

**“War’s Impact on Children Born of Rape and Sexual Exploitation:  
Physical, Economic and Psychosocial Dimensions”**

R. Charli Carpenter  
Assistant Professor  
Graduate School of Public and International Affairs  
University of Pittsburgh  
charli@pitt.edu

**ABSTRACT**

Sexual violence and exploitation are endemic in war-affected regions, and children are often produced as a result. It has been estimated that tens of thousands of children have resulted from mass rape campaigns or sexual exploitation during times of war in the last decade alone. Born of war, these children are deeply affected by the social upheavals that brought about their conception, as well as their treatment by society on the basis of their biological origins.

According to anecdotal reports and available evidence, these “war babies” often face stigma, discrimination, abandonment and even infanticide as infants. Due to their extreme economic difficulty and lack of secure family networks, they may be particularly vulnerable to becoming street children or being trafficked. As older children they may be stateless, and efforts to secure their rights under international law may prove fruitless due to their ambiguous legal status. As adults, their ability to secure a sense of their own identity may be frustrated by legislation that impedes access to records about their birth parents.

In all of these ways – physical, economic and psycho-social – war and post-conflict environments impact this category of child in particular ways. Yet so far their specific vulnerabilities and needs have been largely overlooked by the international network of human rights organizations that seek to protect children in and after armed conflict. This paper will make the case that this must change. Children born as a result of war are entitled to the same rights as other children, outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Therefore, this paper argues that key actors at country level and within the international community must monitor and address the specific social and institutional barriers to such rights faced by these children.

## **War's Impact on Children Born of Rape and Sexual Exploitation: Physical, Economic and Psychosocial Dimensions<sup>1</sup>**

“Children born of rape may be neglected, stigmatized, ostracized or abandoned. Infanticide may occur.”  
- WHO, *Reproductive Health in Conflict Situations*, p. 113

### Introduction: “War Babies” as War-Affected Children

After the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, hundreds of children conceived in mass rape campaigns were born to mothers who did not want them.<sup>2</sup> Often forced to carry these children to term, most are said to have abandoned their babies (Drakulic, 1993; Niarchos, 1995; Stigalmeyer, 1994); those that have kept them face ostracism and severe poverty in post-war Bosnia (Toomey, 2003). In Kosovo, forced pregnancy victims have reportedly been killed by their families or committed suicide, and at least one is known to have killed her child at birth (Smith, 2000). Local and international actors contest these babies' ethnic identities and citizenship rights (Carpenter, 2000); as a result, their rights to education, family, identity and physical security may be severely curtailed. Overall, however, because of lack of empirical research, almost nothing beyond the anecdotal is known about what has happened to these babies or their prospects for survival and empowerment in the “post-war” Balkans, where some are now approaching adolescence.

The war babies of the former Yugoslavia received a fair amount of media coverage at the time: they symbolized a kind of atrocity that was seen as unprecedented in scope and brutality (Stanley, 1999). But rather than being a rare phenomenon, Bosnia's war babies are illustrative of a global underclass of children born of war rape or sexual exploitation in conflict zones worldwide. In Rwanda, for example, sexual violence during the genocide produced an estimated 2000-5000 such babies (Nowrojee, 1996). There have been reports of infanticide and severe abuse and neglect; the children are often referred to as “children of hate” or “children of bad memories” (Wax, 2004). Elsewhere in Africa, girls abducted into rebel armies and forced into sexual slavery have often given birth to children of their captors, only to find themselves and their children stigmatized and marginalized upon their escape (Bennett, 2002). Many choose to remain with their abductors because they cannot return to their extended families. Those babies who do return with their mothers are often mistreated by relatives who view them as belonging “to the enemy” (Mazurana and McKay, 2003).

Anecdotal evidence suggests similar patterns in other conflict zones – Kuwait (Reuter, 1992), Liberia (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2003:18), the Congo (Human Rights Watch, 2002), East Timor (Powell, 2001), and Nicaragua (Provencher, 2002), to give a few recent examples - where mass rape and militarized exploitation of local women by peacekeepers, foreign soldiers and even humanitarian workers has resulted in an influx of “war babies” (Naik, 2001; Enloe, 2000; Grieg,

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<sup>1</sup>Support for this research was provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and by the International Studies Association.

<sup>2</sup>Estimates of the numbers vary. They range as high as 4000 (Grieg, 2001); relief workers and doctors involved in deliveries during the war were consistently quoted as estimating between 400 and 600. See Williams, 1993; Horvath, 1993.

2001). The most recent evidence (as of May 2004) is that several Iraqi women are pregnant as a result of rape by US forces (Harding, 2004).

This article makes the case that such children – born of wartime rape, sexual slavery or sexual exploitation – are a particularly vulnerable category of war-affected child because of the stigma they face, and that they must be recognized as such by actors engaged in the protection of child rights in armed conflict and post-conflict situations. To inform policies that might contribute to their protection, research more carefully assessing the different dimensions of their vulnerability is urgently needed.

This paper describes what is known about these children and, in the spirit of the research initiative spearheaded by the Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, directs attention to the many “knowledge gaps” that such a research agenda might fill. The paper begins in this section by more clearly defining the category “war babies” and demonstrating that they have been given less attention as a particular category of children than is needed to address some of the social and institutional barriers to achieving their well-being. Next, it describes the physical, economic and psycho-social impact of war on these children in turn, drawing on what little is currently known about war babies and children’s needs in general. Finally, it concludes with some general policy recommendations for states and some specific recommendations for advocates working in the area of war-affected children’s protection. The data in this article is drawn from news reports, available literature on gender-based-violence and child protection in conflict situations, working papers from a workshop on this topic held in Montreal in Spring 2004,<sup>3</sup> and the author’s fieldwork in the former Yugoslavia.

### *Who are ‘War Babies’?*

According to a report by from the War and Children Identity Project in Bergen, Norway, tens of thousands of infants have been born of wartime rape or sexual exploitation in the last decade alone (Grieg, 2001).<sup>4</sup> If we add together the estimated numbers of war-rape orphans, children born to women held captive as sexual slaves or “wives” of military troops, and children born to women exploited by foreign soldiers, peacekeepers and even humanitarian workers, this emerges as a problem of enormous global scope with respect to securing fundamental human rights for children born into the midst of war. The Grieg Report estimates the number of all living war babies at 500,000 (Grieg, 2001:7).

