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Racist Hysteria to Pragmatic  
Rapprochement? The German  
Debate about Rhenish  
'Occupation Children',  
1920–30

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**Abstract**

*This essay revisits 1920s German debates over the illegitimate children of the Rhineland occupation to examine hitherto neglected fluctuations in the relationship between nationalism and racism in Weimar Germany. During the early 1920s, nationalist anxieties focused on the alleged racial 'threats' emanating from the mixed-race children of colonial French soldiers. After 1927, plans for the forced sterilisation and deportation of the mixed-race children were dropped; simultaneously, officials began to support German mothers' paternity suits against French soldiers. This hitherto neglected shift in German attitudes towards the 'Rhineland bastards' sheds new light on the role of debates over gender and the family in the process of Franco–German rapprochement. It also enhances our understanding of the contradictory political potentials of popularised foreign policy discourses about women's and children's victimisation emerging from World War I.*

In the Rhineland, a pure white population of seven million . . . faces twenty-seven thousand coloureds; in the coming summer, this number will rise to forty-five thousand. The occupation authorities have granted these . . . heavily armed coloureds a position of superiority over the

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helpless whites. Exactly how many white girls and women have been victimized during the years of occupation is unclear, yet the extremely numerous cases that have been reported are an outrage. Apart from the terrible hardships suffered by the white women of the occupied territory, the forced racial mixing with coloureds and the pollution through venereal diseases ... gravely endanger the German people ... Woe to the white race if the densely populated Rhineland succumbs to mulattoization [*Mulattisierung*] in the heart of white Europe!<sup>1</sup>

This excerpt from an article by the physician Dr Franz Rosenberger captures important themes of the early 1920s campaign against the ‘black horror on the Rhine’ (*schwarze Schmach am Rhein*), a racist epithet for France’s colonial occupation troops from Northern Africa, Senegal and Madagascar stationed in the Rhineland.<sup>2</sup> Though Rosenberger, a member of the executive committee of the Munich-based German Emergency League against the Black Shame (Deutscher Notbund gegen die schwarze Schmach), belonged to the extreme right wing of the black horror movement, his anxieties about the perilous implications of racial ‘miscegenation’ resonated with a broad political spectrum. Racist hysteria spawned by the black horror endured after the campaign’s decline in 1922–3. During 1927, government officials collaborated with groups in civil society on devising plans to contain the ‘threats’ to public health and racial purity that mixed-race ‘occupation children’ (*Besatzungskinder*) allegedly posed. Such discussions included proposals for compulsory sterilisation and the deportation of the mixed-race ‘Rhineland bastards’ (*Rheinlandbastarde*) to Africa and Asia. While these schemes were unsuccessful during the Weimar Republic, in the Third Reich several hundred mixed-race occupation children became victims of forced sterilisation.<sup>3</sup>

Existing scholarship on the Rhenish *Besatzungskinder* focuses exclusively on the mixed-race children.<sup>4</sup> This literature typically emphasises strong continuities in German attitudes towards race from the Second Empire to National Socialism. Thus,

<sup>1</sup> Dr Franz Rosenberger, ‘Gefahr der Mulattisierung’, *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* no. 163, 18 April 1922, in Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch) R 1603 (Rheinische Volkspflege)/2221.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Keith L. Nelson, ‘The “Black Horror on the Rhine”: Race as a Factor in Post-World War I Diplomacy’, *Journal of Modern History*, 42, 4 (1970), 606–27; Sally Marks, ‘Black Watch on the Rhine: A Study in Propaganda, Prejudice and Prurience’, *European Studies Review* 13, 3 (July 1983), 297–333; Gisela Lebzelter, ‘Die “Schwarze Schmach”: Vorurteile – Propaganda – Mythos’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 11, 1 (1985), 37–58; Christian Koller, *Von Wilden aller Rassen niedergemetzelt: Die Diskussion um die Verwendung von Kolonialtruppen in Europa zwischen Rassismus, Kolonial- und Militärpolitik, 1914–1930* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2001); Jean-Yves Le Naour, *La honte noire: L’Allemagne et les troupes coloniales françaises, 1914–1945* (Saint-Amand-Montrond: Hachette, 2003); Sandra Maß, *Weißer Helden, Schwarze Krieger: Zur Geschichte kolonialer Männlichkeit in Deutschland, 1918–1964* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006); and Iris Wigger, *Die ‘schwarze Schmach am Rhein’: Rassistische Diskriminierung zwischen Geschlecht, Klasse, Nation und Rasse* (Munster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Reiner Pommerin, ‘Sterilisierung der Rheinlandbastarde’: *Das Schicksal einer farbigen deutschen Minderheit, 1918–1937* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1979); and Tina M. Camppt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), Ch. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Erica Kuhlman talks about the debate about the illegitimate German children of American occupation soldiers, yet does not link this debate to the one over the mixed-race ‘Rhineland bastards’. See Erica Kuhlman, *Reconstructing Patriarchy after the Great War: Women, Gender, and Post-war Reconciliation between Nations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 32–3.

Fatima El-Tayeb compares the 1920s debate over the mixed-race *Rheinlandbastarde* to pre-war discourses about miscegenation in the context of the 1912 parliamentary controversy over colonial bans on inter-racial marriage.<sup>5</sup> Both episodes, El-Tayeb argues, underscored the tenacity of a blood-based conception of German citizenship that made it impossible 'to admit that one at the same time could be German and black'.<sup>6</sup> According to Tina Campt, the campaign against the mixed-race *Rheinlandbastarde* provided a crucial link between colonial and Nazi-era discourses about 'racial mixture' by producing a shift in 'public discussions of the implications of Blacks and Black Germans ... from a focus on external concerns to a focus on internal concerns', since the stereotype of the Rhineland bastard was 'the first representation of a domestic, German-born Black native'.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Sandra Maß has highlighted the ways in which black horror propaganda intensified fears over racial 'pollution' by fusing pre-war discourses about the dangers of miscegenation with acute nationalist anxieties arising out of the experience of military defeat and the loss of Germany's colonies. Maß suggests that the presence of the mixed-race occupation children nourished fears that Germany's defeat had reduced her to the status of a colonised country. During the early 1920s, the amalgamation of nationalist and postcolonial anxieties prompted the first calls for the destruction of the mixed-race *Besatzungskinder*.<sup>8</sup>

Recent research on the debate over the mixed-race *Rheinlandbastarde* has enhanced our understanding of the complex layers and meanings of discourses about racial 'pollution' during the Weimar Republic. It claims that Weimar marked a crucial moment when racialist concerns assumed a new intensity and centrality for German nationalism. There is no doubt that the echoes of colonial-era debates over the alleged dangers of miscegenation reverberated strongly in black horror propaganda. Neither is the forced sterilisation of several hundred mixed-race *Rheinlandbastarde* under the Nazis explicable without taking into consideration the intense nationalist resentments

<sup>5</sup> On the colonial marriage bans, see Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), esp. 84–7; Krista Molly O'Donnell, 'The First *Besatzungskinder*: Afro-German Children, Colonial Childrearing Practices, and Racial Policy in German South-west Africa, 1890–1914', in Patricia Mazón and Reinhild Steingröver, eds, *Not So Plain as Black and White: Afro-German Culture and History, 1890–2000* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 61–81; Helmut Walser Smith, 'The Talk of Genocide, the Rhetoric of Miscegenation: Notes on the Debates in the German Reichstag Concerning South-West Africa, 1904–1914', in Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox and Susanne Zantop, eds, *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 107–23; and Birthe Kundrus, *Moderne Imperialisten: Das Kaiserreich im Spiegel seiner Kolonien* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003), 219–50.

<sup>6</sup> Fatima El-Tayeb, "'Blood is a Very Special Juice": Racialized Bodies and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Germany', *International Review of Social History*, 44 (1999), 149–69, 165. See also El-Tayeb, *Schwarze Deutsche: Der Diskurs um 'Rasse' und nationale Identität 1890–1933* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Campt, *Other Germans*, 28. See also Tina Campt, Pascal Grosse and Yara-Colette Lemke-Muniz de Faria, 'Blacks, Germans, and the Politics of Imperial Imagination, 1920–60', in Friedrichsmeyer et al., *The Imperialist Imagination*, 205–29.

<sup>8</sup> Maß, *Weißer Helden*, 213, 130; on German fears of being 'colonised', see also Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 113–5.

directed against these children during the early 1920s.<sup>9</sup> And yet, the exclusive focus in the existing literature on one subset of the larger population of all Rhenish occupation children cannot explain sufficiently why officials abandoned schemes for the compulsory sterilisation and deportation of the black *Rheinlandbastarde* in 1927–8. Typically, historians view this decision as the result of three obstacles: the lack of a sterilisation law before 1933, mothers' resistance, and German officials' concern over possible negative international repercussions.<sup>10</sup> This essay situates the debate over the mixed-race *Besatzungskinder* within the broader context of discussions about the status of *all* out-of-wedlock occupation children (black as well as white *Rheinlandbastarde*) to retrieve an important part of the story that thus far has eluded historians, German mothers' paternity suits against French soldiers.<sup>11</sup> The quest for child support for illegitimate *Besatzungskinder* signified a consequential shift in official and popular discourses about the *Rheinlandbastarde* that sheds valuable new light on hitherto neglected fluctuations in the relationship between nationalism and racism during the Weimar period.

