Review of International Studies (2021), **47**: 4, 468–488
doi:10.1017/S0260210521000115

RIS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Framing, truth-telling, and the limits of local transitional justice

Adam Kochanski*

Centre for International Peace and Security Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Canada
*Corresponding author. Email: adam.kochanski@mcgill.ca

(Received 2 August 2020; revised 15 February 2021; accepted 18 February 2021; first published online 29 March 2021)

Abstract

Transitional justice (TJ) is undergoing a legitimacy crisis. While recent critical TJ scholarship has touted the transformative potential of locally rooted mechanisms as a possible means to emancipate TJ, this burgeoning literature rests on shaky assumptions about the purported benefits of local TJ and provides inadequate attention to local-national power dynamics. By taking these factors into consideration, this article contends that local TJ efforts can be used to *deflect* justice in manners that paradoxically allow ruling parties to avoid human rights accountability and to conceal the truth about wartime violations. It further argues that the principal method by which justice is subverted is not through overt manipulation by abusive governments, but rather, through subtle and indirect 'distortional framing' practices, which ruling parties use to set discursive limits around discussions of conflict-related events and to obfuscate their own serious crimes. After developing this argument theoretically, the case study of Cambodia is considered in detail to reveal and to trace the processes by which distortional framing has been used as a technique to deflect justice.

Keywords: Transitional Justice; Peacebuilding; Truth-Telling; Discursive Frames; Local Agency; Cambodia

Introduction

Transitional justice[1] (TJ) is suffering a crisis in legitimacy and effectiveness.[2] Human rights trials and truth commissions have been assailed for being susceptible to elite manipulation.[3] The liberal underpinnings of TJ have also been questioned, especially the field's prioritisation of democratisation and legal justice for civil and political rights violations over social and economic justice concerns.[4] Even reparations for mass atrocities, which are often touted as the most victim-centred TJ instrument,[5] have proven to be deeply disappointing experiences on several occasions, with compensation not matching rhetorical commitments to repair past harms.[6]

[1]Transitional justice refers to 'the ways countries emerging from periods of conflict and repression address large scale or systematic human rights violations so numerous and so serious that the normal justice system will not be able to provide an adequate response'. International Center for Transitional Justice, 'What is Transitional Justice?', available at: {https://www.ictj.org/about/transitional-justice} accessed 23 January 2017. TJ measures include trials, truth commissions, reparations, lustration, reforms, apologies, memorialisation, and traditional forms of justice.

[2]Vasuki Nesiah, *Transitional Justice Practice: Looking Back, Moving Forward* (Utrecht: Impunity Watch, 2016).

[3]For an overview of these critiques, see Cyanne E. Loyle and Christian Davenport, 'Transitional injustice: Subverting justice in transition and postconflict societies', *Journal of Human Rights*, 15:1 (2016), pp. 126–49.

[4]Zinaida Miller, 'Effects of invisibility: In search of the "economic" in transitional justice', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 2:3 (2008), pp. 266–91.

[5]Pablo de Greiff, 'Introduction: Repairing the past: Compensation for victims of human rights violations', in Pablo de Greiff (ed.), *The Handbook of Reparations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 1–18.

[6]Lisa J. Laplante, 'On the indivisibility of rights: Truth commissions, reparations, and the right to development', *Yale Human Rights and Development Law Journal*, 10:1 (2007), pp. 141–77.

© The Author(s), 2021. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the British International Studies Association.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In response to the blind spots and shortcomings of the top-down approach to TJ that have come into view, the field has taken a noticeable turn towards the 'local' in recent years.[7] Pioneering works have emphasised the importance of local-level knowledge and initiatives, and the need to prioritise victims' needs and demands if TJ processes are to be meaningful, sustainable, and effective.[8] In particular, critics have advocated a radical paradigm shift away from the field's narrow liberal teleology towards a broader and more holistic peace and justice project that seeks to transform social order.[9] Local agency and participation are considered pillars of such a locally rooted, 'transformative justice'[10] framework, which seeks to remove the structural, socio-economic, gender-based, and everyday sources of violence in a society. Therefore, in moving away from the dominant top-down, liberal-legalist model, the local turn promises an alternative 'hybrid' approach that can emancipate TJ from its present ideological and operational limitations.[11]

