Engaging with the imagery of children and motherhood in Deutero-Isaiah.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to engage with the imagery of children, in relationship to motherhood, as encountered in Deutero-Isaiah. The focus passage will be Isaiah 49:14-26. I will be utilising the sociological findings of life in Ancient Israel as it pertains to the world of children and the family, with a specific interest in exilic and post-exilic contexts. Contemporary studies on displacement, exile and post-traumatic stress disorder will be referenced. In Australia we are increasingly in the midst of children who have experienced trauma from forced displacement. Beyond our own personal experiences of family, and childhood, there are many insights be gained into understanding the pain of the 'other'.

The Biblical prophets arose in the context of communities in crisis and discontinuity. They played a significant role in helping a society reimagine itself, giving a rationale to times of crisis whilst retaining memory. The prophets have continued to function in this way throughout history, offering hope.

2. Family in Ancient Israel

Perceptions of having children and the lifestyles the family in Ancient Israel contrast significantly to the 21st Century Western post-industrial world. One of the primary roles of women

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1. There are sections of this paper that are influenced by my current PhD research into Isaiah and exile, but they are not the particular focus of my thesis. I come to the interest in children and mothering that Isaiah 49 reflects out of my own experience of parenthood.

2. I am referring here in particular to asylum seekers and refugees, but the term 'forced displacement' may also refer to those who are internally displaced. Some children have experienced this directly (first generation) or be second or third generation offspring of the displaced, which has particular issues in and of itself. For example, children of the Stolen Children or Forced Child Migrants. For further helpful definitions around the terminology of forced migrations as it pertains to the Neo-Babylonian era see John J. Ahn By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of the Exile, John J. Ahn and Jill Anne Middlemas eds. (New York: T & T Clark, 2012), 183-185.
in the household was to bear children, particularly boys. Leo Perdue explains, "... they pro-
vided their households, including their mothers, both economic security and social status."\(^3\)
Conceiving, bearing and raising children in the ancient world was also a potential source of
anxiety in relation to maternal and child health. As Bergmann notes, "Archaeological evi-
dence suggests that women in ancient Israel were pregnant an average of eight times, but that
only two of these eight children reached adulthood."\(^4\)

The daily life of children in Ancient Israel varied according to whether they lived in larger
towns or agricultural settings, affecting socio-economic standards of living and work require-
ments.\(^5\) The family structure was "multigenerational (up to four generations) and included
the social arrangement of several families, related by blood and marriage, who lived in two or
three houses architecturally connected."\(^6\) The father's role was to educate sons, in labouring,
morality, religious and social customs, and the focus for girls was on the life of the home.\(^7\)
Social cohesion was clearly affected during times of war and displacement. Even during
times of peace, there were cases of children being 'exposed' - left to die.\(^8\) In Jewish law chil-
dren could "be sold into debt service or slavery, though this likely occurred only in extreme
cases of household hardship...parents could present an ungovernable son to the elders of the

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5. Children in rural areas, which was the majority, tended to have higher labour expectations and lower socio-
economic standards of living.
7. For an extensive outline of perspectives on children during the second temple era see Perdue, *Families*,
chapter 3. For example, Perdue notes the anxiety that was held for fathers of daughters in the Jewish
literature, relating particularly to issues of sexual purity. Much familial stress was connected to issues of
inheritance. Children were required to honour their parents based on the Decalogue commandment,
140-142. Boys were educated, and trained for war, whereas "the education of girls consisted primarily in
preparation for marriage." 142.
8. For example, if disabled, or if a girl is born when economically the family needed a boy.
clan to be executed for disrupting the order of the household (Deut. 21:18-21), but this court alone had the right to determine guilt and carry out the sentence." Children on the fringes of society relied on the stability of the established family networks for inclusion.  

It is a mistake to assume that because of these contrasts, that children in Ancient Israel were evaluated only functionally. As Perdue reminds us,  

The announcement of pregnancy was a time of great rejoicing, and the day of birth was the occasion for celebration among family members. Tenderness, love and affection for children are often expressed in the Hebrew Bible, as is the sustaining care provided to children. The child was raised under the care of his or her mother and nursed for a customary period of three years.  

3. Children in the Prophets  

Pre-exilic prophets tend to depict 'children' figuratively i.e.: the people of Israel collectively referred to as the 'children of God' or disobedient Israel is personified as a rebellious child.  