As I hope to show in the first section, under the impact of black horror propaganda, early 1920s debates over the occupation children became fixated on mixed-race children, even though the overwhelming majority of the illegitimate German offspring of occupation soldiers were white. Representations of the mixed-race *Besatzungskinder* focused on Germany's 'pollution' through the alleged spread of 'inferior' racial traits and congenital diseases.<sup>12</sup> Frequently, white occupation children were also associated with the spectre of racial 'degeneration'. Black horror propaganda used images of purported rapes of German women by African French soldiers as metaphors for Germany's 'victimisation' through the Versailles Treaty.<sup>13</sup> This left little room for positive agency by working-class Rhenish women: it either depicted them as passive victims of sexual violence and 'race defilement', or – if the women had entered voluntarily into romantic relationships with Allied soldiers – it condemned them as 'traitors'. As a consequence of the nationalist hysteria whipped up by black horror

<sup>9</sup> See also Raffael Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Pommerin, 'Sterilisierung', 30–2. On the debate over a sterilisation law in the Weimar Republic, see Young-Sun Hong, *Welfare, Modernity, and the Weimar State, 1919–1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 254–64.

<sup>11</sup> The lack of more comprehensive analyses of the history of the Rhenish occupation children of the 1920s is particularly striking when compared to the significant scholarship on German and French occupation children born during and after World War II. Especially Heide Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Post-War Germany and America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Fabrice Virgili, *Naître ennemi: Les enfants de couples franco-allemands nés pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Payot, 2009); and Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> On some of the tensions between the campaign's extreme racism and more conventional nationalist objectives, see Julia Roos, 'Nationalism, Racism, and Propaganda in Early Weimar Germany: Contradictions in the Campaign against the "Black Horror on the Rhine"', *German History*, 30, 1 (March 2012), 45–74.

<sup>13</sup> For linguistic analyses, see Wigger, 'Schwarze Schmach'; and Julia Sneeringer, *Winning Women's Votes: Propaganda and Politics in Weimar Germany* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), esp. 46–7, 67–8.

agitation, many mothers of mixed-race and white *Besatzungskinder* tried to hide their children's foreign paternity. Existing evidence suggests that the nationalist and racist resentments directed against the *Rheinlandbastarde* could seriously jeopardise the children's access to social welfare, thus rendering their already difficult lives even more precarious.

The second part of the essay focuses on the 'litigious turn' in official approaches to the problem of the *Besatzungskinder*. In 1927, the German government began to support Rhenish mothers of out-of-wedlock occupation children in their efforts to bring paternity suits against French soldiers. The new interest in litigation initially coincided with the drafting of plans for the forced deportation of all mixed-race *Rheinlandbastarde*. When these plans were dropped in January 1928, the quest for child support for out-of-wedlock occupation children became the main focus of official policy. Of course, the legal turn in official discourses about the occupation children did not mean that racism disappeared. However, it marked an important shift away from attempts to excise the sons and daughters of colonial French soldiers from the German nation. As we will see, several factors accounted for this change. Complaints by Rhenish administrators about the financial burdens the *Rheinlandbastarde* imposed on public social welfare were one important motivation. There is also evidence of growing pressure from below on state officials to help improve the situation of the occupation children. During the late 1920s, many mothers of out-of-wedlock *Besatzungskinder* became active on behalf of their own and their children's legal rights. Working-class Rhenish women, not the state, took the first step towards suing French soldiers for child support. Since the extreme nationalism of the early 1920s had led many German mothers of illegitimate occupation children to hide their child's foreign paternity, state officials had to wait for the mothers to come forward.

The litigious turn also was linked to dramatic improvements in Franco–German relations during the era of détente. During the second half of the 1920s, France and Germany signed a number of landmark treaties acknowledging each other's borders and facilitating peaceful commerce between the two countries. Legal reforms contained in a 1927 Franco–German trade agreement dramatically reduced the costs of the paternity suits against French soldiers. More importantly, without the good will and extensive co-operation of French legal professionals and bureaucrats, the quest for child support for German occupation children never would have gotten off the ground, since French illegitimacy law contained a number of serious restrictions on the admissibility of paternity suits. The history of the black horror campaign and its aftermath helps shed new light on the role of debates about gender and the family in the process of Franco–German rapprochement. It implies that we may have to revisit the conventional view of 1920s popularised foreign policy discourses centred on themes of women's and children's victimisation. Recent studies have underlined the ways in which such discourses functioned to limit women's power and reassert patriarchal gender roles. The black horror certainly illustrates the dangers of a nationalist and racist discourse manipulating fears about female sexual vulnerability. At the same time, the debate about child support for out-of-wedlock occupation

children suggests that working-class women sometimes were able to utilise such discourses in the defence of their own and their children's interests.

**'Contamination of the German blood': The first stage of the debate over the Rhenish occupation children and their mothers**

In a letter of February 1927, the national women's committee of the right-wing German-National People's Party (Deutschnationale Volkspartei, or DNVP) asked the Reich Minister for the Occupied Territories (*Reichsminister für die besetzten Gebiete*) 'whether any arrangements have been made to support the children of coloured troops in the occupied territory and prevent such mongrels (*Mischlinge*) from being absorbed by the German people (*im deutschen Volke aufgehen*)'.<sup>14</sup> In his reply, the *Reichsminister* reported that the majority of the children received social welfare. 'Special measures' against colonial French soldiers' offspring were impossible, since 'the children, if they are born out of wedlock, follow their mothers' citizenship and therefore . . . are citizens of the Reich'.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the minister promised to launch an official inquiry into the exact numbers of mixed-race children residing in the occupied Rhineland.

The German nationalists' letter testified to the tenacity of the racist fears mobilised by the black horror campaign, and by wartime German attacks on France's use of colonial troops as a 'crime against civilisation'.<sup>16</sup> Officially supported propaganda contributed significantly to the creation of the racist stereotype of the *Rheinlandbastard*. One example are the activities of the main help office for the Palatinate (Haupthilfsstelle Pfalz), a front organisation set up by the Bavarian government to spread anti-French propaganda and combat separatism in the occupied Bavarian Palatinate. Between 1920 and 1922, the Haupthilfsstelle collaborated closely with the German-American journalist and white supremacist, Ray Beveridge, who toured Germany and Scandinavia to demonstrate 'American solidarity' with German black horror protesters.<sup>17</sup> The main help office's director, Dr August Ritter von Eberlein, arranged speaking engagements for Beveridge, launched her articles in the German press, and provided her with a steady supply of 'documentation' about rapes and other crimes allegedly committed by colonial French soldiers.<sup>18</sup> Beveridge's speeches, published in 1922 under the title, *Die schwarze Schmach – Die weiße Schande* (*The Black Horror – The White Shame*), drew heavily on propaganda materials gathered

<sup>14</sup> Letter, Dr von Dryander to the Reich Minister for the Occupied Territories, 12 Feb. 1927, in BArch Reichsministerium für die besetzten Gebiete (R 1601)/2234.

<sup>15</sup> Reich Minister for the Occupied Territories to Dr Dryander, 23 Feb. 1927, in BArch R 1601/2234.

<sup>16</sup> On the German campaign against France's colonial troops during World War I, see Koller, 'Von Wilden aller Rassen', 103–51.

<sup>17</sup> On Eberlein, see Gerhard Gräber and Matthias Spindler, *Revolverrepublik am Rhein: Die Pfalz und ihre Separatisten*, Vol. 1: *November 1918–November 1923* (Landau: Pfälzische Verlagsanstalt, 1992), 74. On Beveridge, see Wigger, 'Schwarze Schmach', 56–66.

<sup>18</sup> Eberlein's telegram to Beveridge, 30 Nov. 1920, in Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BayHStA) Haupthilfsstelle Pfalz (HHStPf) no. 45.

by Eberlein's staff.<sup>19</sup> The journalist accused Woodrow Wilson and the Allies of 'betraying' the interests of the white race and incited Germans to lynch African French soldiers: 'In America, we string up any black who molests a white woman!'<sup>20</sup>

The mixed-race Rhenish children fulfilled an indispensable rhetorical function for racist demagogues such as Beveridge: they were 'living proof' of the relentless 'degeneration' that would befall the white race if world leaders continued to tolerate the presence of colonial troops in the Rhineland. To underscore the alleged 'threats' emanating from the mixed-race *Besatzungskinder*, black horror propaganda distinguished relatively little between black and white occupation children.

It is a fact that 60% of the children brought into the world as a result of the French occupation are born with congenital syphilis. It is a fact that mongrel children typically inherit the vices and negative qualities of both parents . . . It is a fact that the number of births of mongrel children increases more and more in the occupied territory . . . It is a fact that the children's fathers in the occupied territory – be they French officers or French Negroes – strictly refuse to support the child, claiming the legal authority of the Napoleonic Code. It is a fact that these children are a burden on the German population.<sup>21</sup>

White *Besatzungskinder* were entirely absent from the visual propaganda Beveridge designed in collaboration with the main help office for the Palatinate. On 8 December 1920, the journalist urged August Eberlein to find her a mixed-race German child by an African French father. Images of such a child, she stressed, would have maximum political impact in the United States.<sup>22</sup> Evidently, Eberlein obliged. The cover page of Beveridge's *The Black Horror – The White Shame* featured a photograph of the author holding a well-fed black boy and an apathetic, hollow-eyed white girl: 'Ray Beveridge with a bastard child, 9 months old, the offspring of a German white mother and a coloured Frenchman, and with an under-nourished German child, victim of the inhumane hunger blockade'.<sup>23</sup> The illustration radically juxtaposed the material interests of occupation children and 'real' German children; simultaneously, it identified the typical occupation child as mixed-race.

Officials in the foreign office (*Auswärtiges Amt*) in Berlin criticised Beveridge's 'hysterical exaggerations', which were easily disproved by the French and thus threatened to discredit the entire black horror campaign.<sup>24</sup> These objections notwithstanding, the foreign office, too, eagerly capitalised on racist hysteria over the mixed-race occupation children when politically opportune. During the autumn and winter of 1923, German diplomats collaborated with the Swedish pastor, Martin Liljeblad, whose 'Ruhr Committee' harnessed black horror propaganda to its campaign against the recent Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr industrial

<sup>19</sup> Ray Beveridge, *Die schwarze Schmach – Die weiße Schande* (Hamburg: F. W. Rademacher, 1922).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Letter, Beveridge to Eberlein, 8 Dec. 1920, in BayHStA HHStPf no. 43.

