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FACE OF THE CHILD AS AN ICON OF THE VICTIMS OF DEHUMANIZATION AND BESTIALITY. AT THE ROOT OF PEDAGOGICAL CONCERN FOR THE FATE OF THE CHILD AND THE ENDANGERED IDENTITY OF CHILDREN IN A SITUATION OF WARTIME AGGRESSION AND CONFRONTATION OF ETHNO-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

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Abstract. The word “child” and the images depicting children and childhood in the context of acts of aggression, war and crime, in a situation of immense suffering, vividly show the processes of dehumanisation taking place and the acts of bestiality of wartime. For pedagogy, the wartime experience of children poses a particular challenge. Pedagogy is burdened with the duty to care especially for the fate of the child experiencing the horrors of war. It is never enough to emphasise that although the issue of concern for the fate of the child in a situation of wartime aggression is imposed by reality itself, it is a reality that, as ethical sensitivity suggests, should not be. One cannot succumb to stupefaction or indifference in reading the great numbers and the ever-increasing number of children experiencing the dangers and sufferings of war. It is necessary – in a pedagogical perspective saturated with axiology and ethics – to see the Face of the Child as an icon of the victims of dehumanisation and bestiality, which appeals to the consciences of people of good will to concretise and intensify pedagogical concern for the fate of the child and for the endangered identity of children in a situation of wartime aggression and confrontation of ethno-cultural differences. The current pedagogical challenge is to move towards a pedagogically deepened reading of what is written in the wounded or scarred Face of the Child as an icon of the victims of the brutality, dehumanisation and bestiality of wartime. It is important to draw attention to the features of children as the smallest, weakest and most vulnerable people – people who are quite defenceless – in the confrontation imposed on them with the barbarity and bestiality of wartime, which is unfortunately being experienced today by Ukrainian children, and it is their faces that are becoming the icons of the victims of dehumanisation and bestiality. The fate of the children of the war poses a current research and practical challenge also in the research field of history (including the history of education and the history of care institutions). Past – but not fully researched and described – crimes against children are also repeated in the 20th and 21st centuries. Therefore, the historical recognition of, among others, the Nazi genocide of children is essential for a better understanding of the current dramatic situation of the children of war. Special attention in the article is given to Ukrainian children of war who are migrants or deported. If a National Day for Polish Children of War has been established in Poland (as a state holiday “in tribute to the Polish Children of War”), an initiative should also be taken in Ukraine to establish a “National Day for Ukrainian Children of War”. This could be a joint Ukrainian-Polish initiative of academic circles, especially educators. The second postulate includes the creation of a “Virtual Network (Centre) for Children of War Documentation and Research” as a “space” for interdisciplinary and systematic

scientific debate and information exchange in cooperation between Polish, Ukrainian and other countries' academic centres, organising cyclical scientific seminars also in connection with the National Day of Polish Children of War, seminars with both theoretical and practical orientation (e.g. on education and readaptation of children of war).

Keywords: Face of the Child as an icon of victims of dehumanisation and bestiality, fate of children of war, suffering of children, child abduction, National Day of Polish Children of War, National Day of Ukrainian Children of War

“Although the International Convention on the Rights of the Child has closed the desired phase of political will of the states ratifying it, the mere opening of the formal safeguarding of children’s rights has not changed much in the world of the child.”

Boguslaw Sliwerski, *The right of the child to his or her rights*, (2017, pp. 37-38)

“The history of childhood during World War II creates [...] a memento for the world. Therefore, the history of children living under the conditions of World War II should be the subject of research for those who are particularly interested in the fate of the child (also because of the practice of pedagogy as a science).”

Janina Kostkiewicz, *Polish children under German occupation (political, livelihood, educational contexts) – an introduction to the research issue* (2020, p. 7)

1. INTRODUCTION

The word “child” and images depicting children and childhood can and do carry many positive associations. The happy and smiling face of a child is sometimes emblematic of a vision of a happy life and a world in which one can be a happy person together with other happy people. However, the situation changes radically when the word “child” and images depicting children and childhood occur in the context of acts of aggression, war and crime. In a situation of immense suffering, inflicted thoughtfully and on a massive scale, the word “child” and images depicting children and childhood take on different meanings, as they vividly show the ongoing processes of dehumanization and acts of bestiality of wartime.

For pedagogy, the wartime experience of children poses a special challenge, because the child is inscribed in its root (source word) and at the same time in the basic sense of its practice. Pedagogy is burdened with the duty to care for the fate of the child, especially when the child is experiencing serious threats. The fate of children experiencing the cruelty of war is, unfortunately, an ever-present reality that cannot be effectively eliminated from the realm of the human world as a deliberate evil done by man. This reality – such as it is as a manifestation of doing evil in its evident form – poses a research and practical challenge for pedagogy. Historical – but not fully researched and not fully reliably described – crimes against children are repeated with alarming intensification in the 20th and 21st centuries. Historical recognition of, among other things, the various forms of Nazi genocide against children is essential for a better understanding of the currently unfolding tragedies of the children of war (see also: Bandura, 2004; Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2021, pp. 199-203; Kaczyńska, 1946, pp. 50–70; Kostkiewicz, 2020, pp. 7–11; Kozaczyńska 2011; Kwieciński, 2022, pp. 119-138; Theiss, 2012, pp. 79-95; Witek-Malicka, 2013). Special attention in pedagogical reflection is currently being paid to Ukrainian children of war, as they are experiencing the brutality and bestiality of war in a very acute way they are also migrants or are deported and abducted.

