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Caroline Elisabeth Nilsen  
May, 2013

BREEDING HATE:  
THE STORY OF THE NORWEGIAN *LEBENSBOРН* CHILDREN

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of History

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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By

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**APPROVED:**

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Hannah S. Decker, Ph.D.  
Committee Chair

---

Irene Guenther, Ph.D.

---

Sarah Fishman, Ph.D.

---

John W. Roberts, Ph.D.  
Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences  
Department of English

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the Nazis' *Lebensborn* program as it was implemented in Norway and to trace the post-war consequences for the unwitting children it produced. In so doing, this thesis will particularly concentrate on the roles played by international theories of race "science" and Social Darwinism and the unique characteristics of the Nazi occupation of Norway, and the life stories of the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children. This study thus situates the *Lebensborn* program within the context of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century eugenic and racial theory, as well as illustrates its novel characteristics and Himmler's radical intentions for it. In addition, this thesis presents the first in-depth examination of the *Lebensborn* program's wartime ministrations in Norway written in English. Finally, my study adds important new voices of Norwegian *Lebensborn* children to the historiography of this under-researched topic, deepening our understanding of the challenges they have faced – and continue to face – as a direct result of their half-German wartime parentage.

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For my family, both Norwegian and American.

## INTRODUCTION

*“They let the pigs out of the sty [we were caged in] because they said we would make it smell too dirty for them. Then when they let us out they scrubbed us down so hard that we went bright pink, and they said that now we looked like pigs ourselves. That was the first time I was told to my face that my father was a German.”*

---Werner Thiermann, Norwegian *Lebensborn* Child<sup>1</sup>

Werner Thiermann’s life has been marked by emotional and physical abuse, abandonment, restlessness, and extreme frustration. Every facet of his rootless, traumatic youth and his painful, searching adulthood may be traced to the fact of his birth as a Norwegian *Lebensborn* child on October 9, 1941. Born to a Norwegian mother and a German father serving in the *Wehrmacht* (the German armed forces) units that occupied Norway during World War II, Werner endured appalling abuse at the hands of his countrymen after the war ended. Locked in a pigsty by social workers, urinated on and beaten by neighborhood children, shuffled from foster family to children’s home and back again, and denied definitive answers in his search for his father, Werner’s story is typical in many ways of the lives of many of his fellow German-Norwegian “war children.”<sup>2</sup> The personal stories of the unfortunate *Lebensborn* children often recount public humiliation, deprivation, and – more than occasionally – extreme violence.

These children were never intended for such a fate, however. On the contrary, Nazi ideologues and high-ranking leaders like Hitler and, most especially, Himmler hoped that the blond, blue-eyed war children would bring about the racial rebirth of the German people. As such, during the Nazi occupation of Norway, the *Lebensborn* children and

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Catherine Clay and Michael Leapman, *Master Race: The Lebensborn Experiment in Nazi Germany* (Reading, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 144.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-149.

their mothers reaped the considerable material benefits extended to them by German officials eagerly pursuing the Nazis' "positive eugenics" agenda. By both adopting and accelerating the internationally accepted principles of Social Darwinism and race "science," the Nazis developed a two-fold eugenics program that eventually resulted both in the Holocaust and one of the most radical pro-natal initiatives of all time: Himmler's pet project, *Lebensborn*.

The *Lebensborn* program sought, in particular, to curtail high German abortion rates and encourage procreation by "racially pure" Aryans. And while the initiative never achieved any substantial degree of success in Germany, Nazi authorities nevertheless saw fit to establish *Lebensborn* in many of the territories conquered during the Third Reich's sweep across Europe in 1939-1940. The supposedly pure "Germanic" genetics of the Norwegian people made Norway an especially valuable target for the operations of Himmler's *Lebensborn*. Under the Nazi occupation of Norway, any Norwegian woman who met the Nazis' standards of "racial fitness," and who became pregnant with the child of a German soldier, could register for *Lebensborn*. The program consisted of a network of Nazi-run homes and clinics for "Aryan" mothers and their German-Norwegian children, and dedicated itself to providing the best available care to these individuals. Further, Norway proved to be the only country in which the *Lebensborn* program ever operated with any modicum of success. The *Lebensborn* mothers, and the 8,000 children produced by their official *Lebensborn*-sanctioned sexual liaisons with German soldiers, formed a highly visible minority in Norway who sometimes encountered extremely harsh reprisals both during and after the war.

Unsurprisingly, the Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers' sexual relationships with the German occupiers and receipt of preferential treatment by the Nazi authorities – representing the intersection of official Nazi public policy and Norwegian individuals' private interests – were stigmatized throughout the occupation as a form of betrayal. The women then suffered the fierce retribution of their countrymen during the Liberation era, although their so-called “horizontal collaboration” had much less impact on the course of the war than other (primarily male) Norwegians' political and economic collaboration. The *Lebensborn* mothers' sexual treason, however, tainted both themselves and their children. The revulsion and enmity borne toward the innocent children of Himmler's program by the Norwegian public and government irrevocably marked these German-Norwegian children's lives, often consigning them to intense feelings of shame and extreme experiences of suffering.

This study explores the Nazis' *Lebensborn* program as it was implemented in Norway and to trace the post-war consequences for the unwitting children it produced. In so doing, this thesis will particularly concentrate on the roles played by international theories of race “science” and Social Darwinism and the unique characteristics of the Nazi occupation of Norway, and the life stories of the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children. This study thus situates the *Lebensborn* program within the context of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century eugenic and racial theory, as well as illustrates its novel characteristics and Himmler's radical intentions for it. In addition, this thesis presents the first in-depth examination of the *Lebensborn* program's wartime ministrations in Norway written in

English.<sup>3</sup> Finally, my study adds important new voices of Norwegian *Lebensborn* children to the historiography of this under-researched topic, deepening our understanding of the challenges they have faced – and continue to face – as a direct result of their half-German wartime parentage.

Despite the vast amount of research on the Nazi Party’s “negative eugenics” policies of sterilization and extermination, relatively little has been written regarding the Nazis’ foremost “positive eugenics” effort: Himmler’s *Lebensborn* program. Even fewer works have been published about this initiative’s operation in Nazi-occupied Norway. This gap in the historiography looms especially large in light of the fact that Norway possessed just as many *Lebensborn* maternity homes at the height of the Nazi occupation as Germany itself.

Until very recently, academic study of the *Lebensborn* program has remained largely confined to European efforts. Georg Lilienthal’s landmark “*Der Lebensborn e.V.*”: *Ein Instrument nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik* represents one of the very few – and one of the most definitive – works on the daily operations of the program, though he largely exempts the Scandinavian case from in-depth consideration.<sup>4</sup> In the past few years, however, European scholars have published a number of English-language works treating the post-war experiences of the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children exclusively. Kåre Olsen, in particular, has laid essential groundwork with his studies of the

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<sup>3</sup> For this, I owe a great debt to Norwegian historian Kåre Olsen, whose *Krigens Barn: De Norsk Krigsbarna og deres Mødre* [Children of War: The Norwegian War Children and their Mothers] (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co., 1998) remains the only thorough study of the *Lebensborn* program in Norway.

<sup>4</sup> Georg Lilienthal, *Der “Lebensborn e. V.”: Ein Instrument nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik* [The “*Lebensborn* Association”: An Instrument of National Socialist Racial Politics] (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1993).

Norwegian government's official treatment of these children,<sup>5</sup> and Norwegian historians Kjersti Ericsson and Dag Ellingsen have added immense depth to this historical narrative with their examination of the first-hand accounts of several *Lebensborn* children.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Canadian scholar Annette Timm is completing a manuscript on the *Lebensborn* program, addressing some of the questions regarding post-war memory currently conspicuously lacking from the historiography.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis provides the first chronologically comprehensive English-language examination of the story of the *Lebensborn* program in Norway. Building upon previous scholarship and examining new primary sources, this study presents this story from the 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectual, “scientific” foundations of the Nazi eugenics agenda, through the wartime operations of *Lebensborn* in occupied Norway, to the traumatic post-war experiences of the German-Norwegian war children. Beyond the clear historiographical gap, the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children's recent legal struggle for an official governmental apology and reparations underscores the necessity for such a study. Thus, this thesis synthesizes information from the landmark German and Norwegian works on this subject, probes official Nazi policy, examines the actions of the post-war Norwegian government, and presents the first-hand accounts of several of the *Lebensborn* children. In doing so, this study explores the origins and extent of Himmler's *Lebensborn* program,

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<sup>5</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*; Kåre Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher: das Schicksal der norwegischen Lebensbornkinder und ihrer Mütter von 1940 bis heute* [Father, German: The Fate of the Norwegian *Lebensborn* Children and their Mothers from 1940 to Today], trans. Ebba D. Drolshagen (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2002); Kåre Olsen, “Under the Care of *Lebensborn*: Norwegian War Children and their Mothers” in *Children of World War II: The Hidden Enemy Legacy*, ed. Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen, 15-35 (New York: Berg Publishers, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Kjersti Ericsson and Dag Ellingsen, “Life Stories of Norwegian War Children” in *Children of World War II*, ed. Ericsson and Simonsen, 93-113.

<sup>7</sup> Skype conversation with Dr. Timm on October 26, 2012; her treatment of post-war memory will particularly focus on the “Aryan stud farm” myths of *Lebensborn* which have gained so much popular traction.

and raises awareness of the German-Norwegian war children's especially contested and marginalized position within Norwegian society.

This thesis will not, however, address the fate of the Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers in great detail. As we shall see in a later chapter, after the war these women proved extremely reluctant to discuss their participation in the *Lebensborn* program even with their own children. Although the *Lebensborn* children have opened a public dialogue regarding the hardships they faced in the post-war period, this development occurred only within the last fifteen years. Further, it is likely that the Norwegian government and its people have proved receptive to the *Lebensborn* children's stories – and this only to a limited extent – largely because the German-Norwegian children had no choice in their participation in the *Lebensborn* program.

In 2005, the Norwegian government finally restored the right to a pension – a right to which all Norwegian citizens are entitled – to the *Lebensborn* mothers, and thus signified that the appropriate time for a public discussion of their post-war suffering might finally have arrived.<sup>8</sup> By this time, however, the *Lebensborn* mothers would have been predominantly in their eighties. After so many decades of trying to hide their voluntary participation in the program, these Norwegian women have continued their survival tactics of remaining silent and fading into the woodwork of Norwegian society as best as possible. Now that these mothers are in their nineties or older, or – more likely – have died, their defense mechanism of silence has ensured that the stories of their wartime experiences in the *Lebensborn* program and their post-war persecution are extremely difficult to find, if not entirely lost to history.

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<sup>8</sup> Kate Connolly, "Norway Finally Forgives Women who Slept with Nazi Soldiers," *The Telegraph*. London, October 27, 2005.



Certain details of their troubled lives may be gleaned from the *Lebensborn* children's personal accounts, and the Norwegian national archives contain at least a few official communications between these mothers and Nazi *Lebensborn* officials from the war years.<sup>9</sup> A detailed examination of the Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers would therefore necessitate an extended period of study in a variety of Norwegian and German archives, which proved impossible to undertake for the purposes of this thesis. Thus, the chapter of this study that focuses on the immediate post-war period (Chapter Three) concentrates mainly on the *Lebensborn* children, and addresses their mothers only briefly and unfortunately impersonally.

The three chapters comprising the bulk of this study are divided roughly by time period and topical concentration. Chapter 1, on the pre-war era, explores particularly the 19<sup>th</sup> century origins of Nazi eugenics. Chapter 2 moves to the war years, focusing on *Lebensborn*'s pro-natal efforts in Nazi-occupied Norway. Finally, Chapter 3 addresses the period from 1945 to the present, illuminating the life experiences of the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children, and the public and governmental actions that continue to dictate their harsh and oppressive circumstances. We begin our examination with the widely accepted 19<sup>th</sup> century international theories of Social Darwinism and race science that formed the basis for the Nazis' eugenics initiatives, in general, and Himmler's *Lebensborn* program, in particular.

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<sup>9</sup> Norway's preeminent archivist and *Lebensborn* historian, Kåre Olsen, utilizes several of these letters for his work *Krigens Barn*, which I rely upon heavily for the second chapter of this study.

## THE ROAD TO *RASSENHYGIENE*: THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF NAZI EUGENICS

*“No, there is only one holiest human right, and this right is at the same time the holiest obligation, to wit: to see to it that the blood is preserved pure and, by preserving the best humanity, to create the possibility of a nobler development of these beings.”*

--- Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*<sup>10</sup>

Understanding the development of Social Darwinism and race science in Germany is essential to comprehending the Nazis’ unparalleled radical eugenic programs, including the *Lebensborn* program that eventually came to be implemented in Nazi-occupied Norway. That is because the same destructive convergence of fascism, Social Darwinism, and technology-driven eugenics that culminated in the unimaginable mass murder of the Holocaust also resulted in Himmler’s *Lebensborn* initiative. These two programs were – in a sense – opposite sides of the same coin, representing the Nazi state’s *Rassenhygiene* (racial hygiene) policies and pursuit of a “racially pure,” “Aryan” German nation.<sup>11</sup> The Nazis justified and publicized their distinctly modern drive to create a new race through propaganda, often couching their eugenic programs in anti-modern language that extolled traditional *völkisch* values and aesthetics. The theories and practices of eugenics or “race hygiene,” firmly and authoritatively established on the international stage prior to World War II, underwent a dramatic radicalization under the Nazi regime. Drawing on the decades-long worldwide medical, scientific, and socio-

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<sup>10</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim, First Mariner Books Edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 402.

<sup>11</sup> To clarify, any time controversial phrases such as “racially pure,” “racially fit,” or “racially valuable” are used throughout this thesis, they are intended to be understood according to the Nazis’ belief system and not any opinions held personally by the author.

political reasoning of several decades, Nazi Party leaders exemplified the “pessimistic” Social-Darwinist outlook. They pursued their agenda of Aryan “racial purity” by implementing radical eugenics policies of both “positive” and “negative” types.

Though the fascist regimes of the 1920s and 1930s were modern at their core, they executed their plans and programs in part by projecting a public persona that appealed to traditional images, beliefs, and prejudices. Most fascist propaganda alluded to rural values and advocated a return to the traditions and glory of ages past.<sup>12</sup> Even as they presented this conservative face to the public, fascists pursued several decidedly modern policies for which they jettisoned traditional norms of morality and behavior.

In this respect – and in many others – the Nazi Party adhered completely to the general fascist trend. The Nazis produced countless posters harkening back to the supposedly simple and glorious agrarian lifestyle that once dominated Germany.<sup>13</sup> Their rhetoric constantly referred to previous strong, conservative – and often military – leaders like Frederick the Great and Otto von Bismarck, as they sought to romanticize Germany’s culture and history, and to rally Germans behind those images and values in the kind of “invention of tradition” described by Eric Hobsbawm.<sup>14</sup> As we will see, the Nazis inundated the German public with this paradoxical blend of “conservative” *völkisch*

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<sup>12</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: Howard Fertig, Inc., 2000), 59; Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2004), 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, ed. Sara J. Bloomfield (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 103; Lynn H. Nicholas, *Cruel World: The Children of Europe in the Nazi Web* (New York: Random House, Inc., Vintage Books, 2005), 110.

<sup>14</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 1-14 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Hobsbawm asserted in this seminal work that many of the traditions currently considered to have their roots far back through centuries of history were, in fact, “invented” only quite recently. These “traditions” were often created as the result of various ruling regimes’ attempts to legitimate their power by appropriating the past, reinforcing particular values and behaviors by the repetition of symbols and ceremonies supposedly originating in distant history.

propaganda in order to justify and promote their eminently radical medical eugenics initiatives.

Efforts to unite the community around the idea of the *völkisch* German nation represented one of the highest goals of Nazi nationalism. Their continual, pervasive glorification of the racial nation arguably superseded every other ideal in Nazi party doctrine. The idea of the German nation bound by blood and soil – absolutely integral to the Nazis' Third Reich – centered on the concept of a biological, culturally “traditional” German *Volk*, which was often defined negatively against other peoples (i.e. the German *Volk* was *not* a “Semitic” people). Widely available publications such as the official SS magazine, *Das Schwarze Korps*, propounded the moral and racial merits of Germany's “large, healthy rural families...and the necessity of a strong farm population,” citing Hitler's assertion that Germany's small farmers were the “‘blood source’ of the race.”<sup>15</sup> Central in *Mein Kampf*, and fundamental to the movement even before Hitler's membership, racial nationalism dominated Nazi rhetoric from the party's earliest days.

The ideal nation around which the Nazis sought to rally their citizens and build their empire strongly resembled Benedict Anderson's “imagined communities.”<sup>16</sup> Race and language were, by far, the most important criteria for being a member of the *Volk* and, thus, of the national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*).<sup>17</sup> Such racial and linguistic homogeneity, the Nazis believed, would further promote a a common culture and value

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<sup>15</sup> William L. Combs, *The Voice of the SS: A History of the SS Journal “Das Schwarze Korps”* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1986), 72. This article quoting Hitler appeared on page 6 of the edition dated March 27, 1935.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006). Anderson's landmark work introduced the concept of an “imagined community” made up of individual members who perceive themselves to be part of a certain group of people, often based on ethno-linguistic and/or confessional identification. These communities are, thus, based on socially constructed categories, and do not necessarily describe a fixed, limited, geographical community of people who have regular interpersonal interactions with one another.

<sup>17</sup> Mosse, *Fascist Revolution*, 31-33.

system, steeped in those “traditional” beliefs promoted by the Nazi regime. Notably, the Nazis justified their first territorial conquests as restoring ethnic Germans and German-speakers to the Fatherland, in the “reclamation” of lands lost in the Treaty of Versailles and in the *Anschluss* with Austria. As the Nazis conquered and occupied still more European countries, they sought to “Germanize” the those who met the Nazi racial ideal.<sup>18</sup> This came to play an integral role in the *Lebensborn* program.

In addition to their exploitation and exacerbation of militant, racial nationalism, the Nazi leaders incorporated Social Darwinist doctrines into their fundamental party dogma, as Paxton also notes.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the widespread international acceptance of Social Darwinism coexisted very well with the rise of fascist movements around the world, and unquestionably helped to facilitate fascism’s rise. The ideals of the Social Darwinist paradigm provided a highly influential (and pseudo-scientific) justification for fascists’ assertion and exaltation of their own nation above all others.<sup>20</sup> The notion of the natural superiority of one nation or race over another proved extremely compatible with the Nazi ideal of a unified, powerful, and internationally-dominant German nation.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Hitler so admired the natural, scientific processes of evolution, as appropriated by Social Darwinists, that he purposefully constructed the governmental bureaucracy in this way, resulting in what James Diehl calls “the bureaucratic Social Darwinism of the Third Reich.”<sup>22</sup> Government officials in Hitler’s Germany were purposefully assigned tasks that overlapped with other officials’ duties, which encouraged infighting and facilitated

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<sup>18</sup> Clay and Leapman, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Paxton, 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-34.

<sup>21</sup> Harald Ofstad, *Our Contempt for Weakness: Nazi Norms and Values – And Our Own* (Sweden: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1989), 150-151.

<sup>22</sup> James Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland: German Veterans after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 33; Paxton, 154-155.

the strongest or most capable employees to vanquish their competition and forward their own careers. Social Darwinism thus heavily influenced life in the Nazi regime on every level. Its theories had far-reaching implications for the Nazis' eugenics efforts, as well as the Nazi state's bureaucratic structure.

Social Darwinism and the relevant theories of race science combined with the modernist tendencies of fascism to result in the goal of creating "new men" for the new nation.<sup>23</sup> With no broadly popular political system or set of shared cultural values to take the place of those extant prior to the First World War, many Germans felt the need for a strong leader or doctrine to lead their country in a new direction. The Nazis' nationalist speechifying promised an escape from the mediocrity and strife of the 1920s and early 1930s, and instead prophesied their nation's return to strength and glory. This resurgence of the nation, the Nazis thought, could be accomplished solely by the transformation of its people.<sup>24</sup> Only by creating new kinds of people – a new race – could the Nazis fashion a new society capable of asserting itself as a new, powerful, and united nation.

As Paxton notes, only Nazi Germany has ever fully exemplified the formation, institutionalization, and radicalization of fascism.<sup>25</sup> Thus, no other country ever pursued the creation of "new men" by means of medical, legislative race-based eugenics as completely as the Nazis did. The Nazis' simultaneous programs of racial extermination and positive natalism, as exemplified through the Holocaust and the *Lebensborn* program, remain unrivaled in scope and extremity, though certainly not unrivaled in principle. The racial pseudo-science that accompanied the international acceptance of

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<sup>23</sup> Paxton, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1989), 303-304.

<sup>25</sup> Paxton, 169.

Social Darwinism provided the framework for the increasingly pro-Aryan bent of German eugenics initiatives after Hitler's rise to the chancellorship in 1933.<sup>26</sup> This trend developed over the course of the several decades between the advent of Darwin's groundbreaking theory as interpreted by Herbert Spenser and the Nazis' political triumph.

The term "Social Darwinism" itself is something of a misnomer. Darwin's 1859 work *On the Origin of Species* did not elaborate any specific implications for humankind, nor was the treatise inherently racial.<sup>27</sup> One of the only aspects of Social Darwinism genuinely derived from Darwin's scientific theory, in fact, was the emphasis on the role genetic inheritance plays in the evolution and biological variation of animal species. Racist thinkers and economic titans anxious to justify their own positions distorted Darwin's strictly scientific ideas about heredity, natural selection, and biological struggle to argue that racial and social inequality both within and among human civilizations was natural and, therefore, just.<sup>28</sup>

Building on the emerging science of anthropology and the theories of his cousin Darwin, Francis Galton wrote his aptly-titled *Hereditary Genius* in 1869. In this work, Galton argued that intelligence and ability are inherited in exactly the same manner as the physical traits described by Darwin ten years earlier.<sup>29</sup> Based on his personal, albeit biased, observations of the different capabilities of families from different races, Galton attempted to scientifically rank the intellectual and cultural value of the various human races.<sup>30</sup> Even further, Galton suggested that nations could engage in policies that would

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<sup>26</sup> Robert N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 55; Ofstad, 26-38.

