

Ericsson, Kjersti, and Eva Simonsen, eds. 2005. *Children of World War II: The Hidden Enemy Legacy*. New York: Berg. 288 pages. ISBN: 9781845202064.

This book explores the lives of children born of liaisons between the local women in various European countries and the German occupiers. Although some research on the topic has been published from roughly the mid 1990s onwards, the present collection of articles breaks the silence that has enveloped the topic and reveals the scope and depth of stigma that these children had to endure in spite of their innocence. It is a moving and fascinating account of generations lost between post-war attitudes and social policies.

As Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen state in their "Preface," the book grew out of a 2001 research project on Norwegian "war children," that is, children of Norwegian mothers and German occupiers born during or shortly after World War II. The research was triggered by the insistent voices of the war children themselves who had, after years of silence, demanded that their stories of private suffering and public discrimination be told. Two international workshops in Oslo followed: in November 2002, and in November 2003. The present book is a result of the discussions among scholars of this topic.

The book is divided into several sections, organized geographically, and consists of articles with mostly self-explanatory titles. The first section, *North* focuses on Norwegian and Danish war children ("Under the Care of *Lebensborn*: Norwegian War Children and their Mothers" by Kåre Olsen; "War, Cultural Loyalty and Gender: Danish Women's Intimate Fraternalization" by Anette Warring; "Silences, Public and Private" by Arne Øland; "Meant to be Deported" by Lars Borgersrud and "Life Stories of Norwegian War Children" by Kjersti Ericsson and Dag Ellingsen).

The second section is *West*, which sheds light on the situation of children in France and the Netherlands and which also includes a chapter on the legacy of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1945) and the fate of the "red" children in Franco's Spain ("Ideology and the Psychology of War Children in Franco's Spain, 1936-1945" by Michael Richards; "Enfants de Boches: The War Children of France" by Fabrice Virgili and "Stigma and Silence: Dutch Women, German Soldiers and their Children" by Monika Diederichs).

The third section, entitled *East*, broadly examines the cases of children of German men and local women in the "Occupied Eastern Territories" (defined as "The German occupied territories of the former Soviet Union" (179, footnote 1)

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but it could also include countries such as Poland) and discusses the case study of Bohemia and Moravia (“Between Extermination and Germanization: Children of German Men in the ‘Occupied Eastern Territories’, 1942-1945” by Regina Mühlhäuser and “Race, Heredity and Nationality: Bohemia and Moravia, 1935-1945” by Michal Simunek).

The final section, *Germany*, looks at war children, defined very broadly, who ended up in Germany after the end of the war (“A Topic for Life: Children of German *Lebensborn* Homes” by Dorothee Schmitz-Köster; “*Besatzungskinder and Wehrmachtsskinder: Germany’s War Children*” by Ebba D. Drolshagen and “Black German ‘Occupation’ Children: Objects of Study in the Continuity of German Race Anthropology” by Yara-Colette Lemke Muniz de Faria). The section concludes with a look at what the editors call the aftermath of World War II, the Allied occupation of Germany. The focus of the article is on the state institutions’ attitude towards the children of German mothers and African-American fathers. Finally, this section briefly discusses how rape by German soldiers of women in Eastern Europe during the occupation, and rape by victorious Soviet troops of German women and women of other nationalities also often resulted in children who never learned the specifics of their origin.

The book as a whole, and especially the articles in the final section, corrects, one hopes for the final time, the popular misconception of the *Lebensborn* project as the “Aryan race stud project.” In reality *Lebensborn* emerged in Germany in 1935 out of the Nazi racial goal of improving the quality and quantity of the Aryan race but functioned on a daily basis as a welfare institution for select women and their children.

In Norway, it was creative literature that first broached the highly sensitive issue of the sexual relationships between Norwegian women and German men during the Nazi occupation (1940-1945). Herbjørg Wassmo’s trilogy about Tora the “German brat” appeared in 1981 and, given the present testimonies by war children, accurately describes the miserable lives of Tora and her mother in post-war Norway. The subsequent discussion has richly complicated the official version of the heroic and unified resistance of the Norwegian people. Ericsson’s and Simonsen’s book continues to add nuances and depth to our understanding of the World War II events.

