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Relationalities and temporalities beyond binaries

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[concluding reflection for *Parents, Children and the Ripples of Transitional Justice*]

Children and childhoods function as profoundly resonant indicators of the impacts of violence and atrocity and their aftermaths. Some of the most affecting, and most frequently used, images to tell 'stories' of the impacts of such traumatic events are of children standing (or sitting) alone (Berents 2019). These children lack—or are denied—the most central relationship to our imaginings of childhood: that of their parents or family. Their undeniable suffering is located within their embodied presence but is predicated on an implicit understanding by the viewer that there *should* be others around them.

In scholarship of both peace studies and transitional justice, scholars often inevitably focus on a particular actor or on a certain community as a whole. In doing this, incidentally, the *relational* dynamics between actors are often overlooked. In peace studies the turn to the 'everyday', 'local' or 'micro' level peace has in some ways moved to address this oversight (eg Berents 2018; Mac Ginty 2021) by bringing to the fore the daily interactions and connections that constitute collective life amidst and after conflict. In transitional justice scholarship, a similar turn contextual, local justice initiatives in restorative justice shows the importance and value of relational practices (eg Kochanski 2020; Baines and Oliviera 2021)

The significant contribution of this volume is to centre the *relationship* of the child and parent—both in its embodied, individual form, and in the ways in which this relationship manifests and informs macro level processes and engagements in transitional justice. Across the volume, contributors highlight the ways in which the roles of parents and children are experienced, ascribed, denied, and deployed in a wide range of transitional justice contexts. Authors show the myriad means by which the impacts of conflict, violence, and trauma can test, rupture, and reconstruct the dynamics of this relationship.

Tracing just some of the ripples that extend from this volume, I offer here two concluding thematic reflections which draw attention to the ways authors conceive of the parent-child relationship and its importance to transitional justice. The first points to the myriad ways both 'child' and 'parent' exceed the dyadic relationship of the hyphen, and the second on the inherent relationality of intergenerational engagements at different temporalities and scales.

Beyond binaries

There are necessarily simultaneous and contradictory moves happening here that must be productively held concurrently in our imaginings and engagements. On the one hand, contributions make visible the way in which the explicit, biological parent-child relationship is central if often invisible to meaning-making in the pursuit of 'justice' after atrocity. On the other hand, contributions also show us how focusing only on the biological relationship of offspring and those who birthed/raised them limits our ability to understand the way in which this relational dynamic pervades the practices and institutions of transitional justice processes.

Contributions to critical childhood studies working within the framework on international relations or international political sociology have demonstrated convincingly that children are competent, if subaltern or dominated, actors in social and political life (Watson 2006; Mollica 2024; Brocklehurst 2006; Berents 2018; Pruitt 2015; Beier and Tabak 2020; Lee-Koo 2011). In the context of transitional justice, they are contributors to the mechanisms, processes, and outcomes; not just recipients of them.

We must recognise and take seriously the indispensability of children to sociopolitical life. However, we must also take seriously the "malleability of childhood" is "variously claimed, withheld, and ascribed separate from age – revealing it as an intersubjectively held idea residing more in social imaginaries than in meaningfully objective characteristics" (Beier and Berents 2023). An important next step is to take seriously the idea of imagined childhoods (Beier 2022), and the ways in which they profoundly shape our understandings of every single distinct concept of relevance here: "child", "justice", "transition", as well as "adult", and the ideas of what constitutes being "grown-up".

While legalistic framings in international law and in formal or state-based transitional justice processes tend to fix the binary of child-adult or child-parent, critical childhood studies

provides avenues for softening those borders, allowing space(s) for multiple, simultaneous and nuanced understandings of both children's and adults' roles in and after conflict. It is important that these categories/ binaries do not become fixed or homogenous. Their heterogeneity and inherent 'messiness' are in fact where their productive potential lies. As this volume shows, despite disciplining efforts, the categories exceed and escape the boundaries of binaries. There are many kinds of 'parents', 'families' and 'children'. This spans, as contributors note, from the actual biological relationships to interactions between actors that take on the characteristics of that relationship.

The first and most obvious is child/childhood as a time of life. In transitional justice this category takes on particular salience as it is linked to legal framings and obligations of protection. The debates about how to 'deal with' child soldiers in the aftermath of conflict (Macfarlane, this volume), or the responsibilities to children born of wartime sexual violence (Fisher and Mugaro, Denov Mosseau and Lakor, this volume), are illustrative of the need to take seriously not only the age-bound social category of 'child' but the relational duties it necessitates. This parent-child relationship is often in scholarship reduced to "womenandchildren" (invoking Cynthia Enloe (1990) here) or the mother-child relationship (Saidi this volume). A strength of some contributions here is that the focus remains on the parent-child *relationship*. This category of child/childhood as a time of life can also be complicated by paying attention to those individuals who are legally still children but who may also take on the role of parent either through having a child of their own, or care relations of siblings in the absence of parents.

