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***Lebensborn* Maternity Home *Wienerwald*, 1938–1945**

edited by

Barbara Stelzl-Marx and Lukas Schretter

Lukas Schretter / Martin Sauerbrey-Almasy / Barbara Stelzl-Marx

National Socialist Population Policy, Racial Hygiene, and *Lebensborn*: Pregnancy and Childbirth in the *Heim Wienerwald*, 1938–1945

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Student Nurses for *Lebensborn*. Daily Routines in the *Heim Wienerwald*, 1940–1945

Sabine Nachbaur

“Undesirables” among the *Lebensborn* children. The *Heim Wienerwald* and the National Socialist child “euthanasia” program

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Lukas Schretter / Barbara Stelzl-Marx

Editorial

I. Introduction

In 1904, Jewish pulmonologists Hugo Kraus and Arthur Baer opened the *Wienerwald* lung sanatorium in Feichtenbach. After the so-called *Anschluss* of Austria with the German Reich in 1938, the SS seized the building and set up the *Heim Ostmark* (from 1942: *Heim Wienerwald*). It served *Lebensborn* as a maternity home designed to boost the birth rate of “Aryan” children. After 1945, the building was used in quick succession by the *Wiener Jugendhilfswerk* (Vienna Youth Welfare Office), the *Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund* (Austrian Trade Union Federation) as a recreational home and the *Wiener Gebietskrankenkasse* (Vienna Regional Health Insurance Fund), which used it as a rehabilitation centre until 2002. Since then, the building has been consigned to decay.

Since the 1990s the building and its history have been the subject of investigations that differed widely in focus. Ethnographer and local historian Hiltraud Ast wrote a conspectus of the history from 1904 to 1994.¹ Martina Pippal taught a course at the Department of Art History at the University of Vienna in 2007, which tackled the house and its grounds from the perspective of architectural history. Two theses, written at the Vienna University of Technology in 1983 and 2022, focused on the architectural design of the building.² Bertl Mütter wrote a piece of music evocative of the history of the building.³ Studies on Franz Kafka, a patient in the *Wienerwald* lung Sanatorium a few weeks before his death in 1924, and on Austria’s Federal Chancellor Ignaz Seipel (1922–1924 and 1926–1929),

1 Hiltraud Ast, *Feichtenbach. Eine Tallandschaft im Niederösterreichischen Schneeberggebiet* (Wien: Brüder Hollinek, 1994), 61–77.

2 Daniel Trimmel, “Ein Dialog über Zeit. Der Entwurf einer Umbaustrategie,” unpublished thesis, Vienna University of Technology, 2022; Renate Wechdorn, “Sanatorium Wienerwald,” unpublished thesis, Vienna University of Technology, 1983.

3 Bertl Mütter, *Born. Rondo. Für Toypiano mit innerer Stimme*. <https://muetter.at/komposition/born/> (20 October 2023).

who died there in 1932 of sepsis from a bullet that had lodged in his lungs since an assassination attempt in 1924, also touch on the history of the building.⁴

Günther Knotzinger wrote an extensively researched study on the history of *Lebensborn* in Feichtenbach, which has been awaiting publication since 2001.⁵ The PhD thesis by Elisabeth Märker on *Lebensborn* after the *Anschluss* of Austria with the German Reich is based on her research in Polish and Austrian archives and on written and oral reports by contemporary witnesses.⁶ In addition, several historical and artistic diploma, bachelor and master theses have been written on the history of *Lebensborn*.⁷ Sandro Rupprecht has collected and published material on the history of *Lebensborn* in Feichtenbach.⁸ In addition to these studies, autobiographical contributions by Astrid Eggers, Elke Sauer, and Brigitte Rambeck and a novel by Eleonore Rodler are important ports of call for studying the *Heim Wienerwald*.⁹ There are TV documentaries and reports by directors such as Beate Thalberg, the duo Robert Altenburger and Andreas Nowak, and Christoph

4 Rudolf Blüml, *Ignaz Seipel. Mensch, Christ, Priester in seinem Tagebuch* (Wien: Hilfswerk für Schulsiedlungen 1933), 266–68.

5 Günther Knotzinger, “*Das SS-Heim ‘Wienerwald’ und die Geschichte des Hauses von 1904 bis zur Gegenwart*,” unpublished manuscript, Feichtenbach, 2001. At the time of publication of this editorial, Knotzinger’s manuscript is available through Adelgunde Knotzinger, Feichtenbach. For an overview of the history of the *Wienerwald* home based on Knotzinger’s research results, see Anton Blaha, “*Das Heim ‘Wienerwald’ in Feichtenbach*,” 14–15, <<http://stolpersteine-wienerneustadt.at/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2015-10-Feichtenbach.pdf>> (20 October 2023).

6 Elisabeth Andrea Märker, “*Rassisch wertvoll. Die positive Eugenik: Ihre Handhabung am Beispiel des Lebensbornvereins im ‘Heim Alpenland’ und ‘Heim Wienerwald’*,” unpublished PhD thesis, University of Innsbruck, 1999.

7 See, among others, Katja Aumayr, “*Der Lebensborn e.V. zwischen Mythos und Realität. Ideologie, Organisation und Nachwirkungen*,” unpublished thesis, Johannes Kepler University Linz, 2021; Corinna Fürstaller, “*Lebensbornheime in Österreich*,” unpublished thesis, University of Graz, 2010; Sandro Rupprecht, “*Aktion Lebensborn – Die ‘Züchtung’ von ‘Herrenmenschen’ in Feichtenbach*,” unpublished thesis, University of Education Baden, 2014; Reinhard Seifert, “*Der ‘Lebensborn’ e.V.: Eine Zuchtanstalt? Himmlers ‘Rassenpolitik’ und seine Pläne für ein ‘germanisches Reich’. Der ‘Lebensborn’ im niederösterreichischen Pernitz – Heim Wienerwald*,” unpublished thesis, University of Vienna, 2003; Marlene Wanzenböck, “*Zu einer Vergangenheit kommen. Third-Generation-Postmemory. Der Video-Essay als Mediator von Erinnerung*,” unpublished thesis, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2018.

8 Sandro Rupprecht, “*Aktion Lebensborn – Die Züchtung von Herrenmenschen in Feichtenbach*,” in *Wie es bei uns in Niederösterreich war 1938–1945. Spurensuche im Nationalsozialismus. Materialien zur Zeitgeschichte*, edited by Franz Vonwald and Margarethe Kainig-Huber (Berndorf: Kral, 2015).