As a contemporary and blatant “example of the destruction of the possibility of creating a creative identity on the basis of the heritage of one’s ancestors” (an example comparable to the practices of slavery, to the practices of subjugation and even extermination by colonisers of native peoples), Jerzy Nikitorowicz – in the conclusion of his lecture on inherited and independently shaped culture in creative

biographies, delivered at the 11th National Pedagogical Congress in Poznań in 2022 – cites the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine. This aggression is an expression of an imperial approach to other nations, an approach that “does not recognise Ukraine’s right to self-determination, does not recognise the Ukrainian language, statehood, the rich history of this nation, the traditions enshrined in the history and memory of Ukrainians, their values and heroes who fought for a free and independent Ukraine for centuries. Similarly, children are taken out of Ukraine with the intention of assimilation [...]” (Nikitorowicz, 2023, p. 23). The opinion of a professor of pedagogy, expressed here, is also a clear testimony to the fact that, while currently practising pedagogy (and, within this framework, also developing research in the field of intercultural pedagogy), one cannot be indifferent to the fate of today’s children of war, that this “burning” and conscience-raising issue must be decisively addressed and pedagogically reflected upon from various points of view.

I can never stress enough that although the issue of concern for the fate of the child in a situation of wartime aggression and confrontation of ethnic-cultural differences is imposed by reality itself, it is a reality that, as ethical sensitivity suggests, should not be. This was aptly expressed a few years ago by my daughter, then four years old, when I wrote the article “Nazi total crime – about the anthropological and pedagogical aspects of the extermination, robbery, appropriation and Germanization of Polish children (In the foreground of biographical research)”. Daughter Zosia asked: “What are you writing about now, Daddy?”, and this she asked at the very moment when I was once again wondering what the beginning of that text should be, because none seemed appropriate and each appeared too trivial with the seriousness of the subject matter taken up. I replied to my daughter, glibly, that it was about how children were harmed and the suffering of children during the war, adding that I still didn’t know where to begin with that text, of which I had already written quite a lot. The daughter said: “Oh no, on this subject – Dad – better not write, until the “shivers” passed me. Dad, the ‘shivers’ have passed me. You mustn’t write about it...” After a moment’s thought, Zosia added: “We’d better give red hearts, because hearts mean goodness after all. Dad, where do you have to press on these hearts on the keyboard?” In these words of Zosia, revealed a very accurate intuition of a young child, because on such a topic should not be written, first of all, for the reason that such a topic should not exist. It is forbidden to hurt a child, not to inflict suffering on him. It is also forbidden to write about it if you have no intention of preventing harm and suffering to the child. And even more so, one must not write about it in a way that trivializes the harms and suffering of the child (indirectly multiplying those harms). And it is necessary to have these “red hearts” at hand, because this problematic also speaks to the heart and requires heart involvement. This issue also requires cognition with the heart, because it directly touches on the issue of the drama of good in the context of the experience of evil, and – following Blaise Pascal’s intuition (Węgrzecki 1997, pp. 107-114) – we can say that, especially in this case, the heart may have rationales that reason alone – without the cognitive involvement of the heart – does not know or comprehend (see: Rembierz, 2020, pp. 13-49).

Nowadays, on many occasions, both in public debate (and internationally), as well as in pedagogical concepts and research, the right of the child to live free from violence is emphasized (see: Jarosz, 2017, pp. 24-44). Since 1996, the annual “Report of the UN Secretary-General on the Situation of Children in Armed Conflict” has been publicly presented and discussed at the UN Security Council¹. This is an appalling reading and a manifestation of the helplessness of the “civilized world.” In these annual reports, new information is still given (and, so to speak, very similar information is repeated) about more war crimes whose victims are children. When the debate on the UN report was chaired by Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz in 2019, he said that this report “*showed that 2018 was the worst year*

¹ „In a 1996 report, Graça Machel appealed to the international community and the United Nations to take concrete action to protect children from war. As a result, the UN General Assembly established the office of the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. In turn, the Security Council established the UN Coordinated Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism to track the impact of war on children’s lives. ”Since 2005, the UN has verified 266,000 cases of serious violations of children’s rights in armed conflict” (UNICEF 2021).

