



Guest Editorial

Criminology in Post-Violence Transitions: Exploring the Intersections between Human Rights, Grassroots Activism, Transitional Justice, Memory, and Criminology

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Societies emerging from periods of mass violence and repression face profound challenges in addressing the legacies of their past. Over the last few decades, fields like transitional justice and human rights have developed robust frameworks to confront historical injustices, from truth commissions and war crimes trials to reparations programmes and memorialisation initiatives (Ketelaars, 2018; Zschirnt & Menaldo, 2014). Criminology, traditionally focused on crime and punishment in stable settings, has increasingly turned its gaze to these post-violence transitions (Fiedler & Mross, 2023). This special issue, *Criminology in Post-Violence Transitions: Exploring the Intersections between Human Rights, Grassroots Activism, Transitional Justice, Memory, and Criminology*, brings together 11 contributions which illuminate how criminological inquiry can enrich our understanding of societies moving beyond conflict and authoritarianism. Through an academic yet accessible voice, the collection addresses a broad scholarly audience about the intersection of criminology with processes of justice, memory, and social change in transitional contexts.

As guest editors, we situate this issue at the nexus of criminology and transitional justice. We argue that criminology, with its insights into the causes of violence, the operation of justice systems, and the experiences of victims and survivors, has much to offer to the study of post-conflict societies. Conversely, engaging with transitional contexts pushes criminology beyond its traditional bounds, demanding interdisciplinary approaches and a willingness to centre voices and epistemologies often marginalised in mainstream discourse. The contributions in this issue span diverse geographical regions and cultural contexts, with a particular focus on the Global South. Case studies range from Latin America (Guatemala, Colombia, Chile, Argentina) and Africa (The Gambia, Nigeria, Cameroon, South Africa) to Europe (Spain) and international justice fora (the International Criminal Court). Each article reflects unique local realities, from Indigenous struggles in Colombia and Guatemala to post-authoritarian memory struggles in Spain, Argentina, and The Gambia, while collectively speaking to universal themes of justice, accountability and healing after violence.

Methodologically, the issue showcases how researchers are innovating to study these transitions. Ethnographic fieldwork, participatory research with victims and activists, archival analysis of legal records and testimonies, and interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks (from feminist and decolonial theory to social psychology and psychoanalysis) all feature prominently. The result is an issue that is empirically rich and conceptually bold, pushing the boundaries of criminological research. In what follows, we first outline the key thematic intersections that frame the special issue. We then provide a detailed discussion of the 11 articles, highlighting how each contribution advances our understanding of criminology's role in post-violence transitions. Finally, we conclude with conceptual reflections and directions for future research, considering how criminology can continue to engage with human rights, grassroots activism, transitional justice and memory in the pursuit of a more just post-violence world.

Thematic Framing: Intersections of Violence, Justice and Memory

In post-violence contexts, addressing past atrocities is not only a legal or political challenge, but also a social, cultural, and epistemological one (Cohen, 2020; Gready & Robins, 2014; Hoddy, 2021). This special issue engages with five key themes that emerge at the intersection of criminology and transitional justice. The first is concerned with *the legacies of violence and the politics of memory*; the shadow of past violence looms large in transitional and post-conflict societies (Briony, 2021). The call of "*Nunca Más*" ("Never Again") that emerged in Latin America encapsulates a commitment to prevent the recurrence of atrocities by remembering and learning from the past. Memory is a double-edged sword: it can be a tool of empowerment and truth-telling or, conversely, a site of contestation when powerful actors seek to deny or distort history (Tamayo Gomez, 2022a). Several contributions in this issue examine how societies remember mass violence, through truth commissions, oral histories, commemorations, and archival efforts, and how these memories inform justice. Criminological perspectives on state crimes and victimisation enrich these discussions, recognising that what is remembered or forgotten can shape both policy outcomes and community healing.

The second key theme addresses *grassroots activism and justice "from below"*. A recurrent thread in this special issue is the vital role of civil society and grassroots movements in pursuing justice and reform in post-conflict settings. While states and international bodies often establish formal transitional justice mechanisms, much of the impetus for accountability and change comes "from below": survivors' groups, women's associations, Indigenous communities, and youth movements (Tamayo Gomez, 2022b). Grassroots activism serves as a catalyst for truth recovery and legal action, especially when official processes fall short. The articles in this special issue illustrate how community-based actors organise to document abuses, keep memories alive, and pressure authorities to act. By examining these efforts, we see criminology intersecting with social movement studies and community justice, highlighting how social mobilisation can challenge impunity and contribute to safer, more just societies.

