in Pastuchów / Puschkau. Here, Marie attended school and had to learn German. Every time she used a Czech word, she was hit around the head – so she began to forget her mother tongue. What she didn't forget, however, was that she was Czech, that she came from Lidice – and that she was Marie.

One year after the tragedy, as Marie always calls it, she went to live with the Schillers, a childless married couple from Poznań / Posen. After that, Marie Doležalová was known as Ingeborg Schiller. Her birthplace was supposedly unknown – and her parents were supposedly dead. Marie didn't know what had really happened to them.

Marie remembered that the Schillers were good to her and that they liked her. After the war, however, she couldn't talk about it. People around couldn't conceive of the possibility that Germans had treated her well.

Although the Schillers fled with Marie to the West to escape from the advancing Red Army, she was found in her new home. A member

of staff from the children's home had remembered the names of the foster families, and the children from Lidice knew about each other. In 1946, then, Marie was able to return home.

But what and where was her home? The village of Lidice no longer existed. It had been totally destroyed. Her father was dead. Her grandmother was dead. Nobody knew what had happened to her brother. Her mother, however, had survived, although she was seriously ill. Marie visited her a few times in the hospital, but after four months Alžběta Doležalová also died. After that, Marie lived with one of her aunts.

During the Nuremberg Trial against the SS Race and Settlement Main Office, Marie was one of the three witnesses from Lidice. By then, she was 15 years of age, and – although the trial was very stressful for her – she fell in love with her interpreter during this time.

Marie remembered that he was a Czech, a good-looking young man. Of course, it remained purely platonic.

In 1955, a new Lidice was built near the site of the old village. Marie returned as a married woman who was expecting a child. She just wanted to go home. And she stayed home, in Lidice, for the rest of her life. Until her death, in 2021, she was active as an historical eyewitness.

Alnova, probably 1942

Re.: Alexander Litau or Folker Heinecke

That was how Emilie Edelmann began her letter replying to the International Tracing Service (ITS), Child Search Branch in September 1950. The ITS had requested information about the boy with two names, born *on 17.10.1940 in Oderberg or Alnova, Crimea.*

Emilie Edelmann wrote:

As a former Lebensborn employee, I can recall that Alexander Litau was brought from the regional children's home in Posen to the Lebensborn home in Kohren-Sahlis, from where he was transferred to foster care at the end of May 1943. I can no longer remember individual details concerning original families. In particular, I never received any information about the parents or mothers of these children. Additionally, according to my supervisors at the time, they were supposedly orphans, and the sparse documentation that the Lebensborn organization initially received relating to the children allowed no conclusions to be drawn in relation to this.

The *Lebensborn* organization had assumed responsibility for the *administration* of the child abduction programme, due to its experience in matters of secrecy and forging identities. Emilie Edelmann was one of the *admin-*

istrators, and, although she supposedly had only brief contact with the children from the East, she was still able to remember the names, dates and locations of the boys and girls years later.

In the case of Aleksander Litau, however, she could remember very little: two names, one Ukrainian, one German; two locations: the children's home in Poznań / Posen, the *Lebensborn* home in Kohren-Sahlis; one date: the end of May 1943, when the boy went to his German foster parents.

By the time they contacted her, the ITS had long been in possession of rather more information than they got from Emilie Edelman herself: that Aleksander Litau had been fostered by the Heineckes, a childless couple from Hamburg; that they adopted him in 1944; that his father had apparently been a member of the SS and his mother an *Arbeitsmädchen*, a young woman who did compulsory labour service for the National Socialist state, and that he had been born in Bohumín / Oderberg in Upper Silesia.

Our Folker is a German boy, as you can see from his behaviour and his appearance, insisted Minna Heinecke repeatedly, even after the war was over.

In fact, the ITS also had other information. It knew that Aleksander was connected with two different birthplaces – Bohumín / Oderberg, and Alnova on the Crimean Peninsula. It knew that the boy had come

to Kohren-Sahlis from the *Lebensborn* home in Bad Polzin / Połczyn-Zdrój – not from Poznań / Posen, as Emilie Edelman had thought. And it knew how to interpret these facts: Aleksander Litau had probably been abducted as a child – from Ukraine. The ITS did not know any more than that – and, to this day, neither does Folker Heinecke.

His adoptive parents had never spoken *about his business* – and he had never dared to ask. It was only after their deaths that he found among their possessions documents and correspondence *about his business*, as he puts it. They didn't include any indication of his origins or his parents. His own investigations brought more documents to light – for example, the file that the ITS had compiled about him after the war, which was where the letter from Edelman was to be found. However, even a journey to the Crimean Peninsula, which he undertook in the company of a reporter, proved ultimately fruitless. He learned that over 200 Litaus lived there, but he didn't find any clues to possible relatives. Nevertheless, he was confident that he was in the right place: *I thought, man, this is your home patch. You come from Crimea, you were born on the Crimean Peninsula. It was a feeling that I couldn't describe to anybody else...*

And his own memories? At the time, he was only two, maybe two and a half years old. He can vaguely recall a room in Kohren-Sahlis, in the *Lebensborn* children's home. *Brown benches on the left side and the right*. He knows that much. Presumably this image left an impression because it was there that he met his foster parents for

the first time. It remains an open question whether he really remembers this or whether he actually picked it up from hearing stories told by his adoptive parents.

The children – there were about twenty or thirty of us – sat on the left, and my parents came through the hallway and sat on the right and decided which child they wanted to take with them... And I jumped up and took the initiative – the others were all sitting down – and I went over to my father and put my head on his knee. And my father said to Minna straight away, we'll take this one, he'll fit in well with us.

What he undoubtedly genuinely remembers is the *lovely warm feeling* as he laid his head on the knee of the man who was to become his adoptive father.

Later, when Aleksander Litau became Folker Heinecke, it worked out well for him. His parents were very fond of him – and they could offer him a comfortable life. After their deaths, he inherited their shipping company, which made him a wealthy man. Up to the present day, however, he has been troubled by the missing part of his life.

Everything is fundamentally lacking, because I don't know who my birth parents were or anything about where I really come from. That creates a certain instability. And it can consume you – but you can't let it come to that.

Anna Malinowska

“GOOD BLOOD”: LEBENSBORN AND THE THEFT OF “RACIALLY VALUABLE” CHILDREN.

After Adolf Hitler’s rise to power, and with the start of the 3rd Reich, it became clear that the ideological theses of national socialism related to, among other things, the purity and superiority of the Nordic race could be put into practice. Previously, in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had claimed that failure to appreciate racial rights prevented the victorious march of the best race and nullified human progress, by reducing it to the level of a defenceless animal. The German Reich was to embrace as a state the German people as a whole, not only preserving in this nation all the most racially valuable elements, but also bringing it gradually to a sovereign position. Hitler saw only one way to guarantee the nation’s permanence, power and development - strict observance of racial rights. He believed that a nation that ignores these rights faced inevitable extinction.

A national state was obliged to put the problem of race at the centre of social life, take care of its purity, and consider a child to be the most precious asset of the nation.

One man completely obsessed with racial theories and the idea of *good blood* was Heinrich Himmler, one of the most powerful people in the 3rd Reich, head of the SS, the Gestapo, the German police and minister of interior affairs. Even before Hitler came to power, he decreed that SS members had to be given permission to marry, thus controlling racial selection. In 1934, he wrote the following to the SS commanders: *We would all fight in vain, if we do not complement the military victory with the victory of the birth of good blood.*

Himmler claimed that giving birth to children is not someone’s private business, but a duty to the ancestors and the nation. Himmler’s recommendation for couples who could not have children was as follows: *Each SS commander should adopt a racially or genetically valuable child and bring it up in the spirit of National Socialism.*

In 1935, Himmler established an institution called *Lebensborn* (in German: *source of life*). Officially, this was a charitable organisation whose aim was to help unmarried mothers and their illegitimate children. The large number of abortions in Germany (performed clandestinely because the law forbade it) and of children born out of wedlock were not insignificant for the circumstances of its establishment.

In the 1930s, a single lady with child was still an example of immoral conduct and was condemned to social ostracism. *Lebensborn* was supposed to give single mothers the possibility to avoid such disgrace. Quietly and secretly a woman could deliver a fully-fledged Aryan child that was supposed to serve the Führer loyally, being exposed to adequate indoctrination by new parents. Obviously, only a racially suitable woman could take advantage of the discreet services of *Lebensborn*. Also, the issue whether the father met the Aryan requirements was subject to verification. In this context, membership in the SS and NSDAP as well as a National Socialist worldview were not insignificant.

Not long after its establishment, *Lebensborn* started to open special centres, e.g. in Hochland near Munich, Harz in Wernigerode, Kurmak in Klosterheide and Pommern in Bad Polzin (currently Połczyn-Zdrój) for pregnant women. At first glance they looked like well-equipped sanatoriums or maternity homes with highly trained personnel. The residents of such institutions belonged to a kind of ideological community. They listened to the radio together - mainly Hitler's and Goebbels' speeches, they sang national songs together, lectures, which were supposed to *raise young mothers into good, national socialists*, were organised especially for them. In all *Lebensborn* homes, there were obligatory lectures which touched upon the subject of race and its nurturing, population policy, the study of family ties and the SS as a national community.

Working women were dominant among the *Lebensborn* patients; secretaries, typists, accountants, office workers, shop assistants. The fathers of the children had a higher education, in the majority of cases they usually occupied managerial positions or were scientists.

One of the most important events was the ceremony of naming the newborn child. In fact it was a secularised form of Christian baptism. On this occasion the child was placed under the care of the SS *family community*. Under a bust of Hitler, rows of chairs were arranged on which mothers with children, residents, staff and SS men sat. Music played, the master of the ceremony asked questions to the mother and the godfather from the SS, just like a priest in church. Sometimes Himmler himself was the godfather. At the culminating point, a dagger was placed on the child's body. A special speech was also made, recalling, among other things the words of the Führer that with the delivery of a child to the nation, each woman wins a battle for the nation's life.

Children born in *Lebensborn* centres were placed with foster or adoptive families. However, there were situations that mothers took these children with them after a certain time. They would leave for a different town, find a job and stability in life and could take care of their children while no one knew that they were born out of wedlock.

What more could a woman wish for? Having to choose between an abortion that was illegal in the 3rd Reich or a life in condemnation?

Himmler, the founder of *Lebensborn*, was proud of his creation. But honestly, it must be admitted that he was not driven so much by his concern for the women who found themselves in difficult life situations. For Himmler, *Lebensborn* had a military and political significance. It was this institution that was to provide the Wehrmacht with a regular supply of soldiers. It was to produce blue-eyed blondes - one hundred percent devoted citizens of a new, better world.

After the onset of the war, *Lebensborn* became active in occupied countries. The children of *good blood* were to be produced there too. *Lebensborn* initiated organised Germanisation in Romania; the organisation established centres in Norway where children who were born from relationships between Norwegian women and German soldiers started to be delivered. The situation was also similar in Belgium, the Netherlands and France. Also children from Lidice in Czech Republic had gone through racial selection before the Germans razed the town to the ground.

The tentacles of *Lebensborn*, with its other, criminal face, did not spare Poland either.

