

Into the open – or hidden away?

The construction of war children as a social category in post-war Norway and Germany

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Summary

After World War II two groups of children fathered by foreign soldiers were assigned special political functions in the building of a future peaceful Europe. In Norway, the children of German soldiers and Norwegian women and in West Germany, the children of African-American soldiers and German women were constructed as specific categories to be handled in certain ways by state authorities. The Norwegian government, after heated debates, decided that the children were allowed to stay and to be silently and discreetly assimilated into society. In West Germany however, the children begotten to African-Americans came to serve as objects in a national public campaign for international recognition as a democratic state. The two cases demonstrate how social politics for children may serve political purposes, rather than being in the interest of the child.

Zusammenfassung

Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg wurde zwei Gruppen von Kriegskindern, deren Väter ausländische Soldaten waren, eine politische Funktion im Aufbau eines friedlichen Nachkriegseuropas zugesprochen. Die Kinder deutscher Soldaten und norwegischer Frauen in Norwegen sowie die Kinder afroamerikanischer Soldaten und deutscher Frauen in Westdeutschland wurden in spezielle Kategorien gruppiert, welche von den staatlichen Behörden auf besondere Weise behandelt werden sollten. Nach hitzigen Debatten entschied sich die norwegische Regierung, den Kindern den Aufenthalt und eine stille und diskrete Assimilation in die Gesellschaft zu ermöglichen. In Westdeutschland hingegen dienten die Kinder der Afroamerikaner als Demonstrationsobjekt in einer nationalen öffentlichen Kampagne für die internationale Anerkennung als demokratischer Staat. Diese beiden Beispiele zeigen, wie Sozialpolitik für Kinder politische Zwecke erfüllen kann, anstatt dem Wohl des Kindes zu dienen.

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Introduction

In the aftermath of WW II there were two countries in Europe where a specific “war child problem” was identified, to be handled on a national level. In Norway children of German soldiers and Norwegian women were constituted as a problem in social categories. In Germany “afrodeutsche Besatzungskinder”, the children of German women and African-American soldiers, were constructed as a similar category. Other formerly occupied countries also had children of foreign soldiers, born during and shortly after the war, but in these countries the children were mostly defined as cases for social welfare, not to be dealt with on a national level.¹

During, and shortly after World War II, about 10 000–12 000 children of Norwegian women and German soldiers were born in Norway.² After 1945, 5 500 children of German women and African-American soldiers were born in West Germany.³ In both groups, children suffered heavily due to their parental background. In both countries, governments and politicians were alarmed and concerned about the upbringing and future of the children. While Norwegian authorities soon decided to pursue assimilation of the children quietly into society, West Germany launched an extensive public campaign in order to make these “Mischlingskinder” (mixed children) accepted and included in society. According to Lemke Muniz de Faria,⁴ the seemingly well intended exposure of the war children category in the German Federal Republic contributed to the perception of them as strangers and thus led to further marginalisation and social exclusion. Opitz et al.⁵ in their book on the history of white racism against Africans in Germany, support this view.

Life experiences of the German-Norwegian war children are, to a great extent, shared by the children of German soldiers and local women in other occupied countries in

¹ Ericsson, Kjersti and Eva Simonsen (eds.): *Children of World War II – the Hidden Enemy Legacy*. Oxford 2005; Thingstad, Else V.: “Beretning fra Semaines internationales d’études pour l’enfance victime de la guerre (S.E.PG) I: Innstilling fra Sosialdepartementet fra Krigsbarnutvalget 9.7.–3.11.1945”. In: Norges Forskningsråd (ed.): *En hvitbok. Utvalgte offentlige dokumenter om krigsbarnsaken*. Oslo 1999, 273–291.

² Olsen, Kåre: *Vater: Deutscher*. Frankfurt am Main / New York 2002, 47–48; idem: “Under the Care of Lebensborn”. In: Ericsson and Simonsen 2005, as footnote 1, 15–52, 24.

³ Lemke Muniz de Faria, Yara-Colette: *Zwischen Fürsorge und Ausgrenzung. Afrodeutsche “Besatzungskinder” im Nachkriegsdeutschland*. Berlin 2002.

⁴ Ibid.; idem: “Black German ‘Occupation’ Children – Objects of Study in the Continuity of German Race Anthropology”. In: Ericsson and Simonsen 2005, as footnote 1, 249–266.

⁵ Opitz, May et al.: *Showing our colors. African-German women speak out*. Amherst 1992.

Europe.⁶ In this article however, the point is to make a comparison between the “afrodeutschen Besatzungskinder” and the German-Norwegian war children in relation to some specific dimensions not applicable to the other groups.

The first one is the fact that they both were singled out as a group (of “foreigners”) and treated as a national political issue. The purposes of, and ways in which their mental and biological “quality” was to be assessed scientifically, in order to make plans for their future lives, are other aspects. In both countries, the idea was launched to deal with this problem category of children via exposure through official information campaigns. The campaigns aimed at changing people’s attitudes and prejudices towards the children.

While the construction of the children as social problem categories relied upon common ground in both countries, the German case and line of action differed from the non-intervention or “laissez-faire” policy of the Norwegian government. In this article, the discourses involved in constructing the categories are presented. By exploring the argumentation for the two differing strategies of action, it is demonstrated how arguments based on the national interests of the two nations were embedded in the arguments for action in the best interest of the child.

The Norwegian background

Categorising German-Norwegian war children as a social problem relied upon discourses on the national political level, including the authorised scientific concepts and views of professionals within medicine, psychology and education. On a local level, social representations within society and within families constituted the living conditions which resulted in the contemporary life experiences of the war children.⁷ The main emphasis here will be on the construction of a war child category on a national level.

During World War II, the German SS organisation *Lebensborn e.V.* secured a special stronghold in Norway, unlike in other occupied countries.⁸ About 8 000 mothers of children with German fathers were in the care of *Lebensborn*, receiving support and

⁶ Ericsson and Simonsen 2005, as footnote 1.

⁷ Ericsson, Kjersti and Eva Simonsen: *Krigsbarn i fredstid*. Oslo 2005; Ellingsen, Dag: *Krigsbarns levekår*, Oslo 2004.