Children may be identified as a group, just as single women or widows are a collective of the 'marginalised'. As the crisis of exile looms, the biblical literature tends to refer to children in relation to their vulnerability. Prophets of this era portray the poverty and emotional distress of children, (i.e.: hunger, destitution, neglect); the overall disintegration of the social fabric (children taking on leadership roles; breakdown in the family system; older generations not passing on knowledge to youth; young not respecting or listening to adults; young be-

10. This included the fatherless - יָתֹם, yatom. Often translated as 'orphans'.  
11. Perdue, Families, 171. Children still experienced childhood in Ancient Israel, even though there are many points of differences to contemporary life. On the point of empathy, it is worth noting the analogy by Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, A Biblical Theology of Exile, Overtures to Biblical Theology, (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr, 2002), 103, that scholarship around biblical texts of suffering can all too easily find a parallel with colonial attitudes that fail to recognise trauma of the colonized as 'real'. In other words, people of another culture (and in this case, time) have feelings too!  
12. Isaiah 1:2; 30:1,9; Hosea 1:10; 11; 12:3; Jeremiah 3:19; Mal 1:6. The implication in these set of images is that YHWH is a portrayed as a mother or father. See Sarah J. Dille, Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah, JSOT Sup, (London ; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 34-40.  
coming orphans; safety and security threatened). The death of children (by violence or starvation) is a dominant motif in relation to the crisis of exile. The prophets envisage restoration by utilising images of overcoming infertility, celebrating childbirth, and re-population. Zechariah 8:4-5 presents the elderly populating Jerusalem with children playing (possibly sport) in the streets - an ideal picture of a society at peace. Rarely in the prophets do the children themselves have their own voice.

4. Exilic insights

Exilic studies contribute to biblical scholarship by appreciating the contexts that the prophets functioned within and utilise social-scientific and psychological tools to enable deeper understanding of biblical texts. As Brad E. Kelle notes,

...interpreters in the last three decades have raised significant challenges to the consensus and produced new reconstructions that view the Judean experience of exile as a severe and traumatic personal, social, and psychological crisis that entailed suffering and domination and led the deportees into destabilizing recalibrations of their social and theological identity.

My proposal is that Isaiah 49:14-26 is a classic example of survival literature - i.e., literature that emerges from situations of trauma and not only narrates the emergency to some extent but is necessary for memory retainment, recovery, and identity re-formation. Survival litera-

14. Note that many of these references display quite a departure from the family life and childhood that we described in the previous section. They are primarily about a society in crisis.
15. Perhaps a deliberate contrast to Lam 2:21 where ‘young and old lie together in the dust of the streets’.
16. We get the voice of the Suffering Servant and Zion. We get the voice of the Prophet, and even YHWH. Children are not given a first person voice, but in 49:20 we are represented with a third person voice "They will say".
17. See for example Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritchel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright, eds., Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts, Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Israel and its Literature (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). Also Daniel Smith Christopher "Reading exile then: reconsidering the methodological debates for biblical analysis in dialogue with sociological and literary analysis" in By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of the Exile, John J. Ahn and Jill Anne Middlemas eds (New York: T & T Clark, 2012), 139-157. In terms of the extent of the exile see Smith-Christopher, A Biblical Theology, Chapter 2. This field of study appreciates the concept of 'reading both ways'.
19. See Smith-Christopher, A Biblical Theology, chapter 3 for an analysis of Lamentations and Ezekiel as examples of exilic survival literature.
ture may be a mechanism of the transference of history and culture or a method of dealing with the questions that arise out of trauma - questions about faith, doubt and disaster - and the deeper question of 'why did this happen?' More broadly than a study of literature, exilic theology is particularly interested in the concept of 'not being in charge', relevant for children who are the least in charge in society.

Exilic studies help us not just analyse the contexts of the prophets, but inform our understanding of present contexts, potentially providing a hermeneutic for navigating trauma, displacement and loss. There are children in our midst coming directly from contexts of war and refugee camps. We may have children who face issues of death, broken relationships, displacement of home, health crises, and general threats to their sense of security.

