Legacies of War

KIMBERLY THEIDON

Violence, Ecologies, and Kin

Legacies of War

Legacies of War

VIOLENCE, ECOLOGIES, AND KIN

Kimberly Theidon

Duke University Press *Durham and London* 2022

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Courtney Leigh Richardson
Typeset in Portrait by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Theidon, Kimberly Susan, author.
Title: Legacies of war : violence, ecologies, and kin / Kimberly Theidon.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2022. |
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021043837 (print)
LCCN 2021043838 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478015772 (hardcover)
ISBN 9781478018384 (paperback)
ISBN 9781478023005 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Rape as a weapon of war—Colombia. | Rape as a weapon of war—Peru. | Children of rape victims—Colombia. | Children of rape victims—Peru. | Restorative justice—Peru. | Restorative justice—Colombia. | Women and war. | Children and war. | BISAC: SOCIAL SCIENCE / Anthropology / Cultural & Social | HISTORY / Latin America / South America
Classification: LCC HV6558 .T445 2022 (print) | LCC HV6558 (ebook) | DDC 362.88309861—dc23/eng/20220114
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021043837
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021043838

Contents

Gratitude

I began writing this book during a sabbatical that coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Somehow amid the turbulence and loss, I found solace in writing. I loved writing this book, revisiting conversations, field notes, friendships, and much more. My spouse, Kathleen Stauffer, has listened to me read every line out loud, and her wit and love of language helped me rediscover the joy of writing.

A Tufts University Collaborates Grant allowed me to think further about many of the issues raised in this book. With my colleague Dyan Mazurana, we convened an author's workshop at the Fletcher School, Tufts University, to discuss "Challenging Conceptions: Children Born of Wartime Rape and Sexual Exploitation." We spent several days with researchers and practitioners from around the globe, each of whom has spent decades working with women who survived wartime rape and with their children who were the result of that violence. Together we aimed to rethink some of the assumptions that echo in the literature, policy, practice, and popular culture about these children and those around them. Those conversation were illuminating, and an edited volume is forthcoming.

I thank Elisabeth Wood and a very insightful anonymous reviewer for comments and suggestions that sharpened my thinking. Libby is a role model and mentor for many of us, and academia is a better place for her brilliant kindness. At Duke University Press, Gisela Fosada and Alejandra Mejía welcomed my manuscript with an attention to detail and great care for the content.

I appreciate Dipali Anumol and Roxani Krystalli very much. They read and provided comments on this book—and provided, as well, living proof that feminist researchers rock.

As I was adding the final touches to this book, I taught my first environmental humanities course at the Fletcher School. My remarkable students made each weekly discussion a cure for Zoom fatigue. For their lively minds, great questions, political commitment, and class finales that spanned the genres of poetry, websites, op-eds, and musical scores, I thank Raunaq Chandrashekar, Ally Friedman, Hyun Kim, Rebecca Mullaley, Kelsey Rowe, Sarah Shahabi, and Rose Wang.

And still more gratitude, desde mi corazón, to the Peruvians and Colombians who have made my research a passion project. I have felt so fortunate over the years, at times gobsmacked, that I was the lucky researcher with whom you shared your time, lives, and stories. How in the world was I so blessed? Mil y más gracías.

INTRODUCTION

In early November 2019, I stood before a packed room in a recently installed gallery space, *Fragmentos*, in Bogotá, Colombia.[1] As part of the 2016 Peace Accords between the Colombian government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the guerrillas had turned in some thirty-seven tons of rifles, pistols, and grenade launchers. These weapons were subsequently melted down in the Colombian military's foundry, and some of that metal made its way to the artist Doris Salcedo. With the help of women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence—each woman wielding a heavy hammer to pound the metal into thin sheets—those weapons were recast as tiles that formed the floor beneath the visitors' feet. Bogotá-based Salcedo had been opposed to leaving those tons

Doris Salcedo, *Fragmentos*, 2019

of weapons intact, concerned they might be commemorated triumphantly after having caused so much pain and death in her country: "I thought, I don't want them to be monumentalized. They don't deserve to be on a pedestal and respected as a grandiose idea that we should all look up to."[2] She chose instead to design *Fragmentos* as an "anti-monument," staunch in her conviction that "weapons and war are not something that should be celebrated."

