

The Destiny of Children

Introduction

The destiny of children caught up in this conflict seems by default or design to have been an issue right from the beginning.*) In fact: “There’s been no part of this war where the children have not been a factor, including the most vulnerable children of Ukraine.” **)

Sasha de Vogel ³⁾ put in these terms: “More than ever before, children have become the focus of this political order (a full report on the violation of children’s rights ⁴⁾ was recently presented to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child by OVD-Info). Previously, children had been invoked to justify the constriction of adults’ rights: the original anti-LGBTQ law and internet censorship laws, for instance, were framed as efforts to protect children. The war has now made classrooms a battleground of indoctrination, as the regime works to ensure the ideological compliance of the next generation of authoritarian subjects”.

Children have sought shelter in places which the combatants might consider unlikely hideouts; or they might hide in places which they or their carers would consider unlikely targets for bombing or general fighting.

An example of this kind of occurrence might be the bombing of Mariupol Theatre in March 2022 despite it being marked as sheltering children.⁵⁾

However, the focus of this essay is on those children who no longer live with their original families in a stable neighbourhood, who – because of the war – have been left in a no-man’s land without an identity that could give them the necessary supervision and guidance to survive and prosper.

Yale University on the 22nd of February (2023) published a widely quoted report which “documents a widespread Russian initiative to displace Ukrainian children to education and adoption facilities”⁶⁾). It reports that there are in existence at least 43 re-education and adoption facilities throughout the territory of the Russian Federation catering for 6,000 children relocated from Ukraine while other recent reports suggest much higher figures of up to over 700,000 displaced children.⁶⁾

Much of this activity is in clear contravention of the Geneva Convention (IV) of 12th of August 1949, Article 24, 25, 26 and 50 and other international statutes. I am not an expert on the affairs of Ukraine or Russia and I have no knowledge of the right way to bring up children, but even if only a fraction of what is reported is true I find these policies (if that is what they are?) distinctly worrying. Worrying, not only because their prime purpose is to destroy Ukrainian ethnicity but simply because of their very existence at a time in human history when everywhere else people and their leaders are fighting for tolerance, openness and understanding. I feel a need to understand why they exist and are implemented with such force. I hope that others can benefit from my findings, which is why I have decided to do this essay.

What is the purpose of it all?

The notion that Ukraine is not a country, but a historical part of Russia, appears to be deeply ingrained in the minds of the Russian leadership. It is a subject that Putin in particular appears to feel unusually passionate about. Is it historically accurate to claim that Ukraine has never truly been a nation or state in its own right? ⁷⁾

Vladislav Surkov was once regarded as the mastermind behind Vladimir Putin's Ukraine policy. He was dismissed in February 2020, but within days he had stated that "there is no Ukraine. There is Ukrainian-ness. That is, a specific disorder of the mind." Surkov went on to claim that Ukraine is "a muddle instead of a state. But no nation. 'The Self-Styled Ukraine', but no Ukraine.

At an April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, Vladimir Putin reportedly claimed that "Ukraine is not even a state! What is Ukraine? A part of its territory is in Eastern Europe, but a considerable one, was a gift from us!" In a speech marking the annexation of Crimea, Putin declared that Russians and Ukrainians "are one people. Kiev is the mother of Russian cities. Ancient Rus' is our common source and we cannot live without each other." Ukrainian national identity is a product of foreign interference, he has insinuated.⁸⁾

People involved in the research by the Yale Humanitarian Research Laboratory (YHRL) note that the Russian officials with whom they communicated really believe "that somehow Ukraine should not exist, that Russia has the right to rule the territory that is Ukraine and that the people in that territory should be Russian," said David Simon, director of [another studies program]. "The reason why I think that they're so unabashed in saying what they're doing is that ... they don't believe in Ukraine."⁹⁾

It is on this background the Prosecutor General, Andriy Kostin, needs to build an "anchor case" for a charge of **genocide** and seems confident that he has assembled enough material to be able to prove the widespread and systematic pattern of attack against Ukrainians due to their identity and nothing to do with the combatants engaged in armed clashes. We are all witnesses of the policy of demographic change through forced deportation of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians to Russia, Belarus or their transfer to the occupied territories, along with the establishment of the filtration camps and a deliberate policy of **forced deportation of Ukrainian children**. As we say, they are stealing the future of the Ukrainian nation.¹⁰⁾

From the point of view of the Russian families there would not seem to be anything on towards in this practice. From their perspective they are just helping children without parents.

