



“They Must Be Germans”

The Nazi Germanization Program and the United Nations Relief and
Rehabilitation Administration, 1939-1947

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Introduction

Children are simultaneously the most forgotten and most remembered victims of war. The most remembered by their communities because of the loss of such young lives, but the most forgotten by history because they are not politicians, soldiers, writers, or artists. However, it is this very innocence and simplicity that makes them perhaps the most important group to examine when telling the story of war and its aftermath. After World War II, an estimated 8 million children were considered homeless in Germany, 50,000 of whom were children who had been kidnapped from all over Europe and brought to Germany by the Nazis for “Germanization.”¹ Germanization was a Nazi program of deliberate imposition of German characteristics and identity upon non-German individuals. The existence of these children was a surprise to postwar aid workers from The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) who were suddenly tasked with finding these children, identifying them, and returning them home. The return of these children was a vital part of postwar re-population programs as well as national narratives of unity and pride in the wake of the devastation of the Nazis. There is no better example of this than Poland, where an estimated 20,000 children had been kidnapped during the war.²

Identity is a recurring theme throughout the experience of these children, continually questioned and examined by government actors. The Nazis were the first to manipulate these children’s identities, endeavoring to build the future of the German nation by drawing on the population of “racially valuable” individuals of so-called “German stock,” referring to their Germanic heritage, and Germanizing them. Whether or not these children were actually of

¹ Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children : Reconstructing Europe’s Families after World War II*, 2015, 4; Tara Zahra, “‘A Human Treasure’: Europe’s Displaced Children between Nationalism and Internationalism,” *Past & Present* 210 (January 2011), 341.

² Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 13.

German descent was no matter, their intelligence, appearance, and ability to learn German made them plenty “racially valuable” for the increasingly desperate Nazis. After the war ended and postwar humanitarian organizations moved in, including the UNRRA, these children’s identities were again brought into question as aid workers struggled to identify these children’s nationalities and families. Formerly occupied countries, including Poland, used postwar international organizations and agencies to argue for their right to “their children,” even if those children were living in better conditions in Germany with an adoptive family as a result of Germanization. Underage and without autonomy, these children became pawns in an international reckoning of national identity, citizenship, and power. Historians commonly frame World War II’s kidnapped children as one of the many victims of the Nazi war machine, but in fact they are more: their existence reveals a government redefining nationality for their own purposes. Nationality, under the Nazis, was not being born within a country, but as being culturally belonging to a nation—culture became a key piece of nationality. After the war, a new hybrid definition emerged within the international community: a combination between a person’s birthplace and the language and cultural practices they grew up with. Thus, the kidnapped children of Europe expose a transition in the international community’s understanding of identity from something physical to something personal.

The conflation of nationality and citizenship was key to understanding the way in which the UNRRA approached determining a displaced person’s (DP) nationality. Nationality and citizenship are often used interchangeably in present public international law to describe a person’s legal relationship to a State. However, within specific nations there can be legal distinctions between the two.³ Aid workers battled what DPs claimed their nationality was and

³ United Nations, “Guidance Note of the Secretary General: The United Nations and Statelessness,” June 2011, 3.

what was legally recognized by the international community at the time. A UNRRA officer wrote, “it is my experience that Eastern Europeans customarily distinguish between nationality (in their eyes an ethnic concept, based on cultural factors) and citizenship (corresponding to the concept of nationality, [but] based on legal status following political boundaries).”⁴ Within UNRRA documents, “nationality” commonly refers to both definitions, demonstrating a changing understanding of the term. When faced with determining a child’s identity, many UNRRA workers were left with nothing but recognition of language or a snatch of a memory of a grandparent singing them lullabies. They were forced to make choices about whether language was related to nationality, thus battling these complex understandings of nationality that were ever-changing in the postwar landscape.

When remembered by historians, the kidnapped children of the Second World War exist as a small experience within a larger narrative of postwar refugees. Historians Tara Zahra and Lynne Taylor have written the most extensively on kidnapped children and the UNRRA. In Zahra’s book *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe’s Families After World War II*, she examines the importance of ideas of the family and children’s psychological health in postwar humanitarian work, using the UNRRA’s work with kidnapped children as a case study. Lynne Taylor tells a sprawling and more technical narrative of the UNRRA’s work in the U.S. Zone of Germany as well as that of its successor, the International Refugee Organization’s (IRO), in *In The Children’s Best Interests: Unaccompanied Children in American-Occupied Germany, 1945-1952*. She focuses on the UNRRA and IRO’s work with unaccompanied children from 1945-1952, with kidnapped children playing an important role. Other historians including Lynn Nicholas, Gerard Cohen, and Pieter Lagrou have written on postwar refugees with mentions of

⁴ E.S. Sheldon, “Reports Officer, for District Director to Chief, Reports and Statistics Branch,” June 8, 1946, S-0425-0004-15, UNA, New York, NY.

Europe's kidnapped children but lack a specific focus on this group. This thesis aims to bridge the gap between sprawling accounts of the postwar world and the specific issues facing kidnapped children by examining the ways in which kidnapped children forced governments and individuals to question what national identity and citizenship meant, first for the Nazis and later the international community as a whole.

Two major bodies of archival materials were used in the writing of this thesis. The first is Case 8 of the "Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal," commonly known as the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, which is used predominantly in Chapter 2. The official court files for all of the trials at Nuremberg were bound into a 42-volume series known as "The Blue Series" and constituted the official legal record for trials of the major civilian and military leaders of Nazi Germany who were accused of war crimes. Among these individuals were Hermann Wilhelm Göring, Rudolf Hess, Joachim vom Ribbentrop, Hans Frank, Albert Speer, and many others.⁵ In the court files are official transcripts of court proceedings, prosecution briefs and statements, and final pleas of the defendants as well as prosecution and defense exhibits and document books. The Library of Congress has scanned all 42 volumes in the series, and they are available in full on their website.

Case 8 was *United States of America v. Ulrich Greifelt et al.*, commonly known as the RuSHA Case. From indictment to sentencing, the proceedings lasted from October 10, 1947 to March 10, 1948. The defendants in the case were all connected with various Nazi organizations related to Heinrich Himmler who, among other roles, served as Reich's Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germanism (*Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums*,

⁵ For a more extensive history of the Nuremberg Trials, reference Eugene Davidson, ed., *The Trial of the Germans: An Account of the Twenty-Two Defendants before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg*; John Tusa and Ann Tusa, *The Nuremberg Trials*; Telford Taylor *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials*.

commonly known as the “RKFDV”). In this role, Himmler oversaw the Nazi racial program—the domestic population programs, resettlement of the ethnic Germans, and consignment of racially undesirable persons to forced labor, concentration camps, or extermination camps.⁶ Ulrich Greifelt was the Chief of the Staff Main Office (*Stabshauptamt*) for RKFDV, and the defendants in Case 8 for the most part worked for Greifelt or alongside him to accomplish Himmler’s dreams of strengthening the German people. Three organizations gained significant attention within Case 8 and earned it its nickname as the RuSHA case: the SS Race and Settlement Main Office (*Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS*, RuSHA) itself, the Repatriation Office for Ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsch Mittelstelle*, “VoMi”) of the Nazi *Schutzstaffel* (SS), and *Lebensborn, e.V.* (the Well of Life Society) of the Nazi *Schutzstaffel* (SS).⁷ The heads of these organizations were, respectively, Richard Hildebrandt, Werner Lorenz, and Max Sollman; together, their organizations worked to kidnap and Germanize the children of Europe. Much of the evidence from Case 8 that is used in this thesis comes from evidence that was entered in the trials of these men and their associates, as well as the briefs, statements, and testimony from the prosecution. Case 8 was key to understanding the innerworkings and ideological motivations of the organizations who kidnapped children, as well as gaining testimony from children and families who were affected, which is lacking in other archival sources used.

The second major archival source was the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, whose archives are held in the United Nations Archives in New York City, which is used predominantly in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The UNRRA was established by

⁶ Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 339.

⁷ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, “The SS,” Holocaust Encyclopedia, accessed April 15, 2020. The SS (*Schutzstaffel*, or Protection Squads) began as Adolf Hitler’s personal bodyguard unit. It would later become “both the elite guard of the Nazi Reich and Hitler’s executive force prepared to carry out all security-related duties, without regard for legal restraint.” For more information on the SS, see Adrian Weale, *The SS: A New History* (London: Little, Brown, 2010).

agreement of 44 nations on November 9, 1943 for the purpose of planning, coordinating, and administering of relief to the victims of World War II in any area under the control of the United Nations.⁸ Prisoners of war, enemy nationals, and ex-enemy nationals (those from countries who had allied with Nazi Germany) were excluded from their purview.⁹ The Inter-Governmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR), also established in 1943, and the G-5 division of Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force (SCHAEF) worked with (and sometimes against) the UNRRA in their effort to repatriate the displaced persons of Europe.¹⁰ Headquartered in Washington, D.C., at its peak the UNRRA had a staff totaling nearly 25,000 and missions in over thirty countries around the world.¹¹ Of those missions, the UNRRA mission to Germany was one of the largest in terms of scale and need. The types of documents from the German Mission range from narrative reports on aid work to statistics on food rationing and requests for transportation. For this thesis, only sources relating to the Child Search, Child Welfare, repatriation of children, and Germanization were used. Some sources from the Poland Mission, specifically sources from the Polish Red Cross, were also used.

The UNRRA is not the only organization who has records on the search for kidnapped children. Its successor organization, the IRO, as well as the International Tracing Service (ITS) both have archives which have been used by other historians to examine the processes of searching, tracing, and repatriating these children. However, because the UNRRA was the first organization to work with these children and did the bulk of the repatriations, the UNRRA are a

⁸ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration fonds, AG-018: Germany Mission, United Nations Archives, New York, NY.

⁹ Lynne Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests: Unaccompanied Children in American-Occupied Germany, 1945-1952* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 29-30.

¹⁰ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 16-18. For more information on the internal battles between the three organizations, refer to pages 16-40.

¹¹ "Finding Aid," United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, United Nations Archives, New York, NY.

more valuable resource when attempting to understand the postwar response to Germanization. For this thesis, just sources from the UNRRA will be used.

Together, these archival sources tell a story of Germanization from its inception to the repatriation of its victims and this thesis incorporates theory and broader history to present this forgotten story. Chapter 1 outlines the foundations of Nazi racial theory and the history of the UNRRA. Chapter 2 examines how RuSHA's *Lebensborn* program fit into Nazi racial theory and the importance of the Germanization program to Nazi Germany's greater goals of re-population. Chapter 3 and 4 tell the postwar story of kidnapped children, first through the barriers UNRRA aid workers faced in identifying kidnapped children and second the problems they faced in repatriating these children. This thesis tells the story of kidnapped children from kidnapping to repatriation and the ideological questions about identity that these children raised for the Nazis, aid workers, and the international community as a whole.

Chapter One: Race Under the Nazis and the UNRRA's Mission

The Nazi war machine displaced high numbers of people, both directly and indirectly, during and after the war. When Hannah Arendt wrote in 1945 that after the war “the largest group of potentially stateless people [will] be found in Germany itself,” she was correct.¹² Europe’s kidnapped children were a small, albeit sizable portion of the estimated 6 million DPs in Germany, however the exact number of children who were taken to Germany is difficult to pin down because of a number of reasons.¹³

One reason was identifying victims of “kidnapping” and “Germanization” was complicated in a world where national loyalties were ambiguous and bilingualism was the norm.¹⁴ Second, many of the Nazi records of these children were destroyed by the Nazis at the end of the war and third, the children’s countries of origin were accused of inflating the number of children who had been kidnapped. For example, after the war the Polish Red Cross maintained that at least 200,000 Polish children were kidnapped for Germanization, although the actual number is more likely closer to 20,000.¹⁵ The reason for this numerical discrepancy is unclear, but could possibly be the result of incorrect data, differing definitions of kidnapping, or the Polish Red Cross purposefully inflating numbers to draw attention to the gravity of the situation. Returning these children to their families—or to Poland in general—was a difficult task, and as a result the UNRRA and IRO located and returned to their families only an estimated 10-15 percent of kidnapped Polish children by the 1950s.¹⁶

¹² Hannah Arendt, “The Stateless People,” *Contemporary Jewish Record* 8, no. 2 (April 1, 1945), 145.

¹³ Lynn H. Nicholas, *Cruel World: The Children of Europe in the Nazi Web* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2005), 5. Some estimates place the number of DPs as high as 12.5 million.

¹⁴ Zahra, ““A Human Treasure,”” 341.

¹⁵ Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 13.

¹⁶ Simone Gigliotti, ed., “Unaccompanied Children and the Allied Child Search,” in *The Young Victims of the Nazi Regime: Migration, the Holocaust, and Postwar Displacement* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 279.

As Vinita A. Lewis, a social worker for the IRO said in 1948, “the lost identity of individual children is *the* Social Problem of the day on the continent of Europe,”¹⁷ a statement that rang true. During the war, the identities of many children were hidden in order to protect them from a variety of aggressors, whether they be governments, armies, or neighbors. Many of those who had been sent from occupied countries to foster families in the Reich for Germanization would stay hidden until aid workers discovered their identities. Some would never be located, the children staying hidden from the world—and many, from themselves.¹⁸

I. Racial Theory and the Nazi Plot

World War II saw the culmination of over a hundred years of racial theory and redefinitions of national identity that predominantly ended the existence of multiethnic states as a result of the Nazis’ violent warfare. Through their racial policy and theory, the Nazis reformulated understandings of nationality and national identity, creating a lasting impact on the ways in which the postwar international community perceived race and nationality. Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* in 1925 that, “...we National Socialists must hold unflinchingly to our aim in foreign policy, namely, to *secure for the German people the land and soil to which they are entitled on this earth.*”¹⁹ This quotation demonstrates the core of the overall Nazi ideology and master plan—not only to acquire more land for the German people (the concept of *Lebensraum*),

¹⁷ Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 3.