<sup>27</sup> William I. Brustein, *Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 97.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

breed the perceived “best” people with only their equals, coining the term “eugenics” in his description of these programs.

At the time Galton presented his ideas, most other proponents of eugenics refrained from taking an explicitly racial stance. However, as European colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism grew to a fever pitch in the late years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the scientific measurement and classification of human races became ever more widely accepted.<sup>31</sup> Exemplifying the colonial dominance of northern European countries – such as England, France, and Germany – most scientific hierarchies of race from this time period ranked the white, Nordic, or Aryan race in the highest position.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, racial scientists at the time maintained an overall ambiguous attitude regarding the position of Jews within the racial hierarchy. It was unclear to them whether Jews constituted a single race or were members of a subset within the many other races.<sup>33</sup> And, though a few proponents of racial hygiene argued for the status of Jews as an “inferior” race, many scientists and racial anthropologists placed the so-called Semitic race directly below the Nordic-Aryan race in their constructed hierarchies.<sup>34</sup> William Brustein notes, however, that as the westward immigration of more orthodox Eastern European Ashkenazi Jews increased, domestic and scientific opinions became increasingly reactionary and anti-Semitic.<sup>35</sup> Many among the native-born populations of

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<sup>31</sup> Sven Lindqvist, *“Exterminate All the Brutes:” One Man’s Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 97-148.

<sup>32</sup> Brustein, 99-100.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.



Western European nations considered eastern Jews and other racial types to be “socially threatening, fiscally damaging, and potentially politically dangerous.”<sup>36</sup>

Quite independently of racial values, scientific supporters of eugenics also maintained differing opinions about the very nature of mankind’s evolutionary progress. Proponents of “optimistic” Social Darwinism believed that highly valuable qualities were indeed handed down genetically by the most dominant and assertive people. In short, they believed that Darwin’s principles of natural selection were operating exactly as they were supposed to, moving inexorably toward the strongest and most highly-evolved human race possible.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast, “pessimistic” Social Darwinists believed that the increasing heterogeneity of national societies and the mixing of races impeded natural, positive evolution. They held that “inferior” races and individuals contaminated formerly “pure” and “valuable” gene pools, resulting in the biological and cultural “degradation” of mankind.<sup>38</sup> This view, though not necessarily racial, often prevailed among racial scientists, and gained an ever-greater following after 1870 with the rise of rampant nationalism, colonialism, urbanization, and immigration.<sup>39</sup>

“Pessimistic” Social Darwinists had additional, more concrete reasons behind their negative outlook on mankind’s evolutionary prospects. Advances in the field of medicine, they felt, resulted in the preservation and continuation of lives that would otherwise have ended if nature was allowed to take its proper course and winnow out the

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<sup>36</sup> Sheila F. Weiss, *Race Hygiene and National Efficiency: the Eugenics of Wilhelm Schallmayer* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 62-3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-37.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

weakest members of the species.<sup>40</sup> In addition, the nationalization and expansion of welfare benefits, particularly after World War I, led to the notion that increasingly liberal, humanist, and cosmopolitan governments also impeded the natural processes of human evolution by offering assistance to supposedly inferior humans in dire circumstances.<sup>41</sup> These perceived evils of medicine and government found their diametric opposites in the legislated, medically-driven eugenics programs that sprang up around the world. Such programs came to fullest fruition in Nazi Germany.

As discussed, Galton's theory of eugenics sought to manipulate the reproduction of human beings in order to ensure that only the most desirable physical and mental traits would be inherited by future generations. Most of the countries that adopted eugenics policies never progressed beyond the "negative eugenics" first proposed in 1892 by psychiatrist August Forel, regardless of whether official anxieties stressed race or widespread "degeneracy."<sup>42</sup> Naturally, governments pursuing eugenics agendas found it far easier to forbid certain "inferior" people from reproducing than to force certain "superior" people to couple with one another for the conscious goal of producing racially- or biologically-"gifted" offspring.

It comes as no surprise, then, that most nations' governments restricted their legislation to sterilization laws alone. (Some countries, however, including the United States, did hold contests to recognize and reward families that displayed outstanding hereditary "fitness."<sup>43</sup>) Legislation in most countries allowed for the sterilization of some combination of the mentally retarded, the genetically deformed or diseased, criminals,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> *Sacrifice and National Belonging in Twentieth Century Germany*, ed. Gregg Eghigian (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 99-100.

<sup>42</sup> Proctor, 96.

<sup>43</sup> Bloomfield, ed., 45, 50.

and – sometimes – alcoholics. Illegal in Germany until 1933, sterilization took place in many of the world’s most civilized countries, including England, the United States, and Switzerland. In addition to Germany, at least eight countries in Central and Western Europe, as well as the United States (as early as the 1920s) and Japan, had enacted sterilization laws by March 1936.<sup>44</sup>

Due to the horrifying extremity of the Holocaust, both popular and historical thought after World War II has displayed a notable tendency to view Nazi eugenics programs as terrible, fatal aberrations from the parallel, putatively “normal” intellectual and scientific developments within other contemporary Western nations.<sup>45</sup> While the racial hygiene policies pursued by the Nazi regime unquestionably constitute the most extensive examples of such initiatives, many other countries enacted similar – though far less aggressive – eugenics programs, led by their respective national scientists and politicians. These prominent individuals and the policies they pushed reflected the international acceptance of Social Darwinist theories and “race science” during the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, such public authorities validated both the broad intellectual environment and the specific “scientific” reasoning behind the Nazis’ racial hygiene policies. The widespread acceptance of negative eugenics policies outlined above, in particular, must not be overlooked. It comprised an important aspect of the international intellectual environment that allowed the Nazis’ radical program of racial extermination to flourish.

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<sup>44</sup> “*Wir Stehen Nicht Allein*” [“We Do Not Stand Alone”] in *Neues Volk*, March 1, 1936, p. 37, reproduced in Proctor, 96-97.

<sup>45</sup> This view is perhaps best exemplified in Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s controversial work, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Random House, Inc., Vintage Books, 1997).

Indeed, the early stages of German racial science and theoretical support for eugenics policies demonstrate great congruence with those of other countries. Far from exemplifying anything like the teleological *Sonderweg* (“special way” or “special path”) approach common in studies of German racism, the intellectual path traveled by the early leaders of German racial science was decidedly typical of that era in that field.<sup>46</sup> The highly influential figure of Wilhelm Schallmayer – whose 1903 book *Vererbung und Auslese im Lebenslauf der Völker* (Heredity and Selection in the Life Path of Nations) introduced significant numbers of Germany’s middle class to the ideas of “pessimistic” Social Darwinism and eugenics – represents arguably the best example of the normality of early twentieth-century German race science and eugenics.<sup>47</sup>

Like many of his contemporaries, Schallmayer adhered to the “pessimistic” view of Social Darwinism. The economic turbulence of the 1880s and 1890s, and the advances in medicine and social welfare programs, contributed to the prevalence of this perspective among scholars of the time.<sup>48</sup> Schallmayer also shared with his international colleagues the opinion that the only way to combat the negative effects of the rising birthrate of so-called “inferior” persons was for nations to institute eugenics programs.<sup>49</sup> Such policies would ensure that only the most valuable human traits would be reproduced, thereby populating the country with the intelligent, assertive, and resourceful people needed to restore both economic stability and the genetic, biological strength of the national community.

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<sup>46</sup> Paul Weindling, “The *Sonderweg* of German Eugenics: Nationalism and Scientific Internationalism,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 22 (September, 1989): 321-333.

<sup>47</sup> Weiss, *Race Hygiene*, 3-4

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-44

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

Schallmayer put these ideas forward in his first – in fact, Germany’s first – tract on eugenics, *Über die drohende körperliche Entartung der Kulturmenschheit und die Verstaatlichung des ärztlichen Standes* (“On the threat of the physical degeneration of human culture and the nationalization of the medical profession”).<sup>50</sup> This work was not widely read by scholars active in the field, however, and even less by the educated German middle class. A few years later, though, many of the same ideas found their way into the treatise Schallmayer wrote for the prestigious Krupp competition of 1900. This work, which eventually earned the top prize in the competition, became his *Vererbung und Auslese* (Heredity and Selection), and immeasurably influenced the German eugenics movement. The book received a great deal of critical coverage in the press and professional journals, bringing the work to the attention of a large portion of the German population, including statesmen and policy-makers.<sup>51</sup> By the time of his death in 1919, Schallmayer was widely regarded as “the intellectual father” of German eugenics.<sup>52</sup>

Schallmayer’s vision of eugenics was explicitly non-racial in perspective. Indeed, Schallmayer argued throughout his life for the use of the terms *Eugenik* or *Rassehygiene* when discussing eugenic ideas and policies.<sup>53</sup> The latter term is, of course, extremely similar in appearance – lacking only an “n” – to the more widely employed *Rassenhygiene* that the Nazis would later adopt; their respective meanings, however, carry very different implications. *Rassehygiene* implies that there is but one, singular race to be improved: the human race. *Rassenhygiene*, on the other hand, denotes a multiplicity of races to be cleansed or improved upon. Racial scientists and proponents

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 103.

of eugenics who subscribed to Galtonian racial classifications and hierarchies therefore preferred the term *Rassenhygiene*.

In his *Vererbung und Auslese*, Schallmayer emphasized the importance of both nature and nurture in improving mankind. Not only did nations need to ensure the reproduction and inheritance of the best genetic traits, but they also needed to provide the fittest citizens with the best possible education and medical care.<sup>54</sup> Even further, the general population had to be introduced to the principles of Darwinism and its social implications. By educating all common citizens about the duty they owed to their country in their marriages and sexual relations, Schallmayer believed that “biologically-fit” persons could be impelled to seek out one another for reproduction in the service of the nation.<sup>55</sup>

Just as Schallmayer deemed both nature *and* nurture to be essential, so too did he view both “positive” and “negative” eugenics as indispensable. Positive eugenics includes policies that encourage or ensure the reproduction of the most genetically- and biologically-“valuable” humans in the improvement of a society or of mankind in general. Negative eugenics forms the darker corollary to these initiatives and consists of deterring, forbidding, and often permanently preventing “inferior” people from reproducing to halt the further degradation of the race or nation. As noted, most national eugenics programs found it far easier to undertake efforts in negative eugenics, especially because the subjects of sterilization policies most often consisted of people who were

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 52-63, 74-86.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 55-58.

unable to defend themselves and who had no champions willing to speak on their behalf.<sup>56</sup>

In his Krupp competition award-winning treatise, Schallmayer advocated a number of practical policies that nations might adopt in order to improve their citizenry. Chief among these were ideas for a “health passport,” a military exemption tax, and the nationalization of medicine.<sup>57</sup> The health passport, as proposed by Schallmayer, would be updated by a physician every year with a description of the general level of health and fitness of an individual. Citizens would be educated in the principles of Darwinism and instructed to take potential sexual partners’ health passports into consideration before engaging in sexual relations with them.<sup>58</sup> The military tax was meant to prevent physically “inferior” men, too weak to serve in the military, from gaining an economic advantage over their “natural superiors,” whose strength and fitness resulted in their military service (which did not pay as well as some civilian occupations). Those too biologically “unfit” to serve in the military would have been expected to shoulder the burden of this tax, thus further preventing their gaining any advantage over their “natural superiors.”<sup>59</sup> The nationalization of medicine, which also would have played a role in issuing the health passports and instructing the populace, would educate physicians according to state-decreed standards. This would result in improved medical care for the most biologically “valuable” citizens.<sup>60</sup> While none of these proposals was ever enacted in its original form in Germany, they laid important intellectual groundwork for later Nazi eugenics policies.

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<sup>56</sup> Proctor, 96.

<sup>57</sup> Weiss, *Race Hygiene*, 52-63.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

As Schallmayer's ideas and the initiatives of other important figures of the eugenics movement gained public attention and acceptance, German scientists and statesmen began to collaborate towards eugenics initiatives.<sup>61</sup> This process greatly accelerated after World War I due to the massive loss of life during the war, as well as the post-war decline in birth rates.<sup>62</sup> The perceived need to rebuild and strengthen the nation became acute.

The foundation of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics in Berlin in 1927 comprised perhaps the most significant development in German eugenics during the Weimar period.<sup>63</sup> In accordance with the more liberal, democratic social practices of the Weimar Republic, the work of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute followed Schallmayer's non-racial principles during the first six years of its existence.<sup>64</sup> During this time, the eminence and authority of the various scientific figures associated with the Institute lent even greater credibility to the science of eugenics. They expounded seemingly rational arguments for the cessation of welfare benefits and the promotion of sterilization legislation, all the while cementing in the minds of statesmen and the public the potential national utility of eugenics.<sup>65</sup>

The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute became rapidly racialized after the Nazis' ascension to power in 1933. Instead of the more international, universal *Eugenik* that sought to reproduce and promote the best of all humanity, the Nazis had no interest – or rather, little to no belief – in the genetic value of non-Nordic races. Their appropriation of the

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<sup>61</sup> Paul Weindling, "Weimar Eugenics: The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics in Social Context," *The Annals of Science* 42 (1985): 303-318, p. 308.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 310-311.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.



Institute resulted in a turn toward *Rassenhygiene*, which meant that the Institute's scientists had to conform, at least outwardly, to the party's racial doctrines if they wished to retain their prestigious positions and research funding.<sup>66</sup> There were, of course, scientists among this group who needed very little coercion or encouragement to turn toward racially-motivated eugenics.

Undoubtedly the most influential among these race scientists sympathetic to Nazi ideologies was Alfred Ploetz, who rose to prominence as one of Germany's foremost eugenicists and racial scientists around the turn of the century. Ploetz, in fact, coined the very term *Rassenhygiene* in 1895 and, though he initially reflected the views of other racial scientists and anthropologists who rated Jews highly within the racial hierarchy, he became increasingly anti-Semitic over the course of his career.<sup>67</sup> As a devoted Social Darwinist and member of the secret Nordic club *Mittgartbund*, Ploetz undermined the non-racial stance taken by the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute almost from its inception, organizing a small pro-Nordic faction within the ranks of the Society for Racial Hygiene.<sup>68</sup> The research he conducted and the racial arguments he made during the Third Reich earned him numerous awards from Nazi state officials, though he did not officially join the Nazi Party until 1937.<sup>69</sup>

Fritz Lenz and Eugen Fischer also proved instrumental in the racialization of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute. These overtly race-focused scientists believed, as did many others, that psychological, behavioral, and physical traits were racially determined.<sup>70</sup> Their Nordic sympathies made them ideal candidates for cooperation with the Nazis.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 315-316.

<sup>67</sup> Brustein, 134-135.

<sup>68</sup> Proctor, 15, 24-25. This society largely comprised the scientific membership of the Institute.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>70</sup> Bloomfield, ed., 28.

Fischer, in particular, exerted a great deal of influence as director of the Institute; his control over the direction of research and the appointment of scientists to various posts, including the infamous Ottmar Freiherr von Verschuer, greatly facilitated the racialization of the Institute after 1933.<sup>71</sup>

Beyond the works and influences of individual scientists, the aftermath of World War I also helped to racialize the work of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute and the bent of the German eugenics movement as a whole. The notorious “stab in the back” legend and accusations of Jewish incompetence and duty-shirking at the front helped create an overtly anti-Semitic atmosphere in many sectors of German society.<sup>72</sup> Where scientific opinion had once been ambivalent regarding the biological value of the so-called Semitic race, eugenicists and race scientists now expressed views in line with larger national and political trends under the Nazi Party.<sup>73</sup>

All of these developments in Germany, from Wilhelm Schallmayer’s 1903 treatise to the Nazi appropriation of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, set the stage for the Nazis’ most ambitious eugenics initiatives: the Final Solution and Himmler’s *Lebensborn*. Both of these programs developed gradually, becoming increasingly radicalized examples of negative and positive eugenics. The perfect storm of economic woe, political instability, xenophobia, heightened anti-Semitism, pervasive Social

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 32-35. Von Verschuer is most notorious for his medical experimentation with twins, and for his supportive, professional patronage of Josef Mengele. Mengele, the “Angel of Death,” became the Chief Medical Officer of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in 1943. There, he was responsible for meeting incoming trainloads of inmates, and selecting who among them were fit for labor and which would be sent to the gas chambers immediately. Mengele also conducted a number of infamous experiments on prisoners at the camp, most infamously on twins and pregnant women.

<sup>72</sup> Brustein, 56. This “stab in the back” legend, or *Dolchstoßlegende*, asserted that the German Army was not responsible for Germany’s defeat in World War I. Instead, according to the myth, Germany had been betrayed by civilians on the home front, and by politicians, republicans, socialists, and Jews, in particular.

<sup>73</sup> Loren R. Graham, “Science and Values: The Eugenics Movement in Germany and Russia in the 1920s,” *The American Historical Review* 82 (December, 1977): 1136-1144.

Darwinism, popular racial science and anthropology, expansion of welfare, advances in medicine and technology, cultural shock, and – eventually – Nazi territorial conquest, resulted in eugenics policies of unprecedented scope and impact.

We have already touched on the fascist goal of creating “new men” in order to return the nation to its supposed former strength and glory. For the Nazis this meant a return to traditional, *völkisch* values and imagery. In addition, their racial definition of the nation glorified the Aryan race above all others. The mythic Aryan race, according to Fritz Lenz of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, was “the hero of history,” responsible for the world’s greatest science, inventions, art, and military conquests.<sup>74</sup> In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler tied the entirety of human culture and civilization to “the presence of the Aryan,”<sup>75</sup> and attributed the “German race’s” tendency to nostalgia, poetry, music, and imperialism to “the Nordic racial nucleus.”<sup>76</sup> The Nazis shared Hans F. K. Günther’s view that “the man of Nordic race is not only the most gifted but also the most beautiful.”<sup>77</sup> Nazi propaganda images of the beautiful Aryan, “most often in portraits of sunny athletes, large families, and marching soldiers, and sometimes by contrast in juxtaposed close-up shots of misshapen, degenerate individuals and formless heaps of people,” bombarded the German public under the Nazi regime.<sup>78</sup> Further, the Social Darwinist principles embraced by leaders of the Nazi party resulted in an additional emphasis on the intelligence, leadership, and physical strength of the future German people.

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<sup>74</sup> Proctor, 55.

<sup>75</sup> Hitler, 383: “If he dies out or declines, the dark veils of an age without culture will again descend on this globe.”

<sup>76</sup> In a dinner conversation dated May 12, 1942. Quoted in *Hitler’s Table Talks 1941-1944: His Private Conversations*, ed. Hugh Trevor-Roper, trans. Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (New York: Enigma Books, 2000), 475-476.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Clay and Leapman, 17.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 91-92.

These new people would be partly a creation of their culture and education, the kind of “nurture” that Schallmayer had advised in his work. The Nazis’ enormous, concerted drive to dominate every aspect of Germans’ personal lives served this eugenics-specific goal very well. Nazi clubs and organizations sprang into existence for every age group and for virtually every interest or hobby, and official party control of the media completed what Paxton calls the Nazi “invasion of private life.”<sup>79</sup> Nazi leaders utilized their control of everyday existence to inculcate citizens in party doctrine. For example, state-issued *Ahnenpässe* (ancestor passports) were required for participation in *Kraft durch Freude* activities and – eventually – for activities as basic as high school attendance and marriage, and traced German citizens’ Aryan lineage four generations into the past.<sup>80</sup> As Peter Fritzsche notes, such initiatives encouraged Germans to reconceptualize their own identities in racial terms; Nazi leaders hoped that this growing racial consciousness would result in an increased number of marriages “designed to produce genetically fit children.”<sup>81</sup>

The theories and principles of Social Darwinism, race science, and eugenics were taught in schools from the primary grades forward. Hitler made this steadfast emphasis on young Germans’ racial education apparent from the first:

The crown of the folkish [sic] state’s entire work of education and training must be to burn the racial sense and racial feeling into the instinct and the intellect, the heart and brain of the youth entrusted to it. No boy and no girl must leave school without having been led to an ultimate realization of the necessity and essence of blood purity.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Paxton, 125.

<sup>80</sup> Fritzsche, 80. Through the *Kraft durch Freude* program, the Nazis sought to make typically upper- and middle-class leisure and travel activities available to the German masses.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

<sup>82</sup> Hitler, 427. Original emphasis.

The official 1937 handbook for the Hitler Youth, required reading for the organization's members, included explanations of major biological and anthropological theories that supported the Nazis' own ideal of Aryan racial supremacy.<sup>83</sup> Schoolchildren in Nazi Germany received a thorough indoctrination into the principles of eugenics even through the wording of the arithmetic problems in their textbook.<sup>84</sup> One chilling example required students to calculate the amount of money the state spent on "crippled" and "feeble-minded" students versus "ordinary" students, leaving the implications of such questions unspoken but perfectly obvious.<sup>85</sup> Even from their earliest years, German citizens were conditioned to believe Nazi leaders' racial rhetoric. The scientific language and "evidence" used to present Nazi eugenics beliefs helped to convince many people of the veracity of those ideas, turning ordinary German citizens into what Peter Fritzsche calls "racial warriors" who acted as accomplices in the Nazi Party's struggle against "dangerous racial enemies" within the nation.<sup>86</sup>

Like Schallmayer, the Nazis also believed in the importance of supplementing this educational "nurture" by improving upon nature. The German poet Gottfried Benn explicitly described the new kind of man who would be produced by Nazism as "a new biological type," reflecting many party leaders' belief in the importance of biological science and medicine in re-forging the Reich.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, "for the Nazis, biology was the

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<sup>83</sup> Proctor, 137. In addition, as early as October 1935, the leadership of the Hitler Youth began using the term "biological marriage" as a euphemism for premarital sex between young, "racially valuable" Nazis. *Informationsdienst der Reichsjugendführung vom 28. Oktober 1935*, quoted in Kiryl Sosnowski, *The Tragedy of Children Under Nazi Rule* (New York: Howard Fertig, Inc., 1983), 204.

<sup>84</sup> Nicholas, 84-86.

<sup>85</sup> Lisa Pine, *Hitler's "National Community": Society and Culture in Nazi Germany* (London: Hodder Education for the Hodder Headline Group, 2007), 46-47.