From the point of view of the Russian authorities the practice has at least three advantages:

1. According to the laws of war-fare (Convention (IV). Geneva 12 August 1949, especially Article 24-26 and 50) the occupying power has an obligation to make sure the civil population including children is well cared for.

2. The Russian authorities will seek to get orphanaged children to Russia so that they are not given to Ukrainians who may seek to bring them up as anti-russians and therefore a potential danger.

3. The deported children may in due course bring new strength to Russia with a declining population.¹¹⁾

The researchers at Yale Humanitarian Research Laboratorium (YHRL) have looked at sources of children that might be suitable candidates for indoctrination and re-education and have identified two streams as shown in the diagram page 3.

The two streams are: 1. Children with family; and 2. Children – purported orphans – in institutions or uncertain custody.¹²⁾

According to Daria Herasymchuk, Ukraine Commissioner for Children's Rights, there were five methods:¹²⁾

1. Killing parents and taking the children
2. Taking them directly from parents
3. Separating parents and children in co-called filtration camps
4. Tricking them by sending children to sports or health camps, often blackmailing them.
5. Kidnapping from special schools, boarding schools and orphanages.

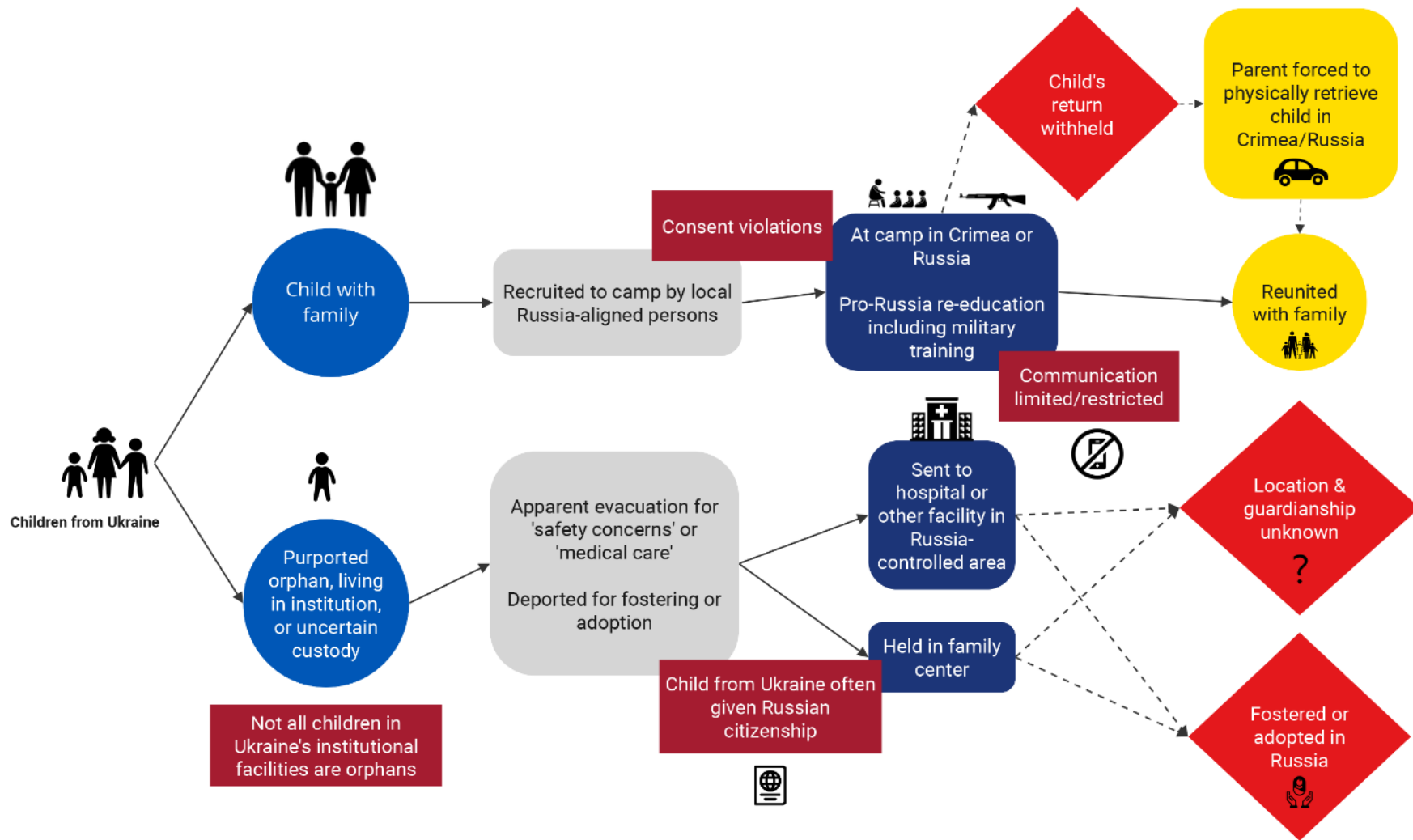
This may not be the strictest professional classification, but it would appear that group 1. - 4. apply especially to children with a family at the point of abduction whereas group 5. applies to mass abductions from schools and other institutions.