¹⁸ Nicholas, *Cruel War*, 5.

¹⁹ Italics added for emphasis. Adolf Hitler and Ralph Manheim, *Mein Kampf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 65.

but also that define of who were “the German people.”²⁰ This question was answered in what is now referred to as Nazi racial theory, which centered around the idea of racial purity.²¹

Racial theory at its core found immutable physical characteristics in humans that identified individuals as belonging to a specific race. This new type of theory developed in the nineteenth century through a collaboration between a variety of European thinkers, including Charles Darwin and Arthur de Gobineau. During this same period, the amount of science produced that linked physical appearance to mental abilities, criminal tendencies, and hereditary features increased, strengthening the arguments of eugenicists and racialists.²² Racial theory thus could be used, among other things, to argue the mental superiority—or inferiority—of a race.

German racial theory revolved around the use of two terms: “Aryan” and “Nordic,” both of which were commonly used by Hitler and the Nazis to refer to the same group of individuals: Germans. These concepts were developed by racial theorists during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and were foundational for the Nazi party when developing their own racial theory.²³ “Aryan” refers to a family of languages including Norse, Greek, and Sanskrit and “Nordic” refers to the idea of the Nordic race, which included people residing in areas of Germany.²⁴ These terms allowed the Nazis to not only claim any Aryan or Nordic peoples as German, but also tether Germanness to both cultural identity and national boundaries. Both

²⁰ Anton Weiss-Wendt and Rory Yeomans, eds., *Racial Science in Hitler's New Europe, 1938-1945* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 5. “*Lebensraum*” was coined in 1904 by a German zoologist named Friedrich Ratzel who interpreted Darwin’s theory of evolution as “the violent struggle between species for territory”. The direct translation of *Lebensraum* is living space and was commonly used by the Nazis in reference to a need for more land for the Germanic people to live on.

²¹ Hitler and Manheim, *Mein Kampf*, 405.

²² Weiss-Wendt and Yeomans, eds., *Racial Science*, 6.

²³ Germany (Territory under Allied occupation 1945-1955 : U.S. Zone), *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10. Nuernberg, October 1946-April 1949*, vol. 4, 15 vols. (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1949), 622; Geoffrey G. Field, “Nordic Racism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38, no. 3 (1977): 523.

²⁴ Richard McMahon, *The Races of Europe: Construction of National Identities in the Social Sciences, 1839-1939* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 105-6.

Aryan and Nordic racial theorists believed that these groups were superior to others, with the Nordacists going so far as to say that the German nation was the last refuge of the Nordic race. As a result, the Nazis were able to lay claim to large swaths of land and people across Europe, arguing that they were in fact German because of their Aryan or Nordic history—they were “lost German blood.”²⁵

Nazi racialists, led by Hitler’s beliefs, pulled together these different ideas into a surprisingly malleable theory commonly known as Nazi racial theory, which built upon existing theory and infused it with Nazism. Under their new theory, Aryan-Nordics (Germans) were the superior race and had to unite in the face of other races (among them, Jews) who threatened their survival and existence.²⁶ This theory served as foundational to Nazi laws, policies, campaigns, and overall goals of building a more powerful German nation. Over the course of the Nazi reign, this body of theory was constantly reconfigured and redefined in order to best assist in Nazi plans. Hitler himself even acknowledged that his use of “race” was flawed and expressed that he used it for a political purpose, not an intellectual one:

I know perfectly well...that in the scientific sense there is no such thing as race...And I as a politician need a conception which enables the order which has hitherto existed on historic bases to be abolished and an entirely and new anti-historic order enforced and given an intellectual basis...And for this purpose the conception of race serves me well...With the conception of race, National Socialism will carry the revolution abroad and re-cast the world.²⁷

Hitler highlights in this quote two key things: first, the importance of race to the Nazi ideology and mission, and second, how the Nazis used race as a weapon, framing it however

²⁵ Bradley J. Nichols, “Nazi Germanization Policy in Occupied Europe,” in *German-Occupied Europe in the Second World War*, ed. Raffael Scheck, Fabien Théofilakis, and Julia S. Torrie (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2019), 215

²⁶ Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich*, 331; Weiss-Wendt and Yeomans, eds., *Racial Science*, 6-10.

²⁷ Quotation from a book of Hermann Rauschning’s, an early colleague of Hitler’s. Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1939), 229-30.

they needed. The importance of race and the malleability of racial theory allowed the Nazis to rationalize their territorial claims, as well as programs like Germanization and the kidnapping of non-German children in general.²⁸

Three agencies: VoMi, RuSHA, and *Lebensborn*, all under the umbrella of the Nazi SS, worked together to bring the Nazi racial plan to fruition.²⁹ The kidnapping of European children fell within the purview of all three agencies, but *Lebensborn* did a significant portion of the work. The Race and Settlement Main Office (RuSHA) was one of the oldest arms of the SS.³⁰ Among many activities, the office staff carried out racial examinations that were based on Nazi racial theory across Germany and Europe to determine the racial identity of individuals, including examinations of all children considered for Germanization. These racial examinations focused on a variety of factors, including family history, language, and things as rudimentary as physical appearance, all which the Nazi racialists theorized to be contributing to an individual's racial identity.³¹ Physical appearance was a key factor in the kidnapping of children, allowing the Nazis to lay claim populations whose actual Germanic heritage was suspect. Additionally, RuSHA gave new German names to the kidnapped children and handled the official records of

²⁸ The term “non-German” in this sense is referring to the idea of children not being from Germany’s pre-World War II national borders. Although these children were seen as German to the Nazis, in the view of international organizations they were considered to be Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Baltic, etc.

²⁹ Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 611. The Office of Repatriation of Ethnic Germans (VoMi), worked more on programs involving “ethnic Germans” but was responsible for pieces of the kidnapping process.

³⁰ Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 634. For more information on *Lebensborn*, see Catrine Clay and Michael Leapman, *Master Race: The Lebensborn Experiment in Nazi Germany* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995); Herbert F. Ziegler, “Fight Against the Empty Cradle: Nazi Pronatal Policies and the SS-Führerkorps,” *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, no. 38 (1986): 25–40; Romain Icard, *Lebensborn: The Nazi Nurseries*, Documentary (ZED, 2014); Larry V. Thompson, “Lebensborn and the Eugenics Policy of the Reichsführer-SS,” *Central European History* 4, no. 1 (1971): 54–77; Eva Simonsen and Kjersti Ericsson, *Children of World War II: The Hidden Enemy Legacy* (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers, 2005).

³¹ Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 635, 678.

the children, while *Lebensborn* handled the day-to-day activities and the futures of the children.³²

Lebensborn, established in 1935, was the most important of the three departments when it comes to the kidnapping of non-German children for Germanization.³³ Originally founded as a society within RuSHA, it quickly became an office within the SS as both its workload and Heinrich Himmler's interest in the office increased.³⁴ Using membership dues, the society provided welfare assistance to large families and single mothers, ran maternity and childcare facilities, and found foster homes for illegitimate children of SS officers—but only if the offspring were racially valuable.³⁵ When the Germanization program started, *Lebensborn*'s involvement seemed natural based on its previous responsibilities. The organization took on a major role in the program, specifically with the care of the children, logistics of the Germanization program, and the placement of children into foster homes.³⁶ These homes and the work of *Lebensborn* were of vital importance to Himmler, who saw the children it cared for as the future of Germany.

Himmler and the Nazis were concerned about the future of the German race, a fear compounded by the sharp decline in German birth rate after World War One.³⁷ Once the Nazis came to power, they focused on trying to increase the birthrate specifically within the SS in order

³² Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 678.

³³ *Lebensborn* loosely translates to “fountain of life” but there is not a perfect translation. The office was a society at its founding, which SS members and officers paid dues to in order to support them and their families.

³⁴ Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 631-633, 636. Himmler was in fact the chairman of the office which made sense considering his position of Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germanism, which placed VoMi, RuSHA, and *Lebensborn* all under his purview.

³⁵ Thompson, “Lebensborn and the Eugenics Policy of the Reichsführer-SS,” 54, 60, 62; Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 635-636.

³⁶ Thompson, “Lebensborn and the Eugenics Policy of the Reichsführer-SS,” 64-75.

³⁷ Ziegler, “Fight Against the Empty Cradle,” 25. The German birth rate dropped sixty percent after the war, making it, with the exception of Austria, the lowest fertility rate in Europe.

to ensure the quality of the children produced was up to par with the Nazi ideal.³⁸ This was the origin of Himmler's population programs, of which there were multiple efforts throughout the pre-war period to boost the birth rate. Many of Himmler's policies were similar to Nordic racialist ideas, including, "financial incentives for large families, improvement of maternity and child welfare services, heavy penalties for abortion, and a national campaign against the spread of 'progressive' ideas."³⁹ Many of these policies only applied when the children born were racially ideal, meaning they fit into what Nazi racial theories determined to be German. Incentives were only given to families who would provide Aryan children, and abortions were only approved for "hereditary unhealthy children"—specifically Jewish children.⁴⁰

Himmler was deeply invested in *Lebensborn's* work. To him, the society's work with pregnant mothers and families was a vital piece of his population programs, which emphasized motherhood. Motherhood became a national ideal under Himmler, with divorce laws even including fertility in possible grounds for divorce.⁴¹ Himmler was trying to re-educate society to reject traditional stigmas against illegitimate children and bigamous marriages, which he hoped would boost the birth rate. When the war broke out, renewed pressure was placed on *Lebensborn* as the male population of German went to war.⁴² Himmler implemented policies in the SS to

³⁸ Ziegler, "Fight Against the Empty Cradle," 25-26.

³⁹ Field, "Nordic Racism," 530-6, quote from Paul Kluge, "Nationalsozialistische Europaideologie," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 3 (July 1955): 240-75. Although Himmler's population programs were perhaps founded on Nordic theory, as the Nazis rose in power the Nordics began to see that their opinions differed on domestic and foreign policy despite agreeing on racial ideals. After 1940, as the Nazis shifted their focus intensely on the destruction of the Jews, Nordic racism largely ceased to exist within the Nazi ideology, which was not necessarily the focus of the Nordic argument. Instead, the Nazis used a Nordic and Aryan racist ideology as a foundation for their plans that were far more based on a program of power and conquest. While racial ideology (including Nordicism, Aryanism, and anti-Semitism) among may have been foundational, Nazi racial theory evolved to support military conquests, population programs, and other Nazi actions. One of those actions was the kidnapping of non-German foreign children under a program of Germanization.

⁴⁰ Ziegler, "Fight Against the Empty Cradle," 27.

⁴¹ Ziegler, "Fight Against the Empty Cradle," 28. If a husband considered his wife to be sterile, he could file for divorce—whether or not she was medically sterile was irrelevant.

⁴² Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 635; Ziegler, "Fight Against the Empty Cradle," 30.

give furloughs to married men so they could go home and have children, expanded maternity homes to allow foreign women who gave birth to the children of German soldiers, as long as their child would be racially valuable, and further encouraged illegitimate children.⁴³

Despite all of Himmler's population programs, the birth rate did not increase enough to support the population that the Nazis dreamed of. This disappointment pushed Himmler and his work in RuSHA and *Lebensborn* to consider "kidnapping" children from occupied territories as a part of a program of Germanization, of which Poland was a main target.⁴⁴ After the war, the UNRRA picked up the pieces of the Himmler programs, uncovering the identities of the children who went through the programs and struggling to send them home.

II. The UNRRA and Unaccompanied Children in Postwar Germany

By July 1945, an estimated 3.3 million of the 5.8 million DPs in Germany had been repatriated, with or without the help of SCHAEF and the UNRRA.⁴⁵ Left behind were the groups more difficult to repatriate, predominantly Eastern Europeans, as well as those who did not wish to repatriate. Unaccompanied children made up a complicated and significant piece of those who remained in Germany. In April 1945 the UNRRA estimated there was over ten thousand unaccompanied children among the DPs in Germany and that number would only go up as more were discovered.⁴⁶ These unaccompanied children included those who had been kidnapped for Germanization, as well as those who were unwanted, uncared for, or abandoned. They had ended

⁴³ Thompson, "Lebensborn and the Eugenics Policy of the Reichsführer-SS," 68-72.

⁴⁴ "Feb. 19, 1942 order from Greifelt" in Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 635-636. "Kidnapping" as a term was not used by the Nazis internally. Instead, they referred to the children as being "transferred" to *Lebensborn* homes as a part of a "Germanization" or "re-Germanization" process.

⁴⁵ Nicholas, *Cruel War*, 4; Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 34. Many DPs found their way home through "self-repatriation", a large portion of whom were from France (1.39 million).