The packed audience that afternoon included a mix of nongovernmental organization (NGO) representatives, human rights activists, lawyers working within the transitional justice courts, doctors from the Ministry of Health, journalists—and an undetermined number of rape survivors. I began my talk, "Challenging Conceptions: Children Born of Wartime Rape and Sexual Exploitation." As I scanned the audience, I noticed a woman in the second row. She was clearly of *campesina* (peasant) origin, and I was struck by her rigidly straight posture and frozen face. Was I offending her? I was not sure.

There were many questions following my talk, and toward the very end a hand rose in the second row. She asked me for the microphone, which she held in one hand so that she could unwind a wad of tissue with the other. She began sobbing and the room went silent. She had been brutally raped as an adolescent and had told no one, fearful that she would be blamed for what had happened to her. With time, her swelling abdomen gave her secret

away. She explained, "I knew nothing about abortions. I didn't know what to do. I started jumping off chairs, landing on my stomach. I jumped and jumped, hoping I would kill it. It was disgusting to me."[3] Her efforts to abort failed, and she gave birth to a baby boy. She paused in an effort to stop crying, but tears continued to stream down her face. "I could barely stand to look at him. He repulsed me. I didn't want anything to do with him." With time, her mother convinced her to breastfeed the baby, which magnified her disgust. Once again, her body was lent to reproductive labor she hated, this time to feed a baby she wished had never been born. Her son is now an adult, and she was unable to have any more children as a result of the damage done by the rape. She sees him from time to time, but that gives her no comfort. "Everyone has always noticed how short-tempered he is—so aggressive, so angry. I don't know what it is. He is just like that. Everyone knows he's not normal. I don't know, but I think it must be something genetic. Something is wrong with him."

* * *

This woman's son is just one of the tens of thousands of children who have been born worldwide as a result of mass rape campaigns or wartime sexual exploitation.[4] What about these living legacies of rape and sexual violence? What do we know about these children and their life chances? How might we study the intergenerational impact of their violent conceptions? Over a decade ago, in her important edited volume, *Born of War: Protecting Children of Sexual Violence Survivors in Conflict Zones*, R. Charli Carpenter asked, "Why have children born of war by and large remained invisible on the international agenda, and how can this be changed?"[5] This invisibility was even more striking given the amount of attention that has been paid to conflict-related rape and sexual violence over the past three decades. How might we understand this disconnect?

Sex at the Security Council

In March 1994, the United Nations (UN) established a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, mandated to examine the causes and consequences of gender-based violence, especially rape and sexual violence targeting women and girls. Additionally, the UN's ad hoc International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda—countries where conflict-related sexual violence in the early 1990s captured international attention on an unprecedented scale—greatly advanced efforts to codify sexual and

reproductive violence. The jurisprudence resulting from these two tribunals classified systematic rape and other sex crimes as war crimes, crimes against humanity, and forms of genocide. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in 1998, built on and extended those advances, providing a broader basis for prosecuting sexual crimes (including rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity) as violations of international laws on war, genocide, and crimes against humanity. No longer would sexual crimes be considered merely "moral offenses" or "injuries to honor or reputation" as they had been defined in the Geneva Conventions.

On a complementary front, a series of UN Security Council Resolutions focused on the important role women play in conflict prevention, resolution, and peace-building efforts, while simultaneously denouncing the use of rape and sexual violence against women and girls in situations of armed conflict. Collectively known as the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, these resolutions (UNSCR 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, and 2467) demand the complete cessation of all acts of sexual violence by all parties to armed conflicts, with each successive resolution lamenting the slow progress made to date on this issue. In addition to insisting on the need to protect children from rape and sexual violence in armed conflict and postconflict situations, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2122 specifically notes "the need for access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health services, including regarding pregnancies resulting from rape, without discrimination" (2013). There is nothing said about the outcome of those pregnancies, nor about their meaning for the mothers and their children. There is a striking irony here: concurrent with the hypervisibilization of conflict-related sexual violence was the relative silence around two potential outcomes of rape—pregnancies and babies. Some feminists have argued that sexual violence is about power and domination, not sex; one can endorse this important political insight yet still insist that we must recognize the "sex" in sexual violence. Where there is heterosexual intercourse, there are erections, penetrations, ejaculations, and potential impregnations. This is sex, albeit violent, repugnant, and degrading.