I will therefore deal with the two groups separately.

1. Children with family

Caitlin Howarth reports on four separate reasons why parents would send their child to a camp like this in the first place? She suggests four reasons:**)

1. Parents wanted to protect their children from fighting;
2. They wanted their children to have access to intact sanitation;
3. have access to nutritious food, and
4. give their children a break, they could not themselves afford.



Within the territories occupied by Russia a very direct approach is used: “The ‘Kyiv Independent’ reported that families in Iziu said that they were offered a sum of 10,000 rubles (\$165) as an incentive to send their children to schools using the Russian curriculum.” “When a school principal refused to cooperate with them, they lined him up against a wall and sprayed rounds all around him.” ¹³⁾

Children and their parents have been subject of relentless, somewhat underhand pressure to send the children to facilities described as “summer camps”. A researcher from YHRL describes it in these terms: “And they had teachers who spend not just one year or one class but multiple years with their students building relationships with parents, building relationships with their families over generations – telling them that it was safe and advisable, that they should send their children to these camps, that this was the best possible thing for them to do. And they followed that advice.” ^{**)} ¹⁴⁾

However, once the parents had accepted that it might be in the child’s interest to go to a camp more pressure would be employed: “In many instances, consent from Ukrainian childrens’ parents were obtained under duress. The report details how parents were made to sign over power of attorney, how agreed-upon terms of stay lengths were violated and parents’ refusal to allow their children to attend camps “were ignored” by organizers.” ¹⁵⁾

In at least four camps — including Medvezhonok which hosts at least 300 Ukrainian youth — childrens’ returns to their parents were suspended, and they are being held past their scheduled date of return. Parents also report being unable to obtain information about their children’s whereabouts after their return is delayed.

Russia does not deny the practice of "adoption", claiming with patriotic fanfare that it is part of a humanitarian effort to save the children from so-called "Nazi" influences.¹⁶⁾

In many cases, those Ukrainian parents who track down their children in camps and present correct documentation are informed that they have been "liberated" and told to wait for the day when Russia controls the whole country. ¹⁶⁾

Speaking from Kherson, liberated in November (2023) after being occupied a month into the war, government ombudswoman Daria Gerasimchuk told the Observer: "They kill the parents, for whatever reason, and kidnap the child. In other cases, they just grab the child directly from the family, perhaps to punish that family."

The Danish newspaper 'Information' referred to an investigation by Associated Press that had found that Russia had deported children “without consent, had lied to them that they were not wanted by their parents, used the children for propaganda purposes, given them to Russian families and given them Russian citizenship.” And

some of them had become orphans because the parents had perished during Bombardment." ¹⁷⁾

The children are then forcibly adopted by Russian families or sent to summer camps where they are re-educated in the hope of turning them into Russian citizens, reports claim.

Russia's goal appears to be to absolve any childhood attachment with Ukraine, so as to undermine the existence of Ukraine.

The Russian Government Commissioner for Children, Maria Lvova-Belova told a Tass press conference: "Unfortunately, we see that these children were brought up in a completely different culture and they did not watch the same films our children watched, they did not study history as our children did." ¹⁸⁾

2. Children – purported orphans – in institutions or uncertain custody.

“As Russia’s invasion terrorised a generation of Ukrainian children last year, the fate of one group of youngsters hung particularly in the balance. Languishing in Soviet-era institutions across the land were 25,000 orphans – most with no parents to pick them up and run from the bombs.¹⁸⁾

Some orphanages were shut, their children handed over to emergency care or whoever could be found to look after them. In cities under Kremlin occupation, orphanages saw their children deported along with thousands of others to Russia, where families are paid to adopt and “assimilate” them.

