

Beyond Seeing and Listening: Children Born from Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

ABSTRACT

This essay discusses some points made by the three books under review regarding how children born of conflict-related sexual violence have not been seen and listened to by those working in the field of transitional justice. To this end, it explores some of the reasons behind this oversight, including generalized assumptions about their relationships with their mothers, families and communities. It also discusses some of the limitations of the current transitional justice framework to address the plight of these children. Finally, the essay emphasizes the importance of analyzing more deeply the particular context in which these children are embedded. To this end it draws from some of the frameworks presented in the three books under review, which allow for a more capacious comprehension of the situation of children born of conflict-related sexual violence.

KEYWORDS: Children born from conflict-related sexual violence, children born of war, feminism, gender-based violence, sexual violence in armed conflict

Legacies of War: Violence, Ecologies and Kin, Kimberly Theidon. Duke University Press, July 2022, 128pp. ISBN: 9781478015772 – hardcover (\$23.95).

Challenging Conceptions: Children Born of Wartime Rape and Sexual Exploitation, eds. Kimberly Theidon, Dyan Mazurana and Dipali Anumol. Oxford University Press, January 2023, 352pp. ISBN: 978-0197648315 – hardcover (\$97.00).

Born of War in Colombia: Reproductive Violence and Memories of Absence, Tatiana Sanchez Parra. Rutgers University Press, April 2024, 204pp. ISBN: 9781978832466 – paperback (\$40.95).

INTRODUCTION

Children born of conflict-related sexual violence are one of the groups that have received the least attention in the field of transitional justice.¹ Their particular challenges, sufferings, needs and aspirations remain invisible to many practitioners and academics. This strongly contrasts with the growing attention to, and even hypervisibilization of, conflict-related sexual violence,

¹ I use the term 'children' instead of 'people' to acknowledge their relationship with their mothers, although many of them are adults at the time of writing or at the time of engagement by transitional justice practitioners.

a violence inherently connected to these children's existence.² However, this relative neglect is slowly starting to change.

Research on children born of conflict-related sexual violence has grown during the last 20 years. Starting with Carpenter's edited volume from 2007 on children born of war (the first book to focus on these children),³ subsequent studies have sought to understand their plight in several postconflict contexts.⁴ This research has revealed how many of these children experience discrimination and rejection in their family and community networks, the ways in which they deal with conflicting identities and belongings and the material hardships they face as a result. This growing body of knowledge has been accompanied by greater visibility of the work conducted by practitioners. In 2015 the International Center for Transitional Justice presented a report about the situation of these children and their mothers in Uganda at a symposium that convened practitioners, academics, stakeholders and victims themselves.⁵ Practitioners and scholars have also formed transnational networks to discuss their projects, including the work presented in the edited volume under review here.⁶ These collaborations represent important steps in the work with children born of conflict-related sexual violence. They provide a space to share what is known, what is missing and how different social actors, at a national and international level, should respond.

It was not until 2019 that children born of conflict-related sexual violence were directly and formally recognized by Resolution No. 2467 of the UN Security Council.⁷ This led to a report in January 2022 comprehensively explaining many of the harms endured by these children and their mothers, both at a physical and psychological level, in contexts in which patriarchal norms and systems endanger their livelihoods.⁸ It described how their association with their fathers makes them and their mothers targets of violence from family and community members. Consequently, many of these children experience forms of psychosocial trauma expressed in symptoms of depression and anxiety. Furthermore, the report details how discriminatory birth registration policies limit their access to health care, education, housing, inheritance and property ownership. It presents policies, laws and interventions that have been developed to address the challenges facing these children and their mothers. It concludes with commitments made by the UN Secretary-General and with recommendations for the UN Security Council, nation-states and relevant non-state actors that work with these children and their mothers worldwide. However, both before the report and after, the progress made by states to directly recognize and address children born of conflict-related sexual violence through policies has been minimal. To date, only Colombia, through its *Victims and Land Restitution Law*, explicitly recognizes these children as victims and subjects entitled to reparation through the domestic reparation programme.⁹

² Kimberly Theidon, 'Gender in Transition: Common Sense, Women, and War,' *Journal of Human Rights* 6(4) (2007): 453–478.

