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Child Security in Asia

The impact of armed conflict in
Cambodia and Myanmar

Cecilia Jacob



Child Security in Asia

Millions of children around the world are affected by conflict, and the enduring aftermath of war in post-conflict societies. This book reflects on the implications of children's insecurity for governments and the international humanitarian community by drawing on original field research in post-conflict Cambodia and in Myanmar's eastern conflict zones.

The book examines the way that politics and discourses of security and child protection have further marginalized rather than enhanced the protection of children. In Cambodia, threats from trafficking, exploitative labour, and high levels of domestic and social violence challenge the government and the international humanitarian community to respond to the new human security terrain that is the legacy of three decades of political violence. Myanmar has endured over 60 years of insurgency and civil conflict in ethnic minority states, significantly affecting children who are recruited into armies, killed, maimed or tortured, and displaced.

Analysing the theoretical and practical challenges faced in addressing children's security in global politics, the book offers a novel framework for responding to the politics of protection that is at the heart of this crucial issue. It is a useful contribution to studies on Asian Politics and on International Relations and Security.

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and Myanmar

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This book is dedicated to my family who have been my strength and encouragement.

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Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CBO	community based organization
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
CSO	civil society organization
DDR	demobilization, disarmament and rehabilitation
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
FUNCINPEC	National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	internally displaced person
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	international non-governmental organization
IO	international organization
IR	international relations
KHRG	Karen Human Rights Group
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army (military wing of the KNU)
KNU	Karen National Union
LEASET	Law Enforcement Against Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking of Children
MOI	Ministry of the Interior
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MOSAVY	Ministry of Social Affairs, Veteran and Youth
NGO	non-governmental organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
NTF	National Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SSR	security sector reform
TBBC	Thailand Burma Border Consortium
TBC	The Border Consortium

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UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNIAP	United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
WHO	World Health Organisation

Introduction

Children of War: The Generation Traumatized by Violence in Iraq: Growing up in a war zone takes its toll as young play games of murder and mayhem.

Headline and excerpt from the *Guardian*, 6 February 2007

War Games: Conflict Becomes Child's Play for Young Pashtuns: Video of Pashtun children enacting suicide bombing shows the psychological impact of Taliban violence on a generation.

Headline and excerpt from the *Guardian*, 28 February 2008

Face That Screamed War's Pain Looks Back, 6 Hard Years Later... The image of Samar, then 5 years old, screaming and splattered in blood after American soldiers opened fire on her family's car in the northern town of Tal Afar in January 2005, illuminated the horror of civilian casualties and has been one of the few images from this conflict to rise to the pantheon of classic war photography.

Headline and excerpt from the *New York Times*, 7 May 2011

Dramatic images of children impacted by conflict, such as those described in the newspaper excerpts above, are deeply disturbing, and are commonly used as powerful representations in media reporting of conflicts around the world. The image of the traumatized war-child has become central in popular discourses of armed conflict and civilian protection. With in-depth case studies on post-conflict Cambodia and militarization in Myanmar, this book will question the way that children are conceptualized in global politics, through discourses and institutional practices related to protection and the security of children affected by armed conflict.

Globally, children are used in alarming numbers in armed forces, and are subjected to the physical and psychological horrors of war through rape, torture, killings and forced displacement (Machel 1996). As inheritors of post-conflict devastation, children grow up with the impact of weakened governance institutions in the process of reconstruction, high levels of corruption, and distorted economies that harm civilians through structural violence (Wessells and Edgerton 2008). New vulnerabilities are created for children who are exposed to exploitation and abuse by those seeking to capitalize on the unregulated economies following conflict.

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Child security presents an important challenge on the global security agenda, because protecting children from these violations of their human rights is not a straightforward process. Political, logistical and material complexities exist, making child security an area that requires concentrated attention by researchers, policy-makers and civil society to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are designed and implemented to respond to this crucial global security issue.

Developments in children's rights have significantly influenced the way that childhood has come to be understood globally, including in the field of global security. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) encompasses a range of entitlements to children that represent a departure from earlier universal declarations on children's rights (namely the 1924 League of Nations declaration and the 1959 UN declarations). The UNCRC accords children basic rights to protection from harm and exploitation, but importantly it also includes articles on children's participation in decisions concerning their own life, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of association and assembly, and freedom of privacy, which in effect bestow on children the status of rights bearers (Wells 2009: 32). As bearers of rights, children's status in global politics has been transformed over the past century in ways that have enabled international advocacy to expand the global security agenda to include children, with the protection of children from armed conflict a priority on the UN security agenda.