<sup>86</sup> Fritzsche, 85-86.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 110. Hitler stated in *Mein Kampf*, "Anyone who understands National Socialism only as a political movement knows virtually nothing about it. It is even more than religion; it

key to the destiny of the German people.”<sup>88</sup> To produce the desired biological results, the Nazis turned to eugenics. Here, too, they followed in Schallmayer’s footsteps by initiating both negative and positive eugenics programs.

On July 14, 1933, the Nazis passed the *Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*, the Sterilization Law. This law allowed the sterilization of any individual determined by a genetic health court to be suffering from any “genetic illness,” including alcoholism.<sup>89</sup> The sterilization of these “genetic deficient” was meant not only to prevent them from further “degrading” the population of the Fatherland, but also to relieve the state of the economic burden of caring for their potential offspring.<sup>90</sup>

This same kind of economic reasoning pushed Nazi negative eugenics further down the path of radicalization. Very shortly after World War II began, in October 1939, with the British “hunger” blockade and civilian hardship of WWI almost certainly weighing on his mind, Hitler wrote a secret memo commissioning “specified doctors to grant a mercy death [*Gnadentod*] to patients judged incurably sick, by critical medical examination.”<sup>91</sup> Eventually known as the T-4 program, the extermination of these “lives not worth living” (or “lives not worthy of life”) was intended to lighten the Third Reich’s burden of providing for its citizens during wartime by eliminating these unproductive,

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is the will to a new creation of man.” Quoted in Joachim Fest, *Hitler* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1974), 214, my emphasis.

<sup>88</sup> Fritzsche, 83.

<sup>89</sup> Proctor, 96.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 177. Hitler also had at least one, highly-publicized American precedent to look to in contemplating “mercy deaths.” In 1916, Chicago physician Dr. Harry Haiselden advised a young family to allow their newborn, severely deformed baby to die. Remarkably, the controversial case garnered so much national attention that Sheriott Pictures Corporation produced a fifty-minute film starring Dr. Haiselden himself. The film’s tagline was: “Kill defectives, save the nation and see ‘The Black Stork.’” Advertising poster reproduced in *Medicine and Medical Ethics in Nazi Germany: Origins, Practices, Legacies*, ed. Francis R. Nicosia and Jonathan Huener (New York: Berghahn Books for The Center for Holocaust Studies at the University of Vermont, 2002), 24.

“useless mouths.”<sup>92</sup> Needless to say, this shift from sterilization to murder, and the technical procedures that put more than 90,000 people to death by September 1941, comprised a giant step toward the Nazis’ Final Solution.<sup>93</sup>

The Final Solution was perhaps the most radical, and certainly the farthest-reaching and the most effective negative eugenics program of all time. The sterilizations and “mercy killings” that immediately preceded the mass murder of Jews, Gypsies, and other groups designated as unworthy of life, however, were not presented to the German public in specifically racial terms. The establishment of the death camps – in which inmates were executed based on solely racial criteria – thus marked the overt public racialization of the Nazis’ increasingly radical negative eugenics policies.

In contrast, the Nazis’ positive eugenics initiatives, which culminated in Himmler’s *Lebensborn* program were multi-faceted, public, and highly publicized. Numerous policies were enacted in order to produce more “valuable” births for the Aryan race and the Fatherland. These included the awarding of the “Mother Cross” medal and cash prizes to women who produced large broods, marriage loans and child allowances for “biologically valuable” couples, the institutionalization of Mother’s Day as a national holiday, and a “heredity passport” program remarkably similar to the health passport outlined by Schallmayer in 1903.<sup>94</sup> Himmler warned in a speech in early 1939, which was later reprinted in the SS periodical *Das Schwarze Korps*, that “every healthy young German is committing a crime against the people if between twenty-five and thirty-five

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 178. The T-4 program took its name from the medical offices located at *Tiergartenstrasse 4*, the doctors of which were originally charged with implementing the “euthanasia.”

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>94</sup> Proctor, 38; Bloomfield, ed., 81; Weiss, 155; Combs, 141; Clay and Leapman, 55; Nicholas, 57; Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 29; Matthew Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich* (New York: Hodder Arnold and Oxford University Press, 2003), 40-41; *Facsimile Querschnitt durch das Schwarze Korps* [Copied/Reproduced Sections of *Das Schwarze Korps*], ed. Helmut Heiber and Hildegard von Kotze (Munich: Scherz Verlag, 1968), 158-159.

(the best years for childbearing) he does not have four or five children.”<sup>95</sup> In addition, the Nazis enacted increasingly strict anti-abortion legislation. The abortion of “Aryan” fetuses was, in fact, punishable by the death of the woman seeking the abortion and the medical provider in extreme cases after 1943.<sup>96</sup>

Founded on December 12, 1935, *Lebensborn* itself grew out of Himmler’s desire to prevent the abortion of racially and genetically “valuable” babies.<sup>97</sup> Under the guidance of Himmler’s personal physician, Dr. Gregor Ebner, the *Lebensborn* program established a number of maternity homes and child care institutions for “racially fit,” primarily unmarried mothers bearing the child of an SS officer.<sup>98</sup> Entry into the SS was limited by strict physical regulations of height and Nordic appearance – standards which Himmler just barely met – as well as proof of several generations of purely Aryan ancestry.<sup>99</sup> These requirements prescribed a self-consciously elite SS membership in accordance with Ernst Jünger’s visions of “a new race of men” who would be exclusively “Aryan” as well as ideal physical specimens.<sup>100</sup> Hitler, too, believed that the SS would eventually produce the German elite of the future specifically because “only the SS practice[d] racial selection.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Combs, 116. The article quoting from Himmler’s speech appeared on page 3 of the *Schwarze Korps* edition dated March 16, 1939.

<sup>96</sup> Weiss, *Race Hygiene*, 155; Clay and Leapman, 55

<sup>97</sup> Bloomfield, ed., 86; Stephenson, 145. The Nazis’ anti-abortion legislation had little effect, however. According to Gestapo estimates, women in Nazi Germany obtained somewhere between 500,000 and 1,000,000 abortions per year during the late 1930s (Stibbe, 54).

<sup>98</sup> Paul Weindling, *Health, race and German politics between national unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 539.

<sup>99</sup> Clay and Leapman, 30-31; Nicholas, 60-61; Fritzsche, 105-106: “Ordinary members had to provide proof of their Aryan ancestry going back to the year 1800, senior officers back to the year 1750.”

<sup>100</sup> Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 178; Combs, 64. Jünger’s highly popular writings about his experiences in WWI, and his conservative, militant, revolutionary ideals, helped to undermine the Weimar Republic. Though he was never officially a member of the Nazi Party and eventually took great care to distance himself from the Party, Jünger never openly criticized Hitler before WWII.

<sup>101</sup> Trevor-Roper, ed., 106. Quoted from a conversation taking place on the night of November 1-2, 1941.



The sole purpose of the *Lebensborn* homes' existence was to procure "biologically valuable" children for the Reich. More specifically, the homes sought to protect the unborn babies of members of the SS and their "racially fit" sexual partners, be they girlfriends or wives. This rejection of the "bourgeois obstacles" impeding "Aryan" population growth and its wholehearted acceptance of "genetically valuable" children born out of wedlock constituted the most blatantly nontraditional aspects of the *Lebensborn* program.<sup>102</sup> A *Schwarze Korps* photo-story on Germany's first *Lebensborn* home, *Mutterheim Steinhöring*, lambasted religious doctrine and middle-class morality – which, it asserted, "is only a morality of appearance" – for having stigmatized unmarried mothers and their children.<sup>103</sup> "To [them], every mother of good birth [was] sacred...[though] marriage [was] still the most desirable goal since raising and educating children within the family is best."<sup>104</sup> The official SS stance on women was, thus, characteristically conflicted. Though *Das Schwarze Korps* expressed disdain for the superficial upper- and middle-class piety that degraded unmarried mothers, it simultaneously and persistently promoted a traditional vision of femininity centered on motherhood, "the one vital task that a man cannot do."<sup>105</sup>

Within the *Lebensborn* program, women could receive pre-natal care and give birth in the state-run homes, after which they might keep their child or give it up for adoption to an approved German family.<sup>106</sup> As noted previously, the latter option may in fact have been the most amenable to Himmler's goals for *Lebensborn*. Once a child was

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<sup>102</sup> Thompson, 56-59; Nicholas, 59-60.

<sup>103</sup> Combs, 103-104, 165. These assertions appeared on pages 3 and 9 of the *Schwarze Korps* edition dated December 30, 1937, and were accompanied by six photos of the clean, stately accommodations of the *Lebensborn* home in Klosterheide. Reproduced in Heiber and von Kotze, eds., 124.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 333-334.

<sup>106</sup> Clay and Leapman, 135; Pine, 71.

adopted into a German family, he or she would be subject to exactly the same cultural and educational indoctrination, the proper “nurture,” that influenced every other German child in the Third Reich. This same idea applied to the “racially valuable” children taken from the occupied countries, particularly in the Eastern territories.<sup>107</sup> After their faces and bodies were measured according to racial-anthropological theory, young children were classified in terms of their “genetic value” (i.e. what they could offer to the “Aryan” gene pool).<sup>108</sup> The most “racially valuable” were sent to Germany in order to place them with German families in which they would be raised to be productive members of the Fatherland.<sup>109</sup> As the German army swept through Europe, a total of nineteen *Lebensborn* centers were eventually established in eight foreign countries; Norway hosted nine *Lebensborn* offices, a number equal to those within Germany, thus attesting to Nazi leaders’ belief in the immense genetic “value” of the Norwegian people.<sup>110</sup>

The Nazis combined the modernist tendencies inherent in fascism with the principles of Social Darwinism to produce this unprecedented pro-Aryan eugenics initiative. Nazi leaders sought to demolish the supposedly decadent and degraded society they had inherited from the Weimar Republic and to replace it with a strong, new *Volk*. Theories of Social Darwinism and race science, widely accepted in certain international circles, formed the basis for the Nazis’ exaltation of the *völkisch* nation and the Nordic race, from which they pursued ever more radical programs of eugenics to “purify” their *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community). As Nazism reached the apex of its power, its

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<sup>107</sup> Pine, 71.

<sup>108</sup> Clay, 95-96.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 76.

leaders produced the most comprehensive and pro-Aryan eugenics program the world has ever known.

Despite the formidable intellectual, scientific heritage of the *Lebensborn* program, however, the initiative did not attain even a moderate degree of success in Germany, a source of great irritation to Himmler.<sup>111</sup> Rumors of “breeding farms,” as well as the positive official SS stance on unmarried but “racially fit” mothers, troubled many Germans, particularly among the upper and middle classes and the Catholic community.<sup>112</sup> Instead, *Lebensborn* achieved its greatest success in Nazi-occupied Norway, where its operations produced at least 8,000 officially-registered, “racially fit” “Aryan” children. It is to the Nazi officials’ belief in – and desire for – the Norwegian people’s Nordic genetics, and to the *Lebensborn* program’s wartime ministrations in Norway, that we now turn.

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<sup>111</sup> In an undated (probably July 1940) letter to Field Marshal Keitel, Himmler requested greater official and financial assistance from the army for the *Lebensborn* program. Himmler hoped that such support would help to overcome the lingering stigma attached to unmarried mothers, as well as drive down the abortion rate of “still some 600,000 annually in Germany.” Reproduced in Stephenson, 180-181.

<sup>112</sup> Stephenson, 24, 32. A certain Ruth Dellmann of Berlin wrote a letter to Hitler on May 31, 1932, asking for clarification on the Nazi Party’s population policy, which she feared would result in “Germany’s progeny...[being] raised on breeding farms.” Reproduced in *Letters to Hitler*, ed. Victoria Harris, trans. Steven Rendall (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 55-56.

REINVIGORATING THE ARYAN RACE: *LEBENSborn*'S OPERATIONS IN NAZI-OCCUPIED NORWAY

*“...It would be a great task for German women and girls of good blood, also outside matrimony, to become, not out of levity but out of a feeling of responsibility, the deepest and earnest moral conviction, the mothers of children begotten by soldiers...We should never forget that the victory of the sword and the spilled blood of our soldiers would be senseless if it were not followed by the victory of the child and the settling of new territories.”*

--- Heinrich Himmler, SS Order for the Whole SS and Police Forces, October 28, 1939<sup>113</sup>

The Nazi forces invaded Norway on April 9, 1940, continuing their victorious *Blitzkrieg* sweep across continental Europe. In conquering Norway within just a few short weeks, Nazi officials believed they had become masters of a vast reservoir of “pure, Aryan” blood. They quickly made the decision to encourage members of the German armed forces to engage in sexual relationships with Norwegian women, with the aim of rejuvenating the Nordic race through the production of children who would form the vanguard of Germany’s racial future.

In order to pursue this cornerstone of the Third Reich’s self-prophesied Aryan destiny, Nazi leaders speedily established several branch offices of the *Lebensborn* organization within Norway. Due to the unique nature of the German occupation of Norway, *Lebensborn* operated there in a different manner and attained a distinctly higher rate of success than it did in Germany. Chief among the special qualities dictating the structure and operation of the *Lebensborn* program in Norway were: first and foremost, Nazi officials’ fervent belief in the strength and purity of Norwegians’ Nordic blood;

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<sup>113</sup> Reproduced in Sosnowski, 279 (Annex 1: English Translations of Original Texts).

second, the large number of Germans stationed in Norway during the occupation, often for long periods of time and in very close quarters with Norwegian civilians; and third, many Norwegians' animosity toward "horizontal collaborators," which often drove young women pregnant by members of the occupying forces to rely on the medical and material assistance of the German authorities.

Out of these considerable advantages for the Nazi regime grew an extensive bureaucratic apparatus that attempted to monitor and direct the lives of tens of thousands of individuals, both Norwegian and German. Throughout the war, the *Lebensborn* program in Norway struggled to obtain admissions of paternity from German soldiers, provide pre- and post-natal care to pregnant Norwegian women, arrange for the adoption of unwanted German-Norwegian children, and resolve all the logistical issues arising as corollaries to such initiatives. In this, the Nazi authorities directing *Lebensborn's* operations in Norway were hamstrung by the realities of the Second World War, particularly the military transfers and combat deaths of German soldier fathers, and eventually the Allied forces' liberation of Europe beginning in 1944.

The first question that must be addressed concerns the scale of *Lebensborn's* operations in Norway. Because Norway was the only country in which the *Lebensborn* program ever gained a strong foothold and operated as Himmler had intended, Norwegian-German children outnumbered the mixed-nationality children born in other Nazi-occupied countries by the thousands.<sup>114</sup> The most commonly accepted figures for

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<sup>114</sup> Ove Johnsen, "Lebensborn i Norge" ["*Lebensborn* in Norway"] in *Norge under Okkupasjonen* [Norway under the Occupation] (January 1996): 5, appendix I; Eva Simonsen, "Into the Open - or Hidden Away? The Construction of War Children as a Social Category in post-war Norway and Germany" in *NordeuropaForum* (February 2006): 28; Olsen, "Under the Care of Lebensborn," 24; Clarissa Henry and Marc Hillel, *Children of the SS*, trans. Eric Mossbacher (London: Hutchinson & Co. Publishers, Ltd., 1976), 125. Norway, in fact, recorded a 58.8% higher rate in the birthrate during the occupation years. Cited in Sosnowski, 124.

Norway are as follows: 8,000 officially registered *Lebensborn* children, and 2,000-4,000 additional non-*Lebensborn* German-Norwegian “war children” (*krigsbarna*).<sup>115</sup>

Historians and sociologists have extrapolated from the conservative estimate of 10,000 total German-Norwegian war children that somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000 Norwegian women engaged in sexual relations with at least one member of the German occupying forces.<sup>116</sup>

It is also important to establish at the outset of this chapter the romantic and completely voluntary nature of these Norwegian women’s relationships with their German soldier partners. Contrary to sensationalized popular belief, the *Lebensborn* program was not a match-making service or a network of Aryan breeding centers; by all accounts, the vast majority of Norwegian women who entered *Lebensborn* homes to deliver their children and receive care became pregnant through genuine relationships with Germans.<sup>117</sup> Because the German force of 350,000 soldiers occupied Norway for nearly four whole years in unusually close proximity and contact with the civilian population (they were frequently billeted with local families, particularly in northern Norway), romantic relations between German soldiers and Norwegian women occurred

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<sup>115</sup> Simonsen, “Into the Open - or Hidden Away?,” 27; Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 70. For a detailed description of the thought process leading to the estimation of 2,000-4,000 non-*Lebensborn* war children, see Olsen’s *Krigens Barn*, 68-72. This chapter relies heavily on the information presented in Olsen’s *Krigens Barn*; it is, by far, the most thorough study of the *Lebensborn* program in Norway to date.

<sup>116</sup> Olsen “Under the Care of Lebensborn,” 24; Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 13.

<sup>117</sup> Clay and Leapman, 72, 140-141; Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 141; Paul Weindling, *Health, race and German politics*, 539. Indeed, the only personal account describing *Lebensborn* as a sort of “breeding center for Aryans” comes to us from junior SS officer Peter Neumann. In a short, fifteen-page segment of his memoirs, he claims that a regimental doctor apprised him of his own racial value during a medical examination. On the basis of his genetic fitness, according to Neumann, he was assigned to do his duty for the Fatherland in *Lebensborn* before serving at the front. Once at the *Lebensborn* home, he met a girl named Liselotte and supposedly agreed to try to “give a child to the Führer” with her. They received an instant marriage license from the SS authorities at the home, Neumann claims, and immediately consummated their hours-old relationship. Several months later, Neumann received a letter from Liselotte at the front informing him of his child’s birth. Peter Neumann, *Other Men’s Graves*, trans. Constantine Fitz Gibbon (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, The Shenvall Press, Ltd., 1958), 74-85, 156-157. No other corroborating accounts of such a process have yet been found by historians.

quite frequently.<sup>118</sup> In their personal accounts, the German-Norwegian *Lebensborn* children themselves often stress how “dazzled” their young, naive mothers were by the victorious, respectful, and worldly German men quartered in their towns.<sup>119</sup> Many Norwegian girls also happily accepted the pleasure of being treated to dinners at the finest restaurants, movies, and concerts in public parks and gardens, by their German boyfriends.<sup>120</sup> Thus, they embarked on their relationships with German soldiers out of genuine affection, and usually only turned to *Lebensborn* out of the desperation and abandonment that often followed their pregnancies, after which they frequently found themselves cast out of their parents’ homes and local communities.

Instead of arising from historical fact, then, the “breeding farm” myths that have gained such traction in the popular understanding of the *Lebensborn* program seem to stem primarily from Nazi leaders’ long-term hopes for the organization. Himmler, in particular, expressed his desire on several occasions to eventually make participation in *Lebensborn* compulsory for all “racially fit” women in the Reich, whether or not they were married:

According to the existing middle-class code an unmarried woman has no right to long for a child. She has to wait respectably until the man comes along who’ll grant her desire. If he fails to appear, she must simply accept her fate...I realized this and I’ve given such women the opportunity to have the child they want. The woman receives assistance, has the happy experience of being a mother and for the first time plays her full part in the life of the nation. For you can imagine that we only employ valuable and racially pure men as ‘Conception-assistants’...you’ll see what we shall make of the scheme once the war is over. Our propaganda will be subtle and unobtrusive, but highly

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<sup>118</sup> Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 230; Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 173; “Report of the Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Committee” in *En Hvitbok: Utvalgte Offentlige Dokumenter om Krigsbarnsaken* [A White Book: A Selection of Official Documents about the War Children Case] (Det Norsk Nasjonalbiblioteket, Norges Krigsbarnforbund (NKBF), 1999), 62.

<sup>119</sup> Per Arne Löhr Meek’s *Lebensborn 6210* (Kristiansund: Ibs. Forlag, 2004) contains an excellent example of this phenomenon, as does Werner Thiermann’s interview in Clay and Leapman, 141-142.

<sup>120</sup> Henry and Hillel, 123; Clay and Leapman, 135.

effective: it will become a point of honor with every woman, and her duty to the Reich, if she's still childless at the age of thirty, to have children in this way. That will be the Lebensborn's finest hour!<sup>121</sup>

Even further, still struggling to break free from the “superficial bourgeois morality” he so despised, Himmler harbored hopes of introducing the option of bigamy or polygamy for “racially fit” men in Germany after the war.<sup>122</sup> In these plans, Himmler evidently enjoyed the support of both Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg and the Führer.<sup>123</sup> Of course, such plans never came to fruition. Even had Germany not been defeated, it is unlikely that these plans for “conception-assistants” and bigamy would have attained much success, especially in Germany where resolutely lingering “middle-class morality” ensured widespread public disdain of the comparatively mild German *Lebensborn* program already in existence before and during the war.<sup>124</sup>

In sum, there is little to no factual basis for the current popular conception of *Lebensborn* as a system of sterile, unromantic “Aryan breeding farms.” Rather, as in Germany, the *Lebensborn* program in Norway offered medical and monetary assistance to the predominantly single women already pregnant by romantic relationships with German soldiers. Through its network of offices and homes, *Lebensborn* helped “racially valuable” expectant Norwegian mothers to escape their hostile home communities, provided them and their children with medical care and financial support, arranged for

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<sup>121</sup> Felix Kersten, *The Kersten Memoirs: 1940-1945*, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon and James Oliver (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), 81. Felix Kersten was Himmler's personal masseur and physician. Kersten records this conversation with Himmler in his diary entry for May 9, 1943.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-177. Kersten records this in his diary entry for May 4, 1943.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*; Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 113; Nicholas, 67. In a January 1944 document dictated to Martin Bormann, Hitler “declar[ed] that ‘by special application a man should be able to enter a marriage relationship not only with one woman but also with a second, the second woman as well as her children taking his name.’” Quoted in Nicholas, 67.

<sup>124</sup> The public outcry raised over rumors of “unbridled behavior” (Koonz, 399) and “SS effort[s] to recruit young women to have illegitimate babies” (Combs, 159) was so severe that Himmler felt the need to personally defend *Lebensborn* in *Das Schwarze Korps* (on page 5 of the issue dated June 8, 1944).



the mother's and/or the child's passage to Germany in some cases, and cared for the children whose mothers had consigned them to *Lebensborn* for adoption.