³ Charli Carpenter, ed., *Children Born of War: Protecting Children of Sexual Violence Survivors in Conflict Zones* (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 2007).

⁴ Erin Baines and Camile Oliveira, 'Securing the Future: Transformative Justice and Children "Born of War,"' *Social & Legal Studies* 30(3) (2021): 341–361; Burcu Akan Ellis, "'I Broke Free': Youth Activism and the Search for Rights for Children Born of War in Bosnia,' *Genealogy* 7(3) (2023): 73–86; Kimberly Theidon, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Children Born of Wartime Sexual Violence,' *Current Anthropology* 56(12) (2015): 191–200.

⁵ International Center for Transitional Justice, *Redress Needed for Children Born of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Northern Uganda and Their Mothers* (New York: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2015).

⁶ See e.g., 'The Children Born of War Project,' https://www.cbwproject.org/about_us/ (accessed 16 October 2024).

⁷ See United Nations Security Council Resolution 2467, UN Doc S/RES/2467 (2019) adopted on 23 April 2019.

⁸ 'Women and Girls Who Become Pregnant as a Result of Sexual Violence in Conflict and Children Born of Sexual Violence in Conflict,' Report of the Secretary-General, UN Doc. S/2022/77 (31 January 2022).

⁹ See Ley de Víctimas, L. 1448/11, junio 10, 2011, 40.096 Diario Oficial.

As Tatiana Sanchez Parra notes in *Born of War in Colombia*, children born of conflict-related sexual violence remain 'unseen by the human rights and transitional justice agenda' (p. 2). Likewise, as Kimberly Theidon urges in her sole authored-book *Legacies of War*, we need to 'listen to what they have to say about their lives and life chances' (p. 35). Bearing this in mind, this review essay focuses on three recent publications to clarify why we have not been able to see and listen to these children towards comprehensively understanding their plight. The essay also affirms the importance of analyzing the particular contexts in which these children (and their mothers) are embedded to better comprehend their experiences and be able to respond to them. It concludes with some final thoughts on how to move forward in work with children born of conflict-related sexual violence.

LIMITED AND PARTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE CHILD'S EXPERIENCE

These authors and editors argue that there are several challenges that prevent a deeper comprehension of the situation of children born of conflict-related sexual violence. Prime among these obstacles, noted in the works under review, is the overuse of the term stigma. As Theidon explains, the term stigma is found abundantly in the literature about these children, functioning more as a 'placeholder' than as a 'analytically nuanced tool' (p. 10). Notwithstanding the fact that many of these children are very likely to experience what some psychologists and social scientists might categorize as stigma from members of their family/community/nation, the misuse of this term can lead us to assume that they go through particular experiences when they might actually not. For instance, Mazurana explains in *Challenging Conceptions* (the volume she co-edits) that in Mozambique children born of conflict-related sexual violence are in fact seen as 'pure' by their family and community, with a corollary assumption that nothing is 'wrong' with them (p. 248). The experience in Mozambique is unusual. Nevertheless, the overuse of the term stigma can keep us from unpacking the lived experience of Mozambican children, failing to ask questions about what beliefs, interest, values and norms underpin the rejection and exclusion of these children where it occurs (Theidon, p. 11).

This stigma narrative has served to limit the willingness of transitional justice practitioners to work with children born of conflict-related sexual violence due to the fear of singling them out in their communities and therefore putting them at greater risk of discrimination. Working with these children and their mothers does entail great ethical challenges, mainly due to the secrecy that might surround the circumstances of their conception. As Theidon argues, 'each methodological choice is an ethical decision as well' (p. 17). However, this fear should not be used as an excuse to keep us from seeking to better understand and address the needs of these children. As Sanchez observes, institutional silence and the lack of tools to work with these children critically limit the ability of transitional justice practitioners to challenge the exclusion and other forms of violence they are already experiencing (p. 36). Worse yet, if we do not recognize and create a bureaucratic category for them within transitional social and legal systems, both at a national and international level, it will be much more difficult to start developing the tools, strategies and policies we need to respond to their specific situations.