On the 17th of March this year (2023) an arrest order was issued by the International Criminal Court against the president and Russia’s Commissioner for children’s rights both accused of illegally deporting thousands of children from Ukraine to Russia, predominately from care homes and orphanages.

The state-backed child abductions have been denounced as a crime against humanity, as many may never see Ukraine again, but it has also shed an unflattering light on Ukraine’s orphanage system, which Ukraine’s First Lady has vowed to end by phasing out orphanages in favour of foster care.

These institutions were inherited from our time in the Soviet Union,” Nina Horbachova, the foundation’s Kyiv-based director, told The Telegraph. “The children in them are not socialised or educated in a family atmosphere. We want to change that.” ¹⁹⁾

An investigating by the UN claims that children are being sent from war-torn Ukraine and forcibly deported to [Russia](#) where they are offered up for adoption. The

organisation's rights chief Michelle Bachelet said her office 'has been looking into these allegations of children forcibly deported from Ukraine to the Russian Federation'. These reportedly included children who were 'taken from orphanages and subsequently offered for adoption in Russia,' she said.*)

Although thousands of children were taken from orphanages, an ombudswoman for abducted children has given insight into the various sinister "scenarios" in which Ukrainian children have been taken to Russia.

Last year, it emerged that Ukrainian children aged between four months and 17 years old were being taken from orphanages in the Donbas, Mariupol, and Kherson. Some have been taken to "re-education" institutions from their schools, with parents reporting that they have been essentially coerced into agreeing to let their children go.¹⁸⁾

CCTV footage of unknown origin has surfaced in the media showing Russian soldiers literally hunting for unattached orphans amid the ruins of bombed out cities.

Maria Lvov-Belova, the Russian president's Child Commissioner, has plans to open centres for adolescents "to give them special attention", and to deploy teams to reach out to "street children" in the occupied territories.²⁰⁾

Filtration camps

Desperate Ukrainians have been fleeing their war-torn country since the invasion began on February 24, 2022. More than 12 million people have fled their homes, with five million travelling to neighbouring countries, according to the United Nations.

Ukrainians fleeing areas like the devastated Mariupol have unknowingly arrived in so-called 'filtration camps', the first reports of which emerged quickly after the invasion began, with the destruction of their home being only the beginning of their troubles.

New arrivals in Russia are then shifted to onward destinations, but many don't know where they are going or what waits for them and many have had their passports seized, meaning that once they have been transported to Russia, they cannot leave.^{17*)}

Reports suggest there is evidence filtration camps were set up even before the invasion of Ukraine began and grew following the capture of Mariupol in April. Researchers at Yale University say they have uncovered 21 "filtration" sites in the Russian-controlled territory of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine.

The researchers say these sites are used by Russian forces and their allies to process, register, interrogate and detain Ukrainians trying to leave Russian-occupied territory. Those detained can include civilians and prisoners of war.¹⁹⁾

In the Yale study, the Russian Embassy in Washington is quoted as saying the system “is about checkpoints for civilians leaving the active combat zone. In order to avoid sabotage operations by the Ukrainian nationalists’ battalions, Russian soldiers carefully inspect vehicles heading to safe regions.” It adds that it will “detain bandits and fascists” and that the Russian military does not create barriers for civilians but helps them by providing food and medicine.

When asked about the process to allow refugees into Russia, he said there were “filtration points” on the border.

“They are checking people who appear aggressively disposed towards the Russian Federation,” he said. “Filtering occurs precisely upon arrival, there are no ‘mass camps.’ They are border-crossing points, nothing more.”

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) indicated that filtration camps are a common place for egregious human rights violations, including of the rights to liberty, security of person and privacy. OHCHR documented that such filtrations involve “body searches, sometimes involving forced nudity, and detailed interrogations about the personal background, family ties, political views and allegiances. Personal belongings, including mobile devices were examined, personal identity data, pictures and fingerprints were gathered. Those awaiting filtration may spend nights in vehicles, in unequipped and overcrowded premises, and sometimes without adequate access to food, water or sanitation. We are particularly concerned that women and girls are at risk of sexual abuse during filtration procedures.”²⁰⁾

Descriptions of the filtration process do not usually specify whether the victim is a child or adult, but the following may give a flavour of what they can expect.