20. Of interest here is the work of Alain Epp Weaver, States of Exile: Visions of Diaspora, Witness, and Return, Polyglossia: Radical Reformation Theologies, (Scottdale, Pa: Herald Pr, 2008), Chapter 1. Weaver discusses John Howard Yoder's work on the concept of 'not being in charge'.

21. This is particularly a fruitful place for research for child psychologists, as well as biblical scholars, who are also interested in how a religious voice speaks to recovery. Note Daniel Smith-Christopher's point that these studies are begging for a religious perspective, as many of the contexts of conflict are religious, and the methods of restoration and recovery have a spiritual dynamic. Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Reading Exile Then: Reconsidering the Methodological Debates for Biblical Analysis in Dialogue With Sociological and Literary Analysis," in By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of Exile, ed. John J. Ahn and Jill Anne Middlemas, Library of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament Studies (New York: T&T Clark International, 2012). See the point by Jason Hart that there is a limited amount of research in this field that goes beyond a 'psycho-medical approach' and a greater need to focus in particular on children and adolescents. Jason Hart FMO Research Guide: Children and Adolescents in Conflict Situations in the Forced Migration Online Research Resources, http://www.forcedmigration.org/research-resources/expert-guides/children-and-adolescents-in-conflict-situations/studying-children-and-adolescents-in-conflict (accessed August 29, 2013), 2.

22. Statistically, women and children are affected most by displacement through conflict. The Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University, http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/ founded in 1982, has produced many research projects around the impact of war, and displacement on children. The contexts studied are varied - ranging from the holocaust era, Palestinian refugee camps, South American exiles from political upheaval, reflections from the Balkan conflicts of the 90s, civil war in Sudan, and Afghan and Iraqi conflicts. Note also Hugo Kamya "The impact of war on children: the Psychology of displacement and exile" in Kelle, Ames, and Wright, eds., “Interpreting Exile”, 235-249.
In terms of issues pertinent to our reading of Isaiah 49:14-26, questions arising out of exilic studies may include: what are the psycho-social effects of conflict (war, displacement) and how is a society affected corporately when it loses many children via conflict? How might these factors be evident in the text? How might this text function in assisting resilience and identity to a community or individuals under stress, particularly children and aiding in recovery?

5. Isaiah 49:14-26 - mother and child imagery - an exilic reading

Deutero-Isaiah is notable for the inclusion of a collection of oracles characterised by their use of familial images. This includes personifications of Daughter Zion (representative of the people of God) as a mother, and a wife of YHWH, and YHWH as a faithful husband. YHWH is also depicted as a parent, and uniquely in mothering images, such as labouring, and breastfeeding. Isaiah 49:14-26 sensitively merges imagery of children and motherhood, and by doing so intentionally pinpoints the source of a key trauma of the people of Israel in exile.

23. Reading the text of Deutero-Isaiah as survival literature in the context of a post-war climate may give some leading as to the reason for the uniquely feminine images it uses in many of the oracles of salvation - it provided a different method of presentation of YHWH to a people in great pain.

24. Isaiah 42:14-16 incorporates a graphic simile depicting YHWH in labour "like a woman in childbirth I cry out, I gasp and pant." Isaiah 49:15 depicts YHWH via a metaphor as a nursing mother who will not forget her children (by implication in contrast to Daughter Zion who did). Isaiah 50:1-3 depicts YHWH as a husband who is not divorcing his wife and Isaiah 54 where YHWH is the faithful forgiving husband. These images are intermingled with the depiction of Daughter Zion as a bereft mother (49), wife who is not divorced (50), barren woman who becomes inundated with children (54), abandoned wife of YHWH who is restored (54). To read further on these topics, see John J Schmitt, “The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother,“ *Revue biblique* 92, no. 4 (1985/10/01/O 1985); Mayer I. Gruber, *The Motherhood of God and Other Studies*, (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1992); Nelly Stienstra, Yhwh is the Husband of His People: *Analysis of a Biblical Metaphor With Special Reference to Translation*, (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1993); Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, *Isaiah’s Vision and the Family of God*, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994); Richtsje Abma, *Bonds of Love : Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts With Marriage Imagery* (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3), Studia Semitica Neerlandica, (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999); Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*; Christl Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr, 2008).
the loss of children. It also acts as an affirmation of the function of the family in re-building a society.25