<sup>23</sup> Beveridge, *Schwarze Schmach*, inside of cover.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Delbrueck, 'Aufzeichnung über die Propaganda gegen die farbigen Truppen im Rheinland', 28 Feb. 1921, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PAAA) Politische Abteilung II: Besetztes Rheinland (R) 74.419.



district. In November 1923, Liljeblad approached the German legation in Stockholm about data on 'coloured mongrel children' in the French-occupied Rhineland. In the light of Liljeblad's 'untiring efforts and unquestionable successes', the foreign office provided him with the requested statistics.<sup>25</sup> The use to which Liljeblad put this type of information is evident from his English-language pamphlet, *The World's Shame on the Rhine*, published the following year. Based on the number of mixed-race children allegedly fathered within the span of one year by a colonial regiment stationed in Mainz (150), Liljeblad estimated that all colonial occupation soldiers together were responsible for the birth of 1,800 'mongrels' annually. If the Rhineland occupation lasted the entire fifteen years stipulated in the Versailles Treaty, he predicted, 'a band of 27,000 children of coloured troops and white mothers would be spread over the poor Rhinelands [*sic*]. What a peril this enormous army will be to Europe, we cannot even fancy.'<sup>26</sup> Liljeblad claimed that 68,000 Swedes already had signed his protest 'against the holding of coloured troops in Europe'.<sup>27</sup>

The fact that early 1920s debates over the Rhenish occupation children tended to be fixated on the offspring of African French soldiers signified a considerable propagandistic feat and testified to the virulence of racist anxieties in the aftermath of World War I. Actual figures of mixed-race children hardly substantiated claims about the impending 'mulattoisation' of the Rhineland. Although, during the post-war years, on average about one third of France's Rhine army was comprised of colonial troops, children fathered by colonial French soldiers made up only a very small portion of the larger group of occupation children in the French zone.<sup>28</sup> In late March 1927, for example, officials in the Bavarian Palatinate counted a total of 715 out-of-wedlock children by European and colonial French troops; fewer than 10% (68) of these children had colonial French fathers.<sup>29</sup> In 1931, the foreign office reported twenty-four mixed-race 'occupation bastards' for the Prussian Rhine Province and ninety-three for the Palatinate, respectively.<sup>30</sup> These were low numbers indeed, even if officials highlighted the obstacles to obtaining accurate information. Thus, the president of the supreme regional court (Oberlandesgericht) in Düsseldorf complained that his office had no record of any legal guardians appointed for illegitimate children of 'coloured members of the occupation troops', since the mothers invariably tried to hide the fact that 'a coloured is the child's father'.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Letter, the German legationary in Stockholm, Nadolny, to the foreign office in Berlin, 19 Nov. 1923, in PAAA R 74.424.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Liljeblad, *The World's Shame at the Rhine*, 4th edn (Hälsingborg: Schmidt, 1924), 29–30.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>28</sup> During the early 1920s, an average of about 25,000 colonial soldiers formed part of the French army of the Rhine; this amounted to roughly 30% of all French occupation troops. Maß, *Weisse Helden*, 79; and Le Naour, *Honte Noire*, 73.

<sup>29</sup> Oberlandesgericht Zweibrücken, 'Übersicht über die Zahl der unehelichen Kinder in der Pfalz, die von Besatzungsangehörigen stammen', March 1927, in BArch R 1601/2234.

<sup>30</sup> Letter, Heinrich von Friedberg to Albrecht Graf von Bernstorff, 9 Feb. 1931, in PAAA R 74.424.

<sup>31</sup> Report on 'Uneheliche Kinder farbiger Besatzungsangehöriger' by the Oberlandesgerichtspräsident Düsseldorf to the Prussian minister of justice, 1 Sept. 1923, in PAAA R 74.424. On the legal status of illegitimate children in Weimar Germany, see Michelle Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk: Weimar and Nazi Family Policy, 1918–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007),



One important factor contributing to the difficulties of ascertaining more exact numbers of out-of-wedlock occupation children was fear of harassment. In the French-occupied zone, the so-called 'French sweethearts' (*Franzosenliebchen*, or women dating French soldiers) were the target of bitter nationalist resentment often culminating in brutal physical attacks.<sup>32</sup> The city of Worms, where France's Senegalese troops were stationed until their withdrawal from Germany in June 1920, was a case in point. In July 1919, the French commander of Worms, Lieutenant Colonel Romieu, published an announcement in the local paper on administrative affairs, *Wormser Zeitung*. Romieu complained that for some time now, 'organised bands of young people' had been attacking German women and girls in the area, 'cutting off their hair, covering their bodies in shoe polish, and publicising their names with libellous commentaries'. The French military clearly believed that German administrators turned a blind eye on these vigilante measures. For the future, Romieu promised to bring Worms's mayor before a police tribunal and to court-martial the perpetrators if the German authorities failed to make arrests 'within forty-eight hours'.<sup>33</sup>

German officials often accused the mothers of occupation children of 'polluting' the German 'racial stock' and draining public coffers at the expense of hard-working, respectable families. A report on the care for occupation children by the district physician (*Bezirksarzt*) of Landau, Dr Schmitt, illustrates this line of reasoning.

Typically, it is like this: the children are taken away from these Frenchmen's women (*Franzosenweiber*) and are raised with public money, without [the mothers] having to make even the tiniest contribution, so that the latter are ready for new deeds as soon as they have given birth. Therefore, quite a few women (*Weiber*) are known who have three or four children [by occupation soldiers], all of whom have different skin colours.<sup>34</sup>

199–212; David F. Crew, *Germans on Welfare: From Weimar to Hitler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 123–6; Hong, *Welfare*, 78–80; and Edward Ross Dickinson, *The Politics of German Child Welfare from the Empire to the Federal Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 121–3.

<sup>32</sup> On relations between French soldiers and Germans in the occupied Palatinate and the cultural dynamics of national stereotypes, see Sabine Kientiz, 'L'occupation française et la construction culturelle des différences nationales dans le Palatinat de 1918 à 1930', in *Histoire et sociétés: Revue européenne d'histoire sociale*, 17 (2006), 32–43; and Kientiz, 'Mal Freund, mal Feind: Deutsch-französische Beziehungen im linksrheinischen Besatzungsalltag nach 1918', in Reinhard Johler, Freddy Raphaël, Claudia Schlager and Patrick Schmoll, eds, *Zwischen Krieg und Frieden: Die Konstruktion des Feindes* (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde Verlag, 2009), 219–43. Kientiz suggests that the perceived exoticism of France's African soldiers played a major role in reinforcing German nationalists' sense of insurmountable cultural differences between France and Germany: 'Occupation française', 39. On civilian interaction with colonial occupation soldiers, compare also Maß, *Weißer Helden*, 105–20. Violence directed against German women who (allegedly) had had sexual relations with foreign soldiers was also a feature of 'passive resistance' during the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. See Gerd Krüger, "'Wir wachen und strafen!": Gewalt im Ruhrkampf von 1923', in *Der Schatten des Weltkrieges: Die Ruhrbesetzung 1923* (Essen: Klartext, 2004), 233–55; esp. 247–50.

<sup>33</sup> 'Amtlicher Teil', *Wormser Zeitung: Amtsblatt für die Bekanntmachungen sämtlicher Behörden des Kreises und der Stadt Worms*, 144, 351 (15 July 1919), 1. In Stadtarchiv Worms (StdtAW) Abt. 13, no. 2281.

<sup>34</sup> Report on the care for occupation children by Dr Schmitt to the Bavarian state commissioner for the Palatinate, 26 Nov. 1927 in Landesarchiv Speyer (LASp) Pfalzbesatzung und Separatistenbewegung (R12)/693.

The generous treatment of the mothers of the occupation children, Schmitt objected, constituted an injustice vis-à-vis 'honest married women' and widows, who had to pay out of their own pocket for the education and upbringing of their children. The district physician advocated a change in policy forcing the *Franzosenweiber* to support their 'mostly syphilitic, mentally retarded, or otherwise inferior children' on their own. To contain the moral and socio-hygienic dangers allegedly emanating from the mothers of occupation children, Schmitt proposed the stricter enforcement of existing laws against prostitution and abortion. His suggestions testify to the noxious ways in which stereotypes of working-class mothers of *Besatzungskinder* blended class prejudice, misogyny and racist fears.

What did the real lives of occupation children and their mothers look like? The example of the rural county of St Goar in the French-occupied Prussian Rhineland sheds some light on this question. Only six of the twenty-eight known *Besatzungskinder* lived in relatively viable economic circumstances. In some of these cases, the foreign fathers contributed to the children's upkeep; in a few others, the mothers had married and their husbands had acknowledged the children. The overwhelming majority of St Goar's *Besatzungskinder*, however, lived profoundly precarious lives marked by extreme poverty, ill health and unstable care-giving situations. Typically, the soldiers abandoned their German girlfriends once they learned of their pregnancy. In many cases, the women claimed that men had broken their promise of marriage. Most of the mothers of St Goar's *Besatzungskinder* came from the lowest rungs of small-town and rural society. Their fathers were day labourers, small farmers and, in a few cases, minor public officials. Although the mothers' parents often agreed to take in their daughter and her out-of-wedlock child, the report highlighted the great need of these families, as in the case of the forester (*Förster*) Jürgens and his wife, 'who themselves have eight children and therefore have to make the greatest sacrifices to raise an additional child'.

