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The Best Interests of the Child in National Terms: Policies Concerning Children of Polish Female Forced Laborers and Displaced Persons in the Early Cold War Era

"I believe that the best interests of a child are always to be reunited with his mother and to return to his home country; in this case, there is no doubt that the child is Polish." Zygmunt Radomski, a representative of the Polish Red Cross (*Polski Czerwony Krzyż*, PCK) in the American occupation zone in Germany, wrote the above words justifying his objection to the decision issued by the American court in Augsburg following a hearing about the repatriation of a child to Poland.[1] "For these reasons, the PCK does not consider the decision of the court to be correct, and if even the mother changed her position regarding the return of the child, the child should be repatriated, and upon return [to Poland], the care of the child will be taken over by the state, which, by maintaining the relevant care institutions, tries to come to the aid of citizens who are unable to provide their children with proper care and education."[2]

The judge in Augsburg, based on the evidence, favored leaving the young girl with her German guardians. The Polish position, as represented by Jan Bikart, the Chief Delegate of the Polish Red Cross Germany, did

1 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in the introduction are from a single source: the report (with annexes) of the court hearing on the repatriation of the girl, drawn up for the Polish Military Mission by Zygmunt Radomski, the PCK delegate in Germany who attended the hearing. Archiwum Akt Nowych, AAN (Central Archives of Modern Records), Polski Czerwony Krzyż. Zarząd Główny, ZG PCK (Board of the Polish Red Cross), 227, Report on the court hearing on the repatriation of H. H., with annexes, Munich 26. 11. 1951, 217–21.

2 AAN, ZG PCK, 227, Report on the court hearing on the repatriation of H. H., with annexes, Munich 26. 11. 1951, 217–21.

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not recognize the verdict. Bikart ordered that the child's legal guardianship be transferred to Poland and initiated a fight over custody to the bitter end. According to him, the Polish child should be brought up in Poland, whatever the financial—or moral—cost.

It was the end of November 1951. More than six years had passed since the end of the largest war in global history, which had completely transformed international relations. In Augsburg, which became part of the American zone of occupation in Germany after the war, the above hearing concerned the case of Hania, a Polish-born six-and-a-half-year-old girl who was to be taken away from her temporary German guardians and sent to Poland. The hearing took an unexpected turn for the Polish officials, who were convinced that they would leave the courtroom with an order stating that the child be returned to Poland immediately. They engaged a number of people and institutions to achieve this goal. They probably believed in the righteousness of the action they were taking: it was unthinkable for them to leave a Polish child in the hands of their enemies.

In the few weeks between the first and second court hearings, a campaign for the return of the child was launched on an unprecedented scale. At the request of Bikart, the PCK General Board in Warsaw forced the biological mother and her husband to sign documents demanding the "repatriation" of the girl and declaring that they were able to provide her with care and an education. The woman was tracked down in a village in the Opole region of southwestern Poland as early as 1948, when her permission was needed to "repatriate" a child found at a German orphanage. It is not known whether she was married at the time, but in 1951, she was living with her husband. Her life story and that of her husband remains unknown. The couple received three letters to sign: one addressed to the Polish Red Cross (in Germany) in which they ask for the "immediate return" of their daughter; and a second and third addressed to the American court and the *Jugendamt* in Germany, respectively—each "strongly requesting" that the girl be returned to Poland. The girl's mother also explained that she had not been able to take her daughter to Poland in 1945 due to her (the mother's) illness and stated that after she had "obtained suitable living conditions," she had made efforts to bring her daughter back to Poland. The couple also assured American and German officials that they wanted to raise the child together "and devote themselves completely to her."

Searching for the mother and attempts to contact her undoubtedly required making the matter public. The local authority—the Municipal National Council—in the territory where the family resided was respon-

sible for completing the documentation by certifying the reliability of the signatures of both spouses, among other things. The family's privacy was inevitably violated in this way. It is not known to what extent the mother had shared her experiences as a forced laborer with her relatives and neighbors. Did her husband know about her illegitimate daughter? How did he react? How did this knowledge affect the family, and how they were perceived by their local community? Today, these are rhetorical questions that emerge when considering the ethical dimensions of the actions taken by the communist regime in postwar Poland.

Equipped with the three letters, Zygmunt Radomski, certain of victory, asked the court for a positive decision regarding the "repatriation" of the child. However, there was an unexpected turn of events. The official guardian of the child *(Amtsvormund)* called a witness, the girl's foster father, who had asked Hania's biological mother for permission to keep the child in Germany after the first hearing. She, in turn, wrote a private letter to her daughter's foster parents the day after signing the documents for the PCK. From this letter, one can learn that the child's biological father was German, and for this reason, her husband did not want the child to live under the same roof with him. The woman also mentioned that they already had five children of their own, and one more would only bring problems. The letter ends with the statement: "so I agree that this daughter of mine should stay in Germany, and that you should take her."

In view of this plot twist, the judge decided, without any doubts, that "in accordance with the interests of the child and the will of the mother, the court considers that the child should remain with the present German guardians." In response to this verdict, the PCK Chief Delegate for Germany asked the Polish Military Mission (*Polska Misja Wojskowa*, PMW) in Berlin to take the following steps:

1. The child's mother should be held criminally responsible for misleading the Polish authorities.
2. The child's mother should be deprived of custodial authority over H[. . .] H[. . .], and the guardian appointed by the [Polish] court should apply for the repatriation of the child.
3. The [PCK] Representation [in Germany], being in possession of a court decision on the withdrawal of custody, the appointment of a new custodian, will apply to the US court to take up the case anew [. . .].

We do not know how this case eventually ended or whether the girl was forcibly brought to Poland. This information might be in her files in the

Archives of the PCK Information and Search Office (Archiwum Biura Informacji i Poszukiwań PCK, ABINF PCK), but only family members of the person in question have access to this information. However, it is possible to hypothesize that the child was not seized before the Polish Red Cross was ordered to leave the American zone, which occurred at the beginning of April 1952. Thus, this case was probably one of the last interventions of the PCK as the representative of the Polish state concerning the so-called "revindication and repatriation action" of Polish children.