Local TJ is not unflawed, however, and several scholars analysing these forms have shown that the local is beset by all sorts of problems, dilemmas, and contradictions as well, which may limit their contributions to idealised ends.[12] Common criticisms include: they fall short of legal standards for due process;[13] they reinforce gender-based and age-set hierarchies that perpetuate structural forms of violence, discrimination, and subordination;[14] they are often entangled in political struggles with national and international elites who may hijack them;[15] they unfold within prevailing constellations of power where systems of surveillance and intimidation enforce compliance.[16]

Yet, despite these criticisms, a great deal of romanticisation persists in the academic study and practice of TJ.[17] For example, in an advance version of his final report to the UN Human Rights

[7]For a comprehensive review of this turn, see Adam Kochanski, 'The "local turn" in transitional justice: Curb the enthusiasm', *International Studies Review*, 22:1 (2020), pp. 26–50; Dustin N. Sharp, 'What would satisfy us? Taking stock of critical approaches to transitional justice', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 13:3 (2019), pp. 570–89. This mirrors similar turns in the international development and peacebuilding fields, see, for example, Hans P. Binswanger-Mkhize, Jacomina P. de Regt, and Stephen Spector (eds), *Local and Community Driven Development: Moving to Scale in Theory and Practice* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010); Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P. Richmond, 'The local turn in peace building: A critical agenda for peace', *Third World Quarterly*, 34:5 (2013), pp. 763–83.

[8]See Wendy Lambourne, 'Transitional justice and peacebuilding after mass violence', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 3:1 (2009), pp. 28–48; Paul Gready and Simon Robins, 'From transitional to transformative justice: A new agenda for practice', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 8:3 (2014), pp. 339–61.

[9]Sharp, 'What would satisfy us?', p. 578.

[10]This term refers to a 'transformative change that emphasizes local agency and resources, the prioritization of process rather than preconceived outcomes and the challenging of unequal and intersecting power relations and structures of exclusion at both the local and the global level'. Gready and Robins, 'From transitional to transformative justice', p. 340.

[11]See Dustin N. Sharp, 'Emancipating transitional justice from the bonds of the paradigmatic transition', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 9:1 (2015), pp. 150–69.

[12]See, for example, ibid.; Rosalind Shaw and Lars Waldorf (eds), *Localizing Transitional Justice: Interventions and Priorities After Mass Violence* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Joanne Wallis, Renee Jeffery, and Lia Kent, 'Political reconciliation in Timor Leste, Solomon Islands and Bougainville: The dark side of hybridity', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 70:2 (2016), pp. 159–78.

[13]Kasaija Phillip Apuuli, 'Procedural due process and the prosecution of genocide suspects in Rwanda', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 11:1 (2009), pp. 11–30.

[14]Adam Branch, 'The violence of peace: Ethnojustice in northern Uganda', *Development and Change*, 45:3 (2014), pp. 608–30; Mohamed Sesay, 'Hijacking the rule of law in postconflict environments', *European Journal of International Security*, 4:1 (2019), pp. 41–60.

[15]Lars Waldorf, 'Mass justice for mass atrocity: Rethinking local justice as transitional justice', *Temple Law Review*, 79:1 (2006), pp. 1–87; Wallis, Jeffery, and Kent, 'Political reconciliation'.

[16]Susan Thomson, 'The darker side of transitional justice: The power dynamics behind Rwanda's *gacaca* courts', *Africa*, 81:3 (2011), pp. 373–90; Susan Thomson and Rosemary Nagy, 'Law, power and justice: What legalism fails to address in the functioning of Rwanda's *gacaca* courts', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 5:1 (2011), pp. 11–30.

[17]Kochanski, 'The "local turn" in transitional justice'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Council, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence, Pablo de Greiff, stated that more 'experimentation and local remedies should be encouraged'.[18] Similarly, while scholars often warn against 'the dangers of romanticising the local',[19] acceptance of localism as a best practice has remained largely intact. Indeed, in focusing narrowly on the distinct contexts in which they are being used – and perhaps driven by sympathy – analysts frequently discuss 'a version of local justice they *want* to see work',[20] rather than one reflected in reality.