⁴⁶ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 45. "Unaccompanied children" was the term widely used to describe children who were without an adult caring for them. Those who were accompanied by an unrelated adult were also of concern, but not as pressing as those who had no care.

up separated from their families in Germany for a variety of reasons: older ones who were brought to Germany through the Nazi forced labor program, younger ones who had been placed in the care of individuals besides their parents and had lost these individuals, or had been born of “enemy nationals” (Nazis) and “United Nations nationals” (citizens of UN member countries).⁴⁷ SCHAEF determined early on that unaccompanied children would need to be “protected” until they could be returned to their respective governments or their parents. Children would not be allowed to be adopted, placed in permanent homes, or accompany adults outside of Germany, even if those adults were “United Nations nationals.”⁴⁸

The UNRRA’s objective was to reunite unaccompanied children with their families as early and quickly as possible, and if that was impossible they would return them to their respective countries of origin and place them in government care.⁴⁹ There were a series of programs that the UNRRA experimented with in 1945 for moving groups of unaccompanied children out of Germany and to other countries for temporary care. The Swiss took some, although this arrangement quickly fell apart for multiple reasons. England took a number of Jewish children who had been in concentration camps, as well. However, finding children for these programs became increasingly difficult, as some countries’ liaison officers (representatives from another country consulting with the UNRRA on the treatment of its DPs) forbade the

⁴⁷ Taylor, *In the Children’s Best Interests*, 42-43; Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 10-11. 40-50,000 White Russian children were deported in “Operation Hay” to work in the Reich, and at least 28,000 Soviet youth under 18 were conscripted for labor in the Luftwaffe and armaments industry. Many of these children remained adrift in Germany after the war ended. Many children were abandoned in Germany as the result of the fact that one-third of foreign workers in Germany were women. Foreign workers who became pregnant were allowed to return home, but the Nazis quickly suspected intentional pregnancy and began forcing abortions or sterilizations starting in 1943. Women who were impregnated by German men were allowed to bring their babies to term even after 1943, but if these children were seen as Germanizable they were placed in SS-run Lebensborn homes for adoption by a German family. Children who were deemed “racially unworthy” often died as a result of neglect and starvation in special institutions for foreign children.

⁴⁸ Taylor, *In the Children’s Best Interests*, 42. “United Nations national” was the term widely used by the UNRRA to describe individuals who were citizens of a UN member state and were within the parameters of UNRRA care. For example, Germans were not United Nations nationals.

⁴⁹ Taylor, *In the Children’s Best Interests*, 43-44.

movement of their children outside of Germany unless the children were being returned to their home countries. The Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Poland were among these countries.⁵⁰

Poland was particularly complex, partially as a result of the political situation. After a failed attempt to defeat the Germans in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, the Poles were liberated by the Soviet army, with the Soviets capturing Warsaw on January 17, 1945.⁵¹ Poland was governed by a Communist-dominated coalition who allowed the Soviets to keep its territory of eastern Poland.⁵² The Communist government in Warsaw, which was by late 1945 recognized diplomatically as the legitimate government of Poland, was determined to keep non-Jewish children out of the hands of the London Poles (the remaining wartime anti-Communist Polish government in exile) for fear that the children would never return to Poland.⁵³ Similar to the obstacles the UNRRA faced in repatriating adult DPs, the difficulty of repatriating Polish unaccompanied children would be a reoccurring theme throughout the UNRRA's efforts.

In August 1945, the UNRRA decided a plan for the systematic for United Nations children search in Germany was a vital necessity. The newly developed plan was to canvass all institutions and agencies caring for children, focusing on child welfare agencies, such as the Jugendamt (Youth Welfare Office); foster home placement agencies; kindergartens, and nurseries; as well as churches and schools.⁵⁴ Each child would be screened and all information regarding the child's background would be recorded, as well as an assessment of the quality of care the child was receiving, and from there make a decision as to if the child would remain or be

⁵⁰ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 57-59.

⁵¹ History.com Editors, "Soviets Capture Warsaw," HISTORY, January 14, 2020.

⁵² Robert Blobaum, "Poland," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2008); Krzysztoflew, *Map of Border Changes in History of Poland, Years: 1000, 1569, 1939 and 1945* (Wikipedia, June 10, 2007).

⁵³ Schottland for Sir Frederick Morgan, "21 Polish Unaccompanied Children and Polish Red Cross" (October 19, 1945), S-0401-0002-01 - Child Welfare Section - Conferences - Child Welfare - Central Headquarters, UNRRA.

⁵⁴ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 62.

taken to one of the children's camps in Germany.⁵⁵ This process was extremely successful, uncovering hundreds of children of varying backgrounds, including Jewish, Hungarian, Polish, Ukrainian, Czech, Yugoslavian, and German children.⁵⁶ The German and Hungarian children were considered to be of ex-enemy origin, so they were not the responsibility of the UNRRA, their care mostly left to the local German authorities and churches.⁵⁷

Separate DP camps and sections of existing camps were set up for unaccompanied children in order to meet children's specific needs. In the camps, attention was paid to children's health, nutrition, education, and even vocational training was provided for older children who were of working age.⁵⁸ Children's information was registered with the tracing arm of the UNRRA and from there the administration checked their records to see if anyone, usually a family member, had submitted a request for the child.⁵⁹ If yes, then that child would be returned to that person. In the situation where the children were orphans or no requests existed in the records, then consent from the official liaison officer from the child's country of origin was obtained to resettle the child or repatriate them.⁶⁰ In most cases, it was impossible to reunite families. Children who were old enough to be consulted about repatriation would be, but those who were not were considered "wards of their country of origin," thus leading to what were commonly known as "forced repatriations."⁶¹

⁵⁵ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 62; S. Howells and W. Edgerton, "Face Sheet for Alois Hoffmann" (January 21, 1946), S-0437-0013-11 - Displaced Persons - Child Search Procedure, UNRRA; Willem G. Huysson, "Face Sheet for Anton Mynarsky" (January 30, 1946), S-0437-0013-11 - Displaced Persons - Child Search Procedure, UNRRA.

⁵⁶ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests* 62-63.

⁵⁷ Michelle Mouton, "Missing, Lost, and Displaced Children in Postwar Germany: The Great Struggle to Provide for the War's Youngest Victims," *Central European History* 48, no. 1 (2015): 60.

⁵⁸ George Woodbridge, *UNRRA: The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. Vol. 2* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1950), 532.

⁵⁹ "10,000 Kidnapped Children Found by UNRRA" (May 26, 1946), S-0400-0004-03 - 014.6 - Unaccompanied Children - Reports, UNRRA.

⁶⁰ "10,000 Kidnapped Children Found by UNRRA" (May 26, 1946), S-0400-0004-03 - 014.6 - Unaccompanied Children - Reports, UNRRA.

⁶¹ Woodbridge, *UNRRA*, 532.

In their interviews with children, UNRRA officers consistently faced dilemmas of nationality, especially in cases of kidnapped children. Upon arrival in Germany, their names were Germanized, they were forced to speak only German, and commonly young children had forgotten—or been brainwashed into forgetting—their birthplaces and true identities.⁶² Interviewers commonly used language recognition to discover the origins of young children, such as in the case of six-year-old supposedly German Brigette Poberotski, who, upon being spoken to in Polish, recognized the language and her real Polish identity was discovered.⁶³

Compounding these issues was the debate between nationality, ethnicity, and citizenship, which will be explored more deeply in Chapter 3. The Allied forces and the UNRRA believed that as a result of the postwar border changes political borders matched ethnic boundaries. In fact, European countries were far less ethnically straightforward than the aid workers would have liked to believe.⁶⁴ The Baltic case was particularly difficult because of the changing borders of the Soviet Union and the absorption of the Baltic states into the USSR.⁶⁵ Lists of internationally recognized nationalities were complex—Jewish was considered a nationality, but what did one do with a Polish or Soviet Jew?⁶⁶ The battle to clarify the meaning of nationality plagued the UNRRA until its end, largely because of the inability for the various agencies and administrations working with DPs to make a final and clear decision on the topic.

Just as the UNRRA was struggling to define nationality, European countries were using it as an opportunity to ask for the return of its population—a population that they could determine. Historian Tara Zahra wrote, “[r]econstruction was understood as an explicitly nationalizing

⁶² “10,000 Kidnapped Children Found by UNRRA” (May 26, 1946), S-0400-0004-03 - 014.6 - Unaccompanied Children - Reports, UNRRA.

⁶³ “10,000 Kidnapped Children Found by UNRRA” (May 26, 1946), S-0400-0004-03 - 014.6 - Unaccompanied Children - Reports, UNRRA.

⁶⁴ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 280-282.

⁶⁵ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 282-283.

⁶⁶ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 283.

project, an effort to recover the national sovereignty and rehabilitate the national honour compromised by the Nazi occupation.”⁶⁷ Countries who had lost significant amounts of their population at the hands of the Nazis, such as Poland, used nationality to argue which children they should have back, allowing them to refuse the repatriation, for example, any ethnic German Poles.⁶⁸ Additionally, nationality was used to stake claim to Polish youth, commonly using rhetoric that reduced the children to property of the nation. The UNRRA, and the international community as a whole, by and large respected these claims. The kidnapped children stood at center stage in the battle over nationality, symbols of the future for decimated countries, just as they had been for the Nazis.

Through the postwar process of repatriation and expulsion, population transfer and exodus, countries were fighting to reclaim a semblance of national sovereignty by regaining populations lost to the Nazis. They were forced to clarify what national identity meant and define ideas of citizenship in the new postwar order. New legitimacy was given to nationalist, socialist, and Zionist traditions in Central and Eastern Europe through the nationalist claims on children during the postwar period. The Allies were attempting to unravel the postwar nationalities and identities that the Nazis had reshaped during the war. Through their policies to Germanize Europe, erase non-German populations, and redistribute populations, the victims of these efforts were forced to think more deeply about their national identities, thus causing the concentration on national identities.⁶⁹ In the next chapter, the Germanization program is explored in more

⁶⁷ Zahra, “A Human Treasure,” 334.

⁶⁸ This was legally allowed under the postwar Potsdam Agreement (1945) which allowed the “transfer” of German minorities in Europe to Germany. An estimated 12 million “expellees” arrived in Germany, and between 600,000-1.5 million died in the process. For more information, refer to Ian Connor, *Refugees and Expellees in Post-War Germany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁶⁹ Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 125.

depth, with specific focus on the treatment of Polish children, the largest population of kidnapped children.

Chapter Two: The Nazi Germanization Program

The terms “Germanization” (*Eindeutschung*) and “re-Germanization” (*Wiedereindeutschung*) were used by the Nazis to describe a process of, as the prosecution lawyers at Nuremberg called it, the “transforming non-Germans into Germans.”⁷⁰ The terms carried both an ideological and procedural connotation. They referred to the overall concept of people being Germanizable as well as the concept of the process of Germanizing much of Europe. Germanization and re-Germanization are not terms that truly describe the reality of the situation, but they will be used in this thesis in order to understand the Nazi perspective of events.

Germanization was a process not exclusive to the kidnapped children of occupied territories; it was applied broadly to any individual, child and adult alike, of whom Germanic descent could be identified (this didn’t include “undesirable” individuals, such as those who were Jewish, Gypsy, or homosexuals). The program began in Poland, since it was the first nation to be conquered in 1939, and Poles became the largest group forcibly “re-Germanized,” among both adults and children.⁷¹ There, the Nazis followed a program of extermination and deportation of the non-German population, and then Germanized by force all persons who were deemed “racially valuable.”⁷²

The very idea of Germanization goes against conventional assumptions about Nazi policy and Poland is a perfect example of this quandary. If the basics of Nazi racial theory is applied to

⁷⁰ Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 642.

⁷¹ Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 645.

⁷² Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 639.

Poland, the grand assumption would be that any person who did not fit into the *Volksdeutsch* category, meaning ethnic German, would be treated as an enemy, deported to labor camps, persecuted, or killed.⁷³ Factually, Poland was only 7 percent German in 1939, whereas 86 percent of the population identified as Polish and 5 percent as Jewish. For many who would later be determined to be *Volksdeutsch* their actual connection to their ethnic Germanness was tenuous after decades of intermarriage with other ethnic groups and the passage of time.⁷⁴ So then why did the Nazis embrace Germanization as a policy at all in Poland? And what happened to the children?

The answer is neither clear nor simple. Much of it is tethered to theory and mythology of German superiority. Nazi racial theory rationalized the move on Poland, the Germanization program and kidnapping non-German children based on Poland's Aryan-Nordic heritage.⁷⁵ Many Nazis internalized these ideas by the time they arrived at their posts in occupied territory and had beliefs similar to Gauleiter Albert Forster in a Danzig-West Prussia, the region of present-day Northwestern Poland that includes Gdańsk (known as Danzig to the Nazis). Forster saw that the area's Polish-speaking residents possessed the same "racial complexion" as Germans and wrote: "We would not be true National Socialists, if we did not have the unshakable conviction that we can succeed in molding these people into enthusiastic Germans through our leadership and tutelage."⁷⁶ To Forster, Germanization was the natural course of action and he believed that it was a possible task. He would be proved correct, especially in the

⁷³ Doris L. Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche' and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (1994): 569.

⁷⁴ Germany, *Trial of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 638; Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche,'" 571.

⁷⁵ The term "non-German" in this sense is referring to the idea of children not being from Germany's pre-World War II national borders. Although these children were seen as German to the Nazis, in the view of international organizations they were considered to be Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Baltic, etc.