The Revindication and Repatriation of "Stolen Children"

At least in the summer of 1945, the Polish authorities were aware that Polish children had been deported to the Third Reich for the purpose of Germanization.[3] This was when the first concrete actions were taken to address the issue: the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare ordered its units throughout Poland to draw up lists of deported children.[4] However, surviving documents show that local social welfare departments did not take this order seriously, and most offices failed to carry out this task. Almost simultaneously, in the early autumn of 1945, the topic of searching for Polish children in occupied Germany and Austria and repatriating them to Poland was taken up. The action was to be coordinated by the network of units of the Polish Repatriation Mission (*Polska Misja Repatriacyjna*, PMR), which was already active in the area and dealt with, among other things, the return of Poles to their homeland. However, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the plan did not develop.[5] The explanation may be that, in view of the multitude of tasks facing the Polish authorities in the country immediately after the war, there was simply no one to take up this particular concern. When there was the realization that the Polish Red Cross was basically the only organization that could

3 For more on the policy of Germanization of Polish children, see, among others: Isabel Heinemann, *Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut. Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003), 508–30.

4 AAN, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej, MPiOS (Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare), 371, Letter from the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare to the Social Welfare Departments of the Provincial Offices in Poland regarding a register of children deported to Germany for Germanization, Warsaw, 26.7.1945, 2.

5 AAN, MPiOS, 371, Note on the search for Polish children in Germany, Warsaw, 20.09.1945, 37–39.

logistically handle the whole action, it turned out that its realm of action was limited because of politics.[6] During the war, the association split, and some activists remained in Nazi-occupied Poland while others left to operate wherever in the world there were Poles. Throughout 1945, the association in Poland was subjected to a gradual politicization (prominent activists were replaced by persons compatible with the goals of the Communist Party), and it was eventually subordinated to the new authorities. These new officials were not, however, accepted abroad, where the émigré branch of the Polish Red Cross, based in London, was still operating legally and was part of the umbrella organization that was the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The PCK in Poland, which had been taken over by the communists, was not recognized by either the ICRC or the Allies. In the territories of the former Third Reich, the Polish-based PCK cooperated with the "London" PCK, as the branch is known today. Although the delegates of the "Warsaw" PCK had been present in occupied Germany since the autumn of 1945, it must have taken months for them to be taken seriously. This convoluted process culminated with all of the Allies withdrawing accreditation from the "Londoners" and granting it to the "Warsawers."[7]

The two circles were diametrically opposed in terms of their opinions on the fate of Polish citizens residing on the territory of the former Third Reich. The group associated with the Polish government-in-exile in London discouraged anyone from returning to communist Poland and encouraged them to remain outside their homeland, at least until there was a regime change in Warsaw. The "Warsaw" PCK, on the other hand, was keen to bring as many Poles as possible back to the country, which was being reconstructed after the war. During the first postwar months, however, this repatriation process was not organized from the top down. One impediment was the fact that Poles had to yield to Soviet citizens returning to the Soviet Union, who were traveling eastward along the same routes. Furthermore, the spontaneous return of Poles from German captivity remained outside the control of the state, which is why they are sometimes called "wild repatriations."[8] The system of assistance for

6 For more on the postwar fate of the Polish Red Cross, see: Joanna Szymoniczek, *W cieniu wojny. Polski Czerwony Krzyż w latach 1945–1972* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2016).

7 On the "London" PCK transformed into the Polish Aid Society, see: Anna Maria Stefanicka, *Spieszmy z pomocą. Historia Towarzystwa Pomocy Polakom* (London: Towarzystwo Pomocy Polakom, Wydawnictwo Non Omnis, 2016).

8 Janusz Wróbel, *Na rozdrożu historii. Repatriacja obywateli polskich z Zachodu w latach 1945–1949* (Łódź: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009), 441–43.

refugees after crossing the border was created on an ad hoc basis, often only in response to emerging needs. Because the Polish authorities inside Poland could barely cope with the vast needs of returnees, it was natural that Poles in the occupation zones were dealt with by structures coordinated by the "London Government." Delegates from Warsaw monitoring the situation in Germany and Austria reported that the "Londoners" were urging their compatriots to emigrate and were also willing to support the international adoption of Polish orphans.

Polish children left in the Allied occupation zones without parental care were not considered a priority by the Polish authorities. In the western zones, this multinational group of unaccompanied children came under the care of UNRRA, while in the territories occupied by the Red Army, assistance to children was not organized at all.[9] Most of the children came from the prewar territory of Poland, but their territorial origin was not necessarily the same as their ethnicity or nationality. For this reason, the Western Allies in particular had to put much more effort into securing the fate of these orphaned children. UNRRA set itself the goal of repatriating minors to their countries of origin as quickly as possible. To carry out the operation, however, it needed collaborators in the countries to which the children were to be sent.[10] In the case of Poland, the circumstances outlined above made logistics difficult and contributed to the delay of the entire repatriation action. This resulted in, among other things, a prolongation of the peculiar "state of limbo" in which the children were trapped, as well as reduced efficiency. In the end, only a small number of children staying in UNRRA special centers were sent to Poland.

As a result of the efforts of a few delegates of the PCK General Board in Warsaw (although most of them worked in the Katowice branch of the PCK on a daily basis), at the beginning of 1946, contacts were established with UNRRA, and the branch gained the trust of the Allied powers.[11]

9 For more on UNRRA's welfare activities directed toward unaccompanied children in the lands of the former Third Reich, see: Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). On children in the American zone, see: Lynne Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests: Unaccompanied Children in American-Occupied Germany, 1945–1952* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017). There is no study of child welfare in the Soviet zone beyond those related to UNRRA operations.

10 AAN, ZG PCK, 217, Report on the conference of representatives of the ZG PCK and UNRRA representatives, Arolsen, 27.02.1946, 24–27.

11 The process of establishing contacts and negotiations between UNRRA and the PCK on the issue of unaccompanied children considered to be Polish, as well as the changing relationship between these organizations over time (later IRO and PCK) is described in detail in my PhD thesis, published in 2022. See: Jakub Gałęziowski,

The challenges and formalities associated with the transfer of recognition and operations from the London PCK to the Warsaw PCK, and then the Polish side's prolonged lack of readiness to receive the children, resulted in the first child transport finally arriving in Poland only in June 1946. It, therefore, took more than a year after the end of the war for the first group of children to be repatriated.

Sources indicate that at first, only a handful of people were determined to take concrete action. It was no coincidence that the issue came to the attention of social welfare officials in Katowice and local PCK activists. UNRRA, encountering disorganization and stonewalling by the central government in Warsaw, established contacts directly in the region from which many of the children in the care of the United Nations had come. These were children transported from Upper Silesia by the evacuating Germans in 1945. They were wards of orphanages or other institutions like boarding schools, as well as kindergartens and nurseries. Representatives of the Polish authorities in the occupation zones had problems classifying these children as Polish because they often did not speak Polish—usually, they spoke Silesian or German. Few people from Warsaw understood the peculiarities of Upper Silesia, and for many months, it was the officials in Katowice who became the chief advocates for these children, seeking their return. In doing so, they also lobbied for closer cooperation with UNRRA, which they saw as an ally. As a consequence of this involvement in the repatriation process, the Katowice branch of the Polish Red Cross *de facto* took on the burden of coordinating the entire campaign.