Disproving Dr Schmitt's stereotype of the lazy welfare recipient, the mothers of St Goar's *Besatzungskinder* worked extremely hard to support themselves and their children. To keep her employment as a domestic servant, Johanna Lingens left her son, Heinrich, with her widowed father, Jakob, a small farmer (*Ackerer*). When her father threw her and the child out, Johanna temporarily put her child into foster care, yet the fees soon surpassed her earnings. Eventually, a social worker convinced Jakob Lingens to take Johanna and her son back, though she noted with concern that 'the child makes a neglected impression; he lacks the necessary care in his grandfather's household'. The war widow, Gertrud Müller, had four legitimate children as well as one out-of-wedlock child by a French soldier, who had cut off all contact with her after his transfer back to France. Müller supported her five children with money she earned by sewing. Occasionally, she received food and clothing from the district welfare office (*Kreiswohlfahrtsamt*). The report noted that the mother 'now leads a respectable life and tries hard to raise her children well. The current inflation, however, often creates severe need, which affects not only the French child (*Franzosenkind*), but also the war orphans.' Magda Fiedler, also a widow, lived alone with three children, one of whom, Liesel, was the daughter of a French soldier. Liesel

was so sickly – according to the report, she suffered from congenital syphilis – that her mother was unable to resume any paid work. 'Therefore, the family is often in great need, which the welfare office can alleviate only very slightly.'<sup>35</sup>

The St Goar case studies show that the mothers and their families frequently shouldered the main burden of raising out-of-wedlock occupation children. The example of St Goar also suggests that public welfare funds in the occupied territory often were so depleted that officials, even if they acknowledged legitimate need, were unable to offer adequate material support to the families of *Besatzungskinder*. Ironically, the intense nationalism of the early 1920s led many German officials to resist French involvement in social welfare for German *Besatzungskinder*. In May 1920, the Bavarian representative at the office of the Reich commissioner for the occupied Rhenish territories (*Bayerischer Vertreter bei dem Reichskommissar für die besetzten rheinischen Gebiete*) reported with some alarm that

several black infants live in the crèche (*Krippenheim*) in Speyer, where Sister Maxima takes excellent care of them. Everyone seems to be absolutely delighted about these cute 'black princes', who are dressed in pretty red shorts (*Höschen*). Sister Maxima had planned to accept charitable donations for her wards from the French ladies in Speyer. Apparently, she intended to remind these ladies that after all, the children's fathers were coloured Frenchmen. Enlightened about her naiveté, Sister Maxima has abandoned her plan.<sup>36</sup>

Eight months later, Frau Held, district social worker (*Kreisfürsorgerin*) in the occupied Bavarian Palatinate, expressed concern that some mothers of mixed-race occupation children believed 'firmly in the possibility of marrying' their children's fathers. Held blamed these expectations on certain French and German priests, who had encouraged the African soldiers to attend their children's baptisms and given their blessings to inter-racial marriages. 'The mother of one hitherto innocent girl told me that she only agreed to her daughter's relationship with a black after "her" priest assured her that he would permit a future marriage'. The welfare official viewed with great suspicion the visits a French priest had paid to the children's home run by the deaconesses (*Diakonissenhaus*) in Speyer. Among other things, the cleric had promised that the French state would provide for the illegitimate children of colonial French soldiers. Held discounted this as a sinister propagandistic ploy:

As desirable as it would be if we could rid ourselves of the obligation to care for these occupation children, I believe the actions of this cleric, just like the false promises of marriage . . . represent a calculated system on the part of the French authorities designed to create pro-French sentiments among the population. Therefore, I urge that we keep a close eye on these types of French charitable work.<sup>37</sup>

German resistance against French participation in the care of the mixed-race occupation children, and the opposition of officials to marriages between colonial

<sup>35</sup> 'Bericht über die im Kreise St. Goar lebenden unehelichen Kinder von Besatzungstruppen und deutschen Frauen und Mädchen', circa 1921, in LHAK Best. 441/19884. Unless otherwise noted, I have changed the names of the children and their relatives.

<sup>36</sup> Internal memo, Bayerischer Vertreter bei dem Reichskommissar für die besetzten rheinischen Gebiete, 16 May 1920, in BayHStA Vertreter beim Reichskommissar für die besetzten Gebiete 8.

<sup>37</sup> Report by Frau Held, 20 Jan. 1921, in BayHStA HHStPf no. 35.

French soldiers and Rhenish women, together underline the ways in which nationalist and racist hysteria obstructed more rational approaches to social welfare for *Besatzungskinder* during the early 1920s. In April 1922, the district president (*Regierungspräsident*) in Koblenz in the American zone supported requests that the Reich cover social services for impoverished occupation children and their mothers as part of the costs of the Allied occupation. He stressed the ‘political significance’ of the issue, since ‘it would cause great bitterness among the [Rhenish] population if the state avoided its responsibilities’. Moreover, because local welfare providers often were ‘negligent due to the strong resentment against the girls who have become involved with American soldiers, the direct support through state funds is urgently necessary in the children’s own interest’.<sup>38</sup> Some fragmentary evidence exists suggesting that as a result of such conflicts over the social rights of out-of-wedlock *Besatzungskinder*, the latter’s lives may have become significantly more precarious than those of illegitimate children living in unoccupied Germany. In July 1921, the mayor of Landau reported that of forty–five occupation children born in his town, fifteen (33%) had died.<sup>39</sup> By comparison, the infant mortality rate for illegitimate children in the Reich as a whole was 25.5 percent.<sup>40</sup>

The most sinister nationalist resentment and racial prejudice directed against mixed-race *Besatzungskinder* manifested itself in attempts to remove such children from the German nation. As Reiner Pommerin, Tina Campt and others have shown, at least some Weimar-era officials were sufficiently concerned about the spectre of ‘racial pollution’ to contemplate seriously the possibility of forced sterilisation of the mixed-race *Rheinlandbastarde*.<sup>41</sup> In late 1927, these plans were abandoned, partly because Germany still lacked a sterilisation law. That same year, officials in the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Territories collaborated with the General Evangelical-Protestant Missionary Association (Allgemeiner Evangelisch-Protestantischer Missionsverein, or AEPM) to persuade Rhenish mothers of mixed-race *Besatzungskinder* to give up their children and send them to ‘new homes’ in Africa and Asia. The scheme, however, soon foundered on the mothers’ resistance. In early January 1928, Dr Witte, head of the AEPM’s East Asia Mission, regretted that, excepting only one case, pastors in the occupied territories had been unable to convince the mothers of mixed-race *Besatzungskinder* to agree to their children’s ‘deportation to Africa or other countries’. Most pastors reported that ‘the coloured children are treated well by their relatives’, although other children often bullied them. Witte consoled himself with the fact that the actual number of mixed-race children was ‘not terribly big’ and expressed the hope ‘that they eventually will be absorbed by the German blood’.<sup>42</sup> One week later, officials in the Reich

<sup>38</sup> Statement by the *Regierungspräsident* in Koblenz, 3 April 1922, in LHAK Best. 441 (Bezirksregierung Koblenz)/19884.

<sup>39</sup> Mayor of Landau to the Bavarian state commissioner for the Palatinate, 16 July 1921, in BayHStA, HHStPf no. 63.

<sup>40</sup> Mouton, *From Nurturing*, 202.

<sup>41</sup> Pommerin, ‘Sterilisation’, 30.

<sup>42</sup> Dr Witte to the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Territories, 11 Jan. 1928, in BArch R 1601/2234.

Ministry for the Occupied Territories informed Witte that the mothers' opposition and the concern 'that official intervention in this area would have undesirable political consequences' had convinced them to drop all plans for the deportation of the mixed-race *Besatzungskinder*.<sup>43</sup>

### The 'litigious turn': German mothers' paternity suits against French soldiers

The abandonment of schemes for the forced sterilisation and removal of the mixed-race *Rheinlandbastarde* to Africa and Asia overlapped with the arrival of a litigious turn in official approaches to the problem of the *Besatzungskinder*. In 1927, the German government began supporting Rhenish mothers' paternity suits against French soldiers in the hope of setting a legal precedent. This shift in policy was partly the result of growing pressures on the central state to alleviate the financial burdens on public social welfare in the occupied territory. By the late 1920s, the percentage of *Besatzungskinder* dependent on public assistance often was significant. In 1927, occupied Hesse reported 354 out-of-wedlock occupation children, 211 of whom regularly received state support. In the city of Mainz, all the 151 illegitimate children of French occupation soldiers were dependent on social welfare.<sup>44</sup> Of 691 out-of-wedlock occupation children reported for the county (*Regierungsbezirk*) of Düsseldorf for 1930, one quarter (166) was on public welfare.<sup>45</sup>

Since the strains on public social welfare in the Rhineland were nothing new in 1928, this factor alone does not explain the timing of the paternity suits against French soldiers. As we have seen, during the early 1920s, German officials adamantly opposed French involvement in the care for out-of-wedlock *Besatzungskinder*. This contrast points to the importance of recent changes in foreign relations. The Dawes Plan of 1924, which rendered reparations more manageable for Germany, and the Locarno Treaty of 1925, in which Belgium, France and the German Reich pledged not to alter their mutual borders by force, constituted major milestones of détente. The year 1925 also brought the end of the Ruhr occupation and the completion of the first phase of the removal of Allied troops from the Rhineland. Germany's admission to the League of Nations in 1926 was an important indicator of the country's progress towards international rehabilitation.<sup>46</sup> All these developments – as well as the coming

<sup>43</sup> Letter, Ministerialrat Meyer of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Territories to Dr Witte, 17 Jan. 1928, in BArch R 1601/2234.