The third key theme presents *feminist and decolonial critiques*. Post-violence transitions do not occur on a level epistemic playing field, power dynamics of gender, race, and colonial history profoundly shape whose justice is prioritised. A number of contributions here apply feminist and decolonial lenses to critique traditional approaches to justice. Feminist perspectives draw attention to sexual and gender-based violence, long under-acknowledged in war and atrocity narratives, and question whether conventional courts or truth forums adequately address the needs of women and LGBTQ+ survivors (Ketelaars, 2018). Decolonial approaches, similarly, question the dominance of Western legal norms and highlight Indigenous and local concepts of justice that may conflict with state-centred models. By foregrounding these critiques, this special issue interrogates how transitional justice can be more inclusive and responsive to those most marginalised, and how criminology can engage with alternative knowledge systems (for example, Indigenous cosmologies or community dispute resolution practices) in understanding harm and repair.

The fourth key theme engages with *challenges to state-centred justice*. Many articles reveal the limitations of state-centric justice mechanisms in delivering meaningful accountability and reconciliation. Courts may prosecute a few high-level perpetrators but fail to capture the broader structures of violence; truth commissions may document abuses yet lack the power to enforce reparations or prosecutions. In some cases, states themselves become obstacles, instituting amnesties, or as seen recently, electing leaders who roll back previous human rights gains (Roht-Arriaza & Mariezcurren, 2012). Our special issue highlights how state inaction or resistance often necessitates alternative pathways: community tribunals, social protest, artistic memorialisation, or transnational advocacy. Criminologists are thus called to consider justice not only in formal institutions like courts and police, but also in informal, hybrid, and insurgent forms of justice that arise in transitional periods.

The final key theme underpinning discussions is about *emerging approaches to human rights in transitional contexts*. Some contributions point to innovative approaches to human rights and justice emerging from transitional contexts. These include conceptual frameworks like transformative justice and abolition feminism that seek to move beyond punitive paradigms; the use of forensic science and archaeology as truth-telling tools in service of human rights; and notions of human dignity, spiritual

healing, and community rebuilding as integral parts of justice. Such approaches broaden the scope of criminology and justice studies, integrating mental health, ecology, spirituality, and other dimensions into the conversation on what it means to recover from violence. They demonstrate a trend towards interdisciplinarity and holistic understanding, recognising, for instance, that rebuilding social trust or restoring dignity to victims can be as important as legal verdicts in a transition out of violence (Moffett, 2023).

The thematic framing of the special issue underscores that criminology in post-violence transitions is necessarily pluralistic and critical. It must account for historical harms and power imbalances, engage with actors beyond the state, and remain adaptable to emerging challenges and ideas. We move on now to present the specific contributions of the special issue's 11 articles, showing how each exemplifies and enriches these themes.

Insights from the Special Issue Contributions

Truth, Memory and Grassroots Justice

One core focus of this special issue is how truth-seeking processes and memory work unfold in transitional societies, often propelled by those most affected. In *Building Voice Upon Voice: Truth, Memory, and Activism in The Gambia's Transitional Justice Process* by **Aminata Ndow**, we see a powerful examination of a formal truth-seeking body, the Gambian Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission (TRRC), and the community activism surrounding it. Ndow's ethnographic research with the Women's Association for Victims' Empowerment (WAVE) illuminates how families of the disappeared in The Gambia navigated mourning and memory during and after the TRRC. The article recounts intimate gatherings of women sharing stories of loss under Yahya Jammeh's 1994–2017 dictatorship, as they ask, "What is the Government going to do about these victims?" Post-TRRC, with the commission's hearings, concluded victims' relatives in The Gambia found themselves asking "What next?", and Ndow demonstrates that the legacy of the TRRC will depend on sustained civil society advocacy to carry forward its recommendations.

Drawing on critical theorists (Derrida, Ricoeur, Foucault, Arendt), Ndow analyses how truth, power and collective memory interact in the Gambian context. The key argument, highly relevant to criminology, is that formal truth-telling must be complemented by grassroots activism and victim-centred approaches to achieve justice. State-led efforts alone (especially ones without prosecutorial teeth, as the TRRC lacked) are insufficient. This contribution highlights how victims' voices and community mobilisation become crucial in holding the state accountable to the Truth Commission's findings and ensuring that the truths uncovered translate into real change. It situates criminology in dialogue with transitional justice by centring the experiences of victims of state violence and showing how memory activism (families speaking out and preserving the stories of atrocities) forms a foundation for ongoing justice efforts in a post-authoritarian transition.