A group of American women social workers particularly involved in the "Polish issue" took the opportunity to draw attention to another worrying phenomenon that their organization was encountering on the ground: the neglect and subsequent abandonment of babies born to unmarried Polish female displaced persons (DPs).[12] This was a major problem for UNRRA because the number of unaccompanied children with irregular citizenship status was increasing. The interventions of the Polish authorities in these cases initially had no effect, and their general lack of interest in the problem astonished the Allies. At the same time, already in the first transport of children that arrived in Koźle (town in Upper Silesia, 70 km from Katowice) in June 1946, as many as one-third

Niedopowiedziane biografie. Polskie dzieci urodzone z powodu wojny (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2022), 234–63.

12 AAN, ZG PCK, 217, Report on the conference of representatives of the ZG PCK and UNRRA representatives, Arolsen, 27.02.1946, 25.

of these so-called "repatriates" had been born in the Third Reich or in the occupation zones.[13] In other words, these were not children kidnapped by the Nazis; they were the abandoned offspring of Polish female forced laborers and DPs. However, no one in Poland problematized this particular issue, and propaganda from the time maintained the narrative of recovering "stolen children" from the enemy. In subsequent transports, too, this pattern persisted. It was also necessary to quickly relocate the assembly point for such transports from Koźle to Katowice because the premises of the original location were not suitable for children under the age of four.

From the very beginning, the action was chaotic, lacking—above all—a single, stable governing body on the Polish side; the result was that no one felt responsible for the outcome. It was only in the second half of 1946, after yet another intervention by UNRRA representatives, that decisions were made on the Polish side to take steps to improve the operation. The proper course of the action was to be guaranteed by Roman Hrabar, the former head of the Department of Social Welfare in Katowice, who was appointed Plenipotentiary of the Ministry of the Interior and Administration for the Repatriation of Children.[14] This designation brought with it the hope that the disparate and overlapping actions taken by multiple offices involved in the Polish side's repatriation efforts would now be coordinated by a single office. Hrabar took matters into his own hands and traveled around the Allied occupation zones in Germany for many weeks to get an idea of the situation on the ground and to directly supervise all activities. Although the circumstances are unclear, Hrabar was recalled to Poland in summer 1947 and sidelined shortly thereafter. On the basis of the available documents, individual conflicts with colleagues, mutual antipathy, and/or rivalries may have been behind this turn of events, but some scholars have also suggested that the special services were responsible for Hrabar's marginalization.[15] This thesis, however, requires thorough investigation.

13 Archiwum Biura Informacji i Poszukiwań PCK, ABINF PCK (Archive of the PCK Information and Search Office), Transports of children, 8305, List of children arriving in transport I from Germany to Koźle on 5.06.1946, Warsaw, 3.08.1946.

14 AAN, MPiOS, 371, Letter of the Deputy Minister Dr. E. Pragierowa to the General Government Plenipotentiary for Repatriation W. Wolski, Warsaw, 1.10.1946, k. 96–97.

15 Ewelina Karpińska-Morek et al., eds, *Teraz jesteście Niemcami. Wstrząsające losy zrabowanych polskich dzieci* (Crakow: Wydawnictwo M, 2018), 272–73. On Hrabar's collaboration with the "security police," see: Anna Malinowska, *Brunatna kołysanka. Historie uprowadzonych dzieci* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Agora, 2017), 281–98.

The repatriation campaign never gained any momentum, peaking at the end of 1946 and the beginning of 1947, and as the months went by, fewer and fewer children arrived on each transport.[16] The lack of progress in finding children or successfully bringing back those who had already been identified led to an increasing amount of propaganda around the campaign. In Poland, it was believed that children residing in Germany and Austria could fill the postwar demographic gap and that it was in the state's best interest—in principle—to retrieve as many of them as possible. This approach went hand in hand with the general ideologization of life in the Polish state, where the communist authorities increasingly restricted people's freedoms according to Stalinist patterns.

The Allies were initially positive about the expressions of willingness to care for orphaned and abandoned children coming from the Polish side. The dedication of UNRRA social workers was also confirmed in reports by Polish officials under the direction of Hrabar.[17] At first, Allied military authorities who issued decisions regarding individual children also turned a blind eye to various deviations and irregularities in the repatriation process. Relatively quickly, however, the Allies realized that the Polish authorities were not fulfilling their obligations and were committing violations. Consequently, over time, the Allies began to harden their approach to the removal of children from Germany and Austria to Poland; this shift in attitude was met with consternation in Poland.

An example of these problems was the notorious violation of one of UNRRA's principles: the condition for sending a child to his or her home country was establishing contact with the child's biological family. However, some children waited for no one and were redirected to care institutions or organized foster care upon arrival in Poland. If at the beginning such transfers were not blocked, later on this rule was much more strictly enforced.[18] When the Poles realized that it was in their vital interest to cooperate with UNRRA after all, it was too late to rebuild trust. Year after year, the paths of the two diverged, and mutual accusations of ill-will hampered the work of activists in the field even though each side believed that it was acting in the best interests of the children.

Although Hrabar himself no longer directed the action (after his return to Katowice, he worked as a lawyer), he never abandoned his interest

16 See, among others: AAN, MPiOS, 373, Report on the Inspection of the PCK and the Silesian-Dąbrowskie Provincial Office, Warsaw, 4.05.1948, 90.

17 AAN, ZG PCK, 218, Report of the DG PCK on Germany. Annex No. 9: The issue of the search for children, Arolsen, 3.2.1947, 160.

18 Marvin Klemme, *The Inside Story of UNRRA: An Experience in Internationalism* (New York: Lifetime Editions, 1949), 257–58.

in the fate of Polish children in the former Third Reich.[19] He was involved in their commemoration as a member of the Central Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes and later, privately, as the author of many books on the subject.[20] Until the very end, he also legitimized the entire action by preserving the narrative about Poland's "stolen children." At the same time, he was interested in the fate of Polish female forced laborers in the context of their motherhood, drawing attention to the fate of their children, only some of whom survived the war as most were exterminated for racial reasons. It is possible that it was he who sparked the Polish authorities' interest in the fate of those who had survived and, thus, he who wanted to bring them to Poland at all costs.

