

## Preface

Ruti G. Teitel

WE ARE WITNESSING what I have elsewhere identified as a “global” and “normalized” phase of transitional justice, a proliferation of accountability mechanisms and processes at and across different levels—international, regional, domestic, and local (Teitel 2008). Yet it is often unclear what these developments actually mean, either theoretically or operationally, at the intersection of the international and the local. This challenge goes to the heart of this book. By focusing on issues of locality, this work puts in question prevailing assumptions and illuminates current controversies in the field through comparative and interdisciplinary research covering a wide ground.

This searching book sets out to get beyond generalizations about the global moment, to take a hard, close look at local realities and impacts on the ground, and to interrogate the state of current responses to conflict and repression. The contributors challenge the teleological assumptions of transitional justice, examining the concrete ways in which its mechanisms intersect with survivors’ practices, standpoints, and priorities in specific places and times. They thereby refashion conventional understandings of “the local,” “justice,” and “transitions.”

The range and depth of experience here are impressive. The various contributions probe across regions in far-ranging inquiries spanning Central and South America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia, exploring complex forms of accountability. Through careful work on the ground, the contributors show persuasively that transitional justice developments have not moved along a linear and progressive trajectory but are instead reshaped through a diverse array of forums and interests, as well as through clashes among multiple rule-of-law values. In so doing, the contributions unsettle as

they challenge the notion of so-called best practices of transitional justice that can be exported throughout.

A recurring theme throughout this scholarly inquiry is how to learn from local standpoints. If a global approach means we are somehow beyond the state and its democratization project, the place-based approach advocated by this book's editors returns us to survivors' experiences of the state and of the global processes that affect them—experiences that may generate other aims and priorities. Choosing between the local and the international has been said to involve the values of objectivity and fairness of a neutral judiciary as opposed to those of local discretion and accountability. But framing the dilemma this way can obscure the often profound disjuncture between survivors' priorities and the interests of international specialists. Moreover, who gets to decide?

As this book tacks between the ideals of transitional justice and the realities on the ground, it opens up an important evaluative space—one that is always guided by the central place of the victims of these mass crimes. Given the pervasive sense of threat and the ever-greater toll borne by civilians in contemporary conflict, this ought to be the guiding principle today. What is the impact of transitional justice measures on survivors? How can their well-being be reconciled with state building? By posing these fundamental questions, which are as much moral as legal and political, this book sheds light far beyond transitions.

RGT  
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