
The new book, The Gender of Reparations: Unsettling Sexual Hierarchies While Redressing Human Rights Violations, edited by Ruth Rubio-Marín, is a powerful interdisciplinary exploration of gendered reparations in transitional countries.1 Through a gendered perspective, it not only dives deep into the human rights violations experienced by women,2 it also endeavors to present “engendered” reparations as a partial solution to the harms experienced during conflict. Taking countries such as South Africa, Ghana, and Chile as examples, The Gender of Reparations is a well-ordered collection divided into eight chapters with each author contributing a separate and distinct piece. Although it is clear that the authors in the collection begin where Rubio-Marín’s previous book, What Happened to the Women?, ended, the new book is fairly accessible to readers without much knowledge of reparations.3

While the reader will benefit from reading any chapter as a standalone piece, reading it from beginning to end is truly moving. A common thread throughout the book is that violence against women is perpetrated before, during, and after conflict. Before conflict, violence against women is normative, accepted, and ordered. During conflict, there is an abrupt discontinuity with that norm in the form of extreme and unimaginable violence. In the post-conflict period, war is often followed, unfortunately, by heightened violence against women as the new accepted norm. Rubio-Marín has structured the collection in a similar fashion, so that the reader who reads from start to finish has some glimpse into the tri-part terror. The beginning chapters spend considerable time laying out the normative cultural perspectives of gender in conflict countries. These chapters are followed by pieces that, in addition to addressing a particular

1. The book contributors, and I in this essay, use the term “transitional country” to refer to nations transitioning to democracy after a period characterized by extensive and pervasive human rights violations.
2. The book also includes, to some extent, the experiences of men and boys where possible. For example, Duggan and Jacobson briefly address sexual violence against men in their contribution (p. 128).
facet of reparations, describe in detail the horror experienced primarily by women and girls, but also men and boys, during conflict. At times, it is difficult to finish some passages. It becomes impossible not to empathize with the victims, be appalled by the violence, and desperately desire some resolution and justice. Finally, the reader climbs out of those chapters to arrive, with some relief, at pieces that are focused on solutions and the transformative potential of reparations.

**INTRODUCTION**

In the beginning chapters, the authors introduce the book’s thesis and provide general background for the reader. The introduction, written by Rubio-Marín, addresses two important questions. The first is, why focus on reparations over other judicial procedures? Reparations are defined as “the effort to restore someone (or something) to the state it was before harm was done,” implying “a structured and procedurally just way of trying to redress or compensate harm.” Reparations take the form of economic compensation, restitution, rehabilitation, and symbolic measures administered at the national level. In contrast, judicial adjudication through national or international tribunals and courts render individualized justice on a case-by-case basis (p. 4). Rubio-Marín argues that the administrative nature of reparations programs makes them more suited to the task of addressing harms experienced systematically by a wide swath of the population (p. 4). Moreover, reparations programs compensate everyone in a particular category of human rights violations in the same manner, promoting egalitarian notions throughout society. Additionally, in addressing rights violations, reparations programs are rights-promoting and rights-enhancing (p. 4). Reparations programs also have the benefit of sparing victims the navigation of the judicial system, with its high costs of litigation and evidence gathering as well as the painful experiences of presenting evidence and cross-examination (p. 5). In regards to gender specifically, women often face these barriers to the legal system more acutely in transitional countries (p. 5). Accordingly, reparations can be powerful tools in the transition period after conflict has ended.

The second question addressed by the introduction is, why focus on women when the concept of gender is not so narrowly confined? From the start, Rubio-Marín asserts that the “concerns about gender and gender sensitivity in this . . . [context] . . . refer to the disparities and inequities in access, power, opportunities, and rights experienced by women across a wide spectrum of spheres” (p. 4) (emphasis added). Rubio-Marín contrasts the increased use of reparations with the assertion that reparations programs have not yet been designed to be fully fair and efficient in redressing the gender-based violence experienced by women during conflict (p. 1). Thus far, reparations have adopted a gender-neutral approach as a way to achieve goals of “recognition, civic trust,

and social solidarity” for both men and women (p. 3). However, women experience conflict and participate in the transitional post-conflict process in distinct ways (p. 2). Accordingly, Rubio-Marín proposes that “engendering transitional justice” can be a more powerful and successful approach (p. 2). Thus, Rubio-Marín prepares the reader for the chapters that follow, asserting that gender-sensitive reparations programs are a necessity in the post-conflict transition period and have the potential to make positive transformative impacts on women.