* * *

As early as 25 November 1939, Himmler received a report prepared by the Racial-Political Office of NSDAP regarding the former Polish territories incorporated into the German Reich.

A considerable part of the racially valuable groups of the Polish people, who, on account of national reasons are not suitable for Germanisation, will have to be deported to the rest of Poland. But here it has to be tried to exclude racially valuable children from resettlement and to educate them in suitable educational institutions. (...) The children suitable for this are not to be over 8 to 10 years of age because, as a rule, a genuine ethnic transformation, that is, a final Germanisation, is possible only up to this age. The first condition for this is a complete prevention of all connections with their Polish relatives. The children receive German names which etymologically are of accentuated Teutonic origin. Their descendant certificate will be kept by a special department. All racially valuable children whose parents died during the war or later will be taken over in German orphanages without any special regulation. For this reason a decree prohibiting the adoption of such children by Poles is to be issued.

The campaign to Germanise the children from foreign nations became the apple of Himmler's eye.

Any good blood - and this is the first principle you need to learn - that you find somewhere in the east, you can either conquer or destroy (...) Whenever you happen to find good blood, you must obtain it for Germany or you have to make sure that it will no longer exist. Under no circumstances must it be on the side of our enemies - said Himmler in his speech to higher SS officers on 16 September 1942.

One year later, in his speech about Slavic nations in Bad Schachen Himmler emphasised:

Obviously in such a mixture of peoples there will always be some racially good types. Therefore, I think that it is our duty to take their children with us, to remove them from their environment, if necessary by robbing or stealing them. Either we win over any good blood that we can use for ourselves and give it a place in our people or - Gentlemen - you may call it cruelty, but nature is cruel - we destroy this blood. We cannot justify to our sons and descendants leaving this blood on the other side.

How was it possible to recognise if a child *is suitable*, has *good blood* in them? For this purpose, the Nazis conducted racial tests. What did this look like in Poland?

In Silesia, testing was not necessary because the local population was considered to be made up of ethnic Germans. In the so-called *Wartheland* and *Pomerania*, racial selection took place. Children were sought in child care facilities and foster families. In the General Government, the activity was targeted, above all, towards children from families of German origin, who had not declared themselves to be as *Volksdeutsche*, and towards children of executed hostages.

To put it simply, the procedure covered the following categories:

- Children of parents who resisted Germanisation. This referred mainly to people of German descent.
- Children from mixed-nationality marriages. In the areas annexed to the Reich, the Kashubians, Silesians and Mazurians were also considered non-Poles. Mixed marriages remained under constant surveillance, because they did not guarantee the raising of a child in the German spirit. If any deficiencies were found, the child could be taken away.
- Children from divorced mixed marriages. If a divorce or annulment of marriage was pronounced, the Polish parent was always deprived of the right of custody. Also in the case of previously granted divorces, a review was carried out and custody was awarded to the German parent.
- Children staying in child care facilities. This was the easiest way to obtain racially valuable children. Officers could simply walk in and pick out children they considered suitable.
- Children staying in foster families. The procedure for collection was relatively simple. In order not to cause distress to the families, they had to be informed that the children would be placed in boarding schools or rest facilities. Children were not to be taken away from those foster parents who were suitable for Germanisation.

- Children under the custody of Polish guardians.
- Children of deported, murdered or displaced parents. Of course the racial criterion was important, however, in these cases, also the very circumstances of the orphanage of the children and the concern that they may take revenge for the death of their parents were taken into account.
- Children in camps. In 1942, plans were drawn up to establish a concentration camp for minors in Łódź on Przemysłowa Street, with a branch in Dzeirzążnia. There were about one thousand people in the camp on average. Children were taken to the camp, without any other criteria, as *juvenile criminals*. In Silesia, in turn, a network of Polenlagers was created - these were the camps for the Polish population. These camps were intended for displaced people who were supposed to make room for German resettlers. Children and adolescents made up a sizeable proportion of people in the camps, therefore, the camps were visited by racial expert committees.
- Children born in Germany or taken away in Germany. Until 1943 the Germans did not take any decisions regarding pregnant female workers. After 1943, they were allowed to have abortions. Especially when the father of the child was not of German origin. However, as war losses were becoming greater and greater, the Ger-

mans decided to take away children delivered by the workers and raise them as German children.

- Children deported for work. Tens of thousands of children and adolescents were deported to Germany during the war. The deportation was supposed to allow the much needed labour force to be obtained, at the same time it was supposed to enable the assimilation of racially valuable individuals by the German nation.
- Children taken away on the basis of special orders. During the displacement action in the Zamość region, racially valuable children came under the care of *Lebensborn*. As part of special actions, children from schools in, e.g. in Lviv, Radom or Tomaszów Mazowiecki were also deported.

In addition to this, there were situations that children were simply stolen from their homes, if they caught the eye of someone because they appeared to be racially valuable.

Racial studies were conducted by “experts” who completed special forms. The size and shape of the respective body parts as well as the colour of hair and eyes were specified accurately in them. Photographs of the given child were attached to these forms in three poses. Medical and psychological examinations were carried out. A child was not subjected to Germanisation if it showed signs of any

mental problems even if it did have blonde hair and blue eyes. Then, the children were placed in *Lebensborn* centres or, if they were older, in those which housed members of the Hitlerjugend organisation - in the case of boys, and Bund Deutscher Mädel in the case of girls.

The children were given a new identity. And so Karwinowski would become Karpers, Mikołajczyk - Micker, and Sosnowska - Sosemann. Just to keep the first syllables and help the child to learn its new name more quickly. It was not always possible and some names were translated into German: Olejnik - Oelmann, Młynarczyk - Mueller, Ogrodowczyk - Gaertner. If, on the other hand, the child bore a name which sounded Slavic, it was given a typical German name. Cieślak - Schueller, Rzamiak - Kramer, Czestawski - Zallinger.

In order to conceal a child's past even more, fake birth certificates were drawn up for it, which included false data related to birth dates and places. How did this look in practice?

Basia Gajzler born in Gdynia on 1 February 1938 became an orphan right at the beginning of the German occupation. The girl's mother died of a heart attack in the first days of the war. Her father died during the September campaign. The rest of her family from Gdynia was displaced. Basia and her grandma arrived in Łódź. In February 1942, the grandmother received a call from Jugendamt. She was due

to appear there with her four-year-old granddaughter to undergo an examination. The Committee took an interest in the petite blonde. The grandmother was told that the child had to be kept for further examinations. She returned home alone. She did not see her granddaughter again for quite some time. Basia Gajzler was taken to an orphanage at Przędzalniana Street in Łódź and some time later was sent to the *Lebensborn* centre in Bad Polzin.

Just as was the case with other children, Basia's name and surname were changed. She became Bärbel Geisler. The nannies in the centre only talked to the children in German. If the children tried to communicate with each other in Polish, they were punished. They were brought up with a firm hand and beaten for every minor offence.

In September 1942, the centre was visited by Wilhelm Rossmann. He wanted to adopt a child. Before that, he and his wife had lost their 9-year-old daughter, who had fallen ill and died. Their two adult sons served on the front and the Rossmanns decided to take a child to bring it up. This is how Bärbel came to their house in Lemgo, Rhineland.

The girl quickly acclimatised. The Rossmanns treated her like their own daughter - they cuddled her and pampered her, but could reprimand her or rebuke her when needed. Bärbel learned German perfectly, and forgot words in Polish completely. At the beginning of 1948, when the girl was 10 years old, she was repatriated to Poland. She found

out that her real grandmother had been waiting for her and her name was Barbara Gajzler, and not Bärbel Rossmann.

The life of Alojzy Twardecki tells a similar story. With the difference that Basia, who returned home to her grandmother, eventually ended up in a children's home in Łódź. Alojzy's longing, loving mother was waiting for him in Poland.

Alojzy from Rogoźno Wielkopolskie became Alfred Hartmann. His first childhood memory was of a centre where children played soldiers and listened enthusiastically to the Führer's speeches from a radio loud-speaker. Every child dreamt of having a daddy who was an officer. Preferably from the SS or Luftwaffe.

Aloysius/Alfred's dream was not fulfilled because Theodor Binderberger, director of the Koblenz Employment Office, took him from the centre. However, the five-year-old's disappointment burst like a soap bubble. He found himself in a loving, well-off family living in a large, comfortable house. Theodor's wife worked for the Luftwaffe and was the head of the leave section for officers. Also the new grandparents of the boy, who adored him, lived with the new parents.

The Binderbergers' peaceful life was disrupted by a letter that arrived from Poland in 1949. It was written by Małgorzata Ratajczak, the true mother of the child. After many perturbations, Alojzy returned to

Poland only after the year 1953, when he was fifteen years old. The mother would never have found her son, had it not been for the fact that he was taken away by the Germans together with his cousin, who was ten years old at that time and simply remembered and understood more. The cousin had been sent to the Hitlerjugend camp in Austria, but he knew that the Germans had changed Alojzy's details and named him Alfred Hartmann. The boy managed to return from Austria and tell Małgorzata that she had to look for her son under a different identity.

The example of the Witaszek family shows that the Germans obtained the racially valuable children of their enemies. Halina and Franciszek who lived in Poznan had five children. During the occupation, Franciszek got involved in conspiratorial activities. He became the commander of the Union of Retaliation (an organisation which was part of the Union of Armed Struggle, and then the Home Army). In April 1942, he was arrested and then executed. Also his wife, Halina was detained. She had previously managed to hide her children: the three older ones with her brother, and the two youngest daughters - three-year-old Daria and two-year-old Alodia - with relatives in Poznań. However, it was not possible to protect the two girls from the interest of the Germans. They were sent to the Office for Racial Matters for testing. The "experts" there judged them to be examples of a truly Nordic race. They were transported to the centre in Bad Polzin, i.e. Połczyn Zdrój.

Alodia Witaszek was named Alice Wittke, and Daria - Dora Wittke. Alodia was adopted first, in January 1944. The girl was taken to the home of the Dahl couple from Stendar nearby Berlin. Luise Dahl worked as a secretary, her husband Wilhelm was staying in France, in a prisoner-of-war camp. The German “mutti” treated Alice like a little princess. She cuddled her, sewed her dresses, and signed her up for swimming pool and ballet classes.

Daria, in turn, was taken by the family of Edmund Schoeln from Weitra in Austria. The Schoelns were simple people. He was a room painter and served in the army, and his wife took care of the house. The girl remembered her German mother - *mutti* - as a quiet and kind woman. She had toys at home, and her grandfather made her a wooden cradle and a pram.