Isaiah 49:14-26 reflects a society in diaspora (verse 16, 21) where memory is retained of violence and imperial oppression (verse 17, 19, 23-26). A bereaved mother recovering from rape (15, 19, 21) mourns her lost children (verse 15, 20, 21).26 The text gives a fragmented picture of the historical situation by its use of poetry rather than prose. As Balentine reminds us "poetry is generically terse, figurative, and decontextualised"27. By utilising metaphor, simile and personification a story is produced with characters that may speak beyond their situation that we may relate or react to. This can be challenging as they offer "multiple, sometimes conflicting voices that insist... on giving speech to pain and suffering."28 The use of rhetorical questions address the real sources of anxiety. There are components of memory here that enable a cultural retelling of important collective stories.29

25. The date and setting of Deutero-Isaiah is a much debated topic. The focus of this paper contends that regardless of exact setting, Deutero-Isaiah was dealing with a people who experienced trauma post-war, and displacement. Whether they were in a foreign land or displaced within Judah, second or third generation forced migrants, the textual clues read through an exilic lens would suggest a stage of recovery from crisis.

26. In relation specifically to women, the use of sexual violence and shaming as a weapon of war in the Ancient Near East was widespread. In Deutero-Isaiah, the depiction of Daughter Zion (the people of Judah) and Daughter Babylon includes a metaphor of rape, as a sign of her desolation. The land is depicted as being laid to waste. When we come across the English translations 'afflicted ones' or 'desolate', in Deutero-Isaiah, the reference may be towards sexual violence. For example: Is 47: 49:13, 19; 54:1, 4; 51:23 may be an implicit reference to rape. For further on this topic see: Bebb Wheeler Stone, “Second Isaiah : Prophet to Patriarchy,” Journal for the Study of the Old Testament no. 56 (1992); Pamela Gordon and Harold C. Washington, “Rape as Military Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible,” in A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets, ed. Atalya Brenner, (London: T&T Clark International, 2004); Sandie Gravett, “Reading ‘rape’ in the Hebrew Bible: a Consideration of Language,” Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 28, no. 3 (2004). If Deutero-Isaiah is also read as a response to Lamentations (as well as other prophets), we note the sexual violation of Daughter Zion referred to in Lam 1:8, see Patricia Tull Willey, Remember the Former Things: the Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation, (Atlanta: Scholars Pr, 1997).


29. The concept of being the people of YHWH (vs 13 is affirmed by verse 15); the walls of Jerusalem in verse 16. Deutero-Isaiah is generally noted for its appropriation of the Exodus imagery (the echo here is of slavery but the Exodus motif is not explicit in 49:14-26), to not only engender the memory of YHWH's
Sometimes the reflections of suffering in writing may not be recounted as we would expect and we need to be prepared to 'read into the gap' to understand the layers of what Deutero-Isaiah may be speaking to us today. For example, there is perhaps a darker side to the restorative tone, with the expected answer to the rhetorical question of verse 15a, "of course a mother cannot forget her children" subverted by the implication of the reply YHWH gives in 15b. Mothers can neglect their children. Lam 4:2-4 implies that nursing was performed by wild animals. Zion had not only experienced the worst, but had to resort to it herself. As Dille observes, the pathos of a mother separated from her (older) child would not be a strange concept to a generation in exile. On the other hand, parents may have voluntarily abandoned or even cannibalized children during siege.

Isaiah 49:21 seems to show Zion not recognising her own children. Studies suggest that following conflict and exile anxiety and heightened stress, produce decreased patience by mothers towards children. The studies of PTSD of refugee children or even their offspring show actions in the past but reframe it towards the future to give hope. See Philip B. Harner, “Creation Faith in Deutero-Isaiah,” Vetus testamentum 17, no. 3 (1967); Rikki E. Watts, “Consolation or Confrontation: Isaiah 40-55 and the Delay of the New Exodus,” Tyndale Bulletin 41, no. 1 (1990); Rikki E. Watts, “Echoes From the Past: Israel’s Ancient Traditions and the Destiny of the Nations in Isaiah 40-55,” Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 28, no. 4 (2004). The Creative Redeemer (go’el) is implied in YHWH’s restorative role (vs 26b).