The common experience these children face is the perception by the societies into which they are born that they are “of the other” (Salzman, 1998). Stigmatized as both illegitimate and as “enemy” children, their human rights may be compromised in a number of ways, from rejection, abuse or neglect by immediate and extended family members, to stigma by the broader community, to lack of access to resources and denial of citizenship. As Rehn and Sirleaf write in a recent UNIFEM report (2003:18), “the children... become the symbol of the trauma the nation as a whole went through, and society prefers not to acknowledge their needs.”

As this paper outlines at greater length below, these patterns are highly problematic measured against ideals for children’s well-being and development, aspired to in international treaty law and advocated for by the human rights network.<sup>5</sup> What is most ironic, therefore, is that

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<sup>3</sup>This workshop took place at the International Studies Association Annual Conference in Montreal, Quebec, March 2004. A proceedings is available online at <http://www.drake.edu/artsci/faculty/carpente/wb>.

<sup>4</sup>The production of war babies is far from a contemporary phenomenon, however: older examples include children born of wartime rape in Bangladesh 1971-72 (Rozario, 1997); children born to Korean sex slaves during World War II (Provencher 2002); and French children left behind by German soldiers at the end of World War I (Harris, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> For a description of the children’s rights network, see Brysk, 2004; on the Convention on the Rights of the Child see Leblanc, 1995. On the politics of advocacy networks generally, see Keck and Sikkink, 1998.

there is scarcely mention of this category of child within international discourse on war-affected children (Carpenter, 2004a). Much greater attention is now being paid in international law and humanitarian policy to the psycho-social and protection needs of women and girls who have survived wartime rape and exploitation (Mertus, 2000; Lindsey, 2001) but the burgeoning interest in wartime sexual violence has included very little systematic attention to the babies born as a result (Carpenter, 2000).

This silence is evident in the “issues” links on websites of major humanitarian organizations engaged in child protection.<sup>6</sup> On the agenda of such Internet portals to the children’s rights community are such issues as landmines, small arms, child soldiering, trafficking, unaccompanied children and, increasingly, the girl child. But the stigma faced by war babies (and how human rights actors might address this so as to ensure their protection) has attracted remarkably little attention from a children’s rights perspective. It neither occupies agenda space in its own right, nor is it mentioned explicitly under themes such as “discrimination,” or “unaccompanied children.” Nor has it drawn attention as a research priority or “knowledge gap” at a recent path-breaking conference on data-gathering with respect to war-affected children.<sup>7</sup>

In part, children born of war escape attention because the concept of the “war-affected child” has been constructed according to a certain paradigmatic notion of what being “affected by war” entails.<sup>8</sup> This paradigm posits a notion of a normalized childhood “disrupted” by the onset and continuation of war. For instance, the Graca Machel *Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* (1996:1) describes war’s impact on children with the following examples: “children are slaughtered, raped, and maimed... exploited as soldiers... starved and exposed to extreme brutality.” Implicitly, this frame privileges and renders salient the harms faced by older children already living at the outbreak of armed conflict: loss of family members, disruption of normality, mutilation, recruitment, sexual abuse, deprivation, displacement, and the psycho-social effects of witnessing violence. Few of the issues that have become salient on the international agenda to date emphasize the ways in which infants experience armed conflict or the consequences for “normal” development of those born into a war zone in which their prospects for acquiring an initial sense of “normality,” “identity,” or even being accepted into a “family” are diminished from the start (Nordstrom, 1998).

It is not the case that there has been no recognition of this advocacy gap: the problem has been in following up with data-gathering, policy recommendations and evaluative reports assessing best practices. For example, in 2000, Machel’s follow-up report, *Review of the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* called for an international fact-finding study entitled *Where Are the Babies?* to track and assess the needs of children born to war-rape victims during the 1990s (Machel 2000:20). Yet no international child rights organization has funded such a study in the years since the report was issued. Moreover, although the September 2000 Winnipeg Conference on War-Affected Children for which this Review was drafted included a background paper on

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the Office for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict at <http://www.un.org/special-rep/children-armed-conflict/>; the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund at <http://www.unicef.org>; Save the Children Alliance at <http://www.savethechildren.net>; the Children and Armed Conflict Unit at the University of Essex at <http://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/themes/default.htm>; Human Rights Watch’s Children’s Unit at <http://www.hrw.org/children/>; and the Child Rights Information Network at <http://www.crin.org>.

<sup>7</sup> See the Report of the Conference “Filling Knowledge Gaps: A Research Agenda on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children,” held in Florence, Italy, July 2-4, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> On the social construction of different notions of “childhood” and “children’s rights” see Boyden, 1997.

“War-Rape Orphans,” no mention of this category of child was included in the NGO Draft Document resulting from the conference.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, the International Committee of the Red Cross’ *Women Facing War* study specifically calls for more research and follow-up on children born of rape: “Children born as a result of sexual violence need to be raised free from neglect, discrimination and ostracism. The fate of these children needs to be researched and appropriate assistance and protection provided them” (Lindsey, 2001:56). Most recently, both the Secretary-General’s *Report on Women, Peace and Security* and UNIFEM’s Independent Experts’ Assessment entitled *Women, War and Peace* make cursory reference to this category of children (Mazurana and Whitworth, 2003; Rehn and Sirleaf, 2003:17-18). But it is notable that these three reports, each of them constituting comprehensive assessments of human rights issues pertaining to women and armed conflict, do not themselves collect any primary data whatsoever on the child rights dimension of this problem.

This paper makes the case that this must change. Children born of rape and sexual exploitation constitute one of the most vulnerable sectors of the larger population of war-affected children. In addition to the deprivation, violence and insecurity faced by all children in war zones and post-conflict situations, war babies may also be deprived of fundamental human rights guaranteed to children such as the right to survival, the right to be protected from stigma and discrimination, and the right to a nationality, family and identity. They may face specific health risks due to the circumstances of their birth, and the psycho-social trauma of their mothers may affect their early childhood development. Moreover, because their identities may be politicized by various state and non-state actors in post-conflict situations, it cannot simply be assumed that decisions regarding their care are being carried about with their best interests in mind.<sup>10</sup>

As described below, extrapolating from anecdotal evidence and available research, this nexus of harms is likely to affect these children physically, economically and psycho-socially, both as youngsters and later as adults. To determine how interventions might offset these harms, or how they might vary from case to case, much more systematic data-collection must be undertaken, ideally by fact-finding commissions established within the child protection network itself.

### Physical Impacts

Those concerned with child protection wish to mitigate the impact of armed conflict on the physical security of children. In what ways does conception by sexual violence or exploitation physically affect children who are brought to term as a result?

