

# "I AM FILLED WITH HOPE THAT MY SON IS STILL ALIVE"

## THE SEARCH FOR MISSING CHILDREN AFTER THE HOLOCAUST<sup>1</sup>

TEHILA DARMON MALKA

In this article, Tehila Darmon Malka presents and analyzes various aspects of the complex and painful process of the search for missing children after the Holocaust. Based on search requests sent to the Central Identification Index – a historical source of major importance that in recent years has been used in research – this article describes the unique profile of the searches for children as part of the search for relatives in general. In addition to the searching parents, to whom the first part of the article is devoted, the end of the war saw the organization of various agencies who viewed identifying children who survived in hiding and under assumed identities as a vital national mission. The public discourse on the lost children that was part of this search process offers us an original perspective on the rehabilitation of Jewish society after the Holocaust.

In 1948, the film *The Search* won an Academy Award. Shot in 1947 and directed by Fred Zinnemann, the film told the story of a son and mother searching for one another. Unique about the film was that it was shot at the authentic sites destroyed in the war, with the parts played by actual survivor children who had lost their families. It was the first film to present on the big screen the large-scale

search for children that began immediately after the war. These searches were carried out by a variety of parties that can be roughly divided into two main groups: 1) institutional bodies and national organizations; 2) relatives and family members, of which a small yet salient proportion was made up of surviving parents searching for their own lost children. This article will focus on the subject of the





missing children after the war. I will focus on the specific aspects of the parents' search for their children after the war compared to the national search and finally, touch on the interaction between the two searching groups.

World War II claimed the highest number of casualties of any war since the documentation of wars began. But beyond the documented loss of life, the war created another equally

painful phenomenon: the disappearance of millions of people. According to the accepted sociological definitions, a person is considered missing if someone is searching for them even when there is no information about their condition or whereabouts. When the war ended, millions of refugees and displaced persons tried to return to their homes and families to discover the fate of their loved





A JDC children's home in Austria after the war (Yed Vashem Archives)

ones and in the hope of rebuilding their lives. According to the estimates of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration as of May 30, 1946, even after the return of millions to their homes after the war, there remained more than 3,585,000 missing persons from the Allied countries, apart from Russia, where it could be assumed that the missing numbered in the millions. In addition, some 1.7 million Germans were missing.

On June 3, 1944, the section for uprooted populations in the Allied armies drafted a document that outlined the principles policy and treatment of the displaced persons. Since it was anticipated that millions of people would find themselves displaced, directionless, homeless and unable to start their rehabilitation at the war's end, it was decided that all displaced persons who found themselves outside the borders of their own country because of the war and who wished to return to their country and home could do so through a process called repatriation. At the end of the war, this policy was

implemented with full force. Soviet citizens were forced to return to their home country, and citizens of other countries were allowed to choose whether or not they wished to return. At the same time, it was clear to the heads of the armies and states that the return of citizens to their countries was critical to the start of a state's rehabilitation.

However, due to the families' desire to find their family members and renew ties with them, many refused to join the process and settle in the place designated for them, fearing that they would be unable to find their missing family members if they did so. Consequently, the Allied armies determined that the phenomenon of migration in search of missing relatives was preventing the resettlement of the population, which was of course a basic precondition for the rebuilding of Europe. That was why the Allied armies decided to establish the Central Tracing Bureau, which later changed its name to ITS (International Tracing Service). In 1951, this body was annexed to the International Red Cross, with the two search sections united into one.





For the Jewish survivors, the search for relatives was even more pressing. To many of them, joining the repatriation being carried out by Allied armies had but one goal – to return home to reunite with family members and then to leave. Unlike the members of other nations, many Jewish repatriates, especially those from Eastern Europe, had no desire to resettle in their country of origin, and the only reason for their return was the chance that any of their family members might have survived and they would in this way be reunited. Out of a desire to help this population and to direct them, either by finding relatives in Israel and immigrating to Eretz Israel, the Jewish Agency established its Relatives Search Department. Other Jewish organizations, such as the JDC, the Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants (OSE) and the International Jewish Congress, also set up search offices to help survivors with this most burning issue.