9 Astrid Eggers, “*Ich war die Marionette meiner Mutter*,” in *Verschwiegene Opfer der SS. Lebensborn-Kinder erzählen ihr Leben*, edited by Astrid Eggers and Elke Sauer (Leipzig: Engelsdorfer, 2015), 134–50; Brigitta Rambeck, “*Ich war ein Schubladenkind*,” in *Born of War – Vom Krieg geboren: Europas verleugnete Kinder*, edited by Gisela Heidenreich (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2017), 155–61; Eleonore Rodler, *Feichtenbach. Eine Faction* (Wien – Klosterneuburg: EDITION VA bEnE, 2009); Elke Sauer, “*Der Lebensborn – eine Lebenslüge*,” in *Verschwiegene Opfer der SS. Lebensborn-Kinder erzählen ihr Leben*, edited by Astrid Eggers and Elke Sauer (Leipzig: Engelsdorfer, 2015), 151–64.

Bendas.¹⁰ The family history of a woman born in the *Heim Wienerwald* – her mother was a guard at the *Ravensbrück* concentration camp – is told by Gesa Knolle and Birthe Templin in the documentary *Was bleibt* (What Remains) and by Simone Bader and Jo Schmeiser in the documentary *Liebe Geschichte* (Love History).¹¹ Since the 2000s, especially since 2020 and not least in connection with the research done at the *Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für Kriegsfolgenforschung* (Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War, BIK) conducted in cooperation with the Institute of History of the University of Graz, statements on *Lebensborn* have appeared in Austrian print media, on television, and radio.¹² In the official remembrance of the Second World War, the building in Feichtenbach has hardly featured at all so far. The pulmonologists who were expropriated by the Gestapo in 1938 have received little attention in commemorative media such as school textbooks, museums, and street names. A memorial for the doctors was erected in front of the building in 1994. Established in 2017, Lower Austria's *Haus der Geschichte* (House of History, HGNOE) in Sankt Pölten has a showcase dedicated to the history of the building.¹³

This volume presents research conducted at the BIK in collaboration with the University of Graz on the *Heim Wienerwald* in the period between 1938 and 1945. The research was funded by the Jubilee Fund of the Austrian National Bank, the Province of Lower Austria, the Future Fund of the Republic of Austria, and the Open Innovation in Science Center of the Ludwig Boltzmann Society. Our thanks go to these funding bodies for their financial support. We would like to express our gratitude to the archives and institutions that have given us access to valuable

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- 10 *Geheimsache Lebensborn*. Film. Austria. Directed by Beate Thalberg. 42 min., Vienna, ORF 2003 (CultFilm); *Lebensborn – die vergessenen Opfer*. Directed by Robert Altenburger and Andreas Novak. 53 min., Vienna, Menschen und Mächte, ORF 2019; *Kinder für das Vaterland: Das Schicksal der Lebensborn-Kinder*. Directed by Christoph Bendas, News Magazine Thema, Vienna ORF2, 5 December 2016. *Die "Auserwählten" – das Schicksal der Lebensborn-Kinder*. Directed by Christoph Bendas. 11 min., Vienna News Magazine Thema, ORF2, 21 April 2021.
- 11 *Was bleibt*. Directed by Gesa Knolle and Birtha Templin. Silvia Loinjak production, 57 minutes, 2008; *Liebe Geschichte*. Directed by Simone Bader and Jo Schmeiser, Klub Zwei production, 98 minutes, 2010.
- 12 See, for example, Judith Brandner, "Lebensborn im Wienerwald," *gehÖrt*, Mai 2004, 10–11; Judith Brandner, "Lebensborn im Wienerwald – ein Lungensanatorium als Gebäranstalt für arisches Leben," *Ö1 Hörbilder*, 15 May 2004; Judith Brandner, "Menschenzucht – Der Lebensborn e.V. als Instrument nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik," *Ö1 Dimensionen*, 31 August 2004; Barbara Schleicher, "Es steht ein Haus in Österreich," *Spectrum, Die Presse*, 9 December, 2002; Barbara Schleicher, "'Herrenmensch' und arische Frauen. Das SS-Lebensbornheim Wienerwald," *morgen. Kulturzeitschrift aus Niederösterreich* 3, 2003, 28–30; Christoph Bendas, "Die Auserwählten," *Profil*, 6 August 2018, 48–53; Cornelia Grobner, "Das NS-Entbindungsheim im Wienerwald," *Die Presse*, 9 May 2020; Christian Hütterer, "Ein Zauberberg in Ruinen," *Wiener Zeitung*, 31 January 2021.
- 13 See *Haus der Geschichte*, ed. Niederösterreichische Museum Betriebsgesellschaft, Heidrun Wenzel (St. Pölten: Niederösterreichische Museum Betriebs GmbH, 2022).

sources, in particular the *Marktgemeinde* Pernitz, the Arolsen Archives, the *Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv* (Lower Austrian Provincial Archives), the *Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv* (Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna), the *Bundesarchiv* (German Federal Archives) in Berlin, and the *Sammlung Frauennachlässe* (Collection of Women's Personal Papers) at the University of Vienna. Our thanks go to those born in the *Heim Wienerwald* who shared documents and personal or family memories. Furthermore, our thanks go to the relatives of those born in this *Lebensborn* facility, the people living in the vicinity of the building, and to researchers and students of the history of the building driven by an interest in contemporary history, who have shared their knowledge with the project team. Last, not least, we would like to thank Otmar Binder and Katy Burgess-Fladerer for the translations and/or the copy-editing of the papers in this volume.

II. Breeding Farms or Welfare Institutions: Rumors about *Lebensborn*

Few organisations of the National Socialist regime are the subject of as many legends as *Lebensborn*. The myth that *Lebensborn* facilities were places for blond and blue-eyed men to impregnate blue-eyed blondes still persists today. This perception was deepened by the German movie *Lebensborn. Liebe auf Staatsbefehl* (*Lebensborn. Love at the behest of the State*) from 1961,¹⁴ which is based on a novel by post-war best-selling Will Berthold.¹⁵

Other popular novels and movies elaborated on this image of *Lebensborn*, such as the 1965 novel *Die Schande* (The Disgrace) by Benno Voelkner and the movie *Lebensborn – Gestohlene Liebe* (*Lebensborn – Stolen Love*) from 2000.¹⁶ A book and a documentary by French journalists Marc Hillel and Clarissa Henry from 1975, while claiming to stick to facts, nevertheless maintain that *Lebensborn* maternity homes were “breeding farms” designed for the optimization of procreation.¹⁷ In the recent past, two productions stand out that, deliberately or by accident, promote this image. The BBC series *World On Fire* aims to depict the effects the first year of the war, 1939, had on Europeans. One storyline in the

14 *Lebensborn. Liebe auf Staatsbefehl*. Film. Germany. Directed by Werner Klinger, 1961, 84 min.