⁷⁶ Nichols, "Nazi Germanization Policy in Occupied Europe," 216.

case of the kidnapped children. And so, the regime set out to mold the Polish nation through the Germanization of land, territory, and the people residing there.⁷⁷



Figure 1: Map of the German administration of Poland, 1942.⁷⁸

Following the Nazi-Soviet Pact of Nonaggression, Poland was partitioned along demarcation lines. Eastern Poland was absorbed into the Soviet Union, western and northern Poland were incorporated into the Third Reich, and a German occupation regime was set up in central Poland, known as the General Government.⁷⁹ The region of western Poland was renamed the Warthegau and northern Poland was referred to as West-Danzig Prussia.⁸⁰

The procedures of Germanization varied by area. *Wiedereindeutschung* “WED” or “re-Germanization” was also a special initiative called *Wiedereindeutschungsverfahren* (re-Germanization procedure) which selected outgoing deportees from annexed and occupied territories to undergo assimilation with German families within the Reich.⁸¹ Nazi officials in the General Government carried out their own independent search for “persons of German descent”

⁷⁷ Catherine Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 129-30.

⁷⁸ *German Administration of Poland, 1942*, n.d., US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

⁷⁹ Blobaum, “Poland”.

⁸⁰ *German Administration of Poland, 1942*, US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

⁸¹ Nichols, “Nazi Germanization Policy in Occupied Europe,” 215.

(*Deutschstämmige*). The *Deutsche Volksliste* “DVL” or German People’s list, was introduced in the annexed territories of western Poland, predominantly the Warthegau, which made registration on the list compulsory and involved a racial examination, thus giving the Nazis full lists of the racial makeup of the remaining residents of Poland.⁸² An individual’s ability to be Germanized was based on the racial designation from their examination.

From this process the Nazi term of “Polonized” arose—that a person of German stock had been turned Polish as a result of cultural exposure and societal pressure—which allowed the Nazis to argue that these individuals could naturally be “re-Germanized.”⁸³ Under this theory, a person’s cultural identity had become a race; a German person had become Polish through the dilution of their Germanness, and so naturally the Nazis had the right to reclaim that individual as German and re-Germanize them, thus allowing them to reclaim their inherited race. Many individuals who fell into this category were forcibly “transferred to Germany” and/or conscripted into the German army by the tens of thousands.⁸⁴ All in all, little more than 4 percent of the Polish population were determined to be fit for re-Germanization.⁸⁵

Children of Poles whose DVL status determined they could be re-Germanized but who resisted Germanization were removed from their parents’ care and sent to “special homes” in Germany for Germanization. This method was used to try and force people to register for the DVL and follow Germanization orders.⁸⁶ For example, in the case of Maria Lambucki, she was determined to be of 100 percent German blood but refused Germanization. As a result, her two

⁸² Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 639; Nichols, “Nazi Germanization Policy in Occupied Europe,” 215.

⁸³ Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 639-641.

⁸⁴ Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 640-641.

⁸⁵ Weiss-Wendt and Yeomans, eds., *Racial Science*, 44.

⁸⁶ Letter from Hofmann to Schultz, Chief of the Race Office, 12 February 1942, “Concerning the Separation of Polish Children from Parents Who Resist Germanization” (Document NO-1404, Prosecution Exhibit 163) in Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 779.

sons, aged 8 and 13, were taken to Germany, separated from one another, and transferred to boarding schools where they began their Germanization process, thus becoming one of the thousands of kidnapped children.⁸⁷ Children were incredibly racially valuable and the only individuals who could be fully Germanized in Nazi eyes, making their removal from their parents advantageous for Nazi officials. These children under WED policy had to be “educated [referring to the re-Germanization process] in the German environment” for the Germanization to be successful, thus rationalizing the transfer of children from Poland to Germany.⁸⁸

The practice of removing children as retribution against parents who refused the DVL quickly expanded to encompass any children living in Poland who possessed racially acceptable features or heritage. Key to the (re-)Germanization of children was the separation from their home countries, families, and communities.⁸⁹ In a treatise from the Office of Racial Policy in the NSDAP (The National Socialist German Workers' Party, or the Nazi Party) the following outline of the resettlement process of racially valuable Polish children is stated:

...The children suitable for this [Germanization] are not to be over 8 to 10 years of age because, as a rule, a genuine ethnic transformation, that is, a final Germanization, 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 are ethnologically 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.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ From correspondence between Himmler, RuSHA, VoMi, and *Lebensborn*, in Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 647.

⁸⁸ Ulrich Greifelt, “Decree establishing WED procedure,” May 9, 1940, in Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 643.

⁸⁹ Extracts from Report Signed by Creutz, 25 March 1943, “Concerning the Re-Germanization of Racially Valuable Persons” (Document NO-3996, Prosecution Exhibit 804) in Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 777.

⁹⁰ “1939 Treatise by the NSDAP Office of Racial Policy” in Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 675.

These were the general guidelines for the process, but more clear procedures for the care of these children were outlined in a series of decrees and orders coming from Himmler's office, The Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germanism Main Office, from 1939 through the end of the war. These children's stories began in a variety of places: Polish orphanages and children's homes, foster homes, schools, labor camps, and even a child's home with their parents or grandparents.⁹¹ Children were subjected to a racial, psychological, and health examinations by RuSHA workers, and those who were considered to be strong enough were sent to one of two locations: depending on their age, either German "home schools" or a *Lebensborn* home. Despite children over 10 not being suitable for Germanization according to the NSDAP Treatise, Himmler disagreed, finding children up to the age of 12 useful. For children between ages of 2 to 6, they went first to a *Lebensborn* children's home, which took over the child's guardianship, and a foster family was searched for. Children between 6 and 12 were placed in "special home schools" that would accommodate the needs of the children, before eventually being lodged in rural homes, commonly where their labor would be used and were frequently mistreated by their host families.⁹² These "special homes" were commonly at converted old boarding schools where children would be instructed in German and given normal schooling in German, while being indoctrinated with Nazi ideologies.

⁹¹ "Circular signed by Greifelt, 19 February 1942, concerning the Germanization of Polish Children, Regulation No. 67/I" (Document NO-1615, Prosecution Exhibit 407) in Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 995-998.

⁹¹ Nicholas, *Cruel World*, 253; Extract from the testimony of Prosecution witness Paczesny," 6 November 1947 in Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 1002-1006; "Application from Helena Staszewska to the Youth Office, Lodz, 22 January 1943, for return of her grandchild" (Document NO-4899, Prosecution Exhibit 413) in Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 1001.

⁹² "Circular signed by Greifelt, 19 February 1942, concerning the Germanization of Polish Children, Regulation No. 67/I" (Document NO-1615, Prosecution Exhibit 407) in Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 995-998; Nicholas, *Cruel World*, 250.

One child, Slavomir Grodomski Paczesny, was interviewed for the Nuremberg Trials, and described his experience in the Germanization process. He was born in Łódź, and at the age of 11 a woman took him from his home which he shared with his parents. He was taken to a children's home in Łódź with 40 other children, examined by a Dr. Grohmann, and determined to be racially acceptable. Both of his parents attempted to remove him from the home but were unsuccessful and not allowed to see Slavomir. From Łódź, he was taken to another children's home in Kalisz for six months, where he was taught to speak and read in German and not allowed to speak Polish—and if he did, he was not given a meal. Although his mother came to visit him in Kalisz, she was not allowed to see him. Slavomir ended up in Salzburg, Austria, where he was told he would never return to Poland and was given a new name—Karl Grohmann. As Karl, he lived with two different families, both times doing farm work for the families and was told to call them mother and father. During his time with the foster families, he stayed in touch with his parents back in Poland through letters, though this was against policy.⁹³

Slavomir's experience is indicative of the general experience of many children—taken against their will, carted around Germany and Austria by Nazi administrations, given a new name, and placed with a family they did not know. The rights of parents or guardians were completely suspended the minute a child entered a home for a racial examination, the children at the mercy of the workers.⁹⁴ Some adoptive families were suspicious of the origins (and sometimes the age) of their foster children, who they were told were German children recovered from the Eastern territories. When they asked questions *Lebensborn* officials provided them with falsified documents, including birth certificates, certifying the children were who the officials

⁹³ “Extract from the testimony of Prosecution witness Paczesny,” 6 November 1947 in Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 1002-1006.

⁹⁴ Nicholas, *Cruel World*, 245.

claimed they were.⁹⁵ Children were reduced to property of the Nazi state, families disregarded, and their identities remade into German, a trend continued throughout the course of the war.

Through *Lebensborn*'s activities and Himmler's attempts to grow the Germanic race, one can see how increasingly desperate the Nazis were getting to find a method to successfully increase the population of the Nazi state. Kidnapping children for Germanization overtime became an integral part of their solution. These children were the future of Nazi Germany and would help rebuild Europe with Nazi ideology once they were Germanized, their identities reinvented, a policy allowed by Nazi racial theory. In the opening statements from the Nuremberg Trials, the prosecution argued that, "[The Nazis] had the colossal conceit to declare that even though a Polish family showed no trace of German ancestry, if its physical characteristics were compatible with the German racial idea and the family was able and efficient, then they must be Germans."⁹⁶ The prosecution was correct—these children's identity was a complete lie and one that was upheld through the Nazi ranks to the top. To the Nazis, though, it was no lie, but instead part of a theory integral to Nazism.

Children were key to the future of Nazi Germany, and by reinventing their identities the Nazis pushed their own racial theory into new territory. They redefined what it meant to be German—was it simply physical traits, or was it ancestral? Cultural? Citizenship? If one were to ask the victims of Germanization, their answer would probably lie in the former: simply physical traits could mean one was German, regardless of how you perceived yourself, which defies what most would consider a valuable measure of identity. According to a *Lebensborn* worker, one time a Polish Jewish child was accepted as racially acceptable, despite his obvious Jewish

⁹⁵ Nicholas, *Cruel World*, 251.

⁹⁶ Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 642.

heritage, simply because of his physical traits.⁹⁷ Himmler stated in 1943, “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.”⁹⁸ The Nazis saw it as their right to take these children, regardless of how these children saw themselves, in order to serve a greater Nazi purpose, their justification based in racial theory.

The identity of kidnapped children was reinvented to serve the greater Nazi goal: of strengthening the Germanic people and to weaken national groups in occupied countries.⁹⁹ The Nazis, in many ways, succeeded in these goals, but after the war there was a reckoning concerning the identities of these children. Did they stay in Germany, where some had lived for the past five years, brainwashed into believing they were German, or did they return to Poland where, many times, no family awaited them? Yet again, the national identity of these children was being transformed by forces larger than themselves for agendas far outside of their control. The UNRRA would be the next group to do this, but this time under the auspices of humanitarian aid.

⁹⁷ Nicholas, *Cruel World*, 248.

⁹⁸ “Himmler speech at Bad Schachen,” October 1943 in Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 674-675.

⁹⁹ Germany, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, 637.

Chapter Three: Stateless Children and Pliable Nationalities

Aid workers for the UNRRA stumbled upon the problem of Europe's "kidnapped" or "stolen" children quite accidentally—by many reports, the discovery of these children occurred as workers were interviewing unaccompanied children in Germany and trying to discern their parentage. The uncovering of the wide-reaching plot to Germanize Europe's children created upheaval within the administration because the specific needs of this group of children set them apart from others. Since the UNRRA only handled United Nations nationals, any child whose national identity was unknown or suspected to be German couldn't receive any aid, leaving these vulnerable children in limbo. Many aid workers were deeply concerned about the ramification of this policy and fought the international community to allow the UNRRA to provide aid to children whose identities were unknown, exposing deep divisions between the UN, local Military Governments, and other actors. Additionally, identifying documents about these children were scarce at best, more commonly non-existent. As a result, piecing together children's basic identities—names, ages, hometowns, families, and most importantly, nationality—involved near detective work. At the end of World War II, the child victims of Germanization faced a reckoning over their identities. Their names, families, and nationalities were questioned, and the answers found by UNRRA workers set the course of the children's lives.

Considering the severity of the problem—an estimated total of 50,000 kidnapped children—one would expect concrete policy and procedures for the identification, treatment, and repatriation of these children.¹⁰⁰ However, the exact opposite occurred. As late as July 1946, UNRRA aid workers and their associates were still asking for official instructions on the three most pressing issues facing those working with kidnapped children: searching for and tracing

¹⁰⁰ Zahra, "A Human Treasure," 341.

UN children, the identification process, and the conditions for removal from their current locations.¹⁰¹ There was no uniform technique or procedure, leaving the UNRRA floundering to create a coordinated effort to help these children get home. The inability of the UNRRA, local military governments, and the international community as a whole to answer vital questions at the heart of the issue limited the success of the UNRRA's work, as well as that of its successor, the IRO, and as a result, the number of kidnapped children who were successfully discovered, sent home, and reunited with their families.

This chapter will examine the barriers faced by UNRRA workers in identifying these children, the moral quandaries raised by their work, and the issues they faced in sending children home once their identities had been determined. Since Polish children made up the most significant portion of kidnapped children, the chapter will specifically focus on them, although other countries in Eastern Europe also lost large numbers of children to Germanization.

Between the beginning of the search in September 1945 and April 30, 1946, approximately 10,000 unaccompanied children were found in Germany.