for children during armed conflicts – more than 12,000 children were killed or maimed in 20 monitored conflicts. The number of verified cases is striking, while the full scale of violence [...] and abuse of children is still unknown. [...] children are also attacked in schools and hospitals, are recruited to fight, sexually abused and deprived of their rights. Such trauma deprives them of their childhood, their dignity and leaves lasting marks in their adult lives” (Czaputowicz, 2019). In September 2021, it reported: “Since 2005, the UN has verified 266,000 cases of serious violations of children’s rights in armed conflict. [...] More than 104,100 children have been killed and maimed, 93,000 recruited into armed groups, 25,700 abducted and 14,200 sexually abused. In [...] 2020. The UN verified a total of 26,425 violations of children’s rights in armed conflict. That’s 72 violations per day. Last year was [...] the seventh consecutive year in which the number of violations of children’s rights exceeded 20,000 cases. These [...] are only the cases that have been verified. The actual number is [...] much higher. However, these are not mere statistics. Behind each of them are specific children who have lost their health, their lives or have been the victims of immense suffering and trauma” (UNICEF 2021). One cannot succumb to stupefaction or indifference in reading the large and ever-increasing numbers, one must – especially in a perspective strongly saturated with axiology and pedagogical ethics – see the Face of the Child as an icon of the victims of dehumanization and bestiality, which appeals to the consciences of people of good will to concretize and intensify pedagogical concern for the fate of the child and the endangered identity of children in a situation of wartime aggression and confrontation of ethno-cultural differences.

2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Face of the Child as an icon of victims

The Face of the Child in the pedagogical perception of human affairs can and should be read as the Face of the Other, in the sense in which Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) captures the phenomenon of the Face of the Other in his anthropological-ethical reflection, the perspective of which has already inspired pedagogical reflection on more than one occasion.

The Face of the Child appears as a particularly clear in its anthropological-ethical message, the Face of the Other, which in a special way “naked” (“bare”) and “completely defenseless” expresses itself – especially in a situation of brutality, dehumanization and bestiality in times of war – an appeal to the human conscience for unconditional respect for humanity, and this respect in the most elementary aspects. The Face expresses with itself an appeal that reads: looking at my Face – you will not hurt me, looking at my Face – you will not kill me. The Face forbids killing – as Levinas repeatedly says. And whoever does not see this appeal emanating from the naked and defenseless Face, does not hear and does not respect it, in his actions becomes truly non-human and loses his own humanity, commits an act of radical dehumanization and bestiality (even transforms into a beast).

As for anthropological concepts of perceiving the “Face of the Other,” referring to the Polish debate on the subject, one can try to distinguish between two distinct approaches: “*The face in Tischner’s approach is radically individual, carrying history, while in Lévinas’ approach it is devoid of history and individuality, belonging to the anonymous ‘foreigner or widow’*” – as Adam Workowski (2003, p. 400) notes in considering the paradoxes of encounter in the philosophy of Jozef Tischner (1931-2000). Yet, it can also be considered that these two approaches – one proposed by Tischner and the other by Lévinas – give a fairly accurate account of the different ways in which the Face of the Other manifests itself and is perceived in different ways: once very distinctly individual, embedded in the history of concrete human existence and the historical context of its fate, and once radically transcendent, going beyond the individual contexts, as the Face of the orphan, the foreigner, the widow, the Face of the unknown, towards which one not only cannot remain indifferent, but must act accordingly and responsibly. In the pedagogical reading of the Face of the Child, these two approaches can actually guide to different aspects of a given situation and at the same time can complement each other.

The concept of icon as applied to the Face of a Child read as an icon of the victims of dehumanization and bestiality of wartime can be seen in at least two basic senses:

(1) In the sociological sense, as a phenomenon – a figure, attitude or image – carrying a clearly

recognizable and socially-bearing important message, being a clear sign for something that needs to be so visualized.

(2) The icon in relation to the Face of the Child, however, can be understood in a much more root sense, in the sense inherent in the spirituality and theology of the Christian East.

The resources of the spiritual heritage of the Christian East, in which the icon plays an important role, are all the more urged by the "winds of war" painfully affecting Eastern Christians in the Middle East and Ukraine.

For Eastern Christians, the icon has a special – even sacramental – character. In this spiritually deepened perspective, the Face of the Child is seen as an icon in which the essential – even the most essential – content concerning particularly cherished – albeit mortally endangered – values is recorded, as an icon through which universally understood humanity shines through.

It is also for this reason that one should often refrain from showing reproductions of photographs showing the Face of the Child as an icon – in the sociological sense – of the victims of the dehumanization and bestiality of wartime. This is because one should consider in depth whether the suffering Face of the Child can be evoked and shown as a necessary visualization of the content of the paper or article, or whether its display should be considered inappropriate because its deep meaning has been reduced to the role of an illustration "making the message more attractive" and enhancing its expression?

It is worth taking into account the conviction present in Eastern theology and spirituality that an icon – in its sacred sense – cannot be shown just like that. This is because an icon is meant to inspire due respect for the (sacred) contents recorded in it, and therefore it can only be properly displayed under certain conditions. This makes it all the more important that the Face of a Child, as an icon which is a record of the defilement of a child's innocence and a child's pain, should not be displayed without due respect.

Under conditions of war, situations are particularly exacerbated – even total – that threaten children's innocence and the human dignity it manifests, situations that do not respect the most elementary, most basic appeal that the Face of the Child expresses as the Face of the Other. In the context of a threat to the dignity of the child, which is also expressed in his or her Face, the observation about the particular discovery of the experience of dignity in a threatening situation should be taken into account, as pointed out, among others, by Janusz Mariański: *"Discussions on dignity emerge particularly clearly in situations of threat or challenge. From the facts of the violation or questioning of human dignity - as if by negative means - we come to a better understanding of dignity and to a somewhat empirical justification of it. The discovery of dignity is most often accomplished through the elementary experience of injustice and suffering"* (Mariański, 2021, p. 206); (about the child's dignity and rights – see also: Żebrowski, 2009, pp. 22-37; about the dignity of the child as an anthropological and pedagogical category – see also: Wolman, 2021).