In 1994 the United Nations Security Council commissioned child rights patron Graça Machel to conduct an inquiry into the impact of armed conflict on children. The specific protection of children has historically been a normative concern in the laws conducting armed conflict, as indicated by the provisions made for children in the Geneva Conventions, and the rationale behind the creation of 'zones of peace' to provide space for child protection during hostilities (Vittachi 1993). However, the 1996 'Machel Report' focussed international attention towards the plight of millions of children around the world whose security had been violated directly and indirectly by armed conflict in an unprecedented way (Wessells 1998). The increased visibility (or greater awareness) of children in the civil wars of the 1990s spurred the growth of civil society and advocacy networks that emphasized the rights to protection of children involved in or affected by armed conflict;¹ such networks raised the profile of the issue on foreign policy agendas of governments (Sorger and Hoskins 2001), in academic institutions,² within the United Nations,³ and in regional forums.⁴

This book asks: how can the security of children affected by conflict be conceptualized in the study of global politics? And what does this issue mean for human security actors in the everyday programming and working of national and global governance institutions? In this book, I will examine the ways in which *child security* (the human security of children affected by conflict either directly or indirectly) creates a political dilemma as much as it presents a theoretical challenge within the field of global politics. Although this is not a work on governance per se, the role that conflict and post-conflict governance and politics play in the human rights, physical protection and development of children is emphasized in the conceptualization of child security.

The central question driving this book is: can a human security agenda be implemented on the ground in a way that is meaningful for child security? By ‘meaningful’ I mean that international standards and national policies are formulated to protect the rights and physical safety of children. Importantly, legislation should be translated into the reality of safety from gross physical harm and deprivation in the daily lives of children living in conflict-affected societies. In this question, I acknowledge the development of comprehensive international law and normative standards designed to protect human rights, including particularly vulnerable groups such as children. Yet I am also aware that the mere existence of appropriate laws and standards does not automatically translate into physical protection without huge investments by states, the international community and civil society to ensure that these are implemented. The need to protect children affected by conflict therefore implies that questions of interests, resources and priorities of decision-makers be understood as the crux of child security issues. These questions are ultimately political.

This central question raises several other related questions, which are addressed in this book. First, what are the historical and sociological factors within conflict-affected societies that shape the interests and preferences of state actors so that they often exclude issues of child insecurity in the national security narrative? This question is important given the crucial role played by key decision-makers in deciding which interests will be prioritized in political agendas, and therefore how resources will be allocated and political attention directed in public debates. Without understanding the historical and social context in which politics unfolds, the politics surrounding the protection of children remains vague. This is unhelpful for the overall goal of identifying ways in which children’s protection can be enhanced.

Second, what role do factors such as identity, agency (political agency and children’s agency), discourse and norms play in shaping the practices of human security actors in relation to the protection of children? This question examines the dynamics and processes impacting on decision-making and the acceptance of concepts such as human security. Human security requires that values of human rights, human dignity and human equality are shared by security actors. Seeking to protect human lives above other political priorities entails a value-laden approach as to what is deemed the foremost priority for national and international attention. An account of varied historical and socially produced identities, and of political interests and values, may therefore present some contradictions and alternate value systems that challenge the implementation of a human security agenda on the ground. The empirical case studies presented in Chapters 4–7, based on child protection fieldwork undertaken in Cambodia and Myanmar, assist in unpacking these questions.

In my field research in Cambodia and Myanmar, I found it important to discuss two particular issues in relation to each other: state security practice (often militarized), and development and humanitarian-oriented responses to child protection. In these two states, both with long histories of conflict, there has been a tendency for state security and child protection to be constructed as

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two independent issues, the former as a matter of high politics and the latter as a low-priority social issue.

For example, children in Myanmar are directly affected by the military's underage recruitment; by targeted civilian attacks that do not distinguish between children and adults; and by the absence of humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected communities in war-torn ethnic minority states (Amnesty International 2008; Human Rights Watch 2007b; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2008; International Crisis Group 2006; United Nations Secretary General 2007; United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar 2012).