30. I will address this issue of reading into the gap further on, but at this point it is worth noting Capper where he discusses the ‘vow of silence’ that victims of abuse experience suggesting "Lamentations may be considered as a means of articulation as part of coming to terms with abuse and its aftereffects." John Capper, “Text, Tradition and Trajectory in Interpreting Lamentations,” ANZATS Conference (2011 July), 4. Capper goes on to explore the significance of reading Lamentations using the frame of PTSD, and survival literature.


32. Dille, Mixing Metaphors, 145. She goes on to detail the passages that discussed such potential realities of the siege and exile, such as Deut 28:53-57, 2 Kings 6:24-29; Lev 26:29, Jer 19:9; Lam 2:20, 4:4 and suggests that “it is difficult to know how historically reliable these passages are, and how much is hyperbole”.

33. Dille, Mixing Metaphors., 144.

34. See the work of the Refugee Studies centre at Oxford University for examples of the nature of the anxieties for displaced children and what is necessary for Children to experience some sense of wellbeing. See Marina Ajdukovic "Mothers' perception of the relationship towards children during displacement: a six month follow up" Refugee Studies Centre, 1-19, 1995. http://repository.forcedmigration.org/show_metadata.jsp?pid=fmo:2056 (Accessed August 29, 2013). This study shows the effect of
that they experience much dislocation in terms of their identity, anxiety about those who are left behind as well as fractured relationships with adults.\textsuperscript{35} Thus the text contains a strong element of trust building.

Isaiah 49:23, and 26 may be an example of the kind of ambiguities present in literature that emerges from dislocation and diaspora. The counter-imperial images of children being held up with honour by the enemies, and even parented in some ways by them, are disturbing. Of particular concern here is children being used as 'weapons' to oppress the oppressors.\textsuperscript{36} As Carolyn Sharp summarizes "Texts produced in cultural contexts of colonization do not simply 'represent' exile and oppression. To varying degrees, they can collude in the colonizer's ongoing exercise of power on the subaltern imagination."\textsuperscript{37} Thus, at times we read of the rejection of power structures of empire in Deutero-Isaiah that give visions of a utopic society devoid of division, whereas in other passages there seems to be an appropriation of the dom-

\textsuperscript{35} For example, Marianne Kröger, “Child Exiles: a New Research Area?,” Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies 23, no. 1 (Fall 2004). Kröger looks at Jewish child exiles of the Second World War era. Children were unsure if they were sent away because they had done something wrong. It may not be immediately apparent that it was for their own survival. Issues recorded include survivor guilt, shame, and difficulty adjusting to the new environment. Kollontai reminds us (in relation to post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina) that even the next generations that grow up displaced carry anxiety, or if there are physical reminders of conflict, such as "scars of bullets and bombs on homes and other buildings; instances of people being killed by landmines on the outskirts of many major towns and cities" that mental unsettledness continues to affect a population. Pauline Kollontai, “Healing the Heart in Bosnia-herzegovina: Art, Children and Peacemaking,” International Journal of Children’s Spirituality 15, no. 3 (Aug 2010), 266. In relation to Isaiah 49:16 and 19 it is significant in this regard that the walls and desolation of the land are mentioned.

\textsuperscript{36} This is sadly the case in more recent conflicts in the world. Child soldiers of Sudan and the Congo are but two well known examples. It also continues the cycle of victim becoming abuser. See how this impacts children in terms of dealing with violence, and carrying it through generations in Hugo Kamya "The impact of war on children: the Psychology of displacement and exile" in Kelle, Ames, and Wright, eds., “Interpreting Exile”, 242-245.

ination language in a counter-imperial backlash.\textsuperscript{38} Sharp incorporates Jon Berquist's points on
the 'double-mindedness' that exiles exist in, where they must learn to navigate a complex
world of mixed loyalties that produce what she describes as a 'painful hybridity'. This is re-
presented in some exilic texts and "texts produced under colonialism may be 'discourses of re-
stance,' but these textual acts of resistance can themselves be toxic, producing new subal-
terns and new kinds of deformation as pathological by-products of the experience of
subjugation."\textsuperscript{39}

The next generation (second or third generation forced migrants) were the target of the
prophet's rhetoric of persuasion - aiming to ensure the people that they are not forgotten or
forsaken by YHWH and that they begin the move back to the land.\textsuperscript{40} Isaiah 49:14-26 func-
tions to restore resilience and identity to a community or individuals under stress. It does this
by acknowledging the grief, particularly of mothers, caused by the bereavement of children.