⁸ Lilienthal, Georg: “*Der Lebensborn e.V.*” *Ein Instrument nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik*. Frankfurt am Main 1993; Olsen 2002, as footnote 2.

shelter during pregnancy and birth. After the war, the *Lebensborn* archives soon came into the possession of Norwegian authorities, making it possible to identify, and eventually trace, the majority of German-Norwegian war children.

Both during and after the war, women with relations to Germans and children with German fathers were alike objects of hatred and contempt among large parts of the Norwegian population. Influential groups such as representatives of the Clergy and the exiled Norwegian social democratic party in Sweden had dealt with the “problem” during the war, giving their advice as to how the mothers and children were to be treated.⁹ Post-war, numerous letters to the editors and articles in newspapers indicate a heated climate. Some were heavily in favour of deporting mothers and children to Germany, while others argued for a more humane treatment and upbringing of the children in Norway. Shortly after the end of the war, the Norwegian government in the summer of 1945 established a special committee that was to deal with the future of the children of German soldiers and Norwegian mothers.¹⁰

Why Norway, as the only one of the formerly occupied countries, singled out this group of women and children as a specific target category for this day of reckoning, is still mainly unaccounted for. The impact of the success of the *Lebensborn e.V.* may have been of some importance, but to what extent this fact actually influenced Norwegian public opinion towards the children and their mothers has not been investigated. The Norwegian strategy of bringing the issue into the open on a national level was quite different from the ways, for instance, whereby Danish authorities handled the same group. In Denmark, the paternity of the fathers was systematically concealed by legal means and, indeed, the whole issue was effectively silenced in both the “public and private”.¹¹

Defining the female body as a “combat zone” in war, and punishing female “sexual traitors” after the war, was not uncommon in Europe.¹² An optional explanation may be that Norwegian society perceived the sexual relations between the local women and

⁹ Norges Forskningsråd 1999, as footnote 1.

¹⁰ For a more extensive analysis of the report from the committee see Borgersrud, Lars: *Staten og krigsbarna*. Oslo 2005.

¹¹ Øland, Arne: “Silences, Public and Private”. In: Ericsson and Simonsen 2005, as footnote 1, 53–70.

¹² Virgili, Fabrice: *Shorn Women. Gender and Punishment in Liberation France*. Oxford 2002; Warring, Anette: “War, Cultural Loyalty and Gender”. In: Ericsson and Simonsen 2005, as footnote 1, 35–52.

the German soldiers as a more serious violation of national values and honour than that which was the case in other countries.¹³

After the war, Norwegian women who had been known to have had sexual relations with Germans were punished in various ways, both publicly and privately. An unknown number of women had their hair shorn and were harassed in public.¹⁴ Only a few of the perpetrators were persecuted or sentenced. “They are two good men who during the occupation have shown a good national attitude” was one explanation given by local police for non-prosecution.¹⁵ Immediately after the war, thousands of these women were interned in large camps, officially in order to prevent the dissemination of venereal diseases. Others were imprisoned without any legal procedures, and many lost their jobs. In order to deport the women, in August 1945 Norwegian authorities issued a provisional law on marriage concerning liaisons between Norwegian women and Germans. By marrying a German, the women lost their Norwegian citizenship and were forced to go to West Germany with their babies, many of them to meet with extreme hardship.¹⁶

German-Norwegian war children as a social category

The ambiguities of Norwegian society extant in the construction of the war child category can be followed in the discussions and suggestions made by the aforementioned group of politicians, bureaucrats and professionals. The main dichotomies dealt with, and negotiated, were:

- The mothers: prostitutes and the feeble minded – or ordinary decent girls led astray by love and infatuation?
- The nationality of the children: of German – or Norwegian “blood” and “quality?” Future fifth columnists and fascists – or reliable “Norwegians”?
- The scientific-medical: nature or nurture? The racial or the mental hygienic interpretation/treatment – or both?

¹³ Ellingsen, Dag et al.: *Kvinner, krig og kjærlighet*. Oslo 1995.

¹⁴ Olsen 2005, as footnote 2, 15–52.

¹⁵ Ibid.; Olsen uses this quotation also in: idem: *Krigens barn*. Oslo 1998, 265: “[...] er to greie ungdommar som under okkupasjonen har vist ein fast nasjonal holdning og som det ikkje er noko å seia på.”

¹⁶ Olson 2005, as footnote 2.

- The socio-economic: a future labour force – or a burden to society?
- The legal: a biological father (German) – or a social father (Norwegian)?
- The psychological: a biological mother (the German's "tart") – or a trustworthy substitute mother?

Within the War Child Committee, it was generally agreed that all these open ended questions called for scientific investigation of the mental quality both of the mothers and of their children. While it never actually came to mental testing of the children, some of the mothers were tested for IQ. The results were presented in the main Norwegian papers: Of 310 women who had had relations with German soldiers, and were placed in camps after the war, 9 out of 10 were said to be mentally deficient or feeble-minded.¹⁷ Two years earlier another psychiatrist, Ørnulv Ødegård, who served as an expert adviser to the War Child Committee, had stated that a great proportion of the women were feeble-minded or imbecile.¹⁸ Ødegård based this general diagnosis of the mothers on his impression of some women who were patients at the psychiatric hospital where he worked during the war, who had had relations to Germans. According to Ødegård, about 4 000 of the children were also feeble-minded and/or carriers of defective genes. Altogether, mothers and children constituted a political threat and an economic burden to a future democratic Norway, with their "German blood" and dispositions towards moral deviance and crime.

The Norwegian case of constructing the war child category as a national issue was deeply intertwined with the psychiatric diagnosis of mental deficiency.¹⁹ The war children were not a singular case as far as it concerned linking socially deviant behaviour, or the "wrong" political attitude, with mental deficiency. In Norway, May 1945 was a time of great excitement, joy and hatred, and also of great determination. Three weeks after the war ended, Inge Debes, a prominent labour politician, a judge and head of a

¹⁷ Rasmussen, Augusta: "Det intellektuelle nivå hos 310 tyskertøser". In: *Nordisk Psykiatrisk Medlemsblad* (1947:1), 166–169; "Omtrent alle tyskerjentene var mer eller mindre åndssvake". In: *Arbeiderbladet*, 19th April 1947.

¹⁸ Norges Forskningsråd 1999, as footnote 1.