Among the missing persons that the survivors were searching for were of course children. According to UNESCO, when the war ended there were 8 million children in Germany, 6.5 million children in the Soviet Union, and 1.5 million children in France who were virtually homeless. This is how William Byford Jones, an officer in the British army described them: “There were also little children who were alone, carrying some small bundle, with a pathetic label attached to them. They had somehow got detached from their mothers, or their mothers had died and been buried by other displaced persons somewhere along the wayside.”<sup>2</sup> Most of these children had lost contact with their families during the war and were considered missing from their families, and among them one small group was particularly striking – the Jewish children.

The Jewish children found alive and on

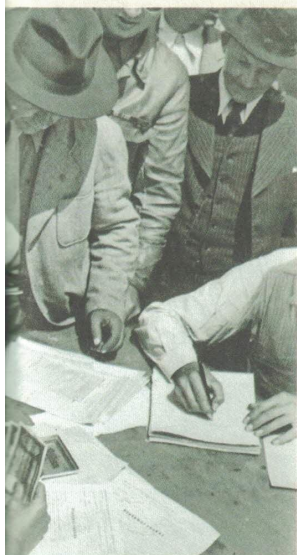
their own were placed into the category of children separated from their families due to racial, religious or national persecution. The chief means by which Jewish children were saved during the war was by being hidden in the homes of non-Jews and in orphanages and convents. In this way, their parents had hoped the children would escape the bitter fate of their family and people. When the war ended, some of these children began to come out of their hiding places, just when a search for children who remained in the homes of their rescuers began. Both types of children were brought to children’s homes run by UNRRA, later run by emissaries that came from Eretz Israel.

#### PARENTS SEARCHING

Among those searching for the children were parents who had managed to survive the war. Some actually found their children. Gertrude Kase Richman, a welfare worker in the DP camps reported what happened in the UNRRA Rosenheim Transient Children’s Center while she was there:

*About 25 percent of the children were claimed by their parents. As might be expected, Rosenheim became a major point in the return movement, causing many parents to come there. In addition, parents could find out through the district head/leadership/administrations of the various kibbutzim – kibbutzim were groups of children gathered from different places – about the presence of their children there. That is why it was not surprising to learn that on the day a group arrived, numerous parents also arrived who would wait for them with the aim of claiming their children.<sup>3</sup>*

Parents who were unable to find their children on their own either in the children’s homes throughout Europe, by returning home or searching in the place where they



Registration of survivors by UNRRA staff (Yad Vashem Archives)



had hidden the child turned to the aid organizations that specialized in searching for family members.

It should, however, be noted that the proportion of appeals from parents to the search organizations was low compared to the search for other relatives during this period. A breakdown of about two hundred search requests that arrived over a period of several days in October 1947 to the Central Identification Index (CLI), which was located in the United States and coordinated the search and information requests that came to several Jewish organizations, including the Hebrew Immigrants Aid Society (HIAS) and the Joint Distribution Committee showed that only one letter (0.5%) had come from a parent who searching for their child, compared to 39% of the requests to help find uncles and aunts and 29% of the requests to find cousins.<sup>4</sup> This is consistent with the analysis of letters I conducted in the Jewish Agency's Relatives Search Department over a period of fifteen years (1945-1960), according to which only 6% of the letters came from parents searching for their children.

There are two main reasons for the small number of requests from parents. One was the death of the children – most of the Jewish children who lived in Nazi-occupied countries perished during the war. Due to the harsh living conditions in the ghettos and during escaped, the mortality rate among children was the highest among the entire population, with the parents themselves often witnessing their death, hence the absolute certainty regarding their fate. Another reason is the death of the parents, especially mothers who were responsible for the care of their young children and who were sent together with them to their deaths. There were also cases of children who were abandoned, either in the hope that a stranger



The Rosenheim Transient Children's Center after the war (Yad Vashem Archives)

might find the child and save them or due to the mother's desire to save her own life in the knowledge that if burdened with a child she would be sent to her death. But the vast majority of mothers remained with their young children or tried to save them as best they were able.

In the following lines, I will try to characterize the parents' search for their children based on the search-request letters sent to the various organizations involved in the search for and location of relatives after the war. When discussing the search for children, two possible definitions of the word child must be considered: a person from the age of zero to sixteen or eighteen, the age





range defined by the search organizations and the offspring of the parents regardless of the child's age. Since this article deals with both parents and search organizations, I will use the narrow definition of the term, i.e. children up to the age of eighteen at the end of the war.