<sup>44</sup> Annelise Timmermann, *Die Rheinlandbesetzung in ihrer Wirkung auf die Sozialausgaben der Städte* (Berlin: Reimar Hobbing, 1930), 89.

<sup>45</sup> Survey of out-of-wedlock children of occupation soldiers compiled by the *Regierungspräsident* Düsseldorf, circa spring 1930, in LHAK, Best. 403/14918.

<sup>46</sup> On post-war stabilisation, see Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Patrick O. Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace after World War I: America, Britain, and the Stabilisation of Europe, 1919–1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). On Franco–German relations, see Nicolas Beaupré, *Das Trauma des großen Krieges, 1918–1932/33*, trans. Gaby Sonnabend, Deutsches Historisches Institut Paris, *Deutsch–Französische Geschichte*, vol. 8 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009), esp. 68–92 and 201–16, on détente.

to power in the Reich of a Social Democratic coalition government in June of 1928 – were necessary preconditions of the legal turn in the debate over the Rhenish *Besatzungskinder*.

Last but not least, the late 1920s witnessed important changes in the behaviour of the unwed mothers of occupation children. Rather than hiding their children's foreign paternity out of fear of discrimination and harassment, many Rhenish mothers now approached state officials for help in locating and suing their child's Allied father. In late April 1927, Dr Karl Führ, a lawyer in the town of Landau in the occupied Bavarian Palatinate, wrote a letter to Eva Meyer in Langenschwalbach. Führ specialised in the legal aspects of the occupation; he defended Germans before French military courts.

Dear Frau Meyer,

I have just received access to your petition of 26 February 1927, wherein you request diplomatic assistance to urge the French Lieutenant André Latour . . . to support your daughter Lotte's . . . illegitimate child born on 14 July 1925 and currently in care at the Johannis Convent in Wiesbaden. I am happy to provide you with legal advice, which I offer free of charge, given your difficult financial situation and the nature of the matter . . . Such claims cannot be advanced via diplomatic channels but rather have to be brought before the appropriate court in France. Time is of the essence, since paternity suits cannot be filed once two years have lapsed since the birth of the child. The mother, not the grandmother, has to sue the father on behalf of her child, which makes it necessary that your daughter Lotte personally asks me to take the requisite legal steps. She has to tell me the name of the child and provide official proof of indigence [*Armutszugnis*].<sup>47</sup>

Führ proceeded to lay out in detail the conditions under which French law permitted paternity suits, and he urged Eva Meyer to verify that her daughter's case met these requirements. Two weeks later, Führ applied to the Inter-Allied Rhineland Commission (IARC) in Koblenz to grant Lotte Meyer the right to sue *in forma pauperis* (*Armenrecht*, or pauper's status under the law), which would allow her to use the services of a French poor litigants' counsel. On 24 June, he learned that the decision on this matter lay within the purview of the state prosecutor in Latour's home town of Denain. When Lotte Meyer and her mother could not afford to hire a French lawyer, Führ volunteered his services.<sup>48</sup> He copied his correspondence with the Meyers to the Reich Minister for the Occupied Territories in Berlin.

The case of Meyer v. Latour apparently never progressed beyond the failed attempt to achieve pauper's status for the plaintiff.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, by approaching the German government over the legal rights of her illegitimate granddaughter, Eva Meyer helped set into motion a major shift in official policy. A decree by the Inter-Allied Rhineland Commission on 30 July 1921 had banned German courts from presiding over paternity suits against Allied soldiers, rendering German officials pessimistic about the prospects of obtaining child support for out-of-wedlock *Besatzungskinder*.<sup>50</sup> The Meyer case prompted them to rethink their strategy. On 25 June 1927, the Reich Minister for

<sup>47</sup> Führ's letter to Eva Meyer, 27 April 1927, in BArch R 1601/2259.

<sup>48</sup> Führ's letter to Eva Meyer, 25 June 1927, in BArch R 1601/2259.

<sup>49</sup> Führ's letter to the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Territories, 4 Jan. 1930, in BArch R 1601/2259.

<sup>50</sup> Letter, Count Adelman, Reich commissioner for the occupied Rhenish territories, to the *Regierungspräsident* in Wiesbaden, 14 May 1927, in LHAK Best. 441/19884.

the Occupied Territories inquired whether the foreign office 'would be willing to mediate in an appropriate case of a paternity suit in France'. He offered to cover the costs of litigation 'in a few particularly suitable cases', since 'the German occupation children are completely deprived of any rights vis-à-vis their father'.<sup>51</sup> The Reich minister obtained the support of the Prussian Minister of the Interior (*Preussischer Minister des Inneren*). In February 1928, the latter told him that he would 'welcome it in the interest of the population of the occupied territory if we could initiate a paternity suit in France, if necessary by covering the costs through Reich funds.'<sup>52</sup>

Why this focus on *French* soldiers' illegitimate offspring? After all, contemporary statistics showed that the number of out-of-wedlock children fathered by American and British troops was far more significant. After the end of the Allied occupation on 30 June 1930, officials in the Prussian Rhineland counted 4,532 *Besatzungskinder* still residing there. Of these, the majority (1,866) had American fathers, and close to 1,100 had British fathers. By comparison, French troops had considerably fewer illegitimate Rhenish children (864).<sup>53</sup> This imbalance was particularly noteworthy given that the US army had left the Rhineland in February 1923 and that French troops significantly outnumbered their British colleagues.<sup>54</sup> Political factors certainly played a role in the initial decision to focus on paternity suits against French soldiers. German officials were probably hesitant to alienate American leaders, since they depended on the latter's support in their ongoing efforts to negotiate more lenient reparations conditions. Since German diplomats considered France the main obstacle to a revision of the Versailles Treaty, and since they strove to exploit political differences among the Allies, this may help explain why officials did not pursue child support claims against British troops.

And yet, in certain ways it was the recent Franco–German rapprochement, and not the long-standing Franco–German antagonism, that explains why the official German campaign for child support for *Besatzungskinder* focused on French fathers. Unless German mothers had the right to sue *in forma pauperis* before the courts of a foreign country, paternity suits against occupation soldiers were prohibitively expensive. In contrast to US law, which did not grant German citizens this right, the Franco–German trade agreement of August 1927 allowed Germans under certain conditions to claim pauper's status in legal proceedings before French courts.<sup>55</sup> This provision played a crucial role in enabling working-class mothers of illegitimate occupation children to initiate paternity suits against French men.

<sup>51</sup> Letter, the Reich Minister for the Occupied Territories to the foreign office in Berlin, 25 June 1927, in BArch R 1601/2260.

<sup>52</sup> Prussian minister of the interior to the Reich Minister for the Occupied Territories, 5 Feb. 1928, in BArch R 1601/2259.

<sup>53</sup> Heinrich Webler, 'Besatzungskinder', *Zentralblatt für Jugendrecht und Jugendwohlfahrt*, 22, 4 (July 1930), 126–8; statistics at 127.

<sup>54</sup> Keith L. Nelson, *Victors Divided: America and the Allies in Germany, 1918–1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>55</sup> Report by the German foreign office, 19 Jan. 1928, in BArch R 1601/2259.



There were other legal factors, as well, that caused German officials to concentrate their litigious efforts on French fathers. Residency requirements and other restrictions severely limited the rights of foreign illegitimate children and their mothers in the United States and United Kingdom.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, recent reforms of French paternity law posed fewer obstacles and were more easily compatible with German law. In France, the civil code of 1804 traditionally prohibited paternity suits.<sup>57</sup> The law on the 'judicial recognition of natural paternity' of 16 November 1912 modified Article 340 of the civil code, allowing paternity searches under certain conditions. Important restrictions were that 'the man could not have been married to another woman at the legal time of conception', and that 'a mother could take action only as plaintiff in the name of the child during the first two years of the child's infancy, or within two years after the father stopped supporting the child or their relationship ended'.<sup>58</sup>

In July 1927, the Reich Minister for the Occupied Territories asked Dr Führ to review another potential paternity suit against a member of the French army of the Rhine.<sup>59</sup> On 21 June 1925, the factory worker, Hermine Becker, had given birth to an illegitimate son, Jakob. Becker lived in Euskirchen near Cologne in the Prussian Rhine Province. According to her, Jakob's father was the French adjutant, Claude Montclair, with whom she had had a four-year-long relationship ending in February 1925, when Montclair returned to his home in Constantine, Algeria.<sup>60</sup> When interviewed by the Prussian *Regierungspräsident* in Cologne during June 1927, the mayor of Euskirchen furnished a number of items attesting to the seriousness of the relationship between Becker and Montclair, among them letters and telegrams by Montclair, as well as a photograph of the couple showing Becker five months pregnant.<sup>61</sup>

Führ advised against pursuing child support claims for Jakob Becker, since the two-year time limit on paternity searches had expired.<sup>62</sup> In April 1928, the Reich Minister for the Occupied Territories nevertheless instructed the foreign office to collaborate with Führ and the German embassy in Paris in preparing a paternity suit against Claude Montclair. Two legal developments in France rendered German officials

<sup>56</sup> Report on English illegitimacy law, 3 Jan. 1930, Beckeridge and Braune, London, in BArch R 1601/2259. See also the undated typewritten summary of British and American illegitimacy laws in LHAK Best. 441/19884.

<sup>57</sup> Rachel G. Fuchs, *Contested Paternity: Constructing Families in Modern France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 30; and Jean Elisabeth Pedersen, *Legislating the French Family: Feminism, Theater, and Republican Politics, 1870–1920* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

<sup>58</sup> Fuchs, *Contested Paternity*, 123.

<sup>59</sup> Letter, the Reich minister to Führ, 28 July 1927, in BArch R 1601/2260.

