

# Reviews

***Conflict-Related Violence against Women: Transforming Transition***, Aisling Swaine  
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 332 pp., \$99.99 cloth, \$34.99 paper.

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Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against women, particularly rape committed by armed actors, has received significant attention from policymakers, practitioners, and scholars over the last decade. While this attention is welcome, as it has led to various efforts aimed at preventing and responding to such crimes, it has eclipsed the other harms women suffer in conflict-affected environments. This broader category of conflict-related violence against women (CRVAW) is the focus of Aisling Swaine's recent book, and her overarching aim is to empirically and theoretically expand our understanding of the form, function, and nature of CRVAW. Of course, feminist international relations scholars have given some attention to the harms beyond what Swaine refers to as "strategic rape." However, the breadth and depth of Swaine's analysis, combined with extensive experiential knowledge that she has gained as a practitioner delivering humanitarian aid in conflict-affected environments, sets this book apart and holds the promise to influence both scholarship and practice.

Swaine's three case studies on Liberia, Northern Ireland, and Timor-Leste are well chosen for developing a theory of CRVAW

and evaluating how effectively transitional justice responds to it, since each site experienced and responded to different types of violence against women and employed different transitional justice mechanisms. Each case study also offers unique and valuable insights into CRVAW other than rape (Northern Ireland), the continuum of violence between conflict and peace (Liberia), and the labeling and redefinition of violence after conflict (Timor-Leste).

Swaine's data comes from interviews with service providers in the three sites as well as from archival records. Thus, somewhat controversially, the voices of the victims/survivors are only heard through the voices of others. On one hand, this risks compromising Swaine's aim to expose harms that are not commonly acknowledged, for as long as these women's voices find no direct expression, there may still be harms left invisible. On the other hand, the decision not to expose these women to further harm through re-traumatization, especially in places where support services may not be available, is ethically sound. Moreover, as Swaine maintains, and as Elisabeth Jean Wood has also argued regarding the ethical challenges of field

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research, CRSV is an increasingly popular research topic, and there are many more ethically justifiable ways to gather narratives on harms without causing further trauma.

The book exposes the complex, fluid, context-specific, and multifarious nature of CRVAW, which does not start and stop at the formal edges of conflict. Swaine employs the term “harm” to encompass a broad range of types of violence not necessarily “tethered to predetermined categories of violation stipulated in law and policy” (p. 12) and to include harassment, duress, and loss as well as more obvious physical violence. In so doing, she helps address the limitations in our understanding of CRVAW and builds a persuasive theory of violence.

Swaine also shows that the heretofore limited understanding of CRVAW has adversely affected the ability to respond appropriately to the harms suffered. Specifically, international legal frameworks and transitional justice mechanisms have privileged some harms above others and have failed to engage comprehensively with gender or gendered violence. As she rightly argues, beyond limiting the scope for justice and accountability, retaining a narrow focus on CRVAW “means sustaining the structural inequalities that cause the violence” (p. 265). She therefore calls for policy, law, and practice to acknowledge the breadth and complexity of CRVAW.

While Swaine’s prescriptions are necessary if all harms are to be addressed, and the relationship between them and structural factors better understood, whether and how this can be done is less clear. This is particularly the case when the responsibility is, in part, laid at the feet of international and national actors engaged in post-conflict societies—actors that operate from within the very structures, cultures, and organizations that reflect and

reinforce the patriarchal norms and practices (and thus the gendered inequalities) that they are urged to address. Indeed, a focus on the strategic rape discourse rather than on “the conflict to private violence nexus” (p. 286) is not only easier but strategically advantageous, avoiding, as it does, self-critical reflection and instead placing the focus squarely on the extraordinary, “the other,” or “them.”

It is also hard to see how formal transitional justice mechanisms, particularly the criminal prosecutions and truth commissions that Swaine concentrates on, each with its limited focus and reach, could bring about the structural change required. To be sure, these mechanisms can and should, as Swaine argues, engage with gender in substantive and procedural ways. A deeper transformational change, however, must come through a comprehensive approach to peacebuilding that encompasses, at the very least, gender-responsive programs across the security, socioeconomic, and governance sectors. Only such an approach can begin to address the structural factors that drive violence against women before, during, and after conflict. Indeed, as Swaine concludes, a focus on transformation rather than simply transition is required “to truly bring about cessation of harms” (p. 262), and legal and justice processes alone cannot bring about the seismic change required. By focusing on transitional justice, Swaine does show us the suboptimal impact that these mechanisms have on the breadth and complexity of gendered harms, the gendered inequalities that sustain them, and how those harms (and those who suffer them) are perceived by society and by the victims/survivors themselves.

While the focus of this book is necessarily on CRVAW, Swaine’s aim might have

been further realized by briefly attending to harms against men. A focus on CRSV has not only eclipsed the harms suffered by women beyond “strategic rape” during conflict but has also overshadowed CRSV and other harms against men and boys during and after conflict. A comprehensive approach to conflict-related violence that expands our understanding to encompass the full range of harms and draws upon a feminist analysis to unpack the gendered norms and practices that result in gendered harms (to women and men) may have more traction in theory and practice. The focus on harms suffered by women always risks reinforcing the woman/victim–male/aggressor binary. By contrast, attending to the agency of women (which Swaine does well by highlighting the “victim/survivor” role) and identifying gendered conflict-related violence against men can help dismantle these gendered binaries.

Of course, such an expansion of aims might be too much for a single book project. And, indeed, Swaine does give a nod to this idea, acknowledging that gendered harms affect people of different gendered identities, and she suggests that the framework she has developed “could be tailored to unearth men’s experiences of conflict-time harm” (p. 287). Overall, the book provides a valuable platform to further expand general awareness of conflict-related gendered harms, responses to those harms, and ways in which those responses currently fail to effect the necessary structural change required to improve security for all and promote prospects for peace.

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***Toward a Cosmopolitan Ethics of Mobility: The Migrant’s-Eye View of the World,***

Alex Sager (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 103 pp., \$54.99 cloth.

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Is there a fundamental right to international freedom of movement? Are national borders and restrictions on international migration legitimate, and if so what are their normative grounds? If states may admit migrants selectively, what are legitimate criteria for selection? These are the types of questions that preoccupy ethicists of migration and that have recently become the object of considerable scholarly attention.

But much of this scholarship is unsatisfactory, argues Alex Sager in his new book. The

contemporary ethics of migration, Sager contends, occurs within a “methodologically nationalist” framework constituted of four presuppositions: (1) human life is normally static and migration is exceptional, “something to be undertaken only with great necessity” (p. 25); (2) states exercise unlimited sovereignty and control over immigration (p. 27); (3) political membership and community are “something that exist within state territories” (p. 28); and (4) borders are immutable and solely constituted by the