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“Those People Who Actually Do the Job...” Unaccompanied Children, Relief Workers, and the Struggle of Implementing Humanitarian Policy in Postwar Germany

Christian Höschler*

Abstract: *»Diejenigen, die die Arbeit wirklich machen...‘ Unbegleitete Kinder, Sozialarbeiter und die schwierige Umsetzung humanitärer Ziele im Nachkriegsdeutschland«.* The youngest survivors of Nazi persecution had experienced a variety of tragic fates: children lived through the horrors of the concentration camps, endured forced labor, and even kidnapping for the so-called Germanization agenda of the Nazis. From 1945 onwards, the military and relief agencies in occupied Germany witnessed the aftereffects of hitherto unparalleled crimes against children. They devised strategies aimed at their care, repatriation, and resettlement. As this article will show, it was by no means always possible to carry out this task successfully. Policies created at the administrative level frequently clashed with the reality of everyday relief work. This article reflects on the current state of historical research regarding displaced children, and in particular the potential of microhistory as a means of improving our knowledge about this aspect of the postwar period. By drawing upon the example of the IRO Children’s Village in Bad Aibling, Upper Bavaria, the discrepancy between official policy and the actual struggle in the field – including ideological factors, practical challenges, and the human element – is illustrated. In doing so, the aim is to help refine previous narratives regarding the care for displaced children in the postwar period.

Keywords: World War II, postwar period, displaced children, UNRRA, IRO, IRO children’s village, microhistory.

1. Introduction

In 1945, the field of international child welfare was not a clean slate. Three decades before the liberation of Europe from Nazi domination, events surrounding World War I had already triggered a continued period of experimentation. This included the testing of frameworks for effective humanitarian activities through international cooperation, involving charities, agencies, and

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governments (Marshall 2002, 184-90; Cunningham 2011, 171; Marten 2013, 152-3). As one result of this development, the League of Nations passed the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* in 1924, prioritizing children as the group of victims that should be the first to benefit from aid in a time of crisis (Marten 2013, 153).

However, after World War II had ended, the military and relief agencies in occupied Germany soon realized they were witnessing the aftereffects of hitherto unparalleled crimes against children. While previous experience was undoubtedly valuable, it had its limits in the face of the (horrible) unknown. This became increasingly evident after the majority of displaced persons (DPs) – UN civilians who had survived the war outside of their home countries – had been repatriated by late 1945 (Blackey 1946, 2; UNRRA 1946, 1). Various governments, particularly in Eastern Europe, were still reporting thousands of children as missing. The Allies and international relief agencies, most notably the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), understood that in order to tackle this problem, they would have to devise a careful strategy of searching for, and looking after, displaced children who were still missing somewhere in Germany (Blackey 1946, 2).

As this article shows, it was not always possible to successfully implement official guidelines for this process. Rather, policies created at the administrative level frequently clashed with conditions in the field and the realities of everyday relief work. Following an overview of the experiences of children during (and after) the war, I reflect on the current state of historical research regarding this topic, particularly with regard to the potential of microhistory as a means of enriching our knowledge about this aspect of the postwar period. Finally, by drawing upon the example of the IRO Children's Village in Bad Aibling, Upper Bavaria, I will illustrate the discrepancy between high-level policy development and the actual struggles of everyday relief work, including ideological factors, practical challenges, and the "human element."¹

2. The Youngest Survivors

The reasons for the displacement of children during the war were manifold. The Allies managed to free only a limited number of Jewish child survivors from the concentration camps. Other children belonged to families that the

¹ This article is based on selected parts of my book *Home(less): The IRO Children's Village Bad Aibling, 1948-1951* (Höschler 2017) and deals with a very specific aspect of the history of Europe's displaced children in the postwar period. The book offers broader information regarding many aspects only touched upon briefly in this paper, such as everyday life in the Children's Village, psychological approaches to dealing with displaced children post-1945, and relationships of the IRO Children's Village with its German neighbors.

Nazis had deported from their home countries for the sake of exploiting them as forced laborers for the German economy. Frequently, these children ended up performing forced labor themselves. Finally, thousands of minors – mainly from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia (and only those displaying the desired “Aryan” qualities) – were kidnapped by the Germans and placed in special homes run by the SS organization *Lebensborn*. From there, the children were handed over to German families who, it was intended, would raise them, thus adding to the creation of the so-called “master race” (Blackey 1947, 1-3).