This article builds on and branches off from earlier critiques to question the continued optimism about the local, probing whether and how powerful political actors undermine local TJ efforts to realise their own self-interested objectives that may oppose obtaining the truth and delivering justice. My central argument is straightforward: (1) TJ measures can be used instrumentally by governing parties to *deflect* justice – that is, to sidestep accountability for their own serious human rights violations – using strategic framing tactics that establish a dominant discourse of conflict-related events that reflect the government's interests to avoid responsibility for atrocities it committed; and (2) such distortions give governments a tool to undermine *any* TJ proceeding, *including local approaches*. I call this 'distortional framing' – a theory I develop using the body of sociological literature on collective action frames and social movements.[21] This framework has two defining features. First, while existing research tends to attribute the instrumentalisation of TJ proceedings to state actions that are both direct and coercive,[22] distortional framing describes strategic subversion as the outcome of a subtle and largely *indirect* process of discursive boundary formation that delimits the meaning and scope of TJ. Second, and related, while extant scholarship focuses primarily on state-level actors' attempts to undermine TJ initiatives, this theory calls attention to the vital, yet mostly overlooked, role of *local gatekeepers* in shaping discourses of conflict-related events,[23] which can lead to significant omissions and distortions. Indeed, there has been a tendency in existing research to portray local actors either as passive 'takers' who simply execute directives from above, or, alternatively, as 'resistors' of state actions. By contrast, distortional framing treats local actors not merely as resistors or passive proxies of the state, but rather, as active agents who have their own interests and priorities in the process and can be complicit in perpetuating distortions and reinforcing a preferred version of the conflict, but from the bottom up.

To elucidate this process, the article explores the use of distortional framing as a tactic to deflect justice in Cambodian localities. While we can expect, based on extant scholarship, that this argument may be relevant to state and internationally driven TJ efforts, the focus is on subnational TJ processes, as they present a tough test case for the theoretical framework – given their decentralised nature, community-based and participatory initiatives should be less susceptible to government interference than a state-level mechanism, such as a trial or truth commission. Thus, by focusing the analysis on the local, one can probe the plausibility of the theory at a level of intervention that tends to be seen as a possible workaround to the problem of instrumentalisation.

[18]Pablo de Greiff, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Recurrence (advance edited version)' (New York: United Nations, 2017), p. 15.

[19]Yvette Selim, 'Contestation and resistance: The politics of and around transitional justice in Nepal', *Conflict, Security & Development*, 18:1 (2018), p. 52.

[20]Kochanski, 'The "local turn" in transitional justice', p. 36, emphasis in original.

[21]Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, 'Ideology, frame resonance and participant mobilization', *International Social Movement Research*, 1:1 (1988), pp. 197–217.

[22]See Loyle and Davenport, 'Transitional injustice'.

[23]For more on the limited scholarly work on gatekeepers in TJ, see Christalla Yakinthou, 'Reframing friction: A four-lens framework for explaining shifts, fractures, and gaps in transitional justice', in Paige Arthur and Christalla Yakinthou (eds), *Transitional Justice, International Assistance, and Civil Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 186.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Indeed, as the case study reveals, the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has sought to distort – and has succeeded in influencing – TJ proceedings by framing conflict-related events in a way that sets temporal limits on discussions of the war and identity boundaries around who can claim the status of a victim or be designated a perpetrator, which has adversely impacted well-intentioned local TJ initiatives as well. A focus on localisation further reveals one more aspect that would not be seen if the analysis was limited to a state or international instrument: while powerful elites in the CPP initiated this discursive strategy, it is *local* actors who are reinforcing it, completing a dynamic feedback loop that has shielded both high-ranking *and* local-level CPP officials from criminal accountability and obfuscated important parts of the historical record that are inimical to their interests.

By showing how local TJ processes can be used to distort, rather than deliver, justice through subtle and indirect framing methods, this article makes two contributions. First, it introduces the theory of distortional framing, which contributes to the literature on discursive frames in International Relations (IR). While most studies of discursive frames in IR consider how social movements use framing to realise international policy achievements,[24] or to show how dominant discourses (for example, of a civil war, of a rebel group, and so on) can lead to policy inertia or misguided policies,[25] this article describes how discursive framing techniques can be used as a strategy to block or undermine unwanted policy initiatives (in this case, human rights accountability and truth recovery efforts). In other words, the article operationalises a theoretical framework that can be used to examine instances of *preventive* discursive tactics in world politics.

Second, the article contributes to ongoing efforts to de-romanticise the local through a more nuanced analysis of these approaches. By dissecting several questionable assumptions underpinning scholarship and practice in this area, it shows how the shortcomings of the local mirror limitations of the top-down approach to TJ. Indeed, the politicisation and distortions experienced in Cambodian localities are not dissimilar to ones that have occurred when the International Criminal Court or other international criminal tribunals have been involved.[26] Thus, the article shows the local is not the panacea some have suggested[27] and that powerful elites have tools to distort TJ at *any* level, including those assumed to be beyond their grasp.

