

Decolonizing Theory and Practice of Transitional Justice

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Decolonizing theory and practice is increasingly recognized as a highly relevant project in social sciences, including peace and conflict studies. Historically grown and still lingering post-colonial hierarchies and global entanglements manifest themselves in notions and promotions of particular forms of peace and justice, and require a careful examination regarding dominant concepts and their inherent power asymmetries. This also holds true for the field of transitional justice.

Transitional Justice encompasses a whole range of processes societies undertake to reckon with the legacies of past atrocities. As an interdisciplinary field that is rooted in but not limited to international law, sociology, anthropology, and political science; it went through rethinking its key tenants, with burgeoning literature that invites to look 'beyond the end of history' (Sharp, 2018). More recently, a call to move from transitional towards transformative justice has been made, with an emphasis on long-term change, local agency, as well as tackling inequalities and root causes of conflict. Yet, the field is at a crossroads due to the challenges it encountered over three decades of its existence. Even though the focus on symptoms rather than causes persists, a body of critical scholarship is emerging that examines colonial legacies of atrocities and appropriate responses when searching for justice.

As the post-colonial turn in social sciences illustrates, the formal independence of former colonies is not an endpoint or a teleological aim of transitions. Not engaging with a decolonial agenda, therefore, risks promulgating colonial, post-colonial, and neo-colonial dynamics. Thus far transitional justice theory and practice are reluctant to evaluate critically and facilitate the change of the post-colonial situation. One of the 'weakest' points of transitional justice is 'its engagement with the concept of decolonization itself,' which is either minimal or lacking (Matsunaga, 2016). Against this backdrop, the few existing studies that assess transitional justice from a post-colonial perspective have emphasised the de-historicization and structural continuity between colonial and postcolonial governance.

The aim of the Special Issue is to examine deeper colonial roots of conflicts and oppressions, making a case for more radical alternative futures for transitional justice. It assembles papers that rethink some of the key tenants of transitional justice as a field, as well as its theoretical and ontological premises. The Special Issue, moreover, examines whether transitional justice mechanisms are suitable for addressing the legacies of various forms of colonialism and coloniality and what it would mean for the field to be decolonized.

With this Special Issue, we want to push the decolonial agenda in transitional justice forward. First, we want to advance scholarship on questions such as: How to address the legacies of colonialism in transitional justice to end protracted cycles of violence and oppression? Are transitional justice mechanisms and instruments (justice, truth, reparations, guarantees of non-repetition, and memorialization) suitable to address the legacies of colonial violence? This shall include articles on contexts in which transitional justice was used as a vehicle of decolonization

(with varying degrees of success and failure), as well as on non-Western imperialisms and colonialism, such as post-Soviet imperialism.

Second, we want to stimulate the development of decolonial epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies in the field of transitional justice. This will *inter alia* focus on questions of time and temporality, teleology, the peace/war binary, as well as notions of justice. It also investigates the question of knowledge production in transitional justice, calling for addressing epistemic inequality.

We welcome theoretically innovative and rigorous as well as empirically rich contributions broadly covering the following themes: (1) decolonizing theoretical and ontological inquiry into transitional justice; (2) epistemological inquiry – examining decolonization of transitional justice knowledge production; (3) case studies into transitional justice and settler-colonial states; (4) case studies into atypical transitional justice cases, examining non-Western imperialism.

If you would like for your contribution to be considered for the Special Issue, please send an abstract of 500 words and a short biography (100 words maximum) by 28 February 2023 to Yaas Bahmani, bahmani[at]students[dot]uni-marburg[dot]de. For further information please contact Yaas Bahmani at bahmani[at]students[dot]uni-marburg[dot]de.

Guest Editors:

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The Special Issue contributes to the collaborative research project *Post-Colonial Hierarchies of Peace and Conflict* (<https://www.postcolonial-hierarchies.net/>)