Where formal mechanisms falter or leave gaps, informal initiatives often rise to fill them, especially in the realm of truth recovery and memory. *Transitional Justice and Forensic Exhumations: Reconciling Post-Conflict Violence in Spain* by Natalia Maystorovich Chulio transports us to a very different context, Spain, which nonetheless shares strikingly similar dynamics of grassroots justice. Maystorovich Chulio examines the surge of mass grave exhumations that have taken place in Spain in recent years as a means of confronting the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and Francoist dictatorship. In Spain's transition to democracy after 1975, a state policy of amnesia (enshrined in a 1977 Amnesty Law) meant that tens of thousands of victims of Franco's repression remained buried in unmarked graves, their stories suppressed. The article demonstrates how, decades later, families of the disappeared and civil society associations spearheaded a social movement to exhume the dead and reclaim historical memory.

These exhumations, often initiated privately by victims' families in the absence of robust state action, have become acts of grassroots transitional justice. Maystorovich Chulio details how forensic specialists, together with local communities, have collaborated in open exhumation sites, blending scientific methods with oral testimonies. This collaborative and transparent process has allowed families to actively participate in recovering their loved one's remains, thereby merging forensic truth with communal healing. The article compellingly argues that such bottom-up efforts serve a dual purpose: on one hand, they produce evidence and historical truth-telling about past atrocities (even when formal courts are barred by amnesty laws); on the other, they foster reconciliation and acknowledgement by revising collective memory.

As regards criminology, this study is instructive in illustrating how justice can be pursued outside the courtroom, and how forensic science becomes a tool of memory and human rights activism. It underscores the notion that, even in so-called "established" democracies like Spain, grassroots initiatives, digging literally into the past, are crucial to reckon with historical

violence, thereby complementing or substituting for state justice processes. The Spanish case is a reminder that transitions can be long and ongoing, requiring persistent societal efforts to achieve a measure of justice and truth.

Memory, Activism and Resistance Movements

Beyond formal truth institutions, this special issue highlights broader social movements as carriers of memory and agents of justice. In *Temporal Imaginations: Mnemonic Frames Against Extractivism in Guatemala* by **Vaclav Masek Sánchez**, the focus shifts to post-conflict Guatemala, where the scars of a decades-long civil war and genocide (culminating in the 1990s) continue to influence contemporary struggles. Masek Sánchez's article explores an innovative concept of "temporal imaginations" the self-reflective, historical frames that Indigenous Maya Q'eqchi' activists use to situate their present-day environmental struggle in the continuum of past injustices. Through 18 months of participant observation with grassroots organisations (such as Defensoría Q'eqchi') fighting against the Fénix nickel mining project, and dozens of interviews and testimonies from genocide survivors, the article reveals how collective memory of past violence is weaponised as a tool of resistance.

Indigenous activists in El Estor, Guatemala, draw direct parallels between the current extractivist exploitation of their lands and the legacies of settler colonialism and state violence that their communities endured during the civil war. By invoking memories of historic injustices and framing their fight against a mining company as part of a much longer struggle for dignity and autonomy, they cement group loyalties, articulate grievances, and rally support across generations. Masek Sánchez shows that these "temporal imaginations" enable activists to project both backwards and forward in time: they remember the brutalities of the past to prevent their recurrence, and they envision a future free from oppression.

For criminology, the Guatemalan case exemplifies how crime and conflict are narrativised by communities in resistance, linking environmental harms to prior human rights violations. It also demonstrates the potency of memory as a mobilising force, essentially, a form of knowledge-power that grassroots movements deploy against state and corporate impunity. This perspective broadens criminological inquiry to include not only the study of harms (such as ecological destruction linked with violence) but also the study of how affected communities construct meaning and justice claims over time.

Collective memory and activism are also at the heart of *Social Movements as Triggers of Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma and Memory in Chile* by **Karla Henríquez, Nicolás Pinochet, Geoffrey Pleyers, and Fedra Cuestas**. This article delves into post-dictatorship Chile, nearly 50 years after the 1973 coup that ushered in the Pinochet regime. Chile's transition to democracy in 1990 did not immediately erase the deep traumas of torture, disappearance and repression inflicted on its people. Henríquez and colleagues investigate how social movements in contemporary Chile serve as conduits for processing and transmitting the unresolved trauma of state terror across generations. Moving beyond the work of dedicated human rights NGOs, the authors highlight the role of broader movements, student protests, feminist rallies, and anti-neoliberal demonstrations, in reopening and reframing discussions about the dictatorial past.

Using qualitative data and interdisciplinary lenses from social psychology and psychoanalysis, the article illustrates that within these movements, spaces often organically emerge where latent or "unspoken" trauma surfaces. For example, young protesters who did not directly experience the dictatorship nonetheless inherit its memory through stories in their communities and the public symbols of protest, such as photographs of the disappeared held aloft in marches. The authors pay particular attention to the gendered dimension of memory: women survivors of sexual political violence under Pinochet, whose suffering was long marginalised as a "lesser" form of torture, have found in the feminist movements a platform to demand recognition of these gender-specific atrocities. By articulating silenced histories, such as rape and sexual torture, within the context of contemporary gender equality struggles, Chilean activists link past and present, insisting that the personal and political traumas of yesterday be acknowledged today. The article's findings underscore that Chilean society, decades on, is still indelibly shaped by the violence of the dictatorship and that social movements act as a vital form of justice-seeking.