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\textsuperscript{38} Unlike Lamentations and Ezekiel which certainly display signs of immediate and extreme trauma, Deutero-
Isaiah depicts more a longer term experience of diaspora and separation. For a discussion around this
context of diaspora, see David M. Carr "Reading into the gap: refractions of trauma in Israelite prophecy"
in Kelle, Ames, and Wright, eds., "Interpreting Exile", 301-302.\

\textsuperscript{39} Sharp, 366. Note on pages 372-373 Sharp investigates the psychological reference to 'splitting' as an "an
adaptive and potentially pathological defense against trauma", that she applies to a study of Jeremiah,
Ezekiel, and Lamentations. The consequences of painful texts may be disturbing to us. Isaiah 49:23 and 26
are examples of how a text of exile appropriates power language to see a bloody end. Just as the exiles are
treated as the 'other' so they use similar language to separate themselves from the powers over them
(tyrants, oppressors, warriors). As Carr notes Refugee studies indicate that nationalism is at risk of
increasing in diasporic communities under threat of cultural assimilation. "Reading into the gap: refractions
makes the point that in studies of 'people undergoing collective trauma is the tendency toward
dichotomization of social relationships into 'us' and 'them'.'"

\textsuperscript{40} See Richard J. Clifford, \textit{Fair Spoken and Persuading : an Interpretation of Second Isaiah}, (New York:
Paulist Press, 1984); Yehoshua Gitay, \textit{Prophecy and Persuasion: a Study of Isaiah 40-48}, (Bonn:
Linguistica Biblica, 1981) on the role of the rhetoric of persuasion in Deutero-Isaiah. On the comment
regarding the movement back into the land, note Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “Geography and Textual Allusions:
Interpreting Isaiah XI-IV and Lamentations as Judahite Texts,” \textit{Vetus testamentum} 57, no. 3 (2007). ; Lena-
Sofia Tiemeyer, \textit{For the Comfort of Zion : the Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40-55},
Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, (Leiden: Brill, 2011). Her work must be noted as she has convinced
many that the location of the message of Deutero-Isaiah was Judah. If this is the case, then we are looking
more at situations of internal displacement or returnees to a land under empire and the particular issues this
raises.
Children are depicted as significant, in relation to re-population, and reversal of the threats faced in an 'unsafe' environment. The relationship between mothers and their children is prophetically restored, indicative of a society heading towards healing but not ignoring the betrayal that has caused dislocation. It retells the story by placing it within a larger narrative, finding a broader meaning and context for the suffering, as well as hope for the future.  

Safe and hygenic play environments, and nurture are two key requirements of recovery from crises for children, as highlighted by verse 20. Bearing children after disaster never replaces those that have died and is a source of great anxiety, but also a prophetic act of hope. This passage aims at restoring a sense of comfort that children are ultimately not forgotten. Verse 15 uses the gentle alliterative effect of the ‘sh’ sound in hatiskah (forget) issah (a woman) and assonance when combining these words with ulah (nursing child) - וּהַשָּׁכַ֖ה אֲשֶּׁר שָׁלֹֽה. In

41. Of interest here is the work of M. Jan Holton, “Our Hope Comes From God”: Faith Narratives and Resilience in Southern Sudan,” Journal of Pastoral Theology 20, no. 1 (2010). and "Imagining hope and redemption: a salvation narrative among the displaced in Sudan” in Kelle, Ames, and Wright, eds., “Interpreting Exile”, 217-233. Holton gives an account of the Dinka exiles finding a sense of connection with the Biblical narrative of exile and their own story. Also see Pauline Kollontai, “Healing the Heart”, 268, on the importance of hope. Even within the art projects of the children of Bosnia-Herzegovina that represented the brutal realities and pain of war and post-conflict life, there was a drive within them to include images of hope and future - such as sunshine and rainbows. They needed something to look forward to, as well as looking back. For some children experiencing extreme PTSD, there is a difficulty to live in the present where "trauma (is experienced) not as a past event but as a current event in their lives.” Hugo Kamya “The impact of war on children: the Psychology of displacement and exile” Kelle, Ames, and Wright, eds., “Interpreting Exile”, 243. This can produce a sense of helplessness.