A young man, Taras Tselenchenko, 21, from Mariupol, and his 80-year-old grandmother, were subjected to the filtration process twice. “He was fingerprinted, photographed, interrogated and psychologically pressured through interrogation by a former member of the Ukrainian military, along with a Russian in civilian clothes and holding a baseball bat.” Marya Vychenko, 17, was subjected to filtration in a camp in Mangush. Apart from the usual humiliations, “she was sexually harassed but was spared violence because the Russian soldiers did not find her pretty. ‘Maybe the next one will be prettier’, they said to her.”

Those who do not pass filtration may be detained in filtration camps for months. From there they may be sent to detention centers or prisons in the occupied territories or Russia. A survivor, 16-year-old Vadym Buriak, testified that he “had to live in a prison cell without even a working toilet. Almost daily, he would hear and see the torture of Ukrainian prisoners of war and then be forced to clean up the blood in the torture rooms.”

“They are checking people who appear aggressively disposed towards the Russian Federation,” he said. “Filtering occurs precisely upon arrival, there are no ‘mass camps.’ They are border-crossing points, nothing more.”²¹⁾

There may be different types of “camps”, each with a different purpose. In ‘France 24’ Lou Romeo describes “Rehabilitation centres” with the purpose of further assimilation.

Re-education, indoctrination, brainwash

Writing about the destiny of the children of Ukraine and their present predicament four words or concepts seem to be constantly intertwined by reporters.

The four words or concepts are: rehabilitation, re-education, indoctrination, and brainwash listed here in order of severity.²²⁾ The treatment the Russian authorities are meting out to the Ukrainian children in their control they will describe as ‘rehabilitation’ or ‘re-education’ ie bring the children back to good condition with a suitable correction of their knowledge of history and therefore able to play an acceptable part in the future Russian society. By contrast the Western, European world criticises this treatment as variably ‘indoctrination’ or more severely as ‘brainwashing’ ie filling the child’s mind with the one doctrine “..... that somehow Ukraine should not exist, that Russia has the right to rule the territory that is Ukraine and that the people in that territory should be Russian.”⁶⁾

The president in a comment to Tass typify the Russian response: “It is only natural that she evacuated children from the zone of combat operations or dangerous areas in Donbas. What is wrong about it? We should thank her (the Commissioner for Children’s rights) for that and make a low bow to her,” (the president) said. “Is it right to sanction for it? It is outrageous.”²³⁾

This attitude conforms neatly to the established custom in Russian government as reported by Sasha de Vogel (cf Introduction to this essay): “the original anti-LGBTQ law and internet censorship laws were framed as efforts to protect children.”

“These children have been deported since 2014 and have suffered brainwashing and manipulation. This has been directed by the highest political level in Russia and directly contravenes Article 7 of International Criminal Court’s Rome Statute. It is a war crime.”²⁴⁾

Furthermore, it is clear that all levels of Russia’s government are involved: “We (the researchers at Yale University!) have identified 12 individuals in this report not currently on US and/or international sanctions list. These 12 individuals and others we identify in the report are part of a whole-of-government activation to sustain and operate and promote this system primarily to an internal Russian domestic audience. It includes up to four regional governors, and reports to a woman, Maria Lvova-Belova, the children’s rights commissioner for Russia who report directly to the president. We identify personnel who report to Maria Lvova-Belova who is on the US sanctions list and we identify other individuals and organizations that are part of this ecosystem, a system of patronage.”²⁵⁾

At the grass roots level we find the teachers who traditionally have appeared as trusted advisors on matters of upbringing of children, but is now having an altogether more dubious function as securing a steady flow of subject into the ‘ecosystem’: “teachers

who spend not just one year or one class but multiple years with their students building relationships with parents, building relationships with their families over generations – telling them that it was safe and advisable, that they should send their children to these camps, that this was the best possible thing for them to do.”²⁶⁾ And the parents would follow that advice.

However, there is a battle happening, a battle against any trace of Ukrainian identity: “Ukrainians are racing against the clock to save children in occupied areas from the effects of Russian propaganda ahead of the new school year, amid claims the Kremlin is shipping in teachers to raise a generation of children loyal to Russia.

“They’re destroying books, they’re destroying libraries, they’re burning our textbooks,” says Olena Sotnyk, an adviser to the Ukrainian deputy prime minister.

“Teachers in occupied areas face an unenviable choice: resist and risk punishment, try to flee, or work with the Russian authorities and face accusations of being collaborators.”²⁷⁾

A teacher could resist: In cities such as Kherson, where the Russians have not had much time to install a regime and restrict communications, there are still opportunities for resistance – though they are very risky.