However, this introduction lacks a short and basic discussion defining reparations and describing the current state of reparations programs, which would be helpful to readers not versed in reparations literature. If the introduction included a more robust account of past reparations programs, the reader could more fully appreciate just how inadequately gender-based violence is currently redressed during the transitional period. For example, although there has been some incorporation of gender sensitivity in reparations programs, most, if not all, programs prioritize violations experienced primarily by men, including “illegal detention, torture, summary execution, and disappearances” (pp. 64, 218). Violations primarily experienced by women such as rape and sexual violence are sometimes not even recognized as crimes requiring reparations (p. 218). Basic background context like this would have been enormously helpful and would have further illuminated the urgency for engendering reparations.

“How do we conceptualize harms to women with an eye to the demands of reparative justice? How must we think about harms that come about in and because of conflict from the point of view of moral obligations to repair human lives, relationships, communities, and nations?” (p. 22)

Margaret Urban Walker takes a nuanced look at violence, both sexual and otherwise, against women as civilians, combatants, and political activists. She recognizes the impact that normative concepts of masculinity and femininity have on the nature of violence committed and the reparations process that follows. In addressing the questions above, Walker proposes an “open-ended and adaptable” scheme through a four-prong argument. First, coercion and violence against women are normative. Second, the concept of a continuum of violence, in which oppression and violence against women fluctuates, is only partially helpful in conceptualizing violence experienced during conflict. Third, violence against women can usefully be analyzed through eight dimensions. And fourth, categories of harms help reparations program designers and researchers ask the right questions (p. 22).

From the outset, Walker recognizes that “[g]ender norms are differentiated both within and between social groups of unequal privilege,” and, as a result, forms of violence and the impact of violence on victims are shaped by “differing social locations created by class, race, ethnicity, indigeneity, and other factors” (pp. 25-26). In light of this important observation, Walker argues that since
forms of violence and oppression experienced by women are normative, it has been difficult for both men and women to distinguish these norms as atrocities (p. 26). The norms are legitimized by concepts of masculinity that are exacerbated during conflict when men demonstrate their power to other men through violence against women. During conflict, the severity and types of violence against women escalate far beyond the oppression in the pre-conflict period, particularly because rape is often employed as a weapon of war. The higher levels of violence will often lead to a new heightened norm of violence against women in the post-conflict period, evidenced by women’s increased vulnerability to instances of domestic violence (p. 31). Reparations designers must take heed of this important point. Despite the nuanced analysis of the concept of masculinity in conflict countries as a legitimizing force for violence against women, Walker misses an opportunity to address concerns about imposing Western sensibilities on developing and transitional countries in her analysis of cultural norms in conflict countries in pre-conflict settings. However, Walker takes note of cross-cultural similarities in concepts of womanhood in the third part of her argument (p. 35).

According to Walker, the concept that violence against women is experienced on a continuum, where violence exists before conflict and then increases during and after conflict, does not adequately capture the “catastrophic discontinuity” of the ordered oppression of pre-conflict life (p. 29). To illuminate this break, she presents eight dimensions of violence against women that must be considered when crafting reparations programs. A few are especially worth highlighting, such as “women and property.” When designing reparations programs, it is vital to redress not only the transgressions of sexual violence but also the property and economic losses as well. While the sexual violence against women during conflict is simply horrific, great care must be taken not to focus solely on the sexual harms against women in the transition period (p. 40). Women also lack the control over property that men enjoy, which makes repairing their economic productive power not only essential to their survival, but also possibly transformative in changing social norms around female equality (p. 40). A second notable dimension is “women as/and social capital.” Robert Putnam’s work on the importance of social capital in American society is widely read and cited. In transition countries, social capital is equally important, and

5. Walker discusses that much of the sexual violence against women during conflict is not primarily a result of desires for sex, but desires to feel manly, to show dominance over other men within their own group, and also to prove that the opponents cannot adequately protect their own women from violence thereby using control over “their women” as a war weapon (pp. 27-28).