¹⁹ On a group level the issue of mental deficiency was used for a variety of purposes immediately after the end of the war. Simonsen, Eva: *Vitenskap og profesjonskamp. Opplæring av døve og åndssvake i Norge 1881-1963*. Oslo 2000; Idem: *War children as morally and mentally deficient? – the labelling process*. Paper at the workshop *German – Norwegian War Children – An International Perspective*. Oslo 15th – 17th November 2002.

Parliament committee on social reform in Norway, called for a summit meeting of all nation-wide organisations within social affairs and social work. The purpose of the meeting was to make a request on behalf of all organisations to the Norwegian government in an urgent matter: the need for Norway to establish the medically-based care for the mentally retarded, on a large scale. In comparison to its neighbouring countries, Norway was lagging far behind in dealing with social issues, from a eugenic point of view. According to the Norwegian Secretary of Social Affairs, this lack of eugenic precaution had resulted in Nazism and collaboration: “Had there been suitable institutions for the mentally retarded in Norway before the war, the number of Nazi party members would have been much lower.”²⁰ Inge Debes, the appointed head of the War Child Committee shared this view:

One should think, having in mind what we have just been through, with mentally retarded people acting as prison officers, torturing prisoners, and the many feeble-minded people in the so called hird [Nazi paramilitary forces], and in the Nazi Party, that people all over the country would be more than eager to bring our country out of this [...] medieval state.²¹

Applying the label “mental deficiency” on both mothers and children created specific political and professional dilemmas, but also options for action. The idea of deporting the children was seen as one alternative, both from a national point of view and one argued for as an action in the best interest of the child. Growing up in a foreign country, with no idea of their repulsive background, the children would be spared the scorn and contempt of other children and of their neighbours, which might be the case in Norway. Thus, forecasting a better future for the child, the idea of exporting the children abroad was made more palatable to the Norwegian public with the notion of the children as genetically inferior. Suggestions of sending the children to Sweden for adoption, or to West Germany to live with their mothers or their relatives, were launched both publicly, and in more secretive diplomatic and political circles. Neutral countries like Sweden and Switzerland were nominated as appropriate places due to

²⁰ Secretary of Social Affairs Aslaug Aasland; see ”Hvis vi hadde hatt en bedre åndssvakeforsorg, så hadde vi ikke hatt så mange medlemmer i NS.” In: *Aftenposten*, 6th August 1946.

²¹ ”En skulde tro, at med de oplevelser vi nå har hatt, med åndssvake fangevoktere som har pint fangene, og de mange åndssvake i den såkalte hird og i N.S., skulde folk hele landet rundt være ivrige etter å bringe landet ut av [...] et middelalderstandpunkt.”; Riksarkivet. PA 250 Norges Røde Kors. 0086. 7-5. Norsk Forening for Socialt Arbeid: Letter to the Norwegian Red Cross May 31st 1945.

the fact that they had been spared the atrocities of war. Representatives of Australian authorities visited Norway in the summer of 1945 in order to discuss the migration of German-Norwegian war children to Australia. These officials, touring Europe in search of children, intended to increase the future stock of white people in Australia.²²

Change in opinions and change of plans

The nature of the case of Norwegian war children was first revealed outside Norway at an international conference on children who were victims of war, held in Zürich in September 1945.²³ A member of the Norwegian War Child Committee, the physician Else Vogt-Thingstad, attended this meeting as a representative of the Norwegian government.²⁴ Her impression was that Germany was neither a place to send the children nor their mothers – a lack of food, clothing and housing and a not very welcoming German society all counteracted any plans of deportation.

During the summer of 1945, the War children committee received reports from some of the Norwegian municipalities on the social and economic situation of the children, and the assumed prospects for their future lives. Some local authorities anticipated future problems for the children if mother and child were to depend on social welfare. But in total, the reports were not very alarming. These impressions of the attitudes in local communities in Norway are quite similar to the reports collected on the situation of the African-American children in West Germany in the early 1950s: no great problems at the present time of inquiry, but locally there was great concern about future financial problems and perils in relation to the children.

The response from the War Child Committee was that specific legislation concerning the war children was needed, aiming at protecting the children from harassment and persecution by way of special legal dispositions and institutions. The objective of this special treatment of segregation was to protect the children from contempt and scorn and at the same time to safeguard their upbringing as good future national citizens preventing them from turning into juvenile delinquents and “making their minds safe for democracy”, so to speak. The idea was that, as children in danger, the war children

²² Coldrey, Barry: “‘A charity which has outlived its usefulness’: the last phase of Catholic child migration, 1947–56”. In: *History of Education* 25 (1996:4), 373–386.

²³ Thingstad 1999, as footnote 1.

²⁴ Norges Forskningsråd 1999, as footnote 1.

would most likely turn out as dangerous themselves.²⁵ These alarming prospects, both for the children and for society, made the War Child Committee propose that an officially initiated information campaign, aimed at re-educating Norwegian society, using the media etc. should be introduced. People's attitudes towards the children would be more positive with more information available. In conclusion: no children, except for a group who were mentally retarded, were to be sent abroad, according to the committee.

What actually took place was very far from the plans proposed by the committee. No special legal measures concerning the children were taken. No information campaign was ever launched. A small number of children were sent to their fathers in West Germany after their mothers died. 30 children, who had been sent to Germany during the war, were sent to Sweden and secretly adopted there.²⁶

The war children problem as a national political issue soon faded away and vanished from the public sphere, only to continue its existence within the privacy of the family sphere, or within orphanages and other institutions where war children spent their childhood. On a national level, around 1950 it was assumed that the war child problem had solved itself smoothly, and quite naturally, without state interference.²⁷ 11 percent of the children were said to be adopted by Norwegian families, others were living with their mothers or other family members. The mothers were integrated in society, earning their living, or married.²⁸ From a state of moral and national panic as far as the war children were concerned in the summer of 1945, the situation in Norway five years later seemed stable and normal. The problem as a specific category had dissolved and faded away. The objective put up by state authorities, of societal assimilation, had been reached. On a local level there are few official utterances on war children or their mothers after the inquiry, mentioned earlier, made by the Ministry of Social Affairs in the summer of 1945. Worries about a dramatic rise in social expenditure seem to have vanished or were no longer raised. On the surface, and on a national level, the war child problem had been solved, in a civilised and quiet manner. Public opinion and so-

²⁵ Simonsen, Eva: "Children in danger – dangerous children". In: Ericsson and Simonsen 2005, as footnote 1, 269–286.