15 Will Berthold, *Lebensborn: Roman aus Deutschlands dunkelster Zeit* (München: Kindler, 1958). At the same time, first stories with a fictionalised narrative about *Lebensborn* were published by Berthold in the German magazine “*Revue*”.

16 *Lebensborn – Gestohlene Liebe* (orig. *Pramen života* [Spring of Life]). Film. CZ. Directed by Milnan Cieslar, 2000, 107 min; Benno Voelkner, *Die Schande* (Rostock: Hirnstorff, 1965).

17 Marc Hillel and Clarissa Henry, *Lebensborn e.V. im Namen der Rasse* (Wien – Hamburg: Zsolnay, 1975).

second series, first broadcast in 2023, follows a 16-year-old girl, Marga, who signs up for *Lebensborn* and conceives a child with an SS man in a *Lebensborn* home.¹⁸ The fourth series of *Das Boot*, produced in Germany with Austrian participation, was aired in 2023. In it, underage girls and women are even forced into *Lebensborn* homes to be made pregnant by SS men and to give birth there to the children thus conceived.¹⁹

However, such myths attached to *Lebensborn* had been around even before the 1960s. Already in the Third Reich, popular misgiving about the *Lebensborn* homes was widespread. There were rumours that the association paired up selected women and men in a coercive breeding programme. The *Lebensborn* leadership was aware of claims that “in Lebensborn, SS men made themselves available to women who wished to have a child.” It should be obvious that such rumours “are malicious gossip and only serve the purpose of damaging the reputation of the SS,”²⁰ according to SS-*Oberführer* Gregor Ebner. Ebner served as *Lebensborn*’s head of healthcare from 1937 to 1945, as an executive board member of *Lebensborn* from 1938 to March 1942, and concurrently as the director of the first *Lebensborn* maternity home, *Hochland*, which opened in Steinhöring near Munich in 1936. Incidentally, Ebner said, “we feel that it is not the worst fruit that wasps nibble on and therefore pursue with all the greater enthusiasm and fanatical idealism this admirably beautiful work, which is, of course, beyond the comprehension of whims and moralizers.”²¹

Throughout its existence, *Lebensborn* offered the services of its maternity homes only to women who were already pregnant. Requests such as that of an SS-*Unterführer* were refused, who asked for a woman who would carry his child; his wife, whom he did not want to divorce, was infertile. While *Lebensborn* per se was not involved in match-making or artificial fertilisation, it did propagate such initiatives and, with its maternity homes, it incentivised a population policy that openly disregarded bourgeois and Christian notions of morality.²²

The myth of *Lebensborn* homes as facilities for coercive breeding is often countered by the narrative that it was primarily a charitable organisation. In fact, Himmler and the *Lebensborn* leadership had justified founding the association in 1935 by arguing that unmarried “Aryan” mothers were to be protected from

18 *World on Fire*. Directed by Drew Casson, Barney Cokeliss, and Meenu Gaur (Series 2). Written by Peter Bowker, Matt Jones, and Rachel Bennette. BBC One, 2023.

19 *Das Boot*. Directed by Andreas Prochaska, Matthias Glasner, and Rick Ostermann (Staffel 4). Written by Toy Saint and Johannes W. Betz. Sky Deutschland, 2023.

20 *Ebner an Gefreiten Rudolf Müller*, 13 July 1943, Arolsen Archives (hereinafter: AA), 4.1.0/8210200, Ref. 82448953.

21 *Ibid*, Ref. 82448954.

22 Lillenthal, *Der “Lebensborn e.V.” Ein Instrument nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik*. 2n. ed (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2008), 147–59.

discrimination and defamation. To this end, *Lebensborn* offered them the possibility of anonymous childbirth in its maternity homes and sought to provide high-quality care around pregnancy and birth.

Even the Allied judges at the Nuremberg trials acquitted *Lebensborn* of the charge of involvement in National Socialist crimes. Instead, they emphasised *Lebensborn*'s charitable purpose: "It is quite clear from the evidence that the *Lebensborn* Society, which existed long prior to the war, was a welfare institution, and primarily a maternity home" and "that of the numerous organizations operating in Germany who were connected with foreign children brought into Germany, *Lebensborn* was the one organization which did everything in its power to provide for the children and protect the legal interests of the children placed in its care."²³ Since then, numerous studies have shown that *Lebensborn*'s primary goal was to prevent unmarried pregnant women classified as "Aryan" from having an – illegal – abortion, and at the same time to encourage SS men to beget children without regard to any existing marriage. As historian Georg Lilienthal put it in his mid-1980s landmark study, *Lebensborn* homes such as the *Heim Wienerwald* were neither an institution for coercive breeding nor a charitable institution. They were solely tasked with implementing the National Socialist regime's racial policy.²⁴

23 Quoted in Lilienthal, *Der "Lebensborn e.V."*, 9.

24 Lilienthal, *Der "Lebensborn e.V."* Further studies on the history of *Lebensborn* include, among others, chapters in the following volumes: Angelika Baumann and Andreas Heusler, *Der Lebensborn in München. Kinder für den "Führer"* (München: Schiermeier 2013); Gisela Heidenreich, *Born of War – Vom Krieg geboren. Europas verleugnete Kinder* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2017). Monographs published on *Lebensborn* include Thomas Bryant, *Himmlers Kinder. Zur Geschichte der SS-Organisation "Lebensborn e.V." 1935–1945* (Wiesbaden: Marix, 2011); Caterine Clay and Michael Leapman, *Herrenmenschen. Das Lebensborn-Experiment der Nazis* (München: Heyne, 1997); Volker Koop, "Dem Führer ein Kind schenken." *Die SS-Organisation Lebensborn e.V.* (Köln – Wien – Weimar: Böhlau, 2007); Dorothee Neumaier, *Das Lebensbornheim "Schwarzwald" in Nordrach* (Marburg: Tectum, 2017); Rudolf Oswald, *Den Opfern verpflichtet. Katholische Jugendfürsorge, Caritas und die SS-Organisation "Lebensborn" nach 1945* (München: Sankt Michaelsbund, 2020); Dorothee Schmitz-Köster, "Deutsche Mutter, bist du bereit..." *Der Lebensborn und seine Kinder*. 2nd ed. (Berlin: Aufbau, 2011); Dorothee Schmitz-Köster, *Kind L 364. Eine Lebensborn-Familiengeschichte* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2007); Dorothee Schmitz-Köster and Tristan Vankann, *Lebenslang Lebensborn. Die Wunsch Kinder der SS und was aus ihnen wurde* (München – Zürich: Piper, 2012); Dorothee Schmitz-Köster, *Unbrauchbare Väter. Über Muster-Männer, Seitenspringer und flüchtende Erzeuger im Lebensborn* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2022).