The article begins with a short summary of the blind spots and limitations in existing scholarship on local TJ. The next section develops the theoretical argument in greater detail. After a brief note on methods, the following section traces the use of distortional framing in Cambodia. The concluding section considers the study's implications for theory and practice and discusses several avenues for further research.

[24]Examples include the 'Jubilee 2000' campaign for debt relief and the landmine ban movement. See Joshua W. Busby, 'Bono made Jesse Helms cry: Jubilee 2000, debt relief, and moral action in international politics', *International Studies Quarterly*, 51:2 (2007), pp. 247–75; Richard Price, 'Reversing the gun sights: Transnational civil society targets land mines', *International Organization*, 52:3 (1998), pp. 613–44.

[25]Autesserre's work on the failure of international peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo demonstrates how a dominant frame of the causes of that country's civil war inhibited external interveners from seeing potential solutions that could have aided successful conflict resolution (for example, greater attention to micro-level determinants). Séverine Autesserre, 'Hobbes and the Congo: Frames, local violence, and international intervention', *International Organization*, 63:2 (2009), pp. 249–80; Séverine Autesserre, 'Dangerous tales: Dominant narratives on the Congo and their unintended consequences', *African Affairs*, 111:443 (2012), pp. 202–22.

[26]See, for example, Gabrielle Lynch, *Performances of Injustice: The Politics of Truth, Justice and Reconciliation in Kenya* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Jelena Subotić, *Hijacked Justice: Dealing with the Past in the Balkans* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[27]See, for example, Laura Arriaza and Naomi Roht-Arriaza, 'Social reconstruction as a local process', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 2:2 (2008), pp. 152–72; Joanna R. Quinn, 'Social reconstruction in Uganda: The role of customary mechanisms in transitional justice', *Human Rights Review*, 8:4 (2007), pp. 389–407.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Situating the 'local' and shortcomings of existing research on local TJ

Local TJ efforts have been described in diverse contexts ranging from the Asia-Pacific and South Asia,[28] to Central and South America,[29] to sub-Saharan Africa,[30] and have included traditional courts, healing and reintegration rituals, documentation and truth-telling efforts, reparations projects, and memorialisation initiatives. Conceptualising where and what the 'local' *is* has been contested, however. The crux of this conceptual challenge is these measures are multifaceted and multidirectional – they can be bottom up or top down; they often involve a variety of stakeholders that run the gamut from the local, to the national, to the international; and they regularly combine elements of customary law and local tradition with external ideas and practices imported from elsewhere. In fact, 'local TJ is not always – or, even, usually – *truly* local'.[31] They often receive input from domestic and international actors who authorise and/or fund them.

Some scholars understand the local as a 'place-based standpoint' from which victim's experiences with TJ can be comprehended.[32] Other analysts prefer to associate the term with 'everyday', micro-level responses that are neither bound to the state, nor to external actors.[33] Both of these conceptions are inadequate, however, as they do not capture the complex ways these measures are being adapted and hybridised to meet local circumstances. Hence, I prefer a conception of the local that sees them as '(1) a locally *based* practice that is (2) informal, participatory, and holistic in nature and that (3) seeks to address a legacy of human rights violations in the wake of a mass atrocity'.[34] This definition recognises the essential spatial and participatory dimensions of the local – these *subnational* processes are fundamentally anchored to the very districts, communes, or villages in which they transpire and directly engage communities recovering from war. Importantly, by recognising the local as a spatially bound and participatory process that has transcalar connections, one can begin to appreciate how practices occurring locally intersect with and are shaped by national and international discourses.

The first wave of literature on local TJ was overidealistic, which led to a great deal of romanticisation. More recently, researchers have laid bare a 'dark side of hybridity',[35] calling attention to the 'instrumentalisation, misappropriation and co-option of local practices',[36] which, some warn, may 'cause the precise types of outcomes it was originally intended to overcome and avoid'.[37] The most frequently discussed example is that of Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)[38] using the *gacaca* courts as a tool to bolster *its* version of the 1994 genocide and the party's

[28]Rebekka Friedman, 'Remnants of a checkered past: Female LTTE and social reintegration in post-war Sri Lanka', *International Studies Quarterly*, 62:3 (2018), pp. 632–42; Renée Jeffery and Hun Joon Kim (eds), *Transitional Justice in the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[29]Arriaza and Roht-Arriaza, 'Social reconstruction as a local process'; Pilar Riaño Alcalá and María Victoria Uribe, 'Constructing memory amidst war: The historical memory group of Colombia', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 10:1 (2016), pp. 6–24; Kimberly Theidon, *Intimate Enemies: Violence and Reconciliation in Peru* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

[30]Luc Huyse and Mark Salter (eds), *Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from African Experiences* (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2008).