6. The eight dimensions include: male exchanges through violence toward women; symbolism of gender and punishment of women’s (and men’s) gender transgressions; specifically sexual or reproductive coercion, harm, torture, and mutilation; targeting women’s mothering; women and property; women as/and social capital; quandaries of shame and exclusion; and women’s insecure testimonial positions (pp. 33-46).

rebuilding social capital during the transition period must have a strong presence in reparations design. Women contribute immensely to social capital in their communities through labor and social connections (p. 41). Since the goal during conflict is to disrupt the social capital of villages and communities, women are a prominent target for violence. Sexual violence undermines cultural values and destroys social bonds (p. 41). But conflict also destroys the country’s infrastructure, which breaks community bonds and deteriorates social capital by inhibiting women’s ability to be economically productive, creating competition for scarce resources, and isolating individuals (p. 41).

A third dimension of violence against women is connected to the legal battle for redress, “women’s insecure testimonial position” (p. 45). Rape victims are often shamed and ostracized in their communities if others are aware of the incident, and women have good reason to fear reprisal from perpetrators who continue to live nearby (p. 45). As if these were not significant enough barriers to legal redress, women are often not allowed to give testimony in regards to specific matters or without the permission of men, even if they find the resources to pursue legal redress (p. 46). Because of these access barriers, violations of human rights are committed with impunity (p. 46). It is easy to see, even with just the three examples highlighted here, how the design process becomes quickly complicated and challenging when redressing human rights violations with a gendered perspective.

Finally, to help illuminate the interaction between gender, violence, and harm with respect to women, Walker elucidates four categories of violence: gender-normative violence and harm; sex-, reproductive-, and care-specific violence; gender-skewed violence and harm; and gender-multiplied violence and harm. The latter two categories are particularly interesting because they highlight gendered harms that are not sexual in nature. “Gender-skewed” forms of harm are those which women encounter more than men, though the violence is not specifically targeted at women. For example, because men have already been conscripted, abducted, killed, or otherwise been forced to leave the community, the destruction of home sites, forced displacement, and removal to refugee camps are harms that disproportionately affect women (p. 51). “Gender-multiplied” forms of violence are those in which women suffer more than their male counterparts as a result of the same act of violence (p. 52). For example, in societies in which women have few property rights, harm to property is more acutely felt by women than men who are more readily able to seek restitution. These categories help to create a more nuanced view of the unique impacts felt by women during war and conflict.

I elaborate at such length on Walker’s essay because she so clearly illustrates how quickly acts of violence compound on women in particular and unique ways. Also, importantly, she is undoubtedly aware that boys, girls, and men also experience violence during conflict in gender-specific ways (p. 57). Her analysis of gender and conflict violence illustrates that it is essential, but also difficult and complex, to take into account the gendered effects of violence.
on women, men, girls, and boys when constructing reparations programs.

“A[n agenda for ‘engendering’ reparations . . . ” (p. 66)

Rubio-Marín also authors the book’s second chapter, “The Gender of Reparations in Transitional Societies.” Arguing that reparations programs should have both individual and societal aims, she avers that there are four necessary steps to achieve due recognition to victims: first, recognition of violations of victims’ rights; second, state acknowledgement of responsibility for rights violations; third, recognition of harms resulting from the rights violations; and fourth, provision of aid to victims to help cope with harms and subversion of the “structures of subordination” that led to the rights violations (p. 66).