The Face of the Child as an icon of the victims of the dehumanisation and bestiality of wartime manifests itself – one might say powerfully – in children's drawings in which children's experiences are recorded and expressed. These drawings are also icons written by a child's hand: they reveal a child's vision of the manifold and, one might say, beyond human imagination systematic evil of wartime, they reveal a child's susceptibility to being deeply – as it were, in the epicentre of a person's humanity – wounded by the aggression, brutality, dehumanisation and bestiality of wartime, they reveal and give voice to the appeal not to hurt, not to inflict suffering and not to kill.

The Face of the Child appears as an icon of the victims of the dehumanisation and bestiality of war, which is immortalised and then reproduced in emotionally and emotionally moving photographic documentations of sometimes very drastic situations ("scenes") during the war and in their artistic transposition, when the photograph as a work of art is exhibited in exhibition halls and on magazine covers (and also awarded as the work of a particular artist).

However, we must make the reservation that, due to the tendencies towards the commercialisation of art, there is a serious risk of overly expressive exaggeration and artistic aestheticisation, the danger of trivialising the excessively expansive and unrestrained depiction of children's suffering faces, and even of instrumentalising these photographs, these images. For they cannot be approached without preserving that respect which, in Eastern Christianity, the icon arouses, which arouses that / That which is written in the icon, that / That which shines through the icon.

The current pedagogical challenge is also to move towards a pedagogically deepened reading of what is written in the wounded or scarred Face of the Child as an icon of the victims of brutality, dehumanisation and bestiality in times of war, so that the Face of the Child continually awakens pedagogically sensitive consciences which, in view of the brutality of war on a massive scale, The Face of the Child should continually awaken pedagogically sensitive consciences which, in view of the brutality of war on a massive scale, may become dulled at the sight of yet another (“yet another”, “one more”) wounded or battered Child’s Face, so that this Face continues to prompt us to take appropriate pedagogical action – in accordance with our conscience – for the good of the child, despite the brutality, dehumanisation and bestiality of wartime.

The particularly difficult situation of Ukrainian children, struggling with the painful experience of war, has also been highlighted on many occasions by Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, and he did so once again in one of his weekly messages, announced in August (14.08.2023), at a time when holidays are organised for children despite the war: *“In such brutal circumstances, our children are the most vulnerable of all the people of Ukraine. That is why the Church tries to take care of them, especially in summer. Our Carpathian Mountains have turned into a continuous camp for children, where nature itself heals the wounds of war. Our parishes, dioceses and patriarchal structures are making efforts to ensure that as many children as possible go to these ‘lungs of Ukraine’ not only to rest, but also to receive spiritual and psychological support to heal their wounds and renew their strength (...). Above all, we are trying to take care of the children of military personnel and children from cities where people are living under fire (...). I would like to express my gratitude to the activists, volunteers, educators and psychologists who work (...) to extend Christian care to the smallest, the weakest, the most vulnerable. I sincerely thank you [...], for surrounding Ukrainian children with attention and love”* (Shevchuk, 14.08.2023). It is also important here to point out, as it were, the constitutive characteristics of children as the smallest, weakest and most vulnerable persons – persons who are quite defenceless – in the confrontation imposed on them with the overwhelming barbarism and bestiality of wartime.

2.2. Protecting children and their rights *versus* the barbarity of military aggression

Military aggression and times of warfare are a ‘bloodbath of death’, physical and spiritual death. The victims of a war characterised by ruthlessness are children, threatened at the core of their physical and spiritual existence, affected in many dimensions by the destructive – direct and far-reaching – effects of warfare. Spiritually wounded children carry these effects with them through their lives and then pass them on to the next generation.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child – adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989, in a year of great change and great hope – is sometimes brutally and even totally violated in times of military aggression and hostilities. The protection of children and respect for their rights, especially in times of war, when dehumanisation is prevalent and criminal acts of bestiality proliferate – is, from an educational point of view, a particular challenge for all people of good will.

When one currently accesses the Polish website of the Ombudsman for Children’s Rights – at <https://brpd.gov.pl/prawa-dziecka/> – a messenger appears with an automatically displayed message given in two languages: *“Do you need help? Вам потрібна допомога? Chat for children and young people / Чат для дітей та підлітків”*. This is a clear testimony that the situation of military aggression and hostilities, the manifold effects of which are experienced by Ukrainian children, is not confined within the borders of the defending state, but – especially with regard to the protection of endangered children’s rights – has a much broader, even universal scope.