In Autumn 1947, both girls learned that they had to go to Poland and that their *muttis* were not their real mothers. In Poland, their real mother, Halina Witaszek, who had survived a concentration camp, was waiting for her daughters completely crazed with fear and longing,

Janusz Bukorzycki was taken away from his legal guardians. He was abandoned on one of the streets in Łódź as a few-week-old baby. Some passers-by found a bundle with the baby. There was a sheet of paper found with the baby. *Janusz Bukorzycki born on 3 May 1933*. The child was taken to an orphanage in Łódź, from which he was taken by Anna

and Józef Konieczni two years later. During the occupation, the boy’s guardians received a call to subject Janusz to medical examinations. After they were performed, the opinion was given that he was fit to be a German. Janusz Bukorzycki ceased to be Janusz Bukorzycki in order to become Johann Buchner. But the boy was now already ten years old and was aware that this was not true. He ended up in an orphanage in Oberweis, Austria. Children from this place were taken up for adoption, but no family was interested in Janusz. Therefore, he was transferred to a centre for boys, in which all of them were members of Hitlerjugend. The boys practiced shooting guns, took part in marches and were supposed to work on their physical fitness. On 8 May 1945, the day on which the unconditional capitulation of the 3rd Reich was signed, the German guardians did not turn up in the centre, abandoning their dependants. After some time Janusz returned to his home in Łódź.

* * *

Contrary to official instructions, *Lebensborn* also claimed older children. However, these, unlike Barbara, Alojzy or Alodia, to name a few, did not find new German families that would love them.

Twelve-year-old Barbara Mikołajczyk lived with her mother in Łódź. Her father was deported to work in a forced labour camp. In 1942 her mother received a letter declaring that she was to appear with her daughter for an examination. The “experts” praised the pretty nose

and blue eyes of the 12-year-old. They ordered her to pull up her skirt in order to check whether her spine was crooked. After the proper qualification Barbara did not return home. Here is what she testified as a witness during the Nuremberg trial, in which functionaries of *Lebensborn* were tried:

We were brought to Heimschule in Achern-Baden. We stayed there for about one year. We had to be members of BDM (Bund Deutscher Mädel), wear uniforms and greet each other "Heil Hitler". We were banned from speaking Polish and teachers beat us when they had found out that we had spoken this language. We were told that we were Germans and that we were to forget that Poland existed. We were taken from Achern-Baden to some camp in Salzburg. There, we stayed for about two months, and also there, we received our new names. I was named Barbara Micker and placed in a German family. I was told to call them father and mother. However, I could not do so. I tried to get in touch with my family in Poland, which was not allowed, unfortunately - she testified, adding that the German family knew she was a Polish child.

Alina Antczak, another girl coming from Łódź, also testified during the Nuremberg trial.

I stayed in the centre in Achern-Baden for about a year, I had to be a member of BDM and wear a uniform. I once saw Himmler, who

visited our establishment. In general, various SS and Lebensborn leaders visited us. After leaving the centre I was told that my name was Hilda Anziger. Then, I was placed in the Mehnert family in Peter-shein. It was August 1943. The German family did not have any children. I was ordered to call them "father" and "mother". However, I could not call them this way and just referred to them as "aunt" and "uncle". When my male guardian died, I had to work harder. The female guardian often shouted at me, beat me and called me "you, Polish swine" in anger - said Alina before the court.

According to her account, there were also other little Polish girls who lived with German families in this area. One of them, with whom she became friends, died. *There were many children in that family, she had to work hard. It was a farm. One day she caught a cold and after the illness she died - Alina testified.*

It was common practice for children to be taken away from Polish forced labourers. Very often, their children never found or got to know their mothers after the war.

That was the case with Renata Juras, who was born in December 1944 in the maternity home at Hindenburgstrasse 59 in Augsburg, in south-western Bavaria. She was born to Stefania Juras, a forced labourer-weaver at the Aura weaving mill at Kazböckstrasse 4 in Augsburg. The father of the child was a German soldier, Herbert Sarch.

Before the outbreak of the war, her mother lived in the town of Jezierzany, in the Borszczów district, in the territory which now belongs to Ukraine. In September 1939, she escaped to Lviv. There she started to work in Cafe Lewandowski. In April 1944 she was deported to Germany. At that time she must have already been pregnant. After her birth, Renata was most probably taken to the Hochland centre near Munich, 100 km from Augsburg. In June 1947, the girl was delivered from Germany to Katowice, together with a transport of other children. There she was placed in an orphanage from which she was taken by a married couple, the Herwicks.

Herbert Scharch died in Poland, near Pszów. He was also buried there. The last trace of Stefania Juras comes from June 1949. It is known that she was in Italy at that time and that she applied to leave for Argentina. It is not known whether she ended up there or what happened to her.

* * *

Some of the abducted children never found out about their true Polish identity or they discovered this truth years later, as adults.

After entering the territory of the Third Reich, the Allies began to realise with time that there were children in local orphanages or farms, who could not be identified or who came from occupied countries.

The search for them began along with their repatriation. They also started to come across documents related to *Lebensborn*. Unfortunately, these documents were incomplete, therefore we will never be able to learn about many of the activities related to the Germanisation of Polish children.

As early as at the end of war, the employees of the organisation themselves started to destroy the documents. The occupying forces were not very careful with them either. Most of the materials were collected at the *Lebensborn's* Registry Office in Munich. After the Allied forces had entered Germany, they were packed into six boxes and loaded onto a truck. It is not known where they were transported. It is known however, that a few months after the capitulation, the truck was stopped on the road by an American unit under the command of Captain Kaufman. After checking the cargo, the captain ordered the documents to be thrown into the river. It can be presumed that the papers did not represent any value to him. This careless decision of the American captain Kaufman came to light thanks to Yugoslavian officers, who were accredited in the American zone. They noticed floating documents in the river. They fished some of them out. When they realised that the documents contain Slavic names and surnames of children, they alerted the occupation authorities.

Roman Hrabar, the plenipotentiary of the Polish government responsible for child recovery was one of the first people in Poland who

investigated the criminal activity of the *Lebensborn*. He estimated that the Germans had seized over 200,000 Polish children. After the war, 30,000 children from this group were successfully found. We do not know anything about the fates of the other children. We can only assume that the majority never learned the truth about their origins. They never regained their identity.

Those who were recovered and transported back to Poland not only had to learn their true identity. It was not just a matter of a name, a surname or words in a language that was foreign to them at the time. They had to get to know and learn their new relatives, being aware that the German families were not their true families. The fate of the Germanised children was very different. Not all of them had loving relatives waiting for them in Poland. Some of them ended up in orphanages. Years later, as adults they tried to find their true parents. Sometimes they succeeded, but it did not look like a family reunion with a happy ending in all cases. Sometimes, both the children and the parents imagined each other differently which gave rise to disappointment. Sometimes it turned out that two complete strangers came together, unable to get to know each other or to communicate. There was no way to make up for those long years of separation.

A lot of the children abducted by *Lebensborn* never got to know their true mothers or fathers, because, sadly, those parents did not survive the war. There were also cases when bureaucracy failed and

the children transported to Poland never learned their real names and surnames, and thus their roots.

The *Lebensborn* crime is physically bloodless, but it left its mark on the psyche of its victims. For many children abducted by the Nazis, the war did not end with the capitulation of Germany in 1945. It took them years to learn a new life, to search for the truth about themselves and their loved ones. The extent to which these children were harmed is most evidenced by the fact that deprivation of national identity was recognised by the UN General Assembly as a crime of genocide, which is not subject to a statute of limitations.

Katarzyna Kaczorowska

MOSTLY UNRECOVERED. THE POST-WAR FATE OF THE POLISH “STOLEN” CHILDREN

This story is both a disgrace and a pang of conscience. Disgrace, because of the fact that the organisers of the procedure of stealing children, depriving them of their identity and nationality and murdering those who did not meet the requirements of the Aryan race, were not, in the majority of cases, held criminally responsible for their deeds. And a pang of conscience, because the Polish state and international organisations such as the Red Cross did not effectively claim the Polish children abducted by the Nazis. Those of the children, who managed to learn the truth about their origins or returned to Poland after the war, were not recognised as war victims by the German authorities. They are still waiting for a resolution of the German Bundestag, which would at least open the road to such a basic issue as the granting of the victims of this genocide and ethnic cleansing the status of victims. And to hearing three words. *Please forgive us.*

The post-war history of the Polish children stolen by Nazi Germany can be divided into two periods. The first one, quite natural to be honest, occurs in the first years after the end of the war. The second one is in fact related to restoring the memory of dramas which were forgotten for various reasons. The Germans began to learn this history only at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, while the Poles discovered it anew at its end.

One of the key figures of the first stage of the history of the young Poles kidnapped for the purpose of Germanisation was Roman Hrabar, a lawyer and Representative of the Polish Government for Recovery of Polish Children. He held this function from March 1947 to August 1950, and later, he was active in the Main Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation. This was also the time of the so-called 8th Nuremberg Trial, where representatives of *Lebensborn*, which was involved in the Germanisation of Polish children, were in the dock. This was also the time of the return of about 30,000 of them to Poland, including the cases spectacularly publicised at that time in the Polish press, such as the finding of two daughters of a doctor from Poznan, Franciszek Witaszek - Alodia and Daria - in November and December 1947, just nine months after the start of Hrabar's activities. Doctor Witaszek, a member of the resistance movement was murdered by the Germans. His daughters, in accordance with the perverse strategy adopted by the Nazis, regarding the handing over of the children of murdered members of the anti-Nazi under-

ground for Germanisation in 1943, were taken away from their family. They were taken to a *Lebensborn* centre in Kalisz, located in monastic buildings (the Polish nuns had been expelled). Their names and their surname were changed in the centre from Witaszek to Wittke. Alodia became Alice, and Daria became Dora. The former was sent to a family living in Germany and the latter to Austria.

The search began in Silesia

After the war, Hrabar moved to Katowice and began to work at the provincial office, where, among other things, his task was to create an information flow system for those families seeking their lost relatives in the turmoil of war. This is how he came across the issue of the missing children, initially looking for those deported from Silesia. Gradually, however, it came to his attention that the Germans had been abducting children in areas incorporated into the 3rd Reich, that is, in Silesia, Greater Poland and Lodz. Lodz became the centre of their activity in this area, but also in the General Government. Ultimately Hrabar became the head of the team, whose task was to determine the scale of abductions and recover the largest possible number of children. And here, the first problem arises. So far, historians have relied only on estimates regarding the scale of the phenomenon of the Aryanisation of children from

the occupied territories. Hrabar and his colleagues were certain that the Nazis deported at least 200,000 boys and girls from Poland. Today there is talk of at least 50,000, but the true number cannot be determined. This is because the Germans changed the identities of the children, falsified their birth certificates and destroyed the documentation in the centres where the young Poles were staying at the end of the war and immediately after it, before passing them off to German families. (The documents left behind by the Nazis were also destroyed by the allied forces, apparently without realising the importance of the evidence or ignoring the matter of changing the identity of children as seemingly insignificant.)

Polish historians estimate that Poles accounted for as many as 70% of the abducted children identified up to that time. Only 15-20% were brought back to Poland. This was about 33,000 boys and girls, including 20,000 from the Soviet zone, 11,000 from the western zones in Germany and about 2,000 from Austria. If the upper limit for the number of children deported for Germanisation is assumed to be 200,000, then 170,000 of them remained outside the country. However, it is impossible to treat these figures as binding, because, firstly, the search for the children was abandoned and, secondly, since the search was abandoned, for decades after the war there has been no will or funds to undertake even a research project allowing the true scale of the Nazi Germanisation campaign to be assessed.

Other issues, which require a more detailed description, include the work of Roman Hrabar, the circumstances of his recall from Germany and the analysis of the notes which he brought with him and which are kept nowadays in the Archives of Modern Records and, in a digitised version, in the Institute of National Remembrance.