One of the great strengths of this chapter is the focus on the transformative potential of reparations to “unsettle preexisting gender hierarchies” (p. 70). For example, engendering reparations will involve choosing forms of reparations that will “stick to women’s hands” such as microcredit, symbolic reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition (p. 104). Further, Rubio-Marín states, it is essential not to simply compensate women for the losses resulting directly from conflict, but to compensate them for what they would have lost under a nondiscriminatory system (p. 101). Engendering reparations requires that women and men are compensated for harms both sexual and non-sexual in nature (p. 100). And yet, the author recognizes that while the future-oriented transformative aspects of engendered reparations are important, providing immediate relief to victims should not be sacrificed for those goals (p. 107).

While Rubio-Marín’s agenda for engendering reparations takes into account multiple facets of the problems program designers face, she does not adequately address the logistics of reparations provision for impoverished transitional countries. Welfare states in developing countries face abundant issues of funding simple welfare state programs, such as unemployment or basic education. The next question that must be addressed in response to the agenda set forth in this chapter is, how can a transitional country implement effective reparations programs while balancing priorities to rebuild national infrastructure and offer basic general welfare programs to all citizens? In any adequate response to this question, this book makes clear, the priorities of a nation will have gender-specific impacts, and those should be considered when constructing all transition programs.

I. GENDER-SPECIFIC ATROCITIES COMMITTED AND EXPERIENCED DURING CONFLICT

In the book’s middle chapters, the authors include detailed discussions of the actual violence women experience during conflict in their analysis of reparations. Many passages are difficult to read for any mildly compassionate reader. The writing style is highly effective, forcing the reader to understand the irreparable nature of many of the harms committed. It is difficult to fathom how
recent reparations programs designated these violations low priority for reparations, if the programs even recognized them at all. Accordingly, the vivid descriptions of torture press upon the reader the necessity of reparations that are transformative in the lives of women.

“As a result of the systematic and exceptionally violent gang rape of thousands of Congolese women and girls, doctors in the DRC are now classifying vaginal destruction as a crime of combat . . .” (p. 126 n.21) (citation omitted).

Colleen Duggan and Ruth Jacobson author the third chapter on implementing reparations for sexual and reproductive violence. The authors define sexual violence as physical and psychological violence carried out through sexual acts or by targeting sexuality, including “practices such as rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution and sexual exploitation, forced marriage, sexual torture or mutilation, and sexual humiliation.” (p. 125) Reproductive violence, accompanying and intensifying sexual violence, is carried out through acts of “forced pregnancy, abortion, or sterilization” and interference with “men’s or women’s biological ability to reproduce or effectively parent” (p. 125). Duggan and Jacobson spend much time illuminating the “laundry list of horrors” in times of conflict when forms of aggression are specifically chosen for their ability to “achieve the maximum terrorization of communities and suffering and humiliation of the victim” (pp. 125-26). This results in gender-specific physical, emotional, and material harms that must be addressed by reparations programs. For example, in addition to vaginal rape, victims will often also be subjected to anal rape, insertion of weapons or broken bottles, vaginal injury due to lack of lubrication, medical complications such as fistulas and sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV), and in the case of many young girls, fatal injuries (p. 126). Following the actual experience, women and girls experience shame and guilt for having been defiled through their subjection to a sexual act outside of marriage. This is then intensified by the stigma and ostracism placed on victims by their communities, members of which view the victims as unmarriageable and damaged, and even as having cooperated with the enemy (p. 128). Astonishingly, this is just one example of the compounded gender-specific harms experienced by women and girls. Cases of genital mutilation, electric shocks, and forced sex slavery—in conjunction with instances of non-sexual violence such as forced recruitment into fighting forces or creation of widows who lack the ability to be economically productive—are all human rights violations to which the authors seek a solution.

In addressing these multiple and complex traumas, the authors suggest that three “modest yet significant” goals can be accomplished through reparations programs. Reparations, first of all, may be able to provide some level of compensation and rehabilitation to victims of sexual and reproductive violence (p. 124). Reparations may also be able to play an important role in preventing
and stopping the chain reaction following sexual and reproductive violence, as
discussed above, including difficulties of social reintegration, lowered status,
issues of economic survival, and severely damaged eligibility for marriage (p.
124). Third, discussions surrounding reparations design might encourage
structural reforms toward gender equality (p. 124).