It makes perfect sense to constantly remind ourselves of the binding, unchanging power of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at a time marked by the brutality of military aggression and the dehumanisation of armed action. For it is not just a hopeless repetition of “empty-sounding” words that have lost their meaning in a situation of war and crime. It is a consistently repeated appeal to conscience and goodwill to provide effective protection for children and ensure that their rights are respected, even

though this seems an unrealistic utopia in the inhuman conditions of military aggression. It is precisely by going against the grain of these conditions that one must steadfastly testify that the rights of the child – as an expression of fundamental and inalienable human rights – are still and unalterably valid. The concern for the protection of children and the respect of their rights in the face of the destructive power of military aggression and armed action, expressed in concrete actions – in particular in the various types of pedagogical, care and educational actions – is also – in the universal axiological and anthropological dimensions – a concern for the respect of elementary human dignity, the most basic concern for humanity. If one abandons the concern for the protection of children and the respect of their rights, acknowledging that war time has its “barbaric laws” (as a “necessity of fate”, as an “inexorable fate”) which are difficult to resist, one will at the same time nullify the concern for humanity. For these fundamental reasons, there should be no acceptance – a moral acceptance that is, as it were, an outright renunciation of humanity, a moral suicide, a self-destruction – of the primacy of dehumanisation, barbarism and bestiality of military aggression and armed action over concern for the protection of children and respect for their rights.

A short message given in two languages on the Children’s Ombudsman website: “*Do you need help? Вам потрібна допомога? Chat for children and adolescents / Чат для дітей та підлітків*” should have its counterparts in all languages of the world, so that the readiness to help a child threatened by the effects of war is as common an attitude as possible.

“*Thank you Poland for your help. Thank you for the work of advocates from Poland and Ukraine in the international arena on behalf of children, victims of Russian crimes*”, with these words Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky addressed the participants of the international conference on children’s rights “*Ukraine: War. Unsung Lullaby*” in Kiev. During the proceedings, Children’s Ombudsman Nikolai Pawlak together with Ukrainian Human Rights Ombudsman Dmytro Lyubinets presented a report on Russian crimes against children” (The President of Ukraine thanks Poland, 2023). This jointly presented official report, other documents and still incoming information on violations of elementary children’s rights are a constant appeal to human conscience and an appeal to remember the fate of the children of war. And this remembrance is also expressed by undertaking studies and pedagogical research on this painful issue.

2.3. Pro memoria

Nearly two hundred years ago, state appropriation of Polish children took place on the part of the aggressively advancing Russian empire as one form of punishment of Polish insurgents: “*Conscription of Polish Children into the Army of the Russian Empire 1831-1832*” – carried out during and after the fall of the November Uprising, the punitive conscription of Polish children into the Army of the Russian Empire. In accordance with an order from Emperor Nicholas I of 23 March 1831, children of those who took part in the November Uprising were to be treated as so-called cantons and conscripted into special battalions of the Russian army. By an order of 24 March 1832, the Russian government ordered that boys from 7 to 16 years of age, children of political émigrés, orphans, children of paupers and street people were to be put into special children’s battalions.” (Wikipedia, Conscription of Polish Children...).

Any such act of appropriating a child and depriving him of his own Face and divesting him of his identity, of separating him from his immediate and extended family, such an act as ‘conscription’ – literally: incorporation into a foreign body – into the military structures of the Russian empire should be met with moral condemnation as a variant of genocide (and this regardless of the number of such situations that occurred and also regardless of the civilisational context of the time, in which the militarisation of children’s lives was allowed as one form of socialisation that was socially desirable).

The news given above about the practice of punitive conscription of Polish children into the Russian army is taken from the popular Wikipedia and should be common knowledge, but it is not. As for historical research, Wiesław Caban’s study “*Cantonists from the Kingdom of Poland in the Tsarist Army from 1832 to 1856*” seeks more objective findings: “*A fairly exhaustive determination of the principles of conscription of children from the Kingdom of Poland into the Tsarist army, as well as the number of those*

conscripted for the years 1832 to 1856, is no longer possible, because the state of preservation of the sources in both the Russian and Polish archives does not allow it. It is somewhat incomprehensible why a separate group devoted to cantonists has not been preserved in the Central State Historical-Military Archive in Moscow [...]. And it should be known that at the time of the liquidation (1856) [...] of the cantonists, there were about 378,000 children and youth in their ranks" (Caban, 1990, p. 4). It can be established that "from Lithuania and in general from the so-called partitioned gubernias, the tsarist apparatus of oppression tried to conscript into the cantonist battalions as many children as possible whose fathers had participated in the November Uprising" (Caban, 1990, p. 5). The fate of the children in the ranks of the Russian army (like other soldiers) was extremely harsh: "If [...] in the era of Nicholas I about 42,000 soldiers died annually due to harsh conditions [...], one can imagine what the mortality rate was among children whose physical development was under very harsh conditions". In addition to the serious threats to physical development and health, the threats to spiritual and intellectual development posed by the form of Russian re-education in the barracks drift were no less acute: "Those children from the Kingdom of Poland who survived the journey deep into Russia and the stay in the cantonment units and later in the army, [...] were lost to Polishness. [They were taught only in Russian] and instilled with the idea that they were to serve the Tsar and the Orthodox Church. Until 1852, Roman Catholicism was not taught in the cantonment establishments of Kiev and Minsk, where the largest number of Polish children were located" (Caban, 1990, p. 11). Becoming acquainted with the history of Polish children absorbed by the cogs of the empire and the regime of the Russian army, makes one realise the orientation of the whole effort towards divesting them of their native cultural identity and towards radical denationalization.