For the field of criminology, this work is a testament to the idea that the aftermath of state crime is lived not only legally or politically, but culturally and psychosocially. The Chilean case encourages criminologists to engage with concepts of collective trauma and memory transmission, recognising that social activism can function as an alternative mechanism of truth and reparation, one that operates in streets and public discourse, parallel to (and sometimes in tension with) formal transitional justice measures.

A cautionary counterpoint to the positive power of memory activism is provided by **Rosario Figari Layus** in *Never again? The Institutionalisation of Far-Right Negationism and Shrinking Space in Argentina: Impacts on Transitional Justice Trials and Memory Politics*. Argentina has long been seen as a transitional justice success story in Latin America: since the return of

democracy in 1983, it pursued truth (the 1984 Nunca Más! report), justice (extensive human rights trials for the 1976–1983 dictatorship’s crimes), and memory (numerous memorials and commemorations), largely due to the tireless efforts of human rights organisations like the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Figari Layus’s article, however, sounds an alarm about recent reversals in this hard-won progress.

With the rise of far-right political forces, exemplified by the election of populist outsider Javier Milei in 2023, Argentina has seen the institutionalisation of negationist discourse at the highest levels of government. This article documents how denial and revisionism regarding the dictatorship’s human rights abuses, once fringe, have moved into mainstream policy: funding for human rights institutions has been slashed, public officials openly question the established historical truth of state terrorism, and victim groups face new stigmatisation and threats. Crucially, Figari Layus illustrates that such rhetoric is not harmless speech, it has “concrete consequences that undermine the functioning and scope of transitional justice and memory actors and spaces”. We see attempts to obstruct ongoing trials of perpetrators, a reduction in public access to archives and information, and the curtailing of commemorative events and activism through both formal means and intimidation. This Argentine experience provides a sobering lesson that transitional justice gains are not irreversible: the progress made over decades can be eroded when political will shifts dramatically.

For criminology, which often examines power dynamics and the politics of law enforcement, this case highlights the importance of political context in shaping justice outcomes. The Argentine case urges scholars and practitioners to consider how to safeguard truth and justice processes against backlash, and how to respond when the state itself becomes an agent of historical denial and impunity. In a broader sense, it reinforces one of the special issue themes: the need for constant vigilance and sustained activism. Even in a country whose very slogan “Never again” became synonymous with transitional justice, the struggle over memory and accountability continues, reminding us that post-violence transitions can face new waves of contestation long after the guns have fallen silent.

Decolonising and Localising Justice

Several contributions examine transitions through the lens of local knowledge systems and decolonisation, asking how post-violence justice can become more culturally attuned and emancipatory. In *Attempts from the Transitional Justice in Strengthening Indigenous Justices in Colombia* by **Angela Marcela Olarte Delgado**, the author confronts the interface between a formal, state-led transitional justice process and Indigenous conceptions of justice. Colombia’s peace process after its decades-long armed conflict (officially ending with the 2016 peace accord with FARC guerrillas) led to the creation of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), a transitional justice tribunal tasked with addressing war crimes. Olarte Delgado’s article critically examines to what extent this mechanism has managed to strengthen Indigenous justice systems in Colombia, or conversely, how it might perpetuate what she terms “epistemic violence.” Indigenous peoples in Colombia, often the communities most impacted by the armed conflict’s massacres, displacement, and abuses, have their own ancestral forms of justice and concepts of harm and healing.

The article finds that while Colombia’s JEP has made efforts to incorporate interculturality (for instance, by recognising Indigenous authorities and considering ethnic perspectives in its proceedings), tensions abound. Certain JEP legal orders and frameworks still operate on Western assumptions about wrongdoing and reparation, which can clash with Indigenous ontologies of justice and reconciliation. For example, Indigenous cosmologies may see land, community harmony, and spiritual balance as central to justice, which is not easily translated into the JEP’s legalistic remedies. Olarte Delgado demonstrates that “strengthening Indigenous justice is dependent on understanding its ontology”, meaning that the Colombian transitional system can only truly support Indigenous communities if it respects their ways of defining and resolving harm. This might require decolonising the legal process itself: allowing space for Indigenous law (perhaps through autonomous Indigenous justice processes running in parallel to the JEP) and ensuring that transitional justice does not inadvertently impose the very colonial logic that marginalised Indigenous peoples in the first place.