The possible secrecy about their origins, which their mothers might want to maintain, is one of the main challenges to 'seeing' children born of conflict-related sexual violence. For these women, their experiences of sexual violence are a source of pain and shame, leading many of them to hide this information from their children and from others. Theidon explains that the dynamics around any actual disclosure about the circumstances of their conception, both to the children themselves and to others, are complex (p. 14). For instance, in Peru the names these children were given are associated with their fathers or their violent conceptions, including, for example, 'Soldado' (soldier in Spanish) or 'Chiki' (Quechua, for danger or bad omen).

Far from concealing their identities, Theidon argues that these names may have been chosen by their mothers to publicly denounce the violence inflicted on them (p. 17). In another example of this complexity, Sanchez explains that in Colombia many mothers have not disclosed to their children how they came into being. However, these mothers nevertheless seem to have in common the belief that their sons and daughters already *know* (p. 132). As can be seen, processes of maternal disclosure about the circumstances of conception, to their children and to others, are not uniform. They vary widely in terms of when and how they take place, and what purpose they are designed to serve.

Both Sanchez and Theidon emphasize that the process of disclosure to children born of conflict-related sexual violence about their origins (and the violence associated with it) is fraught with emotional challenges, both for their mothers and the children. The decision to talk with their children about their origins can become even more challenging when reparations are contingent on disclosure.¹⁰ From an ethical point of view, the choice of disclosure lies with the mothers. With all the burden that it entails, it is they who must decide when and how much they want to (and can) share, and in what ways they choose to do so. Those in the international, domestic or local community who work with these women and their children seek to assist in this process by providing the necessary emotional support. Along this line, some of the authors in the edited volume by Theidon, Mazurana and Anumol have found that disclosure about their conception can be beneficial for these children in the long run. Atim et al. (p. 122), as well as Anumol and Mundere (p. 262), found that children who have full knowledge about their origins were supportive of their mothers and had greater resources to make sense of, and better manage, their relationships in their communities. These children were furthermore able to connect with other children in a similar position. Thus, despite the emotional challenges explained comprehensively in these works, disclosure can provide an opportunity not only for others to see them but, most importantly, for them to better see and make sense of themselves.

One thing these books make clear is that it is important to consider the challenges in seeing children born of conflict-related sexual violence as distinct in themselves, and not solely in relation to their mothers. For Theidon, these challenges are partly due to the fact that throughout their lives they fall between competing rights regimes (p. 34). These include, for instance, the tension between the child's right to life versus their mother's right to abortion, and also the child's right to know about their origins versus their mother's right to privacy. Mothers and children also might be placed in a position in which they have competing interests. Mazurana explains, for example, how Yazidi women who have been victims of sexual violence by Islamic State fighters are accepted back into the Yazidi faith. However, due to patriarchal understandings of descent, their children are not, thereby placing these women in an impossible position (p. 254). Consequently, seeing these children as independent subjects requires us to understand and perhaps sustain tensions they might have with their mothers, which is a difficult task.