As we have seen, Nazi officials like Himmler proved extremely eager to capitalize on German-Norwegian sexual relationships, which they perceived as offering an unparalleled chance to re-“Nordicize” the Reich. Already in May 1940, a bare month after the invasion of Norway, *Reichsgesundheitsführer* (Reich Health Leader) physician Leonardo Conti and *Lebensborn* administrative head Max Sollman met to discuss the possibility of ensuring that the “Aryan” children inevitably born of German-Norwegian liaisons would receive a properly German (read: Nazi) upbringing.<sup>125</sup> Conti hoped that Sollman's organization might be able to establish a birthing home in Oslo or Bergen, two of Norway's largest and supposedly most “racially pure” cities, and arrange for the children possibly to be adopted by German families. The children and their mothers should receive instruction in the German language, and have the opportunity to work and live in a “German environment.”<sup>126</sup> Above all, Conti stressed, the “racial value” of the Norwegian people needed to be taken into account as the Nazi regime strengthened its already nearly complete conquest of Norway.<sup>127</sup>

Before and during the war, Nazi officials loudly proclaimed their interest in Norway's history and their feelings of racial brotherhood with the Norwegian populace.<sup>128</sup> A story in *Das Schwarze Korps* (the official SS journal) about the archaeological recovery of a Viking ship, dated March 27, 1935, asserted that Norway

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<sup>125</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 17.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. “De måtte få opplæring i det tyske språk og få arbeid og bolig i et tysk miljø. Det burde også etableres spesielle fødehjem for dem i Oslo eller Bergen, og en måtte forberede mulighetene for å kunne adoptere bort barn til tyske familier.”

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. “Den nordiske rase som ble så høyt verdsatt av det tyske naziregimet, skulle ha sitt arnested i de skandinaviske land, og en måtte ta hensyn til dette nå når en var i ferd med å vinne kontroll med Norge.”

<sup>128</sup> Clay and Leapman, 131, 132-133; Nicholas, 195, 263, 273-275.

was “the homeland of the Germanic people.”<sup>129</sup> Racial theorist Hans F. K. Günther based his description of the ideal “Nordic man” on the observations he made during the several years he lived in Norway with his Norwegian wife.<sup>130</sup> Hitler, in his rambling dinner conversations, referred time and again to his belief in the “value” of Scandinavian blood and expressed his particular joy that the SS (*Lebensborn*) was “installed in Norway,” where it could act as “a nursery of rulers.”<sup>131</sup> Himmler adamantly asserted that Norwegians were “of the same Germanic blood” as the Nazis – an opinion reinforced by the survey conducted in Norway in spring 1941 by SS “race experts” – and that the “Nordic racial element” in the German people could be strengthened by sexual relationships between German men and Norwegian women.<sup>132</sup>

As a result, Nazi troops were ordered to conduct themselves in a respectful, decorous manner during the invasion and occupation of Norway. In the words of SS *Gruppenführer* Wilhelm Rediess, Himmler’s representative in Norway, “it [was] definitely desirable that German soldiers should have as many children as possible by Norwegian women, legitimately or illegitimately.” In short, “victory by the sword” must be consolidated by “victory by the cradle.”<sup>133</sup> Rediess naively hoped that the “friendly relations” between German soldiers and the female Norwegian population might one day

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<sup>129</sup> Combs, , 74.

<sup>130</sup> Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 50. According to Günther, this “Nordic man” was “characterized by tall height, has a slender face, a high forehead, a narrow nose with a high bridge, a strong chin, thick blond hair, deep-set light-colored eyes, and a reddish-white complexion.”

<sup>131</sup> Trevor-Roper, ed., 25, 171, 229.

<sup>132</sup> Terje Emberland and Matthew Kott, *Himmlers Norge: Nordmenn i det Storgermansk Prosjekt* [Himmler’s Norway: Norwegians in the Greater German Project] (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co., 2012), 14, 56, 77-79, 189-190. Walther Darré had suggested the racial utility of sexual unions between Germans and Norwegians to Himmler as early as 1936. *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>133</sup> Excerpted from Wilhelm Rediess’ booklet *The SS for Greater Germany – with Sword and Cradle*, only twenty copies of which were ever published. Quoted in Henry and Hillel, 116, 121; also quoted in Clay and Leapman, 131.

produce “20 or 30 divisions” of future warriors for the Reich.<sup>134</sup> To his mind – and Himmler and *Lebensborn* head physician Gregor Ebner agreed – the potentially large numbers of illegitimate German-Norwegian children offered an unprecedented opportunity to reinvigorate Germany’s Aryan racial stock.

In order to safeguard these babies born out of wedlock for the Fatherland, however, it would be necessary to establish uncontested German control over the offspring of the mixed-nationality sexual unions between German men and Norwegian women. This goal gained even greater impetus when the success of the Nazis’ procreation campaign in Norway became apparent. Within three months of the Nazi invasion of Norway, in July 1940, the German *Wehrmacht* received its first request for assistance from a Norwegian woman pregnant by a German soldier.<sup>135</sup> On December 5, 1940, Rediess wrote a letter to Himmler predicting an imminent German-Norwegian baby boom. In it, Rediess estimated a figure of 800 pregnancies resulting from the first half-year of the occupation, extrapolating from the growing number of individual cases being brought to the German authorities by Norwegian women and from the birth statistics being reported in Denmark.<sup>136</sup>

Rediess also expressed his concerns that the growing number of illegitimate children be brought solely under German authority in this letter, and explicitly suggested that the *Lebensborn* program would be able to prevent these children from being lost to

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<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Nicholas, 274-275.

<sup>135</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 20.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 23; Henry and Hillel, 118-119; Clay and Leapman, 133. “Allerede nå, etter drøyt et halvt års okkupasjon, var det en god del norske gravide kvinner som hadde kontaktet Reichskommissariat og bedt om bistand. Rediess var også blitt kjent med en rapport fra Danmark som tydet på at omfanget av saker med barn som ble født med tyske fedre, virkelig kunne få store dimensjoner...I løpet av bare et halvt år skulde det der være meldt om hele 800 svangerskap.” Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 23.

Germany through the Norwegian upbringing to which their mothers' citizenship entitled them:

...it should be noted that only a small proportion of the unmarried [German] fathers conclude from the fact of their paternity that they should marry the child's mother and thus bring both mother and child into the sphere of influence of the German Reich. Thus, if we take no steps to care for the greater proportion of these Norwegian mothers...these children will be lost to any influence by us, as their illegitimate birth by a Norwegian mother gives them Norwegian citizenship...To add to the stock of racially valuable blood in our racial community I suggest the establishment of (1) German-controlled maternity homes (*Lebensborns*) and (2) homes in which mothers and children can be looked after.<sup>137</sup>

With visions of hundreds of thousands of German-Norwegian children weighing on his mind (a far cry from the 8,000 *Lebensborn* children born during the war), Rediess impressed upon Himmler the urgency of establishing an administrative and practical apparatus capable of "capturing" these birth cases as they arose.<sup>138</sup> Unsurprisingly, Himmler proved extremely receptive to Rediess' ideas. He arranged to meet with Rediess, Max Sollman (administrative head of *Lebensborn*), Josef Terboven (*Reichskommissar* of Norway), Dr. Gustav Richert (chief advising physician of Terboven's *Reichskommissariat*), and Dr. Jürgen Reinecke (lead physician for the SS- and police-courts of Norway), during his first visit to Norway in early February 1941.<sup>139</sup> At this meeting, Himmler made the official decision – on the advice of these highly supportive Nazi authorities – to establish a branch of *Lebensborn* in Norway.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Quoted in Henry and Hillel, 118-119.

<sup>138</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 23.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28; Emberland and Kott, 191.

<sup>140</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 27-28. The Norwegian division was, in fact, the first *Lebensborn* institution established outside of Germany. "På møtet ble det konkludert med at Lebensborn e.V. skulle etablere seg i Norge, noe som var Lebensborns første etablering utenfor Tyskland."

Unlike in Germany, where *Lebensborn* operated to support exclusively the women pregnant by SS men, the Norwegian *Lebensborn* branch (also called *Abteilung Lebensborn*, or the *Lebensborn* Division) would provide assistance to “racially fit” women pregnant by *any* German soldier. Because the officials present at the February 1941 meeting (correctly) believed that ordinary *Wehrmacht* soldiers would father the majority of *krigsbarna* (“war children”), Himmler and the others elected to place the Norwegian *Lebensborn* Division under the authority of the *Reichskommissariat* (Terboven), rather than under Rediess and the SS.<sup>141</sup> Despite this, Terboven could clearly rely on SS support – particularly in the forms of funding and staff – for the various *Lebensborn* offices and homes eventually established throughout Norway.<sup>142</sup> In addition, Himmler assigned Dr. Reinecke of the SS the task of procuring for *Lebensborn* the legal right to guardianship of the growing illegitimate “German garrison within the Norwegian people.”<sup>143</sup> At this relatively early stage, the Nazi authorities decided to open *Lebensborn* counseling centers for expectant mothers in Oslo, Lillehammer, Kristiansand, Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim, and Narvik, with a maternity clinic designed by Max Sollman to follow at an undetermined location.<sup>144</sup>

To their credit, the Norwegian regional governors and Social Department officials proved highly reticent to turn over control of these legally Norwegian children to the

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid. “Etter Terbovens ønske skulle Lebensborn i Norge sortere under Reichskommissariat. Han begrunnet dette bl.a. med at de fleste barnefedrene ville være vanlige soldater og ikke høre til SS og politiet.”

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 23, 65-66. “Himmler tok imidlertid ansvar for etableringen av organisasjonen med personell fra SS.” Thus, despite its official designation as a department of the *Reichskommissariat*, the Norwegian *Lebensborn* Division remained a *de facto* SS organization.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 29; Emberland and Kott, 191. “Himmler ga Dr. Reinecke ansvaret...for å sikre rettslig overføring av formynderskapet til barna til Lebensborn.” Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 29.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 28. Five of these seven cities are located in southern Norway. As we will see, the *Lebensborn* officials consciously constructed this geographical concentration with specific racial and administrative reasons in mind.

Nazi regime. Despite the concerted efforts of Terboven's office, led by legal expert Rudolf Schiedermaier, it was not before March 1943 that *Lebensborn* obtained absolute control over all cases of German-Norwegian children.<sup>145</sup> Even then, Nazi officials only achieved this consolidation of authority with the legislative assistance of Vidkun Quisling's collaborationist *Nasjonal Samling* (NS) government.<sup>146</sup> By leading the struggle to force a supplement to the Norwegian Children's Law of 1915 through the Norwegian Social Ministries, Schiedermaier succeeded in having the children of German-Norwegian unions declared automatic German citizens, available for adoption in the Reich.<sup>147</sup> Further, the Norwegian courts lost all jurisdiction over the lives of these now officially German children, and no Norwegian could adopt such a child without the express permission of *Lebensborn* officials.<sup>148</sup> Each of these legal maneuvers, however, only served to make official what had been in practice since the autumn of 1941 at the latest: the German authorities' total control over the Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers and their children.

Immediately after the decisive meeting with Himmler in February 1941, the Nazi authorities in Norway sprang into action to establish *Lebensborn* in the conquered country as quickly as possible. SS Major Wilhelm Tietgen, specially summoned from the Munich *Lebensborn* office, arrived in Norway in March 1941 as the first director of the Norwegian division of *Lebensborn*, and quickly set about organizing the program's operations throughout Norway.<sup>149</sup> He achieved rapid and lasting success; by spring 1942

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 52-53. "Fra nå av tok tyske myndigheter direkte kontakt også med lokale norske myndigheter for å få oversendt krigsbarnsaker."

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 55; Nicholas, 275.

<sup>147</sup> Nicholas, 275; Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 46, 55.

<sup>148</sup> Henry and Hillel, 120; Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 51-53.

<sup>149</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 56, 65. "I midten av mars 1941 ankom SS-Sturmbannführer Wilhelm Tietgen Oslo for å etablere Lebensborn...I løpet av denne tiden [March through autumn 1942] ble *Abteilung*

Tietgen had not only established *Lebensborn*'s Norwegian headquarters in Oslo, but also divided the organization's bureaucracy into seven distinct departments and opened eight additional *Lebensborn* offices in localities throughout Norway.<sup>150</sup> Such an organization required a great deal of money and manpower. With the constantly growing number of Norwegian women seeking *Lebensborn*'s aid, Tietgen eventually employed 223 people (91 Germans and 132 Norwegians) by April 1943, while his successor Ernst Ragaller employed close to 300 people by the end of the war.<sup>151</sup> In addition, Tietgen budgeted 4.1 million Norwegian *kroner* (\$9.4 million) for *Lebensborn*'s first year of operation in Norway.<sup>152</sup> *Lebensborn*'s operations accelerated over the course of the war to such an extent that Ragaller's projected budget for 1945 totaled some 11 million *kroner* (\$25.4 million).<sup>153</sup>

The complex network of local offices and homes established by Tietgen, all coordinated through the Oslo headquarters, produced Norway's first official *Lebensborn*

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*Lebensborn* utviklet fra en ide til en landsdekkende etat med ansvar for det stadig økende antall krigsbarnsaker." Tietgen would later be replaced as the director of *Lebensborn* in Norway by Ernst Ragaller in 1944.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 57-58. *Lebensborn*'s bureaucracy in Norway consisted of the following departments: care (of the mothers), guardianship, establishment and operation of homes, children, finances, legal and theoretical organization, and central bureaucracy (archive, statistics, etc.) Tietgen established local *Lebensborn* offices in: Oslo, Lillehammer, Kristiansand, Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim, Narvik, Tromsø, and Kirkenes.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 57. "I april 1943 sysselsatte *Abteilung Lebensborn* f.eks. tilsammen 223 personer ved hovedkontoret, utekontoret, og hjemmene. Av disse var 91 tyske og 132 norske...ved krigens slut hadde minst 300 tilsatte for å drive sine omfattende virksomheter i Norge." The maternity home at Hurdal Verk, for example, employed 23 people: 1 director, 1 manager, 1 head nurse, 1 midwife, 1 secretary, 1 office clerk, 1 German language tutor, 2 Norwegian nurses, 1 head chef, 1 sous chef, 2 kitchen helpers, 1 milkmaid, 4 housemaids, 2 laundresses, 1 custodian, 1 person to tend the fires, and 1 gardner. Of these, at least 7 had to be German. (Ibid., 95)

<sup>152</sup> These *kroner* and dollar amounts refer to their wartime values, and have not been calculated to reflect the post-war inflation of these currencies.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 59. "I sitt første budsjettforslag for regnskapsåret 1941 opertete Tietgen med et budsjettforslag på 4,1 millioner kroner, og kostnadene økte stadig utover krisårene. Det siste krigsåret var *Abteilung Lebensborns* budsjett på om lag 11 millioner kroner."

child on August 24, 1941.<sup>154</sup> The baby girl was born only ten days after the arrival of the first group of Norwegian women at the first *Lebensborn* maternity home outside of Germany: Hurdal Verk, approximately 40 miles north of Oslo.<sup>155</sup> Occurring just over six months after Himmler's February 1941 meeting, the baby's birth testified to the immense energy and motivation with which Tietgen and other authorities rushed to install *Lebensborn* in Norway. The urgency they felt to establish these local counseling offices and maternity homes had a firm basis in reality; within a week of the first *Lebensborn* birth, four additional German-Norwegian children were delivered at Hurdal Verk.<sup>156</sup> Rediess' estimate of hundreds of thousands of children for the Fatherland seemed a distinct possibility at this stage. Sixteen months after the invasion of Norway, the romantic relationships between German soldiers and Norwegian women had had time to develop and were now beginning to produce the Aryan fruits so long-awaited by the likes of Hitler and Himmler.

In light of the daily increasing number of Norwegian women expecting a child by German soldiers, Tietgen and his fellow authorities recognized the necessity both for a physical *Lebensborn* presence throughout Norway and for many different kinds of homes.<sup>157</sup> Based on the knowledge gained by the *Lebensborn* program in Germany since 1935, the officials anticipated the need for homes where expectant Norwegian mothers could stay both before and after giving birth. Ideally these homes would be located some

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 125. Tietgen immediately wrote a proud letter to Max Sollman in Munich to apprise him of this major step forward.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. "14.8.1941 ble de første vordrene mødrene opptatt med hjemmet Hurdals-Verk. Denne dagen er å anse som hjemmets åpningsdag. Vi forventer den første fødselen allerede i løpet av denne uka." Hurdal Verk was – as we shall see – one of the only *Lebensborn* homes in Norway built from the ground up by the German authorities. More often, they simply appropriated extant accommodations.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. "Inntil i dag er det født ytterligere 4 jenter og 1 gutt ved hjemmet."

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 81. "En måtte ha ulike typer hjem og i ulike deler av landet om en skulle dekke de behov som oppsto ved at stadig flere norske kvinner ble gravide med tyske menn."



distance (usually 30-60 miles) outside of a large city, far from the prying eyes of disapproving Norwegians yet still within easy transport in case of a medical emergency requiring a hospital.<sup>158</sup> Additionally, smaller homes within larger cities would provide lodgings for Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers en route to the outlying maternity homes, and a number of homes for German-Norwegian children would take care of the infants whose mothers could not – or would not – keep them.<sup>159</sup>

Even before Tietgen's arrival in Norway, *Lebensborn* officials began surveying existing buildings throughout the country in search of appropriate accommodations for the various homes.<sup>160</sup> In order to acquire the necessary medical facilities for the maternity clinics – in which the *Lebensborn* mothers were not expected to spend a great deal of time – German authorities began searching for institutions among Norwegian asylums for the “blind, insane, alcoholic, and crippled,” as well as orphanages.<sup>161</sup> For the purposes of the *Lebensborn* homes in which mothers and children would live for long periods of time, however, the officials commandeered several of Norway's most comfortable and well-appointed hotels.<sup>162</sup> These establishments already possessed the correct numbers and types of private bed- and bathrooms, kitchen facilities, large

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.; Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 53. “Diese Heime sollten recht weit von einer größeren Stadt entfernt liegen, aber gute Verkehrsanbindung haben.”

<sup>159</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 81; Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 53. In Germany, *Lebensborn* officials had found, so many children were unwanted that the infants quickly overcrowded the maternity homes, making it difficult to admit new expectant mothers. The establishment of separate homes for children, they thought, would solve this problem. “Dort blieben so viele Kinder, die nicht bei ihren Mütter leben konnten, dass die Aufnahme neuer Schwangerer schwierig wurde.” Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 53.

<sup>160</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 81-82.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 83; 101-107. “Høsten 1941 sørget en også for å få innsamlet opplysninger om blindeanstalter, sinnssykeasyl, alkoholistanstalter og vanføre hjem rundt om i landet for å vurdere om noen av disse kunne egne seg som *Lebensborn*-hjem.”

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 82, 86-91.

communal areas, and pleasant outdoor grounds for *Lebensborn* employees and participants to enjoy.<sup>163</sup>

To provide the best possible surroundings for their champions of the “Nordic race,” German officials spared no expense; the total sum paid in compensation to the Norwegian owners of these establishments over the course of the war came to 1.9 million *kroner* (\$4.5 million).<sup>164</sup> In addition to the nine regional offices Tietgen established throughout Norway in spring 1941, *Lebensborn* authorities eventually opened a total of 12 residential homes for the mothers and children involved in the program. These included 2 maternity clinics, 2 homes for expectant mothers, 4 “city homes” for mothers en route to other larger maternity homes, 3 homes for children, and 1 school intended to help Germanize those Norwegian mothers who hoped to marry their child’s father. By the end of the war, these twelve institutions had the combined capacity to care for 491 children and 325 mothers at any given time.<sup>165</sup>

Norwegian mothers generally followed a similar path through the extensive national network of *Lebensborn*. After discovering her pregnancy by a German soldier and – quite often – being turned out of her parents’ home, the average Norwegian *Lebensborn* mother contacted the nearest local *Lebensborn* office for support. These local authorities would then arrange for her to travel to southern Norway to one of the residential *Lebensborn* homes where she could be racially and politically evaluated and, if found “valuable,” receive the ante-natal care befitting a mother of the Reich. Close to her due date, the Norwegian *Lebensborn* mother would be transferred to one of the

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 82, 126. The *Lebensborn* officials were determined that these long-term homes would in fact be “homes” and not “institutions.”

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 100-101. “Til sammen betalte tyske og norske myndigheter om lag 1.885.000 kroner som kompensasjon til de norske eierne for bruken av disse eiendommene til *Lebensborn*-hjem.”

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 98-99. For further reference, see Olsen’s chart reproduced in the appendix of this study.

organization's maternity clinics to deliver her child, perhaps stopping to rest in a *Lebensborn* "city home" for a night or two on her way to the clinic. After delivering her child, she would be given the option of caring for the baby herself or entrusting its guardianship to *Lebensborn*. Depending on the mother's decision, *Lebensborn* would then take care of the child until suitable adoptive parents in Norway or – preferably – in Germany could be found.<sup>166</sup> Alternately, the organization would provide the mother who elected to keep her child with a generous living stipend and even permanent lodgings when they were available.<sup>167</sup>

Indeed, the German authorities extended every possible benefit to Norwegian mothers throughout their experience in the *Lebensborn* program. Once they became pregnant and turned themselves over to *Lebensborn*'s ministrations, these "Aryan" mothers and their future children found themselves the subjects of Himmler's personal interest. Just as he did in the case of Germany's *Lebensborn e.V.*, Himmler emphasized not only the harmful effects of smoking during pregnancy, but also the importance of a healthy diet.<sup>168</sup> In order to give these Germanic children the best possible start in life, Himmler ensured that the homes "received priority treatment during the war"; *Lebensborn* often had access to such strictly rationed items as cheese, bread, whole milk,

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 204. "Den konkluderte med at barnas statsborgerlige forhold ikke var av betydning for om adopsjonen skulle være gyldig etter tysk rett. Det vesentlige var at adoptivforeldrene var tyske." Within Norway, *Lebensborn* successfully placed 100 German-Norwegian children with adoptive parents during the war, and had begun work on a further 370 adoption cases at the war's end. (Ibid., 205) Including the *Lebensborn* children sent to Germany, the Norwegian *Lebensborn* program had initiated work on at least 600-700 adoption cases by May 1945. Ibid., 211.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 116-117, 126. Olsen uses as his exemplar a nineteen-year-old girl from northern Norway who became pregnant by a German soldier in the summer of 1943. Her parents' furious reaction, her journey through several *Lebensborn* offices and homes across the country, and her decision to keep her child are all highly typical of Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers. Less usual, however, was this mother's success in obtaining permanent post-birth residence through *Lebensborn* at the relatively late date of May 1944, after most of these homes had filled up. (They were immensely popular among the socially outcast *Lebensborn* mothers.)