“Unaccompanied” children referred to any child without a parent or guardian, including children who had been kidnapped, abandoned, or orphaned. Of those 10,000 unaccompanied children, there was *some* information on the nationality of just 7,005 children— of whom 2,023 were Polish. There was no nationality information on the remaining 3,065 unaccompanied children.¹⁰² The UNRRA doesn't seem to have tracked the number of kidnapped children, but numbers of unidentified children—those with no nationality information—can be assumed to represent large

¹⁰¹ Office of Military Government for Germany (US), Prisoners of War and Displaced Persons Division, “Record of Conference on the Coordination of Activities of U.S. Forces, Military Government and UNRRA with Particular Regard to Searching for and Identifying United Nations Children in Germany Held in Frankfurt” (July 22, 1946), S-0437-0013-15 - Displaced Persons - Child Welfare - Legal Matters, UNRRA.

¹⁰² UNRRA, “Displaced Children Reported Found in Germany Tables” (April 30, 1946), S-0400-0003-30 - 014/1/A - Repatriation and Resettlement Reports, UNRRA, 4.

numbers of these. Based on this data, two facts are clear: unidentified children made up a sizeable portion of the UNRRA's case load and of children whose nationalities were identified, a significant portion of them were Polish.

In order to establish their identities, aid workers interviewed children about their birth homes. For children who had been taken from their homes as infants, though, their memories were limited.¹⁰³ One aid worker wrote, "particularly the infants,[sic] will never be completely identified."¹⁰⁴ Sometimes older children who had been with the younger ones since their removal from Poland were able to fill in the gaps, but this was uncommon as children were unlikely to stay together in groups after arrival in Germany.¹⁰⁵

With respect to kidnapped children, the most time consuming and important task for the UNRRA was identifying their nationalities, because then, even if a child was an orphan, they could still be repatriated to their country of origin. Without any identifying nationality, though, a child remained in limbo, which meant that providing services for them would be challenging. There were no universal legal principles or a clear UNRRA policy for determining nationality or clarity on which individuals the UNRRA could provide services to, a problem that plagued the administration throughout its existence.

Unaccompanied children who were found in Germany were by default considered to be German until aid workers proved otherwise. The UNRRA was particularly concerned about the possibility that kidnapped children would be ultimately identified as German, not because they were German, but because there was not enough evidence to prove they were not. Children in

¹⁰³ John Troniak, Director Team 566, Regensburg, "Importation of Allied Unaccompanied Children to Germany" (April 23, 1946), S-0437-0016-18 - Displaced Persons - Children - NSV Deportations and Evacuation, UNRRA.

¹⁰⁴ U.S. Zone Child Welfare, "Extracts from U.S. Zone Child Welfare Report - Feb 1946" (February 1946), S-0412-0008-03 - Central Headquarters - Monthly Narrative Reports - February, UNRRA, 1.

¹⁰⁵ John Troniak, Director Team 566, Regensburg, "Memorandum on Letter from Sister Serafika of Kinderfluchtlingeheim Kallmunz" (April 27, 1946), S-0437-0013-09 - Displaced Persons - Child Search Policy - OMGUS, UNRRA.

this situation would be unable to receive any UNRRA services or aid. The UNRRA required a clear policy on what to do in situations where there was not enough conclusive evidence about a child's national identity. However, their hands were tied, because a policy of this nature had to come from the Allied Control Authority (ACA) who governed the Allied Occupation Zones in postwar Germany and Austria and the Office of Military Government, United States (OMGUS), who operated parallel to the ACA.

When policy drafts did emerge, though, they commonly left out children who lacked clear nationality—such as kidnapped children.¹⁰⁶ The “ACA directive,” as it was referred to, was one document meant to fill these gaps, and at the beginning the UNRRA had high hopes for it. Instead, the ACA directive exposed the clear difference of opinion between the UNRRA and OMGUS over children of unidentified nationality. The American delegation to the ACA supported OMGUS's position on children of unidentified nationality, a position repudiated by the other delegations as well as the UNRRA. OMGUS's position was that any child living in Germany whose nationality couldn't be otherwise proven was German, and that children shouldn't be removed from their current living conditions unless they were unsafe—regardless of their national identity. Drafts of the ACA directive were in line with OMGUS's position and even went as far as granting German citizenship to children of presumed German nationality—something the ACA had no authority do, but instead lay with local German authorities.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Allied Control Authority, Directorate of Prisoners of War and Displaced Persons, “DPOW/P(46)75: Provisional Measures to Assure the Protection of Children Deported to Germany or Born in Germany of Displaced Persons” (June 15, 1946), S-0401-0003-10 - Child Welfare Section - Unaccompanied Children – Policy, UNRRA.

¹⁰⁷ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 164-171. OMGUS's position on the issue was influenced by the American Military Government's desire to shut down displaced person operations, including those related to children, in 1946 because of the sheer number of DPs. OMGUS was facing a reality that many DPs would remain in Germany, which would require a continuation of resources the military didn't have. However, shutting down DP operations would also shut down the UNRRA's work in the U.S. Zone of Germany, or at the very least, heavily hinder. OMGUS had concerns about the growing number of children who the UNRRA had located but could not repatriate. They saw the UNRRA as incompetent, disorganized, and ineffective—concerns which were not

When drafts of the ACA directive were presented at a series of conferences in 1946, UNRRA workers took issue with these ideas, specifically the determination that, as Eileen Blackey, a Child Care Consultant for the UNRRA and the UNRRA's main liaison with the ACA, put it, "any child born or living in Germany whose nationality cannot be determined is presumed to be German, until such time as other proof is available."¹⁰⁸ This would mean that these children would not get aid, services, or repatriation assistance from the UNRRA until their nationality was determined as non-German.¹⁰⁹ The administration was shocked by what they saw as a clear disregard for the nations who repeatedly demanded that their children be returned from Germany. The director general of the UNRRA, Fiorello La Guardia, even wrote a telegram to the ACA on the issue in order to emphasize its importance to the UNRRA.¹¹⁰

The battle over the ACA directive continued through 1946 and into 1947 but was never clearly resolved. Instead, it embroiled the entire administration in a time-consuming fight that led to more questions than answers, created little new policy, and confused child search workers.¹¹¹ The American Military Government's actions demonstrated a blatant disregard for the interests and work of the UNRRA, as well as the children it served. The ACA directive is just one example of the many disagreements over policy on nationality that had a negative effect on children who were left in the lurch.

necessarily incorrect, but were the result of both a need for the administration to be flexible and a perpetual lack of resources. Chapter 7 of this book details the battles over the ACA directive in greater detail.

¹⁰⁸ Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant, Welfare Branch, UNRRA CHQ, "Report on Conferences on Unaccompanied Children Held in Berlin" (March 15, 1946), S-0401-0008-04 - Polish Red Cross, UNRRA.

¹⁰⁹ Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant, Welfare Branch, UNRRA CHQ, "Report on Conferences on Unaccompanied Children Held in Berlin" (March 15, 1946), S-0401-0008-04 - Polish Red Cross, UNRRA.

¹¹⁰ Cyrus Greenslade, Acting Chief of Operations, Germany, "Cable from LaGuardia Concerning Children with Undetermined Nationalities" (December 1946), S-0401-0003-10 - Child Welfare Section - Unaccompanied Children - Policy, UNRRA.

¹¹¹ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 164-197.

UNRRA workers continued to demand policy on the topic of nationality through letters and reports up until the end of the administration. One Child Search Officer, signed as C.D.H., most likely Cornelia D. Heise, wrote in March of 1947:

There remains the issue of children whose nationalities cannot be determined, which policy up to this point has no firm answer—at that moment authorization for removal is required by Military Government, which takes a very conservative view on the nationality. However, there will need to be international decisions on the group of children whose nationality cannot be determined because of a lack of evidence, and this group is now in the hundreds and may reach several thousands...Decisions will need to be made as to whether these children, all of whom have been brought into Germany from the outside, will remain in ex-enemy care for lack of specific proof of citizenship or will be given the benefit of United Nations status.¹¹²

Heise pinpoints the core of the problem surrounding nationality: the ramifications it had on the very individuals the UNRRA was trying to help. She highlights the importance of an international decision on nationality that would be made above the Military Government, which she saw as the only way for true and permanent progress to be made. When she wrote that the Military Government had a “conservative view” on nationality, Heise most likely meant that the Military Government refused to acknowledge culture and ethnicity in their determinations of nationality. Heise insinuated that because of the Military Government’s conservative view on nationality and unwillingness to change their position, fewer children’s nationalities were recognized.

Within the UNRRA, confusion over the definition of nationality—and what constituted it—caused widespread problems. Workers filled out the “nationality” space on displaced persons reports differently, some using legal citizenship, others ethnicity, language, religion, or other

¹¹² C.D.H., “Resume of Child Search Program and Problems” (March 31, 1947), S-0437-0013-08 - Displaced Persons - Child Search Policy, UNRRA, 3.

markers. Nationalities such as “Polish Belo-Russian” and “Polish-Ukrainian” emerged, which left aid workers flummoxed as to which group to place these individuals for repatriation, services, and data reports to their superiors.¹¹³ For unaccompanied children, matters were further complicated by a policy requiring a national liaison officer to confirm the nationality decided by the UNRRA aid worker. For liaison officers, nationality clearly meant citizenship, because they only confirmed the nationality of individuals whose ethnicities equated a recognized citizenship. For example, in order to have one’s Polish nationality confirmed, one had to demonstrate Polish ethnicity. The only exception was the newly created “Jewish” category, which was created by SCHAEF to ensure extra protections were given to Jews who refused to repatriate to their home countries.¹¹⁴ As Lynne Taylor writes, the final determination that liaison officers gave was often based “as much on political imperatives as on the evidence in a child’s file.”¹¹⁵ Whether it be the political views of the liaison officer or the aid worker, imposition of nationality by these various agents was never impartial—they were influenced by the demands of national governments, the Cold War-era fear of Communist governments, scars of World War II, postwar border changes, and the opinions of the agents themselves. Nationality and citizenship were conflated and confused. The term “nationality” became a slippery one. It was manipulated for political purposes, with some nationalities being denied and others acknowledged (or created, one could argue, in the case of the new “Jewish” category) as it suited a power’s political interests.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ John W. Rourk, Principal Welfare Officer, Team 566, Regensburg, “Conference on Search and Registration of Unaccompanied Children. Committee on Statement of Questions Needing Policy Decisions and Conference Recommendations.” (May 9, 1946), S-0437-0014-08 - Displaced Persons - Children – Conferences, UNRRA; Ivan Hasslocher, Acting Chief, Reports and Analysis Division, “Reporting Requirements - June 4, 1947” (June 4, 1947), S-0437-0017-07 - Displaced Persons - Children - Reports and Statistics Branch - Correspondence Received from and to Central Headquarters, UNRRA.

¹¹⁴ Taylor, *In the Children’s Best Interests*, 287.

¹¹⁵ Taylor, *In the Children’s Best Interests*, 330.

¹¹⁶ Taylor, *In the Children’s Best Interests*, 341.

The claim that countries had to their unaccompanied children raised the question of how much these children belonged to the state. U.S. government policy gave nations “the birthright that is rightfully theirs, the children lost by the nefarious practices of Nazi aggression.”¹¹⁷ Many policymakers saw the rehabilitation and acclimation of kidnapped children to their birth countries as vital to the biological, moral, and economic reconstruction of the nation.¹¹⁸ Children became a key piece of nationalist arguments for population growth and national sovereignty across Europe and a narrative quickly emerged of nations needing to “get back their children.”¹¹⁹ According to Tara Zahra, this reflected the long-standing belief that children were the “collective property” of the state, an idea that had been developing since the late 19th century.¹²⁰

The confusion over and pliability of nationality was just one barrier in identifying a child. Another was the lack of UNRRA aid workers who spoke specific dialects, especially from Baltic and Eastern European countries, who were needed in order to interview and identify children. The British Zone struggled to find Slavic language speakers, which reduced their ability to interview children they found and slowed down the repatriation process of these children.¹²¹ The Polish government offered employees from its Ministry of Education who were experienced in interviewing children to the UNRRA in order to alleviate the workload of the UNRRA workers.¹²²

¹¹⁷ “Commentary on Proposed USFET Directive” (n.d.), S-0437-0013-15 - Displaced Persons - Child Welfare - Legal Matters, UNRRA, 6.

¹¹⁸ Zahra, ““A Human Treasure,”” 332.

¹¹⁹ Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 221.

¹²⁰ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 323.

¹²¹ UNRRA, Central Headquarters for Germany, “Minutes of Interzonal Conference on Child Search and Repatriation – October 16th, 17th, and 18th, 1946” (October 16, 1947), S-0437-0014-08 - Displaced Persons - Children – Conferences, UNRRA.

¹²² Madeline Lay, Child Welfare Consultant, “Unaccompanied Children in Bavaria” (October 26, 1946), S-1394-000-0018 - Welfare – Children, UNRRA.

Polish children were an especially problematic group to identify because of postwar border changes. Poland lost significant territory to Russia in postwar settlements and to complicate matters further, the Silesia region, where many kidnapped children came from, had a prewar mixed German and Polish population.¹²³ Simply determining a child was born in prewar Poland was not enough to make a final determination about nationality, because it was possible the child's birthplace was no longer in Poland. Instead, the language spoken at home became an important marker in identifying the nationality of the children and the country that they should be repatriated to.