Unfortunately, after the war ended in 1945, the Allies did not succeed in agreeing on a universal policy with regard to the search for, and protection of, missing children. The entire process turned out to be a massive challenge that observers at the time aptly referred to as “a giant jigsaw puzzle” (Hirschmann 1949, 253) and “an almost hopeless quest” (Macardle 1951, 296). To start with, the Allies did not agree on a coherent strategy, with different procedures carried out in the individual zones of Allied-occupied Germany. In the US and British zones of Germany, UNRRA was directly tasked with the search for children, on behalf of the occupying authorities. In the French zone, the military government itself was the body that primarily carried out this activity. The Soviet zone was yet another special case. Here, there were effectively no DP camps, and no cooperation between UNRRA and the Soviet authorities. Besides such differences, the universal challenge everywhere was the lack of documentation that would facilitate the search for foreign children. The Nazis had done a thorough job of destroying documents clarifying the identity of their youngest victims (Blackey 1947, 3-4).

The military governments tried to shed some light on this confusing situation by ordering the German authorities to produce all available information pertaining to foreign children who in one way or another had ever been registered on German soil, for example in the local records of German communities, counties, and regions. To the annoyance of UNRRA, German cooperation was poor, and feedback unsatisfactory. Ultimately, the task of finding children was left to special UNRRA search teams. Based on whatever information they could lay their hands on, workers combed through a vast number of German institutions, including orphanages and hospitals. There, they looked for further clues and conducted interviews with children on site, hoping to find out whether they were in fact displaced (Blackey 1947, 7). If the relief workers succeeded in finding and identifying a foreign child, and if the national authorities (for example, the Polish government) were able to verify the information resulting from this, an official request was placed with the military government to have the child removed from his or her current environment. The next step was to place the children in special centers where UNRRA could care for them. If no further complications arose, the children were ultimately returned to their home country, and (ideally) reunited with their biological families (Blackey 1947, 27). UNRRA’s final report on the situation of unaccompanied children in Ger-

many states that there was a total of 17 such children's centers in the US zone each housing an average of 150 children at a time (11 of which were designated homes for Jewish children). In the British zone, there were smaller installations, with an average population of 50. In the French zone, there were only two such centers (Blackey 1947, 44-5).

However, as with adult DPs, there were multiple problems surrounding the repatriation of children – which was the only strategy the Allies had originally agreed upon. A crucial point was the question of determining a child's nationality, for this was by no means an easy task. While it was not so hard to conclude that a child possessed, for example, French, Belgian, or Danish nationality, matters were much more complicated in the case of children believed to be from Eastern Europe. There, the postwar era saw the reversal or creation of borders and the expulsion of ethnic minorities from several countries. What if the territory where a child was originally from no longer belonged to the nation-state in question? This made the determination of nationality a difficult exercise, not just for UNRRA workers, but also from the point of view of governments in Eastern Europe (Blackey 1947, 21-2). As time passed and many children returned home, there remained a growing number of controversial cases. Sometimes, the occupying authorities in Germany deemed the evidence regarding individual children to be incomplete or unconvincing. Children would then not be released for repatriation, and remained in Germany indefinitely (Blackey 1947, 25).

In other cases, forced laborers had their children taken away from them during the war (sometimes immediately after they were born, often out of wedlock). Often under duress, the parents of such children would sign documents releasing them to German families. However, after the war, the validity of such documents was questioned and, unsurprisingly, national governments wanted most of *their* children to return home (Blackey 1947, 28-9). There were also children, usually older individuals, who refused to be repatriated. As with adult DPs, in this instance UNRRA's only option was to try and convince them to change their minds (Blackey 1947, 39). With the notable exception of Jewish children who were increasingly able to leave for Palestine (Blackey 1947, 52), at this point in time, there were hardly any resettlement schemes in place. Since children were never forcibly repatriated, the result was that the children's centers failed to empty in the same way as the adult DP camps did (Blackey 1947, 44). This really only changed when the successor agency to UNRRA, the International Refugee Organization (IRO), took over. The IRO developed an extensive resettlement program, ultimately resulting in the emigration of thousands of DPs (and displaced children) to countries such as Canada and the United States.