[31]Kochanski, 'The "local turn" in transitional justice', p. 28, emphasis in original.

[32]Rosalind Shaw and Lars Waldorf, 'Introduction: Localizing transitional justice', in Shaw and Waldorf (eds), *Localizing Transitional Justice*, pp. 3–26.

[33]Pilar Riaño Alcalá and Erin Baines, 'Editorial note', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 6:3 (2012), pp. 385–93.

[34]Kochanski, 'The "local turn" in transitional justice', p. 28, emphasis in original.

[35]Wallis, Jeffery, and Kent, 'Political reconciliation'.

[36]Ibid., p. 160.

[37]Ibid.

[38]The RPF was a rebel group that fought the Rwandan government during the Rwandan civil war (1990–4), which culminated in the genocide of Tutsi by Hutu militias starting on 6 April 1994. Over the next hundred days, between five hundred thousand to one million Tutsi were killed. RPF forces halted the genocide with a military victory on 4 July 1994 and the group has governed the country ever since.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

legitimacy as victors.[39] Such critiques have helped balance discussions of the local by adding careful considerations to the dilemmas surrounding these practices, especially the hidden politics that often underlie and shape them.

Nonetheless, while these works have tempered expectations about local TJ prospects, scholars and practitioners still tend to take a sanguine view of these methods and all too often make facile statements about their benefits.[40] Even critics, who are more attuned to the perils of romanticisation, remain normatively committed to the *principle* of localisation, as 'it is in such spaces that community-relevant initiatives can be identified'.[41] Hence, shortcomings are ascribed to implementation gaps that can be corrected (for example by enhancing victim participation or by bypassing CSOs to support community-driven efforts directly),[42] rather than to an issue with the premise of localism itself.

The predilection for local practice has produced several blind spots in scholarship.[43] In particular, researchers have neglected questions of power and how it is wielded locally. Indeed, while we already know from the literature that local TJ is not impervious to struggles over power and governments may try to control these initiatives to further their own political interests,[44] two major oversights persist in treatments of agency and power. First, local actors are often reduced to a monolithic category, who either uniformly accept or resist orders from above,[45] rather than treated as a collective of actors with their own and, at times, competing interests in the process. This view overlooks crucial nuances in local agency and power,[46] such as: (1) the significance of local/national patronage networks;[47] and (2) the importance of local elites in the on-the-ground design and setup of local TJ,[48] including making key decisions relating to who gets to take part and who does not and, consequently, whose stories are legitimate and whose are not.[49]

Second, extant literature focuses narrowly on manifestations of compulsory power – in which A (for example, the government) exerts direct control over B (for example, the local)[50] – rather than on more subtle and indirect forms of *productive* power.[51] This account is inadequate because it neglects important synergies between local actors, on the one hand, and their national and

[39]Waldorf, 'Mass justice for mass atrocity'. The Rwandan government revived the *gacaca* courts in 2001 to address the backlog of incarcerated suspected *génocidaires*. A drastically modified and scaled-up version of a customary dispute resolution mechanism, the courts heard some two million cases over a seven-year period from 2005 to 2012. See Phil Clark, *The Gacaca Courts, Post-Genocide Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda: Justice Without Lawyers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[40]For an overview of these works, see Kochanski, 'The "local turn" in transitional justice'.

[41]Selim, 'Contestation and resistance', p. 53.

[42]Gready and Robins, 'From transitional to transformative justice'.

[43]Kochanski, 'The "local turn" in transitional justice'.

[44]This is a common critique of Rwanda's *gacaca* courts. See, for example, Thomson and Nagy, 'Law, power and justice'; Waldorf, 'Mass justice for mass atrocity'.

[45]Chandra Lekha Sriram, 'Post-conflict justice and hybridity in peacebuilding: Resistance or cooptation?', in Oliver P. Richmond and Audra Mitchell (eds), *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 58–72.