The Cambodian government, having ended its internal conflict in 1998, does much better in providing for the basic needs and protection of children. However, the responsibility for the protection of victims of child trafficking, exploitative child labour and high levels of child abuse is allocated a low political priority and slotted into the scope of work of the underfunded Ministry of Social and Veteran's Affairs and Ministry of Labour. Still seen as social problems, these issues are not treated as the direct effects of three decades of conflict on the economic, social and human rights situation in the country, but rather within the context of development and social service delivery.

I argue that there is a need to understand child insecurity in Cambodia and Myanmar in terms both of security *and* development in which children's human rights are at stake. The space between *security* and *development* at the heart of much human security literature is *political*, and is the area in which the protection of children can easily be bypassed by the two dominant policy frameworks.

By politics, I refer to the roles of government and state, which are central in the administration of the affairs of states and which exercise authority. Politics is structured on belief systems, on ideologies and values, and is related to the exercise of power by those with authority to do so. Processes that are deemed *political*, therefore, are those that involve these two interrelated aspects of politics, contestations between (subjective) value systems and the exercise of authority that impacts the society being governed. In a Southeast Asian context, power is personalized through patronage and kinship networks, and authority is hierarchical and largely unquestioned (Kent 2006; Sedara 2010: 8). Understanding the politics of protecting children necessitates a cultural awareness of children's social status, and the association in the minds of policy-makers between children, human security and the importance of child security to the interests of the state.

While I emphasise the role of the political process within governments as a focal point for child protection reform in conflict-affected societies, I also recognize that the definition of *political* is much broader than practices associated with the state government. Rather, politics and political relationships extend beyond the government to other social spheres, with individuals (including children) and civil society organizations playing a key role in constituting the politics of both state and global governance.

The reason I argue that this space between security and development is *political* is because the process in which specific issues are considered to be *security*

issues (read priority issues) is a political rather than objective process. First, personal, economic and political interests of decision-makers *politicize* the securitization process (rather than taking ‘security’ out of the political domain) (Huysmans 2006). Second, any debate on the protection of rights is contingent on political contestation over which rights are legitimate and should be secured. And finally, socially constructed ideas feed into understandings of what constitutes a threat and who is to be protected.

These political and sociological factors all play a role in defining *security* in a given political context. In the equation of human security, therefore, factors such as interests, norms, and socially constructed identities are important components that play into the agendas and practices of security actors. These factors have, in the case of Cambodia and Myanmar, excluded child insecurity from security discourse and practice in a way that has downgraded the issue of ‘child protection’ to a low-priority and under-resourced social problem, as opposed to a central human security concern at the national level where due resourcing and programming can be implemented.

I refer to this political space as the *protection gap*, suggesting that child insecurity resulting directly or indirectly from conflict is often excluded from the dominant (state) security discourse surrounding conflict. Further, in the development-oriented work of humanitarian agencies, *protection* is assigned a specific meaning and context (discussed in detail in Chapter 3) that may not take into account the structural, political and conflict-related nature of children’s insecurity, but rather address it as a social problem that lacks context. In Cambodia and Myanmar, specific programmes targeted to address issues such as human trafficking and exploitative child labour target the poverty, criminal and justice aspects of these issues – and rightly so. This is without, however, also tackling the broader political context and security discourse in which, I argue, child security is more deeply rooted. Further, as a result of segregating child protection from discussions of national security and governance, important humanitarian and state actors (such as police, court officials, and social workers) *do not tend to see themselves or to be seen as significant human security actors*, which diminishes children’s priority to the state in the larger context of national interests.

In this book’s two case studies on Myanmar and Cambodia, the political nature of children’s insecurity is empirically laid out. Through a political and sociological approach to the subject of child security, the roles of militarization, displacement, conflict and poor governance are centred as primary factors causing insecurity for children in these two countries. In light of the theoretical and empirical analysis presented in this book, I suggest that traditional humanitarian responses to child security have originated from a development-oriented child protection framework, and draw on primarily Western constructions of childhood as a distinct and vulnerable phase of children’s lives.

While segregating the individual ‘victim’ child, these programmatic responses often do not address the broader political and social context of conflict, militarization, displacement and post-conflict governance in entire communities in

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which children are implicated. Therefore, rather than being seen as integrated into the broader national picture of human security, humanitarian-led child protection programmes still tend to treat child insecurity as a separate social issue of child protection. This reduces the possibility of government's recognizing the need for a holistic and integrated response to child insecurity as a national priority.