The nature of the child-parent relationship is also dependent on socio-cultural context. While Minority World / Global North understandings of this relationship are often connected to nuclear families and limited in scope, this is not the only or even most common model or manifestation of this relationship. As authors in the book show while it can be explicitly biological, it can also be expressed through adoption, or through community recognition of children born of wartime rape as Denov, Mosseau and Lakor show in Uganda, and Hasona discusses in Iraq. Relations of care, 'guardianship' perhaps more than parenting, also exceed the biological dyad, and can involve extended family and communities that fulfil (or abnegate) those roles and responsibilities.

Finally, in the plurality of meanings of the parent-child binary, we can find the category of relations of power and domination that reproduce the socialised expectations of parents for their children. As authors show, this can be beneficent, in acknowledging the responsibilities of institutions, governments, or other actors to provide services, nurture and support for those in its care. It can also be problematic, such as when populations are infantilized—made child-like—in paternalistic ways, or when actors such as the state, with a duty of care, abnegate that 'parental' responsibility for their citizens.

However, I want to offer another dimension, less explored in this volume. In moving beyond single categories to considering the parent-child *relationship*, 'child' also references a persistent relational category to 'parents', regardless of age. Even in your own middle-age, you remain someone's child. Even elderly individuals whose own parents have died, remain their children. The persistence of this connection moves the child-parent from time-of-life to an enduring *relational* identity. There is productive potential to push explorations begun in this volume to take seriously what the implications of such a move might be.

Intergener-relationality

Across this volume, contributors have shown the multiple ways in which parents, children and the parent-child relationship are affected by TJ responses in the wake of atrocities and conflict. If, as I note above, the contribution of this volume is attention to the *relational* dynamics between actors, rather than the categories themselves, another way of articulating this is in attending to intergenerational engagements. Attention to intergenerationality is both careful consideration of the lived experiences of different generations *in relation to each other* and recognition that the impacts of these relationships move not only from older-to-younger, but in both directions (see among many others Valladares 2024; Theodoru et al 2023). Again, this can occur both at the level of specific people and their interactions, as well as at the level of state-relations with populations over time.

The careful empirical work of authors in the volume has shown the ways in which the complexities of intergenerational trauma in the wake of violence not only curtails TJ efforts broadly, but also hinders children's participation in TJ processes specifically. Ibhawoh and Alade (this volume) unpack the impacts of Boko Haram's violence in the Lake Chad Basin as it impacts child-sensitive TJ approaches. They identify persistent social hierarchies and stigma, among other factors, as factors that interrupt or prevent meaningful approaches across

generations in seeking justice. In their chapter on gacaca courts in Rwanda post-genocide, Holá, Eichelsheim, Berckmoes, and Richters suggest that adopting an intergenerational approach in TJ would allow both scholars and practitioners to understand both micro-level and broader societal impacts of TJ initiatives themselves, promoting "a more holistic assessment of what 'doing justice after atrocities' means".

Other contributions to the volume draw our attention to the intergenerational impacts in the absence of TJ processes, or when TJ processes do not serve the needs of certain actors and instead reproduces the harmful patriarchal relationships of domination that can characterise parent-child relationships into the domain of state-citizen relations. One site explored in the volume is the harmful manifestation of the parent-child dynamic when colonial states engage with Indigenous peoples. This is shown in both Barreno's careful unpacking of the harmful colonial, patriarchal, and racist processes of the Guatemalan state's engagement with Maya peoples; and Patrick's detailed accounting of the perpetuation of colonial norms through systemic violence of legal systems for child welfare of First Nations children in Canada.

I write these concluding reflections to this volume as a settler on unceded Indigenous lands of so-called Australia, a nation state that has reckoned very poorly with our colonial past (and ongoing present). There has not been a national process of reconciliation, treaty or justice in Australia, and this lack of reckoning has had profound consequences on ongoing intergenerational harms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples here.

