

Children Born of War

Children Born of War: The children of the occupations during and after the Second World War

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Recent conflicts such as those in Bosnia and Rwanda, where sexual violence against women was used as an instrument of warfare, have raised public awareness of the complex war-time interactions between local women and foreign soldiers. While the topic has only recently surfaced as an area of political interest, the phenomenon is not new. Every war sees children born as a result of contact between local women and 'foreign' soldiers. The soldier might be seen as an enemy or ally. Often, children fathered by foreign or enemy soldiers become victims of social harassment (e.g. children of German fathers in occupied France). Often they fail to receive the social benefits available for other children of single parents (such as the children of American soldiers in occupied Germany). They are often socially stigmatized (e.g. children of Russian soldiers in East Germany or children of German soldiers in Norway) and denied most elementary education and social security (e.g. children of American soldiers in Vietnam). More fundamentally, they often suffer from identity crises, as many do not know their fathers and, in some cases, not even their mothers. Children have been born as a result of relationships ranging from mutual consent to organised rape.

Many recent studies of conflicts such as the wars in Bosnia and Croatia, the wars in Rwanda, Bangladesh, Congo and elsewhere have focused on the traumatization of women and children. They have also attempted to gain some understanding of the economic consequences of sexual violence against women. In the course of this research it has become evident that there is little historical appreciation of wartime violence against women and, similarly, of children born of war and occupation.

The Birmingham-based international and interdisciplinary project on Children Born of World War II aims to fill one of the gaps in our historical understanding of the phenomenon of 'children born of war' by investigating a specific and very substantial subgroup of children, namely children born of 'foreign' fathers and local mothers during the occupations associated with the Second World War. These include the German occupation in parts of Europe during the war and Allied post-war occupation of Germany. It is envisaged to study the military policies and practices of different parties to war and occupation with regard to soldiers' conduct on the ground and its consequences. Furthermore, it is hoped that the situation of children born of war and occupation between 1939 and 1955 can be investigated using an interdisciplinary and comparative approach, which among others utilises empirical social science methodology as well as historical methods and which will cover as full a range of geographical locations as possible.

By analysing the policies of the different military and civilian authorities vis-à-vis these children and their mothers and fathers, by collecting and studying data about the war-time and post-war short- and medium term effects of the specific circumstances of children born of war and their mothers, we hope to gain a better understanding of the social, psychological, economic and political impact of children born of the Second World War on post-war European developments.

Further information:

www.childrenbornofwar.org (<http://www.childrenbornofwar.org>)

www.bik.ac.at/pdf-dateien/Pro_Kurier.%20Kinder%20der%20Besatzung.pdf (http://www.bik.ac.at/pdf-dateien/Pro_Kurier.%20Kinder%20der%20Besatzung.pdf)

home.online.no/~kluwer/ (<http://home.online.no/~kluwer/>)

www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,1504125,00.html (<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,1504125,00.html>)

www.nkbf.no/Engelsk/main_e.htm (http://www.nkbf.no/Engelsk/main_e.htm)

www.krigsboern.dk/ (<http://www.krigsboern.dk/>)

www.werkgroepherkenning.nl/ (<http://www.werkgroepherkenning.nl/>)