The argumentation put forward in this Colombian case is a vivid example of the need to expand our concept of justice beyond the state and beyond Eurocentric norms within the field of criminology. Olarte Delgado invites criminologists to engage with legal pluralism and to consider how formal justice systems interact with community-based justice in post-conflict societies. The article also resonates with broader calls to decolonise criminology by valuing Indigenous and local epistemologies when analysing crime, victimisation, and redress.

In “*What Do We Do With all This Dying?*”: *South African Time, Space, and Place in Forensic Evidence* by **Robyn Gill-Leslie**, the focus on local epistemologies takes a different form, through an exploration of how cultural conceptions of time and place intersect with forensic practices in the aftermath of violence. Gill-Leslie examines the Marikana Commission of Inquiry in

South Africa, which investigated the tragic 2012 Marikana massacre (where police shot and killed dozens of striking mineworkers). This article is distinctive in weaving in a theoretical gesture of *ukwakumkanya*, a term drawn from an Indigenous (isiXhosa or related) concept meaning, in context, “to bring light” or enlightenment, framed through transcorporeality (the idea that bodies, living or dead, are interconnected with their environment and social context).

By analysing medico-legal evidence from the commission with these lenses, Gill-Leslie surfaces how forensic truth is not purely universal and scientific, but also local and relational. International human rights norms often emphasise universal “rights” such as the right to dignity in death or the right for families to know the fate of their loved ones. While crucial, Gill-Leslie argues that focusing only on such universal frames can occlude local understandings of death and justice. In the Marikana case, forensic evidence, ballistics, autopsy reports, and crime scene reconstructions, did more than serve legal accountability; it became part of a narrative that communities used to make sense of loss. The article shows that South African notions of time and space, rooted in the country’s specific historical and cultural landscape, offer alternative interpretations of forensic findings: For instance, how communities understand the transformation of the body after death, or the spiritual significance of the place where someone dies, can imbue forensic evidence with different meanings than a court-centric view would.

Moreover, Gill-Leslie points out that empowering local communities to engage with forensic processes can challenge the state’s monopoly on truth production. In Marikana’s aftermath, there were efforts by activists and victims’ families to bring in independent pathologists and to question official narratives, reflecting a desire to reclaim the truth process. For criminologists, this piece is a reminder that evidence and truth are not objective facts revealed in a vacuum; they are interpreted through cultural frames. It urges criminology to integrate perspectives from anthropology and indigenous knowledge when examining forensic and investigative practices in post-violence settings. In essence, justice after atrocity must account for multiple realities, the legal-scientific reality and the lived cosmological reality of communities, and criminological work should strive to bridge these, rather than privileging one to the exclusion of the other.

Post-conflict reforms aimed at peace and security can also benefit from localised, context-sensitive approaches, as illustrated in *National Ownership Flaws and Promises: A Critical Analysis of DDR Program for Ex-Boko Haram Combatants in Cameroon* by **Lydie Christelle Belporo**. This article addresses a different facet of post-violence transition, the Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants, in the context of Cameroon’s struggle against the Boko Haram insurgency. DDR programmes are common in the aftermath of wars and are crucial for turning fighters back into civilians and preventing cyclical violence. Belporo provides a critical criminological analysis of Cameroon’s DDR initiative for former Boko Haram members, uncovering challenges in its design and implementation. A key concern identified is the issue of “national ownership”: while in principle DDR should be led and tailored by the affected nation (rather than imposed externally), in practice Cameroon’s programme has faced difficulties truly embedding in local contexts.

Through qualitative research including interviews with ex-combatants and DDR officials, the article finds that a top-down approach and the lack of involvement of “middle-range actors” (such as local community leaders, traditional authorities, and grassroots organisations) have hampered the reintegration process. Ex-fighters often return to communities that are fearful or resentful, and without local intermediaries to facilitate reconciliation and provide support, DDR centres risk becoming isolated camps rather than bridges back to society. Belporo proposes a conceptual framework of dissociation and national appropriation, essentially calling for DDR programmes that dissociate from one-size-fits-all models and are creatively appropriated at the national and local level. This means empowering local actors in the Lake Chad Basin region to adapt reintegration strategies to their cultural and socio-economic reality (for example, involving religious leaders in deradicalisation, or designing livelihood training that fits local economies).

The findings emphasise an interdisciplinary understanding of DDR: not only a security measure, but a social and psychological process requiring trust-building, community engagement, and attention to trauma. For criminology, which often examines desistance and reintegration of offenders, the Cameroon case extends these concepts to the realm of political violence and terrorism. It highlights that even in dealing with extremist violence, a community-centred, context-aware approach is key, aligning with the issue’s broader theme that post-violence justice must move beyond rigid state-centred frameworks. The article ultimately argues for more nuanced, context-sensitive DDR policies that recognise ex-combatants as a diverse group with varied motivations and reintegration needs, and that harness local resources to address the root causes of radicalisation. This contributes to a criminological understanding of how societies can break cycles of violence through inclusive, locally grounded strategies.