A civil society leader who escaped the city in May, is still in contact with people who remain there. She told of ongoing efforts to connect children and teachers to the Ukrainian curriculum using online learning and VPNs (Virtual Private Network) to bypass Russian internet restrictions.²⁸⁾

“Many teachers have refused to cooperate, but it endangers them personally and it’s a big threat to their personal security, so not all of them have.”²⁹⁾

“We know that some teachers have stayed. They had an opportunity to leave and they’ve decided to remain with the children to safeguard them to protect them from the Russian propaganda.”³⁰⁾

Disinformation

Apart from repeating the notion that everything Russian is wonderful and that the Russians are engaged in a brave existential struggle against an evil Ukraine supported by Western powers bent on the destruction of ‘the motherland’ – Russia, what is the nature of the propaganda which the Ukrainian children and people should be protected from? The only example of so-called ‘disinformation’³¹⁾ is that Russia has been provoked to carry out the ‘special military operation’ to eradicate the threat from a Nazistic Ukraine.

Reporting on this issue appears very sparse in the media generally. What is reported gives the impression of a lack of substance and a lack of clear guidance and coordination from the leadership. Presumably this is the organization described above which otherwise gives the impression of being strongly centralised under the direct command of the president through the Commissioner for Children’s rights.

At an elementary level there are several reports on the necessity for the children to learn the Russian national anthem and forget about the Ukrainian do.

At a “Moscow school, a Kremlin-imposed weekly “patriotic” ceremony involving singing the national anthem and raising the Russian flag had to be scrapped after some students rebelled.”³²⁾

“If they did not sing the Russian national anthem, the children were asked to write an explanatory note, the teenager said.”³³⁾

“After two relatively pleasant weeks, he was moved to another camp that, he said in a rare phone call home, was “like a prison”. Attendees were beaten for refusing to sing the Russian national anthem, sexually abused and psychologically manipulated.”³⁴⁾

For some the so called re-education appear to cover a broad range of subjects: We (the researchers at Yale HRL!) have found that about 32 of the camps identified by Yale HRL appear engaged in systematic re-education that expose children from Ukraine to Russia-centric academic, cultural, patriotic, and/or military education. Multiple camps endorsed by the Russian Federation are advertised as ‘integration programs’, with the apparent goal of integrating children from Ukraine into the Russian Government’s vision of national culture, history, and society.³⁵⁾

However, it would appear that “patriotic education” and especially history is marked for special attention.

Lvova-Belova told a Tass press conference: "Unfortunately, we see that these children were brought up in a completely different culture and they did not watch the same films our children watched, they did not study history as our children did." ³⁶⁾

Nataliya Vasilyeva³⁷⁾ makes the point that “Since the start of its invasion of Ukraine last year, the Kremlin has been using schools to ramp up efforts to indoctrinate the next generation of Russian children and dispel any doubts about the goals and wisdom of the so-called “special operation”.

Vladimir Putin has personally pushed for a “common standard” in school history textbooks, which are set to include a new chapter on the conflict from September, and stressed the need for “patriotic education”.

Ms Vasilyeva also draws attention to the proposed and by Kremlin prescribed “Talking about What’s important” sessions to be included in the national curriculum.

To understand why patriotism and history feature so strongly in the minds of the leaders of the new Russia it is worth reminding ourselves of the events of the late 1990s when the USSR was unceremoniously dissolved. Neymeyer makes the following observation:

Boris Yeltsin (President of Russia 1991-'99) “expected that Russia would be welcomed into the ‘West’ with a massive aid package and NATO membership. Instead, it was left in the ‘East’ and received meagre humanitarian assistance. After decades of being told that they represented the world’s leading civilisation, Russians

were reduced to eating expired US military rations. The Yeltsin administration's economic 'shock therapy', carried out in consultation with Western advisors, brought an atmosphere of brutal lawlessness that enriched a few and impoverished many others." ³⁸⁾

It is with this and other events leading up to the collapse of the Soviet union as a stark coloured back cloth that the leadership forge a new curriculum which force Russian schools – like schools everywhere – to promote a patriotic version of the country's history. Following the invasion, special lessons were held to explain to schoolchildren that Russia had been forced by NATO to start a war in defence of peace not withstanding as Sasha de Vogel observe that it "is in the regime's interest that children grow into acquiescent, nationalistic adults." ³⁹⁾