In light of these goals, the chapter provides a strong introduction to, and
analysis of, the many reparation possibilities for victims of sexual and
reproductive violence. Duggan and Jacobson use qualitative research from seven
countries8 to provide a background of how previous reparations programs have
(or have not) addressed sexual violence, stating the best practices of program
components such as which violations to include as reparations triggers,
testimony requirements, and which benefits (material and nonmaterial) are the
most helpful, while focusing on gendered impacts and transformative potential.
In particular, the authors provide a well-argued discussion broadly interpreting
one form of reparation, guarantees of non-repetition,9 as a platform for structural
and legal reforms (p. 155). They note that legal reforms will have an “immediate
and dramatic” effect by moving sexual and reproductive violence to the national
agenda and from codification to implementation, in addition to addressing the
harms experienced by victims (p. 156). They further highlight laws on abortion,
inheritance and property ownership, and violence against women and girls, as
particularly urgent spheres for legal reform related to the reparations of victims
of sexual and reproductive violence. Thus, the chapter contrasts the harms to be
redressed and the modes of reparations providing relief.

“[S]omeone told the rebels that we were in the mosque. . . . They located us,
killed six people, chopped off my sister’s head, raped me, tied me up and
amputated my foot . . . for four days I was there alone and maggots started
coming from my foot . . . Later I was rescued by . . . soldiers who took me to
the hospital where I learnt I had become pregnant and had to do an
abortion.” (p. 381)

An eight-year-old girl heading her own household, thirty young girls in an
enemy camp forced to beat another girl to death, soldiers beating babies and
small children against a tree so many times that not only did the children die, but
so too did the tree (pp. 166-67, 169). Dyan Mazurana and Khristopher Carlson,
in their contribution to the book, grapple with how to redress atrocities like these
committed against children. Mazurana and Carlson successfully integrate
individual experiences and generalized statistics of violence into the broader
analysis of how to use reparations as a method to recognize and rectify the
violence experienced by children. For example, in the past decade, “2 million

8. The countries included are South Africa, Guatemala, Peru, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste,
Ghana, and Canada.

9. Guarantees of non-repetition, offered by governments, can encompass many types of
in institutional reform to ensure prevention of future gross human rights violations (p. 116-17).
children have been killed in situations of armed conflict, 6 million children have been permanently disabled or injured, more than 14 million children have been displaced, and more than 1 million have been orphaned and separated from their parents.” (p. 166) The reader is forced to become acutely aware of the problems that reparations must seek to address and the enormous difficulty of that task.

Another of the chapter’s strengths is that the writers recognize that children, and girls specifically, experience conflict violence in distinct ways. Girls’ mobility resulting from traditional divisions of labor takes them farther from the safety of their homes and makes them particularly vulnerable to certain acts, including abductions and forced marriages (pp. 170-71). The violent experiences of girls during conflict are distinct from the experiences of women (p. 170). Girls are targeted in particular for their young age, hoped-for virginity, and low sexual disease rates, as well as for the impact on the community of sexual violence against young girls (pp. 170-71). Accordingly, this distinct experience poses unique obstacles for reparation provision.

Mazurana and Carlson aver that national laws must be brought into compliance with international laws regarding the rights of children. It is essential that children have access to reparations and that discrimination against children is not reproduced and reinforced through reparations programs (p. 175). As one method of creating nondiscriminatory programs, the authors assert that child survivors should be included in the reparations design process. Further, using tables to highlight which categories of harm experienced by children have been addressed by reparation programs in the past, the authors emphasize that the programs best suited to addressing child survivors’ needs have yet to be implemented. There are many obstacles to achieving beneficial reparations for children, including lack of reparations triggers that include children as beneficiaries, age and time limitations that inhibit access to reparations, and failure to recognize children as potential victims (pp. 184-89).

As part of an ideal and comprehensive reparations program for children, Mazurana and Carlson propose the establishment of boys’ and girls’ centers. The centers would serve as recognition of children’s basic right to a safe community space, help facilitate reparation delivery, and allow girls especially to develop strong and safe relationships with each other (pp. 206-07). The promising proposal provides a transition to the following chapters focusing on specific modes of reparations.

II. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Following the chapters that plunged the reader into the atrocities committed during conflict, the next contributions focus more narrowly on particular modes of reparations. For example, symbolic reparations, including monuments, days of remembrance, and public apologies, are proposed in chapter

10. Countries highlighted in the table are: Argentina, Chile (1990), Chile (2003), Guatemala, Peru, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Timor-Leste.
seven, and microfinance is proposed as a delivery mechanism for compensatory reparations in chapter six.

“In contexts of massive human rights violations . . . neither international legal remedies nor the domestic judicial system are capable of coping with thousands – hundreds of thousands, in certain cases – of potential claimants . . . .” (p. 262).

Chapter five serves as a transition, albeit a long one, written by Rubio-Marín as well as Clara Sandoval and Catalina Díaz. The chapter, which perhaps would have best followed chapter two because of its discussion on defining beneficiaries, focuses on the process of repairing family members and specifically on the violations most frequently qualifying for reparations including “arbitrary, illegal, or extrajudicial[] killings, torture, disappearance, and arbitrary detention.” (p. 218) The chapter is split into two unequal portions. The first part focuses on the international jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR). While the discussion about the international jurisprudence is interesting and results in a nice comparison with best practices coming from the IACtHR, it seems a bit out of place in a book on reparations. Moreover, previously in the book, several authors, including Rubio-Marín, already discussed why reparations are preferable to individual justice through tribunals, making such a lengthy discussion of tribunals a distraction from the heart of the book.

The second part focuses on domestic national reparations programs in Argentina, Chile, South Africa, Peru, Guatemala, and Sierra Leone. The authors emphasize the importance of defining family members not as heirs and dependants but as victims in their own right, broadening the scope of beneficiaries of reparations, and structuring compensation and benefits so that the needs of victims are reflected and addressed. The section stresses that not only are the rights violations that trigger reparations primarily experienced by men, but also that women and children often derive their only compensation through reparations provided to men. Finally, the chapter ends with the important observation that when beneficiaries are multiplied as suggested in the chapter, there are feasibility concerns for providing comprehensive reparations. This issue is partly taken up by the two contributions that follow.

“If . . . far from having to choose between reparations programs and development programs, one could design a reparations program in a way that serves developmental goals, the advantages of moving forward immediately become plain.” (p. 293)

In her essay, Anita Bernstein looks at the intersection of tort theory, microfinance, and gender equality to demonstrate the transformative potential of
reparations. Pecuniary reparations in some countries have taken the form of a monetary transfer to individuals. For example, in South Africa, post-apartheid cash payments to victims totaled 5.5 million USD (p.292). However, many transitional countries do not have the resources to undertake a similar approach (p. 292). Thus, in recognizing this, Bernstein proposes microfinance as a tool to make it possible for transitional countries to offer immediate material compensation for violations without waiting for the nation to adequately develop enough resources on its own.

Bernstein begins her argument with tort theory before discussing the engendering potential of microfinance. Tort theory recognizes that monetary compensation is only part of what tort law seeks to accomplish (p. 297). Tort law also allows the victim to voice a complaint and the government to make a finding of fault to officially recognize the harm (p. 298). The government can facilitate this process, in addition to recognizing its own vicarious liability of the harm (p. 298). The goals of tort law and reparations are similar. However, monetary compensation is not always possible or desirable. Thus, Bernstein argues that microfinance is preferable to cash transfers because microfinance enables safe keeping of the transfer, provides possibilities for saving, facilitates expansion of credit, creates routes to social services for women, and aids in social and institutional building. Additionally, Bernstein notes, microfinance is a politically viable option (pp. 308-10). Finally, she points to research concluding that microfinance can have a transformative impact on gender equality (p. 318).