3. (Previous) Research

Professional historiography dealing with the fate of Europe's DPs originated in the mid-1980s. Since the creation of the pioneering works of those days, most notably the studies of Wolfgang Jacobmeyer (1985) and Mark Wyman (1989), a rich body of literature has grown, covering many different aspects of a wider phenomenon. For a long time (and to this day), a special emphasis has been placed on the case of Jewish DPs. More recently, a distinct strand of literature aiming to explore the fate of children has emerged – viewing them not so much as the helpless victims of Nazi persecution, but as the youngest survivors who had endured deportation, incarceration, forced labor, and violence. This later interest in children as DPs is perhaps linked to the fact that for many years, the significance of their wartime experiences was downplayed on the assumption that children are too young to realize what is happening around them during times of crisis (Kröger 2003, 18).

Clearly, recent research has shown that this is by no means the case. The American historian Tara Zahra published an important first study in 2011. Although its conclusions are, at times, of a somewhat general nature, Zahra identifies many of the central issues surrounding the care for displaced children after the war, and much of the subsequent literature has built upon her work. More recently, the Canadian historian Lynne Taylor (2017) has provided researchers with an in-depth, comprehensive study of displaced children in the American zone of Germany. In addition to these broader perspectives, a few publications have exclusively described the history of individual DP camps and dedicated centers housing displaced children (Tobias and Schlichting 2006; Andlauer 2011; Wiehn 2013). Nevertheless, the majority of studies that have made a significant impact on this particular area of research have tended to provide overviews rather than in-depth studies of a limited subject (Gring 2014, 125). The underlying top-down approaches illuminate many of the central ideas, policies, and individual areas of action within the history of DP child welfare, and as such, they are obviously indispensable.

These studies provide the supportive framework for a different way of writing about the past that implements more of a bottom-up approach: microhistory. The theory and methodology behind this school of history are not clear-cut. However, one definition offered in 2009 by a prominent German representative of microhistory, Otto Ulbricht, illustrates this rather well. Ulbricht has concluded that “microhistory consists of a few basic principles, a good amount of theoretical reflection and great diversity in practical application” (Ulbricht 2009, 13).² In any case, the key principle of microhistory is that it narrows

² „Mikrogeschichte besteht aus wenigen Grundsätzen, einem guten Maß an theoretischer Reflexion und großer Vielfalt in der Praxis“. Translation by the author.

down the concrete subject of investigation to a manageable size and thereby ideally enables historians to take into account all of the available source material. The aim is to create not just a comprehensive, but also a nuanced narrative (Ulbricht 2009, 13-4). Apart from the fact that the histories of individual DP camps can be of tremendous interest and relevance in their own right (Schröder 2005, 21), microhistorical studies have the potential to make important contributions to broader narratives if they do not limit themselves to describing events of local history. If linked to existing, broader research, they can support or contradict assumptions made by historians in wider contexts (Mocek 2010, 54), shedding light on historical shades of grey instead of painting black-and-white images. This would appear to be a worthwhile aim, given that recent attempts at writing transnational and global accounts of migration and displacement have been said to be “strangely lacking in details, nuances and colours” (Frank and Reinisch 2014, 478).

With regard to the history of DPs, Adam Seipp (2015) has even suggested that it “should in large part be written as microhistory” (235). As is so often the case, the optimal approach may be to take the middle ground. In our case, this implies that microhistory should aim to both support and refine broader narratives concerning displaced children and international child welfare in the aftermath of World War II. Others have taken a similar approach, for example, Heide Fehrenbach who, drawing on Tara Zahra’s aforementioned research on displaced children, has been “interested in exploring some significant *exceptions*” to previous interpretations and has referred to the “multiple ways that postwar notions of kinship and belonging were shaped as self-conscious responses to Nazi social ideology, policy, and practice” (Fehrenbach 2010, 177, emphasis in original).

4. The IRO Children's Village Bad Aibling

In June 1948, Eleanor Ellis and Vinita V. Lewis penned a frustrated letter to their supervisor Philip E. Ryan, Chief of Operations at the headquarters of the IRO in the American zone of Germany. As child care officers, Ellis and Lewis were unhappy with the service being offered to displaced children. In their opinion, UNRRA had failed to establish appropriate guidelines for the efficient coordination of the program at a higher level, leaving too much responsibility and autonomy to the various UNRRA sub-districts. They also contended that little had improved since the IRO takeover (Ellis and Lewis 1948, 1). According to Ellis, this not only caused confusion within the central administration, but also hampered the implementation of important repatriation and resettlement goals. Ellis believed that the childcare program was “too loosely knit” and this, she suggested, posed a real problem (Ellis 1948c, 2).