<sup>168</sup> Stibbe, 41, 101-102.

and fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>169</sup> In one case alone, the *Lebensborn* children's home at Stalheim received a remarkable 52 liters of whole milk daily in the autumn of 1943.<sup>170</sup> This concern for Norwegian "Aryans" stands in stark contrast to the near total neglect shown to the Nazi-designated "racially valuable" children taken from Eastern Europe. Despite their racial classification, if these children did not have the good fortune to be placed in an official *Lebensborn* home, they would often be shunted into a "nursing home for foreign children" where they received starvation diet rations.<sup>171</sup>

Beyond nutritional privileges, the Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers received extensive economic support from the German authorities. Naturally, *Lebensborn* assumed all the costs associated with the mothers' and children's medical care, clothing, and travel costs to and from *Lebensborn* homes.<sup>172</sup> In addition, the Norwegian mothers who decided to raise their children themselves received a living stipend of 40-45 *kroner* (\$95-105) per month, and an extra 100 *kroner* (\$235) to help them purchase baby clothes, a stroller, and books and toys.<sup>173</sup> Breastfeeding mothers were entitled to an additional 30 *kroner* (\$70) per month, and women staying in *Lebensborn*'s maternity homes received

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<sup>169</sup> Pine, 71; Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 145; Nicholas, 62. With respect to the German *Lebensborn e.V.*, Nicholas notes that several mothers complained about the constant presence of potatoes, sunflower seeds, and oatmeal on the homes' daily menus. Supposedly Himmler "ordered oatmeal to be served every day at breakfast, having heard that it was good for the nerves."

<sup>170</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 143. The orphanage at Godthåb received an equally astonishing 28,900 kilos (63,500 pounds) of potatoes in the ten months between October 1942 and August 1943.

<sup>171</sup> Stibbe, 101-102.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 109, 111, 146. "Dessuten skulle de få dekket kostnadene ved fødselen og eventuelle sykehusopphold for barnet...Driften av Lebensborn-hjemmene medførte også omfattende behov for en rekke typer utstyr."

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. "...gikk Tietgen inn for at de norske mødrene skulle motta underholdsstøtte på 45 kroner pr. måned i byen og 40 kroner på landet... Videre tenkte han seg at mødrene fikk bidrag til anskaffelse av barnetøy, barnevogn og tapt lønn... Dersom moren tok barnet til seg, fikk hun 100 kroner i støtte til å anskaffe spebarnsutstyr."

an extra allowance of 20 *kroner* (\$47) per month.<sup>174</sup> Recognizing the impracticality of expecting the German fathers, nearly all of whom were serving in the *Wehrmacht*, to financially support their Norwegian girlfriends and children, *Lebensborn* officials agreed to take on the financial burden for the duration of the war. After the final Nazi victory had been achieved, they assumed, there would be time to track down the individual *Lebensborn* fathers and exact child support payments from them.<sup>175</sup>

In his groundbreaking, in-depth monograph, *Krigens Barn: De Norske Krigsbarna og Deres Mødre*, Norwegian historian Kåre Olsen recounts the story of a young Norwegian mother (“Marie”) who received the remarkable sum of 3600 *kroner* (\$8500) from *Lebensborn* over the course of the war.<sup>176</sup> Having contacted *Lebensborn* as early as the summer of 1941 and receiving economic support from the organization for nearly four years, “Marie” received far more than the average Norwegian *Lebensborn* mother.<sup>177</sup> Nevertheless, *Lebensborn*’s material support of these “racially valuable” mothers and children was so extensive that the program paid somewhere between 10 and 15 million *kroner* (\$23.5-\$35.5 million) toward their daily living expenses during the war.<sup>178</sup>

Naturally, the German authorities required Norwegian women applying to *Lebensborn* to provide extensive proof of their racial and political “value” before they or their future children could begin receiving any of the substantial benefits the program had

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 111. “Men moren oppholdt seg på barselhjem kunne hun få opp til 20 *kroner* pr. måned i lommepenger. Mødre som ammet sine barn mens de var på barselhjem fikk 30 *kroner* pr. måned i amme penger.”

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 110. “Tyske myndigheter ved Abteilung *Lebensborn* overtok de økonomiske forpliktelsene som normalt ville ha falt på barnefaren. Hensikten var at tyske soldater skulle slippe å bli belastet med slike bekymringer så lenge de var i tjeneste for det militære... For at ikke den enkelte tyske soldat skulle belastes med krav om barnebidrag etc., tok tyske myndigheter ansvar for mor og barn så lenge krigen varte.”

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 112-114. “Totalt beløp Abteilung *Lebensborns* økonomiske bistand til Marie og barnet seg i løpet av krigen til drøyt 3.600 *kroner*.”

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 115. “Samlet sett er det grunn til å anta at Abteilung *Lebensborn* betalte ut anslagsvis 10-15 millioner *kroner* i bidrag og andre tilskudd til mødre og barn i løpet av krigen.”

to offer. Himmler possessed a deep faith in the potential of the blood of “blond, blue-eyed types” to provide “a spring of youth and renewal both for the German people and the Germanic race as a whole.”<sup>179</sup> And, as we have seen, many high-ranking Nazi officials in addition to Himmler believed that the Norwegian people represented a veritable reservoir of Nordic genes. *Lebensborn* employees staffing the various offices and homes in Norway, however, apparently noticed an uneven distribution of Aryan women throughout the country. Northern Norway, in particular, contained a higher proportion of racially “unworthy” expectant mothers, according to the German *Lebensborn* authorities.<sup>180</sup> This was due to the large Sami population in the northernmost Norwegian territories who had, in the German perception, bred with Aryan Norwegians and diluted the genetic worth of the offspring of their “purely Nordic” partners.<sup>181</sup> The presence of this ethnic group in *Nord-Norge* caused the German officials to focus their attentions on southern Norway, where – as noted – they established the vast preponderance of their residential *Lebensborn* homes.

With the lurking danger of expending time and resources on “biologically unfit” Norwegian women, the *Lebensborn* authorities took care to test the “racial value” of all women applying for the organization’s assistance. Notably, *Lebensborn*’s racial “evaluations” relied overwhelmingly on the outward appearances of the Norwegian women. Expectant mothers were required to submit photographs of themselves along

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<sup>179</sup> Kersten, 77-78. These quotations appear in Kersten’s diary entries from January 17-18, 1941.

<sup>180</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 75. “Rasemessig sett befinner dessverre tilfellene seg på det samme nivå. Over 50% av kvinnene må etter min mening ansees som ikke altfor verdifulle.”

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 75, 181. The Sami people are very similar in appearance to American Eskimos and may, indeed, be considered “Native Norwegians,” analogous to Native Americans. They generally live in Finnmark up in the far north of Norway, in the areas bordering Finland and Russia. “Det var her det samiske innslaget i den nordnorske befolkningen som gjorde tyskerne betenkte.” *Ibid.*, 75. “...og tyskerne måtte for all del sikre seg mot å oppta samisk blod i det tyske folk!” *Ibid.*, 181.

with their initial application form.<sup>182</sup> In fact, the Oslo-area homes collectively hired a German photographer in April 1941 for the sole purpose of taking pictures of women arriving from northern Norway who neglected to bring their own photos.<sup>183</sup> The Norwegian women also had to answer numerous questions regarding their families' racial and medical histories (particularly any mental illnesses or "asocial" behavior), and testify to their own moral conduct because the Germans would have nothing to do with "street girls," just as they would not care for any part-Sami woman or child.<sup>184</sup> Only women who could reinvigorate both the biological and moral life of the Germanic people needed apply to *Lebensborn*.

Finally, before availing themselves of *Lebensborn*'s considerable resources, the would-be mothers had to testify to their political reliability, often by demonstrating their lack of connection to Communism rather than by pointing to their membership in Quisling's *Nasjonal Samling* party.<sup>185</sup> The women were generally quite young – usually between the ages of 18 and 25 – and largely apolitical. Thus, while their countrymen decried their sexual relationships with Germans and participation in the *Lebensborn* program as traitorous after the war, the Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers did not necessarily conceive of their wartime pregnancies as political. Admittedly, many of the

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<sup>182</sup> Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 49. "Hier musste sie ein Formular für Kindsmütter ausfüllen (*Fragebogen KM*)...Außerdem sollte sie ihr bisheriges Leben beschreiben und ein Foto von sich beilegen, das auf den Fragebogen geklebt wurde."

<sup>183</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 78. "For kvinnene som var bosatt i Oslo-området, benyttet Abteilung Lebensborn en tysk fotograf. I løpet av tiden fra april til oktober 1941 fotograferte han 87 norsk kvinner..."

<sup>184</sup> Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 49; Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 120-121, 177. "Rase- og karaktermessig mindreverdig kvinner blir ikke tatt opp ved våre hjem, men blir henvist til norske mødre hjem som vi finner fram til." *Ibid.*, 121. For a time, *Lebensborn* officials considered developing tiered care plans for Norwegian women and children according to their racial classification. "Less valuable" individuals would be placed in less well-equipped homes and receive less economic support, in contrast to their more "purely Aryan" peers. Such a complex system proved untenable, however, and was never attempted at the national level. For more information, see Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 120-121, 140.

<sup>185</sup> Kåre Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 49. Despite his attempts to drive up membership in the NS, Quisling remained extremely unpopular and enrollment in the party very low. Few Norwegians, and especially few female Norwegians, would have had an NS membership to show the *Lebensborn* authorities.

women were painfully aware of how angrily their fellow Norwegians viewed their behavior even during the war.

As we have established, the Norwegian women who came to *Lebensborn* for support arrived there as a result of their spontaneous and genuine affections for individual German soldiers. Just as naturally, many of the German soldiers proved anxious to marry their Norwegian girlfriends.<sup>186</sup> Already by autumn 1940, the *Reichskommissariat* had received so many inquiries from soldiers about the possibility of marrying Norwegians that the German authorities were forced to rethink their hitherto strict policy of forbidding marriages between German soldiers and members of the population whose country they occupied.<sup>187</sup> Dr. Richert of the SS and Himmler feared that prohibiting marriages between such couples would result in “racially valuable” Norwegian mothers’ resenting the Reich and – worst of all, from the Nazi perspective – their Aryan children being removed from all German influence.<sup>188</sup> Together the two men agreed upon the solution touched upon earlier in this study: by requiring Norwegian mothers to prove not only their “racial value,” but also their moral and political virtue, *Lebensborn* authorities simultaneously gathered “evidence” of the women’s “fitness” (or “unfitness”) to be the wives of Germans.

Those Norwegian women, who met the Nazis’ three-fold standards and thus proved themselves “worthy” of their intended husbands, were given permission to marry

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<sup>186</sup> Quite often, German soldiers sought marriage and relocation to Germany in order to remove their Norwegian partners from the hostile environment they endured in Norway. Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 174.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 162-163. “Allerede høsten 1940 hadde tyske soldater begynt å kontakte Reichskommissariat med spørsmål om mulighetene for å få gifte seg med sin norske kjæreste... Her var det imidlertid et alvorlig problem at Wehrmacht ved en egen “Heiratsverordnung” hadde forbudt tyske soldater å gifte seg med utenlandske kvinner.” The *Wehrmacht* thought that such marriages would create a conflict of interest for the soldiers involved and thus pose a security risk to the occupation.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 163. “Både Dr. Richert og Himmler hevdet på møtet at forbudet kunne fore til at mange rasemessig verdifulle barn gikk tapt.”



and were extended every courtesy by the German authorities. Upon marriage, the women would receive automatic German citizenship and assistance with travel, lodgings, and employment in the event they wished to relocate to Germany with their child and husband.<sup>189</sup> Indeed, Himmler and *Lebensborn* physician Gregor Ebner greatly desired the latter outcome; an exchange of correspondence between the two men in 1940 demonstrates their hopes for the “‘Nordicization’ [of] south Germany” through the immigration of Aryan Norwegian women to the area.<sup>190</sup> To this end, on February 1, 1941 German authorities in Norway removed the legal requirement for underage Norwegians to obtain parental consent in order to marry.<sup>191</sup> These policies produced a marked effect; of the Norwegian women who applied to *Lebensborn* in 1942, fully 40% (1,029 of 2,514) had already married the German father of their child or had initiated the marriage application process.<sup>192</sup>

The paperwork for such cases could sometimes stretch into a months- or years-long waiting period, however.<sup>193</sup> While the hopeful couples waited through this long bureaucratic delay, the war often permanently doomed marriage applications, particularly through German soldiers’ deaths on the Eastern front. For this reason, although approximately 40% of *Lebensborn* couples initiated marriage applications, only about

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 166; Nicholas, 275. “Kvinnene ble automatisk tysk statsborger...Mor og barn ville komme under tysk kontroll.” Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 166.

<sup>190</sup> Henry and Hillel, 122-123; Nicholas, 274-275; Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 18. Himmler had additional plans for making this transfer of Aryan Norwegians “compulsory.” Quoted in Henry and Hillel, 122.

<sup>191</sup> Henry and Hillel, 120; Nicholas, 274.

<sup>192</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 171. Of these, 139 women had already married and 890 had begun proceedings. 294 of these women relocated to Germany in 1942, which was over 10% of the registered Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers that year.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 192-193.

2.5%-4% (200-300 of 7600 couples) of them succeeded in becoming married by the end of the war.<sup>194</sup>

During the time before their paperwork could be approved, the German authorities nevertheless treated all Norwegian women actively working to marry a German as future citizens of the Reich. For the Norwegian women planning to move to Germany with their future children and husbands, *Lebensborn* officials established a “mother’s school” in Lier (less than 20 miles southwest of Oslo) in autumn 1942.<sup>195</sup> The school’s special purpose consisted of “Germanizing” the Norwegian women in order to prepare them for motherhood and residence in Germany with their future husbands. Like most *Lebensborn* homes, the school provided lessons in the German language.<sup>196</sup> Beyond this *Lebensborn* commonality, however, the mother’s school in Lier also offered instruction in German culture, cooking, sewing, hygiene, and Nazi ideology, aiming to instill in these Norwegian women such “typically German” values as thriftiness, organization, modesty, and hard work.<sup>197</sup> The courses, *Lebensborn* officials hoped, would ready the women for their duties both as housewives and as members of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*.

The Norwegian mothers and children who eventually made their way to Germany through *Lebensborn* often found that reality did not live up to their high expectations of life in the Fatherland. Part of their disappointment resulted from unwelcoming family situations; in some instances, German soldiers had been less than honest in beginning romantic relationships with Norwegian women. Occasionally the mothers – with the

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 176, 194. Olsen presents the especially complicated story of engaged couple “Willy and Astrid,” whose four-year attempt to procure a marriage certificate ended with “Willy’s” death in Russia in 1944. In *ibid.*, 192-193.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 92-93, 99. “I midten av juni 1942 beslaga tyskerne Store Reistad Herregårdshotell...i Lier nær Drammen for å etablere denne ‘mødreskolen’ som ble kalt ‘Mütterschule Lier.’”

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 18-19. “Ved å komme til Lebensborn-hjem i Tyskland så rask som mulig ville kvinnene få god anledning til å lære tysk.”

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 129-131.

assistance of *Lebensborn* – would travel all the way to Germany only to find that the father of their child was already married to a German woman. In such cases, the German fathers sometimes attempted to deny their paternity of the German-Norwegian children, in which case *Lebensborn* would test the alleged father’s blood type to determine whether or not the child might be his.<sup>198</sup> However the proceedings ended, they created negative feelings among everyone involved and made for an exceedingly poor welcome to Germany for the Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers.

*Lebensborn* also sent a small number (approximately 200-250) of German-Norwegian children to Germany without their mothers.<sup>199</sup> The mothers of the children had, in fact, signed over their guardianship to *Lebensborn*, which promised to care for the children until an adoptive home could be found for them in the likely event that their German fathers’ families would not want them.<sup>200</sup> There is some question of whether the children might have been – in a sense – “kidnapped” from their mothers. Many of the women claimed after the war that *Lebensborn* had betrayed its promise that their child would remain in Norway. Despite such allegations, no evidence has been found to support this charge; rather, the documentation reveals only the mothers’ consensual release of their children to the discretion of the *Lebensborn* program, and the characteristic totally permissive stance of the Quisling government.<sup>201</sup> Regardless of their mothers’ knowledge, *Lebensborn* quickly “Germanized” the children upon their

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 155-156. Olsen utilizes the example case of “Heinz” and “Inger” to illustrate this process. See *ibid.*, 155-156.

<sup>199</sup> Nicholas, 275; Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 70, 201.

<sup>200</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 195.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 202, 209-210; Clay and Leapman, 135. “Norske myndigheter konkluderte med at det ikke entydig kunne hevdes at barn var blitt kidnappet fra Norge...Mødrene hadde fraskrevet seg retten til barna, men var altså ikke blitt informert om at det var aktuelt å sende dem ut av landet.” Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 209.

arrival in the Fatherland, often assigning them new names and insisting on their speaking exclusively in German.<sup>202</sup>

Far worse for the Norwegian mothers and children now in Germany, the Allied advance across Europe – particularly the Soviet front moving steadily westward – entangled the *Lebensborn* participants in the same fate as their new German compatriots. Trapped by Germany's collapsing front lines of a country in which they faced both a language barrier and onrushing Soviet violence, without the benefit of friends and family, the *Lebensborn* mothers often found themselves alone, frightened, and directly in harm's way.<sup>203</sup> Women and children residing in *Lebensborn* homes in Germany fled from home to home, seeking desperately to remain a step ahead of the encroaching eastern front.<sup>204</sup> With most Norwegian women and children having arrived in Germany during the last year and a half of the war, due to the amount of time required for *Lebensborn* to make the travel arrangements, their residences in Germany were brief and marked by terror and suffering.<sup>205</sup>

The *Lebensborn* participants who chose to remain in Norway experienced infinitely less violence during the war. However, the multifaceted and enduring hostility borne towards them by their fellow Norwegians created a less than hospitable environment in both the short and the long term. Parents and hometown communities angry with young Norwegian women for "fraternizing with the enemy" often ostracized

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<sup>202</sup> Nicholas, 48; Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 207. "Før det kunne gis bevilling i en adopsjonssak i Tyskland, måtte en forsikre sego m at barnet virkelig var egnet til å 'fortyskes.'"

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 227. "Det stemte for såvidt at disse 'norske' kvinnene og barn var i samme situasjon som tyske kvinner og barn...Mange av dem kunne ikke språket. Her var unge jenter som aldri hadde vært borte hjemmefra og som nå var havnet i et land der de var totalt ukjente."

<sup>204</sup> Nicholas, 461. By the end of the war, the German *Lebensborn* headquarters in Munich alone played host to approximately 300 young children.

<sup>205</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 224. Olsen cites the International Red Cross' estimate that approximately 10% of the German-Norwegian children brought to Germany died there during the war.

them and turned them out of their homes, driving them straight into the embracing arms of *Lebensborn*. In an occupied Norway in which “quislings” represented deplorable betrayal and treachery, giving the Germans the “cold shoulder” was an immensely popular national policy for Norwegians loyal to the king. Young Norwegian women pregnant by German soldiers had few if any places to turn for sanctuary.<sup>206</sup>

The harsh conditions of the Nazi occupation further exacerbated Norwegians’ resentment of the *Lebensborn* women and their children. With a wartime population of approximately 3 million people, the addition of 350,000 German mouths to feed placed an enormous strain on Norwegian resources;<sup>207</sup> indeed, under the wartime rationing Norwegians received only 54% of the calories (per capita) they had been accustomed to consuming before the war.<sup>208</sup> Most Norwegians’ recollections of the German occupation include extensive descriptions of food shortages and the lengths they and their neighbors went to in order to acquire tightly rationed items, as well as creative ways in which to make more palatable those items that were available, such as potatoes.<sup>209</sup> With such universal hardship, most Norwegians reviled the *Lebensborn* mothers for what they perceived as opportunistic behavior.<sup>210</sup> In light of the substantial nutritional and

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<sup>206</sup> Clay and Leapman, 133; Henry and Hillel, 118; Lilienthal, 233; Pine, 71; Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 68, 74, 85, 102, 108, 116, 133, 174.

<sup>207</sup> Werner Rings, *Life with the Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler’s Europe, 1939-1945*, trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1982), 164.

<sup>208</sup> Sosnowski, 109. The same figure for other nationalities include: Germans at 93%, Dutch at 78%, and Jews at 20%.

<sup>209</sup> Reidun Mellem, *Norsk Flyktningbarn i Sverige 1944-1945* [Norwegian Refugee Child in Sweden 1944-1945] (Norway: Nord-Troms Historielag, 2010), 15-19; Tuva Gry Øyan, *Oppvekst under Okkupasjon: Erindringer fra Barne- og Ungdomsår på Grünerløkka 1940-1945* [Adolescence under the Occupation: Memories from Childhood and Teenage Years in Grünerløkka 1940-1945] (Oslo: Grünerløkka/Sofienberg Historielag, 2003), 42-43, 58. Mellem’s and Øyan’s accounts are just two among dozens of such memoirs.

<sup>210</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 140. “Dessuten irriterte det nok mange at kvinnene og barna ble tatt så godt hånd om av tyskerne. De fikk føde sine barn på fasjonable hjem og mottok til dels mer økonomisk bistand enn det som var vanlig for ugifte mødre i Norge.”

economic benefits the *Lebensborn* women received from the German authorities, the Norwegians' envious hostility is unsurprising.