²⁶ Borgersrud, Lars: *Overlatt til svenske myndigheter. De norske krigsbarna som ble sendt til Sverige i 1945*. Oslo 2002.

²⁷ Simonsen, Eva and Kjersti Ericsson: *Krigsbarn i fredstid. Sosialpolitiske og profesjonelle føringer i synet på tysk-norske krigsbarn 1945–1947*. Oslo 2004.

²⁸ Gilhus, Kåre: "Soldatbarn". In: *Norges Barnevern* (1954:6), 90–91.

cial representation on a local level, as revealed to date in the data we have collected, give glimpses of extensive cultural and geographical diversity concerning war children and their mothers. Local variance seems to be the pattern. Seemingly, it is within the closed family circle that the hardship of being an illegitimate “half German” child was most harshly felt.

The construction of an “afrodeutsch” war children category in Germany

Little research has been done on the topic of children of German soldiers abroad or “Besatzungskinder” in Germany.²⁹ The attention to the relationship between the German public and the occupying forces has been limited to the mass rapes of German women committed by Russian soldiers during the first weeks after the fall of Berlin, and to the cultural influence of the American soldiers.

A link between the children of African-American soldiers and German mothers after WW II is the case of the so called “Rheinland Bastarden” after WW I.³⁰ After the war, troops with French soldiers of African origin were stationed in the Rhineland area, much to the disapproval of the Germans and also of the British government. Locally however, the troops were popular, and a number of children were born fathered by them. During the Weimar republic, the Bavarian authorities suggested that the children be sterilised, but action was not taken until 1937 when the children were sterilised by force, by the *Gestapo*. Plans for deporting the children abroad were cancelled, due to the opinion of the international community. After 1945, the government sought to redeem this appalling and disgraceful affair by making an exemplary case out of the handling of the children of African-American soldiers and German mothers. These children represented a historic chance of presenting both the nation and the world with a picture of the new and democratic West German Republic.

²⁹ Drolshagen, Ebba: *Wehrmachtskinder. Auf der Suche nach dem nie gekannten Vater*. München 2005; idem: „Besatzungskinder and Wehrmachtskinder – Germany’s war children“. In: Ericsson and Simonsen 2005, as footnote 1, 229–248.

³⁰ Burleigh, Michael and Wolfgang Wippermann: *The Racial State. Germany between 1933–1945*. Cambridge 1991; Marks, Sally: “Black Watch on the Rhine: A Study of Propaganda, Prejudice and Prurience”. In: *European Studies Review* 13 (1983:3), 297–334.

In her book *Zwischen Fürsorge und Ausgrenzung. Afrodeutsche „Besatzungskinder“ im Nachkriegsdeutschland*, Lemke Muniz de Faria³¹ analyses the positions of German and American authorities on the subject – scientists and professionals, as well as charity organisations and the media.³² There are some striking similarities between the underlying assessments, the constructed dilemmas and the choices made about the treatment of these children, and concerning the perception and treatment of the German-Norwegian war children from 1945 onwards.

The title of the book points to the prevailing ambivalences in the process of defining the children's national, racial/biological, cultural and social belonging. Lemke Muniz de Faria claims that the sources stereotypically describe the existence of “die Mischlingskinder” as a “problem” and that the mothers were subject to discrimination and stigmatisation. On a national level, the official German attitude towards Afroamerican-German “Besatzungskinder” may be described as such: silence and a denial of their existence along with that of about 100 000 other children fathered by the occupation forces, in a first phase between 1946 and 1948.³³ A second phase, from about 1948 to 1951, may be identified when the “problem” materialised and migration and segregation were seen as ultimate options. A third phase existing from about 1952 to the 1960s, when the children reached school age, was a time of public and political attention and exposure for a political purpose.

Phase I: African-German war children – the denial of a problem

In 1946, 16 % of all German children were born out of wedlock. $\frac{1}{6}$ of the children had a soldier father. The unstable and complex circumstances, and a high tolerance for illegitimate children, were among the explanations given about the high numbers. But the “afrodeutsche” children met with little tolerance. One year after the end of the war, 21 000 children had been born to German mothers and fathers from the occupying forces. Up until 1955, 67 753 children were born, 4 776 the children of African-American soldiers. From the beginning there was a distinction between Caucasian “Besatzungskinder” and “Mischlinge”, “Afrodeutsche”, “Mulattenkinder” or “Neger-

³¹ Lemke Muniz de Faria 2002, as footnote 3.

³² See also Fehrenbach, Heide: *Race after Hitler. Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America*. Princeton / Oxford 2005.

³³ Opitz et al. 1992, as footnote 5; Lemke Muniz de Faria 2002, as footnote 3.

mischlingskinder". This discrimination was present in the matrimonial legislation as well as other important areas.

According to Lemke Muniz de Faria, German women maintaining liaisons with the occupying forces after 1945, in general were met with spitefulness and malevolence by those in their surroundings. They were spat at, had their hair cut off, they were attacked and even set fire to in the streets. Women were also abused within their own families. The soldiers were perceived as being irresponsible, with a girl in every town and subsequently with no interest for the children they fathered. Marriage between American soldiers and German women was initially prohibited. In December 1945, the prohibition was lifted, as a result of the War Brides Act. The Fiancées Act from June 1946 permitted the women entry to the USA on a temporary three-month visa. But it was mostly Caucasian soldiers who were allowed to marry their German girlfriends. For African-American soldiers, the situation was made difficult by the military authorities. In the USA, interracial marriages were unwanted, and in 30 states even prohibited until 1967. At the same time, a survey made in 1949 showed that many of the African-American soldiers wished to get married: among the 500 soldiers participating in the survey, 280 answered positively to this question. But the military authorities regarded these marriages as being "against the interests of the army", and that they would lead to "social problems" when the couple arrived in the USA. The civil rights entity NAACP (*National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*) fought in the US for a change of the rules, but without results. The regulations were the same for African-American soldiers all over Europe. Lemke Muniz de Faria relates how women who had contact with Caucasian soldiers, on the other hand, had the possibility of avoiding this stigma by getting married. This option was not open to the women who had children by African-American soldiers, a fact that made the exclusion and stigmatisation of the women and their children even worse.³⁴