In the end, only a few thousand children were brought to Poland between 1946 and 1951.[21] Around 3,400 who arrived in official transports can be identified by name. When all the partial figures are added up, the total number of children affected by the campaign can be estimated to be somewhere between 3,500 to 4,500. It must be assumed that some of the minors returned on their own—younger children with relatives or foreign adults who took them in, and older children and adolescents on their own—and were not included in any official statistics. The campaign ended in failure for the Polish authorities. More than 80 percent of the children the Nazis deported from Polish lands during the war never returned to their homeland. Of those who did, about 20 percent had been born in German or Austrian territory, which does not change the fact that in the communist narrative, which did not recognize such nuance, all of these children were treated as having been "looted" from and therefore reclaimed by Poland.

Propaganda was used to conceal this failure. The greater the hostility of the Allies toward the Polish government, the more the Polish government accused the Allies of deliberately obstructing the search for and repatriation of Polish children. The numbers were meant to shock and frighten Polish society, so they were multiplied—200,000 children deported into the Third Reich; the repatriation of only 30,000 to 33,000 of them—and disseminated in public discourse. These publicity efforts were so success-

19 For more on Hrabar's later activities, see Malinowska, *Brunatna kołysanka.*

20 Roman Hrabar, *Hitlerowski rabunek dzieci polskich: uprowadzanie i germanizowanie dzieci polskich w latach 1939–1945* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 1960); Roman Hrabar, *Janczarowie XX wieku* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 1983), 166–67; Roman Hrabar, *Skazane na zagładę. Praca niewolnicza kobiet polskich w III Rzeszy i los ich dzieci* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 1989).

21 The calculations presented here were first presented in my dissertation. See: Gałęziowski, *Niedopowiedziane biografie*, 257–59.

ful that even today, manipulated data is cited[22] despite the fact that reliable estimates have emerged in scientific research on the topic, as demonstrated by the work of Isabel Heinemann and Ines Hopfer, who claim that deportations to Germany involved about 50,000 children from the entire East Central European region, and approximately 20,000 from Poland.[23] In this sense, then, one can speak of the effectiveness of communist propaganda. But the fact also remains that the majority of children, both those deported from occupied territories and those born in the Third Reich to female forced laborers or prisoners from Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries, were never identified and remained in Germany or Austria, or were designated for (international) adoption.[24]

Repatriation or Forced Relocation? The Children of Former Polish Female Forced Laborers and DPs

When it became known to the Polish communist authorities that there were potentially thousands of underage Polish citizens in the former Third Reich, the aim was to find and bring back as many minors as possible from among those who could be considered Polish. The origin of the mother was considered the primary criterion for determining Polishness; paternity played no role. This approach made it possible—in parallel with the search for children deported to the Third Reich during the war—to undertake the search for children born in the Reich to Polish forced laborers and later DPs. According to the fragmentary statistical record, many such children were believed to have been born throughout

22 Karpińska-Morek et al., *Teraz jesteście Niemcami*, 118–19; Józef Łaptos, *Humanitaryzm i polityka. Pomoc UNRRA dla Polski i polskich uchodźców w latach 1944–1947* (Crakow: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego w Krakowie, 2018), 259; Szymoniczek, *W cieniu wojny*, 136–37, 152.

23 Heinemann, *Rasse,* 509–10. The researcher relied on publicly available partial data. See: Roman Hrabar, Zofia Tokarz, and Jacek Wilczur, *Czas niewoli*, *czas śmierci. Martyrologia dzieci polskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Interpress, 1979), 135–37. Ines Hopfer repeated the findings on the scale of the phenomenon for Poland. Ines Hopfer, *Geraubte Identität, Die gewaltsame "Eindeutschung" von polnischen Kindern in der NS-Zeit* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), 222–23.

24 According to Mark Spoerer, there are still several thousand Germans alive today who had a Polish or Soviet mother and did not even realize it. Mark Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz. Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Dritten Reich und im besetzten Europa 1939–1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt DVA, 2001), 207. A similar phenomenon was noted by Hopfer in Austria. Hopfer, *Geraubte Identität*, 249.

the war. The General Board of the Polish Red Cross collected 25,000 birth certificates of children born to Polish women in Germany and Austria by mid-1946.[25] However, much higher numbers have appeared in the literature,[26] but ultimately none of these figures can be confirmed.

At first, a forced laborer could be sent to her place of origin in order to give birth there and then return to work. In 1943, the Nazis recognized that this practice was unprofitable for the Third Reich. On the basis of an investigation, the fate of the child to be born was determined. If the father was another forced laborer, the woman would be sent for an abortion. The fact that a pregnancy was carried to term did not mean that the child would survive. Frequently, newborns were taken from their mothers and placed in special facilities where they were murdered (mainly through starvation and poor living conditions). In addition to those who were saved by their mothers, those whose fathers were Germans also survived. The latter were identified during the prenatal period and were taken away from their mothers immediately after birth. They were placed in German orphanages where, after their identities were changed, they were quickly put up for adoption. Usually, authorities lost track of them after that, but not always.[27]

From the so-called children's envelopes that survived the "revindication and repatriation action" between 1946 and 1948 and are stored in the archive of the Polish Red Cross today,[28] it appears that UNRRA or IRO child welfare workers and Polish search services managed to track down individual children of former Polish forced laborers that were placed with German families. Some children waiting for adoption in German orphanages were also found. It should be noted, however, that there were situations where it was the mothers themselves who gave their children to

25 AAN, MPiOS, 374, Letter of the Director of the Office of ZG PCK S. Ostrowski to R. Hrabar, Warsaw 4.12.1947, 16.

26 Hrabar gave the figure of 40,000 Polish children born in the postwar American and British zones; Mark Spoerer related this estimate to the entire former Third Reich. Hrabar, *Skazane*, 70; Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit*, 205–6.

27 Regarding maternity and abortion among female forced laborers in the Third Reich, see, among others: Heinemann, *Rasse*, 499–507. For the most recent work on the subject, see: Marcel Brüntrup, "Osteuropäische Zwangsarbeiterinnen und ihre Kinder zwischen Zwangstrennung und Familienzusammenführung, 1940–45," in *Familientrennungen im nationalsozialistischen Krieg. Erfahrungen und Praktiken in Deutschland und im besetzten Europa 1939–1945*, ed. Wiebke Lisner, Johannes Hürter, Cornelia Rauh, and Lu Seegers (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2022).

28 This collection concerns children whose details were recorded by the Katowice branch of the Polish Red Cross. Between 1946 and 1948, children's transports were directed almost exclusively to Upper Silesia. ABINF PCK, Envelopes of children.

German citizens they had befriended or with whom they were more or less acquainted. This happened in situations where they could not or did not want to take care of the children to whom they had given birth. After abandoning children, they often disappeared, leaving no trace, and then returned to Poland or chose to emigrate.

