

BOOK REVIEW

Born of War: Protecting Children of Sexual Violence Survivors in Conflict Zones. R. Charli Carpenter, ed. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2007; vii + 243 pages, inc. index, notes on contributors; ISBN 978-1-56549-237-0; \$24.95US (paper).

In viewing children not just as adjuncts to their mothers' lives but as rights-bearing individuals themselves, the authors of this collection do much to move feminist thinking forward. Whether country-specific or more broadly theoretical, the essays included here highlight the need for protection; for material supports such as food and medical care; for community acceptance; and for psychosocial supports for children and their mothers.

The most difficult issue the authors identify is that which arises when the rights and needs of mothers conflict with those of their children. In extremis such conflict can lead to infanticide or child abandonment. The authors are unequivocal: infanticide is murder and while a mother's motivations may be understandable, her act is not acceptable. A similar position is taken in the case of abandonment, which, intentionally or not, is presented as a kind of passive infanticide. Discussions around issues such as these serve to remind us that in the course of our advocacy for women, there is a danger, even in the most rigorous feminist thinking, of viewing children as products.

Another issue the writers address is the sometimes contested identity of children born of war rape. Especially in ethnicized rape, the soldier-rapist may think of his putative child as belonging to his ethnicity only, seeing the mother as no more than an empty vessel. The woman's family and community - indeed, the woman herself - may also take this view, particularly if the child is marked with physical characteristics of her/his biological father's group. Other children may be considered "mixed," a designation some of the essayists see as an improvement on the former.

Some of the authors included here point out that there are states that may refuse citizenship rights to children born of war rape. Conversely, some states will insist these children "belong" in the face of their mothers' rejection. In this case, the children are seen as a resource, an important means of re-populating a devastated country. In such cases, the state may refuse to allow abandoned babies to be adopted out of the country.

My primary criticism concerns the identification of the book's subject matter. The phrase "born of war" is obfuscating when, really, the authors mean "born of war rape." Ironically, this disjunction replicates one of the conflicts the authors identify: that silence can protect these children from discrimination in their mothers' communities yet simultaneously deny them the recognition required to meet their material, psychosocial and citizenship needs.

As can be seen in this brief review, the issues surrounding children born of war rape are multiple and complex, characteristics replicated in the diversity of voices in this book. There are arguments and proposed solutions which readers will agree with and some they

may not, but, most importantly, in this volume they will uncover a wealth of information and understanding. If you have ever pondered the fate of these children, and especially if you have not, I encourage you to read this challenging and insightful book.

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