### 1. (ALMOST) HOPELESS SEARCH

When looking for a first-degree relative – parents and children – a search request was sent even when the searcher had no information whatsoever regarding the possible location of the child. In only about 35 percent of the cases did the searching parent have even the slightest knowledge regarding the child's possible whereabouts. Parents searched for their children only when they were convinced that there might be some chance of getting them back even where they no had information at all to back this hope up. This fact is notable because contrary to the notion that searches for family members were a spontaneous and instinctive act, a study of the search-request letters sent to the authorities to launch a search shows just the opposite. In fact, most of those who requested help with searches for family members did so only when the searcher had some kind of actual lead regarding the fate of the missing person. Family members personally and privately tracked down leads while making use of contacts in the circles to which they belonged. Only after receiving concrete information – even if unconfirmed – that the missing person might still be alive did they turn to an authority. Even the vaguest rumor that the missing person had been seen alive or a familiar-sounding name heard on the radio could serve as a reason to start a search because that way the searchers could convince themselves that the effort would not be vain.

An example of an almost hopeless search

without any leads was the search for a child named Sergio de Simon. Sergio was seven when he was deported together with his mother to Auschwitz and in early 1945, he was taken for medical experimentation in the Neuengamme camp. On April 20, 1945, Sergio was murdered together with 19 other children upon whom experiments had also been conducted. The mother survived and managed to reunite with Sergio's father and together they began searching for their child. No signs were found that might indicate that Sergio had survived – no one had seen him or heard his name. Nevertheless, the parents repeatedly appealed to the search organizations with requests to find their son. Even after the murder of the 20 children, including Sergio, in Bullenhuser Damm was discovered in 1983, the mother refused to believe that her son was dead. Only in 1995 was the last page of testimony filled out for Sergio.

In most cases when no concrete information was available, the employees of the search organization had great difficulty finding information about the missing person, although when some information that made a search possible was received, their efforts were often met with success. An example is cited in this letter sent from a DP camp in Germany by an emissary of the welfare agencies in February 1947:

*There is a woman in the camp. [...] A few weeks before the war broke out, she traveled from France to Poland to see her parents. Her husband and two children remained in France. In the meanwhile, the war broke out and the woman ended up in Russia. She knew nothing about the fate of her husband and children. [...] She was recently informed that her children are in Israel and her husband is alive in France. As the mother of her children, she seeks to find her children as soon as*





*possible. They share her last name rather than that of her husband.*<sup>5</sup>

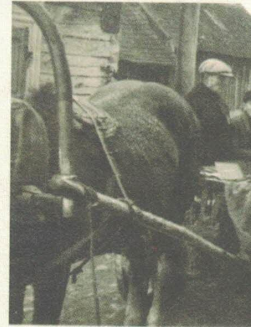
Because in this case the search was carried out in Israel, i.e. a small and fairly delineated area, and because both children were at the ages that the Youth Aliya took care of, it was possible to conduct an efficient search for them. Despite this, it took four months until the Youth Aliya located the two children and another two more until the news was given to the older daughter so that the mother and daughter could be reunited.

Naturally, it was especially difficult to find information about hidden children because as one might expect, the hiding of children was not documented and the death of children was not recorded. In the case of very young children that were saved, it was difficult if not impossible to extract any information from them about their original family. For the parents, the absence of information about their children could be interpreted as a possibility that they might still be alive, opening the door to hope. That is why, although the chances that their child might be found was slim to nonexistent, parents continued to send search requests. Parents searching for their children did so even when the odds were that the child would not be found alive, because they held onto slivers of hope that perhaps their child had not died. For many parents, lack of knowledge was translated into the hope that their child still lived, whereas when searching for other family members, lack of information was translated into the assumption that they were dead. Thus, for example, a father asked representatives of the JDC in Latvia to help him find his son. After failing to find any trace of the son in their records, the JDC representatives turned to the Jewish Agency and asked it to see if the child had perhaps arrived in Israel. "The son was separated

from his father in the Dachau concentration camp on July 24, 1944 and sent to Auschwitz. Some of the boys in that transport survived and returned to Latvia. They noted that Meir L. had been in one of the camps. Please check all the possible records and let us know as soon as possible."<sup>6</sup>

Despite the scant information provided in this letter, the staff tried to locate the boy, but in vain. Today, thanks to overlapping and complementary databases, we are able to fill in the rest of the picture almost entirely. According to documents in the Yad Vashem Archives, the boy, born in 1932, apparently lived in the Kovno ghetto and upon the liquidation of the ghetto, was deported to Dachau. As his father reported, he was indeed sent from there to Auschwitz, where the documentation about his fate discontinued. Despite the more likely scenario that the boy had been murdered in Auschwitz, the father continued to hope that his son had survived. Although there was no concrete information to back up an assumption that the boy was alive, the father hoped that like some other boys that had returned, his son would too. In most cases, however, this was not the case.