I argue in this book that a *child-centred security model* needs to be incorporated in the human security planning of states and humanitarian agencies to recognize the extent of child insecurity in and following conflict situations. This should not discount the indispensable work currently being undertaken by the humanitarian community to protect children, but rather should reinforce and strengthen it with more robust protection mechanisms and resourcing.

This book takes a political-sociological approach to examining the issue of protecting children affected by armed conflict. This is justified through the centrality of politics, perceptions of identity and interest, the role of dominant discourses produced by global security and humanitarian frameworks in setting the international agenda, and the ultimate question of power, which determines how resources and political will can be mobilized towards any given end. As discussed in detail in the case study chapters, power is particularly important in the Southeast Asian context, in which both political and social power structures are deeply hierarchical and centred on elites. Children are precious in Southeast Asian societies; for example, in Myanmar they are considered 'gems'. Yet in terms of power, children are excluded from decision-making processes and political priority, both discursively and materially (such as in budgeting). Holding power enables individuals to engage in corruption and self-serving interests that further undermine the interests of those who are not physically represented within political structures.

From a social constructivist approach to global politics, further questions can be asked to analyse the problem of how to protect children. These include asking who holds the power, and who makes the decisions that prevent, or could enable, the protection of children in a given population? What are the historical, cultural, social and political factors that shape the discourses of security and of childhood, and that have led to the mutually exclusive nature of these two discourses? How have dominant discourses of security and childhood undermined the physical security of children? What are the key institutions and individuals that could be targeted for reforms to bring about change in the protection of children?

By taking this approach I seek to emphasize the potential role of *political agency* to catalyse institutional *transformation* in favour of enhanced child security. I envision that the engagement of the concepts of human security and child security in political discourse could serve as a platform from which to contest the dominant state-centric security discourses. I argue that this approach also circumvents the anxiety in much of the human security literature over the theoretical sophistication of the notion of human security, or the potential for it to serve as another tool appropriated by power-hungry state actors to justify their actions. This is an anxiety that stifles opportunities to ask the questions that

matter to people living in insecurity, for whom human security is a daily concern and should be advocated for at the highest levels of political decision-making.

Design, ethics and approach in studying child security

The parameters of child security

The scope of this book has been narrowed to a discussion of children living in conflict-affected and post-conflict states, with the emphasis on children living in Myanmar and Cambodia. As the broad scope of issues covered by the term ‘child protection’ brings every harm experienced by children in every country of the world, from domestic abuse to slavery, under one category, it has been necessary for the purpose of this book to narrow the scope of the research through the concept of *child security*. Individual cases of domestic violence and abuse that would be addressed within the umbrella term ‘child protection’ may be as horrific and as devastating to a child’s own sense of *security* as, say, fleeing from war or being exploited for labour. There is, however, a need to make a distinction between those issues that fall within the scope of social-protection responses to individual cases of child protection (such as family support, custody arrangements, foster care, police warrants against offenders) and those that entail widespread violations of children’s rights from structural oppression (war, devastated or weak governance institutions) and targeted political violence (such as ethnic, religious or political persecution) – the latter two being the topic of this book. I will argue that where children are confronted with the pervasive threat of political violence and deeply entrenched social violence in post-conflict settings, it is more appropriate to situate them within a human security framework in order to respond to both the security and development aspects of their insecurity.

Approach to fieldwork

The ‘practice turn’ in critical security studies draws its inspiration from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, considering engagement in the ‘field’ as indispensable for understanding power hierarchies, the social, cultural and economic capital at stake in a given context, and how ‘systems of relations function’ (Salter 2013: 86–7). The approach that I have taken to the methodology was to seek to understand the field, or system, of protecting children affected by conflict and post-conflict society from an in-country perspective. Rather than assuming security for society to rest with a pre-determined array of institutional actors, I spoke to those individuals and actors who identified their work with child protection, as well as to children who were subjects of child protection interventions. This enabled me to reconsider the concept of protection in conflict-affected societies through a fresh conceptual lens, and to understand that the broad systems of child protection in such contexts are nuanced and operate at multiple levels, with many local, government, non-government, and international organization interventions throughout. From the individual carers in children’s safe-houses, to

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non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups, to individual ministers raising awareness among high-level political colleagues, to ministerial committees, to donor countries and agencies providing budgets and policy advice, the work of protecting children in conflict-affected societies involves the efforts of many actors.