Such enmity would only escalate over the course of the war until it finally broke free in the explosion of violence that marked the Liberation and – less overtly – the post-war years. The bitter memories of the occupation, and the implacable hatred most Norwegians bore the *Lebensborn* mothers and their children, plagued the *Lebensborn* participants for the rest of their lives. The fact that the children had never had a choice in being born to Germans and “traitorous” sexual collaborators, made little to no difference in the minds of the Norwegian public and governmental officials. Formerly the Aryan darlings of the Nazi elite, after the war these unfortunate *Lebensborn* children's future prospects became uncertain and decidedly pessimistic.

*TYSKERUNGEN: THE TROUBLED LIVES OF THE GERMAN-NORWEGIAN WAR CHILDREN*

“...we will never be rid of the stigma, not until we are dead and buried...I don't want to be buried in a grave; I want my ashes to be scattered to the winds – at least then I won't be picked on anymore.”

---Paul Hansen, Norwegian *Lebensborn* child<sup>211</sup>

The German occupation of Norway, particularly the *Lebensborn* program's operations during the years 1941-1945, resulted in the creation of a new and highly embattled social category that has remained stigmatized to this day: *krigsbarna*, or “war children.” The German-Norwegian children elicited the highest concern and the most privileged care from such highly ranked Nazi officials as Heinrich Himmler throughout the war. The Liberation in May 1945 that brought joy to so many around the world, however, heralded the beginning of a new phase, one marked by bitterness, enmity and – often – abuse, in the lives of the *Lebensborn* children. Formerly regarded by the Nazis as one of the most prized resources of the Third Reich, the children and their mothers were now almost universally reviled in their home country. Where they had once exemplified rightful national belonging (albeit, as defined by Nazi ideology), the *Lebensborn* children now constituted both a perceived threat to the Norwegian nation that had suffered at the hands of the German *Wehrmacht* and *Gestapo*, as well as a disdainful reminder of the individual Norwegians' varying degrees of collaboration.

Norwegians' disgust with the 10,000-12,000 so-called *tyskerungen* (“German brats”) born to Norwegian mothers took many forms. At virtually any point during the

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<sup>211</sup> Interview with Paul Hansen in Rob Sharp, “The Chosen Ones: The War Children Born to Nazi Fathers in a Sinister Eugenics Scheme Speak Out,” *The Independent* (London, January 20, 2008).

post-war era, any one *Lebensborn* child (out of the 8,000 official *Lebensborn* children) might have simultaneously experienced governmental discrimination, direct interpersonal violence, misinformation regarding their origin, and a host of other deeply unsavory and unmerited punishments. This chapter aims to briefly survey the various means by which Norwegians excluded *Lebensborn* children from the national community and imposed, at times, terribly harsh treatment upon them during the post-war period. Examining several of the war children's personal accounts, this chapter will additionally delineate salient commonalities of experience and attempt to illustrate a kind of spectrum of their post-war experiences, which range from the disturbing and criminal to the relatively mild.

Violence against the Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers and their children began immediately after the war ended. The violence and brutality visited upon the so-called *tyskertøser* ("German tarts" or "German whores") during the frenzied days of the Liberation – in the form of arrests, head-shavings, and beatings – underscore the severity of the perceived betrayal these Norwegian women had committed.<sup>212</sup> The 30,000-50,000 Norwegian women who had had sexual relations with German soldiers formed a relatively large and visible minority within Norway, contributing to the Norwegian government-in-exile's accurate contemporary perception of German-Norwegian sexual relations as widespread.<sup>213</sup> Further, the women's privileged existence during the war, especially if they became pregnant by Germans and delivered their children through the *Lebensborn* program and availed themselves of the remarkable nutritional resources

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<sup>212</sup> Olsen, "Under the Care of Lebensborn," 25-27; Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 256. "...3 000 bis 5 000 Frauen für kürzere oder längere Zeit interniert waren." Some 3,000-5,000 (approximately 10%) of the Norwegian women who had had sexual relations with German soldiers were arrested for durations of varying lengths.

<sup>213</sup> Olsen, "Under the Care of Lebensborn," 24. It should be remembered that Norway's population during this time stood at approximately three million.



provided to them there, sparked feelings of envy and anger among the Norwegian population. Although the women's "horizontal collaboration" did not violate any official Norwegian law – and in the face of the political and economic collaboration of tens of thousands of other Norwegians – the *tyskertøsene* "were the only Norwegians who lost their citizenship as a consequence of their connection to the Germans."<sup>214</sup>

Just as the *Lebensborn* mothers, and the other Norwegian women who had sexual relations with the Germans, had supposedly committed treason through their private, personal interactions, their children became regarded as a potential fifth column within Norway.<sup>215</sup> Their half-German blood, it was thought, might predispose them to authoritarianism and fascism.<sup>216</sup> Utilizing much of the same popular eugenics-based reasoning that led the Third Reich down the road to the Holocaust,<sup>217</sup> several Norwegian medical experts argued for the "biological unfitnes" and "mental deficiency" of the *Lebensborn* children.<sup>218</sup>

The broader public shared these anxieties and many Norwegians did not hesitate to express their thoughts on the matter. In a May 1945 editorial in the *Lofotposten*, a daily newspaper from the Nordland, the author asserted, "They are unable to become Norwegians. Their fathers were Germans; their mothers were Germans in thought and action ... They will forever constitute an element of irritation and unrest among the pure Norwegian population."<sup>219</sup> Although a few isolated voices raised the objection that the

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 25-27.

<sup>215</sup> Clay and Leapman, 137; Simonsen, "Into the Open - or Hidden Away?," 29; Olsen, "Under the Care of *Lebensborn*," 27; Henry and Hillel, 125.

<sup>216</sup> Simonsen, "Into the Open - or Hidden Away?," 30-31; Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen, "Introduction" in *Children of World War II*, 3, 10.

<sup>217</sup> See, for example, Chapter 1 of this study.

<sup>218</sup> Ericsson and Simonsen, "Introduction," 3, 10.

<sup>219</sup> Quoted in Ericsson and Ellingsen, "Life Stories of Norwegian War Children," 94.

perceived “sins of the mother” – as it were – should not be visited on the children,<sup>220</sup> the vast majority of the Norwegian populace felt that forcing the deportation of the *Lebensborn* children and their mothers to Germany would resolve the situation in the best interests of national security.<sup>221</sup>

Officials within the Norwegian government subscribed to much the same line of thought, and began considering plans to deport the *krigsbarna* to Germany even before the war had ended. As early as the autumn of 1943, exiled Norwegian politicians in Stockholm debated and arrived at a proposal for deportation, which included the creation of a supervisory agency with the power to separate mother and child for “national” reasons.<sup>222</sup> These plans reached the exiled Norwegian government in London in March 1944, spurring the establishment of an official committee with the sole purpose of determining whether or not this deportation effort should be undertaken.<sup>223</sup> Along with these national anxieties, Norwegian government officials proceeded along this course of action purportedly with the best intentions of the *Lebensborn* children in mind.<sup>224</sup> Away from the prying eyes and harsh judgments of local Norwegian communities, the war children could begin their lives anew, free from the *Lebensborn* stigma, potentially even with their German fathers and extended paternal families.

Norwegian officials appointed the War Child Commission on July 3, 1945 in order to ensure that the interests of the *krigsbarna* were, indeed, served by the

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<sup>220</sup> Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 250.

<sup>221</sup> Lars Borgersrud, “Meant to be Deported” in *Children of World War II*, pages 71-93, 71. Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 221. “Nach Ansicht der meisten Norweger sollte man die Kriegskinder ins Ausland schicken.”

<sup>222</sup> Borgersrud, 74.

<sup>223</sup> “Behandlingen av halvtyske barn og quislingsbarn etter krigen (Notat April 4, 1944)” [“The Treatment of Half-German Children and Quisling Children after the War (Noted April 4, 1944)”] in *En Hvitbok*, 1999), 41-43; Olsen, “Under the Care of Lebensborn,” 24-25.

<sup>224</sup> Simonsen, “Into the Open – or Hidden Away?,” 31-32.

government.<sup>225</sup> The Commission consisted of a number of high-ranking authorities both civil and professional, including chairperson Inge Debes, a judge and well-established authority on social work; Alf Frydenberg, Deputy Secretary of State at the Ministry of Social Affairs; Else Vogt-Thingstad, chief physician at Ullevål Hospital; and Resident Vicar Carlsen, head of Norway's Child Welfare Council.<sup>226</sup> These officials were charged with "recommend[ing] whether it was desirable to deport mothers and children to Germany, what legal adjustments would be needed and also what initiatives should be implemented if they were to remain in Norway."<sup>227</sup>

Soon after the war ended in Europe, the Norwegian government abandoned its tentative plans to deport the *Lebensborn* participants to Germany, partly due to the influence of the War Child Commission. An international conference on war children held in Zürich in September 1945 addressed the dire circumstances in Germany that resulted from the immense devastation wrought by the advancing Allied forces.<sup>228</sup> The Norwegian representative to this conference, the physician Else Vogt-Thingstad, noted the lack of basic necessities in Germany as well as the embittered, unwelcoming attitude of German society, and concluded that Germany could not provide any semblance of normalcy or comfort to the *Lebensborn* children's upbringing.<sup>229</sup> An alternative location would have to be found.

Earlier that year, on July 23, the Norwegian Social Minister Sven Oftedal had traveled to Stockholm with the hope of arranging for some of Norway's war children to

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<sup>225</sup> Borgersrud, 77; Olsen, "Under the Care of Lebensborn," 27; Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 296.

<sup>226</sup> Borgersrud, 77.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Simonsen, "Into the Open – or Hidden Away?," 32.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

be sent there.<sup>230</sup> This attempt did not attain much success; only 30 Norwegian *krigsbarna* ever arrived in Sweden through official governmental channels.<sup>231</sup> The most remarkable effort centered on the proposed deportation of 9,000 Norwegian war children to Australia. Senior officials from Australia and Norway met in Oslo on November 22-23, 1945 and reached an agreement to this effect.<sup>232</sup> The transportation of such large numbers of people proved to be unfeasible, though, and delayed the plans until late 1946 when it was decided that – because most of the 9,000 had already been adopted – deporting the Norwegian war children to Australia would do more harm than good.<sup>233</sup> Having exhausted these options, the Norwegian government no longer had any choice but to care for its war children within the nation’s borders.<sup>234</sup>

Norwegian officials demonstrated very little concern to add to the number of war children already present in Norway, however.<sup>235</sup> As we have learned, *Lebensborn* officials in Norway had sent 250 German-Norwegian *Lebensborn* children to Germany during the war with the intention that they be adopted by racially and ideologically “proper” (i.e. Aryan, Nazi) German families. Additionally, several Norwegian women moved to Germany during the war to be closer to their German lovers’ or husbands’

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<sup>230</sup> Borgersrud, 78-79.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 79. These children were “announced for adoption...labeled as children found in concentration camps in Germany, whose parents, place of birth and date of birth were unknown.”

<sup>232</sup> “Initiativ for å sende krigsbarn til Australia” (Konferanse 22.11.1945) [“Initiative to Send the War Children to Australia” (Conference of November 22, 1945)] in *En Hvitbok*, 65-67; Borgersrud, 87; Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 307.

<sup>233</sup> Borgersrud, 87. Interestingly, the Australian government initially sought such a large number of white, “Aryan” war children from Norway because of their own efforts to “stem the tide of Asians” within their own country. The head of the Australian delegation to Norway in 1946, Leslie Hayden, feared that the *Lebensborn* children would strengthen Australia’s ties to Germany, however, and opposed the scheme.

<sup>234</sup> Olsen, “Under the Care of Lebensborn,” 27.

<sup>235</sup> Ericsson and Simonsen, “Introduction,” 6; Lilienthal, 233; Volker Koop, “*Dem Führer ein Kind Schencken*”: *Die SS-Organisation Lebensborn e. V.* [“To Give a Child to the Führer”: The SS-Organization the *Lebensborn* Association] (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 222. “Im Gegensatz zu Polen schien Norwegen zunächst wenig Interesse an den nach Deutschland gebrachten Kindern zu haben.” In Lilienthal, 233. “Die norwegischen Behörden hatten ganz offensichtlich nur ein begrenztes Interesse daran, die ‘Kriegskinder,’ die sich in Deutschland befanden, zurückzuholen.” In Koop, 222.

families, and to raise their children far from the disapproving gaze of other Norwegians. After the war, individual Norwegian families occasionally appealed to aid organizations in Germany, asking for assistance in locating the “stolen” *Lebensborn* children.<sup>236</sup> The Norwegian government remained uninvolved in such efforts, however, arguing again that this fresh start in Germany would work toward the *Lebensborn* participants’ own good. Instead, Norwegian officials “decided, in the first year after the war, to leave the bastard children in Germany.”<sup>237</sup>

By making entry permits ever more difficult for the war children and their mothers to obtain, and demanding increasing amounts of documentation and fees from the would-be repatriated Norwegians, the Norwegian government strenuously challenged the efforts of the Red Cross repatriation corps and similar aid organizations.<sup>238</sup> Frustrated by the Norwegian government’s reluctance to accept responsibility for the thirty *Lebensborn* children living in the Friesland home in Bremen, for example, the Swedish Red Cross brought the children to Sweden where they received new identities and were put up for adoption.<sup>239</sup> Under pressure from the British government, Norwegian officials eventually acquiesced to the repatriation requests of the *Lebensborn* mothers, but only under conditions that eliminated or severely reduced their individual rights and those of

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<sup>236</sup> A Berlin newspaper cutting from 1947, for example reads: “*Norwegian children sought*. Seventeen Norwegian families are trying to trace their children taken to Germany by the SS *Lebensborn* organization and accommodated first in homes and then with families. The Central Youth Office, 1-2 Wilhelmplatz, Berlin, W.8., appeals to the population to help in finding these children. Foster-parents in particular are asked to help.” Reproduced in Henry and Hillel, 124.

<sup>237</sup> Marc Hillel, *Lebensborn e.V.: im Namen der Rasse* [The *Lebensborn* Association: In the Name of Race] (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1975), 182. “In den ersten Jahren nach dem Krieg hatte norwegischen Regierung sogar beschlossen, die unehelichen Kinder ‘in ihrem eigenen Interesse’ in Deutschland zu belassen.”

<sup>238</sup> Borgersrud, 82.

<sup>239</sup> Koop, 222. “Diese wurden aber nicht etwa von norwegischen Stellen abgeholt, sondern von Schwedischen Roten Kreuz... Da Norwegen sich weigerte, die Kinder aufzunehmen, wurden sie mit dem Schiff ‘Castleholm’ nach Schweden gebracht... die Regierung in Oslo kein Interesse an ihnen hatte. Aufgrund dieser ablehnenden Haltung erhielten die Kinder in Schweden eine neue Identität und wurden dort zur Adoption freigegeben.”

their children.<sup>240</sup> Despite such efforts to limit repatriation, between 400 and 500 women and children had been returned to Norway from various countries by mid-1946.<sup>241</sup>

The process of repatriation did not run smoothly by any means for the women and children involved, and it quite often proved traumatic for the children in particular. For the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children who had been adopted into German families as infants during the war, the experience of being forcibly removed from their familiar environment and suddenly placed in the care of strangers speaking a foreign language, constituted an immense emotional shock.<sup>242</sup> The separation of the families was extremely painful for all members involved, perhaps most especially for loved ones who never managed to locate one another again. Once in Norway, the problem of language formed one of the greatest obstacles to the repatriated *Lebensborn* children's assimilation into Norwegian society. One woman described "trying with all her might to forget...the language of her childhood during her first year in Norway."<sup>243</sup> In an ironic twist, the children once intended to form the vanguard of the Germanization (*Germanisierung*) of Europe now had to rapidly *un*-Germanize themselves simply in order to make themselves understood and avoid further bullying in their official home country.

The Norwegian government's decision to not seek financial support for the *krigsbarna* from their German fathers represented yet another way in which officials attempted to sever the links between the half-German children and their German parent. Though also a matter of principle, proving Norway's willingness and capability to care

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 83; Nicholas, 508.

<sup>241</sup> Borgersrud, 83.

<sup>242</sup> Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 339; Sosnowski, 53.

<sup>243</sup> Veslemøy Kjendsli, *Kinder der Schande: Ein "Lebensborn Mädchen" auf der Suche nach ihrer Vergangenheit* [Children of Shame: A "Lebensborn Girl" on the Search for her Past] (Berlin: Verlag Dirk Nishend, 1988), 78. "Der Sprache ihrer Kindheit...sie in die ersten Jahren in Norwegen mit aller kraft versuchen mußte, sie zu vergessen."

for the war children and their mothers on the international stage,<sup>244</sup> the issue of unwanted connections to Germany remained primary. The British Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Committee's report reflects this concern: "The Committee does not think it advisable to lay claim to any payment from the German fathers. It has been thought better to cut all ties between them and the children."<sup>245</sup>

The question of the proper citizenship status for the *Lebensborn* children and their mothers proved decidedly less clear-cut for Norwegian officials. The same reasoning that produced massive demands for the deportation of the *krigsbarna* directly after the war also challenged the Norwegian-ness, or the ability to become Norwegian, of the war children. Born of the enemy (their father) and a morally loose traitor (their mother), it was thought that the *Lebensborn* children could scarcely hope ever to become good, upstanding Norwegian citizens.

Due to these biological and psychological anxieties, the children remained an ambiguous legal category until 1950. During the controversy over repatriation, the Norwegian government began using the term "children of Norwegian extraction or partially Norwegian extraction" to describe the hundreds of returning *krigsbarna*.<sup>246</sup> A law of December 1946 indefinitely revoked citizenship for the children and their mothers, depriving them of the basic rights extended to all Norwegians.<sup>247</sup> The definitive Citizenship Act of 1950, however, closed the matter for good. The mothers of half-German children could reacquire their citizenship upon applying for it after a period of

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<sup>244</sup> Borgersrud, 85.

<sup>245</sup> "Report of the Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Committee" in *En Hvitbok*, 63.

<sup>246</sup> Borgersrud, 83.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

five years.<sup>248</sup> The children themselves, however, could not apply for citizenship until they had reached eighteen years of age.<sup>249</sup> At the most extreme, the policy meant that a child conceived near the end of the occupation and born in early 1946 – even though they might not speak German, have met any members of the German side of their family, or have spent any time in Germany during their life – could not become a full, legal Norwegian until 1964.

The War Children Commission also acted upon the biological concerns tied to these questions of citizenship, albeit with a slightly different focus. If a *Lebensborn* child could inherit Nazism or the disposition of a traitor from his parents, he could also – quite literally – inherit mental deficiencies from them. In the summer of 1945, the Commission summoned Norway’s most eminent psychiatrist, Ørnulf Ødegård, to receive his expert opinion on the mental condition of the war children.<sup>250</sup> Based on the 35 women he had treated during the war who had had sexual relations with German soldiers, Ødegård generalized his findings to speak for the entire group of thousands of women with half-German children.<sup>251</sup>

Ødegård estimated that fully half of these women were most likely “mentally retarded.”<sup>252</sup> This called the mental fitness of the Germans they had relations with into question, as well; a man who “had been satisfied with subnormal girlfriends” was almost

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<sup>248</sup> Even so, these women were denied a portion of their pension until a recent decision in 2005, by which time most of the *Lebensborn* mothers had already died. In Connolly.

<sup>249</sup> Borgersrud, 89.

<sup>250</sup> Olsen, “Under the Care of Lebensborn,” 27.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>252</sup> The term “mentally retarded” refers here to the contemporary term used by both the German and the Norwegian medical and psychiatric professions. This classification could cover any perceived mental abnormality, ranging from Down’s Syndrome to “asocial” behavior, one of the Nazis’ most notorious phrases, which they used to justify tens of thousands of sterilizations and so-called “mercy deaths,” or *Gnadentod*.



certainly mentally challenged himself.<sup>253</sup> Based on this reasoning, Ødegård concluded that 4,000 of the 9,000 (the best estimate at that time) *krigsbarna* were mentally retarded, and recommended that as many *Lebensborn* women and children as possible be given psychiatric evaluations.<sup>254</sup> The Commission never acted upon this report,<sup>255</sup> though similar theories and “evidence” appeared in newspapers and further entrenched the widely-held popular conception of the innate biological inferiority of the Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers and their children.<sup>256</sup>

In light of this overwhelmingly negative tide of public opinion and the fact that the *Lebensborn* children could not be deported from Norway, the War Children Commission proposed that the government undertake an educational public campaign to incite more positive, sympathetic feelings toward the *krigsbarna*.<sup>257</sup> The Commission also recommended the expansion of child welfare services in Norway, as well as the prioritization of the *Lebensborn* mothers’ educations.<sup>258</sup> On a less savory note, the Commission’s October 18, 1945 “*Draft of an Act relating to War Children*” and “*Draft of the Special Circumstances Motivating the Act relating to War Children*” proposed to give the government absolute control over the war children, even against the express wishes of their mothers.<sup>259</sup> A child could be placed in foster care, be deported, or even have his or

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<sup>253</sup> Olsen, “Under the Care of Lebensborn,” 28.

<sup>254</sup> Simonsen, “Into the Open – or Hidden Away?,” 30.

<sup>255</sup> Borgersrud, 86.

<sup>256</sup> Augusta Rasmussen, “Det intellektuelle nivå hos 310 tyskertøser” [“The Intellectual Level of 310 German Tarts”] in *Nordisk Psykiatrisk Medlemsblad* [Nordic Psychiatric Journal] (1947: 1), 166-169; and Augusta Rasmussen, “Omtrent alle tyskerjentene var mer eller mindre åndssvake” [“Almost all the German Girls were More or Less Retarded”] in *Arbeiderbladet* [Labor Journal] (April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1947); quoted in Simonsen, “Into the Open – or Hidden Away?,” 30.

<sup>257</sup> Borgersrud, 78, 86.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-86.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

her name changed (from an obviously German one to a less conspicuous Norwegian one), under the conditions of these draft bills.<sup>260</sup>

The Norwegian government never implemented such dubious measures; just as all the Commission's recommendations and drafts were set to be printed and sent on to the *Storting* (Norwegian parliament), the sudden opportunity to deport the war children to Australia appeared to obviate the necessity for such programs.<sup>261</sup> By the time the Australian deportation option fell through in 1946, the war children had already been absorbed into Norwegian society to such an extent that such measures as those proposed by the Commission would likely have had very little impact. Of course, not all war children had equal fortune in their attempted assimilation.