The searching parent also knew that the chances of finding their child were slim, as a father who had survived Auschwitz put it. He arrived in Israel and in February 1947 appealed to the Relatives Search Department to help him find his son: "Perhaps I will be lucky enough to find at least one of my two children."<sup>7</sup> The hope that someone would be found was fervent, as the motivation to search for family members, acquaintances and friends in general, and for children in particular stemmed from the fierce loneliness suffered by the survivors. This is the most intense emotion that emerges from the letters, and in the words of one of the authors: "I am left as 'alone as a rock,' poor and ill."<sup>8</sup>



Children in the Kovno ghetto  
(Yad Vashem Archives)





The parents believed that finding the child would provide a cure for their loneliness. Consequently, grasping on to the hope that their child was still alive was apparently also an expression of a far deeper desire, a fantasy in fact, that they might somehow be able to restore the family and world that had existed before the war.

## 2. EXTENSIVE SEARCHES

How long the search went on was also a distinct element when examining the parents' searches for their children. Most search files contain a single letter. When further information or clarification was requested to aid the searchers, another letter was sent. However, in the search files for children, it is not unusual to find thick files filled with exchanges of letters that continued over years. One example is the case of a mother searching for her son who had disappeared during the war when he was a young soldier in the Red Army. The first letter was sent in early 1950:

*I, the undersigned, the mother of Mark, born in 1926 in Galicia, hereby request to please inform me regarding the address and fate of my son and to provide me with all the details as soon as possible.*

*The details known to me are as follows: In 1943 (September), my son was sent to the Red Army in Asia [...] and his last letter is dated February 10, 1945. After that, I received a notice from Moscow that he suddenly disappeared on February 20, 1945 during the advancement of the Russian army. There are rumors that he may have deserted the Russian army and joined the British or American army and that he is alive somewhere outside Russia. I am a new immigrant and my son does not know that I have moved to Israel or my address, and I very much want to find my son. That is why I am appealing to you to*

*take all necessary steps, such as placing advertisements in the newspapers outside Israel and all other efforts as you see fit to find my son and send me his address so that we can finally be reunited.*<sup>9</sup>

Despite the efforts of the Relatives Search Department, including appeals to the Red Cross and the embassy in Poland, as well as the efforts of the mother who appealed independently to the Red Cross based on the response from the Red Army that her son appeared neither on the list of soldiers that were killed or POWs, the son remained unfound. The mother refused to give up and sent the department another four letters in 15 years, all with the same request – I have been suffering greatly over all these years and ask very much for your help to find, if possible, where my son is now.

For many parents, the time that passed did not blunt the edge of their pain or sense of loss, and so even after ten or twenty years, they continued to search for their children. As a mother wrote to the department in 1959:

*Afterwards [from 1949 on], I received no information that he was alive, that perhaps there would be a reason for me to live, because unfortunately, I do not have one. That is, I have nothing left of my family – neither my husband nor my children. I am all alone. My daughters are no more. The first's name is Beila and the second is Rosa. Please answer me about the above. Perhaps there is some remedy for my terrible pain.*<sup>10</sup>

Even where there was scant correspondence in the file, the date when the file was opened was significant. An example is the case of a father who sent a search request from Germany via the Organization of German Immigrants in 1955, which wrote on his behalf to the Relatives Search Department: "The child was seen in early 1945 in Auschwitz. Anyone who has any



information and can help to make contact should write to us. We would be happy if you would publish this." It appears that at least half of the search requests were opened from the year 1950 on and this appears to be indicative of the hope that the parents continued to harbor, even years after the war.