In 2019, to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda's foundational Resolution 1325, the UN Security Council proposed Resolution 2467. This resolution recognizes that "women and girls who become pregnant as a result of sexual violence in armed conflict, including those who choose to become mothers, may have different and specific needs,"

and advocates a "survivor-centered approach" that recognizes the needs of survivors of sexual violence for nondiscriminatory access to a full range of services. The original language included references to sexual and reproductive health, triggering vocal opposition from the United States and the "right to life" block—a group I prefer to call "forced birth extremists." When the United States threatened to veto the resolution, it was watered down and the "offending" words omitted.

I suspect that one reason children born of wartime rape were and have, to some extent, remained invisible on the international agenda is because there is no reasonable way to discuss this issue from a "survivor-centered" perspective without addressing women's right to abortion—a woman's right to refuse to lend her body to nine months of reproductive labor. The Women, Peace and Security Agenda, for all its good intentions and accomplishments, is a framework that placates those for whom a more feminist agenda would be unpalatable. "Mainstreaming gender" can be a double entendre, as the feminist critique of policy is mainstreamed into an agenda that does not threaten the status quo of powerful countries or interest groups—a move that may obscure the fact that women and their children (especially their fetuses) may be located within competing rights regimes. One cannot finesse away these competing rights. This calls for an *explicitly* feminist peacebuilding and postconflict reconstruction agenda, understood to include a full range of sexual and reproductive rights, including access to safe and affordable abortions.

Despite the capitulation to conservatives in the United States, UNSCR 2467 is an important step forward on the issue of children born of conflict-related sexual violence, specifically acknowledging this category of victims in paragraph 18 and noting their distinct needs. It also requests that the Secretary-General report to the council "within two years and no later than the end of 2021" on issues related to "the equal rights of all individuals affected by sexual violence in armed conflict, including women, girls and children born of sexual violence in armed conflict" (UNSCR 2467, 2019). This is the first time a UN resolution acknowledges children born of conflict-related sexual violence as rights holders that suffer both related *and* distinct harms from the women and girls who are impregnated following acts of sexual violence. Such acknowledgment is both timely and grounds for vociferous debates. There will be a spate of new research, and feminist ethnographers of postconflict reconstruction had best be vigilant and vocal. The impact of armed conflict is obviously gendered; its ecologies and aftermaths are equally so.

Listening to the women that afternoon triggered memories of many other conversations, some of which haunt me to this day. I felt compelled to offer something more than empathy. This book is my contribution to an interdisciplinary research agenda that can bring the insights of anthropology, feminist and queer studies, and the environmental humanities to bear on developing more compassionate policies regarding children born of wartime rape—and contribute to a gendered recognition of the human and more-than-human legacies of armed conflicts. With an eye to both the debates and the potential avenues for further exploration, I draw upon my research in Peru and Colombia. It was in the highlands of Peru that I first met children born of wartime rape and encountered women's efforts to protect themselves and their children from the initial violence as well as its potentially toxic legacies. I will explore some of those efforts and their consequences before turning to Colombia, the first country to recognize children born of wartime rape as potential recipients of reparations. Moving from the written promises of the 2011 Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras, Law 1448 (Victims and Land Restitution Law) to their implementation has been challenging on many fronts. For this particular victim category, implementation requires the delicate task of balancing a child or young adult's right to know the circumstances of their birth with the rights of mothers who may be adamantly opposed to disclosing this information to anyone. This balance means working not only with the mother-child dyad but also with the fathers, families, and communities who may accept or reject these children due to concerns about multiple forms of "inheritance": rights to land and other forms of property; claims to full membership within kinship networks; and theories about the characteristics that are passed from parent to child, at times making these children seem intrinsically, even biologically, dangerous. I examine theories of transmission and "situated biologies" to consider the impact of multiple environments and their legacies, from a woman's womb to the long reach of war and its ability to "get under the skin."[6]

Under the skin—and into the land, rivers, and mountains that are more than a mute backdrop to humanly authored devastation. It is clear that armed conflict can contribute to an environment that is toxic to human health and well-being, but to leave the argument there is to reduce more-than-human entities to mere resources that exist to satisfy human needs and desires, and to measure their destruction as unfortunate but collateral damage. I wish to move beyond this instrumentalized concern for the more-than-human to consider the interspecies entanglements that make life possible in

the best and the worst of times. I will consider the multiple environments in which conception, pregnancy, and childbirth unfold, environments that may lie far beyond the control of any one woman. From toxic chemicals to land mines, from rivers tinged with blood to angry mountains, there are multiple environments and actors that play a role in reproduction *and* post-war reconstruction. To capture these assemblages, we will travel the Atrato River, one of Colombia's longest and most-polluted waterways. On this river, lifeways and waterways converge; as the Atrato winds through the Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities of Urabá, *the river gives and is life*. In recognition of the multiple forms of violence that have convulsed the region and muddied the river's waters, in 2016 the Colombian Constitutional Court ruled that the Atrato is both a victim of the armed conflict and a river with rights. Surely it is time to consider the human and more-than-human wages of war.