As the shortest contribution in the collection, the slightly unsatisfactory chapter missed opportunities for further elaboration and exploration. First, Bernstein does not adequately address critics of microfinance, relegating the arguments of detractors largely to a footnote and assuring the reader that “microcredit” is really the bad guy about which microfinance critics are concerned. Second, Bernstein’s suggestion that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) may be able to help implement the microfinance programs begs to be analyzed in the context of the vast quantities of literature questioning the impacts of NGOs and international funding (pp. 305-06). While ultimately I agree that NGOs may have a role in implementing reparations programs like microfinance,
the subject merits deeper discussion. In the end, however, this chapter suggests that microfinance should be a primary goal of reparations programs as a way to make compensation “stick to the hands” of women, which could be an innovative starting point for further research.

“The range of popular assumptions about what women are and what they do in times of conflict . . . directly impacts on who gets remembered and how we remember individuals after the war.” (p. 332)

Brandon Hamber and Ingrid Palmary add the last substantial, and exceedingly interesting, contribution to the book, “Gender, Memorialization, and Symbolic Reparations,” which addresses how women are remembered and commemorated in the post-war period through symbolic reparations. Symbolic reparations are affordable components in a comprehensive reparations program and can take the form of commemoration days, museums and parks, reburials and rituals, individual and collective apologies, plaques, tombstones, and monuments as well as other appropriate undertakings (pp. 324-25, 328-29). The authors use great examples and illustrations to demonstrate their argument that symbolic reparations have gendered impacts on how women are viewed and remembered, thus giving symbolic reparations great transformative potential.

Yet, symbolic reparations are criticized for reinforcing and perpetuating oppressive gender stereotypes of women and women’s role during conflict and in the home (pp. 332, 341). In addition to illuminating the process of how symbolic reparations can perpetuate such stereotypes, the authors also investigate symbolic reparations as a “unique opportunity” as transformative instruments. Symbolic reparations have such potential because they can offer abstract representations that do not stigmatize female victims of sexual and reproductive violence and allow for victim participation in their creation (pp. 345, 354). There are several obstacles, however, before countries can take advantage of the “unique opportunity.” For example, it is difficult to conceptualize monuments collectively dedicated to women without utilizing gender stereotypes, but in contrast, individualized monuments tend to be event driven with masculine gender overtones (pp. 349-51). Evident in the authors’ further discussion of apologies, in many ways, reparations must be both individual and collective in nature for maximum benefit.

The policy recommendations that follow the theoretical discussion in the chapter are a thoughtful, not to mention practical, contribution. This chapter, more so than the others, lays out very specific and concrete recommendations, including how to increase the positive impacts of symbolic reparations and considerations for reparations delivery (pp. 356, 365). Just a sampling of the policy recommendations reveals discerning proposals. One such recommendation is that public gestures, including apologies and monument unveilings, should be accompanied by substantial explanations of the facts and abuses that occurred generally, and specifically affecting women, and how these
manifest in society. A second recommendation is that symbolic reparations should seek to render the “so-called ‘private’ and ‘apolitical’ lives of women in conflict as public and political, as well as to reinforce the agency of women” (pp. 378-79). In writing the chapter, not only did the authors present why it is imperative for symbolic reparations to be designed and implemented with a gendered perspective, but they also offered pragmatic implementation measures as well, thereby providing a fitting end to this portion of the collection.

CONCLUSION

The final concluding chapter by Rubio-Marín was previously published in a separate edited volume. In many ways it is a nice big-picture conclusion tying together the threads from each chapter. Rubio-Marín emphasizes the importance of collective reparations as well as the importance of recognizing women specifically as beneficiaries of reparations programs. She recapitulates Walker’s argument on the continuum of violence and the abrupt break of normalcy experienced during conflict (p. 392). And finally, she concludes by re-emphasizing the importance of engendering reparations in a way that can transform the society in which victims live (p. 394). She never loses sight of the complexity of the task ahead that will include combining several components, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, and symbolic reparations. Rightly so, Rubio-Marín encourages the reader not to think of reparations as a conclusion or an end, but as part of the “ongoing struggle” for a more inclusive democracy (p.399).