III. *Lebensborn* Maternity Homes and the “Germanisation” of Children From the Occupied Territories

“Racial hygiene” was one of the central elements of National Socialist ideology. It was based on eugenic, social Darwinist, racist population policy ideas that had been discussed internationally since the end of the 19th century. After the National Socialists came to power in Germany, however, the radicalism of the propaganda and the strict implementation of “racial hygiene” policies differed considerably from other countries and from Germany before 1933.

One of the most important steps on the path from exclusion to the murder of minorities classified as “racially undesirable,” “inferior,” or “unworthy of life” was the *Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses* (Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring) of 1933, which legalised forced sterilisations.²⁵ Between January 1934, when the law came into force, and the outbreak of war in 1939, more than 300,000 people were sterilised on the basis of this law.²⁶ Another measure of the National Socialist regime affected Jews and other “non-Aryans” such as Sinti and Roma. The *Gesetz zum Schutz des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre* (Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour) criminalised marriages and sexual relations between Jews and “Aryans”. On 18 October 1935, the *Gesetz zum Schutz der Erbgesundheit des deutschen Volkes* (Law for the Protection of the Hereditary Health of the German People) was passed, which effectively excluded “inferiors” and “foreigners” from the *Volks-gemeinschaft*. The *Nürnberger Gesetze* of 1935 paved the way for the persecution of Jews that would eventually lead to the Holocaust.²⁷ After the *Anschluss*, the *Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses* came into force in annexed Austria in early 1940, much later than other anti-natalist laws, such as the *Nürnberger Gesetze* (from May 1938) or the *Gesetz über die Vereinheitlichung des*

25 Arthur Gütt, Ernst Rüdin, and Falk Ruttke, *Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses* (München: Lehmann, 1934).

26 See, for example, Gisela Bock, *Zwangsterilisation im Nationalsozialismus. Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Schriften des Zentralinstituts für Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung der Freien Universität Berlin 48). (Münster: Monsenstein und Vannerdat, 2010); Gisela Bock, “Nazi Sterilization and Reproductive Policies,” in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race* (Washington: US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004), 61–88; Stefanie Westermann, *Verschwiegenes Leid: Der Umgang mit den NS-Zwangsterilisationen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Köln: Böhlau, 2010).

27 See, for example, Cornelia Essner, *Die “Nürnberger Gesetze” oder die Verwaltung des Rassenwahns 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002); *Die Nürnberger Gesetze – 80 Jahre danach. Vorgeschichte, Entstehung, Auswirkungen*, edited by Magnus Brechtken, Hans-Christian Jasch, and Christoph Kreuzmüller (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2017); David Cesarani, *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933–49* (New York: Macmillan, 2016).

Gesundheitswesens (from December 1938).²⁸ The 1939 *Euthanasie* decree allowed the “mercy killing” (*Gnadentod*) of patients who were classified as “incurably ill”. This marked the beginning of the systematic mass murder of thousands of children and later also of physically or mentally disabled adults.²⁹

In contrast to its anti-natalist measures, the National Socialist race and population policy provided for the promotion of children classified as “hereditarily healthy” for, among other things, military service and use as labourers at the so-called *Heimatfront*. *Lebensborn* was one of these pro-natalist measures, alongside material benefits and the public honouring of families with families with many children, such as the bestowal of the *Mutterkreuz* (Mother’s Cross), and the celebration of Mother’s Day. *Lebensborn* sought to downplay the notion of “illegitimacy” by making the living conditions of unwed “Aryan” mothers essentially comparable to those of married “Aryan” mothers, thus increasing the birth rate among the “Aryan” population. From 1936 onwards, the association operated several maternity homes in the German Reich – one of them was the *Heim Wienerwald* in Feichtenbach, which opened after *Anschluss* in 1938.

A *Lebensborn* brochure contains the following information on who should be admitted to its maternity homes: “The *Lebensborn* homes were created for women and members of the SS and the German police, as well as for single and unmarried mothers in general who need special protection.” It goes on to say that “the precondition for admission to the home is proof of health, hereditary health, and Aryan ancestry up to and including the grandparents, which it is incumbent upon the father and mother of the child to be born to provide.”³⁰ It was important to *Lebensborn* to emphasise that its institutions were not recreational homes after pregnancy and birth. Indeed, SS leaders in Vienna seem to have assumed that they were, as a 1941 letter from Ebner to the *Lebensborn*’s home admissions department indicates: “In our experience, women in need of recovery do not fit into the *Lebensborn* homes either, since in all cases they have been known to demand certain privileges and extra care.”³¹ *Lebensborn* admitted to its maternity homes only unmarried pregnant women who met the racist criteria that also applied in the SS and the pregnant wives of SS and police members. After birth, *Lebensborn* took care of only those children it credited with a positive development – and only those mothers whose mindset passed muster with the SS.

28 Claudia Spring, *Zwischen Krieg und Euthanasie. Zwangssterilisationen in Wien 1940–1945* (Wien: Böhlau, 2009), 51–74.

29 See, for example, Ernst Klee, “*Euthanasie*” im NS-Staat. *Die “Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens”* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2010); Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance. “Euthanasia” in Germany, 1900–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Götz Aly, *Die Belasteten. “Euthanasie” 1939–1945. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2013).

30 *Lebensborn-Broschüre*, n.d. (prior to 1941), 9. BIK, collection of Helga S., Vienna.

31 *Aufnahme von Frau M. geb. S.*, 8 March 1941, AA, 4.1.0/8211100, Ref. 82451230.