<sup>60</sup> Becker's deposition, 29 Jan. 1929, in BArch R 1601/2260. The real name of the defendant suggests that he belonged to the *pièdes noirs* with European ancestry rather than to Algeria's Muslim population. On differential citizenship in French Algeria, see Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 26–7. See also Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

<sup>61</sup> Report by the office of the Cologne district president to the Prussian minister of the interior, 7 June 1927, in BArch R 1601/2260.

<sup>62</sup> Führ's letter to the *Regierungspräsident* in Cologne, 7 Dec. 1927, in BArch R 1601/2260.

hopeful that Hermine Becker's case had a chance of success. One of them concerned Article 1382 of the French civil code, which under certain conditions allowed mothers of illegitimate children to sue for damages and child support.<sup>63</sup> In child support cases, Article 1382 required proof that the father was at fault; seduction, a broken promise of marriage, or the abuse of a relationship of authority could constitute legal grounds for damages. These were stringent requirements. However, according to the German embassy in Paris, in recent years French judges had interpreted the provisions of Article 1382 more liberally.<sup>64</sup> The advantage of Article 1382 was that it imposed no deadline on child support claims. A second strategy focused on the 1912 reform of French paternity law. German legal experts argued that the revision of Article 340 of the civil code had adjusted French and German illegitimacy laws sufficiently to allow French courts to use German law in those cases where a German child and mother brought charges against a French father.<sup>65</sup>

This, however, was far from certain. French judges had considerable discretionary power when it came to defining the legal grounds for paternity suits. In the post-war years, major French courts rejected the admissibility of foreign illegitimacy laws in paternity suits against French citizens. Thus, on 22 December 1920, the Paris appeal court (*cour d'appel*) ruled that Article 340 of the civil code was so fundamental to France's public order that foreigners, too, had to submit to its provisions.<sup>66</sup> To a significant extent, then, official German attempts to secure child support for the illegitimate Rhenish children of French occupation soldiers depended on French judges' willingness to put the interests of the German child and mother above traditional notions of the centrality of Article 340 to the stability of France's public order.

The law suit against Claude Montclair illustrates the crucial role of French officials and legal professionals in facilitating the legal turn in the debate over the Rhenish occupation children. Because the defendant had returned to Algeria, setting up the trial required a complex system for the exchange of information and legal documents. In December 1928, Montclair rejected the charges brought against him, claiming that he was 'the victim of outrageous blackmail' and that Hermine Becker 'had had numerous lovers' during the time he had known her. The state prosecutor in Constantine asked his colleague in Paris to forward Montclair's statement to the German ambassador and to find out whether Becker intended to uphold her charges. The German embassy relayed the document to Dr Führ, who contacted the mayor of Euskirchen to request an official response to Montclair's accusations, as well as a statement by Becker herself.<sup>67</sup> What is perhaps most striking about this chain of communication is French officials' acceptance of the German government's intense involvement in a civil trial against a French citizen on French soil. This attests to

<sup>63</sup> On Article 1382, see Fuchs, *Contested Paternity*, 70, 297 n. 23.

<sup>64</sup> Fuchs, *Contested Paternity*, 177.

<sup>65</sup> Legal assessment composed by the German embassy in Paris, 17 April 1928, in BArch R 1601/2260.

<sup>66</sup> 'Rechtslage der unehelichen Kinder', *Badisch-Pfälzischer Landesdienst* (Mannheim), 18 Feb. 1930, in LAsp R 12/693.

<sup>67</sup> Letter, Führ to the welfare and youth office in Euskirchen, 22 Jan. 1929, in BArch R1601/2260.

the goodwill of French authorities, who seem to have been relatively unconcerned about the possibility that Germany might exploit the law suit for political purposes.

In May 1929, the civil court in Constantine granted Becker the right to sue *in forma pauperis*.<sup>68</sup> Over the course of the next month, Becker's Algerian lawyer, Dr L. Saingery, consulted repeatedly with his German colleague, Dr Führ. Saingery filed claims on behalf of Jakob Becker for recognition of paternity and child support of 400 francs per month; he also filed a claim on the mother's behalf for damages resulting from seduction.<sup>69</sup> Hermine Becker's deposition, given in June 1929 before a court in Euskirchen, carefully addressed the conditions of Articles 340 and 1382 of the French civil code. French and German law excluded promiscuous women from the right to bring paternity suits. To satisfy a crucial requirement of German illegitimacy law, Becker affirmed that she had not had intercourse with any man other than Montclair during the legal time of conception (the period between Day 302 and Day 180 before the child's date of birth). She underlined the quasi-marital nature of their relationship (*wilde Ehe*, or *concubinage notoire*). Becker rejected Montclair's attacks on her moral character: 'Since I considered him my fiancé, he certainly did not give me any money or special gifts for sexual intercourse'. As her future husband, he was entitled to demand intercourse; if she refused, he would use 'more or less force'. According to Becker, when she got pregnant, Montclair had renewed his promise of marriage and given her a golden engagement ring. Until the sixth month of her pregnancy, he had continued to visit her regularly; his sudden announcement by telegram that he had returned to Algeria had come as a shock.<sup>70</sup>

Under the conditions of Article 340 of the French civil code, Becker's case against Montclair was rather weak. She lacked a letter in which the father acknowledged Jakob as his own; more important yet, she had filed her paternity suit too late. Given that French troops had been stationed in the Rhineland since the armistice of November 1918, it was likely that most German mothers of occupation children would face the same problem. This was a crucial reason why German officials argued in favour of using German illegitimacy law in paternity suits against French soldiers. Compared to French law, the German civil code (*Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*, or BGB) contained significantly fewer restrictions on paternity suits. According to Article 1717 of the BGB, if a man was unable to prove that he had not had sexual relations with a woman during the time of conception, or that the mother had had sexual relationships with other men during that time, a court could order him to pay child support. Many unwed fathers tried to avoid paying by accusing the woman of promiscuity; their behaviour often caused lengthy delays in the court's decision. Ultimately, however, in Germany 'only a minority of cases ended with the child losing its right to support payments'.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Court's letter, 11 May 1929, in BArch R 1601/2260.

<sup>69</sup> See Saingery's letter to Erich Becker, Hermine's brother and Jakob's legal guardian, 15 May 1929, in BArch R 1601/2260.

<sup>70</sup> Statement by Hermine Becker given before the district court (*Amtsgericht*) in Euskirchen, 24 June 1929, in BArch R 1601/2260.

<sup>71</sup> Dickinson, *Politics*, 121.

In July 1929, Dr Führ wrote to Dr Saingery that he believed Becker's case warranted using German illegitimacy law, 'since the child was conceived and born in Germany'. He stressed that the 1912 reform of Article 340 had removed contradictions between French and German illegitimacy laws.<sup>72</sup> Evidently, this line of reasoning convinced Saingery as well as the Algerian judge. On 26 November 1929, the civil court of Constantine ruled in the first instance that in the law suit of Hermine Becker against Claude Montclair, 'the national law of the child, which is German law' was decisive. The court justified this decision with the argument that 'when two national laws coincide, the stricter one has to come into application'. While in French law, a successful paternity suit established a familial relationship between the father and his out-of-wedlock child, German law merely stipulated that the father had to pay child support until his son or daughter reached the age of sixteen.<sup>73</sup>

The Constantine ruling represented a major breakthrough for German officials seeking a legal precedent for the use of German illegitimacy law in paternity suits against French soldiers. Other French judges adopted a similar position. In early January 1930, an Alsatian court used German law as the basis of its decision to grant child support to a German woman suing the French father of her illegitimate child. The court argued that 'according to international private law, the citizenship of the mother is decisive'.<sup>74</sup> In addition to establishing a legal precedent, Hermine Becker's law suit against Claude Montclair had created a pattern of Franco-German co-operation also apparent during subsequent paternity searches. In the spring and summer of 1930, German officials repeatedly received assistance from French authorities in their efforts to locate the French fathers of Rhenish occupation children.<sup>75</sup>

Parallel to the government's efforts to establish a legal precedent for paternity suits against French soldiers, the issue of the Rhenish occupation children stirred renewed public interest in the autumn of 1929. The immediate political context was the heated debate about the Young Plan, a new proposal for a modified reparations scheme. The Allies had promised that if Germany approved the Young Plan (which the Reichstag finally did on 12 March 1930), the Rhineland would be evacuated ahead of schedule by 30 June 1930. In contrast, right-wing German nationalists demanded an immediate end to reparations and the unconditional removal of all Allied occupation troops; in December 1929, a popular referendum against the Young Plan organised by the National Socialists and the DNVP failed.

The Young Plan raised the prospect of the early evacuation of the Rhineland while at the same time polarising public opinion over the issue of reparations policy. It is thus perhaps not surprising that the debate about the *Besatzungskinder* now shifted towards the long-term financial burdens the children imposed on the German state. On 19

<sup>72</sup> Führ's letter to Saingery, 3 July 1929, in BArch R 1601/2260.

<sup>73</sup> Ruling of the civil court in Constantine, 26 Nov. 1929, in BArch R1601/2260.

<sup>74</sup> 'Kurze politische Nachrichten', in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 11 (5 Jan. 1930), in LASp R12/693.

<sup>75</sup> Correspondence between the Reich Minister for the Occupied Territories and the French high commissioner for the French Republic in the Rhineland, 11 March and 9 April 1930, in BArch R 1601/2259.

October 1929, the *Kölner Tageblatt* (*Cologne Daily*) ran a story subsequently picked up by newspapers around the country. The paper reported that Allied soldiers had fathered 15,000 illegitimate German children. It also alleged that a ‘major Rhenish women’s organisation’ had prepared a paternity suit in England to establish a legal precedent.<sup>76</sup> Ten days later, the left-wing magazine *Die Weltbühne* (*The World Stage*) similarly praised the efforts of a ‘pacifist women’s group in the occupied territory’ to sue British soldiers for child support.<sup>77</sup> Both articles suggested that Allied soldiers’ child support dues should be credited towards German reparations.