The difficulties were not limited to insufficient documentation. The centers for displaced children operated by the IRO in the American zone of Germany in 1948 were also confronted with challenges of a practical nature, which threatened to disrupt the entire mission. One center, for instance, was situated in Prien, Upper Bavaria. It was a decentralized installation consisting of eight requisitioned hotels (with a total capacity of 310) that were scattered across the town (Capacity of Children's Centers n.d.). This diffuse setup, compounded by a serious shortage of staff, meant that administration in Prien was difficult and unsatisfactory (Trigg 1947, 3). When a Quaker voluntary agency, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), was deliberating whether it should support the center with a team of workers, one of them described the situation at Prien as "deplorable" (Levine 1948, 1). Staff shortage was also a problem in Aglasterhausen (Ellis 1948b, 2), where the IRO was running another children's center with a capacity of 210 (Capacity of Children's Centers n.d.). Problems here were compounded by a lack of basic supplies, such as clothing and school materials (Hyer 1948a, 2). However, a third center, situated in Wartenberg, was apparently more successful than both Prien and Aglasterhausen. Ellis described the setup there as "more controlled, with good programs of school, sports and workshops," and stressed that "there is an atmosphere of family life" (Ellis 1948a, 2). This illustrates that the standards of administration and care in the IRO children's centers varied across the US zone, and that they were strongly influenced by the available facilities. Ellis was frustrated by the lack of a coherent program tailored to the specific needs of children under IRO care. In a meeting held with various voluntary agencies operating in the US zone in the autumn of 1948, she frankly stated that the "program should not be based on the installation but rather [...] the installation should house the program" (Council of Voluntary Agencies 1948, 3).

From the IRO's point of view, there was only one way to solve the problem of multiple centers lacking in uniformity: to consolidate the existing installations into one single center and pull together the best available staff from across the zone. That way, the IRO would finally be in a position to meet the predefined requirements of its program and could actually get on with the job of making plans for the future of the children under its care (Council of Voluntary Agencies 1948, 2). The search for a suitable site within the US zone began and a suitable new center was quickly located. The IRO announced that the new center would be set up on the edge of Bad Aibling (Cox 1948, 4), a small spa town situated 40 miles southeast of Munich. In the end, the IRO Children's Village officially opened on November 22, 1948 (Monthly Report of Area 7 1948).

The purpose of the new Children's Village was to consolidate the work of the previous centers in Prien, Aglasterhausen, and Wartenberg, namely, to house and care for unaccompanied (displaced) children and youths under IRO care in the US zone and to work out plans for their repatriation or resettlement abroad (Tentative Instructions n.d., 2). The term "unaccompanied" reflected the

uncertainty surrounding the fate of a child's family. With regard to the search for relatives, historian Susanne Urban (2016) notes:

As long as the tracing process did not reach a dead end, the child was "unaccompanied," not an orphan. On the one hand, the term mirrored the harsh reality, but on the other hand there was still a spark of hope for [...] welfare workers and, above all, for the children, that perhaps somewhere someone would be alive to accompany the child in its new life, into the aftermath of destruction and desperation. (283)

Apart from special installations that continued to exist throughout the US zone (for instance to house Jewish children), the Children's Village – with its capacity of about 500 children at any one time, and a total of over 2,300 inhabitants over the three years of its existence (IRO Press Release 1951) – would become the only one of its kind (Allen 1949, 1). In addition to the IRO, other relief agencies were also involved in the Bad Aibling operation – most notably the AFSC, which played a crucial role in shaping the social program of the Children's Village.

During the first months of its existence, the Children's Village – contrary to expectations – failed to address many of the problems it was setup to solve. The official report of an early US Army inspection concluded that this was because it "was not properly prepared prior to the arrival of the occupants" (Walker 1948, 3). This was indeed the case, and the details surrounding the creation of the Children's Village make it abundantly clear that, as historian Lynne Taylor (2008, 632) has suggested, it was not only ideological or political issues that decisively shaped the way in which displaced children were cared for, but also problems of a very practical nature. In fact, this had little to do with conceptual policymaking on the part of relief agencies, but was often the result of poor planning and insufficient logistics. While this may seem banal, such shortcomings carried with them profound implications for the implementation of larger goals.