As the Second World War wore on, the role of *Lebensborn* as a hub of the National Socialist regime's population policy became more and more pronounced. More maternity and children's homes were established, especially in Norway. In doing so, *Lebensborn* wanted to draw illegitimate children of SS and of military and civilian members of the German occupying forces into its sphere of influence. A number of mothers gave their children up for adoption to the *Lebensborn*, although they were not always informed that the children would be taken to the German Reich.³² Anni-Frid Synni Lyngstad, singer of the band ABBA, is one of the best known personalities to have been born in a *Lebensborn* home. After the war, having given birth to a child fathered by a member of the German occupying forces heaped public-opinion opprobrium on Norwegian women. Lyngstad grew up with her grandmother in Sweden, partly to escape the hostility that would have been meted out to her in her home country. In 2018, in a national reckoning with the past, the Norwegian government officially apologised to the women in question and their descendants for the stigmatisation and ostracism they had been subjected to.³³

From 1942, in addition to setting up new maternity homes in the occupied territories, *Lebensborn* turned to a second field of activity, the "germanisation" policy. Choosing Eastern Europe as its chief battleground, the association searched for children who could be passed off as "Aryan". Thousands of these

32 See, for example, Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen, "Life Stories of Norwegian War Children," in *Children of World War II: The Hidden Enemy Legacy*, edited by Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen (New York: Berg Publishers, 2005), 93–113; Caroline Nilsen, "Romance, Marriage, and the Lebensborn Program: Gendering German Expectations and Reality in Occupied Norway", in *German-Occupied Europe in the Second World War*, edited by Raffael Scheck, Julia Torrie, and Fabian Théofilakis (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 181–94; Caroline Nilsen, "Breeding Hate. The Norwegian Lebensborn Children," unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Houston, 2013; Kåre Olsen, *Krigens barn: Die norske krigsbarna og deres mødre*. (Oslo: Forum Aschehoug, 1998); Kåre Olsen, *Vater: Deutscher. Das Schicksal der norwegischen Lebensbornkinder und ihrer Mütter von 1940 bis heute* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2002); Kåre Olsen, "Under the care of Lebensborn: Norwegian War Children and their Mothers," in *Children of World War II: The Hidden Enemy Legacy*, edited by Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen (New York: Berg Publishers, 2005), 15–35; Sarah Rehberg, *Die deutsche Besatzung in Norwegen und das Schicksal der "Kriegskinder"*, in *Born of War. Vom Krieg geboren. Europas verleugnete Kinder*, edited by Gisela Heidenreich (Berlin: Links, 2017), 173–90.

33 In Norway, the story of *Lebensborn* became known especially through a book by Veslemøy Kjendsli. It is about *Lebensborn* child Turid, the daughter of a German father and a Norwegian mother, who was born in a *Lebensborn* maternity home in Norway, given up for adoption, taken to Germany and returned to Norway after the war, where she lived in a home until she grew up with Norwegian adoptive parents. See Veslemøy Kjendsli, *Skammens Barn* (Oslo: Metope, 1986). The Norwegian *Lebensborn* children who grew up in the GDR and spent their adult lives there have been little researched to date. In the 1960s, the Stasi used the identities of some of them for espionage. Klaus Neumann, conference report "*Lebensborn*"-Kinder in der DDR. *Erinnerungen im Spannungsfeld zweier Diktaturen* in H-Soz-Kult, 15 June 2011, www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/fdkn-122311 (20 October 2023).

children were deported after a racial biological screening. Their true identity was kept secret.³⁴ A second *Lebensborn* home, *Alpenland* near Gmunden, was to provide a temporary home for those children who in the end would be placed with selected childless foster parents to round off their “germanisation”. After the war, the search for the biological families of these children often led nowhere; decades later, these former *Lebensborn* children often described the return to their home countries as difficult and painful.³⁵

Both people born in *Lebensborn* maternity homes in the German Reich and the occupied territories and those who were abducted by *Lebensborn* have been sharing their experiences with a wider public for years now. In addition to autobiographies, a number of novels featuring *Lebensborn* have been published in German-speaking countries.³⁶ Particularly noteworthy is the much acclaimed autobiography *Das endlose Jahr* (The Endless Year) by Gisela Heidenreich, who was born to a German mother in the *Lebensborn* home in Klekken in Norway in 1943.³⁷ Alois Hotschnig’s novel *Der Silberfuchs meiner Mutter* (My Mother’s Silver Fox) interweaves life and family stories with aspects of the *Lebensborn* organisation. Protagonist Heinz Fritz was born in Vorarlberg in 1942 as the son of a *Wehrmacht* soldier and a Norwegian woman, whom *Lebensborn* had enabled to travel from Kirkenes to Hohenems.³⁸ A radically different approach is adopted by *My Child Lebensborn*, a computer game designed by a Norwegian studio that casts players as adoptive parents of a *Lebensborn* child in post-war Norway.³⁹ In Germany, the *Lebensspuren* association is an umbrella organisation of people

34 See also Verena Buser, “‘Mass Detective Operation’ im befreiten Deutschland: UNRRA und die Suche nach den eingedeutschten Kindern nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in *HISTORIE* 8, 2016, 347–60; Isabel Heinemann, “‘Bis zum letzten Tropfen guten Blutes.’ The Kidnapping of ‘Racially Valuable’ Children as Another Aspect of Nazi Racial Policy in the Occupied East,” in *Genocide and Settler Society. Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*, edited by Dirk Moses (Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 2004), 244–66; Isabel Heinemann, “Fundament der Volksgemeinschaft. Familientrennungen und -gründungen in der nationalsozialistischen In- und Exklusionspolitik,” in *Familientrennungen im nationalsozialistischen Krieg. Erfahrungen und Praktiken in Deutschland und im besetzten Europa 1939–1945*, edited by Wiebke Lisner, Johannes Hürter, Cornelia Rau, and Lu Seegers (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2022), 57–80; Dorothee Schmitz-Köster, *Raubkind. Von der SS nach Deutschland verschleppt* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2018).

35 Ines Hopfer, *Geraubte Kindheit. Die gewaltsame Eindeutschung von polnischen Kindern in der NS-Zeit* (Wien – Köln – Weimar: Böhlau, 2010).

36 Most recent publications include: Ulrike Draesner, *Die Verwandelten* (München: Penguin, 2023); Dirk Kaesler, *Lügen und Scham. Deutsche Leben* (Berlin: Vergangenheitsverlag, 2023); Gudrun Eussner, *Heime für Himmels Väter. Eine Lebensbornkind fordert Auskunft* (Uhingen: Gerhard Hess, 2023).