### *HIV-AIDS*

One effect has to do with the link between sexual violence in war-affected areas and the transmission of HIV to local women through prostitution, exploitation, rape or abduction for sexual slavery (Murphy and Knight, 2004). We know that HIV rates are high in war-affected regions partly due to these factors, and that in some cases rape is used with the explicit intent of spreading the virus, although in other respects the specific causal relations between these phenomena are not clearly understood (Gordon and Crehan, 2000). It is known, however, that vertical transmission of HIV from mother to infant is one of the most certain means of contracting the virus (Quinn, 1996). If raped or exploited women are likely to have been exposed

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<sup>9</sup> See *Caught in the Crossfire No More: A Framework for Commitment to War-Affected Children*, available at <http://www.waraffectedchildren.gc.ca/crossfire-en.asp>.

<sup>10</sup> On children as signifiers of culture and identity, see Brysk, 2003; Scheper-Hughes, 1998; and Stephens, 1995.

to HIV, it is also likely that children brought to term as a result of this violence have been exposed. As Hess argues (2004), research is needed to clarify whether HIV-positive war babies are at greater health risk due to their biological origins than other war-affected infants who also have HIV.

### *Neo-Natal Health Risks*

Generally, little is known about the particular health risks faced by infants conceived as a result of sexual violence, and the extent to which these are distinct from other infants conceived consensually but born under similar circumstances. Based on available evidence however, a number of possible effects can be hypothesized, and these need to be evaluated with careful research.

There is some evidence that certain health risks are associated with children carried to term whose mothers reproductive health is compromised or whose mothers experience psychological and physical trauma during pregnancy (Rodgers et. al 2003). Where the pregnancy itself is construed as a trauma due to its origin, it can be hypothesized that this could affect the physical development of the fetus. A number of children in Bosnia who were born to rape victims are handicapped, although it is uncertain whether factors relating to the rape itself were primarily responsible (Daniel, 2003). There is reason to hypothesize that children brought to term as a result of such physical and psychological trauma, and in an environment where the mother continues to be under severe stress, may need particular medical care as neonates.

For various reasons, women and girls who have been raped or are living in exploitative circumstances frequently try to abort such pregnancies (e.g. Nowrojee, 1996); where access to safe abortion is illegal or inaccessible, these efforts take place through the use of various informal means (WHO, 2000). Such means are not always successful, and such pregnancies sometimes nonetheless result in live births. Research is needed on the health effects of botched abortions on children nonetheless brought to term (Hess, 2004).

Additionally, women and girls impregnated by rape often give birth without assistance, either because they are in captivity or wish to hide the pregnancy (WHO, 2000; Shanks and Shull, 2000). Such babies are at risk during the childbirth process, particularly if their mothers have experienced nutritional deprivation or lack of maternal care during pregnancy (CRLP, 1996). Moreover, the possibility of the mother's death or incapacity as a result of childbirth has important physical consequences for children delivered live in isolation without a support network nearby. Hess has asked the question, for example, of what happens to babies born in the bush to girl soldiers who die during childbirth? Are such infants automatically recruited into and raised by the armed forces, delivered to local communities, or simply killed or allowed to die?

### *Infanticide*

Stories of infanticide pervade literary and social discourse on children born of war rape (Bonnet, 1995). In a novel about forced pregnancy based on interviews with numerous rape survivors from the former Yugoslavia, Slavenka Drakulic describes two such incidents (Drakulic, 1999:4, 128). A recent Italian film about World War II portrays a group of pregnant rape survivors making a secret pact to kill all their children (Benhadj, 2000).<sup>11</sup> Many real-life cases are rumored or reported by human rights and health workers who have known the victims. In Bangladesh, a social worker related stories of infants being put "in dustbins" by public officials after the genocide (d'Costa, 2003:6). After the genocidal rapes in Rwanda, Human Rights Watch reported "Health professionals assume that a number of women gave birth in

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<sup>11</sup>Personal interview, Association of Concentration Camp Survivors Representative, Sarajevo, April 2004.

secret and later committed infanticide. They also believe that a number of women who gave birth in the hospital allowed their babies to die after returning home” (Nowrojee, 1996). In 1993, the director of the Documentation Center for Genocide and War Crimes in Zagreb stated that women who could not get abortions abandoned their infants “or they kill the babies... although we’ve never been able to prove it” (Horvath, 1993:12).

While many of these rumors are indeed unverifiable, and unsubstantiated by carefully kept statistics, there is direct evidence of a few such cases. In Kosovo, for example, a young woman raped by JNA forces during the 1999 conflict gave birth in 2000, snapped her newborn’s neck in front of WHO nurses, and then handed them the corpse (Smith, 2000). In Bosnia, out of a sample of 15 rape-related pregnancies collected by Medica Zenica, 13 of which were carried to term and 3 of whose mothers chose to raise the child with psycho-social support from Medica, one child was eventually killed (Pojsic, 1995; Author interview, Zenica, 2004). A women’s advocate from Croatia recalls one survivor who threw her newborn child into the Sava River (Besirbasic and Sestic, 2002). Distraught mothers do not pose the only such risk to the children. Some survivors have testified that children born to detained women in the former Yugoslavia were killed by their captors after birth (CID 2000:197). While worldwide, infant girls are at the greatest risk of infanticide overall due to son preference, in the case of children conceived “of the enemy” there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that male infants may be at greater risk, being less digestible by a society that may see them as potential fifth column combatants (Salzman, 1998), or by mothers whose attitudes toward males in general may be adversely affected by the experience of sexual violence.<sup>12</sup>

Infanticide not only seems to be directed at some of these children, but also seems to be constructed by some actors as a *legitimate* response to bearing a child of rape. A women’s advocate working with Kosovar rape survivors, referring to the case above, was quoted as saying, “The attitude that she is a cold-blooded murderer is wrong. Who knows what this poor girl has been through?” (Smith, 2000). Beverly Allen, whose pathbreaking 1996 book *Rape Warfare* defined forced pregnancy as genocide and as a form of biological warfare, suggested that infanticide should be considered a psychologically healthy reaction for a mother impregnated by rape (Allen, 1996:99). Even testimonies from women who aborted or chose to raise their children suggest that they considered infanticide a socially acceptable option: “Thank God for the abortion,” a survivor was quoted saying in a recent documentary (Provencher, 2002), “If I had given birth, I would have killed it.” A Rwandan forced pregnancy survivor relates: “I was angry about the pregnancy and even thought about getting an abortion, but I had no money... I gave birth to twins in January 1995. At the time, I accepted them. I could not think about killing them” (Nowrojee, 1996). Evidence that this response is normalized in some contexts as a means of dealing with an influx of “war babies” strongly suggests that infanticide is a serious physical risk to the security of infants born of rape and exploitation. More careful research to document the statistical risk of infanticide and generate programming options for health and social workers would be advantageous.