Between American military authorities and German child welfare authorities

According to American military authorities, American soldiers had no financial obligations towards the children they fathered with German women.³⁵ This was the case

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

whether they accepted paternity or not. Paternity cases and child maintenance cases were judged separately. The German social welfare system was to pay when no alimony appeared. Mother and child were the responsibility of the *Jugendamt*. They received no financial support from the government. As German citizens, the illegitimate children were treated according to the German legislation on children born out of wedlock. According to this legislation, illegitimate children and their fathers were not related (“nicht verwandt”). They were to remain strangers. A demand for alimony was to be made in court. But American soldiers were not obliged to appear in German courts. Legally the children were in a special position. As illegitimate, the children were the responsibility of the mother and her family. The mother, however, did not have legal guardianship of the child. Guardianship remained with state authorities and the public guardian’s office. This office might appoint a legal guardian, be it a person, an organisation or an institution. If the woman was married, her husband automatically became the child’s legal father, even if it could be proven that this was not the case – for example, if he had been absent for years as a prisoner of war. Only the husband or the District Attorney could raise questions about paternity. In the absence of the husband, the District Attorney had the power to dismiss a complaint, without giving the mother the opportunity to give her opinion. As a result, in 1951 the monthly payments made by German authorities for children of American soldiers amounted to approximately 73 500 DM only. American authorities did nothing in order to support the mothers and children. The indifference to the mothers’ distress and complaint is demonstrated in the standardised letters sent by American welfare authorities. They repeatedly claimed that the father had no financial obligations, and that it was not in the interest of American authorities to try to locate soldiers who had children with their German girlfriends, if the soldiers themselves did not get in touch:

On the surface, this may seem harsh. It is not, because the social factors involved make this a sound policy. You, as any other mother of an illegitimate child in Germany, have recourse to the Landesjugendamt for assistance.³⁶

African-German children and their mothers were placed in a particularly vulnerable position. The “mother-and-child homes” from the *Lebensborn* organisation were used to house these children directly after the war. In 1947, a French IRO (*International Refugee Organisation*) officer discovered a large number of “bastards” or “Misch-

³⁶ Ibid., 29.

lingskinder” in these institutions. Conditions were poor and the state of health was terrible. One year before, a Welfare Refugee Officer in Swabia reported that the experiences from his district showed that the African-American fathers took better care of their families than the other Americans did.³⁷ But nonetheless he was deeply worried. In his belief, the future of German children with African-American paternity was just as uncertain as that of the Jewish children who had survived the Holocaust. In spite of promises of marriage by the soldiers, their girlfriends were left to fend for themselves, pregnant or already having given birth to the child. They received nothing from German authorities. Despair and need caused many of them to contact the American military authorities for help. One mother wrote:

The baby is weak, there is not enough milk, only potatoes and watery soup. I do not know how to feed him. Believe me I never would ask for anything if the hardship would not be so great. [...] I ask for the understanding of the Public Welfare Branch as I am by myself, single, with no other help.³⁸

Unlike other mothers, mothers of children with African-American fathers were not entitled to food stamps. The German authorities claimed that there would be no discrimination, but an African-American nurse gave this description of the circumstances in a letter to NAACP 29.11.1949:

These babies [of coloured soldiers, Lemke Muniz de Faria] need food. But the Germans have none for their own and easily tell these German girls that we make no provisions for “nigger” babies.³⁹

Another woman explained that she was engaged to an African-American soldier, but the child, a girl, had to stay with her parents. The parents however, had great difficulties taking care of the child. They were reluctant to bring the child outside, for fear of the reactions the child’s skin colour might cause. When visitors came, the child was hidden. The grandparents were also afraid of what their colleagues and neighbours might have to say about the fact that they had a coloured grandchild. They feared intimidation and harassment when she had to start school. The mother described how she feared that her daughter might become a problem child and cause the family much grief when she grew up. The family had been unable to place her under public care.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 26.

³⁹ Ibid., 27.

The mother hoped that the military authorities could investigate whether it would be possible to place the child with another family in Germany or an African-American family in the USA.⁴⁰

Phase II: The existence of war children is acknowledged.

Plans for the segregation, adoption and migration of German children with African-American fathers soon became an issue. In 1947, representatives from the *International Refugee Organisation* (IRO) had reported the terrible situation and poor future aspects of these-German children. The IRO suggested the children were sent to France. France was seen as a country where the general public were used to people of different skin colour.⁴¹ The children would blend in. This suggestion was discussed in private conversations between the municipal authorities of Lower Bavaria and the French military authorities. The plan was never carried out, but the German government intended to look into the matter again a few years later. The reason for the suggested deportation was the same: the children would never be accepted in Germany, but could expect a brighter future in France. In the meantime, private persons and organisations took steps to care for the children. Some children were taken to Norway and Denmark, picked up and taken away for humanitarian reasons by people who were confronted with the agony and distress of the children. The Norwegian journalist Lise Lindbæk who lived in Germany brought some children to Norway, where they were adopted in 1951.⁴² But most of the children who were sent abroad were brought to America.⁴³ African-American families in the USA were seen as the most suitable place for the children to grow up. The American media, especially the African-American media, were deeply concerned. Their German counterparts initiated a plan for shipping the children to the USA. Many children were actually sent, also by private initiative and by illegal means. But the number of children was not very high. Objections were raised: the dramatic change of environment would not be easy for the children; the African-American families who received the children were often not certified as homes for adoption, mostly due to economic problems. Besides, many had their racial

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Frankenstein, Luise: *Soldatenkinder. Die unehelichen Kinder ausländischer Soldaten mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Mischlinge*. München / Düsseldorf 1954, 6.

⁴² Slaggard, Sigrun: *Krigens penn: en biografi om Lise Lindbæk*. Oslo 2002.

⁴³ Fehrenbach 2005, as footnote 32; Lemke Muniz de Faria 2002, as footnote 3.

pride and would not accept a “half-white” child. Another option for placement for the children was to put them into separate homes and institutions for mixed African-American and German children in West Germany. A noted segregated home for such children was the Albert Schweitzer home for “Mischlingskinder”, aimed at protecting the children from scorn and harassment from peers and school mates.