Reports about the out-of-wedlock occupation children published during the final phase of the Young Plan referendum had a markedly shriller tone. On 16 December 1929, *Welt am Morgen* (*The World in the Morning*) featured an article entitled ‘Who Pays for the Costs of Child Support Resulting from the Occupation?’ The article, which also appeared in other papers, reiterated the inflated number of 15,000 occupation children and claimed that Rhenish women’s organisations were filing paternity suits in England and France. Should these efforts fail, the women would ‘bring this embarrassing matter before the League of Nations, because it is impossible to leave 15,000 children without protection and material support only because the army of occupation has withdrawn prematurely for political reasons. The League of Nations is responsible for the occupation – let it resolve the resulting social problems!’<sup>78</sup> On 23 December, the *Rheinische Zeitung* (*Rhineland Newspaper*) claimed that ‘Two Divisions of Occupation Children’ would remain in the Rhineland long after the withdrawal of Allied troops. The article supported efforts to obtain child support from French and British soldiers, yet warned that for decades to come, the ‘children’s army on the Rhine’ would represent an ‘unpleasant, bitter *souvenir de France*’.<sup>79</sup>

It is not clear what prompted the initial report about a Rhenish women’s organisation allegedly preparing a paternity suit against British soldiers; government officials were unable to verify this information.<sup>80</sup> The story’s strong resonance in the press sheds light on the continuities and shifts in public attitudes towards the *Besatzungskinder* over the course of the 1920s. In 1929, the issue of the occupation children still functioned as a metaphor for Germany’s ‘victimisation’.<sup>81</sup> Nationalists used the example of the continuing costs of supporting Allied soldiers’ illegitimate German children to disparage the political achievement of the early evacuation of the Rhineland and underscore the enduring burdens of the Versailles Treaty. The spectre of the ‘children’s army on the Rhine’ depicted the *Besatzungskinder* as alien elements potentially threatening the nation from within, a theme reminiscent of certain aspects of black horror propaganda. And yet, late 1920s discourses also differed in important

<sup>76</sup> ‘Tommys sind schlechte Väter – Ein Prozeß von prinzipieller Bedeutung’, *Kölner Tageblatt*, 5311 (19 Oct. 1929), in BArch R 1601/2259.

<sup>77</sup> Johannes Bückler, ‘Pioniere von Ingelheim’, in *Die Weltbühne*, 25, 44 (29 Oct. 1929), 645–60.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Wer bezahlt die Besatzungs-Alimente?’, *Welt am Morgen*, 50 (16 Dec. 1929), in BArch R 1601/2259. See also ‘Wer bezahlt die Besatzungs-Alimente?’, *Bayerische Staatszeitung*, 17 Dec. 1929, in LAsp R.12/693.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Zwei Divisionen von Besatzungskindern’, *Rheinische Zeitung*, 352 (23 Dec. 1929), in BArch R 1601/2259.

<sup>80</sup> Letter, the Reich Minister for the Occupied Territories to Führ, Jan. 1930, in BArch R 1601/2259.

<sup>81</sup> On the nationalist politics of debates over children, see Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

respects from the earlier debate over the *Rheinlandbastarde*. Especially striking is the shift away from the fixation on the mixed-race children and towards a focus on the illegitimate offspring of *white* British and French troops. The debate over the occupation children still had strong nationalistic overtones; racist concerns, by comparison, (temporarily) seem to have become less central to it. Arguably, the widespread support for the quest for child support for *Besatzungskinder* reflected an at least tacit acknowledgment that the children had become a permanent part of German society. This, too, was a marked contrast to the black horror campaign, which had denied categorically any possibility of the inclusion of black *Besatzungskinder* into the nation.

What were the practical implications of the litigious turn for the lives of the Rhenish occupation children and their mothers? In January 1930, Dr Führ, the lawyer specialising in paternity suits against French soldiers, complained that he was 'inundated' with requests for legal advice by mothers of *Besatzungskinder*.<sup>82</sup> The mothers often possessed significant knowledge of the legal process. Thus, on 22 October 1929, Erna Schulz wrote to Führ 'with the polite request to provide information as soon as possible'. Schulz had an out-of-wedlock child with a French soldier who was about to leave Germany; the father had acknowledged his child before a German court. Schulz sent Führ a copy of the German document to see if it provided sufficient legal grounds for claiming child support. In case additional materials were needed, she urged the lawyer 'to take immediately the necessary steps so [the father] acknowledges his paternity before French authorities'.<sup>83</sup> Many of the women who contacted Führ had read in the newspaper about the paternity suits against occupation soldiers. Gerlinde Kuhn, who wrote to Führ on 20 December 1929, sought child support from a former American soldier. For several years, the father had contributed four dollars per month towards the costs of raising their mutual child, yet now he had ceased his payments, arguing that 'he is not legally required to do so'. Kuhn asked Führ 'to give me advice and perhaps be my legal representative, so I obtain my legal rights. Since I am not able to continue supporting and raising the child, I could easily obtain official proof of indigence (*Armenattest*)'.<sup>84</sup> Kuhn's letter prompted officials in the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Territories to re-examine the status of foreign illegitimate children in US law.<sup>85</sup> During 1927–30, Dr Führ's office provided free legal advice and services to a sizeable number of unwed mothers of occupation children. This was an important opportunity for the mothers to defend their own and their children's legal rights and material interests.

It is difficult to say how many of the paternity suits against French soldiers ultimately were successful and resulted in significant improvements in the children's standard of living. The activity report for 1928–30 of the Archiv für Berufsvormünder,

<sup>82</sup> Führ's letter to 'Köhler' in the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Territories, 4 Jan. 1930, in BArch R 1601/2259.

<sup>83</sup> Letter, Erna Schulz to Führ, 22 Oct. 1929, in LAsp R12/694.

<sup>84</sup> Letter, Gerlinde Kuhn to Führ, 20 Dec. 1929, in BArch R 1601/2259. Kuhn mentioned that she read about Führ's involvement in paternity suits against occupation soldiers in the newspaper. See also the other letters by unwed mothers in this folder.

<sup>85</sup> Letter to the foreign office, 2 Jan. 1930, in BArch R 1601/2259.

an organisation representing many of the professional guardians of illegitimate German children of foreign fathers, offers some tentative clues. In 1930, the Archiv worked on 4,000 cases of child support claims 'by German children, whose fathers reside abroad, or by foreign children, whose fathers reside in Germany or abroad'. The annual turnover of such cases was roughly 1,400. Between 1924 and 1930, the amount of child support the organisation had been able to secure had risen from 18,518 marks to 171,940 marks. The Archiv claimed that 28% of its cases were successful and prided itself on this 'remarkable achievement, given that these are almost exclusively difficult cases'. In 23% of the cases, it had been impossible to locate the foreign fathers, and in an even greater number of incidents, legal obstacles had prevented the filing of child support claims. Among the countries where the organisation's efforts had been particularly successful were France, Poland and Russia.<sup>86</sup>

Though it is impossible to say exactly how many Rhenish *Besatzungskinder* the Archiv für Berufsvormünder represented, these children probably comprised a substantial portion of its cases. A considerable percentage of occupation children were dependent on public social welfare and had a professional guardian appointed by the youth welfare office (Jugendamt); the Archiv represented many local youth welfare offices. Given the progress in Franco–German collaboration on child support claims against French soldiers, it is plausible to assume that a not insignificant number of the Archiv's wards benefited from these legal improvements. From the winter of 1929, the Archiv was in contact with Dr Führ to exchange information on the progress of child support claims against French soldiers; its staff took a keen interest in the decision of the Constantine court of November 1929.<sup>87</sup> They also shared one of their own successful examples of a child support claim against a French occupation soldier. This was the case of the Moroccan soldier, Messaoud Y. The Archiv had located Y. with the help of his French military superiors, who relayed to him the request that he help support his illegitimate German child. Y. declared that 'he was willing to send a financial contribution to the mother of the child' and asked for the woman's address so he could 'send her personally the requested support'.<sup>88</sup> Especially in cases like this one, where the fathers were located relatively swiftly and agreed to pay a certain form of child support, the lives of some occupation children may have improved considerably.<sup>89</sup> The case of Messaoud Y. suggests that mixed-race *Besatzungskinder* were not excluded from this possibility.

<sup>86</sup> 'Arbeitsbericht des Archivs für Berufsvormünder', *Zentralblatt für Jugendfürsorge und Jugendwohlfahrt*, 22, II (Feb. 1931), 369–72.

<sup>87</sup> Letter, 'Detectors' of the Archiv für Berufsvormünder to Dr Führ, 23 Dec. 1929, in BArch R 1601/2259.

<sup>88</sup> Correspondence between the French military command and the Archiv für Berufsvormünder of Nov. 1929 in PAAA R. 74.425. In this case, I decided to abbreviate rather than change the father's name.

<sup>89</sup> The collaboration between German and French officials in the effort to locate the French fathers of German out-of-wedlock children may well have been indicative of significant shifts in inter-war attitudes towards masculinity and fatherhood. Unfortunately, the sources say relatively little about the fathers' own viewpoints and motivations. Within the limited scope of this article, it was not possible to include an analysis of the paternity suits from the perspective of the history of fatherhood.