### *Abuse/Neglect*

Children of war rape who are allowed to live may be abused or neglected (WHO, 2000). Indeed, family abuse and neglect of children in general is likely to increase under conditions of

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<sup>12</sup>One forced pregnancy survivor who aborted but later gave birth to a son by her husband, stated, “Now I hate all men on this earth,” before recounting the way in which she now abused her young son, “sometimes... beat[ing] him so hard that he bleeds” (Provencher, 2002). Another survivor, who kept her daughter born of rape, admitted that “had her child been male, she would not have chosen to keep him” (Toomey, 2003).

armed conflict and societal stress, and, like domestic violence against women, is one of the most understudied and commented-on dimensions of children's suffering during war. But "unwanted" children conceived in rape may be at greater risk of such abuse, either by their mothers, who may be physically and psychologically unable to care adequately for the child, or, if the mother accepts the baby, by the extended family.

A number of reports document the correlation between psychological sequelae of rape and the risk of abuse or neglect of children born as a result (Lathrop, 1998; WHO, 2000). In cases of wartime rape, neglect of infants carried to term is understood as a key symptom of sexual trauma (Swiss and Giller, 1993; Foeken, 1999:96). Abuse is often reported by women who have raised their child born of rape, either willingly or because they had no acceptable alternatives. Describing a reluctant Rwandan mother, one journalist reported:

"Sometimes she awakes resentful. It is during those days that she finds her temper short and she hits her child. A few times she has tried to give him away. Out of anger she tells him lies: 'You are not even mine. I picked you from the trash.' Sometimes she cries for hours, unable to function. 'I really beat him for such petty things, and I feel I can't love anyone,' she whispered..." (Wax, 2004).

Children whose mothers do summon the courage to care for them often face rejection and abuse from extended family members instead. A forced pregnancy survivor in Rwanda testified, "Almost all my family members have refused to accept the baby - it is a child of an Interahamwe. They have told me that they do not want a child of wicked people. They always tell me that when my baby grows up that they will not give him a parcel of land. I don't know what is going to happen to him" (Nowrojee, 1996).

### Economic Impacts

A second concern of international movement to protect war-affected children is to assess and alleviate deprivation that results from war, so that children can access the resources they need for short-term survival and long-term development. In what ways does conception by sexual violence or exploitation economically affect children who are brought to term as a result?

### *Abandonment*

Children born of rape and exploitation appear likely to be abandoned, although this likelihood seems to vary by context. In Bosnia, for example it is guessed that the vast majority of babies carried to term by rape victims were abandoned at birth by their mothers (Daniel, 2003). Although Rwandan war babies are notable for the number being raised by their mothers, some have claimed that this is due to lack of alternatives: according to one news article (NY Times, 1996) one survivor said "she would gladly give up her 19-month-old boy to anyone who was willing to raise him. No one has offered." In East Timor, by contrast, some aid workers report a "surprising" level of acceptance of the babies among East Timorese rape survivors (Powell, 2001). Such reports conflict, however, with evidence that many Timorese war babies are in institutions (Williams and Lamont, 1999).

It should be noted that even within very conservative societies, women do not always wish to abandon their children conceived in rape: portrayals that this is a uniform response may result in part from a social expectation that this reaction is normal. To the contrary, there is evidence of governments forcing abortions or adoption procedures on women who preferred to keep their babies (d'Costa, 2003:4), and some women have testified that the choice to raise their child was a means of overcoming the horror of rape (Wax, 2004; Provencher, 2002). However, there is certainly anecdotal evidence to suggest that abandonment of war babies is common, due



to a combination of reasons, and making a choice to raise a baby is no guarantee that a woman will be able to follow through. It is unknown how many such children are abandoned after a period in their mothers' or birth families' care, or what then happens to them.

In general, the extent to which abandonment affects young children's economic well-being will depend enormously on what kind of social mechanisms are in place to provide alternative care. It is typically assumed that the best outcome for a neonate is to be placed as quickly as possible with an adoptive family, but the availability of such families and a bureaucracy to connect babies to adoptive parents depends on the context and whether social services are in place. In war zones children are sometimes institutionalized for a period until an adoptive family can be found. Each of these two scenarios is considered below before a discussion of the economic impacts that may obtain if the child remains with her mother.

*Adoption.* There is conflicting evidence regarding the likelihood of war babies being adopted. These prospects may be indirectly affected if they are physically or mentally handicapped at birth (Becirbasic and Secic, 2002). In some contexts, being "born of rape" is described as a direct liability on the willingness of local couples to adopt; those families that have done so have often had to deal with the ostracism engendered by raising a child "of the enemy" (Sullivan, 1996). On the other hand, this appears to be an advantage rather than an obstacle on the international adoption market. In the case of Bosnia, waiting lists existed in Western countries of couples specifically asking to adopt "rape babies," (Stanley, 1999; Pine and Mertus 1994) and after the 1971 war in Bangladesh, many children born of the rapes were exported to the West (Brownmiller, 1979; d'Costa, 2004).

In many cases a war baby's opportunities for placement will depend on political rather than 'market' factors. Some post-war governments actively seek to remove the children from the national population, while others will not allow such children to be adopted abroad. The new government of Bangladesh constructed a "marry-off" campaign for women raped during the war that depended on their relinquishment of their babies conceived in rape, to be sent to other countries (Mookherjee, 2004). By contrast, governments in the Balkans opposed the export of such children for symbolic reasons. By some accounts, the government was worried about being accused of "selling the children," as had happened in Romania (Williams, 1993). Policymakers were also under pressure from religious groups who, depending on their understanding of the child's identity, sought limitations on *which* couples could adopt, either domestically or abroad. The transnational Islamic community, for example, made the case that children born to Bosnian Muslim rape victims must be raised by Muslims (Gledhill, 1993). In other cases, governments are reluctant to surrender "their" citizens to foreign countries due to concerns about post-war demographics (Weitsman, 2003). "We have hundreds of thousands of orphans," said a Rwandan Minister, "Adopting them to the outside means you are looting an entire population" (Lorch, 1995).

The refugee policies of host countries also affect a war baby's economic status and prospects for adoption if abandoned by its mother at birth. It is notable, for example, that while the UK actively sought to streamline its international adoption procedures to import "rape babies" from the Balkans as adoptees, it maintained restrictive asylum laws that prevented pregnant rape victims themselves from immigrating (Stanley, 1999). Similarly, the desire for Bengali war babies demonstrated by countries such as Canada did not extend to providing asylum for their mothers (Chowdry, 2004). The life histories of children born to pregnant women seeking refuge in neighboring countries (and therefore their economic prospects as well as eventual national identities) will be impacted by the extent to which their mothers are successful at seeking asylum, the psycho-social and economic assistance available to the mothers in the host

country, and the nature of the host countries' social safety net for women choosing to give up their newborns.