Between 1947 and 1948, American authorities decided to get an overview of the situation and made statistics of how many German illegitimate children had an American father. They also wanted to achieve a more uniform treatment for paternity cases and to determine the time frame for maintenance payments. The question of citizenship was also something they wanted to investigate. Both the social situation and the health of war children with African-American and German parentage were assessed by US authorities. The conclusion came in a memorandum of 14th September 1948, *Paternity of Illegitimate Children*, stating that: for fathers to accept paternity, and to decide whether they wanted to pay maintenance, both would still be optional.⁴⁴ It was not until 1955 that the German government was able to secure decisions that meant that soldiers from the forces then occupying Germany would have to go before a German court in order to decide paternity and the obligation to pay maintenance to the mother.

Phase III: The treatment of the children of African-American fathers and German mothers – a proof of the new democratic West Germany

When the first children reached school age in 1952, it turned out that most of them still lived in West Germany. In 1956, the total number of illegitimate “afrodeutsche Besatzungskinder” in Germany were 4 681.

Table 1: Illegitimate “Afrodeutsche Besatzungskinder” in Germany in 1956.

<i>Total number</i>	<i>Living with mother</i>	<i>Living with family of mother</i>	<i>In foster or care families</i>	<i>In institutions</i>
4 681	3 036	487	519	639

Source: Lemke Muniz de Faria, Yara-Colette: Zwischen Fürsorge und Ausgrenzung. Afrodeutsche „Besatzungskinder“ im Nachkriegsdeutschland. Berlin 2002, 203.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

The mothers, for the most part, had not been willing to give the children up for adoption, neither in the Federal Republic of Germany nor in the USA. “At least they are not lacking motherly love”, Dr. Luise Frankenstein wrote in a report on “Soldatenkinder” in Europe in 1954.⁴⁵ The fact that most of the children were still in the country represented a problem but also a great political opportunity to German authorities, as it turned out. In 1952, the first main debate on the 94 000 illegitimate war children in Germany took place in the Lower House of the German Federal Government (*Bundestag*). The focus however, was on the 3 093 African-German children. The interest in the children was not based on economics and fear of expenditure. The children represented a political problem, challenging the prevailing ambivalence on concepts of race and nation on one side, and emerging ideas on human rights and equality on the other. In conclusion, all parties agreed on the statement that the children represented a specific problem, being neither “black” nor “white”. The introduction of words like “different” instead of “race” and “coloured” instead of “Negro” was meant to indicate the new interpretation of the children as symbols of the new democratic and tolerant West Germany.

The time when the children were to enter school was considered the first great opportunity for the post-war German nation to demonstrate its new democratic values and practices, and discontinuity with its racist past.⁴⁶ Creating exposure of the mixed African-American/German war children through an information campaign aimed at the public and a plan for the re-education of teachers was to become the proof of a newly democratic and peaceable West Germany. But before the first-year integrating school enrolments (“die Einschulung”) of these children could take place, their true racial quality had to be evaluated, in order to make suitable plans for their education. How to organise their schooling? Should the children be put in regular schools, or would special classes be needed in order to make the children feel safe and kept away from harassment and racism? Where these children suited for education? Were they as capable of learning as other children? What would be the purpose of their schooling? Were their prospects a future life as German citizens, or as immigrants to Africa or other suitable continents? The underlying feeling was that the children did not actually be-

⁴⁵ „[...] mangelnde Mutterliebe kann man ihnen im Allgemeinen nicht nachsagen. Im Gegenteil!“, Frankenstein 1954, as footnote 41, 27.

⁴⁶ Lemke Muniz de Faria 2002, as footnote 3.

long in Germany. Even the climate was unsuitable for them. “In der Heimat” – or “at home” was another place, but where?

Lemke Muniz de Faria explores both the purposes and in what ways German children of African-American paternity and their mothers became objects of scientific investigations.⁴⁷ Several anthropological studies of the children were carried out during the 1950s, within the scientific tradition from before and during the war. In 1952, Walter Kirchner published a study of the children in the field of eugenics as applied anthropology, based on inter-war ideas and concepts of racial hygiene.⁴⁸ The Norwegian Jon Alfred Mjøen, for instance, was someone the scientists referred to, among other openly racist researchers, all claiming the lower intelligence of the “Negro” compared to the European. At a later stage Rudolf Sieg in 1954 and Eyfert et al. in 1960 published studies focusing on the consequences of racist attitudes rather than focusing on the so called “quality” of the children themselves.⁴⁹ A psycho-social study of the children by Louise Frankenstein, published in 1954, stressed the fact that the children had normal IQs, but that the score of the mothers was below average.⁵⁰ The criterion for being registered as a “Mischlingskind” in these studies was appearance, the colour of the skin of the child being a major factor. The objective of the psycho-social study that took place was to evaluate whether the children were suited for integration in German schools and German society. As control groups “white” war children were used. Within the total test battery, evaluation of the genetic quality of the mothers and the fathers were included. Another broad psycho-social study of the children and their mothers by Klaus Eyfert et al. stated that the general IQ score of the African-American fathered children was well above that of the control group, “white” war children. This fact posed the research group with a problem. The quite surprising explanation given was that their African-American fathers belonged to an elite group, not representative of other African-American men.⁵¹ Other surveys based on questionnaires in primary schools also demonstrated that the children appeared to be normal, again with quite a few of them with

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Kirchner, Walter: *Eine anthropologische Studie an Mulattenkindern in Berlin unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der sozialen Verhältnisse*. Berlin 1952. See Opitz et al. 1992, as footnote 5.

⁴⁹ Lemke Muniz de Faria 2002, as footnote 3; Opitz 1992, as footnote 5.

⁵⁰ Frankenstein 1954, as footnote 41.

