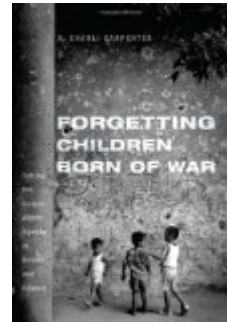


R. Charli Carpenter. *Forgetting Children Born of War: Setting the Human Rights Agenda in Bosnia and Beyond.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. xx + 273 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-231-15130-6.



Reviewed by Andrea Schapper

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Commissioned by Rebecca K. Root (Ramapo College of New Jersey)

There are few human rights (and even fewer child rights) issues about which well-functioning human rights advocacy networks remain entirely silent. In her book *Forgetting Children Born of War*, R. Charli Carpenter addresses one such issue and breaks the silence about children fathered during war rapes and sexual exploitation in zones of violent conflict.

Carpenter's work aims at explaining an empirical puzzle in Bosnia Herzegovina, where both human rights scholars and activists have failed to pay systematic attention to protecting children resulting from rapes in times of war. In Carpenter's usage, children born of war are "children born of sexual violence or exploitative relationships in war zones, where the child's father is perceived to be a member of a foreign or enemy community" (p. 197n). In the 1990s, during and after the Balkan wars, the Bosnian human rights advocacy network was mainly composed of the media, nationalist players, lawyers, and transnational women's rights movements. Carpenter's overall argument centers on this network's focus on the atroc-

ities of rape and its female victims, which draws attention away from the rights situation of the children brought into existence. Narratives put forward by the media continue this pattern by emphasizing women's victimization and constructing children as the existing evidence of war rapes. The resulting babies underpin and symbolize rape atrocities; they "become a symbol of the trauma the nation went through," instead of being subject of human rights protection themselves (p. 18).

Hence, children born of war are denied fundamental civil and political as well as economic and social rights granted to them under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which the former Yugoslav Republic and its successor states, including Bosnia Herzegovina, have ratified. Particularly striking is the existing evidence of attempted and considered infanticide by the traumatized mothers of these children. Moreover, affected children are at the risk of becoming stateless whenever *ius sanguinis* citizenship laws are applied; in any case, with an un-

known soldier as father, their right to identity is being denied. On top of that, war children struggle with neglect, stigmatization, and discrimination leading to physical, economic, and psychosocial constraints from birth to adulthood.

The lack of advocacy attention, Carpenter argues, cannot be explained by international relations (IR) scholarship on human rights norms and transnational advocacy networks. According to such analytical frameworks--grounded in constructivist IR theory--the issue of war children should have been framed as neglect of children's rights. Issues framed as rights violations usually lead to network formation, and, if adopted onto the agendas of major international organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), result in transnational campaigns, norms, and state policies addressing the issue (see Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink's *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* [1998]). In the case of Bosnia Herzegovina, however, women's rights violations have interfered with framing the issue of child rights violations. In other words, women's victimization obscured the fact that children needed to be considered victims of these war crimes as well. Lacking a transnational advocacy network that frames the issue as a high-priority concern on the human rights agenda, no consensus about a common policy response supporting war children in Bosnia Herzegovina has been found among relevant activists. Even data on the number of affected children and the respective kinds of rights violations is lacking or inaccurate. As a consequence, international organizations refrained from designing appropriate technical cooperation programs reaching out to these children and decided to contribute to local support systems instead. These, due to the complexity of the issue, did not evolve effectively enough to formulate concrete policy strategies. The lone exceptions were Islamic NGOs that offered rights-related services to children resulting from war rape in Bosnia Herzegovina through opening safe houses, initiating anti-stigma cam-

paigns, supporting women to raise their babies, and providing financial support.

The violation of women's rights, in contrast, received attention and even became an issue in international legal institutions, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Here, rape has been defined as a form of enslavement and a crime against humanity. For the first time, defendants have been sentenced exclusively as rapists, whereas their children--as the products of these rapes--remained an unrecognized and untouched issue.

Altogether, Carpenter's piece is an excellent and well-written study based on extensive fieldwork in Bosnia Herzegovina on a subject matter that is yet understudied. The author conducted 103 interviews with Bosnian and transnational civil society activists and included 42 rights practitioners in focus groups during several field research trips between 2004 and 2007. She has found--at least in part--convincing answers to the empirical puzzle of advocacy gaps pertinent to children born of war.

In the end, at least three issues remain puzzling. First, Carpenter's insistence on a policy response exclusively focusing on children is in opposition to what international organizations have learned over the years about designing and implementing technical cooperation programs for fostering children's rights. Due to the indivisibility and mutually enforcing character of human rights and children's dependence on their social environment, children alone can never be the only addressees of such policy projects. It is always the children, their parents, and the entire local community that have to be addressed by policy programs that pursue the goal of children's rights realization. Hence, targeting children and their mothers at the same time might not necessarily point to neglecting children's rights but to finding comprehensive policy responses. The question is whether it is indeed possible and advisable to address the rights situation of war rape children

without addressing the rights situation of their raped mothers.

Closely related is a second shortcoming of the study, also linked to an appropriate policy program. Apart from describing the complexity of the issue in great detail, Carpenter does not provide concrete policy suggestions that would accommodate her critique and concerns. At the very end of her book, she briefly claims that mothers and their children should be eligible for veterans' benefits and other forms of economic assistance. In addition, birth registries should be fostered and individuals should be supported in discovering their biological roots. Apart from the fact that these few suggestions do not flow into a comprehensive policy answer, they also presuppose the involvement of both children and mothers. This means that they--to some extent--contradict the argument she has developed throughout her book.

A third critique is directed at Carpenter's claim that IR scholars could learn more about human rights norms by paying closer attention to what issues do not get attention from human rights practitioners and advocacy networks. Here, the single case evidence based on data from Bosnia Herzegovina seems too thin to make such a broad claim. The more general assumption that can be drawn from this case is that human rights claims can interfere with each other. Human rights as well as children's rights are interdependent, indivisible, and mutually reinforcing; hence, they have to be protected and promoted with comprehensive policy strategies reaching out to all of those concerned simultaneously.

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