*Institutionalization.* If an abandoned child is left in the care of authorities in a war zone, rather than being killed or left to die at birth, and if immediate adoption is not a possibility, is likely to end up institutionalized in the short or long-term. In East Timor, for example, "the orphanages are filled with these children of the enemy" (Grieg, 2001:37). Ambiguity regarding a child's biological origins can impede placement and perpetuate the experience of institutionalization. One girl in Bosnia has been in a "legal limbo" for twelve years because her mother abandoned her without instructions as to adoption, and the municipality in eastern Bosnia from which the mother originated now lies within the Republika Srpska, where authorities will not admit responsibility for the child's origins or her well-being, required to initiate adoption proceedings (Toomey, 2003).

It is unclear how the experience of conflict affects the ability of orphanages to care for children. On the one hand, the resources of an entire society are typically stressed during conflict situations, and more goes to the military than to the social sector. On the other hand, orphanages are often a target of humanitarian assistance during armed conflict. Despite reports of atrocious conditions in some state orphanages, it should not be assumed that being raised in an orphanage is necessarily a worse alternative than placement with foster families or adoption for *some* children: this will depend enormously on the institution, on the families in question, and on the child. Longitudinal data following up on the economic, nutritional and psycho-social health of formerly institutionalized children who were placed with families could shed light on the effects of institutionalization on such children as a whole, and children born of war rape in particular.

However, even in the best cases, institutions are temporary families for individuals only, and that upon adulthood state responsibility generally ends. Therefore, if a child is never integrated into a "family" as constructed by the local society, will enter society as an adults without roots, a social network, or (depending on the educational opportunities offered) without viable economic skills. These may not only ensure short-term economic and social vulnerability but may adversely affect the adult war baby's ability to marry or establish a family network during adulthood. Human Rights Watch has claimed that institutionalized children as a whole "suffer a lifelong stigma that robs them of fundamental economic, social, civil and political rights guaranteed by international treaties" (HRW, 2004). We need comparative data on the long-term effects of life-long institutionalization on children in general, and on children whose biological origins are complicated by violent conception on the other.

### *Poverty*

Children of rape or exploitation who are raised by their mothers are likely to be extremely poor. This is related to the status of women in war-affected societies in general, exacerbated by the stigma of having been raped, which may in turn be exacerbated by the "scandalous" choice to raise the child of rape.

It is well known that surviving wartime rape may result in social stigma against the rape victim him or herself (Salzman, 1998; Brownmiller, 1979; Stigalmeyer, 1994). This stigma, if it exists, will typically be exacerbated if the mother chooses to raise her child for a number of reasons. First, the child constitutes evidence of the assault, which could otherwise be denied or repressed. To the extent that silence about one's victimization is a protection mechanism, this option may be unavailable to women who bear their children conceived in rape (CRLP, 1996). Second, to the surrounding community the child may represent an insult and a continual reminder of collective violence: "the perception of public ownership of women's sexuality...

makes it possible to translate an attack against one woman into an attack against an entire community; the impact is multiplied when the woman becomes pregnant” (Shanks and Schull, 2000:1153) Third, the enmity toward the child may be projected upon the mother, who in addition to being seen as dirtied or unmarriageable may also be viewed as complicit or traitorous for not rejecting the child herself. All these factors provide incentives for such women to abandon their children, and for those who nonetheless raise their babies, they generate tremendous social difficulties.

A single woman raising a child needs above all a source of income. But if she lacks a reliable family network for assisting her, the child’s presence itself may prevent her from working or receiving job training unless alternative childcare arrangements are made available. In Sierra Leone, for example, a recent survey of demobilized girl mothers, impregnated by rebel captors in the bush, found that they considered job training the most important form of support, but that lack of childcare assistance for their babies, either by the families or by rehabilitation programs, made it difficult to attend trainings (Mazurana and McKay, 2003; see also Baldi, 2004). Such girl mothers often become prostitutes instead, with related psycho-social, economic and physical risks to the children in their care as well as the risk of contracting HIV and transmitting it through breastmilk.

Poverty can lead to desperate acts in order to survive. In interviews conducted in 2003, human right workers suggested to this author that due to a combination of caregiver ambivalence and extreme economic circumstances, children born of rape victims or prostitutes in conflict areas are more likely to be trafficked, recruited or to become street children. The extent to which this is true needs to be corroborated by careful study.

### *Statelessness*

Some children born of rape or exploitation are denied citizenship by the countries in which they are born, either as a deliberate form of discrimination or as a result of indirect factors, such as *jus sanguinis* citizenship laws. Lack of formal citizenship can have economic impacts if children are denied access to medical care, education or other social benefits. Statelessness also impacts an individual’s freedom of movement, ability to receive asylum, chances of being formally adopted, and vulnerability to trafficking.

According to Grieg (2002:11), for example, children fathered by American soldiers in Vietnam were denied medical care, welfare and education, because it was “customary for fathers to claim legal paternity and to register births.... The implications of this are tremendous. Without citizenship the children are doomed to be a pariah in their birth country.” War babies conceived by Iraqi soldiers during the occupation of Kuwait were reported to have been protected financially, but denied citizenship (Weitsman, 2003).<sup>13</sup> In Croatia, children born to female refugees who had crossed the border from Bosnia might be denied Croatian citizenship, but were sometimes not accepted by Bosnia either.<sup>14</sup> According to a legal analysis undertaken by the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy in 1994, only children with one Croatian parent could be considered Croatian, although an additional provision guaranteed citizenship to children ‘found abandoned.’ “Babies born of rape, however, are unlikely to be covered by this provision as their mother is usually known” (Pine and Mertus, 1994: 29). In 1996, it was reported that war babies born in Croatia to refugee women from Bosnia were being denied the right to go to school in Croatia (Jordan, 1995).

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<sup>13</sup> Reports to this effect differ, however: see Reuters, 1992.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel (2003) documents the fate of a number of physically handicapped children born in Croatia who were never claimed by the Bosnian government during repatriation processes.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child entitles all children to a nationality (Article 7) and requires states to ensure all rights in the Convention to all children under their jurisdiction without discrimination (Article 7). It follows from this that to be rendered stateless as a result of being conceived of rape is problematic from the perspective of implementing the Convention. Initiative to address statelessness among war-affected children should be paying particular attention to this category of child, in order to better understand the causes, effects, and appropriate remedies for this problem.