Polish female DPs also left their newborns either immediately after birth or, after some time, when they realized they were no longer able to care for them. This was especially common when women decided to leave Germany or Austria; the vast majority did so without their children. A similar pattern—of leaving the child behind when emigrating—characterized the choices of women who had relations with Allied soldiers.

Several hundred children born in the former Third Reich were brought to Poland, though the exact number is impossible to estimate (but it did not exceed one thousand). Only a handful of them had their father's nationality listed on the documentation. In most cases, the space is left blank or states that the father is unknown. Among this group, however, there are individuals whose fathers were foreigners. This is confirmed by other written sources and interviews. During my research, I came across several such cases. Knowing that a person might have been fathered by a German or Allied soldier, I returned to the envelopes of these particular children to verify this information. During the first search, which included analyzing about 2,700 envelopes, I tried to pick out those cases where the father's nationality was specified on the PCK's record sheet. When I had information from another source about a child's non-Polish nationality, I carefully checked the other documents in the envelope, especially those that had come with the child in question and had been produced by German officials or the Allies. It turned out that the nationality of the child's father had been indicated there, but for reasons that remain unclear, this information was not transcribed into the documents produced by PCK workers in Katowice. Did they deliberately conceal the identity of the children brought to Poland? On the basis of the available documents, it is impossible to confirm this interpretation unequivocally. I analyzed twenty such cases and found information on several more in other sources. I also looked at cases of children whose paternity remained unknown. These materials, coupled with the documentation of the search operation, allow several conclusions to be drawn.

First, the action was originally intended to apply only to children born on Polish soil and abducted by the German occupiers. The title of the questionnaire—"Registration sheet of a deported child" *(Arkusz ewidencyjny wywiezionego dziecka)*—which was completed for each child brought to Poland, as well as the individual headings in the document indicate

that this particular group of victims of Nazi policy was the focal point of Polish policy. Second, the issue of Polish children born in the Third Reich was brought to the attention of Polish authorities by UNRRA, which was the first organization to encounter this phenomenon. It was the employees of this organization who organized the first transports of unaccompanied children in their care. Documents show that Polish officials working on the ground (in this case, in the American zone) did not know until the very end which children would be included in the first group returned to Poland.[29] The Polish side did not immediately recognize the significance of the problem nor did it understand its potential for the country and its population policy. The one person who prioritized this issue was Roman Hrabar, who became personally involved in documenting what he later called "the crime against motherhood."[30] Finally, at the end of 1946 and the beginning of 1947, on the basis of reports coming out of Germany and Austria by Polish officials involved in the search for minors, it was concluded that it would not be easy to find children who had disappeared during the occupation, neither those deported from Poland nor those born in the Third Reich. For this reason, attention was focused primarily on children born to Polish women after the war regardless of whether the women eventually returned to their homeland or not. As numerous cases show, these women's wishes were not considered, let alone the fact that children did not have even the slightest say in where they would live.

As mentioned before, the most important criterion taken into account was the nationality of the mother, although Polish officials in the field were ordered to be interested in all cases if at least one of the parents had Polish citizenship.[31] In the opinion of those involved in the action, Polish parentage was a sufficient argument for placing the child in Poland. Such children were considered the property of the state and the nation. The Polish authorities (as well as welfare workers, including PCK representatives) were convinced that the child would be best off in the mother's country of origin. This, then, is how they understood the best interests of the child irrespective of whether the child would be brought up by the

29 AAN, ZG PCK, 218, Report No. 5 of Major B. Wiszniowski, PCK Delegate for the American Zone, Munich, 10. 6. 1946, 49–53.

30 Hrabar sought to introduce the term into official discourse, but these efforts were unsuccessful as it was never addressed as a separate topic in Poland. Hrabar, *Skazane*, 150.

31 AAN, Polski Czerwony Krzyż. Delegatury Zachodnie, PCK DZ (PCK Western Delegation), 110, Copy of Circular No. 1/Pr/46 signed by the head of the PMR, Lt. Col. Z. Bibrowski, Berlin, n. d. [31. 5. 1946], 11–12.

biological mother, by her close or distant family, by a foster or adoptive family or, finally, by employees of care institutions. Spending one's childhood in a Polish orphanage was seen as a better option than growing up in a German family, no matter how devoted they were to the child. The interest of the child was identical to the interest of Polish society and the state, which had to cope with wartime population losses. The entanglement of the child's interest with that of the nation contributed to the narrative of injustice Poland suffered, first at the hands of the Nazis and then, after the war, the Western Allies. No one mentioned the Red Army in this context, of course.

The positioning of the battle over Polish children within a Cold War framework contributed to the entrenchment of both sides in their non-negotiable positions. Tara Zahra has drawn attention to the politicization of the concept of the best interests of the child, which each side understood quite differently.[32] In her view, all actors involved cared deeply about the fate of children but differed in their opinions on which solutions would ensure their (the children's) psychological stability. For the Allies, the actual context in which children found themselves as a result of the turmoil of war played a significant role; also influential was the individualistic approach to each case, which was based on Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham's research on psychoanalysis and applied by American and British social workers employed in the occupied territories.[33]

During the first months of the action, ambiguous issues were resolved in favor of Poland despite reservations. The Allied search services were guided by the principle of enforcing justice and redressing grievances: that is, taking the side of the weaker power. This was often done in a context marked by Allied military authorities' misunderstanding of the dynamics at play and in the face of mounting pressure from almost all sides. In August 1946, Eileen Blackey, a representative of UNRRA, addressed representatives of the Polish Red Cross and social welfare officials in Katowice:

> When removing Polish children from German hands, we have difficulties from two sides: the Germans resist handing over the children—they are rather aggressive, while our military authorities are primarily interested in quickly eradicating the DP problem in the occupied territories. When a German claims that a child is German and the child's alleged country of origin does not resist—the occupation authorities are willing to recognise the German position, so as not to drag the

32 Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 18–19.
33 Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 18–19.

> matter out. Only we, UNRRA, constantly attack our authorities in these matters; we sometimes hear remarks: why doesn't the Polish Government care about these children? It is its business.[34]

Such determination must surely have been fostered by the gradual coming to light of Nazi crimes including the abduction of children with a view to their Germanization or the extermination of children of foreign forced laborers considered "unfit" for Germanization, both of which were recognized as war crimes and crimes against humanity during the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg.[35] How great must have been the disillusionment with the attitude of the Polish authorities if, by the end of the 1940s, they were no longer taken seriously. This only strengthened the Poles' sense of injustice.