The parents' searches for their children bore unique characteristics and they may be given the heading "inner impulse." In other words, in cases involving the search for other relatives, when deciding to turn to the various search agencies, the degree of probability that the person would be found as well as the amount of time that could be invested in the search were major considerations. In the case of parents searching for their children, however, these parameters were negligible. Furthermore, unlike in other cases, when an external party was needed in order to get a search started, the searches for children were almost entirely an internal matter disconnected from external parties and motivated by a pressing sense of urgency.

#### **INSTITUTIONALIZED NATIONAL SEARCH "THE CHILD OF ALL OF US"**

In addition to the parents searching for their children, when the war ended, various national search organizations and agencies became involved because they considered the finding of children who had been hidden and their removal from the homes of their non-Jewish rescuers to be one of the most urgent and pressing tasks for the Jewish people as a whole. While the exact number of Jewish children who were saved will never be known, according to Nachum Bogner, of the almost one million children up to the age of 14 that lived in Poland before the Holocaust, some 28,000 survived, although only about 5,000 of them were saved in Poland itself and were recorded in the lists

of Holocaust survivors, of whom about 2,000 lived in Warsaw and its environs. About 4,500 children were handled by UNRRA or institutions under its auspices, including children's homes and kibbutzim of children whose counselors had come from Israel to take care of them. However, there was no doubt that other children still remained in the homes of their rescuers or in convents, and stories of this kind were often published in the newspapers at the time, accompanied by concerns that these children might be lost to the Jewish people forever.

The first to take action to restore these children were Holocaust survivors themselves along with soldiers from the liberating armies. Later, Rabbi David Kahane, the chief Jewish chaplain of the postwar Polish army, through his emissary Rabbi Yeshayahu Drucker, did a great deal to remove Jewish children from Christian homes. Rabbi Yitzhak Halevi Herzog also met with Pope Pius VI to receive his permission to remove children from Christian institutions. At the same time, in the absence of an appropriate organizations and settings to take in young children, it appeared in late 1945 that this type of action was abandoned. In early 1946, the Zionist Coordinating Group for the Redemption of Children in Poland was set up at the initiative of the youth movements. Its goal was to find and redeem children from the Christian homes in which they had been living until then and to set up children's homes in order to restore the Jewish children to their people and prepare them to immigrate to Israel. Because the task of finding and restoring the children to their people was considered critical, it was a concerted, multi-branch effort. Thus, for example, the heads of the Zionist Coordinating Group obtained funding from the JDC to run the children's homes and the funding to remove the



UNRRA children's center in the Zeilsheim DP camp  
(Yad Vashem Archives)



Rabbi David Kahane  
(Yad Vashem Archives)



Rabbi Yitzhak Halevi Herzog  
(Kiddush Hashem Archives)



Album of the Zionist  
Coordinating Group  
for the Redemption of  
Children in Poland  
(Yad Vashem Archives)



children from Christian homes came from the Jewish Agency.

The choice of the words redeem, liberation and rescue was no coincidence. These concepts expressed the feeling of the activists who were convinced that their work made it possible to restore the children to their roots, redeem their souls and bodies from those who might convert them to another religion, and to a certain extent help to redeem the entire nation after the catastrophe that befell it. The choice of the word redeem and the urgency felt by all those that worked to find every missing Jewish child, even without receiving explicit requests from family members, along with their placement in a children's home or kibbutz expressed the way in which many viewed the surviving children. Through the fact that they were alive, despite everything they had experienced, the children symbolized the hope for the nation's rebirth. That they had overcome all the trials and tribulations they encountered during and

after the war, and the desire on the part of many children to immigrate to Eretz Israel turned the surviving children into a symbol of the entire nation's rebirth. In this way, the children were not only part of their own individual families, but also representatives of the entire nation.

The approach of the various authorities to this matter underpinned the understanding that not only were children part of the collective into which they were born, but that they were also the key to the revival of the nation as a whole. "We have become very poor in Jewish children and therefore the value of every Jewish child has grown manifold for us," declared a World Jewish Congress position paper in 1945,<sup>11</sup> and as testified by Sarah Shner Nishmit, who was active in the Zionist Coordinating Group, regarding the motivation behind removing the Jewish children from the homes of their rescuers even when it was clear that the adoptive family was kind: "Our people lost millions.