### Psycho-Social Impacts

Little is understood about the psycho-social impact on children born of wartime rape, and most likely children in different circumstances will experience these effects differently. Based on available evidence, however, it seems clear that children's development, sense of identity and psychological health may be affected in a variety of ways over the course of their young lives as a result of the social dynamics described above.

### *Attachment Difficulties*

In infancy, the main psycho-social impact stems from the possibility of neglect and lack of long-term affective relationships, a difficulty not limited to children born of rape but to which they may be particularly likely to suffer.<sup>15</sup> If a child is kept by his mother, he and she may experience difficulties bonding (WHO, 2000); some rape survivors who have had no choice but to raise their child have reported extreme ambivalence toward their children (e.g. Wax, 2004). "Even now," said one survivor, "when my daughter gets angry there is something in the expression on her face that reminds me of the one who did this to me. I feel like hitting her in those moments. I have to walk away to calm myself" (Toomey, 2003). Other rape survivors have expressed deep love for their children, constructing their baby not as a burden but as a gift from God after all else was taken from them (Powell, 2001; Provencher, 2002). More research is needed on the factors that lead to positive relationships between a rape survivor and her child.

Many survivors choose not to raise their children at all. If a child is abandoned, s/he may lack a close relationship with a caregiver as a result. The record of children's psycho-social development when institutionalized in early childhood is bleak. Even institutionalization under the best conditions is known to affect children's psycho-social development and physical health, depending on resources, ratio of care-givers to children, and the institutional norms (Sigal et. al, 2003). Combined with potential nutritional deficits in the first year, such children's psychological development may be compromised if they lack an opportunity to develop trusting emotional attachments with an older child or an adult. Even children who are adopted into stable families after an initial period of institutionalization often suffer ill-effects as a result of neglect during the early years (O'Connor et. al, 2000; Ames 1997).

### *Stigma and Discrimination*

The Graca Machel Review (2000:24) states that "with supportive caregivers and secure communities, most children will achieve a sense of healing," but in social environments where a child is stigmatized or unwanted, it may be precisely these relationships and this security that such a child lacks. As a child grows older and develops a sense of self and a need for social

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<sup>15</sup> David, et. al. (2004) conducted a longitudinal study on Czech children whose mothers had twice tried to terminate their pregnancies and found a consistent relationship between being born "unwanted" and experiencing various forms of psycho-social difficulty across first 35 years of life. See also Joyce et. al (2000).

acceptance and belonging, becomes sensitive to stigmatization or emotional abuse from close relatives, peers and members of the broader community.

In the early childhood years, war babies may be scorned, teased or stigmatized on the basis of their social origins, particularly if they are living with their mothers in close-knit communities or if their physical features identify them with their father's lineage. One small child growing up in Gorazde with an adopted family was given the derogatory Serb name "Pero" by his neighbors, and reported (at age 3) "hating" to be called the name, though he did not understand the source of their enmity (Sullivan, 1996). Amerasian war babies growing up in Vietnam after the war were labeled "dust of life" by their neighbours or classmates (McKelvey, 1999). "Many children tried to hide their true identity and escape discrimination by quitting school" (Grieg 2001:31).

Although many people assume that young children "don't understand" enough to be harmed by name-calling, this kind of rejection can have dramatic effects. Older Amerasian war babies have reportedly mutilated themselves in attempts to look more "white" or more "Asian" (Grieg, 2001:31). According to a social worker in Sarajevo, an older child in Bosnia learned of his origins from classmates at school after a popular German film around the issue of war babies was released, and became suicidal as a result of their teasing and bullying.<sup>16</sup> Those who as children are never told about their origins may intuitively internalize this societal stigma: an adult war child fathered by a German soldier and raised in post-war Norway said, "No one ever told me why I was different, but I always knew there was something wrong with me."<sup>17</sup> Similarly, institutionalization may also generate a sense of isolation from mainstream society, particularly where it constitutes the sole and official response to war babies' upbringing, as in Kuwait after the first Gulf War. "When they enter school they're always asked the same question: why do you come with a government bus, where are your parents?" a social worker at Dar Tufalah Orphanage said. "They come back and cry and I have to comfort them" (Reuters, 1992).

### *Identity Issues*

Given these various impacts described in the preceding sections, it is not surprising that in terms of early psycho-social development, the conventional wisdom is that the best possible outcome for such children is to be adopted at birth into a social environment where their biological origins are unknown (Williamson, 1993; Aldrich and van Baarda, 1994). Yet as children enter adolescence and young adulthood they begin to reinvent themselves, create a meaningful mosaic of their identities, and ask questions about their roots and origins. Children who have been adopted begin to demand information on their biological parents; children with one absent parent may begin to demonstrate an interest in making contact. For children born as a result of war, there may be a particular need (as well as a difficulty) in establishing contact with their parent in order to ascertain "who they are." Numerous such cases of World War II-era European war babies in search of their North American fathers are documented in the recently published *Voices of the Left Behind* (Project Roots, 2004). These issues can arise even for war babies adopted under the most auspicious circumstances. As Ryan Badol, a Bengali-Canadian war baby, related in the recent documentary *War Babies*: "My interest in my birth mother changed... I [developed] a wish to know more and more [not just about her but] about all the birth mothers."

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<sup>16</sup> Personal interview, Sarajevo, April 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Personal interview, Bergen Norway, June 2003.

Children experiencing neglect, stigma, or other psycho-social difficulties as a result of their origins demonstrate a similar need to ascertain their roots. The suicidal Bosnian child described above immediately expressed a need to contact his birth mother, who had relocated to a third country, though she refused to speak with him when approached by the social worker who assisted her child.<sup>18</sup> For many children left behind by servicemen – in Asia, Africa or Europe – the desire to trace and make contact with their birth father becomes an imperative during adolescence. Numerous advocacy organizations, such as Traces, Project Roots, and the War and Children Identity Project, are now involved in connecting such children with their biological fathers.

For older war babies, the inability to trace one's "roots" can become a source of psycho-social strain. States often place barriers on older war babies' abilities to trace their parents. Canada's Privacy Act, for example, protects World War II veterans who impregnated Dutch and British women after the war from unwanted contact by the women or their adult children (Jarratt, 2004). The desire to keep information secret is also embraced by a number of humanitarian actors, sometimes out of a desire to protect women's interests, but often couched in terms of the child's best interests as well: "It must be remembered that the women are protecting the babies from a stigma that would mark them for life" (Bonnet, 1993:15). Indeed, the systematic repression of information about war babies in the former Yugoslavia has been justified by ministers, social workers and orphanages as necessary to protect both the mothers and the children from stigma (Daniel, 2003). There is indeed a tension between a child's right to know his or her identity and a rape survivor's right to anonymity. But whether the child's best interests are indeed protected by lack of information is unclear, and the complexity of the issue increases as the child becomes older.