42. Berry, Jo de et al "The children of Kabul: discussions with Afghan Families” Save the Children / Unicef Save the Children Federation, Inc: 2003. The findings show that "The parents and children of Kabul want more for their lives than merely being alive and having food, clothing and shelter...children's wellbeing...includes social, emotional and religious as well as physical qualities." 7. They specifically talk about having 'manners' - "good and clean language, respect for elders and parents, bodily cleanliness and hospitality", 8. Relationships are key, particularly within the family. 14.

43. On this point see Hauerwas and Willimon who suggest that having children is important in passing on a story in society. “We have children as a witness that the future is not left up to us and that life, even in a threatening world, is worth living – and not because ‘Children are the hope of the future’ but because God is the hope of the future.” Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, Resident Aliens : Life in the Christian Colony, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 60.

44. Note that in the passage directly prior to this the servant emphasises he was called before his birth, known from the womb by YHWH. Is 49:1. Value is ascribed to children in this perspective.

45. An observation that may be entirely 21st Century that the gentle sh sounds correspond to the sounds a parent may make to settle a child to sleep, an image of intimacy.
Lamentations 2:12 the lives of children ebbed away while they were in their mothers' arms, due to starvation. Now they will be nurtured.

Deutero-Isaiah displays a unique interest in children. However, the dominant voices in Isaiah 49:14-26 are Zion's, YHWH's or the Prophet's. Children's voices may not have been prominent in the ancient near eastern world in general, but they are not invisible. Rather than responding to the parent with bitterness, the children are portrayed as 'hastening back', 'gathering' around their mother, being worn as 'ornaments', like a bride would wear - acting as a tool of healing. In the voice of the prophet or YHWH, 'children born during your bereavement' (verse 20) ask for more space. Children help restore their own mother towards healing.

The reflections of Feuerverger on the use of fairy tales with child refugees is instructive as a tool to help deal with trauma by not sanitizing the story. This enables a child to identify themselves in the story but also can offer a comfort element. I am not suggesting that Deutero-Isaiah is necessarily a fairy tale equivalent, but that we do not benefit our children by only exposing them to the stories in the Bible as morality tales. The representation of children in Deutero-Isaiah is one of blessing, but also portrays YHWH identifying with pain.

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46. Grace Feuerverger, “Fairy Tales and Other Stories as Spiritual Guides for Children of War: an Auto-ethnographic Perspective,” International Journal of Children’s Spirituality 15, no. 3 (Aug 2010) , 239. Feuerverger is the daughter of holocaust survivors and grew up with her own sense of trauma. She particularly uses the story of 'The Little Match Girl' in her work with child refugees. I was prompted to think of similar children's stories that deal with war and trauma such as: 'Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes' by Eleanor Coerr, and 'The Boy in the striped pyjamas' by John Boyne, 'Once' by Morris Gleitzman.

47. In using narrative therapy as a therapeutic tool in relation to PTSD, children are encouraged to tell their story, but it does not have to be in first person narratives. Children may use art, drama, music, dance or writing to tell a story and work through trauma. See Pauline Kollontai, “Healing the Heart”. This work particularly explores how children can work towards peacemaking and conflict resolution via art. The imagery of Isaiah 49:14-26 lends itself to visual presentations of the material via drama or art work, which may be another avenue into understanding.
6. Response to Isaiah 49:14-26 in ministry

Isaiah 49:14-26 read through the lens of exilic insights offers many possibilities and raises many questions relating to our ministry with children and families. It encourages us to present beyond solely masculine metaphors (YHWH as father, warrior, good shepherd) by incorporating feminine imagery (YHWH as mother, Zion as daughter, wife). It challenges us to look at where we may falsely contribute to the social limitations that present perfect parenthood, and asks us to reflect on where we may minister with and amongst brokenness in families. Passages such as Isaiah 49:14-26 may push us to learn how to enable children to engage with texts of pain and encourage us to think more creatively about how we present them. Do we allow children to explore their traumas or anxieties creatively or do we reinforce silence? We may be encouraged to look for the children amongst us who feel out of place or out of space.

By reading with an understanding of the exile as a catastrophe, we cannot dismiss the children or the grief of the mother Zion in Isaiah 49:14-26 so easily. We are invited to sit for a while in her presence and the presence of her children, lost and found.
Bibliography