The Jews of Eastern Europe were irretrievably lost and there is no one to fill the void,"<sup>12</sup> which is why it was incumbent upon them to restore – although not necessarily to their own family – each Jewish child. This was even more so for children without families. Thus, for example, the Allied armies determined that the guardians of these children would be the various Jewish organizations and that they would be authorized to decide where to send the children.

This approach was not exclusive to the issue of the Jewish children and in fact encompassed all the parties in charge of finding the lost children. The subject of the missing children was debated in the years after the war as a national and social issue. The United Nations declared that the abduction of children is a crime against humanity as part of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. At the Nuremberg trials, those responsible for the Lebensborn program were tried for their part in the taking of children of different nationalities from their parents to transfer them to institutions and families in Germany in order to "Aryanize" them. The urge to rebuild the nation states of Europe underlay the declaration by UNRRA that the aim of the search was to find millions of missing children and return them to their home countries out of the desire that they reunite there with their family or be transferred to the state authorities there that cared for children that had no families. The question regarding the welfare of the child was one that was rarely asked and up until 1948, the assumption was that the child belonged to his state and biological family. Even when the question arose, for example in Holland, the goal was to leave the children within the borders of the state with an emphasis on national identity while ignoring the religious identity.

In fact, the welfare of the individual child was not considered and the child was viewed as yet another component in the population that in the aftermath of the war was scattered and displaced from its rightful place, and that now, after the war had ended, the child must be returned as part of the general repatriation process. The welfare of the child, if and when it was at all discussed, was viewed only through the national prism based on the view that it was best for the child to return to his people. According to this approach, and even more so in wake of the Holocaust and the spiritual destruction experienced by the Jewish people, the national movements made every effort to locate Jewish children in order to prepare them to immigrate to Israel. Because this was a national mission of the first order, no discussion was held on the condition of each individual child and decisions about the fate of the children were not made individually.

#### **SUMMARY: AT THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN THE PERSONAL AND THE NATIONAL**

Within the flood for searches of relatives that inundated Europe at the end of the war, the searches for missing children were distinct and unique. Many parties enlisted in the searches, including individuals, states and organizations because the missing children were not just individuals whose whereabouts and fate were unknown; they also represented the potential for revival and rebuilding of society as a whole. In his death, the dead child symbolized the depth of the Nazi cruelty and the helplessness of the individual, expressed in the most terrible and painful way possible in the body of a child abandoned, murdered or starved to death. The pain caused by the missing child emanated from the sense that in a certain sense, the Holocaust was not over. The thought that a Jewish child, who

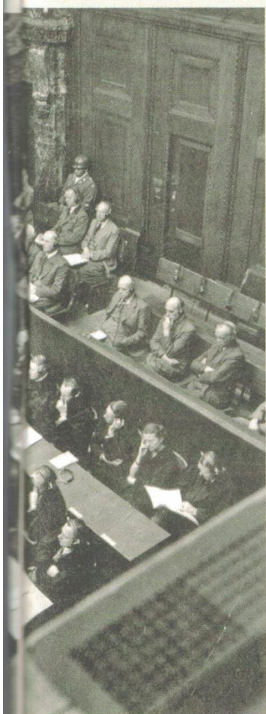


The courtroom of the Nuremberg Trials (Yad Vashem Archives)



Gathering of the Zionist movements after the war (Yad Vashem Archives)





very likely could be the last survivor of a large, ramified family, might live their entire life under an identity that did not belong to them and would be cut off from the Jewish people was extremely painful to all those involved in searching for missing children in the post-war period. That is why the searches for the children were not only a functional matter, but no less and perhaps even more so, a psychological matter and one of national morale in all senses.

Many hopes were pinned on the children lost to the Jewish people. The parent, if he or she survived, viewed in the child both the great love that a parent feels for their child as well as the connection to a past that disappeared along with the bridge to the future. The representatives of the national Zionist movements saw in the child the potential for the rehabilitation of the nation. And indeed, as long as the child was missing with the aim being to find him, the two parties joined hands and worked in cooperation. Even after the child was found, the two parties worked together, because the parent often wanted the child to be educated in the institutions that sent emissaries from Eretz Israel, either because the parent also saw his or her future in Eretz Israel or because they could not afford to or were unable to raise the child.