Another reason why children born of conflict-related sexual violence are not seen as independent subjects is because transitional justice works with a framework that is rooted in the past. As Sanchez explains, in order to be considered a victim (and to be entitled to reparations) one has to trace and reconstruct a past event of harm. However, these children are not considered part of that past because many of them did not exist during these conflicts (although they were conceived during them), which also hinders their recognition as *victims* in their own right. Along these lines, these children tend to be seen merely as a *consequence* of the violence endured by their mothers, a byproduct of rape (pp. 5–6). This narrow vision is connected to an important blind spot of transitional justice over the last 30 years: the hypervisibilization of sexual violence

¹⁰ Both Sanchez (p. 131) and Theidon (p. 33) give a further explanation of the ethical dilemma that results from tying the right to reparation to disclosure to their children about the circumstances of their conception.

at the expense of reproductive violence.¹¹ Several truth commissions throughout the world have made significant efforts to render visible women's experience of sexual violence.¹² However, as Sanchez argues, 'the aspects that involve the reproductive dimension of that violence – such as pregnancy, giving birth and parenting – are often understood as collateral damage' (p. 7). She further posits that this disregard is connected to patriarchal expectations of parenting which assume that pregnancy and childcare are part of women's natural labor. To complement this idea, Theidon reiterates that forced pregnancy and maternity, in addition to the burden to love that stems from 'hegemonic maternal scripts ... should be considered potential forms of gendered harm' (p. 91). This neglect of women's experiences of reproductive violence has also compounded the invisibility of their children's experiences of violence and hardship.

Very few studies have focused on the everyday experiences of children born of conflict-related sexual violence, and even fewer have drawn directly from their perspectives through interviews or other forms of direct data collection. It is a welcome development, therefore, that the edited volume under review offers several valuable contributions in this regard. Working with children held by the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda, the chapters offered by Apio and by Atim et al. bring to light challenges these children navigate in terms of their identity and belonging to their communities upon return. Furthermore, Ní Aoláin (who examines the experience of children in postconflict Syria and Iraq) and Atim et al. gather testimonies of these children, who go on to explain some of the physical, emotional and cognitive sequelae they face living in the midst of protracted conflicts, in some cases with no possibilities of exit. In a unique contribution, Denov et al. survey Ugandan children's experiences with their combatant fathers from the LRA. The strong connection with and protection from their fathers that these children felt provides the existing literature with a more nuanced image of these men and shows the value of having a father figure in their lives. Other chapters show how the experiences of these children will vary deeply depending on the position their fathers occupy in global hierarchies of race, class and nationality. For example, the opportunities afforded to children born of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by US soldiers (described by Seto) are greater than those of the children of ISIS members (outlined by Ní Aoláin). As a whole, the edited volume underscores the agency these children display in diverse contexts as they shape their relationships within their kinship groups and seek to hone their social skills in order to be perceived positively by others.

Getting to know and understand the variegated experiences of children born of conflict-related sexual violence is necessary to adequately design policies that respond to them, most pertinently reparations. However, the only reparation programme that recognizes them as victims, namely that in Colombia, has been more focused on bureaucratic aspects related to where to include them in their compensatory structure than on fundamental discussions around what reparations would mean for such children. In this sense, and as Sanchez explains, an important challenge for transitional justice mechanisms vis-à-vis children born of sexual violence is to envision forms of redress that are not rooted in the past but that open possibilities for a future that is free from armed conflict and that belongs to them (Theidon et al., p. 151). To do this more sensitively, it is paramount to take a closer look at the particular contexts in which they live.

CHILDREN BORN OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONTEXT

The field of transitional justice has been widely criticized due to a circumscribed vision of justice that focuses on a narrow set of human rights violations, thereby overlooking the unequal

¹¹ Kimberly Theidon, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Children Born of Wartime Sexual Violence,' *Current Anthropology* 56(12) (2015): 191–200.

¹² See e.g., truth commissions in South Africa, Peru and Colombia.

social structures and forms of structural violence that underpin conflicts in each context.¹³ The literature now takes it as axiomatic that an analysis of the particularities of each local context is essential to provide adequate responses to victims of armed conflict. This is certainly true of children born of conflict-related sexual violence – as Theidon argues in her co-edited volume, ‘we simply cannot reduce our analyses to the mother-child dyad ... they are all and always embedded in complex networks of intimate relations, families, communities, nation-states’ (Theidon et al., p. 14).