Since postwar Germany had been divided into three separate zones with three zonal governments, policies and opinions on nationality differed between the zones, which created an additional barrier to identification. The French, for example, objected to the idea of unidentified children being under German governance and supported a flexible interpretation of nationality status. As Eileen Blackey, UNRRA Child Care Consultant, put it, "they are anxious to receive all children who are of French heritage, although only one quarter French, and in addition they are willing to accept any other children who might be available for resettlement in France."¹²⁴ The French, as well as the Soviets, proved to be a reoccurring problem for the U.S. and British because they advocated harsher occupation policies in postwar Germany and had differing opinions on repatriation policy. As a result of their inability to agree, it was decided in June 1946 that a quadripartite agreement on location and registration, guardianship, determination of citizenship, adoptions and illegitimacy would be impossible. Instead, each zone would have its own set of policies. Berlin was a particular problem since it was divided among the four

¹²³ J.H. Whiting, Zone Director, "Removal of Children (Polish) from the St. Josephs Kinderheim, Kaufbeuren" (October 14, 1946), S-0437-0013-16 - Displaced Persons - Child Welfare - Policy, UNRRA.

¹²⁴ Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant, Welfare Branch, UNRRA CHQ, "Report on Conferences on Unaccompanied Children Held in Berlin" (March 15, 1946), S-0401-0008-04 - Polish Red Cross, UNRRA.

occupying governments, a situation that necessitated coordination. Repatriation coordination for Polish children was also encouraged because they made up the “vast majority” of unaccompanied repatriable children in Berlin, as well as across the country.¹²⁵

The final barrier for the UNRRA was a lack of standard terminology across all parts of the organization as well as its collaborators. Higher-ups in the administration advocated for standardization to avoid situations that could be misconstrued by UNRRA officers. For example, terms like “stateless.” “Stateless” was a designation used when identifying a child’s nationality and frequently applied to Belgian children, but the use on, for example, a Polish child, caused debate.¹²⁶ According to Lieutenant General F.E. Morgan, the policy regarding stateless persons said that a person only became “stateless” when their government formally rejected them as a citizen, but this had to come from a sovereign act—a person’s renunciation of their nationality did not qualify them to be stateless.¹²⁷ Belgian children could be called “stateless” because the Belgian government rejected its unaccompanied children, unable to provide services for them in Belgium.¹²⁸ For individuals who simply did not want to return to their countries of origin, though, “stateless” could not be used. The determination of “stateless” is just one example of many inconsistent uses of various terms across the UNRRA as a direct result of conflicting or nonexistent policy.

¹²⁵ Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant, Welfare Branch, UNRRA CHQ, “Report on Unaccompanied Nations’ Children in Germany” (June 24, 1946), S-0437-0017-14 - Displaced Persons - Unaccompanied Children, Plans for, UNRRA.

¹²⁶ UNRRA, Central Headquarters for Germany, “Minutes of Interzonal Conference on Child Search and Repatriation – October 16th, 17th, and 18th, 1946” (October 16, 1947), S-0437-0014-08 - Displaced Persons - Children – Conferences, UNRRA.

¹²⁷ Lt-Gen. F.E. Morgan, Chief of Operations, Germany, “Reporting Policy Regarding ‘Stateless’ Persons and Displaced ‘Ukrainians’” (April 9, 1945), S-0437-0017-07 - Displaced Persons - Children - Reports and Statistics Branch - Correspondence Received from and to Central Headquarters, UNRRA.

¹²⁸ UNRRA, Central Headquarters for Germany, “Minutes of Interzonal Conference on Child Search and Repatriation – October 16th, 17th, and 18th, 1946” (October 16, 1947), S-0437-0014-08 - Displaced Persons - Children – Conferences, UNRRA.

These barriers made the identification of children, especially those who had been kidnapped as a part of Germanization, extremely difficult. If identification was impossible, or if there was not enough information to make a conclusive identification that was confirmed by a liaison officer, the child's ability to receive UNRRA services, their legal status, as well as their ability to be traced and repatriated were all in jeopardy. The UNRRA tried to provide services to those with "doubtful" nationality, as they were commonly called, until proof was given otherwise, but with the end of the UNRRA set for late 1947, access to aid for these children, including food and housing, was in jeopardy.¹²⁹

The UNRRA and its successor, the IRO, were both concerned about the future legal status of children with doubtful nationality. Under law, unaccompanied children were the wards of the state, which is what allowed liaison officers from countries such as Poland to identify Polish children and claim them for the government. But if the child had no nationality, it was unclear whose legal responsibility the children were. As a result, the UNRRA's legal team requested that the individual occupying governments of Germany provide legal protections for the children residing in their zones.¹³⁰ The UNRRA and IRO were also concerned about what would happen to these children if their organizations were shut down and the children were simply left with their German foster families or in German institutions without any legal citizenship—a situation that would open them up to serious legal discrimination as adults. As a result, both the UNRRA and the IRO tried to resettle as many children as possible, as the German government was reluctant to grant any of these children citizenship.¹³¹

¹²⁹ C.D.H., "Special Review Committee - Unaccompanied Children" (March 28, 1946), S-0437-0013-09 - Displaced Persons - Child Search Policy – OMGUS, UNRRA.

¹³⁰ Selene Gifford, Director, Welfare & Repatriation Division, "Statement of Problems Relating to Displaced Unaccompanied Children in Germany and Recommended Action by the Military Authorities" (June 1, 1946), S-0401-0003-10 - Child Welfare Section - Unaccompanied Children – Policy.

¹³¹ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 329.

The ability to trace a child's family was directly related to the identification of the child. Upon identification, the Child Tracing Bureau made a file for the child that allowed them to match requests for the child, but without this information it was practically impossible to trace the child or the family. The UNRRA acknowledged that these identifications were flexible—once more was known about a child's family, it was possible that the nationality would be revised, thus completely changing the child's status.¹³² Additionally, repatriation through official channels was impossible without identification. The UNRRA was unwilling to send children outside of Germany without a clear determination of the child's identity, which left unidentified children—or children whose identities were unable to be confirmed—forced to find unofficial methods of returning home.

For some children, the heartbreaking reality was that they might never know the truth about their identity. Many who were kidnapped as young children were left with fragments of their original identity and therefore slipped through the cracks in a sprawling and disorganized organization like the UNRRA. Only an estimated 10-15 percent of Polish kidnapped children were ever reunited with their families.¹³³ For many, the possibility of repatriation died when UNRRA aid workers was unable to establish a firm identity. In this dimension, one could argue the Nazis succeeded; through their efforts to erase the identity of the children it kidnapped, they created a permanent problem that even after the war aid workers struggled to unravel. Many of the victims of Germanization never learned who they were, but even for those who did they ended up yet again as pawns in state efforts to rebuild their countries.

¹³² C.D.H., "Special Review Committee - Unaccompanied Children" (March 28, 1946), S-0437-0013-09 - Displaced Persons - Child Search Policy – OMGUS, UNRRA.

¹³³ Gigliotti, ed., "Unaccompanied Children and the Allied Child Search," 279.

Chapter Four: The Long Journey Home

In the postwar period, UNRRA workers began to define their mission not only practically—meaning repatriation of children, providing aid, etc.—but also psychologically. The children they worked with, they insisted, would be best off with their families and nations of origin. In the opinion of many aid workers, the trauma the children had experienced from crossing borders during the war was so great that they were best off in the company of their countrymen.¹³⁴ Separation from family and an unclear national identity became the largest threats to a child and in many instances took precedence over the possibility that the child would face poverty or loneliness in their nation of origin. This insistence on the child's psychological well-being combined with waning aid resources and internal organizational pressure led aid workers to place heavy emphasis on finding and removing children from Germany. However, in order to accomplish the repatriation of Polish kidnapped children, workers had to overcome great barriers including the time-consuming search and removal process, questionable wartime adoptions, the grave postwar situation in Poland, and issues related to repatriation itself.

The “search” process began on the local level and was carried out by a variety of different individuals, most commonly through local teams of UNRRA welfare workers and child search officers. Once a team identified where a kidnapped child likely lived, UNRRA investigators would obtain permission from the local military government to interview the child and the attendants in what were usually group homes, as well as view any existing records in the home. Orphanages, boarding schools, churches, and other areas where many children had been held during the war were common sites of these searches, as searches of individual homes required more approvals and paperwork. UNRRA investigators would then create reports about

¹³⁴ Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 57-58.

the children interviewed and submit the names of any who showed evidence of “Allied nationality,” meaning they were not born in a country that allied with Nazi Germany. Liaison officers of the respective nations would then make final decisions about the child’s nationality. Once that was confirmed, the process of repatriation would begin.¹³⁵

Child Search Teams battled various restrictions on the locations, people, and documents necessary to complete their searches, leading to recurring frustration within the UNRRA towards local military governments and officials.¹³⁶ The child search, many UNRRA officers argued, required a great deal of flexibility, trust, and confidence on behalf of the local government power, but the amount of “inconsequential measures” that investigators faced demonstrated that the trust and confidence were not there.¹³⁷ The French Zone Ministry for Prisoners, Deportees, and Refugees (PDR) restricted the UNRRA’s search for children of other nations besides France for political reasons, forcing individual national liaison officers to apply pressure on the French to change this policy.¹³⁸ One of the main issues the UNRRA search teams faced, though, was the sheer number of children to search for and the limited number of workers available. For example, a Regensburg Search and Registration Team interviewed 363 children in a few weeks’ time, while 255 awaited interviews from 16 different locations and the team had identified nine more institutions in the area who had possibly been caring for United Nations children.¹³⁹ Letters

¹³⁵ John Troniak, Director Team 566, Regensburg, “Memorandum on Letter from Sister Serafika of Kinderfluchtlingenheim Kallmunz” (April 27, 1946), S-0437-0013-09 - Displaced Persons - Child Search Policy – OMGUS, UNRRA, 1-2.

¹³⁶ “Commentary on Proposed USFET Directive” (n.d.), S-0437-0013-15 - Displaced Persons - Child Welfare - Legal Matters, UNRRA.

¹³⁷ “Commentary on Proposed USFET Directive” (n.d.), S-0437-0013-15 - Displaced Persons - Child Welfare - Legal Matters, UNRRA.

¹³⁸ UNRRA, Central Headquarters for Germany, “Minutes of Interzonal Conference on Child Search and Repatriation – October 16th, 17th, and 18th, 1946” (October 16, 1947), S-0437-0014-08 - Displaced Persons - Children – Conferences, UNRRA.

¹³⁹ U.S. Zone Child Welfare, “Extracts from U.S. Zone Child Welfare Report - February 1946” (February 1946), S-0412-0008-03 - Central Headquarters - Monthly Narrative Reports – February, UNRRA.

and reports from search teams are littered with requests for more workers and resources in order to interview the number of children in their areas.

Interviews with unaccompanied children were tricky but perhaps the most important stepping stone to repatriation since, for many children, the file created by interviewers was the first and only claim to a child's true identity.¹⁴⁰ Multiple interviews would happen in the same room so the children felt comfortable with the interviewers, but also couldn't overhear one another's interviews.¹⁴¹ Interviewers were trained to pay attention to specific details in a child's story, such as a child's lack of documentation, ability to understand languages other than German, if they were brought to Germany by a stranger and not a parent, and the child's mannerisms.¹⁴² As J.H. Whiting, U.S. Zone Director said, "[t]he unquestionably German child usually replied freely and promptly. The response of a non-German child, although he might have said he was German, is often characterized by embarrassment, hesitation, confusion or frantic appeal to a member of the staff for help in making reply."¹⁴³ Hesitation and requests for help from a member of staff or, if the child was in a private home, an adoptive parent, were clues that the child had been coached in their answers—a tell-tale sign that the child had been kidnapped.

One example of the importance of the interview process is the case of an orphanage in Duderstadt, Germany. After being tipped off, the Welfare Officers and the Polish Liaison Officer went to investigate the orphanage and meet with the children. When the German priest of

¹⁴⁰ Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant, Welfare Branch, UNRRA CHQ, "Report on Unaccompanied Nations' Children in Germany" (June 24, 1946), S-0437-0017-14 - Displaced Persons - Unaccompanied Children, Plans for, UNRRA.

¹⁴¹ Dorothy T. Pearse, Child Welfare Consultant, UNRRA H.Q. B.A.O.R., "Child Welfare Conference" (June 13, 1946), S-0412-0006-11 - Central Headquarters - Child Search Repatriation Reports, UNRRA, 12.

¹⁴² Dorothy T. Pearse, Child Welfare Consultant, UNRRA H.Q. B.A.O.R., "Child Welfare Conference" (June 13, 1946), S-0412-0006-11 - Central Headquarters - Child Search Repatriation Reports, UNRRA, 9-10.

¹⁴³ J.H. Whiting, Zone Director, "Removal of Children (Polish) from the St. Josephs Kinderheim, Kaufbeuren" (October 14, 1946), S-0437-0013-16 - Displaced Persons - Child Welfare - Policy, UNRRA, 3.

Duderstadt offered to provide a list of non-German children, the officers refused in case the list would put sick children as in poor health and the healthy ones as German. What they found was an orphanage filled with malnourished and ill fed children.