### Conclusion

The shifts in the German debate about the children of the Rhineland occupation charted here shed important new light on the gender politics of 1920s popularised foreign-policy discourses about women's and children's victimisation. Gender historians of France and the United Kingdom have drawn our attention to the profound ways in which the First World War changed the language of foreign policy. To mobilise public opinion for the war effort, wartime propaganda increasingly depicted the conflict in terms of the sexual victimisation of women and children – a strategy apparent, for instance, in the image of the 'rape of Belgium' – rather than emphasising more conventional rhetoric about treaty violations.<sup>90</sup> According to Nicoletta Gullace, the enduring legacy of this turn in wartime propaganda was the emergence of a new 'international relations of sentiment', which privileged 'an image of international law and a definition of the liberal state that located the safety of women and the family as the primary issue of the public realm'.<sup>91</sup>

Most scholars understandably offer a sceptical assessment of the impacts this discursive shift in justifications of war and foreign policy had on women's status. Susan Grayzel has argued that atrocity propaganda buttressed patriarchal notions of the family in France and Britain by inscribing 'women as passive, ultimately sacrificial victims, as the emblems of the traditional home and family the war was presumably being fought to protect and preserve'.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, Susan Kingsley Kent attributes the decline of feminism and hegemony of separate-spheres ideology in 1920s England to fears of 'gender war' triggered by imageries of male sexual violence predominating in wartime propaganda.<sup>93</sup> Most recently, Marjorie Levine-Clark has drawn a link between the First World War atrocity propaganda and post-war legislation on the maintenance of deserted wives in the United Kingdom and British Empire. Levine-Clark contends that the 1920 Maintenance Orders Act, which excluded single mothers, underscored 'women's vulnerability and dependence on men for support at a time when women throughout the empire were very actively campaigning for greater public roles and economic opportunities'. Anti-German propaganda helped pave the way for the Act's gender inequities by heightening popular concern over women's and children's victimisation by 'unworthy men' and

<sup>90</sup> Especially Ruth Harris, "'Child of the Barbarian': Rape, Race, and Nationalism in France during the First World War', *Past and Present*, 141 (1993), 170–206; Nicoletta F. Gullace, 'Sexual Violence and Family Honour: British Propaganda and International Law during the First World War', *American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), 714–47; and Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). On post-war repercussions, see Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter-war Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Kuhlman, *Reconstructing Patriarchy*.

<sup>91</sup> Gullace, 'Sexual Violence', 725, 747.

<sup>92</sup> Grayzel, *Women's Identities*, 85.

<sup>93</sup> Kent, *Making Peace*, 141.

justifying state intervention against males ‘who did not meet the standards of British manhood’.<sup>94</sup>

The black horror campaign, which borrowed select themes and images from wartime anti-German propaganda, certainly provides evidence of the dangerous potentials of an international relations of sentiment infused with nationalist resentment and racial hatred.<sup>95</sup> Black horror propaganda manipulated fears of sexual violence and racial miscegenation in the post-war world to discredit the Versailles Treaty and its most intransigent defender, France.<sup>96</sup> The nationalist hysteria the campaign helped unleash often turned against working-class German women whose sexual behaviour and social contacts with Allied soldiers did not conform to middle-class conceptions of respectability and national pride.

Arguably, the black horror represents the ‘dark side’ of interwar popularised foreign-policy discourses centred on themes of women’s sexual vulnerability. In comparison, the late 1920s debate about child support for German occupation children suggests that under the changed political conditions of détente, the gender dynamics of nationalist discourses about women’s victimisation shifted also. In the context of Franco–German rapprochement, debates about the neglect of German children by their French fathers offered German officials an opportunity to negotiate French contributions to some of the social welfare costs of the Rhineland occupation, and also to extract a certain symbolic acknowledgment of French moral culpability.<sup>97</sup> For French officials, on the other hand, the issue of child support for French soldiers’

<sup>94</sup> Marjorie Levine-Clark, ‘From “Relief”, to “Justice and Protection”’: The Maintenance of Deserted Wives, British Masculinity and Imperial Citizenship, 1870–1920’, *Gender and History*, 22, 2 (2010), 302–21, 315.

<sup>95</sup> For instance, the theme of national ‘pollution’ through mass rapes committed by ‘racially inferior’ enemy soldiers figured prominently in the French wartime debate over what to do with the ‘children of the barbarians’, children born to French mothers who had been raped by German troops. Compare Harris, “‘Child of the Barbarian’”; and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *L’enfant de l’ennemi, 1914–1918* (Paris: Aubier, 1995). On select borrowing from wartime anti-German propaganda, see Christian Koller, ‘Enemy Images: Race and Gender Stereotypes in the Discussion on Colonial Troops. A Franco–German Comparison’, in Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, eds, *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 139–57, esp. 143; and Anja Schüler, *The ‘Horror on the Rhine’: Rape, Racism, and the International Women’s Movement*, John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien Working Paper no. 86 (Berlin, 1996), 2. I am grateful to Rebecca Spang for drawing my attention to some of the ‘copy-cat’ aspects of black horror propaganda. On ‘colonial themes’ in the First World War atrocity propaganda, see John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 221–3. Compare also Brett M. van Hoesen, ‘Visualising the Enemy: The Rhineland Controversy and Weimar Postcolonialism’, in Geoff Eley and Bradley Naranch, eds, *German Cultures of Colonialism: Race, Nation, and Globalization, 1884–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>96</sup> Lucy Bland, ‘White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War’, *Gender and History*, 17, 1 (April 2005), 29–61; and Elisa Camiscoli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2009).

<sup>97</sup> As shown above, during the late 1920s nationalism continued to play a major role in the German debate over the Rhenish occupation children. To the extent that official Franco–German collaboration on the matter of child support moved beyond the rigid national hatreds of wartime, it may have contributed to what John Horne has called the process of ‘cultural demobilisation’. See John Horne, ‘Kulturelle Demobilisierung 1919–1939: Ein sinnvoller historischer Begriff?’, in Wolfgang Hardtwig,

illegitimate German children provided an opportunity to demonstrate goodwill and a conciliatory attitude towards their erstwhile enemy.<sup>98</sup> To succeed in their endeavours, German administrators and lawyers depended on the co-operation of unwed Rhenish mothers, whom they now had to treat with a new level of (outward) courtesy and respect. For the mothers of *Besatzungskinder*, the quest for child support from French men opened up important opportunities to play an active role in the defence of their own and their children's rights. Speaking as mothers of neglected children, working-class women to some extent successfully mobilised foreign policy discourses about women's and children's victimisation on their own behalf. Even if they remained 'victims' in popular consciousness, the confluence of the women's own efforts and bureaucrats' distinct motivations turned the mothers' 'victimhood' into a justification for more pragmatic policies that improved their situation. In this sense, the Weimar-era debate about the children of the Rhineland occupation highlights the contradictory political potentials of the new international relations of sentiment emerging from World War I.

**De l'hystérie raciste au rapprochement pragmatique? Le Débat allemand sur les 'enfants de l'occupation' en Rhénanie, 1920–1930**

Cette étude réexamine les débats suscités dans l'Allemagne des années 1920 par les enfants illégitimes de l'occupation de la Rhénanie et étudie l'évolution du rapport entre nationalisme et racisme sous la République de Weimar, sujet encore peu approfondi. Au début des années 1920, ce sont surtout les soi-disant 'dangers' raciaux que pouvaient représenter les enfants métis des soldats français des colonies qui suscitaient des inquiétudes à caractère nationaliste. Après 1927, avec l'abandon des initiatives pour la stérilisation forcée et la déportation des enfants métis, l'administration a commencé à encourager les mères allemandes à intenter des procès en paternité contre des soldats français. Ce changement d'attitude envers les 'bâtards rhénans' en Allemagne, encore peu étudié, apporte un nouvel éclairage sur le rôle des débats sur le genre et la famille dans le cadre du rapprochement franco-allemand. Il nous permet en

outre de mieux comprendre le potentiel politique contradictoire des discours de politique étrangère sur la victimisation des femmes et des enfants à l'issue de la Première Guerre mondiale.

**Von der rassistischen Hysterie zur pragmatischen Annäherung? Die deutsche Debatte über die rheinländische 'Besatzungskinder', 1920–30**

Dieser Beitrag untersucht die in der Weimarer Republik geführten Debatten über die unehelichen Kinder kolonialer französischer Besatzungssoldaten auf bislang vernachlässigte Schwankungen im damals bestehenden Verhältnis zwischen Nationalismus und Rassismus. Während der frühen zwanziger Jahre konzentrierten sich die nationalistischen Ängste auf die vermeintliche 'rassistische Bedrohung', die von gemischtrassigen Kindern französischer Väter kolonialer Herkunft ausging. Nach 1927 wurden Pläne zur Zwangssterilisierung und Deportation dieser sogenannten 'Rheinland-bastarde' jedoch verworfen. Zugleich begannen

ed., *Politische Kulturgeschichte der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 129–50; see also Beaupré, *Trauma*, esp. 181–3.

<sup>98</sup> The contrast to the period following the Second World War period is striking. If in the late 1920s, the welfare of German occupation children became a matter conducive to Franco-German rapprochement, after 1945, French authorities often considered such children 'spoils of war'. During the mid- and late 1940s, French officials set up an ambitious adoption scheme for the illegitimate German children of French soldiers to replenish the French nation and ward off the threat of German 'overpopulation'. Compare Virgili, *Nâtre ennemi*, Ch. 9; and Zahra, *Lost Children*, Ch. 5.

Beamt die Vaterschaftsklagen deutscher Mütter gegen französische Soldaten zu unterstützen. Dieser bislang vernachlässigte Einstellungswandel lässt die Rolle der Debatten um Geschlecht und Familie im deutsch-französischen Annäherungsprozess in einem neuen Licht erscheinen.

Er trägt zudem zu einem besseren Verständnis der widersprüchlichen politischen Potenziale popularisierter außenpolitischer Diskurse bei, die im Anschluss an den Ersten Weltkrieg die Opferstellung und Verletzlichkeit von Frauen und Kindern fokussierten.