Some of the most notable examples of the Commission's and the Norwegian government's failure to adequately anticipate and provide for the needs of the *krigsbarna* may be found in the stories of three of the largest repositories of unclaimed *Lebensborn* children: the orphanages at Stalheim, Moldegård, and Godthåb.<sup>262</sup> These orphanages had operated as official *Lebensborn* homes during the war, but needed Norwegian staff and financial assistance to care for the children once the Germans had left. (This does not quite hold true for Godthåb; there, 30 German nurses and an SS officer ran the home until October 1945 because of the Norwegian authorities' unwillingness to assume control.)<sup>263</sup> Despite repeated pleas for financial assistance from the local Red Cross organizations

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>262</sup> Olsen, "Under the Care of Lebensborn," 28; Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 308. Godthåb held about 160 children, Stalheim held 131, and Moldegård held approximately 85.

<sup>263</sup> Olsen, "Under the Care of Lebensborn," 28-29. Head nurse Berta Betz, and her unflagging efforts on behalf of the *Lebensborn* children, was fondly remembered by the Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers and international authorities long after the war. See Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 128-129.

that took over responsibility for the Stalheim and Moldegård homes, the Norwegian Ministry of Social Affairs refused to act for months.<sup>264</sup>

By the spring of 1946, almost all of the war children had been removed from these homes, though 27 *Lebensborn* children still remained at Godthåb, all of whom were considered mentally retarded.<sup>265</sup> Because the Ministry of Social Affairs found it nearly impossible to find parents willing to adopt – or orphanages willing to shelter – the children, officials hit upon the idea of sending the children to an internment camp for women who had slept with German soldiers.<sup>266</sup> The camp shut down before any arrangements could be made, however, which left Norwegian authorities with just one viable solution: to place the Godthåb children in institutions for the mentally retarded and mentally disturbed.<sup>267</sup> The children had never been objectively tested for mental retardation and did not receive any opportunities during their youth to challenge this classification.<sup>268</sup> In 1990, a leading doctor at the institution that took in the majority of the Godthåb children in the post-war period stated, “[If] these children had been offered a new start and a normal life in 1945, they probably would have grown up to be quite normal.”<sup>269</sup>

This particularly reprehensible example of negligence on the part of the Norwegian government represents at once the extreme and the norm of officials’ attitude toward the *krigsbarna*. While the vast majority of *Lebensborn* children did not have to contend with institutionalization, they nevertheless experienced the universally negative

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.; Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 317.

<sup>268</sup> Olsen, “Under the Care of Lebensborn,” 29.

<sup>269</sup> Olsen, *Vater, Deutscher*, 317. “Hätten diese Kinder 1945 die Möglichkeit eines Neuanfangs und eines normal geführten Lebens bekommen, hätten sie sich vermutlich auch normal entwickelt.”

effects of the Norwegian authorities' indifference to their standard of living. Such near total lack of concern accelerated about a year after the Liberation. As Eva Simonsen notes, "[As] soon as the situation quieted down, alternative ideas either for deportation abroad or special initiatives for assimilation in Norway were set aside. From then on the children and their mothers were left to fend for themselves...."<sup>270</sup> Authorities simply assumed that, after the vengeful spirit of Liberation had died down, the *Lebensborn* children would be unobtrusively reabsorbed into Norwegian society.<sup>271</sup>

To a certain extent, this expectation proved correct, though the social acceptance of the *krigsbarna* was never complete and always bore the scars of individuals' wartime experiences. Even contemporary reports remarking on the number of war children adopted by their grandmothers – a cozy, familial image meant to reassure international readers – could not overlook the disdain and outright animosity directed toward these children within larger Norwegian society.<sup>272</sup> Norway did, indeed, find places for the *Lebensborn* children: with their mothers, their extended relations, or adoptive families; or in foster homes, orphanages, or institutions for the mentally deficient.<sup>273</sup> The Norwegian government believed that the re-assimilation conveyed by superficial statistics implied complete success in solving the “war children problem.” This mistaken perception, however, led officials to abandon measures such as the public opinion campaign and educational initiatives meant to facilitate *Lebensborn* participants' reentry into Norwegian life. Instead, the government adopted a policy of silence and a laissez-faire approach to obstacles faced by the war children in their everyday lives. Ignoring most

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<sup>270</sup> Eva Simonsen, “Children in Danger: Dangerous Children” in *Children of World War II*, pages 269-287, 278.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> “Report of the Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Committee” in *En Hvitbok*, 62-63.

<sup>273</sup> Simonsen, “Children in Danger,” 278-279.

Norwegians' openly hateful attitude toward the *krigsbarna* only exacerbated the daily suffering these children experienced.

We turn now to the personal accounts of the *Lebensborn* children. First, a brief note on the sources: almost without exception, the accounts cited here have been collected from newspaper stories in the online archive of the *Norsk Krigsbarnforbundet Lebensborn*, an organization dedicated to advancing the cause of the Norwegian war children.<sup>274</sup> Approximately a decade ago, a team of Norwegian historians and sociologists interviewed 100 *Lebensborn* children for a nationally-funded project, but those accounts have not yet been made available.<sup>275</sup> The Norwegian researchers' primary reservation regarding their sources also holds true for the accounts cited here. Because of the voluntary nature of the interviews, they are somewhat unrepresentative.<sup>276</sup> Indeed, it is often those *Lebensborn* children who have been most severely wronged by the Norwegian government and society who feel the understandable need to make their voices heard. This results in a decided bias toward the negative end of the spectrum of *Lebensborn* children's post-war experiences. Nevertheless, the many commonalities of experience expressed in their accounts reveal something like a set of least common denominators of experience, shared by virtually all Norwegian *Lebensborn* children. It is admittedly impossible to quantify the sufferings experienced by these children, now men and women in their late sixties and early seventies, or to rank any one experience as more "positive" or "negative" than another. Some of the *Lebensborn* children themselves

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<sup>274</sup> Unless otherwise noted, each of these personal stories may be accessed via this organization's official website: <http://www.lebensbornnorway.org/>.

<sup>275</sup> Ericsson and Ellingsen, "Life Stories of Norwegian War Children," 95-96.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

acknowledge that their own suffering cannot compare to the most extreme examples of abuse recounted by others.

### **Harriet von Nickel<sup>277</sup>**

To begin with one of the most negative examples on record, Harriet von Nickel knew little but abuse while growing up. Raised primarily by adoptive Norwegian parents who tried their best to “beat the German hell out of [her],” von Nickel only met her mother twice in her life; on their second and last meeting, von Nickel’s mother told her to “go to hell and stay there.”<sup>278</sup> She never played with other children in her neighborhood, and was publicly humiliated by her teacher every time her class learned about Germany in school.<sup>279</sup> Others perpetrated even more violent crimes against her. A dentist once drilled into her jaw intentionally so that she could feel “what it’s like to be tortured,” a neighbor raped her in the woods behind his house one summer, and a group of drunk villagers branded the swastika on her forehead when she was only ten years old.<sup>280</sup> “[She] rubbed sandpaper on [her] skin to get rid of it.”<sup>281</sup> Even today, von Nickel remains physically and emotionally scarred by these experiences. “Sometimes I just walk the streets and cry...why are people so false and evil?”<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Names have not been changed.

<sup>278</sup> Interview with Harriet von Nickel in Dag Pedersen, “Utlevert i skam til bygdas spott,” [“Issued in Shame to the Community’s Scorn”] *Norsk Aftenposten* in Norsk Krigsbarnforbundet Lebensborn Arkivene. “Moren har Harriet bare møtt kort og heftig to ganger i sitt liv. Siste gang ble hun bedt om ‘å dra til helvete, og bli der’...Pleieforeldrene låste henne inne i mørke kott, og forsøkte etter beste evne å ‘banke den tyske faen’ ut av henne.”

<sup>279</sup> Ibid. “Når klassen hadde time i geografi, og Tyskland var temaet, måtte hun stå oppreist ved pulten mens den kristne læreren, og bygdas klokker, viste elevene hvor ‘stygge og dumme’ tyskerne var.”

<sup>280</sup> Ibid. “Under et besøk hos tannlegen, lot han boret gå inn i kjeven for å la henne føle ‘hvordan det er å bli torturert’. Brennermerking av hakekors i pannen, utført med glødende spiker av berusede sambygdinger, hører med i lidelseshistorien, som kulminerer med at hun som bare barnet ble voldtatt i skogen av en voksen nabo som selv hadde flere barn.”

<sup>281</sup> Connolly.

<sup>282</sup> Interview with Harriet von Nickel in “Utlevert i skam til bygdas spott.” “Det hender at jeg bare går gatelangs og grater...hvorfors er menneskene da så falske og så onde?”

## **Gerd Fleischer**

Gerd Fleischer was born as *Lebensborn* case number 2620 in 1942, after which her father abandoned her and her mother.<sup>283</sup> Though they lived in poverty, Fleischer enjoyed life with her mother until she began school, where classmates called her a “German whore.”<sup>284</sup> Things took a further turn for the worse when her mother married a former Norwegian resistance fighter whose hatred of all things Germans extended to his step-daughter, whom he beat regularly.<sup>285</sup> Fleischer ran away from home at the age of thirteen, somehow survived adolescence and ultimately put herself through school without the assistance of the Norwegian authorities.<sup>286</sup> Perhaps most painfully, her biological father denied her parentage after she tracked him down in Germany, and she was forced to sue him for the child maintenance payments she had never received.<sup>287</sup> As an adult, Fleischer “founded the organization SEIF (Self Help for Immigrants and Refugees)” after bringing the Mexican children she adopted back to Norway and realizing that the Norwegian attitude toward minorities had not progressed much since the days when her former classmates bullied her.<sup>288</sup>

## **Ellen Voie**

Ellen Voie was adopted from a *Lebensborn* home at the age of two by abusive parents who “beat [her] and locked [her] in a small, dark room for hours,” which traumatized her deeply.<sup>289</sup> Living in a small community, she remembers how everyone

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<sup>283</sup> Interview with Gerd Fleischer in “The Chosen Ones;” interview with Gerd Fleischer in Kirsty Lang, “Lebensborn 2620,” *The Times* (London, February 1, 2003), Times Magazine p. 35.

<sup>284</sup> Interview with Gerd Fleischer in “The Chosen Ones.”

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Interview with Ellen Voie in *ibid.*

around her seemed to be aware of her origins and disgusted by her presence in the village.<sup>290</sup> She was raped by a casual acquaintance at the age of nineteen, resulting in a pregnancy that infuriated her adoptive parents. They forced her to give up the child initially, but she “was determined that history would not repeat itself, and with the help of a social worker [she] got [her] son back.”<sup>291</sup> Despite these hardships, Voie finished her education and became a social worker in Oslo, and is particularly dedicated to helping children.<sup>292</sup>

### **Paul Hansen**

Paul Hansen – one of the unlucky 27 children from Godthåb – spent the first twenty years of his life in mental institutions, where he was “locked up with children so sick that some were incontinent and incapable of feeding themselves” when he was just four years old.<sup>293</sup> “It was terrible. At night the adults would scream, some were chained to their beds. I remember feeling very frightened.”<sup>294</sup> He received virtually no education and has only ever been able to work menial jobs because of his lack of training; he currently works as a janitor at the University of Oslo.<sup>295</sup> Further, his personal relationships have suffered because of his lack of socialization during his early, formative years.<sup>296</sup> He blames the absence of government concern for many of the wrongs perpetrated against him. Officials made no attempt to trace his parents before moving him from Godthåb to the mental institution, nor did they ever conduct tests to determine

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Interview with Paul Hansen in *ibid.*

<sup>294</sup> Interview with Paul Hansen in “Lebensborn 2620,” 35.

<sup>295</sup> Interview with Paul Hansen in “The Chosen Ones.”

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.



whether he and his fellow Godthåb inmates were, in fact, mentally retarded.<sup>297</sup> With a life so completely dominated by the shadow of *Lebensborn*, Hansen movingly asserts – as we saw at the beginning of this chapter – that “we will never be rid of the stigma, not until we are dead and buried. . . I don't want to be buried in a grave; I want my ashes to be scattered to the winds – at least then I won't be picked on any more.”<sup>298</sup>

### **Bjørn Langfelder**

Not all *Lebensborn* children experienced this level of physical abuse and deprivation of opportunity. Bjørn Langfelder, for example, never personally experienced any such abuse, “but only because he was virtually hidden away during his childhood.”<sup>299</sup> He spent his early years being shuttled back and forth between a number of foster homes and unrelated farm families in the countryside, most likely – according to Langfelder – because his stepfather neither wanted him around, nor wanted anyone in his local community to learn his “true parentage.”<sup>300</sup> Though Langfelder did not directly experience harsh abuse during his own childhood, he claims to know a woman who was kept in a children’s home and sexually abused for fifteen years, as well as a brother and sister who were locked in a pig sty for two whole days as punishment when they were preschoolers.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Interview with Bjørn Langfelder in Mark Roth, “Nazi Program Still a Source of Pain: Lebensborn Children Feel Shame of ‘Master Race’ Ideology,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (Pittsburgh: November 25, 2006).

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

## **Bjørn Drivdal**

Still other *Lebensborn* children have managed – albeit barely, in many cases – to rise above the disturbing crimes committed against them during their childhood to form strong, rewarding bonds of friendship and family both in Norway and in Germany. Bjørn Drivdal, for example, began working on cargo ships at the age of fifteen in order to escape the constant beatings meted out to him.<sup>302</sup> He associated with the seedier elements of life on the docks whenever in port, stating that he “found it easier to be around people who had something to hide.”<sup>303</sup> His two marriages failed and he had to enter retirement early due to vivid nightmares and trouble concentrating, but he put his time to good use exploring his own origins and locating his German family.<sup>304</sup> In Germany, he discovered that his biological father had been killed in a car accident in 1974, not during the war as he had grown up believing, and also met his two half-sisters and their children, whom he now visits on a regular basis.<sup>305</sup>

## **Kikki Skjermo**

In her remarkable account, Kikki Skjermo recalls an “empty and confusing” life “behind a wall of silence” with grandparents that “never showed [her] any warmth.”<sup>306</sup> A local man raped her when she was ten years old, telling her who “people like [her] were born to be used.”<sup>307</sup> Despite this deeply traumatic event, Skjermo trusted her then-boyfriend enough to marry him at the age of fifteen; they have enjoyed a mutually

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<sup>302</sup> Interview with Bjørn Drivdal in “The Chosen Ones.”

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Interview with Kikki Skjermo in *ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

supportive and loving marriage for over fifty years.<sup>308</sup> On an even more positive note, Skjermo's husband and children encouraged her to trace her German father, with whom she formed a very close relationship. Their families became so interconnected, in fact, that "when [her] daughter got married, she asked if [Skjermo's] father could walk her down the aisle to show the world that the [*Lebensborn*] spell was broken."<sup>309</sup>

The same motivation to change international perceptions of the *Lebensborn* program and its victims spurs many of the *Lebensborn* children to share their stories. Recent legal proceedings initiated by the *Lebensborn* children against the Norwegian government have also helped lift the taboo on public discussion of the war children's turbulent pasts. Paul Hansen, Gerd Fleischer, and others feel a responsibility to share their stories in order raise awareness of what their unfortunate group has faced.<sup>310</sup> They do this, in large part, to help other *Lebensborn* children who have remained silent to realize that there are others who understand the complex emotions and troubled lives that so many of them have endured.

As demonstrated by the accounts cited here, many *Lebensborn* children had violent and traumatic crimes perpetrated against them. The Liberation's spirit of vengeance and retaliation, which Norwegian authorities had hoped would simply dissipate, sparked rabid anti-German sentiment among many Norwegians in the first decades following the war. The unprotected status of the *Lebensborn* children and their high visibility in Norwegian communities made them ideal targets for this supposedly righteous anger. The disturbing prevalence of sexual attacks committed against both

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Interview with Gerd Fleischer in *ibid.*; interview with Paul Hansen in *ibid.*

boys and girls, in particular, may indicate that the perpetrators' psychological motivation for this violence stems from the original acts of sexual collaboration committed by the *Lebensborn* mothers.<sup>311</sup>

Accompanying this inheritance of their mother and father's "sins," many *Lebensborn* children recall having feelings of deep shame about their existence, even when their parentage had been kept a secret from them. Indeed, silence characterized the vast majority of *Lebensborn* children's early lives. The subject of their parentage remained a taboo subject sometimes until the deaths of their adoptive parents.<sup>312</sup> The children who knew the story of their origins could often not talk about them with anyone,<sup>313</sup> and the children who did not understand the source of their instinctive shame could not prepare themselves for the inevitable confrontations with schoolyard bullies or ill-meaning neighbors.<sup>314</sup> While there were, of course, exceptions to this rule, more often than not the *Lebensborn* mothers and children ended up mutually blaming one another for the misfortunes that blighted their lives.<sup>315</sup>

With respect to their other familial relationships, both biological and adoptive, the *Lebensborn* children recount feeling plagued by a sense of never truly belonging or feeling accepted. Many of these children found loving homes with supportive families

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<sup>311</sup> Ericsson and Ellingsen, "Life Stories of Norwegian War Children," 102-103. The daughters of the "loose women" were especially at risk for sexual abuse at the hands of their neighbors, foster parents, and stepfathers.

<sup>312</sup> Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 71. "Opplysningen eller antydningen om at barnefaren egentlig var tysk framkommer kanskje først nå etter 50 år ved at barnemoren selv forteller det til barnet, eller ved at andre innen familien opplyser det etter barnets mor er død."

<sup>313</sup> Randi Bratteli, *Vi som Aldri kan Glemme: Krigens Barn Forteller* [We Who Can Never Forget: The War Children Speak] (Oslo/Gjøvik: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1990). *Lebensborn* child Liv Høegh, for example, recalls her inability to burden her mother with the knowledge of her schoolyard torment, and the deepening chasm of silence and misunderstanding that sprang up between them as a result. "Jeg vet ikke sikkert hva mor gjorde med meg. Jeg kunne jo aldri gå hjem og snakke med henne om alle problemene jeg hadde å slåss med, om alle håndsordene jeg måtte ta imot om både henne og meg."

<sup>314</sup> Ericsson and Ellingsen, "Life Stories of Norwegian War Children," 103-104; Clay and Leapman, 137.

<sup>315</sup> Ericsson and Ellingsen, "Life Stories of Norwegian War Children," 105.

(though these accounts are currently highly underrepresented), however local Norwegian communities' dynamics usually ensured that even these *Lebensborn* children felt the full weight of the inferiority ascribed to them.<sup>316</sup> More often, the *Lebensborn* children did not even have the benefit of a warm, open family to come home to; cold foster parents, abusive stepfathers, and bitter mothers all too often comprised the most constant aspects of their isolated, confused childhoods.<sup>317</sup>

Outside their households, *Lebensborn* children felt particularly vulnerable and disconnected from their local and national communities. School especially presented numerous occasions for the shame and embarrassment of these children. Many recall dreading any history lessons related to Germany or World War II; one man even remembers living in constant fear of “being exposed as the offspring of ‘war criminals.’”<sup>318</sup> Recess hour brought the additional threats associated with bullying. And yet there were still other *Lebensborn* children locked away in asylums with no chance even for this kind of tortuous education.<sup>319</sup> Clearly, the war children had very little likelihood of surviving their childhoods unscathed.

The deep and lasting wounds carried by the *Lebensborn* children into their adult years reveal themselves in statistical analyses of their lives. Dag Ellingsen's comparative study of 1,150 war children in 2004 pointed out several trends, both negative and encouraging.<sup>320</sup> On the positive side, nearly 90% of these war children have been married at some point; additionally, they own houses and have children of their own, and

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 96-97, 103.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 97-98.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 101-102.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 105.

would seem to embody the very “picture of normality.”<sup>321</sup> Disturbingly, however, war children have a much higher rate of suicide than their peers, they experience more health problems (particularly mental health problems), they have more divorces, and they achieve much lower levels of education and income.<sup>322</sup> For example, Ellingsen’s study could not locate a single war child who went on to earn a Ph.D.<sup>323</sup> The trauma, instability, and isolation of their childhoods continue to impact them adversely even today.

Thus, the negligent and often brutal treatment experienced by the *Lebensborn* children after World War II has marked their entire lives and denied them some of the most basic human rights. Beginning with the Norwegian government’s attempts to have them deported and to deny their rightful citizenship, the children have had to endure almost every imaginable kind of punishment – political, physical, emotional, sexual, and material – for the supposed crimes of their parents. Called “German whores” on the playground and labeled “mentally deficient” in institutions and in the press, the *Lebensborn* children have also contended with the many offensive identities imposed on them by the Norwegian government, their caretakers, and the Norwegian people.

Even before the Liberation, in the public’s opinion the half-German *Lebensborn* children posed an apparent threat to the Norwegian nation, which would have to be dealt with as swiftly and completely as possible. Deportation seemed the obvious answer, but no large-scale plans could be organized in a timely enough manner. With most of the 10,000-12,000 *krigsbarna* already settled into homes, orphanages, or institutions by 1946, the Norwegian government elected to lapse into silence on the issue of war

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid. For example, Ellingsen’s study could not locate a single war child who went on to earn a Ph.D.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

children and adopt a hands-off approach to the course of their lives. Left to fend for themselves in staunchly anti-German local communities, the *Lebensborn* children and their mothers, sometimes together and sometimes separately, attempted to navigate life in post-war Norway devoid of legal and moral protection.

“Patriotic” Norwegians’ outrage against the *Lebensborn* participants and their offspring could be expressed in any number of ways, and was exercised quite often. As such, many *Lebensborn* children faced physical violence, sexual abuse, and exclusion from both their own family units and larger Norwegian society. Their shared experiences of suffering and isolation both challenge commonly-held conceptions of Norway’s unblemished wartime resistance struggle, and illustrate the profound depth of Norwegians’ popular anger with the Germans and the “traitorous” women whose “horizontal collaboration” constituted an especially heinous betrayal. Several decades later, the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children would present their grievances on an international stage, rightfully demanding official recognition of their hardships.