'Security' for these children breaches the neat boundaries of civilian protection as formally defined and practiced by international humanitarian organizations and intervening states (Ferris 2011: 279); their needs transcend defined political boundaries, and the scope of protection issues intersects a vast array of state security, development, justice and human rights concerns.

With this approach as my point of departure, I have concluded in my analysis that the protection of civilian populations from the effects of conflict requires a reinvigorated and more comprehensive perspective than is accounted for in the literature on intervening states and formal humanitarian mechanisms.

The fieldwork conducted for this book was undertaken in three countries: Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia. In the course of my fieldwork, I talked with practitioners about child protection issues, policy and legal frameworks, practices and impediments in these three countries. Given the political constraints for foreigners to move outside of government-designated zones in Myanmar at the time of interviewing, and the difficulty of accessing conflict-affected communities from inside Myanmar, I chose to remain in Yangon to speak with United Nations (UN) and International NGO (INGO) staff working with government authorities on child protection in order to assess the official work being conducted inside Myanmar.

I then spent a month in Thailand to collect further data on the situation of children affected by conflict in Myanmar. Most of my time was spent in Mae Sot, a town on the Thai side of the Thai–Myanmar border where there is a heavy concentration of migrants and where there are also numerous international and local humanitarian organizations working with conflict-affected communities inside Myanmar, refugees in Thailand, and illegal migrants in Thailand. I also consulted United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and International Labour Organization (ILO) staff in Bangkok who were working on child protection and labour issues with the illegal migrant community in Thailand.

In Cambodia, UN agencies, government departments and NGOs are concentrated in Phnom Penh, as are many of the shelters and orphanages for child victims of exploitation and abuse. For this reason I remained in Phnom Penh, where I could access a wide range of organizations working both in Phnom Penh and in the provinces.

These two countries were selected as examples of states experiencing conflict (Myanmar) and post-conflict governance (Cambodia). Children's security issues in these two states are high-profile concerns on the global security agenda. Myanmar is commonly believed to have the one of the largest numbers (if not the largest) of child soldiers in the world, and the state military is implicated in a protracted conflict with ethnic minority states in which it systematically targets civilians through its anti-insurgency strategy. Cambodia, having experienced one

of the worst genocides of the twentieth century during the Khmer Rouge regime and having endured civil conflict for three decades until 1998, is now suffering from high levels of child trafficking, child sexual exploitation, the use of children for exploitative forms of labour, and extraordinarily high levels of social violence and domestic abuse. These issues are the objects of international contention and pressure on the Myanmar and Cambodian governments for reform. Further, these two governments suffer from endemic corruption, poor governance capacity and high levels of poverty, which undermine their capacity to protect the human rights of people living inside these states.

The data collected in the field drives the analysis and conclusions in this book. The purpose of my fieldwork was not to recount the experiences and stories of children who have been victims of various forms of insecurity to prove that children suffer extraordinary forms of targeted violence and abuse. There is already a lot of anecdotal data available to describe the ways that children experience insecurity, such as through child soldiering, trafficking and exploitative labour. Excellent work has been done by organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. Moreover, the many local research organizations and NGOs that have interviewed children affected by conflict, trafficking and exploitative labour provide a valuable source of information, and have raised international awareness on these important issues drawing on children's perspectives.

However, there is inadequate analysis of broader governance dynamics in relation to children, in which new areas of political reform could be identified to promote child security. My intent was to interview a wide range of practitioners working in the field of child protection in key government, UN and civil society organizations involved in the legislation and implementation of children's rights and child protection standards in these countries. This was to assess the nature of work being done in these locations. I was keen to learn the ways that these organizations defined security, child protection, and childhood, to determine the extent to which socially constructed definitions and associations impact on the practices of these actors to include or exclude various perspectives in their work.

Ethics and field research

Ethics was unquestionably a foremost concern in my research, in working both with children and with professionals who were concerned that the data they provided would be accurately represented. Approval for the fieldwork conducted in this book was given by the Australian National University Human Research Committee prior to the commencement of the research in 2008. All interviews were conducted with informed consent, and translators were used on only a few occasions where several local child protection staff talked to me through colleagues in their organizations who spoke English. Translators were used in the children's workshops; however, great care was taken to ensure that these translators were all teachers or carers in the same organizations, with whom children already had a strong rapport and trust.