[46]Hollie Nyseth Brehm and Shannon Golden, 'Centering survivors in local transitional justice', *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 13:1 (2017), pp. 101–21.

[47]For an exception, see Anuradha Chakravarty, *Investing in Authoritarian Rule: Punishment and Patronage in Rwanda's Gacaca Courts for Genocide Crimes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[48]Dustin N. Sharp, *Rethinking Transitional Justice for the Twenty-First Century: Beyond the End of History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 67.

[49]This contrasts with portrayals of silence as a form of individualised – rather than, directed – forgetting meant to restore peaceful coexistence. See Susanne Buckley-Zistel, 'Remembering to forget: Chosen amnesia as a strategy for local coexistence in post-genocide Rwanda', *Africa*, 76:2 (2006), pp. 131–50.

[50]This classic formulation is developed in Robert A. Dahl, 'The concept of power', *Behavioral Science*, 2:3 (1957), pp. 201–15.

[51]Foucault saw the constitution of social subjects and their resultant powers as the outcome of diffuse social interactions, systems of knowledge, and discursive practices of broad and general scope. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

international counterparts, on the other. It also overlooks how power is wielded across these levels, both from the top down *and* from the bottom up. Greater attention to power in a productive sense is needed to shed light on the interplay between power and discourse, and the influence of local elites in producing (and reproducing) dominant discourses of conflict-related events. With this in mind, the next section sets out the core theoretical argument of the article, calling attention to subtle expressions of productive power and the uses of indirect framing practices to undermine undesired policy proposals.

Theoretical framework and argument

What are frames and why do they matter?

In the simplest terms, according to Erving Goffman, frames are 'schemata of interpretation'.[52] They give meaning to events that might otherwise be considered routine or inconsequential. In so doing, they guide people in processing and understanding events in their everyday lives (and in the world more generally) and influence their responses. Thus, frames are *social* objects – they shape how issues are interpreted and, as a result, delimit the range of responses that can be taken. In other words, frames identify what a problem is and what it is not; they diagnose causes and consequences; they delineate the universe of prescriptive actions; and they dwarf all alternative understandings of the situation, thereby, precluding responses to dimensions not deemed part of the problem.

Frames are important in world politics because they are embedded in organisational cultures, routines, and practices.[53] They shape how individuals and organisations, such as the UN, understand and interpret world events (for example, the causes and consequences of Cambodia's civil war). Given the frequency of staff rotations in the field, Séverine Autesserre has highlighted the power of *simple* frames, pointing to the reliance of UN and donor agency personnel on 'an uncomplicated story line … and a straightforward solution'.[54] Hence, frames are a formidable simplification tool in large bureaucratic settings such as the UN – they organise knowledge for policymakers and 'reify and perpetuate arbitrary and often dichotomous categories'.[55] UN field personnel who may be unfamiliar with the nuances of a country's history and culture are more likely to grasp a story with palpable victims and perpetrators and an easy-to-follow timeline of events than a more complex version. When this knowledge is transmitted through discourse and policy, the ensuing actions reinforce the frame as the hegemonic – and in time the *only* – understanding of the situation.[56]

How do political actors use discursive frames?

Constructivist IR scholars researching issue framing and normative consensus formation have mostly drawn on the body of sociological literature on collective action,[57] which depicts agents as both architects and consumers of frames. Hence, while Goffman's approach highlights the structural aspect of frames, where dominant understandings of an event shape policymaking,

Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980). See also Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, 'Power in international politics', *International Organization*, 59:1 (2005), pp. 39–75.

[52]Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, p. 21.

[53]For more on the role of bureaucratic cultures and pathologies in international politics, see Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[54]Autesserre, 'Dangerous tales', p. 202.

[55]Autesserre, 'Hobbes and the Congo', p. 222.

[56]Ibid.