In the spring of 1947, Roman Hrabar and the small team for children recovery which he organised went to Heidelberg, to the Headquarters of UNRRA (*United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*) in the American occupation zone, in the capacity of a Government Representative. Accredited as the Senior Child Research Officer representing the Polish Red Cross (PRC), he could count on the help of his good friend Eileen Blackley, who was also a friend of the wife of the US President, Eleonora Roosevelt. He also cooperated with dr. Edmund Schwenk, one of the prosecutors who prepared the so-called 8th Nuremberg trial, in which 14 high ranking SS members and civilian officials were accused of participating in the action of kidnapping children from the territories occupied by the 3rd Reich, not only Polish ones.

Direction: Germany

Hrabar and his people began their work with Regensburg, where Blackley found documentation regarding 4,000 abducted Silesian

children. The first returns began in the late spring of 1947 – transports with the children arrived in Katowice. One success was also the recovery of 25 children from the Schloss Hubertus child care facility in Bavarian Oberlauringen. Contrary to appearances, this did not mean an improvement in the situation of subsequent young repatriates returning to Poland. Many of them were germanised as little children; some came from orphanages and had no knowledge of their origins, families or relatives whatsoever. The systemic terror meant that the majority of them did not know the Polish language, so they had to learn it anew, often mutilating words with a hard accent. Children, who were first taken away from their relatives, i.e. orphaned, who went through oppressive centres where they were prepared for Germanisation, who witnessed the brutality of their ‘guardians’, often murders, also suffered the yet further trauma of rejection by their peers. For them, they were Germans hated as a result of the crimes of the occupation.

In the summer of 1947, that is, after the first successes of Hrabar’s team, the Americans decided to liquidate the department responsible for the search for children at UNRRA. The political situation escalated. It became clear that there were no allies anymore; there was a hard division, not only of Europe, into two blocks competing with each other politically, economically and ideologically. The iron curtain was becoming a fact. Hrabar was incredibly lucky to have known Eileen Blackley, who rushed to Eleonora Roosevelt for help. Fiorello

La Guardia, who headed UNRRA, extended the work of the children's search department by another year. Hrabar, who managed (with this support) to come to an agreement with Americans, could not count on such an understanding in the English occupational zone, however, his cooperation with the French was excellent.

For sure, the finding of the abducted children - Alina Antczak, Barbara Mikołajczyk and Sławomir Grodomski-Paczesny must be considered one of the successes of his team – their testimonies, made during the 8th Nuremberg trial, were of great significance in the judgments of conviction. In this trial, members of the Nazi organisations dealing with Nazi racial programmes, including the SS Race and Settlement Main Office (*Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt*, RuSHA), found themselves in the dock. The trial lasted from 20 October 1947 to 10 March 1948. Among the 14 accused were not only prominent RuSHA activists, but also members of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood (*Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums*, RKFDV, headed by Heinrich Himmler), the Coordination Centre for Ethnic Germans (*SS-Hauptamt Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, VoMi) and the *Lebensborn*. The trial resulted in heavy prison sentences, but the *Lebensborn* members were exempted from serving their sentences. In the opinion of contemporary historians, they successfully convinced American judges that *Lebensborn* helped single mothers and rescued children during the war.

Fusion and chaos

In January 1948, an organ of the General Delegation of the Polish Red Cross for Germany, the Children's Recovery Department, was established in Esslingen. In the same city, there was the central Children's Search Tracing Section for Germany (*ITS Search*) and the central files of sought, found and repatriated children, belonging to the United Nations. The choice of location was therefore most justified. Roman Hrabar already had a reputation as a search expert, so the decision was made to combine his mission as a government representative with the work of the Polish Red Cross. The decision was justified by the necessity to put an end to the dual-track nature of the recovery campaign. Thus, in March 1948. Hrabar became a member of the Main Delegation of the Polish Red Cross for Germany and head of the Recovery Department. On 22 January, together with his deputy Wiktor Pietruszka, they left for Poland for four months to attend a conference, not even supposing that they would not return to the task they had been carrying out for a year and a half.

It was at this point that things began to happen that have still not been fully clarified. Why was Hrabar recalled to Poland? Or rather, why did Hrabar finally not return to Germany to continue the work started in 1947? In a report dated 31 December 1948, the Main Delegate of the Polish Red Cross to Germany wrote: *In July and August, circumstances occurred which temporarily halted the return of Pietruszka and Hrabar*

from Poland to Germany... without specifying what these circumstances were. At the same time, at the beginning of December, a representative of the Polish Red Cross sent a letter to the Ministry of Labour and Social Care, informing them that the International Refugees Organisation (IRO) had requested the return of Hrabar's documents enabling him to carry out his work.

The documents collected in Hrabar's office in Esslingen had been untouched since his departure for Poland. As if that were not enough, there were also new requests requiring urgent action. However, it was not until mid-September 1948 that an order arrived from the Main Delegation of the Polish Red Cross in Spenge, ordering the files in Hrabar's office to be sealed. Two months later, officials arrived at the office with an order from the Main Delegate of the Polish Red Cross to Germany to remove the seals and check the contents of the files. These were the documents which ended up in the Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw and are known under the name: *Hrabar's files*

On 3 December 1948, the authorities decided that the Department was to take care of keeping the central files of sought, found and repatriated children, and the correspondence with the office of the Polish Red Cross in Warsaw and the delegations in Germany. Such an important post, as it would seem, was located in.....a warehouse with an area of 18 m². Five people worked in this small space at shared desks. In January 1949, they were joined by Wiktor Pietruszka, who

attempted to continue the process of the recovery of the children after his return to Poland. At the same time, it was then that mutual accusations about the mess in documentation began, for example, that it was shared with the British Intelligence Service staff and that some files were lent to ITS and IRO. The accusations were accompanied by letters, declarations and grievances. The mess may be explained by the scandalous conditions in which the Polish team had to work, or perhaps by simple personal conflicts and ambitions. Certainly, the whole situation was also influenced by changing political conditions. However, regardless of the reasons for these accusations, the search for the children receded into the background; this was, after all, the aim of the Children Recovery Department.

End of action

Shortly after his return, Pietruszka wrote to the authorities in an alarming manner:

(...) the department does not plan any action, does not study the issue of the Germanisation, deportation, evacuation and extermination of Polish children, does not have current reports on possible action at its disposal, does not carry out, correct, instruct or control action, does not collect books, magazines and action documents, does not

carry out investigations on the centres of Germanisation, deportation, evacuation and extermination of Polish children, does not study deportation routes and does not elaborate on the experience gained.

And he recalled that the collection of documents and also the field work were completed on 1 August 1948, and that without these documents and field reconnaissance, it was impossible to find the children abducted by the Nazis.

The campaign to recover Polish children was completed in 1950 - in August, the British authorities decided that Polish children living in German adoptive families in the British occupation zone were to remain with these families or be placed for adoption in Great Britain. The fact that Hrabar's team had managed to determine the origins and names of 6,500 Polish children by that time did not matter. At the same time, the possibilities of conducting negotiations or exerting pressure were closing - the Polish Red Cross closed all its delegations functioning in Germany by the end of August that year.

After his return from the mission, Roman Hrabar settled in Katowice. He became a successful lawyer, and also a consultant to the Main and District Commissions for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, which were approached by families of abducted children with requests for information or to initiate a search. His books about finding young Poles destined for Germanisation are, to

this day, an important source of information, both on the Germanisation operation itself and the search.

The Lodz Hell

When writing about the crime of the Aryanisation of children taken from their relatives, it is impossible to ignore the *Prevention Camp of the Security Police for young Poles in Lodz* (German: *Polen-Jugendverwahrlager der Sicherheitspolizei in Litzmannstadt*), commonly referred to as Kinder-KL Litzmannstadt or simply as the camp on Przemysłowa Street, after the name of the street where it was located. Children taken from their parents, taken from orphanages or kidnapped during displacements, mainly in the Zamosc region, ended up there. The camp in Lodz was a “stop” on the way to centres, where obedience, learning the German language and forgetting one's own roots were reinforced through beating, intimidation and starvation. But also, those children who turned out to be not sufficiently Aryan after the initial selection or too resistant to Germanisation were sent there. It is estimated that between 2,000 and 3,000 children aged between 2 and 16 went through the camp, but there were also infants. At least 200 of them died. In 1945, the “educators” Edward August and Sydonia Bayer stood trial. They were both sentenced to death.

The last trial related to this camp – based on circumstantial evidence – took place in Lodz and lasted from 12 March 1972 to 2 April 1974. Genowefa Pohl, after the war working as an intendant in a Lodz nursery, was accused, among other things, of murder.

It is suspected that she, as the supervisor of a penal camp for Polish children in Lodz from 1942 to 1944, acting at the behest of the Nazi authorities of the German state, took part in the extermination of Polish children held in the camp, and in particular in the bestial murder of the prisoners Urszula Kaczmarek and Danuta Jakubowska - these were the charges in the indictment.

Pohl was sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment. She was released from prison in Rawicz in the early 1990s. She died in 2003 in Lodz.

As astonishing as it may seem, the children's camp in Lodz disappeared from the collective memory of Poles. Maybe because the children who survived it did not talk for a long time about what happened to them? Suffice it to say that the wooden barracks in which the little prisoners had been confined were pulled down as early as 1945, and in the 1960s a housing estate was built on the site of the camp. After the first publication describing the victims of this place - an article by Maria Niemyska-Hessenowa *Children from the "Lager" in Lodz (Dzieci z "Lagru" w Łodzi)* was published in 1946 - silence fell for many years. It was not until 1965 that Wiesław Jazdżyński's *Report-*

age from an Empty Field (Reportaż z pustego pola) began a several-year-long phase of restoring the memory of the camp on Przemysłowa Street, the culmination of which was the Pohl trial and the 1971 unveiling of the Cracked Heart Monument in Lodz. Four years later, Józef Witkowski, a former prisoner of this lager, published his historical monograph *Hitler's Concentration Camp for Minors in Lodz (Hitlerowski obóz koncentracyjny dla małoletnich w Łodzi)*, it is still the basic compendium of knowledge on the subject (despite historians' reservations in connection with the latest findings). It was only at the end of May 2021 that the Minister of Culture, National Heritage and Sport, Piotr Gliński, announced the creation of the *Museum of Polish Children - Victims of Totalitarianism* in Lodz, to be opened in 2023.

Investigation into the Zamosc region case

Although Polish children were abducted throughout the General Government as well as in Greater Poland and Silesia, the children from the Zamosc region gained a special status after the war - as early as in the years 1946-47, the prosecutor of the Zamosc District Court, acting on the authority of the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, conducted criminal proceedings concerning *the deportation of children from the Zamosc region during the Ger-*

man occupation. The files were transferred to the Institute of National Remembrance in Lublin and the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation. In June 2003, the prosecutor from the investigation department decided to resume the investigation conducted in the second half of 1940s. *The case concerns the crime of genocide committed by the German occupier during World War II in Poland on the territory of the Zamosc region, against the civilian population of the then occupied area, in that the German officers engaged in inhumane acts on that territory, in the form of widespread, forcible removal of Polish children from their parents and their deportation, partly to Germany for the purpose of Germanisation, and partly to transit camps for the purpose of extermination, as part of the German plan for the Germanisation of the Zamosc region.* The deportations, which took place from November 1942 to August 1943, covered a total of 231 villages and their inhabitants in the districts of Bilgoraj, Hrubieszow, Tomaszow, Lubelski and Zamosc.