Taken as a whole, the volume is a great collection for many reasons. Perhaps most importantly, the authors keep the focus on the experiences of women, men, girls, and boys in conflict countries; the necessity of addressing the harms and rights violations that they have been subjected to; and providing real solutions through engendered reparations programs. The volume does this first by taking Rubio-Marín’s book, What Happened to the Women?, as a beginning point, using the largely qualitative data and case studies collected there to explore how reparations programs can better address the gender-specific harms felt by victims. The book also benefits enormously from the distinct, yet connected, nature of each of the contributions. It is clear that each author is aware of the discussions of other authors and is careful to both reference their work but also to offer a separate contribution, not straying too far from the topic at hand. This structure makes the collection feel like a cohesive read from beginning to end as opposed to a disjointed set of articles. Moreover, it allows the authors to pack a big punch with the amount of information, theory, and recommendations they are able to include within the four hundred pages.

However enjoyable the collection was in its entirety, there are a few points

of criticism worth making. First, while increasing the visibility of both sexual and economic violations committed against women is essential, assessment of the gender-specific impact of violence on men and boys in conflict is also necessary. Although men have often historically been the central concern of reparations programs, a gendered analysis would expose topics previously avoided, such as sexual assault on males during conflict. Second, a few of the proposals presented, such as microfinance as a tool for reparations delivery, need more scrutiny and require more research. Yet, I agree with Walker’s statement that while more research is necessary, there should not be any delay in providing available redress to victims in transition countries (p. 21). Third, given this necessity for redress, the authors missed an important opportunity to further impress on the reader the inadequacy of past reparations programs in addressing women as victims. The authors so brilliantly illustrate the harms experienced by women and the transformative possibilities of engendered reparations that a reader new to human rights violations and reparations cannot fully appreciate how inadequately past reparations programs have acknowledged these violations. More information including definitions, statistical data, and the basic background histories of tribunals and reparations programs would quickly remedy the problem. Nonetheless, the book is largely accessible to readers new to human rights and reparations literature, and the interdisciplinary collection has much to offer researchers versed in the topic as well.

In fact, the interdisciplinary aspect of the book adds great depth to the collection. It allows the contributions of each researcher to culminate in a way that addresses several issues from the theoretical to the pragmatic. Not only does it provide a more comprehensive analysis of reparations from the perspectives of many disciplines, there are starting points within the book from which researchers in other disciplines can leap. There are obvious connections for academics in legal studies, sociology, development studies, gender studies, and public policy. But there are perhaps less obvious connections as well. For example, how communities remember women through symbolic reparations is full of possibilities for historians to study the social creation of public memories of public rapes, killings, and violence. Research like this is important for our understanding of how versions of history are perpetuated and the impact that has on societal norms and women in transitional countries.

Finally, the book should be applauded for its incredibly nuanced and subtle analysis of gender. It recognizes women as more than just passive victims and recognizes men as victims as well (pp. 168, 128). At every turn, the authors are

17. See generally Slawomir Kapralski, The Jedwabne Village Green? The Memory and Counter-Memory of the Crime, 18 Hist. & Memory 179, 179-94 (2006); Eva Wolentarska-Ochman, Collective Remembrance in Jedwabne Unsettled Memory of World War II in Postcommunist Poland, 18 Hist. & Memory 152, 152-78 (2006); Eva Wolentarska-Ochman, Response to Slawomir Kapralski, 18 Hist. & Memory 195, 195-97 (2006). These articles collectively show an example of historians discussing how “genuine memories” of atrocities are created by communities in post-conflict settings, in particular how a Polish community remembers the massacre of the town’s Jewish community during World War II.
aware that gendered norms intersect with class, race, religion, and ethnicity. The writers are keenly aware of the unique impact each country’s culture has on how violence is experienced by victims. Not only is the theoretical analysis intelligent and insightful, the book notably offers pragmatic proposals for engendering reparations. Going forward, it is painfully apparent that horrific acts of violence with gender-specific impacts have gone inadequately addressed for too long. The Gender of Reparations offers a wonderful insight into the atrocities of conflict as well as sensible proposals for engendering reparations. The book is a significant contribution in moving toward reparations programs that satisfactorily redress human rights violations experienced by women.

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