When Miss Bloch and the others saw the children, the girls were cringing and on the defensive, saying that they were German and had always spoken German. The boys however were more daring and some of them admitted to being Poles. Actual identification was difficult owing to lack of documents etc. Following this visit however, one of the children, a boy of 15 came to see Miss Bloch, telling her which children were Polish and some of their history. He said that the girls have been afraid to admit to being Polish owing to threat of punishment from the nuns.¹⁴⁴

19 children ended up being removed from the home and taken to the nearby Rhumspringe Camp for observation and identification where the Polish Red Cross gave them extra food to help with their malnourishment. Most of the children were 13 and 14, but some were younger, and most were boys.¹⁴⁵ All of these children were kidnapped from Poland and brought to Germany. This was a common situation that UNRRA officers found all over Germany.

The ACA determined in late 1946 that the UNRRA would cease operations on June 30, 1947.¹⁴⁶ As a result, in 1947, the search of German children's agencies and institutions started to wrap up and search officers changed tactics to accomplish two remaining tasks: find the remaining children and any Nazi documents pertaining to the kidnapping program. During their search of remaining group homes, the Child Search Teams made note of any documents they found and referred information to the investigative teams working on the War Crimes Trials,

¹⁴⁴ Hepburn, Area Welfare Officer, "Children in German Orphanage in Duderstadt" (April 14, 1946), S-0401-0003-03 - Child Welfare Section - Polish Unaccompanied Children and Polish Red Cross, UNRRA.

¹⁴⁵ Hepburn, Area Welfare Officer, "Children in German Orphanage in Duderstadt" (April 14, 1946), S-0401-0003-03 - Child Welfare Section - Polish Unaccompanied Children and Polish Red Cross, UNRRA.

¹⁴⁶ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 193.

which would help create the dossier of evidence in the RuSHA Trial at Nuremberg in 1948.¹⁴⁷ Since most orphanages had already been searched, officers focused most of their attention on children residing in private homes which was more time consuming.¹⁴⁸

After a child was interviewed, their identity determined the following steps. If the child was determined to be under the authority of the UNRRA, then the child's file was handed to the tracing arm of the Child Search and Tracing Section, even if their nationality was still unconfirmed. Though Tracing was flooded with both inquiries and files, the amount of replies they were able to issue in response to tracing inquiries was quite small.¹⁴⁹ As the number of children found increased, so did the backlog of files that had to be cataloged. Just as the search teams were perpetually understaffed and underfunded, so were the tracing teams, who struggled with lack of typists, paper, and even pencils which made it impossible to keep up with the number of files they had to transcribe.¹⁵⁰ Many cases, called "dormant" in some records, were stopped in the tracing process because the child's nationality was unconfirmed. Tracing offices were waiting, commonly, on lists of children who had been reported as kidnapped from their home countries or confirmation of nationality by a liaison officer.¹⁵¹

The second process that followed search was removal, a topic which generated much debate between the ACA, UNRRA, and military governments. Nearly all kidnapped children were in German care when they were found, in a private home as a foster or adopted child, in an orphanage, working, or in another scenario. The UNRRA considered removing non-German

¹⁴⁷ C.D.H., "Monthly Report - Child Search and Tracing Section - June 1947" (June 30, 1947), S-0437-0013-07 - Displaced Persons - Child Search and Tracing Section Reports, UNRRA.

¹⁴⁸ C.D.H., "Resume of Child Search Program and Problems" (March 31, 1947), S-0437-0013-08 - Displaced Persons - Child Search Policy, UNRRA.

¹⁴⁹ C.D.H., "Monthly Report - Child Search and Tracing Section - June 1947" (June 30, 1947), S-0437-0013-07 - Displaced Persons - Child Search and Tracing Section Reports, UNRRA.

¹⁵⁰ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 323.

¹⁵¹ C.D.H., "Monthly Report - Child Search and Tracing Section - June 1947" (June 30, 1947), S-0437-0013-07 - Displaced Persons - Child Search and Tracing Section Reports, UNRRA.

children from German care as urgent because of the child's risk of continued assimilation, loss of documentation, and loss of possible witnesses.¹⁵² One representative of the Polish Red Cross wrote that a child being brought up in a German environment was, "a danger from the national point of view still in the largest humanitar[ian] scale."¹⁵³ To reinforce the urgency of this matter, according to an official UNRRA bulletin, no child who was a citizen of Poland, Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia was allowed to stay in Germany.¹⁵⁴ Altogether, the importance of removal should have made it relatively easy to remove children from Germany once their nationalities were proven, but the opposite occurred.

In order to be officially removed from their living situations, each child had to be approved by the Welfare Branch of the respective Land Office of Military Government.¹⁵⁵ As if the number of approvals required was not enough, many UNRRA workers claimed military government personnel were not always available and that their authorization was ultimately unnecessary. Aid workers argued in favor of UNRRA officers and Child Search Teams having the power to approve removals, as those officers had the case work training and experience evaluating conditions needed to make recommendations for specific children.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Inspector of Silesian County Office, Social Welfare Section, "Short Statement on Polish Children Now in Germany" (July 12, 1946), S-0401-0003-02 - Child Welfare Section - Polish Unaccompanied Children and Polish Red Cross, UNRRA.

¹⁵³ J. Makowiecka, Polish Red Cross, "Report in Matter of Polish Children Expatriated from Silesia End 1939-January 1945 for Germanization Purposes" (January 2, 1946), S-0401-0003-02 - Child Welfare Section - Polish Unaccompanied Children and Polish Red Cross, UNRRA.

¹⁵⁴ D.T. Pearse for Assistant Director, Field Operations, "Removal of Children from German Foster Homes" (January 20, 1947), S-0401-0003-10 - Child Welfare Section - Unaccompanied Children – Policy, UNRRA.

¹⁵⁵ Office of Military Government for Germany (US), Prisoners of War and Displaced Persons Division, "Record of Conference on the Coordination of Activities of U.S. Forces, Military Government and UNRRA with Particular Regard to Searching for and Identifying United Nations Children in Germany Held in Frankfurt" (July 22, 1946), S-0437-0013-15 - Displaced Persons - Child Welfare - Legal Matters, UNRRA.

¹⁵⁶ "Commentary on Proposed USFET Directive" (n.d.), S-0437-0013-15 - Displaced Persons - Child Welfare - Legal Matters, UNRRA; D.T. Pearse for Assistant Director, Field Operations, "Removal of Children from German Foster Homes" (January 20, 1947), S-0401-0003-10 - Child Welfare Section - Unaccompanied Children – Policy, UNRRA.

Some local officials flatly refused to approve all removals, especially from foster homes, while others refused requests on a case-by-case basis. The Public Welfare Branch of the Office of Military Government for Bavaria notified the UNRRA in 1947 that they would not be approving removal of children from foster homes. The Office of Military Government for Greater Hesse had an even stronger policy of authorizing no removals from foster homes except upon consent of the foster parent or the German agency which had placed the child.¹⁵⁷ In June 1947, the date set for the UNRRA's liquidation, there were 103 requests for removal pending at various Military Government offices around Germany and a many of other requests had been refused.¹⁵⁸ It is likely that many of the children caught in the bureaucratic machine were never removed from their German homes because the UNRRA ran out of time.

UNRRA officers also faced resistance from the authorities of German institutions, including, but not limited to, orphanages, group homes, and boarding schools, as well as individual foster or adoptive parents. Officials from German institutions and children's homes would often refuse to release children into the care of the UNRRA, arguing that the children were in fact German and that the UNRRA had no claim over them. These officials frequently reported to military authorities that UNRRA officers were overstepping their boundaries.¹⁵⁹ Cornelia D. Heise, Child Search Officer, wrote "complaints of UNRRA activity in the removal of children and protests that children were of German nationality have been received by military officers at many echelons."¹⁶⁰ These complaints undermined the authority of the UNRRA within

¹⁵⁷ Cornelia D. Heise, Chief, Child Search/Tracing Division, "Removal of Children from German Care" (June 30, 1947), S-0437-0017-02 - Displaced Persons - Children - Removal from German Homes, UNRRA.

¹⁵⁸ Cornelia D. Heise, Chief, Child Search/Tracing Division, "Removal of Children from German Care" (June 30, 1947), S-0437-0017-02 - Displaced Persons - Children - Removal from German Homes, UNRRA.

¹⁵⁹ J.H. Whiting, Zone Director, "Request for Authorization for UNRRRA to Remove Allied Children From German Homes and Institutions" (May 15, 1946), S-0437-0017-02 - Displaced Persons - Children - Removal from German Homes, UNRRA.

¹⁶⁰ Cornelia D. Heise, Child Search Officer, "Monthly Report - Child Search Branch - September 1946" (October 7, 1946), S-0437-0013-07 - Displaced Persons - Child Search and Tracing Section Reports, UNRRA.

postwar aid and recover networks in Germany. At conferences with military officers, UNRRA workers had to continually reaffirm that they were only removing children who had a confirmed non-German identity—making the work of identifying of children extremely important.

Some members of the international relief community did not see why any “United Nations’ children” who were living with German families should be removed if they were receiving good care.¹⁶¹ They asserted that children should only be separated from their “natural, adoptive, or foster parents or with any other person who has been caring for him” if it was in the best interests of the child. However, questions about who and how to determine the best interests of the child were ones to which no one had clear answers. Generally, the desires of the countries of origin were prioritized. Children would be removed from German care if their countries advocated for their return.¹⁶²

The UNRRA struggled with removing children from the homes of their adoptive or foster families because the families argued that they had a legal claim to the child. However, there was an early understanding within the postwar governments that at the end of the war these adoptions under Nazi law were considered null and void, though there was still uncertainty within the UNRRA as to the degree to which they were allowed to interfere with these adoptions.¹⁶³ No adoptions in Germany of or by Polish Citizens were considered valid by the postwar Polish government, because these adoptions should have occurred within Polish courts.¹⁶⁴ Most other countries took a similar stance and this policy provided the legal basis for the removal of Polish

¹⁶¹ Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant, Welfare Branch, UNRRA CHQ, “Report on Conferences on Unaccompanied Children Held in Berlin” (March 15, 1946), S-0401-0008-04 - Polish Red Cross, UNRRA.

¹⁶² Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant, Welfare Branch, UNRRA CHQ, “Report on Conferences on Unaccompanied Children Held in Berlin” (March 15, 1946), S-0401-0008-04 - Polish Red Cross, UNRRA.

¹⁶³ Irene L. Arnold, “Adoption of Children by German Nationals” (November 2, 1945), S-0437-0013-15 - Displaced Persons - Child Welfare - Legal Matters, UNRRA.

¹⁶⁴ Paul Carter, Assistant Legal Advisor, “Adoptions in Germany of or by Polish Citizens” (March 11, 1946), S-0400-0004-05 - 014.6/B - Unaccompanied Children - Guardianship and Adoption, UNRRA.

(and other non-German) children from German private homes. There were still battles over the legal right to the children, though.¹⁶⁵ OMGUS, for example, wanted to allow children to remain in the care of adoptive or foster parents if the situations were safe.¹⁶⁶ There was high demand from both Americans and DPs to be allowed to adopt allied orphan children. But because neither the military, UNRRA nor German courts had the ability to coordinate this process and there was a fear of child's birth parents being located after adoption had taken place, this was not allowed.¹⁶⁷

For Polish kidnapped and unaccompanied children, one of the most unique barriers to repatriation was the postwar political and economic situation in Poland. The Polish Ministry of Health emphasized in its reports how important the repatriation of its children was to the country: “[e]ach child is a treasure to us, which we want to retain and bring-up. This is not only a question of sentimentality but a reasonable populating policy.”¹⁶⁸ The rebuilding of its population was central to the policy of postwar Poland, but the country also struggled to provide for its existing population. Food was an acute need, especially because of the large number of undernourished individuals requiring higher than average rations.¹⁶⁹ There was a lack of housing, resulting in people being forced to live in barracks and in dug outs in the ground. There were high numbers of homeless orphan children and the shortage of living accommodations showed the nation's dire economic reality.¹⁷⁰ Poland relied heavily on UNRRA provisions,

¹⁶⁵ D.T. Pearse for Assistant Director, Field Operations, “Removal of Children from German Foster Homes” (January 20, 1947), S-0401-0003-10 - Child Welfare Section - Unaccompanied Children – Policy, UNRRA.

¹⁶⁶ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 167.

¹⁶⁷ Eileen Davidson, District Child Search Officer, “Monthly Report for February 1947” (February 1947), S-0437-0014-04 - Displaced Persons - Child Welfare - Search Reports - District 1 (Pt 1 & 2), UNRRA.

¹⁶⁸ Dr. M. Skokowska-Rudolf, Polish Ministry of Health, “The Status and Medical Needs of the Children in Poland” (September 10, 1945), S-1394-000-0018 - Welfare – Children, UNRRA.

¹⁶⁹ Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant, “The Care of Children in Poland” (March 25, 1947), S-1394-000-0018 - Welfare – Children, UNRRA.

¹⁷⁰ Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant, “The Care of Children in Poland” (March 25, 1947), S-1394-000-0018 - Welfare – Children, UNRRA. 150,000 orphans and 1.5m “half orphans” (one parent was dead) were reported in 1947. In January 1947 there were 733 Orphan Homes with 48,000 individuals in them.

predominantly food and clothing, to care for its population which continued to grow as more and more were repatriated home.