Similar, systematic, deliberate and even more bestial measures were taken by the German occupying forces during the Second World War. On 19 February 1942, an order was issued by Reichsfuehrer SS Heinrich Himmler to germanise Polish children from orphanages in the so-called Wartheland. A historian who researches these German actions, Bogumił Rudawski, states: "Himmler was possessed by the thought that [...] 'Nordic blood' might flow in the veins of these children and therefore sought to recruit them for the German nation. [...] these children began to be called 'German orphans', claiming that they were allegedly from parents of German descent and [...] were placed in Polish institutions. [...] [reference is also made] to children being taken away from their parents. The search for 'German orphans' began in the Wartheland and took concrete form with Himmler's order of 19 February 1942. From this date onwards, we can speak of the systematic robbery of Polish children" (Rudawski, 2017). This robbery was carried out in a clever and disguised manner on a large scale: "After the war, the Plenipotentiary of the Polish Government for the Revindication of Children established that about 200,000 Polish children had fallen victim to Germanisation. His team managed to bring about 30,000 of them back to Poland. (...) These figures should, however, be treated with [...] caution. Currently, researchers assume that between 50,000 and 200,000 'racially useful' children were stolen from occupied Poland [...]. However, we do not have more precise data" (Rudawski, 2017). This range of figures shows how clever and disguised the appropriation of Polish children was. What the Germans did, which can be described as a "total crime" against Polish children, was aptly put by Roman Z. Hrabar (1909-1996), Plenipotentiary of the Polish Government for the Revindication of Children, in his book ("Hitler's [Nazi] Robbery of Polish Children. The Abduction and Germanization of Polish Children 1939-1945" / "Hitlerowski rabunek polskich dzieci. Urowadzanie i germanizowanie polskich w latach 1939-1945", Wydawnictwo "Śląsk", Katowice, 1960) after a section summarising his activity for the recovery and return of Polish children: "The Germans, by violating basic human rights, by trampling on the rules of international law, by systematically stealing children, had a double objective in view: the strengthening of the biological strength of their own people and the extermination of the conquered nation. The blow was aimed at what is dearest to every nation, what constitutes its strength and its future – the child" (Hrabar, 1960, p. 26).

Unfortunately, the systematic theft of children has occurred and continues to occur during successive wartime aggressions, including now. Currently, one can cite a sizeable archive of media information about the dramatic fate of Ukrainian children during the war. Unfortunately, one can presume that the media information is only the visible "tip of the iceberg", and in reality the fate of

Ukrainian children during the war is on a large scale much more dramatically painful and drastic situations are not uncommon.

Here is one of the latest news reported: "At least 19,000 children deported from Ukraine to Russia and Belarus". "They are being brainwashed and sent to cadet schools" (which was reported by Viktoria Belyashin): "It is for this reason that the ICC [International Criminal Court] in The Hague issued an arrest warrant for Putin. But the abduction of children from the occupied territories continues at its best". Some children from Ukraine have ended up in Belarus, and – turning the allegations around – Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko accuses the West of crimes against Ukrainian children. "They take them out of Ukraine as donors. They dismember and take out organs," he declared [...]" (Bieliaszyn, 2023). Added to this is news headlined rather sensationally: "Secret negotiations on children deported from Ukraine" (Stelmach, 18 07 2023), and what is supposed to be going on in this matter is shrouded in some mystery: "the talks are being conducted exclusively through intermediaries. There is no communication with the Russian side," said Ukrainian children's rights ombudsman Daria Herasymchuk. Moreover, we are convinced that there can be no talks on this issue. This is not a question of exchanging prisoners of war, these are civilians, these are children. – According to Ukraine, Russia abducted 20,000 children with the explicit intention of erasing their Ukrainian identity. The Yale Humanitarian Laboratory claims that at least 6,000 children have been deported to Russia, while official Russian figures put the number even lower." The issue of the far-reaching discrepancies in the figures reported here cannot, however, disguise the elementary fact that the welfare of every child who has been harmed is at stake. Therefore, each of these children must be identified and this must be done as soon as possible, because the passing of time plays a very important and destructive role here.

The successive information and press articles on the fate of Ukrainian children during the war and occupation, which – in alarming mode – are published in the world and Polish mass-media, raise worrying questions about the situation we are dealing with.

The Polish Ombudsman for Children has become involved in the issue of the fate of Ukrainian children affected by war and occupation. He frequently speaks out in defence of Ukrainian children and raises the issue of their deportation: "The Russians mainly kidnap Ukrainian orphans, who are taken to Russia and there they are given: a new identity, upbringing and language. [...] This is a violation of all laws, [...] history unfortunately repeats itself and comes full circle, because [...] the same methods were used in Poland during the Second World War. We [...] established [...] the Museum of Polish Children in Łódź, on the site of a concentration camp for children. We do not know today how the war in Ukraine will turn out, but it is necessary to remember about these kidnapped children" (Ombudsman for Children, 2022). The situation of uncertainty does not, therefore, absolve the obligation to care for the children of the war and to remember their fate.