4.1 The Struggle for Staff and Supplies

The Children's Village was set up in the garrison buildings of a former German military airbase on the outskirts of Bad Aibling (Bennett 1952, 442). Structurally, the buildings were in good condition (Smith 1948), which was an important consideration because, as previously mentioned, one of the reasons why the IRO placed such emphasis on establishing a consolidated children's center was that the previous facilities, particularly those at Prien and Aglasterhausen, were so unsuitable that it was not possible to implement the childcare program in the way it was envisioned. Taking this into consideration, it was a sad irony that similar problems arose in Bad Aibling during the early days of the Children's Village.

To the astonishment of everyone involved, the US Army staff preparing the garrison buildings for the new occupants had done a questionably thorough job

of stripping them of most of their interior fittings, leaving them practically unfurnished. Basic items such as electrical fixtures and even refrigerator motors were missing (Field Visit 1948, 2-3). There was a shortage of bedding in the dormitories (Smith 1948), and there were no tables to eat at in the dining room (Walker 1948, 1). AFSC team member Kathleen Regan would later vividly recall the total sense of helplessness when she arrived with the children:

To this day, all the particulars of our arrival in B. A. remain a big black smudge, a chaotic collage made up of iron gates, barbed wire fences, dun-coloured barracks buildings without heat – in most instances without plumbing, windows out, no electricity. Adults wringing their hands, children clinging to each other crying or wide-eyed staring, babies blue with cold. (Regan Burgy 1989, 2)

The IRO appeared to be taken by surprise, but was in no position to alleviate the situation, not least as there was hardly any furniture available from the nearest IRO warehouse (Field Visit 1948, 2). Interestingly, several weeks into the operation of the Children's Village, a representative inspecting the premises on behalf of the US Army (which after all was responsible for leaving the buildings in such a state) critically remarked that they were "not adequately equipped to meet minimum housing requirements" (Walker 1948, 2).

The deplorable state of the facilities in Bad Aibling was not the only problem interfering with the overall goal of expediting the repatriation and resettlement of the children. The early months of the Children's Village were also marked by a struggle for sufficient and qualified staff, as well as much-needed supplies. Generally speaking, the fact that the airbase had been so poorly prepared for its new residents was an unexpected blow that dampened the motivation of the staff. Everyone had hoped that the problems previously encountered at other facilities with regard to the state of the buildings would not be repeated in Bad Aibling. Blaming the IRO for this state of disarray, AFSC worker Marjorie Hyer reported back to the AFSC headquarters in Philadelphia:

This totally disorganized situation and the general disappointment of the people did terrific things to the morale, of course. A number of employees resigned, while others just sort of hold on half-heartedly. There are very few who still have enough optimism and spirit left to pitch into the dirty mess wholeheartedly and try to straighten it out. The people responsible for the welfare of the kids, both DP and international staff, were so tied up with problems of bare physical existence in the beginning that there was no opportunity to develop any kind of program for the kids to even keep them busy, let alone give them any kind of security in the new situation. (Hyer 1948b, 1)

In contrast, the zone headquarters of the IRO were very dissatisfied with the attitude of their workers in Bad Aibling, stating that there was "much to be desired in the staff's way of working" (Action Sheet 1949, 3). Of course, all the finger-pointing and blame-shifting did not help to improve the situation. Eager to realize its plans, the IRO decided to bring an expert on board to give an opinion on the situation. Philip Ryan (the IRO's Chief of Mission in the US

zone) approached Hildegard Durfee, a psychiatric consultant who was at that time employed by the US Army. Durfee contended that, not only was there a need for a sufficient number of well-organized staff with a compassionate approach toward children but also, above all, there was a need for staff who were professionally trained in the field of childcare, which many (if not most) of the workers in Bad Aibling were not (Durfee 1949, 1). This lack of training was generally the case in many centers housing displaced children in the post-war period (Helbing 2015, 85).

The shortage of staff had a detrimental effect on what many regarded to be the core of the mission in Bad Aibling: the case work department. Responsible for the planning of repatriation and resettlement activities, this unit was hopelessly understaffed. With only a handful of workers, it was unable to function in an efficient manner. In the words of IRO worker L. Findlay, it was “almost impossible for one social worker to carry the paper facts about 150 children in her mind” (Bad Aibling Children’s Village – Memorandum n.d., 2). Indeed, the director of the Children’s Village, Otto Bayer, foresaw a “complete disintegration of services” (Bayer 1949, 1) if the situation continued.