In 2006 the case files were supplemented with materials submitted by the Main Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, including an alphabetical list of the victims, which included over ten thousand names. The list was drawn up in 1988 based on, among other things, files from the 1940s., findings of the Verification Commission of the Association of Children War Victims of the Zamosc Land, and lists of local authorities and militia. The prosecutor decided then to verify this list, which consequently allowed not only the iden-

tification of the survivors, but also their interrogation. In total, 1,841 witnesses and victims have been interviewed, but new witnesses of the tragic events of World War II keep submitting their testimonies to the Lublin commission. There are also archival testimonies of about 1,000 people in the case files. The file number of the investigation is S 62.2007.Zn and it is still ongoing.

Discovering history

It was not until the turn of the 20th and 21st century that the tragic fate of the Polish children began to surface in the German consciousness. – thanks to the work of a history teacher from Freiburg in Baden-Württemberg, Christoph Schwarz, who learned about this crime by accident and, moved by it, began his own private crusade, which quickly turned into a systemic effort. He managed to establish many facts about the activities of several Nazi centres, where the Polish children were taken, among others, Achern near Karlsruhe (among other people, victims of deportation from the Zamosc region were sent there). He also got in touch with now grown-up people who told him what they remembered from the times of war, how they found out that they were Poles and whether they managed to find the truth about their biological families. Actually, Schwarz stepped out of the role of a dispassionate chronicler, reporting on the horrors of war. Out of a deep sense of responsibility,

he got involved in activities aimed at recognising the victims of forced Germanisation as victims of war, just as was the case with the prisoners of concentration camps or forced labourers.

In 2012, together with the survivors he reached out to, he co-founded the association *Geraubte Kinder - vergessene Opfer* (English: *Kidnapped Children - Forgotten Victims*, www.geraubte.de), which has set the goal for itself not only to tell the contemporary Germans a history that is completely unknown to them, but also to bring about the payment of a one-off compensation for the harm suffered - in the amount of 20,000 Euros. (In the years 1992-1993, the federal government of Germany transferred the amount of 500,000,000 German marks to Poland in three tranches).

The Association has submitted a petition to the Bundestag concerning Polish children and compensation for their wrongs twice: in 2013 and 2014. In 2013. The Ministry of Finance acknowledged, in its response to the Association's letter, that the fate of the kidnapped children *affected many families during the war period and was the consequence of the war strategy*, but at the same time the official who formulated the response explained that the forced Germanisation *was not intended to annihilate or deprive individuals of their freedom in the first place*.

On 22 May 2014, German parliament members decided that it was necessary to take action in this direction. A few months later, a letter

from the Bundestag was sent to the Association in which a *declaration was made that a solution would be sought at the political level*. One of the important elements of the campaign, which could be called the campaign of moral pressure for responsibility, was an exhibition organised by Schwarz and shown throughout Germany in that same year. One of its results was the start of the first Polish-German search for stolen children by Interia and Deutsche Welle in 2017.

During the joint campaign *Stolen children/Geraubte Kinder*, journalists, in cooperation with institutions, archives and foundations, not only searched for the victims, but also helped the victims of Germanisation in reaching their relatives, accompanying them in discovering their true identity. The victims of the Aryanisation policy and also the people who knew about such cases in their families started to approach the editors. The result of these activities not only revealed the fates of individual people, but also brought them to a wider audience. In 2018, the first international scientific conference devoted to the theft and Germanisation of Polish children during World War II was held in Cracow. It was organised by the Cracow branch of the Institute of National Remembrance and the Centre for Documentation of Deportations, Expulsions and Resettlement at the Pedagogical University in Cracow. During the conference, discussions were focused on the specifics of stealing *racially valuable* children, the criminal activities against the children of female forced labourers working at the time of war on the territory of the 3rd Reich, and also presentations were

made regarding the current state of knowledge on the searches, reparations and court trials.

In the same year, the Administrative Court in Cologne found no grounds to consider adult victims of Nazi kidnapping and forced Germanisation as victims of the war, which under German law would automatically mean that they would be granted compensation for the harm they suffered. The Court referred to the guidelines issued by the German government in 2011 concerning the persecution of ethnic and national groups considered by the Nazis to be *less valuable* and emphasised that Germanised children could hardly be considered as such... It also referred to the refusal which the victims received in 2013 from the German ministry of finance. In it, the officials explained that the victims of kidnapping and forced Germanisation *were not persecuted because of their conduct or characteristics*. In the justification for its decision, the court in Cologne argued that compensation could only be claimed by those who were German citizens or ethnic Germans at the time they suffered harm, apparently completely ignoring the entire complexity of the legal situation resulting from the change of identity and falsification of documents of children abducted for Germanisation. At the same time, it emphasised that it was not an instance which may add further categories of victims to those who are already entitled to receive compensation; these are, according to the German guidelines, people persecuted by the Nazis *because of their social or personal conduct or as a result of particular per-*

sonal characteristics, e.g. the mentally handicapped. In the opinion of the court the abducted and forcefully Germanised children did not belong to this group.

Victims who are not victims

Of particular importance for the restoration of the Polish memory of this history and for the wider audience, was the work of journalists. In 2017, the *Brown lullaby (Brunatna kołysanka)* by Anna Malinowska, who lives and works in Silesia, was published. Two years later, in 2019, a book entitled *Teraz jesteście Niemcami (Now you are Germans)*, being a kind of a summary of the campaign run by the Polish and German journalists from Interia and Deutsche Welle appeared on the Polish publishing market. Ewelina Karpińska-Morek, one of its co-authors, also separately published her own book entitled *Soszka. Wojna się dzieciom nie przywidziała. (Soszka. War was not the imaginary creation of children)*.

Under the influence of one of these publications – *Teraz jesteście Niemcami* – parliament member Bogusław Sonik sent an interpellation to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2019. In his letter, he asked, among other things, about the actions taken to document the fate of the stolen children and the attempts made over

the years to find them, and pointed to a historical and political paradox - the theft and Germanisation of children were recognised by the UN General Assembly as a crime of genocide and a crime against humanity, but the stolen children do not have the status of victims of World War II.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs responded to that interpellation at the beginning of 2020, writing that:

(...) in the opinion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the MP's interpellation refers to an absolutely important issue, which still requires to be duly documented on the basis of historians' research. This crime is not sufficiently known to the public, therefore, the fact of raising this issue by the MP is very legitimate and necessary. The efforts undertaken to date to describe this crime and, above all, to raise awareness of it among the nations of the world should be continued using many media.

The last sentence in this response, in which the Minister of Foreign Affairs shortly summarises the current state of knowledge and lists related publications is of key significance.

As far as the work on recognising them as victims of World War II is concerned, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs approached the Office for War Veterans and Victims of Oppression.

To this day, the status of the children abducted by the Nazis has not been changed. Those who know their stories or learned them years later as adults, face many traumas, all the more that some of them will never know the truth about their biological parents. No one knows the number of those who will never learn the truth, because all traces of their Polish identity have been erased so effectively. It also happens that even after the Polish family has been found, a sense of connection does not appear - in spite of learning the often dramatic truth, Polish children brought up in a German family, not even adult but just much older, feel a stronger bond with their German Mutti than with their Polish siblings.

The Polish children abducted for the purpose of Germanisation represent not only an indictment of the criminal system, but also of the Polish state, which gave up on fighting for them and for their rights, for political reasons. This issue was never raised in relations with East Germany, coming to the conclusion that German communists are not responsible for the German Nazism, thus all citizens of this communist state are exempted from responsibility for these crimes. In turn, the issue of recognition of the Oder-Neisse border became more important in the relations with West Germany.

Today, over eighty years after World War II came to an end, it seems that the criminal project of the Aryanisation of children, in which depriving them of their identity and creating a new Nazi citizen

ready to serve their new homeland - the 3rd Reich - with their whole heart, soul and body, was of key significance, pales in comparison to the crime of genocide and the hell of the death camps. The official newspeak, in which victims of forced Germanisation were not persecuted because they were not sent to extermination camps or to the ditches over which their executioners from the Einsatzgruppen stood, is nothing more than a cynical attribution of value to pain, suffering, loneliness and uprooting. It is also possible to talk about the sin of omission in reference to the Polish state, for which political issues have taken precedence over the harming of the little ones, to use biblical language. The little ones, if they are still alive and if they managed to discover the truth about their origins, are today reaching the age of ninety. They are witnesses to history and a pang of conscience, if such a category can be used at all in relation to the state. This is the last chance for them to tell historians what they experienced, for their trauma to be understood by therapists and for prosecutors to receive their testimonies. The question is, whether we want to listen to them, and above all, whether we want to draw conclusions from the cruel fates which they suffered.

Serhiy Stelnykovich, Volodymyr Hinda

UPROOTED. THE HISTORY OF THE ABDUCTION AND GERMANISATION OF CHILDREN FROM UKRAINE DURING WORLD WAR II

The leadership of Nazi Germany during World War II is known to have committed many shameful and horrific acts. Mankind still remembers gas chambers, the crematoria in concentration camps, the extermination of Jews and Roma, etc. Some other crimes of the Nazi leaders are lesser known, although they destroyed hundreds of thousands of families and children's lives. Their destructive behavior was based on the concept of the Aryan race. In this case, we are going to discuss the abduction and Germanisation by the Nazis of Ukrainian children meeting the canons of the *Nordic race*. Due to this, there are ethnic Ukrainians still living in Germany, who were forcibly deported from occupied Ukraine to the Third Reich as children. These adults do not

know anything about their true origins or biological parents; those who have learned the truth about their childhood are still trying to find their relatives in their ethnic homeland. On the other hand, tens of thousands of children, primarily from the *Volksdeutsche* category*, were covered by Nazi Germanisation projects in Ukraine only.

Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler initiated the Germanisation of children who were seen as having the *Aryan race* features. In general, this Nazi official was the *father* of many terrible projects involving enslaved peoples, and, in fact, the German people as well. In the mid-1930s, he began implementing the idea of establishing “maternity homes” for unmarried German women - *Lebensborn* (in German: *Source of Life*). This is why *Lebensborn* is also called the Himmler Children Factory.

Lebensborn was officially established on 12 December 1935, originally as a network of shelters for extramarital children of German women. From 1940, the organization's functions expanded; new branches were established in occupied countries of Europe, namely: Norway - 10 branches; Poland - 3; Denmark - 2; and the Netherlands, France, and Luxembourg - one in each.