The Allies' gradual tightening of regulations and more restrictive implementation of them when it came to sending Polish children to their biological mothers' homeland was grist for the domestic propaganda mill. There was no mincing of words: the Allies were compared to the Nazis as it was now they who were stealing Polish children only to transform them into a future low-cost labor force in their own countries. Moreover, data and figures were thrown around even though they contradicted information in official documents.[36] The case of the cooperation of Polish search services with Soviet officials in the latter's zone of occupation in Germany serves as a prime illustration of this phenomenon. Many sources show that coordination between the Poles and Soviets was practically non-existent, as stated by Hrabar in his reports and confirmed by data on the repatriated children.[37] However, this did not prevent communist propagandists in Poland from disseminating completely unrealistic figures. "From the beginning of the action until 1. 8. 1948, a total of 2,143 children were found and repatriated to Poland from the

34 AAN, MPiOS, 371, Minutes of a conference with the participation of a delegation from UNRRA headquarters and representatives of Polish officials and care authorities, Katowice, 17. 8. 1946, 82.

35 These issues were dealt with during the eighth trial of the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg (October 20, 1947–March 10, 1948). See: Kim Priemel and Alexa Stiller, eds., *Reassessing the Nuremberg Military Tribunals: Transitional Justice, Trial Narratives and Historiography* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012).

36 AAN, MPiOS, 372, Memorial on the revindication and repatriation of "stolen children" in Poland, n. d. [1949], 272–77; AAN, MPiOS, 372, Revindication of children, n. d. [1949], 278–80; AAN, ZG PCK, 244, Memorial sent to IRO Headquarters in Geneva by J. Bikart, PCK General Delegate for Germany, Munich, 28. 3. 1952, 269–278.

37 Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 204.

West German zones [. . .]. At the same time, more than 20,000 Polish children were repatriated from the Soviet zone despite the fact that UNRRA and IRO did not operate in this area, or perhaps precisely because they did not."[38] These words are from a press release disseminated by Polish authorities. The information about the repatriation of twenty thousand children was and continues to be reproduced by journalists and researchers to this day even though it comes from a source used in the information battle between blocs during the Cold War. There was a desire to cover up the failure of repatriation efforts and cast Poland's new enemies in a decidedly unfavorable light. Any information detailing the fate of "returned" children would have undermined the whole narrative. For example, Hrabar's books do not tell us that one-fifth of the children brought to Poland in the postwar period were born in the territory of the former Third Reich; that some of these children were fathered by foreigners/non-Poles; and that a large number ended up in orphanages or with foster or adoptive families. Nevertheless, the data produced by the Polish authorities in the context of the emerging Cold War has shaped the Polish discourse on "stolen children" for nearly eighty years, and it continues to be the reference point for most people dealing with the subject today.

As a result of "the revindication and repatriation action," there were people living in Poland whose lives might have turned out very differently had it not been for political circumstances far beyond their control. The fates of the few children of Polish forced laborers and Black American soldiers are a good example of this. In the PCK archive, I identified two children whose files had "Negro" written in the "nationality" box. A third person I identified is named Janusz Majewski, who came to Poland in one of the final transports of children in October 1949. From the documents preserved in the archives, however, it would be impossible to identify him because starting at the end of 1948, the children who arrived in Szczecin and Poznań were not recorded in the same way as the children who arrived in Katowice in earlier transports. Luckily, Majewski, with whom I was able to conduct a biographical interview, was in possession of documents taken from the children's home where he had been living.[39] As a result, the story of his early childhood, which he himself could not remember, can be partially reconstructed today. Born in Paderborn in

38 AAN, ZG PCK, 227, Revindication and repatriation of Polish children, "note for press conference," n. d., 3–8.

39 Janusz Majewski, interview with author, Warsaw–Chicago (Skype), November 26, 2018.

February 1946, Majewski was abandoned in the hospital by his mother, who was not even twenty years old. After more than three and a half years in orphanages initially run by UNRRA and then by the IRO, he traveled to Szczecin in Poland; from there he was sent to an orphanage in Niechorze, and then Jastrowie. He stayed in Polish care institutions until he reached adulthood.

In her book, Lynne Taylor mentions dozens of children born to female DPs and African American soldiers.[40] According to her, the mothers of most of them were Polish women. It is not clear whether the estimate she gives is for the American zone only or whether she includes the other zones occupied by the Western Allies (for example, two of the three Polish "brown babies" I identified came from the British zone).[41] I found many references to these children in the sources. However, it is difficult to make reliable estimates of how many there were altogether, let alone the number of such children who found their way to Poland. Majewski tried to contact people with similar experiences (and appearances). He had heard of five or six Black children living in Poland during his lifetime and had personally met three such people, all of whom were born after their mothers had already returned to Poland. Two had been raised by their mothers, the third had been given up by her mother to an orphanage. "What they experienced, only I could understand," summarized my interviewee, without going into details.[42] Thus, it cannot be ruled out that there were more such children, although certainly not enough for the presence of Black children in Poland to be more widely acknowledged. In Poland, unlike some Western countries, "brown babies" were not treated as a social problem. As Silvana Patriarca noted, in all the countries in Western Europe where this phenomenon occurred, it "was always cast in terms of a 'problem'." Patriarca links this directly to "racial prejudice in societies."[43] In Italy and Germany, it particularly resounded when these children were about to start school, i. e., at the beginning of the 1950s. Before this, they lived in hiding, usually brought up by their

40 Taylor, *In the Children's Best Interests,* 93.

41 This term appears in sources (especially the press at the time) and literature, but recently its appropriateness has been the subject of discussion. See: Silke Hackenesch, "Colorblind Love or Racial Responsibility? (Black) Adoptive Families in Postwar America and Transnational Civil Rights," (unpublished manuscript, 2023), 21–22.