Better staffing ratios and less conflict might have done much to remedy the situation. However, even additional workers would have found their efforts constrained by an “inaccessibility of material things” (Kent 1952, 454), as AFSC team member Natalie Kent put it. In the past, supply shortages had constantly been a problem in the children’s centers and DP camps run by UNRRA and the IRO (Feinstein 2010, 168). Bayer complained that the Children’s Village was “lacking every kind of furniture” (Bayer 1948a), with the notable exception that everyone had a bed to sleep in. However, the bedding was of poor quality, and in many cases, sheets and pillows were missing. Children found no other furniture in their rooms, which hardly made for a welcoming atmosphere in their new home (Smith 1948). It took the IRO several months to provide additional furniture (Cox 1949, 20).

To some, problems such as these appeared to be self-inflicted. The AFSC considered the official IRO tabulations (which specified the amount of supplies that would be provided for the Children’s Village and its residents) “completely unrealistic [sic] and absurd.” At the same time, the seemingly obvious solution (namely, an alteration of said tabulations) was complicated by “a terrific battle with red tape and bureaucracy” (Gildemeister 1949, 1), the results of which were evident in everyday life. Reporting back to the AFSC headquarters in Philadelphia, relief workers Natalie and Oakie Kent explained how the lack of essential goods jeopardized the implementation of meaningful activities:

We talk with a boy who refuses to go to school and find that his home was once a farm in Yugoslavia and that what he and a group of his truant friends really want is a garden project to work on full time. We think what a good idea and [...] find the botany teacher [...] and he wants to direct such a project but says “no tools.” So we find some shovel and spade heads and go to the

carpentry classes to have some handles made, and “no wood.” (Kent and Kent 1949, 1)

Other urgent needs, particularly during the winter months, included supplementary clothing for the children (Elliott 1949, 1) and proper heating systems for the various vehicles used by the Children’s Village (Bayer 1948b). Again, months passed until matters finally improved, with significant contributions coming from organizations other than the IRO. The Church World Service (CWS), for example, sent much-needed clothing of decent quality (Fisher 1949, 1).

4.2 Repatriation and Resettlement: A Cause of Disagreement

Another aspect of life in the Children’s Village that illustrates the glaring gap between official policy and practical application was the controversial question of repatriation versus resettlement. Was it in the children’s best interest to be returned to their (established) home countries? Or, against the background of the intensifying Cold War and the fact that years had passed since the events of displacement, did it make more sense for them to make a new start – by resettling them in other countries, such as the United States, where they could be placed in foster families?

Until 1947, the primary goal of UNRRA, as the main international relief agency taking care of DPs, had been repatriation. This changed when the IRO took over from UNRRA, since the organization launched large-scale emigration programs aimed specifically at resettling DPs abroad. While repatriation as an option remained the official policy of the IRO, some of the staff of the Children’s Village harbored very negative views regarding the subject, sometimes for political reasons in the face of children potentially returning to countries now under communist rule in Eastern Europe. In July 1949, several case workers of the Children’s Village issued complaints to the IRO administration, accusing Emmy Lefson, the case work supervisor in Bad Aibling, of taking “forceful Repatriation [sic] decisions” (Della Torre 1949, 1). Alarmed, senior staff at the IRO immediately took up the matter with the administration of the Children’s Village. Investigating IRO officer, François Della Torre, set up a meeting with all members of the case work department. However, contrary to the fears of the workers who had originally made the complaints, he found that Lefson had in fact “an excellent knowledge of IRO directives and policies,” and that she had always gone through proper channels when making suggestions for the repatriation or resettlement of children under IRO care (Della Torre 1949, 2). Defending the case work supervisor, Della Torre put an end to the discussion (Della Torre 1949, 4). While we do not know the details regarding the cases behind this particular incident, it does illustrate how tensions could emerge among caretakers when planning the futures of the children.