On the research side, the involvement of The Yale School of Public Health's Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL) was important. Here is the information (reported May 17, 2022): "The Yale School of Public Health's Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL) will document alleged violations of international law and crimes against humanity, including war crimes, by Russia-aligned forces in Ukraine as part of a new Conflict Observatory initiative announced today by the U.S. Department of State. The Yale HRL recently identified 22 damaged hospitals and health care facilities in Ukraine in its first report to the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe's Moscow Mechanism. The Yale HRL team will work in close collaboration with the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO), geographic mapping software company ESRI, the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative, PlanetScape Ai, and other partners in supporting the Conflict Observatory" (Yale Joins Conflict Observatory Documenting Ukraine War Crimes, May 17, 2022).

14 February 2023 saw the publication of A Conflict Observatory Report: Russia's Systematic Program for the Re-education and Adoption of Ukraine's Children (Raymond and Caitlin N. Howarth et al), which analyses the system of appropriation and re-education of Ukrainian children. The introduction states: "The separation of children from their parents for indefinite periods documented in this report, even if initial consent for their temporary relocation during an armed conflict was originally obtained, can constitute a violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some of the alleged actions of Russia's federal government and its proxies detailed in this report, such as unnecessarily expediting the adoption and fostering of children from

Ukraine during the current emergency, could constitute a potential war crime and crime against humanity in some cases" (p. 4). This report had a large mass-media response, thus further sensitising decision-makers and the public to the plight of Ukrainian children. On 20 June 2023, another Yale Report: Hospitals, Schools, Farmland Impacted by Destruction of Ukraine Dam was published.

Conferences and academic seminars have been held on various aspects of the fate and functioning of Ukrainian children of war. These debates, which also resonate in mass-media messages, are primarily intended to serve the welfare of the child, whose entire existence is threatened by war and other aggressive actions.

"Children of Ukraine in Poland" – was a topic taken up, among others, at a conference at the Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine (21-22 December, 2022), with deliberations on "the legal situation of children in foster care who were evacuated at the beginning of the war by the Happy Kids Foundation in agreement with the Ukrainian and Polish authorities" (see also: Mendzhul, 2022, pp. 171–183).

At this and other conferences, close attention is paid to respecting the rights of children in a particularly difficult situation for them, when hostile and aggressive actions are destroying their childhood world as it was before. These rights – for the good of the children - must be safeguarded as effectively as possible, both in the dimension of upbringing and care, as well as in the dimension of teaching activities: learning and teaching (which involves an institutionally quite strictly organised educational system and school education). Research on these complex pedagogical issues was undertaken in 2022 by, among others, Olena Budnyk and Anna Sajdak-Burska (Budnyk, Sajdak-Burska, 2022, pp. 9-22; Budnyk, 2023, pp. 129-140).

During the conference "Deportation of Ukrainian Children to Russia", organised (2 June 2023) in the Senate of the Republic of Poland (which on 30 March 2023 passed a resolution condemning the illegal Russian deportation of Ukrainian children), Marek Konopczyński critically discerned and assessed the situation from the point of view of pedagogy: *"the abduction of children from their natural biological, socialisation and upbringing environment and attempts to readapt or acculturate them under conditions of enslavement and loss of the previous world can be described as axiological, social and psychological extermination"*. In conclusion, he rounded off his argument with an appeal to conscience with the questions: *"before our eyes, the tragedy of thousands of children is taking place, kidnapped in an inhuman and bestial way from their loved ones, torn from their natural environment of socialisation and upbringing. We should ask ourselves: how many more tragedies and dramas must befall Ukrainian children for us to understand that as adults today we are incapable of fulfilling our humanity? To defend children from enslavement and harm is [...] to protect everything that is human, everything that is human"* (Konopczyński, 2023). What is at stake here is the life and fate of every – individually, individually perceived – child, and at the same time, what is also at stake here is the understanding and respect of a universally (dignitarily, humanistically) understood humanity.

In an interview on Vatican Radio (21 06 2023), entitled in the words of the interviewer: "Bishop of Zaporozhye: it is our duty to rebuke the children forcibly deported to Russia", Bishop Jan Sobiło states: *"We have a great deal of information about what is happening, how these children are being deported. I know people who, when it was still possible, bought the children back. People would throw themselves together, give the Russians a specific sum in their pocket and make an appointment with the soldiers who prepared the children for deportation. They would tell them: don't deport, share the money and we will take these children to Ukraine. Now it is practically impossible, because it is impossible to go there, [...]. But as long as we could, there were people, there were Christians, there were Protestant pastors who interacted with us. They were making a big deal, because many of these children were saved from deportation. We won't know the truth about this until after the war, because now not everything can be said, so that no one gets hurt"* (Sobiło, 2023). This statement and information comes directly from the front line of what is actually happening. Official data from July 2023 (childrenofwar.gov.ua): since the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, 496 children have been killed, 998 Ukrainian children declared 'missing', more than 15,000 have the status of 'wanted'

and 385 have been found.