Gender and Transitional Justice

Gender justice emerges in this special issue as both a crucial domain of transitional justice and a lens that challenges prevailing practices. In *From Hapless Victims to Collaborators: Exploring the Janus Voices of Women in the Aguleri-Umueri Conflict in Igboland, Southeast Nigeria* by **Daniel Olisa Iweze and Mary Nkechi Okadigwe**, we are confronted with a narrative that defies the conventional portrayal of women in conflict solely as passive victims or as natural peacebuilders. The authors examine a protracted inter-communal conflict between Aguleri and Umueri communities in Southeastern Nigeria, uncovering the “Janus-faced” roles of women, Janus being the two-faced Roman deity, which here symbolises the dual and contradictory positions women held during the conflict. Drawing from historical and qualitative analyses, Iweze and Okadigwe detail how women were indeed among the most vulnerable and victimised by the violence (facing displacement, sexual violence, loss of family members), yet some women also took active parts in fuelling the conflict, whether as instigators, spies, or logisticians for warring factions. At the same time, other women were pivotal as peacemakers, engaging through traditional institutions like the Umuada (a council of daughters of the community) to negotiate ceasefires and mediate disputes. This multifaceted involvement – which places women as victims, perpetrators, and peacebuilders – has often been underexplored in scholarly discourse, which tends to place women into a single category.

The article challenges criminologists and transitional justice practitioners to abandon one-dimensional gender stereotypes. Understanding that women can simultaneously occupy positions of agency and victimhood complicates how we assign responsibility and design post-conflict interventions. For example, demobilisation programmes and truth commissions must account for female ex-combatants or collaborators (who might otherwise be overlooked for reintegration support or even accountability) just as they address female survivors. The Nigeria case also brings in a cultural context: Igbo society’s gender complementarity meant women had their own avenues of influence (like the Umuada) which could either dampen or escalate conflicts. This suggests that effective peacebuilding must engage these indigenous female institutions. In broad terms, Iweze and Okadigwe’s contribution pushes criminology to better integrate gender analysis, recognising women’s complex roles in violence beyond simplistic victim-perpetrator binaries. It aligns with feminist criminological insights that neither glorify nor ignore women’s agency but rather seek to understand it in context.

Addressing gender in post-violence transitions inevitably involves confronting sexual and gender-based violence, which has historically been marginalised as an “inevitable” by-product of war. Two articles in the special issue tackle this difficult subject head-on, proposing new frameworks for justice for survivors of sexual violence. In *Restoring Sexual Dignity: Sexual Violence, Human Dignity, and Transitional Justice in Colombia* by **Sandra Rios Oyola**, the focus is on Colombia’s armed conflict and the women who suffered sexual and reproductive violence within it. Rios Oyola introduces the concept of “sexual dignity” to analyse how transitional justice policies in Colombia have addressed (or failed to address) the harms of rape, forced pregnancy, and other gender-based crimes committed during the conflict. Drawing on interviews with stakeholders, from victims’ organisations to officials in the Colombian Truth Commission and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, as well as content analysis of reports and legal documents, the article identifies a pattern of “dignity takings” and “dignity restoration.”

In essence, the perpetration of sexual violence is seen as a deliberate stripping away of a victim’s dignity and agency, not just a physical violation. Accordingly, justice efforts must aim at restoring that dignity in multiple dimensions. Rios Oyola proposes four key binary dimensions where loss must be countered with restoration: body violation versus body autonomy; lack of control over the future versus control over one’s future; denial of the past versus authorship of one’s narrative, and shame versus honour. This framework is a powerful tool for policymakers, as it suggests that reparations and programmes for survivors should not only provide material or medical aid but also address these existential and social injuries. For instance, ensuring a survivor can reclaim control over her future might involve educational opportunities or supporting her in having children by choice, countering the sense of powerlessness imposed by rape. Enabling survivors to tell their stories and thus take on an authorial role in official histories or memorials can counteract the silencing once endured. Importantly, the article also touches on non-material forms of healing, like spiritual ceremonies and community rituals, as part of dignity restoration, acknowledging that for many survivors justice is as much about emotional and spiritual repair as it is about courts and sentences.

In the context of Colombia’s transitional justice process, Rios Oyola’s insights bring to light both progress and gaps: while sexual violence was eventually included in the agenda of truth-telling and reparations (thanks largely to feminist advocacy), there remains a risk that these crimes are sidelined, or their redress is superficial. This contributes a new dimension within criminology as the article illustrates a human-rights-centred approach to violence that moves beyond seeing sexual assault in war as merely a crime to be prosecuted. Instead, it sees it as a profound violation of personhood requiring a transformative justice approach, one that aims to change societal attitudes (removing stigma from victims, placing it on perpetrators) and to empower survivors in rebuilding their lives.