This was not the only incident indicative of negative views towards repatriation. In September 1949, the then newly appointed director of the Children's Village, Douglas Deane, informed his supervisor, IRO Area Director Earl Blake Cox, that "the case work supervisor sensed that the workers in the Department were unwilling to utilize repatriation as a constructive resource in reestablishment," and that they even showed "intense emotional blocking" (Deane 1949a, 3-4) in this respect. Deane went on:

A case in point is that of the Polish child, born November 1, 1933 who was removed from the German economy on September 1, 1946 and brought to a Children's Center [...] Under heading "If Youth Wishes Resettlement and Is Not Eligible For Any Available Plan What Is His Attitude Toward Repatriation?" Worker writes: "Refuses repatriation." Under heading "What is Workers [sic] Plan For Dealing With Youth's Feelings In Response To Above Question" worker has put nothing but a dash. This is not an isolated example but reflects the manner in which many of the forms are filled out. (Deane 1949a, 9-10)

As a result, Deane's conclusion was sobering:

In failing to come to grips with the individual situations of specific children for whom repatriation should have been considered two or three years ago the agency in many instances has jeopardized the possibility of having the youth consider repatriation in a positive way to present. (Deane 1949a, 10)

Due to the passage of time, many of the children no longer showed any significant sign of attachment to their former homelands (Zahra 2011, 208).

Following a visit to Bad Aibling in October 1949, the IRO's Child Welfare Consultant, Yvonne de Jong, found words that were even more drastic when she ascribed the primary cause of the problem to the atmosphere prevailing in the Children's Village. She concluded that it had "failed to become a neutral community where, according to the policy of IRO, children, and especially those who should be prepared for repatriation, can live in an unbiased environment" (de Jong 1949, 1). Concurring with the findings of Deane, de Jong was not satisfied with the fact that the case workers "sometimes showed a certain reluctance and emotion in applying [sic] strictly to IRO's policy" (de Jong 1949, 4). While Deane suggested bringing in qualified staff with a more open attitude towards repatriation (Deane 1949a, 9), De Jong, in an attempt to limit the damage already done, put forward a more radical plan, suggesting that those children who were thought likely to repatriate should be segregated from the remaining population of the Children's Village. This, she argued, would keep them from becoming preoccupied with talk and activities surrounding resettlement (de Jong 1949, 3). While acknowledging the validity of de Jong's arguments, Deane referred to the limitations imposed by the fact that the IRO would be ceasing its DP operations in the near future – yet another practical issue. Realistically, he pointed to "the harsh necessity of consolidating a dying agency by putting in one Village potential repatriates, resettlers, and temporary care children" (Deane 1949b, 2). Simultaneously, Deane reassuringly stated

that “any antirepatriation tendencies” had, in the meantime, “been corrected by changes of personnel” (Deane 1949b, 2).

Despite official policy, the possible return of children to their former homelands was, and would remain, a delicate matter. It was not just a question of whether the staff, or even a certain proportion of them, was open to the idea of repatriation; many of the children themselves fiercely refused repatriation (Zahra 2009, 83). Former inhabitants of the Children’s Village would later remember how national delegations came to visit in order to persuade the children to return to their home countries in Eastern Europe. However, the efforts of the officials travelling to Bad Aibling were often to no avail. Indeed, on one occasion, they were first ignored and then driven out by the children, who saw no future for themselves in countries from which they were now estranged. An angry mob of older children even set fire to the car of one visiting delegation (Bojko 2015).

5. Conclusion

Recapitulating the struggle for adequate staff and supplies, as well as the differing views on repatriation and resettlement, it is clear that there were both practical challenges and considerable differences of opinion between agencies and individuals with an interest in the future of displaced children. Even within the various organizations involved, staff members held a wide range of opinions. Attitudes were certainly influenced by ideological convictions, but also by issues of a practical nature. European DPs experienced unique stories of displacement that called for personalized assistance and individual planning. It would therefore appear impossible to define a universal set of beliefs guiding relief workers in their goal of repatriating or resettling displaced children at the time, regardless of what the official policy was. With regard to UNRRA’s activities in the immediate postwar years, Lynne Taylor (2009) rightly notes that the agency

found itself torn in two, caught in the middle of the growing struggle between West and East. In many instances that resulted in paralysis at the upper levels of the organization, and ad hoc crisis management at the lower levels. The result was little consistency in policy. (102)

This would appear to also apply to UNRRA’s successor, the IRO. Indeed, no one-sided narrative or interpretation does justice to the complexity of the situation faced by the children and those whose task it was to look after them. The realities of case work in the field were often a far cry from the ideals, theories, and policies informing international relief agencies. Individual workers constantly juggled the requirements of official regulations, the frustration of day-to-day restrictions, the influence of the zeitgeist, and their own ideals and expectations. They – and their wards – were, in the words of microhistorians

Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and M. István Szijártó (2013), “not merely puppets on the hands of great underlying forces of history, but [...] active individuals, conscious actors” (5).

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