Children killed during the Russian aggression were remembered by Ukrainian youth attending World Youth Day in Lisbon. In preparation for participating in the Way of the Cross with Pope Francis, the young Ukrainians wore black T-shirts with pictures of slain Ukrainian children. One of the participants in the World Youth Day (Fr Waldemar Pawelec) recalls this particular event as particularly important: *“We remembered the children who will never be young again, that is, the children who were killed during the war. The young people were dressed in black T-shirts with pictures of these children and the date of their birth and death, as well as the name of the town from which this child came. This took place before the Way of the Cross itself. I think very many people experienced this in particular, because it was a very, very powerful event”* (Zajączkowska, & Dudek, 2023).

The Face of the Child appears here as an icon in which the truth about the existence of a particular victim – a victim who has an appearance, who has a specific name, who has specific years of life ‘from-to’ – has been written down, and at the same time, in a way, the face of victims who are unknown (unnamed) by name has been restored, because the honour due to their dignity and humanity has been paid, because their dignity and humanity must not be destroyed and must not be annulled in the name of any ideas.

3. NO (HAPPY) ENDING – POSTULATES

If a National Day of Polish Children of War was established in Poland in 2023 (as a state holiday “in tribute to the Polish Children of War”, celebrated on 10 September each year), there should also be an initiative in Ukraine leading to the establishment of a “National Day of Ukrainian Children of War”. This could be a joint Ukrainian-Polish proposal from academics, especially educators, as a starting point for the adoption of such a law, referring to the National Day of Polish War Children established in Poland. This is so that the fate of the children of war can be reliably researched and known, so that the memory of the fate of the children of war can be preserved with due respect and reverence.

The second postulate includes the creation of a “Virtual Centre for Documentation and Research on Children of War” as a “space” for interdisciplinary and systematic scientific debate and information exchange in cooperation between Polish, Ukrainian and other countries’ academic centres, organising cyclical scientific seminars also in connection with the National Day of Polish Children of War, seminars with both theoretical and practical orientation (e.g. on education and readaptation of children of war).

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Рембеж Марек. Обличчя дитини як ікона жертв дегуманізації та звірства. Витоки педагогічної стурбованості долею дитини та збереженням ідентичності дітей у ситуації воєнної агресії та протистояння етнокультурних відмінностей, що опинилися під загрозою. *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника*, 10 (3) (2023), 61-74.

Слово „дитина” та образи, що зображують дітей і дитинство в контексті актів агресії, війни та злочинів, у ситуації безмірних страждань, яскраво демонструють процеси дегуманізації, що відбуваються, та акти звірства воєнного часу. Для педагогіки воєнний досвід дітей становить особливий виклик. Педагогіка обтяжена обов'язком особливо піклуватися про долю дитини, яка переживає жахіття війни. Ніколи не буде зайвим підкреслити, що хоча питання турботи про долю дитини в ситуації воєнної агресії нав'язане самою реальністю, це реальність, якої, як підказує етична чутливість, не повинно бути. Не можна піддаватися одурманенню чи байдужості, читаючи про величезну кількість дітей, що зазнають небезпек і страждань війни, кількість яких постійно зростає. Необхідно – у педагогічній перспективі, наповненій аксіологією та етикою, – побачити Обличчя дитини як ікону жертв дегуманізації та звірства, яка волає до сумління людей доброї волі, щоб конкретизувати і посилити педагогічну турботу про долю дитини і про загрозу зникнення

її ідентичності в ситуації агресії воєнного часу і протистояння етнокультурних відмінностей. Актуальним педагогічним викликом є перехід до поглибленого прочитання того, що написано на пораненому чи пошрамованому обличчі дитини як ікони жертв жорстокості, дегуманізації та звірства воєнного часу. Важливо звернути увагу на особливості дітей як найменших, найслабших і найуразливіших людей – людей абсолютно беззахисних – у нав'язаному їм протистоянні з варварством і звірством воєнного часу, яке, на жаль, сьогодні переживають українські діти, і саме їхні обличчя стають іконами жертв дегуманізації і звірства. Доля дітей війни є актуальним дослідницьким і практичним викликом і в історичній науці (зокрема, в історії освіти та історії закладів опіки). Минулі – але не повністю досліджені та описані – злочини проти дітей повторюються і в XX-му та XXI-му століттях. Тому історичне визнання, серед іншого, нацистського геноциду дітей є необхідним для кращого розуміння сучасної драматичної ситуації дітей війни. Особливу увагу в статті приділено українським дітям війни, які є мігрантами або депортованими. Якщо в Польщі встановлено Національний день польських дітей війни (як державне свято „на знак вшанування польських дітей війни”), то в Україні також слід виступити з ініціативою про запровадження „Національного дня українських дітей війни”. Це могла б бути спільна українсько-польська ініціатива академічних кіл, особливо освітян. Другий постулат передбачає створення „Віртуальної мережі (Центру) документації та досліджень про дітей війни” як „простору” для міждисциплінарних і систематичних наукових дискусій та обміну інформацією у співпраці між академічними центрами Польщі, України та інших країн, організацію циклічних наукових семінарів також у зв'язку з Національним днем польських дітей війни, семінарів як теоретичного, так і практичного спрямування (наприклад, з питань освіти та реадaptaції дітей війни).

Ключові слова: Обличчя (Лице) Дитини як ікона жертв дегуманізації та звірства, доля дітей війни, страждання дітей, викрадення дітей, Національний День польських дітей війни, Національний День українських дітей війни.