The sense of silence around the issue not only impedes access to desired information, but also can reinforce the feeling that war babies' very existence is a taboo topic. For war babies unaware of their origins, whether this matters is unclear. But for those who know their origins and are attempting to create a functional social identity, lack of official discourse and information can be an impediment. Many Amerasian war children considered it a moral victory when the U.S. government recognized and took responsibility for them, awarding them immigration rights under the Homecoming Act of 1987.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, as the film *War Babies* documents, Ryan Badol's efforts to gather information on his background were frustrated by the Bengali bureaucracy and ongoing discourses of denial: in the end his greatest desire remains simply to raise awareness of the issue "so that it can be talked about" (Provencher, 2002). Other adult war children continue to lobby for recognition and rights under international law.

### Conclusion: An Agenda for Constructive Change

Governments are charged with the implementation of international standards with respect to the protection of children's rights. To prevent and ameliorate abuses against children born of wartime rape and exploitation, governments must ultimately take action. To the extent that international organizations are a) complicit in the creation and perpetuation of abuses against the children and b) are pivotal in shaping government policies on human rights, international organizations must also pay closer attention to this issue. The academic and advocacy network around the protection of war-affected children could play a stronger role in encouraging such action both on the part of major international organizations and states.

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<sup>18</sup> Personal interview, Sarajevo, April 2004.

<sup>19</sup> This policy alone did not solve all their problems, and there are many lessons to be learned from this "social experiment." However, recognition fulfilled an important psycho-social need for these young people.

### *Monitoring by Researchers, Governments and the Humanitarian Sector*

Currently the ‘knowledge gaps’ surrounding war babies are glaring. Post-war governments have typically chosen not to collect statistics on the number of children, their destinies or their status. The lack of empirical data impedes independent research on the human rights of war babies, prevents follow-up assessments of their well-being, and allows governments to claim that their human rights are a non-issue.

The international community as well has been slow to collect relevant data on this issue. Asking questions about Sierra Leone’s war babies, Giulia Baldi (2004) and Rachel Hess (2004) both point to a lack of useful data in mainstream documents on gender, sexual violence, and public health in West Africa. Questions about such children have not typically been incorporated into research tools for assessing the consequences of gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict settings.<sup>20</sup> Humanitarian organizations should not only be incorporating such questions into their situation analyses, but should be actively encouraging governments to monitor and maintain statistics on this category of war-affected child.

Such organizations should also ensure that their assistance programming in conflict and post-conflict areas includes relevant psycho-social and economic support for these children, as well as the availability of alternatives for mothers who choose not to raise their children. In the past decade, the international humanitarian community and its donors have refined their emphasis on child protection and worked to mainstream a gender perspective into operations and funding priorities (ECOSOC 1998). Gender-sensitive and child-rights approaches must be blended in initiatives aimed at protecting and assisting war babies and their caretakers.

A useful first step would be for major humanitarian organizations (or their donors) to conduct or commission impact assessments of existing field guidelines regarding war babies. UNFPA (1999:42), ICRC (1995:12), WHO (2000) and UNHCR (1995:8) have issued recommendations regarding children born of rape, particularly the need to protect such children against stigma, but these documents provide no specific rules or initiatives for implementing such protection. Nor to this author’s knowledge has there been an evaluation of the extent to which they have been carried out and with what degree of success. How have such guidelines informed assistance and protection operations in conflict areas since they were created? How have they impacted the human rights situation of these children?

To be sure, ethical and methodological issues obtain with respect to collecting data on the way that war impacts these children and determining specific guidelines for implementing best practices in the field. What are the appropriate tools for collecting such information while neither contributing to a child’s or family’s trauma (Bell, 2001) nor exposing them to their community if silence indeed serves as a form of protection (Mertus, 2004). At what age and under what conditions should children be allowed to speak for themselves? Collecting information on the children primarily from caretakers and other adults may circumvent ethical questions with respect to interviewing children, but may also reproduce power hierarchies between children and adults (Reinharz, 1992).

Methodological obstacles also exist. As with other “hidden populations” and “taboo topics” (such as rape itself) it may be difficult to identify the population or to conclusively establish its scope. It is likely to be difficult, for example, to ever determine the number of rape-related infanticides, since many of these children are never likely to appear to the authorities. Children who survive and are willing to speak out regarding the way that they have been

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<sup>20</sup> Phone interview, Jeanne Ward, Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium, August 2003. See also Ward, 2002.

impacted by their social origins will be a self-selected sample and not wholly representative of the entire population. As with much human rights work, subjectivity of terms such as “best interests of the child” will need to be grappled with as researchers design appropriate tools for comparing the situation of war babies to the child protection standards enumerated in international law.

Yet these obstacles are not insurmountable – indeed they obtain with much data collection on human rights issues - and should not be used as an excuse for inaction regarding these children. Dialogue among scholars and practitioners about how best to approach this issue analytically will increase understanding, awareness and contribute to the generation of best practices with respect to data collection. Many of the lessons learned from gathering testimonies from rape survivors – including the need for researchers sensitivity, strict confidentiality measures, follow-up and monitoring, and the willingness to rely on illustrative cases rather than seeking vainly to create a ‘representative’ sample (see Andric-Ruzicic, 2003; Sharatt and Kaschak, 1999). The fact that there will be methodological and ethical trade-offs, as in all research, should not preclude attempts to gather information but should instead generate particular care and sensitivity with respect to research design.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, UNICEF is testing methodologies for gathering data on children born as a result of the mass rapes during the war. This exploratory work combines a survey of the human rights sector to assess which programs if any are in place to address this population, with the collection of case histories on specific children from social workers and human rights activists who have been involved in working with such families. The advantages of this methodology are that it avoids seeking out and possibly traumatizing or exposing individual children and their families in an environment where stigma may be at issue, while allowing some empirical documentation of numbers, locations, life histories and social situations faced by the children. These cases can then be compared both to one another and to the general population of children in post-war Bosnia. The disadvantages of this approach are this case history data still measures primarily the impacts as understood and documented by social workers, rather than as articulated by the children themselves; and that it takes place at a distance from the subject population rather than including them and allowing them to represent themselves. It is also purely illustrative rather than representative, and is hampered by the various social, ethical and institutional constraints faced by the civil society sector in Bosnia in providing information on sensitive subject to an international organization. However, while neither representative nor fully participatory, this approach represents a step toward going beyond the purely anecdotal references available in the press to gather empirical, systematic data on some of these children (UNICEF BiH, 2004).