On the international stage, *Justice for the Invisible, Unspeakable and Inevitable: An Abolition Feminism Analysis of Sexual Violence and the International Criminal Court* by **Natalie Hēni Maihi** offers a sweeping critique of how global justice mechanisms deal with conflict-related sexual violence. Maihi begins by acknowledging the increased visibility of sexual and gender-based violence in the 1990s (after atrocities in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia shocked the world). This visibility, paradoxically, often reduced victims to a faceless mass of the “victimised” and cast perpetrators as monsters, narratives that can strip away the individual agency of victims and the complex motives of offenders, replacing them with stereotypes. The establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2002 was supposed to be a triumph for ending impunity for such crimes, yet as Maihi notes, the ICC has managed only two convictions for SGBV in its two decades of work.

By examining court transcripts and records from two landmark ICC cases, *Prosecutor v. Jean-Pierre Bemba* (which involved rape committed by Congolese rebels in Central African Republic) and *Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen* (which included charges of sexual slavery and forced marriage by a Ugandan LRA commander), the article exposes the limitations of the ICC’s approach. Maihi applies an abolition feminism lens, a perspective that is sceptical of carceral and punitive solutions and instead advocates for transformative justice focused on survivor healing and perpetrator accountability outside traditional prisons. The analysis reveals that despite the ICC’s intentions, its proceedings often subject survivors to retraumatization (through invasive questioning and the slow pace of trials) and fail to address the broader contexts that enabled sexual violence. Moreover, the ICC’s focus on individual perpetrators can ignore the systemic, often racialised narratives, for instance, depicting African perpetrators as embodiments of evil, that absolve structural forces (like militarism or patriarchy) from blame.

Maihi’s abolition feminist critique points out the violence innate to the ICC’s own operations: a court that promises justice but delivers it sparingly, and in doing so may inadvertently perpetuate the idea that legal punishment is the only form of justice. The article suggests transformative justice as a meaningful alternative, one where the emphasis is on meeting survivors’ needs, involving communities in reconciliation, and preventing future violence by transforming social conditions, rather than simply incarcerating a few leaders. For criminology, especially critical criminology, Maihi’s work is a call to re-imagine justice for sexual violence in conflict. It challenges us to question whether international trials, as they are currently conducted, truly serve survivors or deter crimes, and to consider complementary or alternative models that prioritise healing, restorative practices, and the dismantling of harmful power structures. By bringing abolitionist thought (often applied to domestic criminal justice) into the realm of transitional justice, the article bridges fields and asks difficult questions about the ultimate goals of accountability: Is it to punish the guilty, to restore the dignity of victims, or to reshape society to prevent such atrocities? Ideally, it should be all three; achieving this requires innovative thinking and the courage to critique established institutions, as this article exemplifies.

Conclusion: Towards a Criminology of Transition and Transformation

Altogether, the 11 articles of this special issue advance a coherent argument: criminology has a vital role to play in understanding and facilitating post-violence transitions, in partnership with human rights, memory studies, and transitional justice scholarship. The contributions demonstrate that moving a society from a past marked by violence towards a future grounded in justice and peace is a multifaceted process, one that involves not only courts and truth commissions, but also social movements, cultural interventions, and grassroots innovations. In engaging with contexts from the Global South and beyond, the special issue also emphasises the importance of epistemological diversity: we have seen Western legal norms conversing with Indigenous traditions in Colombia, South African spiritual concepts illuminating forensic science, feminist frameworks challenging international tribunals, and local activists in various countries transforming or supplementing state-led initiatives.

A key reflection emerging from this collection is the concept of “criminology in transition.” Just as societies undergo transitions, criminology itself is transitioning, expanding its scope beyond conventional crime and punishment to address questions of mass violence, historical injustice, and human rights. This expansion requires criminologists to be in dialogue with other disciplines and with practitioners on the ground. It also requires comfort with critically interrogating a given state, since in many transitional scenarios the state (or its agents) has been the primary perpetrator of violence. The special issue presents criminology as engaging with state crime, as seen in analyses of dictatorships and civil war atrocities and also exploring how communities respond to such crime when formal justice is inadequate.

Another insight is the significance of memory and narrative in post-violence contexts. Several authors highlighted that how society remembers violence - whose stories are told, whose are silenced, and what lessons are drawn - can either bolster or undermine justice. Memory can empower survivors (as in Guatemala and Chile) or be manipulated by those who would return to repression (as cautioned by the Argentina case). For future research, criminologists could deepen engagement with memory studies, for instance by studying the impact of memorials, museums, or education reforms on violence prevention and community resilience.