⁵¹ Eyferth, Klaus et al.: *Farbige Kinder in Deutschland*. München 1960. Quoted in Lemke Muniz de Faria 2002, as footnote 3.

scores above standard levels.⁵² They were in fact described as lively, humorous and popular among their schoolmates and friends. But worries about when their true “Negro” quality would show, or when their deviant appearance would dawn upon them as a problem, made authorities initiate further studies as the children were getting older. Fear of the sexuality of girls with African-American fathers when they reached their teens was especially strong. Data from these studies parallel those of the Norwegian psychiatrists; the mothers were seemingly inferior, while the fathers appeared to be “normal”. In the German case, the ambiguity in assessing the biological quality of the children in reference to the data collected was strengthened by the fact that the children were supposed to be intellectually inferior in particular as a result of their “mixed” blood. In conclusion, the war children of both Germany and Norway faced the same lose-lose situation: they were most likely “biologically inferior”, and if not, the treatment they were to receive in society would most certainly lead to personal disturbances and “deviant and asocial” behaviour.

Another way of changing the attitudes of people more positively was to use movies as a way of making the children more acceptable to the public. The popular movie *Toxi* was made for this purpose, and released in 1952. The movie however conveys the message of racial tolerance, not racial integration.⁵³ Another example of the belief in public exposure of the problem of German children with African-American paternity was the illustrated pamphlet *Maxi, unser Negerbub* (“Maxi, our Negro boy”) from 1952. The brochure was presented to the class whenever an African-German child started school. A second movie, *Der dunkle Stern* (“The dark star”) released in 1955, went even further in denying the possibility of integrating the “Afrodeutsche” children into the white German nation.⁵⁴ The message of this movie was that the children were to realize that the right place for them to live, their “Heimat” (homeland/home) was somewhere outside Germany.

⁵² Ebeling, Herman: „Das Problem der deutschen Mischlingskinder.“ *Zur 2. Konferenz der World Brotherhood über das Schicksal der farbigen Mischlingskinder in Deutschland.* Frankfurt am Main 1954. In Opiz et al. 1992, as footnote 5.

⁵³ Fehrenbach 2005, as footnote 32.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Aspects for comparison

National similarities in construction of a category

The construction of the Norwegian war child category and the category of the German “Afrodeutsche” war children are, in several aspects, one and the same. They were both defined as “border children” who became symbolic bearers of deep societal conflicts.⁵⁵ The classification systems applied in both countries were based on nationalism, racism and sexism, all embedded within a biological paradigm of eugenics. Women and children are seen as national property. The politics of social welfare, education and child welfare in regard to the two groups of children demonstrate the margins of the emerging welfare state, stating the boundaries between the worthy and the unworthy. For a closer comparative analysis, three main aspects may be identified. Summed up, the similarities in the construction of the two categories which served to marginalise and exclude them were:

- The children were seen as children of the enemy.
- Their mothers were of dubious moral and genetic quality.
- The children were expected to be genetically inferior.

Both groups shared the fate of representing an interior future threat to society, the enemy from within. In both countries politicians, scientists and professionals were ambivalent on the true quality of their nature. This ambivalence resulted in a variety of dispositions and actions directed at the children, seldom with the immediate welfare of the child in mind, but as strategies for the future well being of the nation and thus for the child. The impact of racial hygiene in interaction with the post-war mental hygiene movement, can be traced in the construction processes of both groups; as social engineering with a precautionary aim; as situated practices of child care; and as policies of segregation versus integration. In both countries, mass emigration of the children was suggested in order to solve the “problem”.

Both groups came to serve a national political purpose. In Norway, the war children issue was said to serve as a test of Norway as a democratic nation.⁵⁶ In Germany, they

⁵⁵ Ericsson, Kjersti and Eva Simonsen: *On the border – the contested children of World War II. Childhood*. [forthcoming] 2007.

⁵⁶ Norges Forskningsråd 1999, as footnote 1, 265.

Into the open – or hidden away?

were to serve as the very proof of the democratic new West Germany. In addition, some other vital common elements in the construction process may be identified. In both countries, the social categories constructed were based on biology and served particular political and professional goals. Medical criteria for the diagnosis “mental deficiency” were both IQ and social suitability. This blend of criteria turned out to serve its purpose very well: defining mental deficiency was for judicial and administrative aims, related to social policy and law, criminal law and emigration.

National variations in action – into the open or hidden away?

Little is known about the experiences of the lives of black occupation children in Germany, the USA or other countries where they grew up. One set of documentation on the lives of women in West Germany with African-American and German parentage has been published.⁵⁷ This study gives some indication of the diversity of prevailing social representations concerning these children, seemingly quite similar to those experienced by German-Norwegian war children. One may ask whether an information campaign about the German-Norwegian war children might have served to change public opinion and peoples attitudes, or if the outcome would have been the opposite, or to no effect at all. The direct effects of the movies and the information campaign on “Afrodeutsche” children in West Germany cannot be measured. But there is little support for the idea that the campaign changed the situation for the children for the better. The movie *Toxi* actually served to disseminate racial prejudices rather than dissolving them.⁵⁸

Towards the end of the 1940s, public attention to the war child issue dwindled – it is therefore difficult to tell what the attitudes of central and local authorities in Norway towards the war children were, and what the content of a campaign might have been. The German public information campaign, on the other hand, gives very good insight into the ideas and perceptions that existed about war children in Germany and other countries. In the attempts made to combat discrimination the prejudices towards women, “the other”, the poor, and people with different skin tone (and contempt for these groups), shine through in all their horror. The well-intended information cam-

⁵⁷ Opitz et al. 1992, as footnote 5.

⁵⁸ Lemke Muniz de Faria 2002, as footnote 3.

paings resulted in an unintentional, but not unexpected, effect: The articles, films and pamphlets did not remove prejudices. Instead, ideas of the children as biologically and mentally different and inferior to the rest of the German population were accentuated and consolidated.

While German society stressed the differences between the “Afrodeutsche” children and the rest of German society and the matter of how to overcome these, the Norwegian government’s political analyses finally led them on to another path. When plans for deportation and mass adoption abroad had failed, and IQ-testing and screening of the mental health of the children were abandoned, the war children issue disappeared from the public scene. No information campaign was launched. Instead the children were left to cope for themselves individually in the private sphere, with or without their mothers, as the often isolated, despised and harassed “German brat”.⁵⁹ Their German origin was a well known fact locally, and many of the children have suffered life long hardship due to this fact.⁶⁰

Contested quality – questionable campaigns

Their belonging to a group of contestable quality was a trait shared by the German-Norwegian war children and the „Afrodeutsche” children in West-Germany. For economic and pragmatic reasons the Norwegian government dropped the case, other pressing matters had to be solved. The official idea was that the children might pass as Norwegians as their looks did not differ from that of the population as such. A special social support system would be too expensive. The debate on the war children had served its symbolic function – to let out aggression, to seek out the traitors and take revenge.