During World War II, one of the most important tasks of the *Lebensborn* organization was the abduction and transportation of children from

* The term refers to representatives of the German ethnic group living outside the ethnic homeland before the end of World War II.

the occupied territories to the Reich for their further Germanisation and placement in German families. Such actions in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union began in 1943. Infants were usually forcibly taken away or abducted from their parents (if the parents resisted, they could be killed), taken away from orphanages; orphaned *Volksdeutsche* children were also taken. But not every child was taken away. The children had to meet certain criteria of the *racial theory*. Usually the *racial selection* was carried out at *Lebensborn* branches. According to documents, there were no such branches in the Soviet Union. Soviet children were taken to the branch in Lodz, Poland. It was there that the staff of specialists and doctors determined the *racial value* of the child. The future *Aryan* had to have the characteristics of the *Nordic race*: a certain shape of the skull, physique, eye color (mostly blue), blonde hair, and good health. Those who did not pass the examination were sent to concentration camps or killed at once.

The selected children were sent to *Lebensborn* distribution shelters to await the next stage of Germanisation. The children were given new names and new documents. They were taught the German language. This stage of Germanisation usually lasted three to four months. After that, the child was available for adoption. As a rule, foster parents did not know the origin of the children because it was kept secret. After the adoption, *Lebensborn* inspectors and doctors visited the foster parents on a regular basis to monitor the conditions of the Nazi-style upbringing, living conditions, and the children's health.

In 1946, historians estimated that the Nazis had abducted and deported at least 250,000 children from different European countries. After the war, it was possible to find out about the fate of only 30,000 of them. Some of the children returned to their biological parents, while others remained in foster care. Today, there is a non-governmental organization, *Stolen Children - Forgotten Victims*, in Germany, founded by Christoph Schwartz, a teacher from Freiburg. The members of the organization demand that the children *deprived of identity* be recognized as victims of the war and compensated by the German state, as was the case with the *Ostarbeiters*.

The exact number of children deported by the Nazis from the Soviet Union or Soviet Ukraine has not been precisely determined, and given the disappearance of *Lebensborn's* essential documents, it is unlikely to happen in the future. As for the Soviet Union, historians mostly use figures from 3 to 50 thousand children. Undoubtedly, some of them were abducted from Ukraine. Currently, several such cases are known due to media reports. The most well-known case is that of a Ukrainian boy from the Crimea, Oleksandr Litau. The Nazis abducted him from his parents in 1943 and sent him to an orphanage in Lodz, Poland. It was there that Oleksandr went through the entire program of Germanisation and was transferred to a German family, where he became Volker Heineke.

The story of Oleksandr Litau, also known as Volker Heineke, gained public attention in Ukraine in 2013. All his life the man considered

himself a German from the Heineke family. In their older years, his parents told him they had adopted him. Young Volker did not pay much attention to this fact, because he viewed his adoptive parents as his own. But after they died, sorting through the family's papers, he accidentally found a certificate stating that he had been adopted from a *Lebensborn* shelter. The orphaned Volker wanted to know the truth about his origin. By lucky chance, he was able to do so. Among the few documents relating to *Lebensborn* in the US archives, journalists were able to find his miraculously surviving dossier. It was stated there that Volker Heineke's real name was Oleksandr Litau, and he came from the Crimean village of Alnova in Ukraine. Volker Heineke commented on this finding quite emotionally: *I was very happy - oh, God, I finally knew who I was!*

However, everything was not as simple as it seemed to Volker at first glance. On his first visit to the Crimea in 2002, he could not locate the village of Alnova. Most likely, the German official who filled in his dossier back in 1943, misspelled the name of the settlement. This was a fairly common occurrence in the documents of that time. Thanks to researchers, Volker learned that the Nazi actions of that kind were carried out in the villages of Annivka (until 1945 - Alevke) and Aivove (until 1944 - Efendi-koy). The man's last name was a challenge, too. Having made a DNA test, Volker Heineke visited 8 Litau families in the Crimea, but no matches were found. He then assumed that the last name was misspelled. He tried to search for similar last names: Lito, Litava, and so

on, but this was also in vain. In February 2013, Volker Heineke received a document from the Russian archives about Ivan Litov, a Red Army soldier who was mortally wounded near Stalingrad (now Volgograd, Russia) in 1943. Volker assumed that this could have been his biological father.

Failures in the search for his relatives did not disappoint Volker Heineke: *I have been looking for my relatives for twenty years and I believe I will find them*, he said in a conversation with journalist Heorhii Zotov. *I know a former "Lebensborn" child who managed to find his father's crypt in Yugoslavia... I'm not discouraged. I will be looking for the graves of my mother and father until I die.*

Unfortunately, researchers do not have enough facts about Ukrainian children abducted by the Nazis. Of course, such cases did take place, but most likely not on a massive scale, unlike in Poland or the Czech Republic. In the occupied Ukrainian lands, the ones selected for Germanisation were primarily ethnic Germans - the *Volksdeutsche*. These were the descendants of Germans who settled in these lands in the late 18th - early 19th century. Such Germanisation in Ukraine took place primarily in the specially created monoethnic environments - *Hegewald* and *Försterstadt* areas within the General District Zhytomyr of the Reich Commissariat Ukraine. *Volksdeutsche* children were also Germanised in other habitats of ethnic Germans. The creation of the *Volksdeutsche* areas was one of the reasons why the abduction of Ukrainian children did not become widespread.

As Karl Stumpp remarked about the *Volksdeutsche* living in Berdychiv outside of the ethnic area, *they must be placed in a German environment, otherwise they will lose themselves as Germans*. After all, the Berdychiv *Volksdeutsche* mostly spoke the Ukrainian language and lived in extreme poverty; in many cases they were completely Ukrainianized or Russified. Since the beginning of the Nazi occupation, Karl Stumpp had led a special *Sonderkommando* named after him, and conducted demographic studies in Ukraine. The conclusions of Karl Stumpp's *Sonderkommando* largely became the theoretical basis for the implementation of Nazi colonization projects at the beginning of the war with the Soviet Union.

Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler became the main ideologist of the Nazi colonization of the occupied territories of the East - in particular, Ukraine. He once said: *Our task is not to Germanise the East in the old sense of the word, that is, to instill in the population the German language and German law, but to ensure that only people of truly German blood live in the East*. *Hegewald's* headquarters were built near Zhytomyr in late 1941 - mid 1942. Hitler's *Werewolf* (near Vinnytsia) and Hermann Goering's *Steinbruch* headquarters (north of Vinnytsia) were also located within the Zhytomyr General District.

In the fall of 1942, Heinrich Himmler, obsessed with Nazi colonization projects, initiated the creation of an area of the same name near his headquarters. In total, 31 settlements (former Ukrainian villag-

es), or over 500 km², were included in the *Hegewald* area. The first resettlement to the area in October 10 - 5 November 1942, covered 6,362 *Volksdeutsche*, including 2,412 children. In the spring of 1943, the population of the *Hegewald* increased to over 10,000. At the same time, in the fall of 1942, the second German area (district), *Försterstadt*, started to be established in the environs of Cherniakhiv-Korosten. The area included 30 settlements, and its official proclamation took place in September 1943. Thus, the Nazis in Ukraine did not face the issue of abducting *racially appropriate* children for their further Germanisation. The Germanisation of children took place primarily in the *Volksdeutsche* areas or other habitats of ethnic Germans. *Volksdeutsche* were brought here from all over Ukraine, sometimes even from abroad.

The occupying power paid special attention to school education policy. The young generation was Germanised mainly through education and upbringing. Providing conditions for the education of young *Volksdeutsche* in the German spirit, the new administration adopted a resolution *On compulsory education in public schools of children of German nationality living in the occupied eastern regions*. According to its requirements, children of German descent were subject to eight years of general compulsory education.

On the occupied Ukraine territory, German schools mainly operated in the general districts of Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv, Zhytomyr, and

the Crimea. Archival sources also contain evidence of the existence of a number of German public schools in a number of other regions of occupied Ukraine. The main task of these schools was to educate young people in such a way as to *awaken the old heredity of blood in them as soon as possible*. This implies a sense of belonging to the German nation, which was significantly blunted during the Bolshevik regime.

In some regions, the schooling of *Volksdeutsche* children was combined with ideological and military training in the camps of the Nazi Party (NSDAP). For a long time, children were exposed to special ideology-filled radio programs discussing the crimes of the Soviet government against ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union. The mentors in the camps were non-commissioned Wehrmacht officers and experienced leaders of the *Hitlerjugend* (in German: Hitler Youth) with combat experience. The rollout of the *Hitlerjugend*, in particular, at the Reich Commissariat Ukraine, began in 1942 and aimed to acquaint the younger generation of local Germans with Nazi ideology.

Vocational training of the *Volksdeutsche* youth was another area of focus: in the fall of 1942, vocational schools were established for them. In general, given the fact that the German settlers had a well-deserved reputation as experienced farmers, the occupiers planned to use them primarily as a support workforce in the development of

agriculture in Ukraine. According to the imperial officials, this was only necessary to revive the adult generation and instill in young people *the eternal desire to work and the German culture of agriculture*. The training course in German agricultural vocational schools lasted two years. Physically healthy, politically mature young men of German descent, preferably peasants, were eligible for admission. One of the main conditions for admission was a certificate of *purebred* German origin. Education, accommodation and meals in the schools were free. It was planned to train such children so that they can become agricultural workers, supporters of Nazism.

There was a shortage of teachers in German schools, as many educators were recruited as interpreters. In addition, the vast majority of available German *Volksdeutsche* educators had completed only secondary schools; their knowledge of the German language and pedagogical methods was insufficient. In order to improve the situation, certain measures were introduced, including refresher courses. At the same time, the Nazis actively influenced *Volksdeutsche* teachers ideologically. This is evidenced by the curricula, which included political education and German history. The *Hegewald* Commissioner for Education once said: *The ideological education of Volksdeutsche teachers was of great importance. The most important thing was to show the difference between Nazism and Bolshevism. It is necessary to maintain on an ongoing basis (in teachers— Author) German national consciousness and faith in the Fuhrer, in his just cause.*

The Germanisation of the young children of local ethnic Germans was implemented through kindergartens, and, for orphans - through orphanages. Kindergartens were also established for *Volksdeutsche* preschool children who lived separately in non-ethnic areas. As a rule, such kindergartens were established in the largest and most logistically convenient settlements of a given region. In these institutions, children received education and catering services. The staff of the children's institutions consisted of *Volksdeutsche* girls (women) who had to complete special courses.

In 1943, the monthly pedagogical magazine *Der volksdeutsche Erzieher* (*Volksdeutsche Teacher-Educator*) was published in Zhytomyr to provide methodological assistance to the educational institutions for the Germanisation of the younger generation. This one-of-a-kind publication at the Reich Commissariat Ukraine contained many ideological pieces intended to instill in the younger generation a system of Nazi values.

In the autumn of 1942, on the Dnipro island of Khortytsia near Zaporizhia, the Nazis established a Langemark higher education school. It recruited the most talented young *Volksdeutsche* men aged 17 to 24 years from the entire territory of the Reich Commissariat Ukraine. Requirements for students included political credibility, ten years of education, and talent and ability. The training at Khortytsia lasted for two years. It was intended that after the graduation the students would be transferred to

a school in Bledau near Königsberg to complete a full course of higher education. The Langemark Higher Education Program, together with vocational education, was primarily intended for the Nazism education of the youths. In addition to Ukraine, this practice was tested by the Nazis in the Netherlands, Flanders, and Norway.

