

Overlooked, assimilated, forgotten. Fate and experience of children born to Polish female forced laborers and displaced persons, fathered by foreigners.

The aim of this project is to provide a fine-tuned exploration of the fate and experience of children born to Polish female forced laborers and displaced persons (DPs) fathered by foreigners. The project will relate to the broader context of European unaccompanied children of WWII. The group under investigation has been identified as children born of war (CBOW). CBOW are defined usually as children born from local mothers and fathered by enemy soldiers or occupants during an armed conflict, whether conceived through conflict-related sexual violence or in a consensual relationship.

Drawing on the most open and inclusive definition containing also the situation of forced labour, I identified four different groups of Polish CBOW: children born to Polish women whose (alleged) fathers were representatives of the Third Reich, the Soviet Union, or were prisoners of war of different nationalities; the fourth group consists of the children of Polish female forced labourers and DPs, conceived with German/ Austrian men holding positions of power (such as employers or camp guards), or Allied soldiers stationed in occupied territories that are part of today's Germany or Austria. Some children from the last group were forcibly brought to Poland as 'stolen children' under the so-called revindication and repatriation action.

In my doctoral dissertation, I came to challenge the provided numbers and scale of the above-mentioned governmental action and drew attention to the need for a nuanced interpretation of its trajectory. Thus, the story of the so-called stolen children needs to be recounted.

Through the proposed research, I would like to establish exactly how many Polish children were brought to Poland between 1946 and 1951 under the umbrella of the 'revindication and repatriation action' with focus on these born during and after the war. Especially important will be to investigate the fate of Polish children born in Soviet zones, as the data are fragmented and need to be consolidated.

At the same time, I will try to figure out how many Polish CBOW from the relevant group were left behind in Germany and Austria, and how many of them were targeted for international adoptions.

This blank spot will be described through a grounded and consolidated source base, capturing the experience of these individuals based on autobiographical narrative interviews including them and their families.

The proposed research will thus also involve systematic and rigorous work, whose objective is not only capturing the mechanisms of actions and decisions about children by various actors both in the former Third Reich (including operating there Allies) and later in Poland, but also determining the individual fate of such children. I would like to bring them back to history, to include their stories in the story of the WWII and its aftermath.

In this way, I intend to fill yet another gap in Polish and world historiography. The proposed research will thus contribute to the social history of Poland, the area of childhood studies, the post-war history of Europe – including to the exploration of wartime exile and post-war refuge. By the same token, it will create an opportunity to re-interpret one of the most manipulated narratives about the return of Polish 'stolen children' to their homeland. The project also has international relevance and will contribute to the global CBOW field, as well as to the research relevant to unaccompanied and refugee children studies.