Waqcha: Who Comes to Mind?

When giving talks about children born of wartime rape, I also discuss war orphans to include this vulnerable and at times overlapping group. I ask my listeners to close their eyes and conjure up the first image that comes to mind when they hear "war orphan." The image is usually that of a young child, face smudged with dirt and tears, dressed in ragged clothes, curled up on a flattened piece of discarded cardboard. In addition to the recurrent child-like figure, the image is frequently racialized as well. Conflict-related sexual violence is imagined as something that happens *over there*, to darker-skinned women being abused by darker-skinned men. The politics of representation matter, and "othering" the topic of wartime rape as well is its victims and perpetrators is too common. The emphasis on "conflict-related" sexual violence has both geographic and temporal implications: somewhere else, bracketed in times of extraordinary violence, rather than right here and now as any woman or girl walks down the street—or cowers in her home.

Years of living in Quechua-speaking communities in Ayacucho, Peru, changed *my* conjuring. It was a jolt the first time a middle-aged man stood up in a communal assembly and choked up when referring to the losses he had endured during the internal armed conflict. "Waqchaqa kachkani" (I am an orphan), he uttered through his tears. As I learned, this was not a status that faded when one turned eighteen and left one's childhood years behind. It is a category of being that marks a person on various levels, for life.

"Waqcha" means orphan, and it also means "poor." The conflation is striking. To live without one or both parents is to live with affective and material impoverishment. This term often comes to mind when contemplating children born of war and the ways in which the circumstances of their birth can ripple across their lives. When we speak about "children born of conflict-related sexual violence," we are not speaking about the age of the person per se but rather about the circumstances of their conception and birth—and how those circumstances manifest across their lifetime. The needs of that person will change as they age, but the status is one that will have legacies; these are not always tragic, but they are always there. The age of the person should not be a key factor in whether they qualify for reparations; it is the circumstances of their conception and the concentration of disadvantages and forms of exclusion many of them have faced throughout their life that require remedy. That remedy will in turn depend upon a changing set of needs as the person passes from childhood into their adult life.

I struggled with what terms to use to refer to these children, adolescents, young adults, and elderly people, all of whom could claim the status of *waqcha*, all of whom may be the result of violent conceptions. The most frequent term in the literature is "children born of war"; this is, however, policy speak. "Children born of war" lacks an agent or a perpetrator, and war itself does not impregnate anyone. The language of policy documents may not be the language that allows us to think clearly in our research. Research categories demand greater precision. An anthropologist wants details about age, gender, race, religion, nationality, culture; in short, a researcher needs to incorporate intersectionality into her questions, her categories, and her analysis.[7] The failure to incorporate other identity markers evokes "the danger of a single story." As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie eloquently argues, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."[8] I will share with you numerous stories, some of rejection and pain, others of love and care.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 Salcedo, November 7, 2019.
2 To read the full interview, see Rinaldi, "Peace Monument."
3 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
4 See Carpenter, *Born of War*.
5 Carpenter, *Born of War*, 4.
6 See Lock, "Comprehending the Body"; Clarkin, "Embodiment of War," 424.
7 See Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection*; Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins."
8 Adichie, "Danger of a Single Story."

CHAPTER ONE: BEYOND STIGMA

1 Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI), *Principles for Global Action: Preventing and Addressing Stigma Associated with Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/645636/PSVI_Principles_for_Global_Action.pdf.
2 See Hacking, "Looping Effects."
3 Theidon, "Hidden in Plain Sight," 194.
4 See Wood, "Variation in Sexual Violence during War," among others.
5 See Wood, "Variation in Sexual Violence during War."
6 See Mazurana, "Role of Spirituality."
7 This section draws upon my 2015 article "Hidden in Plain Sight."
8 See Theidon, *Entre prójimos*; Theidon, *Intimate Enemies*.
9 See Wood, "Variation in Sexual Violence during War," for a discussion of repertoires of violence.
10 For further discussion of children born of wartime rape in Peru, see Theidon, "Death of the Secret."
11 Das, *Life and Words*, 54.
12 Olivera Simic, personal communication, September 16, 2017.