Are we then dealing with idealism and good intentions on the side of the German government and neglect and indifference on the Norwegian part in handling their war child “problems”? In Norway a group of German-Norwegian war children has sued the government for failing to launch a public information campaign in the post war years

⁵⁹ Ericsson and Simonsen 2005, as footnote 7.

⁶⁰ War children in Norway are now receiving “ex gratia payment” up to Euro 25 000 from the Norwegian government as moral and economical compensation for their sufferings during childhood and adult life.

on their situation and for violating their human rights.⁶¹ According to their organisation, a campaign would have changed people's attitudes towards them in a more favourable way.

The question of exposure versus invisibility remains an unsolved dilemma, which the examples of Norway and Germany demonstrate. Conceptualised culturally, the two cases may inform us of how marginalisation and social exclusion are to be interpreted within national contexts of cultural diversity. The influence of state policies on a local level, and on subtle forms of inclusion and exclusion within the private sphere, is another issue to consider. For this purpose it is necessary to bear in mind that certain aspects of inclusion may be universal, reflecting similar goals, functions, and experiences across countries. But inclusion is culturally embedded, as are models for the implementation of the agreed definitions which vary from one country to another, reflecting the unique characteristics of the society and culture. What the cases of the Afrodeutsche and the German-Norwegian war children demonstrate however, is that inclusion, democracy, antiracism and "ageism" can never exist within a biological and eugenic paradigm.

Child welfare as political projects

Two stratifying parameters in the construction of the two war child categories are racism and ageism. Both factors may be studied from a perspective of influences and interactions between countries, and between international organisations and a specific nation. Mental concepts of scientists, professionals and politicians in both Norway and Germany were embedded in the paradigm of racial hygiene and eugenics, mixed with new ideas of mental hygiene.⁶² At the same time they were striving to create a new democracy – preparing the ground for, and demonstrating their intentions of, shaping a totally new human being, fit for and safe for democracy and the new political system. In both countries, but in Germany in particular, the war children appeared quite inconveniently, but still turned out to be suitable objects for demonstration of governmental

⁶¹ Their case has now been brought before the European Human Rights Court in Strasbourg. See <http://home.no.net/lebenorg>.

⁶² The intimate connection between eugenics and the mental hygiene movement is demonstrated in the *Proceedings of the First International Congress on Mental Hygiene. Washington, DC. May 5th to 10th, 1930*. New York 1932.

good intentions and the willingness for social reform. The interpretation and construction of the war child category as a social problem, however, was essentially biological. A social problem was given a biological explanation.

What then was the impact of for instance the UNESCO (*United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation*) statement in 1950, on race in West Germany and Norway? The explicit message was that no such thing as “race” existed, except as a social myth. The concept of “race” had no biological basis. “Mischling” or “bastard” gave no meaning. “Race” was to be changed to “ethnic group”. The UNESCO statement on the race issue was clearly an attack on eugenics and racism, advocating a policy for the re-education of the adult world, and a new kind of mental education for the young, securing future peace and democracy.⁶³ According to Lemke Muniz de Faria, the UNESCO statement made little impact in the case of German war children with African-American fathers. Both Norway and the federal Republic seemed to rely more on the ideology of traditional racial hygiene as expressed by the first president of UNESCO, Julian Huxley, in the programme of UNESCO from 1946.⁶⁴

Another stratifying parameter, upon which both construction processes were based, is that of ageism. Ageism may be defined here as the way children were perceived as less worthy and less important beings than adults. Children were regarded as national property and objects for future national investments. Although they were recognised as victims of the war, as “war handicapped children”, the same children were perceived as potential future threats to peace and democracy.⁶⁵ In spite of emerging new knowledge about the basic needs of the child, produced by the experiences of children who were victims of war, ideas on children were still based on pre-war conceptualisations of small children as beings with limited intellectual abilities, limited speech and emotions, founded in a biological evolutionist paradigm. In the cases of the war children, these notions of the needs of a child served to legitimise ideas of mother-child separation, institutionalisation and deportation. In both the Norwegian and the German cases, these ideas existed in the minds of politicians and civil servants. In both cases, depor-

⁶³ Thue, Fredrik W.: *In Quest of a Democratic Social Order. The Americanization of Norwegian Social Scholarship 1918–1970*. Oslo 2006 (= Acta Humaniora; 262).

⁶⁴ Huxley, Julian: *UNESCO: its Purpose and its Philosophy. The Preparatory Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation*. Washington 1946.

⁶⁵ Brosse, Thérèse: *Report on the European Situation. War-handicapped children*. Paris 1950.

tation took place, but on a very moderate scale. In both cases, children were sent back and forth between countries, seemingly due to the ambivalence about their “true” national identity. Economic calculations, as well as notions of the child’s best interest were mixed up in the decision-making processes. Apart from neglecting existing knowledge of the needs of children, ageism must also be said to have played an important part in the handling of the war children.⁶⁶ In the same way that the English historian Harry Hendricks analyses the history of child welfare in the UK, the history of the social politics for these children “is littered with examples of their subservience to broader political objectives, usually (but not always) of a kind that prioritises adult lives”.⁶⁷

To the government of West Germany it was important that the case of “afrodeutsche” children was handled in a way that placed the country in the most favourable position possible internationally. Norway as one of the Allies had less international political prestige at stake, but strong national and professional pressure still made the war children a salient political issue at the time. The English historian Nick Stargardt demonstrates how the children of the “Third Reich” were openly and cynically used for political purposes.⁶⁸ Together, these two cases also demonstrate the importance of children as material for nation building at the time, as well as the impact of the policies of the emerging global organisations, with their emphasis on children as future agents for peace and democracy.

⁶⁶ Freud, Anna and Dorothy Burlingham: *War and children*. Westport Conn. 1943.

⁶⁷ Hendrick, Harry: *Child Welfare. Historical dimensions, contemporary debate*. Bristol 2003, 252.

⁶⁸ Stargardt, Nicholas: *Witnesses of War*. New York 2005.