37 Gisela Heidenreich, *Das endlose Jahr. Die langsame Entdeckung der eigenen Biografie – ein Lebensbornschicksal* (München: Scherz, 2002).

38 Alois Hotschnig, *Der Silberfuchs meiner Mutter* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2021).

39 <https://mychildlebensborn.com/> (20 October 2023).

who were born in *Lebensborn* maternity homes or abducted by *Lebensborn*. It supports families in their efforts to come to terms with the past.⁴⁰ In Austria, the BIK organised a first exchange and networking meeting of people born in the *Heim Wienerwald* in the HGNÖ in Sankt Pölten and a visit to their birthplace in September 2022.⁴¹

IV. Research on the *Heim Wienerwald*: Source Material and Analytical Approach

The articles in this volume pull together current BIK research findings on the history of the *Heim Wienerwald*. Focusing on the *Heim Wienerwald* in the broader context of *Lebensborn* maternity homes, they present the results of quantitative and qualitative analyses of the available data on the veil of secrecy surrounding childbirth in the *Heim Wienerwald*, home admissions, and the racial assessment of mother and child. Secondly, the volume deals with everyday life in the *Heim Wienerwald* and the extent to which the stay of pregnant women and mothers in maternity homes was regulated. Sources related to daily routines and regulations provide insights both into the organisational structure of the home and the ideological goals of *Lebensborn*. Thirdly, the volume gives an insight into the experiences and everyday life of the home staff, especially the nurses. Fourthly, the volume concerns itself with children who did not meet the SS selection criteria. While *Lebensborn* wanted to promote “hereditarily healthy” offspring, the ambivalence of pro- and antinatalist measures in National Socialist racial policy is reflected in the biographies of those children of the *Heim Wienerwald* who were murdered in the context of National Socialist child “euthanasia”.⁴²

A central source for researching the history of the *Heim Wienerwald* was provided by the civil records at the registry office Pernitz II, which were sifted through in situ, having been made available to BIK researchers for anonymised evaluation.⁴³

40 <https://lebensspuren-deutschland.eu/> (20 October 2023).

41 Hans Bogenreiter and Lukas Schretter, *Vor 85 Jahren: Lebensborn-Heim Wienerwald*, <www.museumnoe.at/de/das-museum/blog/vor-85-jahren-lebensborn-heim-wienerwald> (20 October 2023).

42 Preliminary results were presented and discussed at a workshop organised by the BIK in January 2022. Nadjeschda Stoffers, conference report “*Lebensborn. Nationalsozialistische Geburtenpolitik, Entbindungsheime und die “Eindeutschung” von Kindern aus den besetzten Gebieten,*” in *H-Soz-Kult*, 29 March 2022, <www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/fdkn-127926> (20 October 2023).

43 BIK Project *Lebensborn-Heim Wienerwald, 1938–1945. Tabu und Projektion*, funded by the Jubilee Fund of the Austrian National Bank (18270) and the Province of Lower Austria.

The registry office Pernitz II goes back to *Lebensborn* intentions to guarantee women anonymity in pregnancy and birth if they so desired. In the *Heim Wienerwald*, as in the other *Lebensborn* maternity homes, there was a separate registry office in addition to the local one. The *Heim Wienerwald* registry office bore the Roman numeral II after the name of the municipality where the home was situated. The purpose of this registry office was for *Lebensborn* mothers to be exempt from having to inform their home municipality of their whereabouts. The tasks of the *Lebensborn* registry offices included registering the birth of a child without reporting it to the home registry office of its mother or father. This ensured that relatives and the social environment did not learn of the child's existence.⁴⁴

For the analysis of the files of the registry office Pernitz II, the BIK has created its own database, which, among other things, allows access to information on the number of children born in the *Heim Wienerwald* and the places of residence of their mothers at the time of impregnation. The database also provides information on the age structure of the women who gave birth in the home, and the mothers' and children's length of stay in the home.⁴⁵

The files of the registry office Pernitz II, together with the files from Ebner's sphere of activity preserved in the Arolsen Archives, form a solid base for research into the history of the *Heim Wienerwald*. The *Lebensborn* holdings in the Arolsen Archives contain files from the *Lebensborn* central administration, the *Lebensborn* Main Department G, and the head of the *Lebensborn* maternity home in Steinhöring. They deal with the care of mothers and children in the homes, medical statistics, correspondence with and about *Lebensborn* staff, building and property management, and private correspondence. The files thus not only provide information about conditions in the *Heim Wienerwald*, but also allow the history of the *Heim Wienerwald* to be placed in relation to other *Lebensborn* facilities.

The Arolsen Archives also have in their keeping the material collected by Dorothee Schmitz-Köster, which in these pages is referred to as "Bestand Dorothee Schmitz-Köster". She has been researching and publishing on *Lebensborn* since the 1990s and has gathered countless documents and interviews, some of which relate to the history of the *Heim Wienerwald*.

Relevant source material was found in the *Bundesarchiv* in Berlin, for example, from Heinrich Himmler's personal staff. Similarly relevant are individual case files from the marriage department of the *Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt* SS (Race and Settlement Main Office; *RuSHA*), which provide information about the private living conditions of SS members and their brides, wives, and children. From 1 January 1932, all SS members had to obtain a marriage permit and, later, a

44 Lilienthal, *Der "Lebensborn e.V."*, 79–89; Schmitz-Köster, "Deutsche Mutter," 193–96.

45 BIK database, *Lebensborn-Heim Wienerwald*. We would like to thank Felix Hafner, Mariana Kienzl, Theresa Reinalter, and Richard Wallenstorfer for their support in reviewing the files.

permit to become engaged, with a view to “the selection and preservation of racially and hereditarily good blood.”⁴⁶ The documents typically to be submitted by those wishing to marry included a *RuSHA* questionnaire, an SS hereditary health questionnaire, an SS investigation form, an *Ahnenpass* (proof of ancestry, pedigree) and an affidavit listing assets and liabilities. In those cases where the father was an SS man, the holdings thus provide some information about the parents of children in the *Heim Wienerwald*.

In addition, files on the *Heim Wienerwald* can be found in the *Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv*. Another remarkable store of archival material is the *Sammlung Frauennachlässe* at the University of Vienna, the recipient of the bequest of former student nurse and infant nurse in the *Heim Wienerwald*, Marianne Leitner.