Concurrently, some sources suggest that the Nazis abducted some local *racially valuable* non-German children. These children were transferred to special schools (camps). Such cases were rare in Ukraine. In late 1942, Andriy Zlenko, head of the organizational and instructional department of the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Ukraine stated: *A special school has been established in Zhytomyr for minors who were forcibly recruited by the Germans in Kharkiv and other cities of Ukraine.* There, children were taught the German language and trade of war; shooting targets at the ranges which were dressed in Red Army uniforms.

Under the Nazi occupation, belonging to the *Volksdeutsche* was one of the ways to survive. Therefore, some locals who had family ties with ethnic Germans tried to obtain the *Volksdeutsche* status. After all, this could open up better prospects for their children. Therefore, parents on their own initiative contributed to the Germanisation of their children.

This phenomenon can be illustrated by the story of Anatolii Busse born in 1931 in Berdychiv to the family of Ukrainian Lydia and German Emma-

nuel Busse. Emmanuel Busse was repressed by the Soviet authorities in 1937. He also had two sons from his first marriage. In July 1943, when rumors spread in Berdychiv that the Nazis *would pick and deport boys as young as eight*, Lydia Busse registered her son Anatolii as *Volksdeutsche* to save him. Due to this, Anatolii Busse began his studies at a *special German school*, where the Germanisation of the younger generation took place. It should be noted that one of his paternal brothers, Oleksandr Busse, also registered as a *Volksdeutsche* in order to avoid being sent to work in the Reich; and the other brother, Evhenii Busse, was in the ranks of the Soviet Red Army.

Some sources enable partial reconstruction of the post-war fates of such children. After the war, Anatolii Busse continued his studies at one of the secondary schools in Berdychiv. It is known that one of his jobs was at *Progress*, a machine-building plant in Berdychiv.

Such children could no longer fully immerse themselves in Soviet society, because they were labeled as children of *enemies of the people*. They also preferred to remain silent about their past, i.e. participation in the Nazi Germanisation experiments. Anatolii Busse's mother, Lydia Busse, was arrested by the Soviet authorities on 29 March 1946, and prosecuted for voluntarily registering as a *Volksdeutsche*, thus *taking the path to the betrayal of the Motherland*. On 28 January 1947, she was sentenced to 5 years in exile. Lydia Busse was rehabilitated in March 1990 (posthumously).

It can be assumed that during World War II in Ukraine the Nazis attempted Germanisation of about 90-100 thousand children aged 6 to 18. This conclusion can be drawn from the pre-war Soviet census of 1939, which recorded a German ethnic minority in Ukraine of over 392,000 (the ethnic Germans from the western Ukrainian region, who were not included in the census, should also be added here). During the Nazi occupation, the number could be approximately the same. It is clear that the total number of German population was impacted by Stalin's repressions of 1939-1941; however, during the Nazi occupation, *Volksdeutsche* included persons who had family ties with the Germans but were not included in the 1939 census of the Soviet Union. Based on this figure, assuming that about 25% of the total number were children aged 6 to 18 years, we conclude that their number was 90-100 thousand.

Fortunately, the Nazis' abduction, their colonization experiments and the Germanisation of Ukrainian children stopped with the end of the fighting in Ukraine. At the same time, despite the fact that almost 80 years have passed since the end of the World War II, this topic is just beginning to be discussed. For a number of reasons, the recovery of such stories isn't based on published experience of the witnesses of occupation, but on the works of historians. In Ukraine, this topic is only beginning to rise, and requires the carrying out of detailed research based on both archive source resources and, when possible, on memories/post-memory of those people who had experienced Nazi abduction in their childhood.

Pavla Plachá

“STOLEN CHILDREN”. CHILDREN FROM THE CZECH LANDS MARKED FOR GERMANISATION DURING THE NAZI OCCUPATION

The question of children *stolen* from the Czech lands must be seen within the context of the Nazis' efforts for the gradual Germanisation of the *Bohemian-Moravian space*, which was expected to become an integral part of the Third Reich and a gateway to the domination of all of Eastern Europe. It is nevertheless important to differentiate the theoretical foundations of racial ideology from the practical application of Germanising and racial policies, which led to the implementation of concrete steps and were influenced by specific conditions in a particular place at a particular time. The occupation of the *Bohemian-Moravian space* happened gradually, and this had an influence on the formal incorporation of its individual parts into the *Greater Germanic Reich*. While the Czechoslovak

border regions were integrated into the existing state administration of the German Reich following the Munich Conference in the fall of 1938, the core of the Bohemian and Moravian lands was formally attached to the Reich in March 1939 as the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The originally Czechoslovak Těšín region, meanwhile, was made a part of the *incorporated eastern territories* (*Eingegliederte Ostgebiete*) following the defeat of Poland. In each case, the Nazis applied a different strategy for the gradual control of the particular region. Besides racial and ethnic considerations, political and economic interests played a role as well.

The Těšín region

The subject of the Germanisation of ethnically Polish children from Czechoslovakia can be illustrated by looking at the Těšín region, which had a large Polish minority before the war. As part of the *incorporated eastern territories*, this region was seen by the Nazis as originally German. The local *inferior* population (Poles in particular) was to be eliminated, with its elite deported or murdered and the rest of the population reduced to the level of slave labor. The region was then to be repopulated by ethnic Germans (in particular so-called *Volksdeutsche*), but also through the Germanisation of racially suitable individuals (e.g., the *Deutsche Volksliste* program), including Polish families or just these families' children.

According to Roman Hrabar, coordinator of the postwar search for kidnapped Polish children, the Nazis' Germanisation pressures targeted children from divorced mixed marriages, children from Polish orphanages, and children living with adoptive parents or in foster care. In some cases, children forcibly separated from their families included the children of ethnic Germans or of ethnically mixed couples who refused to officially register as German, children deported for forced labor along with their parents, children born to female forced laborers, and children of deported and executed parents. These children were torn from their familiar surroundings (mother, family, or orphanage), subjected to racial measurement, and placed in German homes in the occupied territories or in the *Old Reich*.

The main responsibility for the Germanisation and reeducation of children from foreign nationalities fell upon the National Socialist People's Welfare Organization (*Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt*, NSV), which quickly succeeded in setting up a relatively dense network of homes, counseling offices, and service centers in the occupied Polish territories tasked with implementing ethnic policies. German as well as non-German children labeled "*capable of Germanisation*" (*eindeutschungsfähig*) were placed in the NSV's homes.

Until 1942, the Germanisation of children in the occupied Polish territories was not centrally coordinated. It wasn't until 19 February 1942 that the Germanisation procedure and the division of responsibilities among

the various institutions were defined by Order No. 67/1 of the Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germanism (*Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*, RKFDV). The program's *pilot project* would be the *Reichsgau Wartheland* (a.k.a. *Warthegau*), which was located on originally Polish territory. Under the guise of performing routine medical examinations, the Gau Youth Office compiled a list of children living with Polish foster parents or in former Polish orphanages. There followed a racial examination performed by the local branch of the SS Race and Settlement Main Office (*Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt*, RuSHA) in Łódź (during the war renamed Litzmannstadt). Children deemed suitable for Germanisation were handed over to the Gau administration, which transferred them to orphanages in Bruckau (Bruczków) or Kalisch (Kalisz), where they were subjected to a psychological examination and observation. After six weeks, the head of the orphanage produced a *characterological assessment* of the children, the results of which were sent to the representative of the RKFDV in Posen (Poznań), who decided which children would be Germanised. Selected children aged two to six were handed over to the *Lebensborn* (in German: *source of life*). This organization of the RuSHA placed the children, labeled *Ostkinder*, in its homes in the Reich, changed their official identities (the names of children who were later placed in foster care could be changed again if the foster parents so desired), and raised them in the German language in the Nazi spirit. The objective was the children's placement with German foster parents and their later adoption. Older children aged six to twelve were taken over by the inspector of the *Deutsche Heimschulen*, boarding

schools that provided collective education in the spirit of Nazism. Later, some of the older children were also sent to the *Lebensborn*. The entire process was mostly done by force and against the will of the children's original caregivers. The *Lebensborn* subjected the children to repeated racial measurement, and so some of the originally *suitable* children were sent back to the Gau administration.

The aforementioned Order No. 67/I was later expanded to include the children of executed individuals or individuals deported to concentration camps. In such cases, the relevant Gestapo office became involved as well.

Although the approach applied in the *Warthegau* did not give the SS the desired result, since only a few of the 300 children marked for Germanisation were placed with SS families, it was later implemented, albeit on a smaller scale, in the occupied territories of Yugoslavia and in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

The concept of gradual assimilation was also implemented in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, a region with a significant ethnic Czech majority. Here, Germanisation plans envisioned the partial Ger-

manisation and partial resettlement of the Czech population. Racial policy was first applied in practice in 1941, with an important role played by Reinhard Heydrich and Karl Hermann Frank. The theoretical underpinnings for this effort would be prepared by the German Charles University, where several racially oriented scientific disciplines had been created after the occupation. The selection of Czechs suitable for Germanisation would be done using *racial standards*, with racial measurement performed by the RuSHA, which set up a branch office in Prague and later established regional offices throughout the Protectorate. The racial selection of Czechs would be founded on the creation of a racial register, done secretly under the guise of medical check-ups, with a focus on children born in 1928–1931. These check-ups were to be followed by an X-ray examination of adults, presented as a preventative measure in the fight against tuberculosis. The Prague office of the RuSHA also was an active participant in so-called *special actions*, including the racial selection of children from Lidice and Ležáky.

The planned internment and Germanisation of Czech children in the Protectorate did not appear until the retaliatory measures taken after the assassination of Heydrich. The victims of these measures were children from the villages of Lidice and Ležáky, orphaned children of executed parents, children of prisoners (including those born in prison), and children of parents associated with the assassination. Organizationally, these actions involved the Gestapo's central office

in Prague, while responsibility for the children's Germanisation fell on the Representative of the Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germandom (*Beauftragter des Reichskommissars für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*) and racial examinations were performed by the Prague office of the RuSHA.

The Nazis' approach to the children of Lidice was unprecedented within the context of their relationship to the Czechs as a nation. The children's registration and first rough racial selection were done in a school building in Kladno, where the children were brought with their mothers on 10 June 1942. Only three children who at first glance possessed Nordic features passed the selection process (Hana Špotová, Dagmar Veselá, Václav Zelenka). These three children were then taken to a children's clinic in Prague, where they were subjected to a racial examination and one of them (Dagmar Veselá) was labeled *unsuitable*. After two days, racially unsuitable children older than one year of age and younger than sixteen were transported from Kladno via Lovosice and Dresden to a collection camp of the Central Resettlement Office (*Umwanderungszentralstelle, UWZ*) in Łódź. Following another round of racial measurement, seven of these originally *non-Germanisable* children were chosen for Germanisation (Marie Doležalová, Emilie Frejová, Václav Hanf, Anna Hanfová, Marie Hanfová, Eva Kubíková, Věra Vokatá). All nine *Germanisable* Lidice children were then sent to an orphanage in Puschkau (Pastuchów). Most of them were later placed with German foster families (Hana Špotová, Václav Zelenka,

Anna Hanfová, Marie Hanfová, Marie Doležalová, Emilie Frejová, Věra Vokatá). Eva Kubíková succeeded in being placed into the care of her aunt (her father's sister), who was married to a German and was living in Berlin. Although Václav Hanf was originally placed with a German family along with his sister Anna, because of behavioral problems he was sent back to the orphanage and spent the rest of the war in a number of institutional facilities.