An important place to start the analysis of these children’s contexts is by focusing on the patriarchal systems and dynamics that are present in practically every society that has endured armed conflict. Both Theidon and Sanchez explain that, although operating in particular ways and with variable consequences, in many societies there is a patrilineal understanding of descent in which the father’s genetic contribution to the child is deemed to outweigh that of the mother. In the edited volume, a number of chapters reveal how, based on this understanding of descent, hegemonic groups utilize these children to fulfill a nationalistic purpose. Seto explains how in the postwar period, the United States sought to bring ‘home’ Amerasian children born from US soldiers in Vietnam to lift up the morale of American fathers (Theidon et al., p. 34). Similarly, in a transnational comparison of conflicts over different periods of time, Lee demonstrates how these children have been a means to forge a renewed and idealized version of an existing group, be it the Aryan ‘race’ in the case of the Nazis, the Serbs in different parts of the former Yugoslavia or the New Acholi in Northern Uganda (Theidon et al., pp. 76–77). Within all these postconflict ecologies, patriarchal systems of transmission operate to render women mere vessels, and their children pawns, to serve the interests of hegemonic masculinity.

On the other hand, on many occasions patrilineal understandings of kinship have led also to the rejection of (and/or discrimination towards) these children given that they are associated by victim communities with their fathers and the violence they represent. Even if we accept that it is important to avoid a monolithic approach to these social processes – as argued above in relation to the overuse of the term stigma – it is necessary to closely analyze how patriarchal policies will shape rules of kinship and the economic and social consequences that derive from them. In an example of this type of analysis, Apio gives a closer look at the children born of conflict-related sexual violence in Northern Uganda. The author explains how these children are excluded from family networks because kinship rules associate them with their LRA fathers. This exclusion operates to the detriment of male children, because inheritance laws would entitle them to land if accepted within the family system (Theidon et al., p. 96).

There are particular frameworks that prove useful when analyzing the context of children born of conflict-related sexual violence and their mothers. One of these frameworks, which is discussed in Theidon’s monograph, is ‘situated biologies.’ This term builds on Lock’s previous concept of ‘local biologies’ which posits that the embodied experience of physical sensations – which includes illness, health and wellbeing – is partly informed by the material body, which is itself influenced by environmental, evolutionary, social and individual variables.¹⁴ In a further iteration, Lock and Niewöhner propose the notion of ‘situated biologies,’ seeking to emphasize that body and environment should not be seen as two distinct clear-cut units in interaction but rather as fluidly and constantly entangling and co-constituting each other over time and space, in such a way that the boundaries between them are always disintegrating and rebuilding themselves.¹⁵ Theidon draws on this concept to discuss how women’s experiences of conflict-related

¹³ Paul Gready and Simon Robins, ‘From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice,’ *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 8(3) (2014): 339–361.

¹⁴ Margaret Lock, *Encounters with Aging: Mythologies of Menopause in Japan and North America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xxi.

¹⁵ Jörg Niewöhner and Margaret Lock, ‘Situating Local Biologies: Anthropological Perspectives on Environment/Human Entanglements,’ *BioSocieties* 13(4) (2018): 681–697.

sexual violence, their pregnancies and their relationship with their children should be read from the socio-historical environments of which these women are part. She analyzes the cases of both the Peruvian and Colombian conflicts to explain how particular sets of situated knowledges – about the body, its fluids and components, but also about its relation to the immediate social and natural environment – inform the meanings made by these women about their maternity. These understandings strongly impact their children’s experiences as well.