Soon after the BIK started researching the *Heim Wienerwald*, it obtained data from the archives on hundreds of children who were born there. However, the project team decided not to indiscriminately locate and contact the former *Lebensborn* children known to them from the archives – after all, it had to be taken in consideration that some of them are not aware to this day that they were born in a *Lebensborn* facility. Being confronted by a research team with this aspect of family history for the first time via an interview request, with the potentially attendant consequences of bringing to light family secrets or repressed memories, could have had incalculable personal or familial repercussions. Instead, a decision was made to only trace and contact individuals born in the *Heim Wienerwald*, who had already gone public with their stories through autobiographical publications of one sort or another. A few interview partners were referred to the BIK through so-called snowball sampling, a sampling technique where currently enrolled research participants informally help to recruit other participants. In addition, calls for participation published in Austrian media proved successful at the end of 2020 and led to a great deal of written correspondence and oral interviews.

While not every contact with someone born in the *Heim Wienerwald* resulted in an interview, the BIK did conduct a total of 34 interviews.⁴⁷ In addition, the BIK conducted interviews with family members of former *Lebensborn* children, one

46 SS-Befehl-A-Nr. 65, 31 December 1931 (*Verlobungs- und Heiratsbefehl*), quoted in Gudrun Schwarz, *Eine Frau an seiner Seite. Ehefrauen in der “SS-Sippengemeinschaft”* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1997), 24–25.

47 BIK, Project *Geboren im Lebensborn-Heim Wienerwald. Sammlung, Dokumentation und Aufbereitung lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews*, funded by the Future Fund of the Republic of Austria, P21–4314. Lukas Schretter and Nadjeschda Stoffers, “Ambivalent but Not Indifferent: Interview Narratives of Lebensborn Children from the Wienerwald Maternity Home, 1938–1945,” in *Childhood during War and Genocide: Agency, Survival, and Representation*, edited by Joanna Beate Michlic, Yuliya von Saal, and Anna Ullrich (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2024), 283–96. (European Holocaust Studies 5).

interview with a woman who gave birth in the *Heim Wienerwald*, a former student nurse of the *Lebensborn* maternity home, one interview with a former employee of the *Wienerwald* lung sanatorium before 1938, and one with the daughter of a former employee of the *Lebensborn* home within the framework of the research projects.

Since those born in the *Heim Wienerwald* inevitably have no memories of *Lebensborn* themselves, the focus is on how they make sense of the past and what meaning they attach to *Lebensborn* in their family and life history. The interviewees spent only the first days, weeks or, in a few cases, the first years of their lives in the *Heim Wienerwald*; therefore, in the stories they tell about the home, different layers of individual experience and interpretation overlap with ideas and stories that were passed on in their families.⁴⁸ The project included the painstaking study of photo albums in the possession of some of the interviewees and of letters, postcards, and other documents, with a view to extracting information pertaining to the *Heim Wienerwald* from them. To this day, some of the families of those born there and the people living near the former home are loath to talk about *Lebensborn* and the history of the *Heim Wienerwald*. It is therefore all the more welcome that the BIK studies on *Lebensborn* have found a sequel since 2023 in the form of a project to disseminate the research findings.⁴⁹ Moreover, a participatory research project coopts people born in the *Heim Wienerwald*, their families, and people from the vicinity into the process of historical research. Workshops and field trips serve to propagate the skills that are the historian's stock in trade with which to tackle historical and biographical sources. These so-called co-researchers will also be involved in the presentation of the project results. The participatory research project is thus intended to encourage people to engage with family history, explore the history of the *Heim Wienerwald*, and promote civic engagement.⁵⁰

48 One of the most well-known works on family memory and family history concerning the National Socialist period is by Welzer et al. The authors analyse family discussions in order to understand what "normal Germans" remember about the past. See Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall, "Opa war kein Nazi." *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2014). See also, among others: Margit Reiter, *Die Generation danach. Der Nationalsozialismus im Familiengedächtnis* (Wien: StudienVerlag, 2006); Gabriele Rosenthal (ed.), *Der Holocaust im Leben von drei Generationen. Familien von Überlebenden und von Nazi-Tätern* (Gießen: Psychosozial, 1997); Harald Welzer, Robert Montau, and Christine Pläß, "Was wir für böse Menschen sind!" *Der Nationalsozialismus im Gespräch zwischen den Generationen* (Tübingen: Edition discord, 1997).

49 BIK, Project *Lebensborn-Heim.Wienerwald. Umstrittenes Erbe, gemeinsame Verantwortung*, funded by the Province of Lower Austria.

50 BIK, Project *MEMORY LAB. Partizipative Forschung zum Lebensborn-Heim Wienerwald, 1938–1945*, funded by the Open Innovation in Science Center of the Ludwig Boltzmann Society.

Articles

Lukas Schretter / Martin Sauerbrey-Almasy / Barbara Stelzl-Marx

National Socialist Population Policy, Racial Hygiene, and *Lebensborn*: Pregnancy and Childbirth in the *Heim Wienerwald*, 1938–1945

I. Introduction

Charlotte H., born in 1924, gave birth to her first son, Wolfgang, in March 1944 in the *Heim Wienerwald*, a maternity home run by the *Schutzstaffel (SS) Lebensborn* association. She had met the child's father, Richard S., a year earlier at a dance in Tulln, near Vienna. Richard S. was an on-board aviation mechanic with the *Sturzkampfgeschwader*, stationed at the Langenlebarn air base, which had been built in 1939.