42 Janusz Majewski interview.

43 Silvana Patriarca, "'Brown Babies' in Postwar Europe: The Italian Case," EUI MWP LS, 2016/03 Cadmus, EUI Research Repository, 6, accessed April 5, 2023, http://hdl.handle.net/1814/41165.

biological mothers.[44] In Poland, children from such relationships were camouflaged almost perfectly by their own families and the staff of care institutions, and their numbers were so small that even when they entered school in the early 1950s, it did not provoke much reaction. The phenomenon did not appear in Polish public discourse at the time, and one could say that it still does not appear in the collective consciousness of contemporary Poland or in international scientific discourse in general. In a recent book on the children of Black Americans in postwar Europe, one searches in vain to find even a single mention of multiracial children birthed by female DPs.[45]

Of the three Polish Black children mentioned above, only one was adopted; the other two ended up in institutional care. The fate of one of these children in particular is a harrowing testimony to Polish officials' misinterpretation of the best interests of the child.[46] Little Gienia was born prematurely in Augsburg in February 1946. Her father was an "American Negro soldier," and her mother, a Polish woman. Only a week later, the newborn was placed in a German orphanage because, according to a note, her mother was deemed unfit to care for the child (elsewhere there is a suggestion that her mother experienced shock from giving birth to a Black child); moreover, she left for Poland only three months after the delivery. The girl was placed on a list of children to be repatriated to

44 The subject of children born to European women as a result of their relationships with Black GIs stationed in Europe has been most thoroughly researched in relation to British and German women. See, among others: Lucy Bland, *Britain's "Brown babies": The Stories of Children Born to Black GIs and White Women in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019); Yara-Colette Lemke Muniz de Faria, *Zwischen Fürsorge und Ausgrenzung. Afrodeutsche "Besatzungskinder" im Nachkriegsdeutschland* (Berlin: Metropol Friedrich Veitl Verlag, 2002); Heide Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). Austria and Italy were also affected by this phenomenon. Regina Fritz, Marion Kramer, and Philipp Rohrbach, "'Guter Dauerpflegeplatz gesucht.' Kinder afro-amerikanischer GIs und österreichischer Frauen in der Besatzungszeit," in *Besatzungskinder. Die Nachkommen alliierter Soldaten in Österreich und Deutschland,* ed. Barbara Stelzl-Marx and Silke Satjukow (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2015); Tal Adler, Philipp Rohrbach, and Niko Wahl, *SchwarzÖsterreich: Die Kinder afro-amerikanischer Besatzungssoldaten* (Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 2016); Silvana Patriarca, *Race in Post-Fascist Italy: "War Children" and the Color of the Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

45 Ingrid Bauer and Philipp Rohrbach, eds., *Black GI Children in Post-World War II Europe* (Vienna: V&R Unipress, 2021).

46 ABINF PCK, Envelopes of children, G. S.; Archiwum Domu Dziecka w Rybniku, ADDR (Archive of Children's Home in Rybnik); Akta osobowe dzieci zwolnh ionych, AODZ (Personal files of released children) 1950, vol. 3, G. S.

Poland despite the recommendations of American child welfare workers who believed that she would be best off in the United States. Although slightly delayed in developing psychomotor skills, the girl was making rapid progress during her stay at UNRRA facilities, and her condition was promising. In November 1947, however, she was relocated to Poland and was placed in a home for small children in Upper Silesia. According to surviving documents, her health had already deteriorated during the long and uncomfortable journey and gradually worsened after her arrival in Poland. The girl fell ill a lot; she also did not receive adequate care in Poland. As she grew older, she started to become a problem for the staff of the institution, and when she was not admitted to an orphanage for older children (after the age of three), they did not know what to do with her. The official reason for refusing her admission was her health problems, but it can be hypothesized that the issue of her skin color was not insignificant. After several months of "limbo," the now four-and-a-half-year-old girl was placed in the State Hospital for the Nervous and Mentally Ill in Lubliniec, and there, all traces of her disappear. The documents provide no insight into why her story had this unexpected ending. The impact of early childhood events on her physical and mental development remains a mystery. From the history of her life that can be pieced together from more than a dozen documents, it is clear that she never really experienced life conditions that would have promoted healthy development. Still, by far the best care she received was from American social workers in UNRRA children's homes. At some point, though, someone decided that in order to compensate for demographic shortcomings, she should be brought to Poland. One can only ask rhetorically what her life would have been like had the advice of her first caregivers been heeded.

Two different scenarios were also considered for Janusz Majewski.[47] IRO documents show that, although not explicitly, British social workers suggested that the Black child's transport to Poland was not the best solution, especially because no members of his biological family had been located. But Polish authorities "wished for the child's return," and the decision was made to respond positively to this request under the condition that Majewski would be provided with all the necessary care. This transfer took place in violation of the IRO's procedures for "unaccompanied children," which had been heavily criticized by the Poles. It was noted on the travel manifest that the boy was "returning" to an "orphanage in the country." Decision-makers assumed that he would end up in

47 Private Archive of Janusz Majewski.

an orphanage, and no attempt was even made to look for a family that would foster him. Similarly, the question arises as to what his life would have been like if the scenario that was labeled "plan B" on the form had been chosen. Perhaps a partial answer to this question can be found in the fact that when Majewski reached adulthood, he decided to leave for the United States with his family; he still lives there today.

Conclusions

Thanks to an intense propaganda campaign organized by Polish authorities, repatriated children entered the national narrative as a phenomenon of great importance, and bringing them to Poland was considered compensation for the wrongs suffered by the Polish people during the war and became part of the country's heroic struggle with the "Western powers" to stop their acquisition of Poland's youngest citizens. Additionally, this group became embedded in the consciousness of Poles as children returning to their homeland after years of having been separated from their parents or abducted from Polish orphanages by the Nazis. It was in no one's interest to be specific about who the "repatriated" children were and how many eventually ended up in Poland.

The media at the time presented only a small selection of the most emotionally moving stories in order to legitimize the actions taken by the authorities. This was certainly the content presented in the *Polish Film Chronicle (Polska Kronika Filmowa)*—the title of the newsreels shown in Polish cinemas prior to the start of the feature—as well as other media. For example, one episode of the *Polish Film Chronicle* showed footage of the baptism of eleven infants brought to Poland from Germany who had "luckily avoided Germanization." The information might even appear plausible were it not for the fact that the baptisms took place at the beginning of 1947 and the children were a few months old, i. e., they were born after the war.[48] The episode also shows how these national declarations concerning repatriated children worked in practice and who promoted them. Prominent communists like the Silesian Voivode Aleksander Zawadzki and Vice Voivode Jerzy Ziętek acted as godfathers to these new Polish citizens and were blessed by the Catholic Church in Poland. Although far from reality, the story of "stolen children" that was introduced into public discourse in the early postwar years and repeatedly

48 *Children of the PCK. Baptism of Children Repatriated from Germany*, PKF, 20. 3. 1947, accessed April 5, 2023, http://repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=pl/node/4799.

reproduced in the decades that followed has persisted to this day and has not yet been challenged by any Polish researcher.

There was no room in the propagandistic narrative for acknowledging the diversity of the newcomers or the actual numbers of repatriated children as this information could have undermined the sense of urgency around the issue promoted in the propaganda and its overall effectiveness. Moreover, publicizing the true origins of many of the children, the progress of the action, and the real conditions awaiting these children in Poland would have undermined those responsible for organizing the action and, by extension, Polish authorities.