The issue also underscores the necessity of interdisciplinary methods and participatory approaches. Ethnography and interviews gave voice to victims and activists (Ndow, Masek, Iweze & Okadigwe), legal analysis unpacked institutions (Olarde Delgado, Figari Layus, Maihi), and theoretical syntheses offered new concepts like temporal imaginations and sexual dignity (Masek, Rios Oyola). Going forward, scholars should continue to blend methods, perhaps combining quantitative data on conflict with qualitative testimony, or historical archival work with contemporary observation, to build a richer picture of transitions. Importantly, researchers should strive to involve local communities in the knowledge production process, mirroring the participatory spirit that many articles herein advocate in practice. Collaborative research with survivors, ex-combatants, and grassroots groups can yield insights that more extractive research might miss, and it embodies the very ethos of empowerment that transitional justice champions.

Looking to the future, we identify six directions for further inquiry and practice that build on the findings of this special issue. The first direction for further inquiry and practice would address *safeguarding transitional justice gains*. As shown in Argentina's current predicament, backsliding is a real threat. Researchers and practitioners should investigate strategies to protect truth and justice measures from political reversal, for example, the legal entrenchment of human rights policies, or international support networks that can bolster domestic activism when local space closes. The second direction for further inquiry and practice would consider *integrating local and indigenous justice mechanisms into Western-centric approaches*. The importance of legal pluralism is a topic which features heavily in this special issue. Future work could explore models for hybrid courts or community tribunals that operate alongside national systems, ensuring that Indigenous concepts (like reconciliation ceremonies or communal reparations) stand on equal footing with formal legal approaches. Comparative studies between different countries could yield best practices for genuine intercultural justice.

The third direction for further inquiry and practice is related to *transformative gender justice*. Despite progress, gender-based harms often remain inadequately addressed. A forward agenda includes transformative justice programmes for sexual violence survivors, greater inclusion of women (and LGBTQ+ individuals) in peace negotiations and post-conflict planning, and continued feminist critique of institutions to make them more survivor-centric. Criminology can contribute by evaluating the efficacy of such programmes and highlighting gendered experiences of justice. The fourth direction for further inquiry and practice addresses *expanding the notion of accountability*. Traditional prosecutions target individual perpetrators, but many authors in this issue ask an implicit question: how do we hold systems accountable? Future research might look at mechanisms like truth commission follow-up units, vetting of abusive officials, or reparative initiatives aimed at institutions (police, military, corporations) that enabled violence. This has the potential to broaden accountability from individuals to structures, a space where criminology's understanding of organisational crime and corruption can be very influential.

The fifth direction for further inquiry and practice deals with *healing and psychosocial support as justice*. Several studies included in this special issue touched on trauma and healing. There is room for criminologists to collaborate with psychologists and public health experts to measure the impact of justice interventions on community healing. For instance, do truth-telling processes reduce trauma symptoms? Does involvement in activism improve survivors' well-being? By treating healing as a core component of justice, not an incidental by-product, transitional processes can be designed to be more trauma-informed and supportive. The final direction for further inquiry and practice that we have identified is *linking more strictly the nexus between environmental and transitional justice*. Masek's article on Guatemala hints at a burgeoning area: the intersection of environmental harm and past political violence. In many conflict-affected regions, disputes over land and resources are both causes and consequences of violence. Future research could examine how transitional justice could incorporate environmental justice, for example, restoring lands to Indigenous communities as a form of reparation, or addressing climate change as part of guarantees of non-recurrence in war-torn societies.

This special issue illustrates a criminology that is engaged, critical, and hopeful. The challenges of post-violence transitions are immense: impunity, trauma, distrust, and inequality do not disappear overnight. Yet, articles in this special issue also document remarkable resilience and innovation: mothers banding together to seek the disappeared; communities digging up the truth with their own hands; social movements reinventing collective identity, and scholars proposing new lenses to understand dignity and harm. Our conceptual reflections have led us to view transitional contexts not just as sites of tumult and fragility, but as laboratories of social change where new forms of justice can emerge. The epistemological field of criminology, especially in its critical and interdisciplinary incarnations, is well-positioned to learn from and contribute to these processes.

We reiterate that the intersection of criminology with human rights, grassroots activism, transitional justice, and memory is a fertile ground that demands continued exploration. By embracing complexity, the intersectional truths of survivors, the interplay of formal and informal justice, and the coexistence of hope and backlash, criminologists and practitioners can better support societies aiming to break cycles of violence. We hope this special issue serves as a step in that direction, encouraging further scholarship that not only analyses post-violence transitions but actively engages with them, in pursuit of a more just and peaceful world.

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