The children from the village of Ležáky were subjected to racial measurement as well. Of the thirteen children transported for this purpose from Pardubice to Prague, only the sisters Marie and Jarmila Štulíková were deemed suitable. There were sent to Puschkau as well, where they were placed into foster care with separate foster families.

Besides the children of Lidice and Ležáky, two other children – Jiří Šámal and Alena Šámalová – were sent for racial examinations as well. The siblings were the children of members of the Czech resistance Jaromír Šámal and Milada Šámalová. Until that time, no children of members of the resistance had ever been removed from their families. One reason for this unusual step was apparently the fact that the Šámals were a politically prominent family; another was the occupiers' efforts at demonstrating their harsh treatment of relatives of leading members of the Czechoslovak foreign resistance, which had organized Heydrich's assassination. University professor Jaromír Šámal's father had been Přemysl Šámal, the former chancellor to Presidents Masaryk

and Beneš and a leading representative of the main Czech resistance organization *Politické ústředí* (in Czech: Political Headquarters), of which Jaromír and his wife Milada were members as well. Jaromír was arrested by the Gestapo in Prague on 4 July 1942 and shot the following day. Milada Šámalová spent the remainder of the war in a number of Nazi internment facilities. In December 1942 in Puschkau, Jiří and Alena were placed with German foster parents.

After the war, the Šámal siblings and all the children from Lidice and Ležáky who had been slated for Germanisation were (some sooner, some later) found and returned to their parents or other relatives. Their experience formed one of the main charges of crimes against children during the trials of *Lebensborn* representatives in Nuremberg and Munich. They were also discussed in the 1960s during the trial of Adolf Eichmann.

Not all of the Lidice children were deported beyond the borders of the Protectorate. Seven children younger than one year of age (František Černý, Veronika Hanfová, Pavel Horešovský, Josef Minařík, Jiří Müller, Libuše Müllerová, Jiří Pitín) were transferred from Kladno to a foundling hospital in Prague's Vinohrady district. In early 1943, they were moved to the infectious diseases ward of the German children's clinic housed in the building of the former Czech technical college. Except for František Černý, who died in 1942, in August 1943 the children were transferred to a shelter in the former Masaryk Homes in Prague-Krč.

Seven more children were born to Lidice women after 10 June 1942 (Věnceslava Kohlíčková, Karel Hanžl, Věra Müllerová, Marie Pešková, Anna Straková, Jaroslav Korecký, František Hroník.) The first four were born to mothers who were taken from Kladno to give birth at the Gestapo's department for imprisoned Czech women, located in a maternity clinic on Dykova Street in Vinohrady. After giving birth, the mothers were sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Another two children were born to mothers who had originally been deported to Ravensbrück but were transported to the maternity clinic on Dykova Street and subsequently returned to Ravensbrück. The births of the Lidice children at the maternity clinic on Dykova Street were reported not to the local registry office but to the Prague leadership of the NSV and the Gestapo. After the children were separated from their mothers, the German Red Cross brought them to the foundling hospital at the German children's clinic in Prague II. Of the children born after 10 June 1942, only Věra Müllerová and Jaroslav Korecký survived the war. Both were transferred to the children's shelter in Prague-Krč before the end of the war. After the institute was partially destroyed during an air raid, they were placed into the care of Czech families.

In addition to the Lidice children, the Protectorate authorities also engaged in the mass internment of children whose parents had been arrested during the state of emergency following the assassination of Heydrich and who were subsequently executed at the Mauthausen concentration camp. Children up to three years of age were placed in

the children's shelter in Prague-Krč, where a total nineteen remained until the end of the war. Older children were interned in a former home for invalids at Jenerálka in Prague-Vokovice. These forty-six (or possibly forty-eight) children, who were registered as prisoners of the Prague Gestapo, were subjected to racial examinations, but none were deemed suitable for Germanisation. On 14 April 1944, the children were transferred from Jenerálka to an internment camp in Svatobořice near the town of Kyjov. Since the fall of 1942, this camp had been a collection center for people arrested as relatives of émigrés or members of the resistance who were in hiding. In Svatobořice, the children were isolated from the other prisoners and placed under a special regime. Towards the end of the war, the children were briefly transferred to a school in Kyjov. Following the camp's liquidation in April 1945, they were transported along with some of the other prisoners to Brno and then to a work education camp in Planá nad Lužnicí, where they were liberated.

Until the end of the war, the Nazis did not make a definitive decision regarding the fate of the children who remained interned *en masse* within the Protectorate. Surviving correspondence between Karl Hermann Frank and the head of the *Lebensborn*, Max Sollmann, from the year 1943 shows that they considered the children's racial examination and the subsequent Germanisation of *suitable* individuals. *Unsuitable* children would be deported *to the East*. The following year, *previously non-Germanisable children* were subjected to racial examinations and

a total of twenty-two were selected for possible reeducation. Plans for their placement with German families were nevertheless abandoned due to fears of the Czech public's reaction.

Besides the above-described mass actions, there were also individual cases in the Protectorate in which the children of imprisoned parents were assigned a German caregiver or were placed in an orphanage even though relatives expressed an interest in looking after them.

Additionally, attempts at Germanising orphans or children born out of wedlock to ethnically mixed couples can be seen as another form of *child-stealing*. Generally speaking, there was an effort for *racially desirable* children born out of wedlock to be raised in a German setting. Here, too, the Prague office of the RuSHA played a role, for the agency's official duties included assessments concerning the granting of German citizenship and the approval of ethnically mixed marriages. The RuSHA's examiners subjected parents and children to racial measurement. After March 1943, Heinrich Himmler's order requiring the registration of children born out of wedlock to German soldiers and non-German women was supposed to apply to the Protectorate as well, but the latest research has shown that in such cases the preferred approach was to permit a mixed marriage so that the children could remain with their mother. Germanisation was an easier task for the German authorities when it came to orphans – both Czech and German. If these children were *racially fit*, they could be placed with German foster families.

Reichsgau Sudetenland

A subject that to this day remains little studied is the practice of removing children from their families in Czechoslovakia's border regions, the so-called *Reichsgau Sudetenland*. Some of the practices applied in this region can be gleaned from the cases of specific children. For instance, the database of the Czech-German Fund for the Future's Office for the Victims of Nazism registers the case of three siblings removed from their father by the NSV after their mother was imprisoned at Auschwitz. The supposed reason for their removal was that the father could not look after them due to illness. For purposes of their Germanisation, the children were then transferred to camps in Klosterbrück (Czarnowąsy) and Grottkau (Grodków). Two of the children could be located after the war; the third remained missing. Children could also be removed from their parents on the basis of a Gau administration decree issued on 30 June 1943 regarding children born to unmarried Czech mothers.

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The subject of *stolen children*, meaning children forcibly taken from the Czech lands for reeducation in Germany, remains shrouded in a number of myths that continue to be repeated in the media despite the fact that they have been debunked by historical research. However, even historical research cannot answer all questions, a fact that is doubly true when it comes to Czech historiography. At the same time, it is a subject that

remains exceptionally current today. The victims of forced Germanisation were either temporarily or permanently torn from their families, and some never learned the truth of their birth. They grew up and lived with an identity that was based on lies. It was an experience that shaped their entire life and affected the lives of their loved ones as well.

In the Czech Republic, the subject of children taken from the Czech lands for reeducation in Germany has mostly been viewed within the context of the Czech nation's persecution, and so the main interest has been on children from ethnically Czech families, in particular the Lidice and Ležáky children marked for Germanisation. Their kidnapping has traditionally been associated with the retaliatory measures taken against the Czech nation following the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich. Nevertheless, *child-stealing* was a part of the full set of racial policies enacted by Heinrich Himmler and the NSDAP with the goal of accelerating the birth rate and population growth among ethnic Germans. Himmler had already formulated his plans for the targeted Germanisation of Nordic members of non-German nations in 1939. In his view, the Germanisation of *racially valuable* individuals would remove potential leaders from these foreign nations. For the German nation, this step would be doubly beneficial:

With each successful action, we gain two people: one who is lost to the enemy and in the future will no longer stand against us in the field, and one who stands with us and fights for us.

In the Czech lands, forced Germanisation affected Czech as well as Polish children (and the children of ethnically mixed Czech-Polish, Czech-German, or Polish-German couples). But even German children from Czechoslovakia could become victims of Himmler's plans for the biological and demographic fortification of the German nation.

Recommended publications:

- J. Havlíková, M. Hořák, *Pronásledování nezletilých dětí českých obětí a odpůrců nacismu v letech 1939–1945*, [in] *“Nepřichází-li práce k Tobě...” / “Kommt die Arbeit nicht zu Dir...” Různé podoby nucené práce ve studiích a dokumentech*, Prague 2003
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AUTHORS

Volodymyr Hinda

Senior Research Fellow of the World War II Department, Institute of History of Ukraine at the National Academy of Science of Ukraine. Author of more than 160 publications and books.

Isabel Heinemann, Ph.D

Professor for Modern History at the University of Münster (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster). Her work focuses are History of the USA and Germany in the 20th century, Holocaust and Nazi-occupation policy in Europe, History of Knowledge and Gender History. Her book *“Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut”. Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die nationalsozialistische Rassenpolitik* (2003) [*Race, Settlement, German Blood. The Race and Settlement Main Office of the SS and racial policy of National Socialism*] described for the first time the practice of forced Germanisation of children in a broader context.

Katarzyna Kaczorowska

Journalist and editor. Author of numerous historical reportages on Polish history of the 20th century.

Anna Malinowska

Journalist. Author of *Brunatna kołysanka. Historie uprowadzonych dzieci* (2017) [*Brown Lullaby. Stories of stolen children*], the first publication in Poland after 1989 to deal with the topic of stolen children.

Pavla Plachá, Ph.D

Historian, head of the Research Section Resistance and Dissent in the Years 1938–1989 at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes. Specialises in persecution of women in Nazi concentration camps. Author of the monography *Zpřetrhané životy: Československé ženy v nacistickém koncentračním táboře Ravensbrück v letech 1939–1945* (2021) [*Severed Lives: Czechoslovak Women in the Ravensbrück Nazi Concentration Camp in 1939–1945*].

Dorothee Schmitz-Köster, Ph.D

Journalist and writer. She has been researching the topic of Lebensborn since 1995. She wrote, i.a., *“Deutsche Mutter, bist du bereit ...”: Der Lebensborn und seine Kinder* (2010) [*“German mother, are you ready...”: The Lebensborn and its children*], *Raubkind. Von der SS nach Deutschland verschleppt* (2018) [*Stolen Children. Abducted to Germany by the SS*]. Author and producer of several books, radio features, readings, presentations and exhibitions on Nazi regime.

Serhiy Stelnykovych Ph.D

Professor of History at Zhytomyr State University. Specialises in the history of Ukraine during World War II. Author of more than 120 scientific publications and books.