## EPILOGUE: TOWARD REPARATIONS AND RECONCILIATION

“...Neither can we let the [20<sup>th</sup>] century pass without addressing the injustice many war children have suffered in the post-war era. On behalf of the Norwegian government, I want to apologize for the discrimination and injustice to which the war children have been subjected.”

--- Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik,  
New Year’s Speech, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000<sup>324</sup>

As the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children entered middle-age, many of them began to feel the need for an organization of *krigsbarna* in which they could share their life experiences with one another, largely to put a stop to their individual, isolated sufferings, as noted in the previous chapter. To this end, several Norwegian *Lebensborn* children founded the *Krigsbarnforbundet Lebensborn* (KBFL, “The *Lebensborn* War Children Association”) in 1986.<sup>325</sup> The organization now comprises over 600 members, representing 7.5% of the total 8,000 official Norwegian *Lebensborn* children, and 5% of the total estimated 12,000 German-Norwegian *krigsbarna*.<sup>326</sup> After decades of mistreatment and abuse at the hands of their national government and fellow citizens, and with the growing attention of historians and the popular media, the *Lebensborn* children began exchanging information meant to ameliorate some of the most painful conditions

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<sup>324</sup> Regjering.no Dokumentarkiv: Informasjon fra Regjeringen og Departementene, “Statsminister Kjell Magne Bondevik, Årskiftet 1999/2000, January 1, 2000, 7:30 PM,” Tale og Artikkel [Information from the Government and Ministries, “Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, New Year’s Speech 1999/2000, 7:30 PM,” Speeches and Articles], accessed online on February 12, 2013 at:

[http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dokumentarkiv/Regjeringen-Bondevik-I/smk/Taler-og-artikler-arkivert-individuelt/2000/arsskiftet\\_1999-2000.html?id=264369](http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dokumentarkiv/Regjeringen-Bondevik-I/smk/Taler-og-artikler-arkivert-individuelt/2000/arsskiftet_1999-2000.html?id=264369). “Vi kan heller ikke la århundreskiftet passere, uten at vi tar inn over oss den urett mange krigsbarn har lidd i etterkrigstida. På vegne av den norske stat vil jeg beklage den diskriminering og urettferdighet krigsbarna har vært utsatt for.”

<sup>325</sup> “Litt Historie” [“A Little History”], *Norsk Krigsbarnforbundet Lebensborn* (KBFL) official organization website, accessed on July 20, 2012 at: <http://www.lebensbornnorway.org/velkomm.htm>; Koop, 223. “Viele der norwegischen *Lebensborn*-Kinder hatten sich im 1986 gegründeten ‘Krigsbarnforbundet *Lebensborn*’ zusammengeschlossen, um sich gegen die anhaltende Diskriminierung der staatlichen Stellen zu wehren.”

<sup>326</sup> “Litt Historie,” KBFL website. “Krigsbarnsproblema tikken kom opp I medier, og 1986 ble Norges krigsbarnsforbund grunnlagt, og som nå har 600 medlemmer.”



under which they had lived up to that point. In particular, they shared stories about their troubled lives, which served to foster a sense of communal understanding and inclusion, feelings that had been denied to them all their lives. Further, the *Lebensborn* children – in their early- to mid-forties by that time – traded advice about how best to take advantage of the 1986 Norwegian law that made it possible for them to attempt to trace their German fathers.<sup>327</sup>

While these now-adult Norwegian *Lebensborn* children met with varying degrees of success in tracking down their biological fathers or – more often – their German half-siblings, the sense of belonging created by letters and phone calls through the KBFL community proved almost universally powerful and enduring. Indeed, by 1990 several of the *Lebensborn* children who had only corresponded up to that point, agreed to meet in person at the former German *Lebensborn* home in Kohren-Salis.<sup>328</sup> There, they exchanged family photos and life stories, enjoying an instantaneous and comfortable familiarity with one another.<sup>329</sup> The participants of the meeting found the experience so fulfilling and bonding that the Norwegian KBFL has continued organizing large, association-wide annual gatherings since 1990, often inviting *Lebensborn*- and war children from other countries to attend.<sup>330</sup> Their common struggles and triumphs, shared in the KBFL's unique community of genuine sympathy and understanding, have forged

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<sup>327</sup> “Litt Historie,” KBFL website. “Samme år blev det i følge lov mulig for barna å forska etter sine far.”

<sup>328</sup> Lilienthal, 247-248. “1990 traffen sich im ehemaligen Kinderheim in Kohren-Salis... einige ‘Norwegerkinder,’ wie sie früher hießen und sich heute noch selbst so nennen als Kinder...”

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 248. “Es war interessant...welches starkes Gruppengefühl sie bereits entwickelt haben, obwohl sie sich erst kurze Zeit kennen. Sie...sprachten sich mit dem Vertrauten ‘Du’ an, zeigten sich gegenseitig Fotos aus ihren Kindheitstagen and tauschten Berichte über ihre Lebenswege aus...”

<sup>330</sup> For instance, this year’s meeting will take place on June 6-9, 2013, in the Klekken hotel, former site of a Norwegian *Lebensborn* home. The theme for the gathering is “My father – the German soldier,” and the KBFL has invited any Danish, German, or Belgian war children who wish to attend. (“Årsmøte” [“Yearly Meeting”], KBFL website)

unbreakable bonds of friendship that have provided many of these Norwegian *Lebensborn* children with a novel sense of family.

Additionally, the airing of mutual grievances among members of the KBFL has instilled them with a sense of common purpose. While the organization grew stronger during the 1990s, a number of journalists and historians took up the subject of the Nazis' *Lebensborn* program and the post-war hardships faced by the Norwegian *krigsbarna*. Muckraking writers and filmmakers sensationalized many aspects of the history of *Lebensborn*, and are largely responsible for the popular "breeding farm" misconceptions. They have positively impacted the lives of the German-Norwegian children, however, by helping to lift the taboo on public discussion of the program.<sup>331</sup> As international scholars such as Georg Lilienthal and Kåre Olsen began publishing more academically responsible histories of *Lebensborn*, the plight of the Norwegian *krigsbarna* came to worldwide attention. Olsen's 1998 landmark *Krigens Barn: De Norsk Krigsbarna og deres Mødre*, in particular, impelled Norwegian government officials to acknowledge the injustices that had occurred in that nation for over fifty years.<sup>332</sup> Just over a year after the publication of Olsen's book, Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik issued an official apology on behalf of the national government to the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children for the "injustice many...[had] suffered."<sup>333</sup> Bondevik's apology, delivered during his New Year's Speech on January 1, 2000, consisted of just two vaguely-worded sentences.

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<sup>331</sup> See, for example, the early (and sometimes biased) work of Henry and Hillel.

<sup>332</sup> "Litt Historie," KBFL website. "1998 publisertes historikeren Kåre Olsens bok 'Krigens barn,' som kan på som et standardverk om tyskbarne i Norge. Og ved det følgende årsskiftet ba daværende statsminister Bondevik barna om unnskyldning for den behandling de fikk gjennomgå på venskjøttede barnehjem, hos udugelige foster- eller adoptivforeldre og i skolene."

<sup>333</sup> "Statsminister Kjell Magne Bondevik, Årsskiftet 1999/2000."

Understandably unimpressed with this gesture, 122 members of the KBFL initiated legal proceedings against the Norwegian government in 2001. They sued for more specific official acknowledgement of their sufferings, as well as reparations for the harm inflicted upon them and the opportunities denied to them.<sup>334</sup> This first class-action lawsuit was dismissed, though the judge suggested to the plaintiffs that their case would fare better if presented to the *Storting* (the Norwegian Parliament), the legislative body with the actual authority to award reparations.<sup>335</sup> Both frustrated and hopeful of bringing their suffering to international attention, an even larger group of 154 Norwegian *Lebensborn* children took their case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.<sup>336</sup> They demanded that the sitting Norwegian government apologize for past administrations' legislative discrimination against the *Lebensborn* children, and asked for reparations of between €60,000 and €244,000.<sup>337</sup> In July 2007 their demands were dismissed, this time on the technical grounds that the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children had not exhausted all the legal options available to them within Norway.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Koop, 223; Julian Pettifer "Norway's 'Lebensborn,'" *BBC News Online* (London: December 5, 2001, sec. Programmes: Crossing Continents), accessed on September 18, 2012; "2001 kam es in Oslo einem denkwürdigen Prozess... 122 'Kriegskinder' reichten eine Sammelklage gegen den Staat ein, um neben einer Ehrenerklärung auch eine Entschädigung zu erreichen." In Koop, 223.

<sup>335</sup> Pettifer; Koop, 223. "Zwar wurde die erste Klage norwegischer *Lebensborn*-Kinder abgewiesen, doch bemühte sich dann die Osloer Regierung um eine ernsthafte Aufarbeitung dieses Teils der Geschichte."

<sup>336</sup> Koop, 223; Andrew Malone, "Stolen by the Nazis: The tragic tale of 12,000 blue-eyed blond children taken by the SS to create an Aryan super-race," *The Daily Mail Online* (London, January 9, 2009). "Inzwischen beschäftigt sich der Europäische Menschengerichtshof in Straßburg mit dem Schicksal der norwegischen 'Kriegskinder.' 154 norwegische Staatsangehörige... haben Klage gegen den norwegischen Staat erhoben, weil dieser Gesetze und Verordnungen geschaffen habe, die allein der Dransalierung der 'tyskebarn' dienen." In Koop, 223.

<sup>337</sup> Koop, 223. The Norwegian government had refused to issue a joint apology before this time, claiming that the hardships experienced by the *Lebensborn* children were the result of individual Norwegians' actions, rather than of government policies. "Sie verlangen Entschädigungen von umgerechnet 60 000 bis 244 000 Euro und lassen die Ausflüchte nicht gelten, die besagen, dass die Übergriff in den Nachkriegsjahren nicht vom Staat, sondern von einzelnen Personen ausgeübt worden sein."

<sup>338</sup> Malone; Koop, 224. "Im Juli 2007 wurde die Klage aus formalin Gründen abgewiesen. Die Kläger hätten nicht alle nationalen Möglichkeiten ausgeschöpft und so Antragsfristen überschritten."

Though their case in the European Court failed, many of the *Lebensborn* children, whose accounts we examined in the previous chapter, availed themselves of the opportunity to tell their life stories to an international audience during the proceedings. The lawsuit received a great deal of print media attention, resulting in still further circulation of the Norwegian war children's painful experiences among a worldwide readership.<sup>339</sup> In the meantime, the Norwegian *Storting* had indeed taken up the question of an apology and reparations for the *Lebensborn* children.<sup>340</sup> Led by *Stortingsrepresentant* (Congressman or MP) Finn Marthinsen, chair of the parliamentary select committee on justice, Norwegian legislators sought to "make this apology not just in words but also in the end with compensation and money...[in short,] to close this shameful chapter in our history."<sup>341</sup>

After several long years of debate and public opposition, especially from the generation of Norwegians who lived through the Nazi occupation,<sup>342</sup> Marthinsen's justice committee finally arrived at a reparations settlement regarding the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children on March 18, 2005.<sup>343</sup> The *Erstatningsordning for Krigsbarn* (Compensation Plan for War Children) entitled any person born to a Norwegian mother and a member of the German occupation force – regardless of whether or not they

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<sup>339</sup> Indeed, many of the online newspaper sources I have relied upon in this study to recount the traumatic life stories of the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children date from this period. The official website of the KBFL has an extensive archive of such sources available at:

<http://www.lebensbornnorway.org/velkomm.htm>, under the link "Krigsbarn forteller: Krigsbarn i media."

<sup>340</sup> Koop, 223. For example, the Social Ministry commissioned a research project to discover the nature and extent of the suffering the Norwegian government had inflicted upon the *Lebensborn* children.

"...startete das Sozialministerium ein entsprechendes Forschungsprojekt."

<sup>341</sup> Finn Marthinsen, quoted in "Lebensborn 2620."

<sup>342</sup> Ibid. Marthinsen notes, "I've had a lot of very angry letters from people saying, my father died in the war – are you going to pay me compensation? There's a certain generation who see this bill as a betrayal."

<sup>343</sup> Norske Justissekretariatene, "Erstatningsordning for Krigsbarn" ["Compensation Plan for the War Children"] in the online archive of the Norges Krigsbarnforbundet at: <http://www.nkbf.no/index.html>, under "Dokumentasjon: Erstatningssaker." Accessed on September 6, 2012.

currently held Norwegian citizenship – to a maximum of 200,000 *kroner* (approximately \$35,000) in compensation for the abuse they might have suffered as a direct result of their identity as a war child.<sup>344</sup> Most individuals would be entitled to 60,000-120,000 *kroner* (\$10,000-21,000), though those who could prove themselves subject to “particular suffering, loss, and unfairness” would – in theory – be entitled to much more.<sup>345</sup>

Unfortunately, the *Lebensborn* children have found it extremely difficult to prove their claims of abuse because so little documentation of the harsh treatment perpetrated against them by other Norwegians exists. In such cases, which constitute the vast majority, a “credible claim” of bullying or abuse would entitle an individual to 20,000 *kroner* (only \$3500).<sup>346</sup> While the *Storting*’s decision thus constitutes a major step forward in securing for the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children the governmental recognition and reparations they so clearly deserve, it has proven decidedly less than successful in securing the material compensation legislators like Marthinsen feel their government owes to these individuals.

Nevertheless, the *Lebensborn* children’s legal battles for official recognition of their hardships, which culminated most recently in the Compensation Plan for War

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid. “Billighetserstatning kan tilkjennes personer født i årene 1940-46, med Norsk mor og far som var soldat for den tyske okkupasjonsmakt i Norge. Det er ikke er vilkår at søker er Norsk statsborger... Personer som er påført særlig lidelse, tap og urimelighet som følge av at de er krigsbarn kan søke billighetserstatning etter den utvidede ordningen. Typiske forhold som rammet krigsbarn, og some kan danne grunnlag for en søknad om billighetserstatning er: (1) frem og tilbakesendelsene mellom Norge og Tyskland, (2) urettmessig adopsjon, (3) mobbing. Listen er ikke uttømmende. Det avgjørende vil være om de forhold som anføres i søknaden etter en konkret skjønsmessig vurdering representerer en slik lidelse, tap og urimelighet at det fremstår som rimelig at det utbetales billighetserstatning...”

“Det kan tilstås billighetserstatning opp til 200 000 kroner. Nivået billighetserstatning ligger i dag på mellom 60 000-120 000 kroner. Personer som har vært utsatt for mobbing vil ofte ikke kunne fremlegge dokumentasjon for hva de har vært utsatt for. For krigsbarn er det vedtatt en særordning hvor det, basert på en troverdig egenklæring, kan utbetales billighetserstatning på inntil 20 000 kroner. Dersom det foreligger dokumentasjon på alvorlig skade som følge av mobbing, vil billighetserstatning kunne bli vesentlig større.”

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

Children, have forced an international reckoning of the Norwegian government's and public's post-war actions, and attained a measure of success, albeit a small one, in bringing a sense of closure to the war children, who were for so long rejected and reviled. The acceptance of the Norwegian public of the unfortunate children – caught in the middle of a hotly-contested battle over post-war memories of resistance and collaboration under the Nazi occupation – will likely never be complete, especially among those who lived through the war and occupation. There is hope, however, that as the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children's stories continue to emerge in academic works and the press media, we may begin to understand and empathize with their unique situation within history, and advocate for the rights of this marginalized and severely abused group.

## CONCLUSION

This study has been intended as a step toward deepening our comprehension of one of Norwegian history's darkest chapters. In so doing, this thesis has aimed to explain the intellectual origins and wartime operations of the Nazis' *Lebensborn* program in Norway, and to illustrate the ongoing post-war victimization of the children specifically bred as future leaders of the "Aryan master race." We have seen, in particular, how the internationally accepted 19<sup>th</sup> century ideas of Social Darwinism and race "science" provided the ideological basis, and informed the theoretical plans and practical techniques for the Nazis' "negative" and "positive" eugenics initiatives, which culminated in the Final Solution and the *Lebensborn* program. Additionally, my study has analyzed how the unique nature of the Nazi occupation of Norway directed *Lebensborn*'s wartime ministrations in that country. It focused, in particular, on Nazi officials' belief in the "racial value" of Norwegians' "Aryan" blood, the numbers of German stationed in Norway for extensive lengths of time in close proximity to the native population, and Norwegians' resulting deep anger with women who slept with German soldiers. Finally, we have examined the Norwegian government and public's post-war actions against the *Lebensborn* children, the personal accounts of the German-Norwegian "war children," and the recent class-action lawsuits seeking an official apology and reparations from the Norwegian government. Through this discussion, my thesis has presented an overview of the suffering and challenges these German-Norwegian children faced after World War II, and continue to face even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This thesis has thus formed a contribution to the under-researched but rapidly growing field of the Nazis' *Lebensborn* program. Throughout, this thesis has built on –

and translated into English – the work of a host of international scholars, as well as examined the primary evidence of German authorities’ correspondence and speeches, official Nazi policies, and interviews with the Norwegian *Lebensborn* children. More importantly, in tracing the pro-natal initiative from its ideological origins, to its wartime operations in Nazi-occupied Norway, and finally to its repercussions for the women and faultless children who participated in it, this thesis has attempted to provide the first chronologically comprehensive picture of *Lebensborn* in Norway.

Many further avenues of research and inquiry remain to be undertaken with respect to the *Lebensborn* program. Chief among these are: a thorough examination of the persecution of Norwegian women accused of “sexual collaboration” with German soldiers, and a discussion of the *Lebensborn* participants’ lives after the war that takes into account the powerful influences of gender and post-war memory. Historians still need to analyze just how and why the *Lebensborn* children and their mothers posed such an apparently severe threat to the popular conception of Norway as a nation of fierce resisters against the Nazis, which is still deeply-entrenched in many of the former Allied nations. In addition, scholars must further delineate the important gendered differences in the post-war treatment of collaborators (for example, the official denial of citizenship and pensions to *Lebensborn* mothers, a punishment reserved solely for the female “horizontal collaborators”). Further, by tracing the *Lebensborn* children’s recent struggle for justice and its reception by the Norwegian public and government, and contrasting it with the official and popular recognition of the Norwegian Resistance movement, historians may be able to illustrate and analyze the motivations and actions of both sides of this highly fraught post-war memory contest. Finally, historians must explore in



greater detail the justifications offered by Norwegian medical experts and governmental officials for the institutionalization and abuse of the *Lebensborn* children after 1945, in order to highlight the many disturbing parallels between the Norwegian government's treatment of the *Lebensborn* children and the Nazis' persecution of minorities during the Holocaust. The answers to these intriguing and important questions may also provide important comparative insights for future studies of the *Lebensborn* program in Nazi-occupied countries such as France, Denmark, and Poland.

It will likely take many years for researchers to tease out the various threads of this complex, ongoing, and highly contested story. During their inquiries, however, historians may acquire vital insights into the power of post-war memory in shaping Norwegian national identity. Scholars will quite possibly find that the Norwegian government's attempts to deport the *Lebensborn* participants and decades-long silence regarding the abuses many of them suffered, reflect the perceived threat these women and children posed to "resistance [becoming] the principal frame of reference for wartime histories, commemoration, and public memory" in Norway.<sup>347</sup> Ordinary Norwegians' violence against the *Lebensborn* mothers and children, and their opposition to movements for apologies and reparations, are likely also expressions of these anxieties, though the gender-specific nature of the punishments meted out by male Norwegians may also reflect larger post-war concerns about national masculinity after the occupation experience.

Such questions lie outside the scope of the present study. However, one may still draw several conclusions based on the information presented in this thesis. First, the

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<sup>347</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, "The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe," in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 21.

Nazis' eugenics programs, both "negative" and "positive," built upon a vast body of international Social Darwinist and racial "science" theory; thus, the Final Solution and Himmler's *Lebensborn* represented – in a sense – simply the most extreme and radicalized examples of 20<sup>th</sup> century eugenics initiatives. Second, Nazi officials' perceptions of the Norwegian people's culture and genetic "worth," coupled with the particular practical realities of the Nazi occupation of Norway, dictated the establishment and operations of *Lebensborn* there, and also contributed to the program's immense "success" in that country. Finally, and most importantly, the Norwegian people's revulsion at the German-Norwegian *Lebensborn* children resulted in decades of popular abuse and governmental exclusion, which marred the lives of these children to varying degrees. As these persecuted individuals continue to seek legal justice for the wrongs perpetrated against them, raising international awareness of the Norwegian *Lebensborn* mothers' and children's plights is more vital now than ever. This thesis, though a short academic work, has endeavored to contribute to this essential process of reconciliation by enhancing our understanding of the *Lebensborn* program as a whole, and of its operations and aftermath in Norway in particular.

APPENDIX

Kåre Olsen's chart of *Lebensborn* home names, places, purposes, capacities, and dates of operation. This chart appears in his *Krigens Barn: De Norske Krigsbarna og deres Mødre* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co., 1998), 99. The reproduction appearing here is my own translation.

Type of Home	Name	Location	Capacity	Dates of Operation
<b>Mother's and maternity (birth) homes</b>	Hurdal Verk	Hurdal	Children: 69 Mothers: 40	August 1941- May 1945
	Klekken	Near Hønefoss	Children: 60 Mothers: 35	May 1942- May 1945
<b>Ante-natal mother's homes</b>	Dr. Holm's Hotel	Geilo	Mothers: 60	Autumn 1942- March 1945
	Høsbjør Hotel	Near Hamar	Mothers: 100	March 1945- May 1945
<b>"City homes"</b>	Kristinelund Street 5	Oslo	Mothers: 15	Spring 1941- December 1941
	Olav Kyrre's Place	Oslo	Children: 6 Mothers: 20	February 1942-May 1945
	Hop	Near Bergen	Children: 6 Mothers: 20	June 1942- May 1945
	Trondheim	Trondheim	Children: 10 Mothers: 30	Autumn 1942- May 1945
<b>Children's homes and orphanages</b>	Godthåb	Bærum	Children: 160	February 1942-May 1945
	Stalheim	Voss	Children: 100	February 1943-May 1945
<b>Mother's school</b>	Moldegård	Near Bergen	Children: 80	Spring 1943- May 1945
	Reistad	Lier	Mothers: approx. 20	Autumn 1942- May 1945

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