Sometimes, however, it happened that the desire for individual rehabilitation on the part of the surviving parents who found their individual child clashed with the national desire to hold onto the children and bring them to Israel. This was the situation when parents found their child after he had already begun his education in a children's home of the youth movements. In the absence of the parent's commitment to the Zionist idea and immigration to Israel, the counselors and directors of the children's homes found it difficult to give the children up:

*A problem that arose in regard to reuniting the children and parents was related to the leaders of the kibbutzim. They did not want to lose children from the group. They and the heads of the immigration movement in the DP camps felt that the children represented the future of Palestine and planned to take them into the kibbutzim there where they could be trained to live collective lives in Palestine. That is why the kibbutz leader did not favor any action that involved separating the child from the group and sometimes even argued with the parents, the child and UNRRA to allow the child to remain in the kibbutz.<sup>13</sup>*

The clash was even more intense when it was certain that the child would not immigrate to Eretz Israel with his parents. In such cases, the national consideration was given priority over the personal, as noted by Eliezer Rabinowitz, an emissary of the Jewish Agency to the DP camps:

*The administration of UNRRA informed me in writing that a Jewish family living in Poland was demanding the return of their daughter. To return their daughter to Poland! [...] For me, this was a weighty institutional problem. [...] If it were up to me, I would bring the girl to Eretz Israel without delay, but there are no available certificates whatsoever. The alternative is to send the girl to a different children's camp that would "swallow" her up and she could disappear from UNRRA's probing eyes.<sup>14</sup>*

After consultation with the office in charge of the emissaries in Vienna, it was ultimately decided that the public scandal that would result from the girl's abduction could undermine the endeavor to redeem the children. This, however, was no more than a tactical decision. In other words, the possibility of causing the girl to disappear not only from the eyes of UNRRA but also from her parents who had succeeded after





considerable effort to find their daughter when the children's home was already aware of her identity definitely existed. Although in this case the girl was ultimately returned to her parents, the very fact that some were

willing to do something of this nature was indicative of the approach that saw a conflict between individual and national rehabilitation, if the individual rehabilitation was not subordinated to the national.<sup>15</sup>



1 This paper was written as part of the doctoral dissertation that I am currently writing under the supervision of Prof. Hanna Yablonka. I would like to thank Dr. Ada Gebel who read the drafts of this paper and helped a great deal with her comments, Miki Dror from the Yad Vashem Archives and Miriam Turel at the Central Zionist Archives for helping me to locate the materials.

2 Quoted in Tony Judt Postwar: *A History of Europe Since 1945*, Penguin Books, 2006, p. 23.

3 Yad Vashem Archives, O.37/31, item 3684997. This percentage is lower than that documented in the children's homes of the Central Jewish Committee in which some 400 out of a thousand children had at least one parent. This is cited in Nachum Bogner, *At the Mercy of Strangers: The Rescue of Hidden Jewish Children in Poland*, Yad Vashem, 2001, p. 193.

4 (Yad Vashem Archives), M.18/150.

5 Central Zionist Archives, sp104/90992.

6 Central Zionist Archives, p104/92128, December 26, 1946.

7 Central Zionist Archives, SP104/100024.

8 Central Zionist Archives, SP104/100024.

9 Central Zionist Archives, sp104/105951.

10 Central Zionist Archives, SP104/118265.

11 Stephen Barber, "The Programme of the W.J.C. in the Field of Relief and Reconstruction," USHMM: WJC/Geneva Office, reel 178, file 178, cited in Michael R. Marrus, *The Vatican and the Custody of Jewish Child Survivors after the Holocaust*, p. 383.

12 Sarah Shner Nishmit, *Our Children – The Story of the Zionist Coordinating Group for the Redemption of Children in Poland*, Acre 2007, pp. 49-50.

13 Central Zionist Archives, O.37/31, item no. 3684997.

14 Eliezer Rabinowitz, *In the Uniform of UNRRA with the Holocaust Survivors – 1946-1948*, Tel Aviv 1990, p. 103.

15 This was not the only case. Sarah Shner Nishmit describes at least one more case of a biological mother who sought to restore her son to her after some claimed that she had abandoned him during the war. The couple that adopted the boy and was supposed to immigrate together with him to Eretz Israel was advised or instructed to disappear and cover their tracks in order to prevent the child from being returned. Sarah Shner Nishmit, *Our Children*, pp. 145-146.