[57]See, for example, Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, 'Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes – toward a synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements', in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (eds), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1–20.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

constructivists have emphasised the agency dimension of framing,[58] where political actors – often social movements – frame an issue in a way that will resonate with external audiences and persuade them of their normative pursuits. When successful, they 'are adopted as new ways of talking about and understanding issues'.[59]

As should be clear by now, framing does not transpire in a political vacuum and is a fundamentally strategic process. It is the result of 'conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action'.[60] Such groups use discursive tactics of persuasion,[61] coercion,[62] and consensus formation[63] to either reframe old problems in new ways or connect emergent norms to existing ideas and principles that already resonate with international audiences.[64] The constructivist literature is rich with historical examples tracing the framing strategies of transnational advocacy networks to sway public opinion and mobilise support for their cause. Richard Price, for example, has discussed how the landmine ban movement successfully 'grafted' its issue to existing principles under international humanitarian law prohibiting the use of indiscriminate weapons causing superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering.[65]

Comparatively less attention has been given to how non-state and government actors use framing to *distort* discourse and undermine unwanted policy outcomes.[66] The field of memory studies – in particular, the body of literature on collective memory – offers a useful point of departure to separate such inherently *preventive* framing tactics from efforts focused on persuasion. Seminal works weighing the ethical, political, and normative implications of collective memory have called attention to how framing can be used as a mode of directed remembrance (and, conversely, forgetting),[67] and there have been several attempts to bring this literature into conversation with IR.[68] There are a few recent examples that are relevant to the present analysis. One is Sverker Finnström's research on the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which describes how the Government of Uganda (GoU) framed the rebels in a self-serving way. This frame, which was propelled by the international media and human rights NGOs, cast the LRA as '"the children in the bush", or even the "terrorists", "hyenas" and "bandits"',[69] while downplaying the GoU's

[58]Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics and political change', *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), pp. 887–917; Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[59]Finnemore and Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics', p. 897.

[60]McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, 'Introduction', p. 6.

[61]Nicole Deitelhoff, 'The discursive process of legalization: Charting islands of persuasion in the ICC case', *International Organization*, 63:1 (2009), pp. 33–65; Rodger A. Payne, 'Persuasion, frames and norm construction', *European Journal of International Relations*, 7:1 (2001), pp. 37–61.

[62]Ronald R. Krebs and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Twisting tongues and twisting arms: The power of political rhetoric', *European Journal of International Relations*, 13:1 (2007), pp. 35–66.

[63]Volha Charnysh, Paulette Lloyd, and Beth A. Simmons, 'Frames and consensus formation in international relations: The case of trafficking in persons', *European Journal of International Relations*, 21:2 (2015), pp. 323–51.

[64]Finnemore and Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics'.

[65]Price, 'Reversing the gun sights'.

[66]An exception is the debate surrounding the framing of the 'Save Darfur' campaign. See, for example, David Lanz, 'Save Darfur: A movement and its discontents', *African Affairs*, 108:433 (2009), pp. 669–77; Lee J. M. Seymour, 'Let's bullshit! Arguing, bargaining and dissembling over Darfur', *European Journal of International Relations*, 20:3 (2014), pp. 571–95.

[67]Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[68]Duncan Bell (ed.), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship Between Past and Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[69]Sverker Finnström, 'Reconciliation grown bitter? War, retribution, and ritual action in northern Uganda', in Shaw and Waldorf (eds), *Localizing Transitional Justice*, p. 151.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

