

Change in Transitional Justice. New ways of locating, understanding and measuring change in transitional contexts.

Panel Description:

The concept of transitional justice directly implies change, but change has generally been interpreted in very normative, pre-determined and positivistic ways in the field. The most obvious form of change generally addressed and theorized is linear transitions from war to peace, where change from a prevalently violent environment to one characterized by the absence of war-related violence is arguably most visible. However, even this seemingly unequivocal transition may be less clear-cut than it appears. In reality, these processes are seldom linear, and the complex, unsettling and fluid nature of transitional justice processes across time and space evidences that attempts of dealing with the past is often a continuing process that cannot be simplistically relegated to a specific transitional timeframe during which change occurs. Drawing on her ethnographic research on sieged Sarajevo, Ivana Maček for instance noted that “peace, when it came, did not restore the prewar life people remembered but required them to continue struggling with many of the aspects of war they had found most distressing” (2009, 202). Hence, while at the political level, major change can, and often does, happen with the signing of peace agreements, at the societal level there may be less visible but important continuities from the wartime to the post-conflict or transitional era.

Furthermore, the idea of change in transitional justice is embedded in a strongly progressive narrative, which does not leave much space for addressing the negative side effects of transitions. Failure of transitional democracies to consolidate, the worsening of citizens’ living standards as a consequence of economic transitions, the re-traditionalization of gender roles in the wake of a conflict and similar “transitional failures” are not easy to expound through the prevailing transitional justice analytical lens.

This panel endeavors to broaden the spectrum of ideas of change in transitional justice, so as to account for possible failures of transitions, as well as for positive change overlooked by the standardized transitional justice framework. Potential topics and questions include, but are not limited to:

Change during transitions: How have transitional justice processes produced (positive and negative) change?

Unintended consequences: To what extent and how have transitional justice processes resulted in unintended consequences and even failures?

Transitional justice at the micro-level: How do diverse groups of victims, survivors and conflict-affected communities experience the everyday lived realities of dealing with the legacy of the past?

Temporality and spatiality of change: If change occurs, when and at which levels does it manifest?

Measuring change: What are methodological possibilities and limitations of accounting for and measuring change within the context of transitional justice processes?

This panel’s presentations will draw on in-depth, qualitative and ethnographic accounts from diverse geographical case studies to inductively explore new concepts of change in transitional justice. Rather than at the macro, institutional level, the analyses will be situated at the micro, societal level to explore how transitions affected the everyday lived realities of citizens. Gender and labor relations, citizens’ political participation may be possible areas of positive or negative change addressed by the panel’s presentations.

We invite paper proposals of 500 words max by 5 February 2018.

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