The facts, however, told a story that was vastly different than the official narrative. From reading the memoirs of the "stolen children," one can conclude that despite the diversity of their origins and twists of fate, all of these people faced stigmatization and rejection upon arriving in Poland and, thus, were united as a peculiar community of experience. The psychological consequences, including breakdowns and depression, were felt by individuals well into adulthood.[49] Younger children often had no knowledge of the Polish language, and older children had very limited proficiency. This was enough for Polish society to view these children primarily as "hated Germans."[50] The actual origin did not matter; the children of Poles and children of foreign men were treated identically. I include the latter in the category of children born of war (CBOW),[51] but their identity as CBOW was rendered invisible as a

49 Hopfer, *Geraubte Identität*, 246.

50 Malinowska, *Brunatna kołysanka,* 45, 66, 73, 85, 331; Hopfer, *Geraubte Identität,* 227–30.

51 These are individuals who were born in situations marked by war, occupation, forced labor, or captivity. Their biological parents were on opposite sides of the barricades: one parent, usually the mother, was a member of the invaded (occupied or captive) community, while the other, usually the father, was an invader, occupier, or captor. For more information about this transnational phenomenon, see: Sabine Lee, *Children Born of War in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); Ingvill C. Mochmann, "Children Born of War: A Decade of International and Interdisciplinary Research," *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 42, no. 1 (2017): 320–46; Sabine Lee, Heide Glaesmer, and Barbara Stelzl-Marx, eds., *Children Born of War: Past Present and Future* (London: Routledge, 2021). For more about Polish CBOW, see: Jakub Gałęziowski, "Researching Global Phenomena in Local Circumstances: Polish Children Born of War in the Context of CBOW Research," in *Children and Youth at Risk in Times of Transition: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Baard Herman Borge, Elke Kleinau, and Ingvill Constanze Ødegaard (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2024), 115–38, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111010649-006. Jakub Gałęziowski, *Niedopowiedziane biografie*.

result of being merged into the group of "stolen children" or "children, victims of Germanization." These extremely inadequate and illegitimate labels applied both to those children whose fathers were Germans or Austrians as well as to the "children of the Allies." Although they did not experience discrimination from the state like other Polish CBOW, if they were aware of their roots, most of the difficulties they encountered were largely limited to their private lives and were caused by their loved ones. Many of these children also had problems with the subjective perception of themselves as "other" and with accepting their own "entangled" identities. Health issues remain a separate issue as they largely stemmed from the difficult conditions in which those who ended up in Polish orphanages had to live. My research has shown that the lack of proper medical care and poor nutrition left a permanent mark on many of the children who were brought to Poland from the former Third Reich.

Another pattern emerges from the story of these children: the nationality of the father, even if he belonged to the enemy camp, did not matter to the Polish authorities. It was not seen as a problem, unlike in Western countries such as France, the Netherlands, Belgium, or Denmark.[52] Neither was there any reference to eugenics: the mothers of these children were not viewed as deviants as was the case for women in postwar Norway who had children with Wehrmacht soldiers.[53] In fact, there was no concern that the genes of the parents or the circumstances of conception (rape) would negatively affect the development of these children or prevent them from becoming full-fledged Polish citizens in the future. The desire to reclaim, or rather acquire, as many children as possible who could be transformed into Polish citizens at one point outweighed all other factors. At the same time, repatriation was one small piece in the larger political game that played out against the backdrop of the Cold War. The ends justified the means, and results were to be achieved through humanitarianism as well as political calculations that took into account the demographic losses incurred during the war and the need to fuel political confrontation on the international level. The intensification

52 The first volume of the various CBOW cases: Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen, eds., *Children of World War II: The Hidden Enemy Legacy* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

53 Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen, "Introduction," in *Children of World War II*, 9. It should be noted that there are entries in the children's files indicating that their biological mothers had psychiatric problems and they had to undergo treatment for this. This was one of the reasons given as to why the mothers were separated from their children. Such diagnoses are, however, not scientifically neutral and were socially shaped—the interpretation of such records thus requires special attention and sensitivity, not only replication of the source language.

of the dispute was also intended to cover up the mistakes and failures of the authorities. In short, the welfare of the children was overshadowed by the needs of the Polish state, as evidenced by the stories of individual children.

Returning to the trial described in the introduction, Hania's fate was determined by chance. She came very close to ending up in Poland after living in Germany for almost seven years. The questions that arise are: Would her biological mother's family have taken her in if the girl had been brought to Poland? Or would they have been assured that if only they signed declarations, child welfare services in Poland would take care of the girl? Only the information provided by the German foster parents tipped the scales and left the American judge in no doubt about how to decide the case. Documents stored in the Arolsen Archives shed even more light on the case. First, they confirm the biological mother's lack of interest in her daughter. Shortly after Hania's birth, the mother gave Hania to a local orphanage and left for her home country, offering no sign of life when first the German authorities, and later the IRO search service repeatedly contacted her about the girl. Second, these sources not only confirm the paternity of the father—a farmer *(Bauer)* with whom the woman worked—but also show that the man paid for his daughter's maintenance until she was taken in by a foster family. Third, they show that after three years in foster care, the girl found a permanent home and dedicated caregiver. Fourth, they reveal the level of manipulation the Polish officials resorted to in order to bring the child to Poland. Indeed, at the trial, it was proven that the handwriting used to write the official declaration of the biological mother differed from that of her private letter to the girl's foster father. Documents signed by the woman found in a German office provided the point of reference for the handwriting comparison. The report from the trial states that:

> It is the court's opinion that the private letter in the private envelope reflects more the true facts than any official letter [. . .]. It was obvious that the letter on 12. 10. 51 was written by another person than that dated 13. 10. 51. It was also acknowledged that the mother of the child wrote the letter on 13. 10. 51. Considering the contents of the last letter, it would clearly serve the child's best interest to leave her with the Family G [. . .].[54]

54 Arolsen Archives, AA, Notes on continued Court hearing by L. Weissmueller, copy of doc. 84188358#1/2, Augsburg, 16. 11. 1951. .

What is striking here is that in the mother's letter quoted in the report to the PCK, Radomski omitted a significant sentence that was included in the copy intended for the IRO: "The child understands the German language, what shall I do with her now? The father of the child is German, therefore, let her be in Germany."[55] While it might seem like a small detail, it clashed with the "Polish idea" in the case of Hania. Nevertheless, the Polish state ignored the "best interests" of the child in the service of its nationalist population policies.

55 Arolsen Archives, AA, Notes on continued Court hearing by L. Weissmueller, copy of doc. 84188358#1/2, Augsburg, 16. 11. 1951.