Overview of the Workshop

The ISA Catalytic Workshop, entitled “Letting the State Off the Hook,” was held on March 26, 2019 at the Sheraton Centre, Toronto.

We are delighted to report that the workshop was a success! The workshop brought together a group of 14 scholars from around the world at various academic career stages. The collection of papers offered novel theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of the role of non-state actors in these domains, and empirical case studies of nearly a dozen countries, including: Bosnia, Cambodia, Colombia, Uganda, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, amongst others. The workshop worked to bridge divides between peacebuilding and transitional justice scholars and, as a result, laid the ground for the creation of a longer-term collaborative research network of academics working on these topics.

The workshop considered whether and how the delivery of peace and justice programming in post-conflict societies by non-state actors (agencies and organizations, both public and private) outside of official state mechanisms matters in theory and in practice. The papers explored this central issue through three core themes related to peace and justice provision beyond the state: (1) the agency of local actors and the extent to which their participation displaces governments as the main provider of peace, justice, and security, as well as the impact of such non-state-led interventions; (2) the issue of the legitimacy of non-state efforts and the normative implications of abdicating the state’s responsibility to deliver certain key goods (e.g., security) or rights (e.g., rights to truth and reparations); and (3) the ways unofficial processes can be sequenced with more formal interventions to improve their ‘stickiness’. The collection of papers sparked a lively full-day discussion about each of these subtopics, and further raised a number of questions that will be considered as we move forward.

These questions included:

- Do we need to hold the state to account? Does it even need to be involved?
- How do the different levels/scales fit with all of this, especially the role of the international? Why does the local often skip over the state to engage external stakeholders?
- Is the state hostile? Does it lack capacity? Or, is it indifferent or unwilling to take part?
- How can these interventions be effectively sequenced? Do these informal/non-state efforts only work a while? Are they only a precursor to more formal processes?
- What do we know about the normative claims that we are making in both fields?
Workshop Programme

8:00 Welcome comments by organizers

8:30-10:00 Panel 1: Conceptual and Methodological Issues
Chair/Discussant: Adam Kochanski (Stanford University)
• Joanna Quinn (The University of Western Ontario): Letting the State off the Hook, or The Impact of State Abdication on Transitional Justice: When Non-State Actors Fill the Post-Transition Gap
• Eric Wiebelhaus-Brahm (University of Arkansas at Little Rock): Disaggregating the State and Civil Society
• Séverine Autesserre (Columbia University): Surprising Peace: Controlling Violence From Somaliland to Colombia
• Gearoid Millar (University of Aberdeen): Understanding the Long-Term Influence of Post-Conflict Interventions on State Capacities

10:00-10:30 Coffee Break

10:30-12:00 Panel 2: Accountability and Legitimacy
Chair/Discussant: Kirsten Ainley (London School of Economics)
• Timothy Donais (Wilfrid Laurier University) and Ahmet Barbak (Izmir Katip Celebi University): The Rule of Law, the Local Turn, and Re-thinking Accountability in Security Sector Reform Processes
• Mark Kersten (University of Toronto/Wayamo Foundation): A Step Back to Take a Step Forward: The Future of Justice in Conflict
• Adam Kochanski (Stanford University): Making Reparations Meaningful: Exploring the Legitimacy Gap in Non-State Reparations in Cambodia

12:00-1:00 Lunch

1:00-2:30 Panel 3: Engaging Civil Society I: Social Movement
Chair/Discussant: Eric Wiebelhaus-Brahm (University of Arkansas at Little Rock)
• Marie E. Berry (University of Denver): Gendered Civil Action and the Micro Dynamics of Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina
• Hun Joon Kim, (Korea University): A Clash of Claims: Evolution of Rights Claims around the Jeju 4.3 Events
• Timothy D. Sisk (University of Denver): Bridging Divides? Evaluating Efforts to Fostering Social Cohesion in Conflict-affected Contexts

2:30-3:00 Coffee Break

3:00-4:30 Panel 4: Engaging Civil Society II: ‘Soft’ Approaches
Chair/Discussant: Joanna Quinn (The University of Western Ontario)
• Rebekka Friedman (King’s College London): ‘Healingscapes’ of Northern Sri Lanka: Ritual Healing in the Context of Mass Disappearances and Victor’s Peace
• Elisabeth King (New York University): Symbolic Politics and Reconciling Narratives
• Chris Tenove (University of British Columbia): Networking Justice: Digitally-Enabled Engagement in Transitional Justice by the Syrian Diaspora

4:30-5:00 Dissemination discussion and closing remarks
Dissemination and Outreach Strategy

After consulting with the workshop participants, we are actively working towards publishing the papers as a special issue in either a security studies or peace and conflict studies journal to be co-edited by the workshop coordinators. Our intent is to reach a broader International Relations audience. Six participants have committed their papers to such a special issue: Donais & Barbak, Kim, Kochanski, Millar, Quinn, and Wiebelhaus-Brahm. The coordinators have agreed to draft a special issue proposal following the workshop and to approach the editors of journals they have identified as appropriate. We have also agreed to organize a follow-up panel at the 2020 ISA Annual Convention in Honolulu to receive further feedback on a revised, more cohesive set of papers and to further disseminate our findings.