When it came to care for its large orphan population, Poland strongly preferred foster families over group homes. Special teachers were assigned to monitor foster families to ensure abuse was not occurring and to provide resources to the children and families. This system created an early child welfare system. There were more than 64,000 children in foster families, but approximately 80,000 were expected to be with foster families once all children were returned from Germany, with the majority of the families being peasants who needed material help to support the children.¹⁷¹

Children found out about the situation in Poland through newspapers, and rumors, and Polish DPs in camps, and this information discouraged many children from returning home. Although by and large children had no choice in whether they were repatriated, older children were sometimes given a choice. Three other major factors in this choice were: negative views of communism and the Soviet Union, infrequency of repatriation trains, and having lost their families in Poland.¹⁷² Some children had found work in Germany and saw their economic opportunities as being better in Germany where there was a stronger economy and more resources from occupation governments than in Poland.¹⁷³ UNRRA welfare officers created a series of initiatives and policies to try and encourage Polish children to repatriate, since it was difficult to force older children to do so. The main techniques were a series of propaganda

¹⁷¹ Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant, "The Care of Children in Poland" (March 25, 1947), S-1394-000-0018 - Welfare – Children, UNRRA.

¹⁷² "Repatriation Poll of Displaced Persons in UNRRA Assembly Centers in Germany" (May 1946), S-0401-0008-07 – Repatriation, UNRRA. At this point, Poland was a communist nation and anti-communists were not welcome in the country. Additionally, many Poles who were from East of the Curzon line, an area which had been annexed to Russia felt ties to Poland and didn't want to be Russian citizens.

¹⁷³ Antoni Jarocinski and Florian Kozlowski, "Report of Duty Travel to the Children Center Kloster Indersdorf" (July 13, 1946), S-0437-0013-09 - Displaced Persons - Child Search Policy – OMGUS, UNRRA.

newspapers and films, vocational training and education, and “reconditioning” to allow them to better transition back to their home countries.¹⁷⁴ The latter was especially important for Germanized children so that they would be “renationalized” prior to returning to Poland.

The Polish Red Cross was a key ally for the UNRRA in all steps of the repatriation process, from confirming nationalities to setting up repatriation trains. All Polish repatriated persons would be received by the Polish Red Cross in Poland and be assigned to refugee camps or, in the case of the children, orphanages and foster homes if their parents were unavailable or dead. However, this collaboration was slow going and not always easy; frequently child care workers would complain of delays in visits of workers to Poland and vice versa or the delays in setting up repatriation trains.¹⁷⁵ Despite this, the UNRRA recognized the invaluable work of the Polish Red Cross who truly were vital in repatriating the number of children that the UNRRA did.¹⁷⁶

* * *

The repatriation of kidnapped children was overall arguably unsuccessful. According to Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant for the UNRRA, the number of family reunions was “dishearteningly few.” Even when the nationalities of children were able to be identified, many of their families were untraceable or dead.¹⁷⁷ The lack of resources plagued child search and

¹⁷⁴ “Extracts from a Report on a Survey of Polish Newspapers” (May 1946), S-0401-0008-07 – Repatriation, UNRRA; C.D.H., “Resume of Child Search Program and Problems” (March 31, 1947), S-0437-0013-08 - Displaced Persons - Child Search Policy, UNRRA; Carl H. Martini, Assistant Chief of Operations, Relief Services, “Importance of Information Between Poland and German Operation with Respect to Unaccompanied Polish Children; Visit of Child Welfare Consultant to Poland” (July 24, 1946), S-0401-0003-02 - Child Welfare Section - Polish Unaccompanied Children and Polish Red Cross, UNRRA. Many Poles were wary of Polish newspapers they saw as propaganda.

¹⁷⁵ Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant, Welfare Branch, UNRRA CHQ, “Letter to Roland Berger” (June 11, 1946), S-0401-0003-02 - Child Welfare Section - Polish Unaccompanied Children and Polish Red Cross, UNRRA.

¹⁷⁶ Ethel Starner, Director, Elizabethenheim Children Center, “Repatriation of Polish Unaccompanied Children” (August 21, 1947), S-0437-0012-01 - Displaced Persons - Children - Area Team Reports, UNRRA.

¹⁷⁷ Eileen Blackey, Child Care Consultant, Welfare Branch, UNRRA CHQ, “Report on Unaccompanied Nations’ Children in Germany” (June 24, 1946), S-0437-0017-14 - Displaced Persons - Unaccompanied Children, Plans for, UNRRA.

tracing operations from their start until their conclusion in 1952 with the end of operations under the IRO, making successful repatriation an unattainable dream.¹⁷⁸

Much of the work that the UNRRA handled at the end of the war was carried on by the IRO between 1947 and 1949, when much of the operations shut down before finally liquidating in 1952 when it was replaced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR).¹⁷⁹ The UNRRA phase of the Child Search program closed out with over 3,000 children located in the US Zone, but there was evidence that there were thousands more to be found. Cornelia D. Heise, Child Search Officer, wrote in June 1947 before the liquidation of the administration about the unfinished work the UNRRA was leaving behind,

The program is passed on to IRO with many unsolved problems. No basic policy has been adopted by the occupying authorities regarding unaccompanied children, their location, determination of nationality and removal from German care. A large group of children of undetermined nationality, because insufficient proof is available, pose the fundamental question of disposition. Shall they be given United Nations' status or left in German care? When the plans of older boys and girls are at variance with the decisions of their governments, who makes the final decision? Questions of determination of nationality of certain groups are not settled.¹⁸⁰

Much of the child search operations ceased in the summer of 1947 but had been fizzling out since the ACA's Central Tracing Bureau was shut down at the end of 1946. The US Zone was the only place where operations continued in strong numbers in 1947, while the British and French Zones ceased operations practically immediately after the Bureau closed. The child search saw a revival under the IRO with the creation of Arolsen, the Germany-based

¹⁷⁸ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 323.

¹⁷⁹ Edith Abbott, "I.R.O. and the Missing Children," *Social Service Review* 23, no. 1 (1949): 98–99; UNRRA, "'Resolution 99' in A Compilation of the Resolutions of Policy, Fifth Session of the UNRRA Council" (1946), S-0401-0003-10 - Child Welfare Section - Unaccompanied Children – Policy, UNRRA.

¹⁸⁰ C.D.H., "Monthly Report - Child Search and Tracing Section - June 1947" (June 30, 1947), S-0437-0013-07 - Displaced Persons - Child Search and Tracing Section Reports, UNRRA.

International Tracing Service (ITS), which continues to exist as the Arolsen Archives and serves as the world's most comprehensive archive on Nazi victims.¹⁸¹ However, many of the child victims of the Germanization program were never identified and most likely never will be.

¹⁸¹ Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests*, 200.

Conclusion: Legacies of Displacement and Family Separation

The kidnapped children of Europe captivated the world in the postwar era. Newspapers reported on the horrors of the *Lebensborn* program when information came to light, and countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia used their lost children as a rallying cry. In Czechoslovakia, the case of the kidnapped children of Lidice became a rallying cry for the return of Czechoslovak children both in the country and around the world.¹⁸²

Stories of unaccompanied children and the UNRRA were even told in films. Director Fred Zinnermann's film *The Search* brought the plight of unaccompanied European children to America, telling the story of young Karel Malik, a Czech boy who survived Auschwitz but was separated from his mother. The film won two Academy Awards and gained high praise amongst critics. In the film, UNRRA officials work with Karel's mother to find him, while Steve, an American Army engineer, begins caring for unaccompanied Karel in Germany. Karel and his mother's search for one another may be fictional, but it is one that speaks for the countless searches of its nature that occurred across Germany after the war.¹⁸³

Although the film is fictional and not about a kidnapped child, it speaks to many of the main themes of the story of Europe's kidnapped children. The trauma of the past, the uncertainty of the future, the battle to understand one's own identity, and the involvement of aid workers to piece together the puzzle. Identity plays a significant role in the story as Karel, who has forgotten his name, struggles to explain his identity to English-speaking Steve, and his mother faces a nearly impossible search for her son with the help of the UNRRA.

¹⁸² For more on the Lidice children and the postwar response, see J. E. Smyth, "Children of Lidice: Searches, Shadows and Histories," in *The Young Victims of the Nazi Regime: Migration, the Holocaust and Postwar Displacement*, ed. Simone Gigliotti and Monica Tempian (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016), 299–320.

¹⁸³ Fred Zinnermann, *The Search* (Taipei, Taiwan: Buddha Video, 1948).

Identity is foundational to one's personhood, and nationality is a significant piece of that. The kidnapped children of Europe's identities were out of their control, revised first by the Nazis when their nationalities were stripped of them and later by the humanitarian aid workers attempting to piece their nationalities back together. The *Lebensborn* project of kidnapping children devastated not only those it impacted, but also entire nations. These children were seen as hope for rebuilding their devastated populations, a similar purpose that the children served for the Nazis. However, the narrative was different—it was repatriation, not kidnapping, that was called for, and the UNRRA aid workers were returning these children to their home countries, whether there was family waiting for them or not.

Research on the victims of the Nazi kidnapping program is still lacking, specifically research that focuses on the child's experience. One of the main barriers to research of this nature is a lack of first-person narratives from the children in any form. No memoirs have been written by the survivors and in-depth interviews with these children do not exist, other than a limited number in the transcripts from the Nuremberg Trials. In order to understand the full breadth of the kidnapping program, extensive interviews of the surviving kidnapped children are necessary—and time is of the essence as many of these children are now in their nineties.

With first-person narratives comes the opportunity to understand the full psychological effects of the kidnapping program, something which is currently lacking and vitally needed. Family separation and childhood displacement have both been explored in the years following World War II, but the experience of kidnapped children is much more complex. The role of identity sets this groups apart from others. It is important to understand the long-term impacts identity revision has on the child's psyche—especially when combined with family separation, displacement, violence, and trauma.

Childhood displacement has been the source of many studies that focus on the refugee experience. War-related stress has been proven to have negative impacts on children, but refugee and displaced children are especially affected.¹⁸⁴ The current detention of refugees on the U.S.-Mexico border and the separation of families make the understanding of extended family separation incredibly important. Existing studies on the impacts of family separation vary in the subgroup studied, but common impacts on children include: the probability of falling below the poverty line, exposure to gender violence, higher risk of depression, anxiety, hostility, paranoid ideation, interpersonal alienation, and social withdrawal.¹⁸⁵ Research has shown that even when reunited with their families, children can experience difficulty with emotional attachment to their parents, self-esteem, and physical and psychological health. For many children these wounds do not heal with time.¹⁸⁶

The prolonged institutionalization of children, including in orphanages or displaced persons camps, has significant effects on child development, especially in young children.¹⁸⁷ For young children who are institutionalized, “the issue here is the lack of individualized attention, and lack of ability to form relationships with adults that can be responsive to them,” says Jack P. Shonkoff, a professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and a professor of child health and development at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health and Harvard Graduate School of

¹⁸⁴ Marina Ajdukovic and Dean Ajdukovic, “Impact of Displacement on the Psychological Well-Being of Refugee Children,” *International Review of Psychiatry* 10, no. 3 (January 1998): 186–95.

¹⁸⁵ Selected publications on family separation include: Dolores Seijo et al., “Estimating the Epidemiology and Quantifying the Damages of Parental Separation in Children and Adolescents,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 7 (2016): 1611; Carola Suárez-Orozco, Hee Jin Bang, and Ha Yeon Kim, “I Felt Like My Heart Was Staying Behind: Psychological Implications of Family Separations & Reunifications for Immigrant Youth,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 26, no. 2 (September 8, 2010): 222–57; Leisy J. Abrego, *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love across Borders* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014).

¹⁸⁶ Johayra Bouza et al., “The Science Is Clear: Separating Families Has Long-Term Damaging Psychological and Health Consequences for Children, Families, and Communities,” Society for Research in Child Development, June 20, 2018, <https://www.srcd.org/briefs-fact-sheets/the-science-is-clear>.

¹⁸⁷ Isaac Chotiner, “How the Stress of Separation and Detention Changes the Lives of Children,” *The New Yorker*, July 13, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/how-the-stress-of-separation-and-detention-changes-the-lives-of-children>.

Education.¹⁸⁸ For kidnapped children, a lack of individualized attention was a constant during their displacement because of first the understaffing of *Lebensborn* homes and after the war the lack of aid workers to care for the children.

The experiences of kidnapped children and the entire displaced persons population must be remembered. As Lieutenant General F.E. Morgan, Chief of Operations in Germany wrote in 1946, “[it] must not be forgotten that Displaced Persons are not mere cattle, but are sentient human beings who have survived experiences and ordeals quite unimaginable to those who have been fortunate enough to lend their whole existence in a comparatively stable society.”¹⁸⁹ This thesis builds on work by historians such as Tara Zahra and Lynne Taylor to tell the story of the kidnapped children of Europe, the Nazi program that pulled them from their homes, and the aid workers who helped them return home. By analyzing the role of identity, it is clear that the kidnapped children’s plight did not end when the war did. Instead, it continued as the international community struggled to understand their identities and nationalities in a world changed by the Nazis.

¹⁸⁸ Isaac Chotiner, “How the Stress of Separation and Detention Changes the Lives of Children,” *The New Yorker*, July 13, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/how-the-stress-of-separation-and-detention-changes-the-lives-of-children>.

¹⁸⁹ Lt-Gen. F.E. Morgan, Chief of Operations, Germany, “Narrative Report for the Month of March 1946” (n.d.), S-0412-0008-12 - Central Headquarters - Monthly Narrative Reports – November, UNRRA.

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