The relationship of the Australian Government and Indigenous peoples throughout its history can be seen as a parent-child relationship characterised by paternalistic, infantilising, and violent logics (Macoun 2011). This can be seen through efforts at 'civilising' Indigenous peoples through their wholesale removal to missions, the underpinning logics of child removal that are known now as the 'Stolen Generations', and in the early 2000s the 'Northern Territory Intervention' explicitly premised on the claim of perpetration of sexual abuse by Aboriginal men against children (Macoun 2011; Nakata 2018). These violent, patriarchal policies and their consequences echo those described by Barreno and Patrick in Guatemala and Canada (this volume). It also directs us to consider why, as Hola et al (this volume) call for, attention to intergenerational dynamics as part of taking the parent-child relationship seriously in TJ, can offer paths forward from these enduring harms.

Finally, I want to push these considerations of the dynamics of intergenerational relations in the context of transitional justice further. More than just the relational responsibilities of generations to each other in contexts of shared lived experiences, an attention into the relationality of intergenerational engagements necessitates, in my mind, a close attention to temporalities and relations *across* time and space. Integener-relationality is dependent not only on the immediate relationships of the family or community, or even of national-level justice mechanisms, but to generations that have died, and those yet to be born.

In the context of justice and non-repetition of mass atrocity events, the call of 'Never Again' as a moral injunction against another Holocaust of Jewish people, or in its broader use, against genocide in any form, has a generational invocation. To call for this to never happen again requires an acknowledgement of the violence perpetrated against past (or current) generations and a promise to future generations. While the call of 'never again' is most associated with the Holocaust, as well as genocides like Rwanda and the genocidal violence against Palestinians in Gaza (see Moses 2024), its applicability in TJ contexts is broader.

The temporal dimensions of the moral injunction of 'never again' can be found in several Latin American contexts. A particularly pertinent example is in the response to the Argentinian military dictatorship of the 1970s and 80s. In the wake of the dictatorship, the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons) was established. CONADEP's final report was titled '*Nunca Mas'* (Never Again) and found the government was responsible for the forced disappearance or assassination of approximately 9000 people, although human rights groups say it could be more than three times that number (Crenzel 2009). The *Nunca Mas* report has been consistently in print since the mid 1980s in Argentina; its injunction to memory, accountability, and non-repetition situated firmly in the mutual relations of generations past, present and future.

It is by paying attention to the multi-scalar, multi-temporal *relations* that constitute responses to violence and mass atrocity that intergenerational relations hold promise for understanding the significance of the parent-child relationship in its myriad manifestations.

New possibilities

Contributions to this volume open a much needed, and previously largely overlooked site for both scholarship on TJ and that of critical childhood studies within global politics. Taking seriously both efforts to either resist or reform binaries and to the temporal and relational dimensions of intergenerational engagement offers productive avenues for considering why paying attention to parent-child relations in TJ are significant. From here, paths and questions open before us for new research questions and agendas.

These include the possibility of further explorations that relate 'child' and 'childhoods' to other social identity markers. More attention can be paid to the gendered dimensions of this relationship also. The scrutiny of feminist and queer scholars should be brought into *ongoing dialogue* with those concerned with children and childhoods in TJ. Illustratively of how this can be done well is in Caitlin Biddolph's examination of the non-recognition of queer children by institutional processes (this volume). Another possible avenue is to consider beyond the (important, but over-scrutinised) mother-child relationship, what the gendered dimensions of the parent-child relationship are both in lived encounter and in the practices of institutions in taking on these relational obligations. Here, a close consideration of paternalism and patriarchy as intertwined social technologies of governance (Beier and Berents 2024) could extend discussions on TJ.

Alongside this, the indirect manifestations of the parent-child relationship are also worthy of further scrutiny. Contributions that point to the way in which the state or other institutions take on parental responsibilities –imperfectly, or perhaps at time, with neglect, show the value of this. Beier (this volume) also points us to collective memory-making and memorialisation as powerful sites of reproducing these relationships and their concomitant power relations in the construction of narratives of the past and towards the future. Children are active meaning makers in this and must be taken seriously as such.

Children will always invariably be symbols and pawns in the political contestations over conflict and its aftermath. Contributions to this volume show that they cannot and should not be considered alone. Rather, close attention to the *relational* dimensions of the child-parent relationship in its myriad manifestations offers promise of more nuanced understandings of not only children's lived experiences, but of broader dynamics of power, privilege, and the contestation over meaning in TJ. Taking the categories of both 'parent' and 'child' in their truly plural, multi-scalar, and multi-temporal dimensions can encourage scholars and

practitioners towards more responsive and relevant efforts in the pursuit of justice, care, and responsibility in the wake of shattering violence.

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