The editors point out that academic research on this topic needed approximately sixty years after the end of World War II to emerge. One of the reasons for this time lapse is certainly the feeling of shame that the majority of children have felt as the progeny of native women and the enemy’s men. The individual articles in the book amply illustrate how wars have unintended consequences well beyond the point in time when warring states formally declare the end of armed hostilities. In the case of the war children the consequences reach into their adult lives, and sometimes affect the next generation as well.

First branded as traitors by the community and often by their own families, the majority of mothers and their children were subsequently ignored and buried in silence. It was common for the mothers themselves to opt for silence vis-à-vis their children, who, consequently, could only start looking for their biological roots later in their lives. Just as importantly, the reactions by the state authorities could compound the stigma: the war children of Norway, for instance, were first treated as German citizens and threatened with deportation, and later often branded as mentally impaired.

The editors are reluctant to draw parallels between how the war children were treated in a given European region and the harshness of that region's occupation. Instead, they tentatively posit a parallel between the silence that governs the issue of war children in Eastern Europe and the repressiveness of that region's occupation. It is the editors' contention that additional research is needed before one can reach a definitive conclusion.

What emerges from the book are clusters of interrelated issues that offer much food for thought, issues such as the reasons behind liaisons between the enemy's men and local women—casual sexual affairs or long-term relationships that resulted in marriage; the barriers to long-term relationships towards the end of the war and the questions of the citizenship of the children and the domicile of the family; the tension between the women on the one hand, and their own families and the wider community on the other; the utterly chaotic events surrounding the end of World War II and the reshuffling of national priorities; acts of revenge on the part of the victors; the official and professional response that often branded the children as a group as mentally defective, a response grotesquely similar to not unlike that displayed by the Nazi eugenicists; the responses of the states' bureaucracies where files and the answers they contained got buried for decades. Overarching all these issues is the umbrella question of how notions of gender, nation and war interrelate. Finally, the post-war national myths of the resistance movements as utterly heroic and unified also affected the attitudes towards these mothers and children.

The research for the individual articles draws from widely varied sources: from official decrees to secret memos, from social workers' reports to psychiatric observations, from sparse and sporadic earlier research, from newspaper articles. Most crucial perhaps were personal testimonies. The testimonies of lived experience is where all other issues converge: most, although not all, war children were daily made to feel the weight of their incorrect origins and became the scapegoats for the pent-up hatred for and feelings of revenge towards the Nazis.

The cases of war children in Franco's Spain and post-war Germany are discussed as "Prelude" and "Aftermath" to the main World War II events. The somewhat different and specific circumstances in Spain and post-war Germany, respectively, nevertheless reveal strong similarities with the attitudes that Norwegian, Danish, Dutch, German and/or Czech communities displayed towards

the opponents' children. Most often the red children of Spain and the "Mischlinge children" [mixed-race children] of Germany were deemed somehow biologically deficient and in need of state intervention. In addition, families loyal to Franco often adopted the red children and their original birth certificates were destroyed.

The book is appropriately bounded by contributions from the two editors: an "Introduction" by Kjersti Ericsson and an "Epilogue: Children in Danger: Dangerous Children" by Eva Simonsen. The "Introduction" clearly lays out the scholarly objectives for the volume: to shed light on the war children and their plight; to examine the attitudes toward the children that treated them as riches or liabilities depending on the times; to study how the conceptions of gender, nation, and war framed the events during and after the war; to probe the scientific and professional attitudes toward the children; to hear the life stories of these children. The "Epilogue" summarizes the heart-breaking depth of suffering and displacement in post-war Europe among children in general and among the war children in particular. The fact, however, that some of these children can now openly tell their stories is encouraging. Students of war and its legacy would be well advised to include this book as part of their studies.

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