Theidon also analyzes how events occurring in natural environments during these conflicts, such as the pollution of the Atrato river, impact and permeate women’s and children’s experiences of embodied violence to ‘get under their skin.’¹⁶ To this end, in addition to the concept of situated biologies, she draws from frameworks that broaden our understanding of the maternal environment, such as that of Hoke and McDades, who see it as a complex intergenerational set of ‘physiological, social and political-economic processes.’¹⁷ This approach allows us to place bodies in history to analyze how they carry unevenly the burden of war based on class, race and other disparities that divide the Global North and the Global South. In a similar vein, Theidon brings to the conversation an environmental reproductive justice framework,¹⁸ which she explains ‘is attuned to the structural forces that shape reproductive outcomes’ (p. 81). Together these frameworks help us better understand how these children and their mothers are embedded in nested and interconnected contexts. Furthermore, in line with several indigenous onto-epistemologies, these frameworks push us to think about these children (and about ourselves, that is, human beings in general) as *part* of these contexts, as belonging and being closely intertwined and dependent on them.

Another framework that helps broaden and complexify the analysis of the context of children born of conflict-related sexual violence is reproductive justice, a framework embraced by both Theidon and Sanchez. Reproductive justice is informed by discussions around intersectionality. It is a framework that emerges from an historical context in which the debate about reproductive rights was centered on abortion. However, for many feminists of color it encompassed much more than this. They maintained that reproductive justice entails (1) the right to have children, (2) the right to not have children and (3) the right to parent those children in safe and healthy environments.¹⁹ As can be seen, reproductive justice is a framework that places reproduction and parenting in a much wider context. As Sanchez explains, for black and Indigenous women (and other people with biologically female bodies) this involves looking at how they live ‘within entwined racist, classist and colonial systems that underlie practices, laws and policies that deprive them of control over their bodies and reproductive autonomy’ (p. 42). Bringing a reproductive justice lens to contexts of armed conflict sheds lights on how these women’s conditions of reproduction and parenting are ‘defined by the policies, economies, logics and practices of war’ (p. 42). An examination of the broader context of reproduction in armed conflicts reminds us that in the vast majority of cases, those at ‘the saturation point of interconnected injuries’ (Theidon, p. 92) are poor women from racialized communities.

The frameworks presented above challenge us to see the connections between the several injustices and harms that operate at different levels, and how they impact the lives of children born of conflict-related sexual violence and their mothers. This might include hitherto under-examined nationalistic policies at a state level that impact these children and their mothers by using them as pawns of a postwar political agenda; systems of knowledge about the body’s fluids

¹⁶ I use the term ‘natural environment’ here to refer to non-human beings, such as animals and plants, but also mountains and rivers. However, in many societies and cultures, like in the highland communities of the Andes, there is no difference between the natural and social world as they see themselves in close relation to these non-human entities.

¹⁷ Morgan Hoke and Thomas McDade, ‘Biosocial Inheritance: A Framework for the Study of the Intergenerational Transmission of Health Disparities,’ *Annals of Anthropological Practice* 38(2) (2014): 187–213, 191.

¹⁸ Drawing on Martine Lappé, Robbin Jeffries Hein and Hannah Landecker, ‘Environmental Politics of Reproduction,’ *Annual Review of Anthropology* 48(1) (2019): 133–150.

¹⁹ Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger, *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

and the transmission of identity that can directly affect how a woman feels about the child growing inside her; and attacks on the ecosystem that can affect the in-utero environment. Theidon argues that there is power to be reclaimed ‘by tracing the proverbial dots and connecting seemingly disparate categories of events’ (p. 58). In agreement with this argument, Sanchez explains that when looking at the context of children born of conflict-related sexual violence, we need to understand that the forms of violence that affect their lives occur at the overlap of colonial legacies of exclusion, extractive economies and the armed conflict itself (p. 146). For her, by having a more comprehensive and complex understanding of these interconnected social justice issues, they may become more intelligible to transitional justice academics and practitioners, a welcome departure from the partial and fragmented understandings of children’s needs so ably critiqued in these works.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In working with children born of conflict-related sexual violence, many practitioners and academics in the field of transitional justice call for the presence of specialized psychologists or therapists. Although as professionals from the mental health field we receive training that might provide us with some tools to work with these children, it is certainly the case that any possible wait for a group of expert therapists should not be used as an excuse to keep postponing the work with them. Emotional support for these children and their mothers is urgent. As psychologists, we do not have a monopoly on empathetic listening or healing. More than needing a particular group of professionals, as this essay has sought to articulate, work with these children requires a careful revision of the ways we are approaching them and how we are taking into consideration the broader contexts of which they are a part. Above all, we must revise assumptions about their emotional state, about their physical and mental health and about their place within their families, communities and nation-states. Furthermore, it is imperative to query if these assumptions might stem from patriarchal discourses present in our societies. Also essential is to work with these children seeking to comprehend their plights in relation to their particular contexts.