In 2021, at the age of 97, Charlotte H. reminisced to an interviewer on her pregnancy and on what it was like for her to give birth at the *Heim Wienerwald*. Having mentioned her socialist background, she recounted how her godmother and Richard S. nevertheless got her admitted to *Lebensborn* towards the end of her pregnancy. She arrived at the *Heim Wienerwald* four weeks before her child was due. It was only when she went into labour that it was discovered that the child presented in the brow position, which she felt the medical staff proved insufficiently qualified to handle. However, her six-week stay after delivery lived up to her expectations: during air raids, mothers sought shelter in the basement of the home with their newborns, who were kept in a separate nursery. She also came into contact with children older than her son, some of whom, Charlotte H. suspected, were the offspring of the home's staff. She spent sociable hours at lecture evenings, in needlework classes, and in sing-alongs of folk songs such as *Auf de schwäbsche Eisebahne* and *Heidenröslein*. After her release, Charlotte H. was taken in by her mother. She never saw Richard S., the child's father, again. She later learned from his sister that he had been killed on the Western Front in the same year, 1944, some time after she had given birth to their son.¹

1 Charlotte H., interviewed by Sabine Nachbaur, 19 August 2021, interview in the possession of the Ludwig Boltzman Institute for Research on Consequences of War (BIK). The interview was not recorded. This summary of Charlotte H.'s experiences in the *Heim Wienerwald* is based on a report of the interview, released by Charlotte H. and available at the BIK. – The genesis of this

Charlotte H. and the father of the child were classified by *Lebensborn* as “Aryan,” and Charlotte H. was therefore allowed to give birth in the *Heim Wienerwald*. *Lebensborn* sought to ensure that “Aryan” unwed women would choose not to have an abortion if they faced social stigma or even ostracism from their own families. Instead, they were encouraged to foster “Aryan” life and contribute to a future “racially pure” nation by being offered discreet childbirth. According to its 1938 statutes, the mission of *Lebensborn* included “supporting racially and hereditarily valuable large families” through financial aid, “providing accommodation [...] for racially and hereditarily valuable expectant mothers who, after a careful screening of their own family and the family of the genitor can be expected to give birth to equally valuable children,” “caring for these children,” and “caring for the mothers of these children.”² Despite its emphasis on racial aspects, *Lebensborn* and the *Heim Wienerwald* might appear to have been an additional benefit for SS families, combined on the part of the SS with a charitable gesture towards unwed mothers. In reality, *Lebensborn* was an integral component of the National Socialist racial and population policy.

With Charlotte H.’s story as a point of departure, this article first situates the history of the *Heim Wienerwald* in the context of National Socialist population policy, racial hygiene, and *Lebensborn*. Case studies explain the measures taken by *Lebensborn* to keep pregnancy and childbirth secret, the admission of women to *Lebensborn*, and the assessment of the “racial suitability” of mother and child by *Lebensborn*.

The article builds on Georg Lilienthal’s landmark study on *Lebensborn*, which establishes both its function in various phases of the Third Reich and its place in National Socialist racial policy, and Dorothee Schmitz-Köster’s social history studies on *Lebensborn*.³ Studies on the *Heim Wienerwald* include those by Hiltraud Ast, Günther Knotzinger, and Elisabeth Märker.⁴ The article is based on a

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2 *Lebensborn e.V. in München*, brochure, Miesbach, 8. Provincial Archives of Lower Austria (NÖLA), Office of the Lower Austrian Provincial Government, Provincial Office I/2, number 33/1975, see also *Ziele des “Lebensborn” e.V.*, Arolsen Archives (hereinafter AA), 4.1.0/8209800, Ref. 82448155. The authors thank Otmar Binder for translations of German-language quotations of documents and interviews and for copy-editing the English version of this article.

3 See, for example, Georg Lilienthal, *Der “Lebensborn e.V.” Ein Instrument nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2003); Dorothee Schmitz-Köster, *“Deutsche Mutter, bist du bereit...” Der Lebensborn und seine Kinder*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Aufbau, 2011). For more information on volumes and monographs as well as unpublished works on *Lebensborn* and the *Heim Wienerwald* in particular see the editorial in this volume.

4 Hiltraud Ast, *Feichtenbach. Eine Tallandschaft im Niederösterreichischen Schneeberggebiet* (Wien: Brüder Hollinek, 1994), 61–77; Günther Knotzinger, *Das SS-Heim “Wienerwald” und die Geschichte des Hauses von 1904 bis zur Gegenwart*, unpublished manuscript, Feichtenbach,

database-driven and anonymised analysis of 946 surviving files of the registry office Pernitz II, including the so-called *Reichsführer SS Fragebögen* (*Reichsführer SS Questionnaires*), of which 346 drafts have been preserved in the Pernitz municipal office. In addition, the article refers to documents from the sphere of activity of Gregor Ebner, who served as *Lebensborn*'s head of health care from 1937 to 1945, and as a member of the *Lebensborn* board from 1938 to March 1942. Concurrently, he was the director of the first *Lebensborn* maternity home, *Heim Hochland*, which opened in Steinhöring near Munich on 15 August 1936. These documents are accessible in the Arolsen Archives.

In the preparation of this article, mothers and fathers of children born in the *Heim Wienerwald* could no longer be interviewed, with the sole exception of Charlotte H.. The oldest woman known from written records to have given birth in the *Heim Wienerwald* was born in 1899 and was admitted to *Lebensborn* on 3 February 1939.⁵ The youngest was born in 1925 and was admitted on 23 January 1941.⁶ The analysis of these documents was therefore supplemented by information from biographical interviews with former *Lebensborn* children who had spent the first days, weeks or months of their lives in the *Heim Wienerwald*. Being a *Lebensborn* “child” is an indication of parental involvement in National Socialist racial and population policies. The interviews, conducted between 2021 and 2023, therefore not only provide an insight into what the “children” were told about their parents’ applications to *Lebensborn* and their mothers’ stay in the home, but also shed light on the significance – if any – of being born in the *Heim Wienerwald* for their own family and life stories.⁷

II. National Socialist Racial Policy, *Lebensborn*, and the *Heim Wienerwald*

The SS association *Lebensborn* was founded in December 1935 in the context of National Socialist racial policy. In addition to the *Heim Wienerwald*, which opened in 1938 and where Charlotte H. gave birth to her child in 1944, *Lebensborn*

2001; Elisabeth Andrea Märker, “Rassisch wertvoll. Die positive Eugenik: Ihre Handhabung am Beispiel des Lebensbornvereins im ‘Heim Alpenland’ und ‘Heim Wienerwald,’” unpublished PhD thesis, University of Innsbruck, 1999.

5 Franziska M., 51/1939, registry office Pernitz II.

6 Bernd T., 48/1941, registry office Pernitz II; list of residents, registry office Pernitz II.

7 For information on the interview project and the interview methodology, see Lukas Schretter and Nadjeschda Stoffers, “Ambivalent but Not Indifferent: Interview Narratives of *Lebensborn* Children from the Wienerwald Maternity Home, 1938–1945, in *Childhood during War and Genocide: Agency, Survival, and Representation*, edited by Joanna Beate Michlic, Yuliya von Saal, and Anna Ullrich (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2024), 283–96. (European Holocaust Studies 5).