In actual fact under Russia's compulsory military service today's high school students could find themselves as fighters in Ukraine, a role they would be well prepared for and it is not just ideology gruesome battlefield footage have been shown to children, , and "cadet clubs" where students learn marching drills and practice assembling AK-47s have become more common in recent years.⁴⁰⁾

The researchers appear to find these developments more worrying. In answer to a question from a member of the audience one of them state: "..... the course that was taken specifically sort of described as **a course for a young fighter**, and that took place at the **Russian University of Special Forces**. So this is not at a facility that would otherwise be used for typical teenage recreation. This is at a military facility with military equipment." ⁴¹⁾

" some training is involved – and we do call it **training** specifically because in these cases it's not just sort of kids sitting in a classroom and hearing a lecture or a talk by different instructors. It's handling firearms; going over military courses etc. We have photographic and video footage of them going through obstacle courses, engaging in physical training, like, handling vehicles, handling weapons, and as we said, being in the presence of some people who we would consider serious men in the armed forces. So for those reasons we certainly take this very seriously.⁴²⁾

That being said, we do not have documentation of any deployment of these young boys. So I do want to stress that. That's one stage that we have not seen.⁴³⁾

Future outlook

Gloomy and pessimistic as the above account may be there are nevertheless signs that the metaphorical 'wheels' may be about to turn.

During late March and early April this year (2023) it was reported in the media and a number of publications that a group of up to 31 children had been reunited with their parents thanks to a charity known as 'Save Ukraine' with the children giving vivid descriptions of life in the so-called 'filtration' camps.⁴⁴⁾

'Save Ukraine' is also referred to in an article in the **'i'** newspaper ⁴⁵⁾ in which the founder, Mykola Kuleba, explains the difficulties and cost in organising rescue

missions. The difficulties are partly due to travel restrictions introduced by the Russian authorities which mean that any rescue party has to travel long diversionary routes crossing several national borders and having to overcome the suspicions of local border guards at each crossing which all adds to the cost. In addition there are the time and effort required in preparing each case so as to overcome the reluctance of any camp's leadership in releasing an internee.

Mr Kuleba's organisation currently has four such missions including about 110 children making progress.

An interview in the same article with a cleric of the Apostolic Orthodox Church, Mikhnov-Vaitenko, refer to "volunteers all around Russia – thousands working with Ukrainian refugees including children."

Mikhnov-Vaitenko added he would carry on assisting families for as long as needed. "Somebody must do this," he said, adding that other volunteers were "peaceful people". "They don't want to take part in any sort of war," he said. "They want to show they are against it." ⁴⁶⁾

The Presidency of UN's Security Council rotates between its fifteen members and in April of this year it was the turn of the Russian Federation even with the conflict in Ukraine still raging and amid speculation that the country would use the Presidency as an opportunity "to use the UN pulpit to push his country's case for the war and try to win support, or at least acquiescence, from nations still sitting on the fence over it, whether they abstain in UN votes on the conflict or aid and abet efforts to circumvent sanctions." ⁴⁷⁾

In that context Russia's treatment of Ukrainian civilians, and children in particular, was especially important given the recently issued warrant for the arrest of the Russian President and the presidential Commissioner for Children's rights by the International Criminal Court.

Russia's ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, arranged the meeting for Wednesday the 5th of April (2023) when the Commissioner for children's rights is due to speak and "the discussion about Ukraine will focus on "evacuating children from conflict zone".

Ambassadors from Western countries boycotted the informal UN Security Council meeting, sending low-level diplomats instead. And diplomats from the United States, Britain, Albania and Malta walked out when Maria Lvova-Belova started to address the meeting by video link. Britain also blocked the webcast because Russia would not confirm who would brief the meeting.⁴⁸⁾

However, Ms Lvova-Belova, the Commissioner did say "there has been no official communication with Ukrainian authorities about the children, but she said her office has met with representatives of Unicef, Refugees International and the International Committee of the Red Cross and "we provide all available information about the situation of children. "Now we're coordinating efforts with the Red Cross on reunification," she said.⁴⁹⁾

At the time of finishing this essay I have found no independent means of verifying these claims or any evidence resulting actions. Whether they are to be believed is therefore unclear.

It is to be hoped communications have taken place with a satisfactory outcome for all parties. Without such outcome no cessation of hostilities will happen and even less a lasting peace.

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