### *Accountability Mechanisms*

Generally, it is men in positions of coercive power who conceive these children, deliberately or incidentally, either through rape or through exploitation of impoverished and desperate women and girls in conflict situations.<sup>21</sup> Even when such men are not ordered to rape by their governments, they are generally under the command of either states or international institutions. These entities should be held accountable for preventing sexually exploitative or violent behavior, and held responsible for the consequences of such behavior, including the up-keep of children born as a result. This would mean, for example, not only prosecutions for U.S.

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<sup>21</sup> However, at an interdisciplinary workshop on war babies held in Montreal, it was pointed out that in some cases female soldiers or aid workers may also engage in sexually exploitative behavior toward young boys in conflict situations.



prison guards responsible for raping Iraqi women along with torture and abuse of other prisoners, but compensation by the American government to those women and support for the children, if brought to term, that are now known to have been conceived as a result (Harding, 2004).

There is an enormous “accountability gap” when it comes to war babies. While in a few cases government leaders have been tried and punished for organizing systematic rape campaigns, such punishment has rarely included compensation for the women victimized or children conceived as a result. Moreover, while rape is condemned as a war crime, the international culture of militarized masculinity tolerates and even promotes the sexual use of local women by foreign soldiers and peacekeeping troops (Enloe, 2000). The suggestion that Western powers should restrain their soldiers from sexual relations with women overseas or that soldiers (or Western governments) should be held liable for children fathered during tours of duty has seldom been raised by the human rights network (though often raised by local activists: for example, see Reuters, 2003). State governments should provide mechanisms for protecting these children and providing support to their mothers, including child support benefits and immigration rights if desired. Older war children seeking their fathers should be permitted to access identity records by relevant states.

Similarly, international humanitarian organizations with a record of sexual exploitation have used Codes of Conduct and dismissal from service as superficial policy responses (Naik, 2001). These actions create the appearance of accountability that can alleviate donor outrage, but they neither address victims’ needs nor provide a context for preventing future abuses. A more proactive approach would be a commitment to gender-sensitization training requirements for aid workers and peacekeepers that would question assumptions about the legitimacy of prostitution in conflict areas. Moreover, international organizations should commit to providing child support and compensation for the victims if they are truly accountable for the actions of their employees.

### *The Best Interests of the Child*

Governments should make decisions about the placement and care of war babies on the basis of the child’s best interests rather than the interests of demographic or nationalist policies. Often, however, post-war governments have undertaken quite divergent policies affecting these children for symbolic reasons rather than with the child in mind. For example, the question of whether an abandoned child’s human rights can best be secured through domestic or foreign adoption should ideally be made through an assessment of the resources and possibility for a positive social environment available to the child in both cases.

Governments should also take seriously the specific social difficulties these children may face and take steps to alleviate them. In the aftermath of conflict, it is easy to underestimate the gravity of these children’s situation, as most war-torn societies are facing many other problems of equal or greater scope and resources are often stretched. Nonetheless, from a child rights perspective it is important to assess and address the various social factors underlying different children’s particular vulnerabilities. For example in Rwanda, the education ministry is designing an initiative to integrate awareness-raising regarding Rwanda’s war babies into the elementary school curriculum in an effort to offset peer discrimination in the school setting (Wax, 2004).

However, the success of such initiatives also needs to be monitored so that best practices can be established. In some cases, the establishment of a particular initiative may provide a sense of closure to the issue, precluding much-needed additional programming. For example, a *fatwa* issued by the Islamic authorities in Bosnia stating that Bosnia’s war babies should not be stigmatized is often cited by government authorities as “proof” that the children are integrated

into society.<sup>22</sup> However, it is not clear how effective this proclamation was in changing social attitudes, or whether in the absence of other long-term economic, psycho-social and sensitization programs, it was sufficient to address the war babies' needs.

### *The Role of The Children's Rights Network*

Given the nature of the international system, it is unlikely that any of the initiatives listed above will be undertaken spontaneously by powerful actors protecting their own interests and agendas. The necessary first step to initiating constructive change is therefore attention to the issue by the children's human rights network.

Human rights actors play a key role in setting the international agenda by lobbying governments, organizing conferences on thematic issues, publicizing abuses, and gathering information relevant to the formulation of sound policy (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). By the same token, human rights actors can exercise the power of omission by neglecting to highlight certain topics relevant to their mandate. If organizations concerned with war-affected children are silent on the needs of war babies, the international community is unlikely to address them.

The first thing that must be done is to make the issue visible. An emerging human rights advocacy group, War Babies International, is using the Internet to frame the issue, publicize available data, and raise international awareness through reciprocal links to other organizations in the children's rights network. Actors working in the area of war-affected children can make a small difference in awareness-raising by linking to this website once it is published later in the year.

More importantly, the issue needs to be incorporated into the mainstream discourse of well-established organizations already working on war-affected children's issues. War babies can be discussed as a category of their own, alongside "child soldiers," "displaced children" or "girl children," and should appear as an agenda item on the website and Annual Reports of organizations like the Office of the Special Representative, UNICEF, and Human Rights Watch. Alternatively, the existence of war babies as a particular group might be mentioned under broader themes already on such organizations web pages: discrimination, separation, statelessness, institutionalization, trafficking. The links between these broader issues and war babies' social origins should be explored and illuminated.

Beyond re-framing the child protection agenda to include war babies as a means of raising awareness, human rights organizations are in a good position to conduct more systematic fact-finding work on the children themselves, an urgent necessity in order to craft specific policies. Graca Machel called for a study entitled *Where are the Babies?* in 2000: any of the major child rights organizations who engage in fact-finding as part of their mandate might reasonably be expected to commission such a study. Research initiatives should include efforts to more systematically estimate the scope of the problem; should involve following up on specific children; analyzing the sources of different policies with respect to their rights and measuring these against international standards; and identifying and evaluating different programs aimed at addressing their needs and those of their mothers. The dissemination of empirical data on the children, their status and potential best practices regarding their care would not only provide valuable data for programmatic purposes, but would have an important awareness-raising effect.

Children born of wartime rape and sexual exploitation constitute an understudied and under-served category of war-affected child. Though each war baby's story is different and needs are unique, all face a range of potential barriers to the achievements of their human rights under

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<sup>22</sup> Personal interviews, Sarajevo, April 2004.

international law. Assessing and the addressing these barriers should be a priority for child protection advocates.

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