Any meaningful work with children born of conflict-related sexual violence requires going beyond seeing and listening and pushes those interested in these endeavors to connect at a more profound level. Short-term interventions or extractivist research should be eschewed, giving place to long-term commitments, both from academics and practitioners. In this regard, paradigms such as psychosocial accompaniment, seen previously in work with victims of armed conflict,²⁰ might prove useful as they entail a dialogical relationship that is close and continuous where the accompanier listens and offers flexible and strategic support.²¹ Psychosocial accompaniment also requires a form of listening that is ‘linked with the affective significance of the actual experiences.’²² However, as mentioned previously, accompaniment is not only the work of psychologists. A similar approach to accompaniment can be found in different fields, for example in long-term and critical ethnographic work. A prime example is that of Sanchez, who ‘learned to respect the pace of the day, to seek out the shade of the trees in the hot midday sun.’ Likewise Theidon, who invites us listen to women and their children on their own terms as they ‘speak about fast and slow forms of violence’ (p. 92).

Context-sensitive long-term work with children born of conflict-related sexual violence should provide greater opportunities for them to express themselves in their own time, on their own terms and maybe even through means that go beyond verbal accounts. As Mazurana’s work

²⁰ See e.g., Alison Crosby and M. Brinton Lykes, *Beyond Repair? Mayan Women’s Protagonism in the Aftermath of Genocidal Harm* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019).

²¹ Mary Watkins, ‘Psychosocial Accompaniment,’ *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 3(1) (2015): 324–341.

²² See discussion in ‘Global Health and Liberation Theology: A Dialogue Between Dr Paul Farmer and Theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez’ (2011) <https://liberationtheology.org/global-health-and-liberation-theology-a-dialogue-between-dr-paul-farmer-and-theologian-gustavo-gutierrez/> (accessed 16 October 2024).

in Mozambique reveals, when healing from violence, words can sometimes fall short. Other means that allow the processing of these experiences can be more attuned to the victims' needs (Theidon et al., pp. 247–248). Along this line, she further urges us to look at the forms of emotional, social and spiritual support already present in these children's communities (p. 251). Close collaboration between those already working with local resources and practices and those who come to assist these children from outside can offer a promising way forward.

It has often been argued that transitional justice needs to be victim centered. In the case of children born of conflict-related sexual violence, their mothers have the paramount role given that, as mentioned previously, the decision to disclose is theirs. However, their children also should have a role as protagonists. Indeed, some are already starting to guide these processes by advocating for their right to redress, justice and a life free from conflict. For instance, in their chapter, Virginie Ladisch and Jaqueline Mutere – the latter a survivor of sexual violence in, with a child from, armed conflict – narrate how Jaqueline has been coming together with other survivors, mothers and children, to discuss among themselves and with policymakers their needs and aspirations for a better future (Theidon et al., pp. 276–268). The challenge is not only to listen to the voices of these children and their mothers but also to work with them in their circumstances, incorporating local resources and creating transnational dialogues between child and mother survivors, practitioners, academics and stakeholders in the field of transitional justice. In this way, we can start to see and listen more fully to these children and maybe even go beyond this.

Gabriela Távara

Psychology Department, Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, Av. Universitaria 1801, Lima

15088, Peru. Email: gtavara@pucp.edu.pe

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