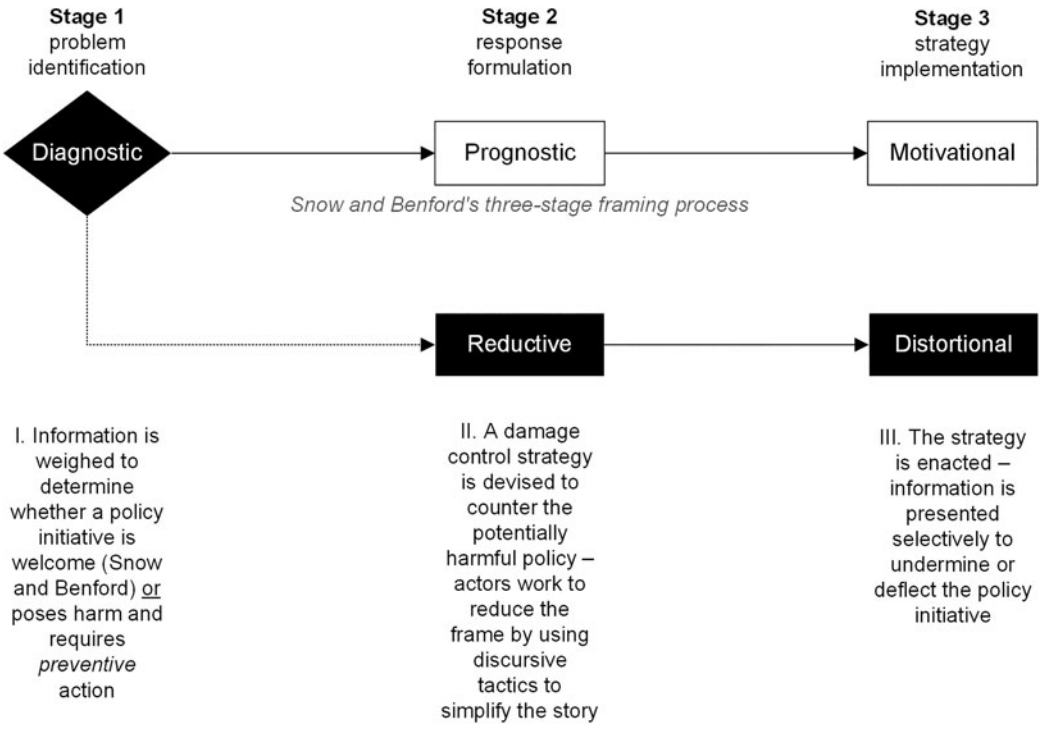


Figure 1. Snow and Benford's three-stage framing model and divergent distortional framing pathway

own transgressions.[70] Another example is Sarah Kenyon Lischer's exploration of the role of memorials in propagating a dominant 'atrocity narrative', which 'determines the plotline … labels victims and perpetrators, interprets history, assigns meaning to suffering, and sets the post-atrocity political agenda'.[71] These examples show that frames are deeply embedded in existing constellations of power and intertwined with politics, with those in power getting to set the frame on *their* terms. Thus, when a truth recovery effort risks implicating members of the regime in atrocities, it has an incentive to distort discourse to deflect harm through preventive framing strategies.

Persuasive and preventive framing strategies

The social theory of David Snow and Robert Benford operationalises the structure and agency dimensions of framing strategies as mutually constitutive processes, where both discourses and identities are produced and reproduced in ways that act on and shape each other.[72] Their three-stage 'core framing tasks' model sees framing as a technique of persuasion (see top of Figure 1).[73]

As we can see, their framework disaggregates the framing process into three distinct stages: diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational. (Diagnostic framing refers to the initial step when an event is classified as an issue in need of corrective action; prognostic framing refers to the next

[70]Kristof Titeca and Theophile Costeur, 'An LRA for everyone: How different actors frame the Lord's Resistance Army', *African Affairs*, 114:454 (2015), pp. 92–114. These efforts have focused on excluding the 1981–86 Ugandan Bush War (when officials in the current government committed atrocities as rebels) and the post-2002 period (when now acting as the government, the Ugandan military's counterinsurgency operations against the LRA brought significant civilian casualties).

[71]Sarah Kenyon Lischer, 'Narrating atrocity: Genocide memorials, dark tourism, and the politics of memory', *Review of International Studies*, 45:5 (2019), p. 806.

[72]Snow and Benford, 'Ideology, frame resonance and participant mobilization'.

[73]Ibid., pp. 199–204.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

stage when actors identify solutions and think about how the issue can be framed in the most persuasive way to obtain a positive policy outcome; motivational framing refers to the final stage when actors deploy their mobilisation strategy in an attempt to persuade audiences and rally public support around their cause.)

While Snow and Benford's three-step framing process is useful to explain instances of successful advocacy campaigns, given its linear motion towards a positive policy result, it has more limited value in explaining cases where framing methods have been deployed as a preventive treatment. The attempts of small arms control opponents to stymie global efforts to limit the illicit trade in small arms are one example. In this case, the National Rifle Association and other groups unsuccessfully tried to distort efforts to negotiate a multilateral treaty as an affront to state sovereignty (for example, the use of arms exports as a foreign policy tool) and an infringement on the constitutional right of citizens in some countries to bear arms.[74] Given distortional framing tactics are being utilised in world politics, it is valuable to think about how they are being employed not only for positive ends, but for purposes of prevention and obstruction as well (see bottom of Figure 1).

Stage 1 of a distortional framing process, I posit, mirrors Snow and Benford's initial problem identification step, where actors weigh information to identify the best way forward but are aware of an alternative pathway – an issue may be thought to pose harm and be in need of a preventive response to undermine the unwanted initiative. Hence, it recognises actors face a key decision at the diagnostic stage between applying corrective (as in Snow and Benford's model) *or* preventive treatments in the ensuing stages of the framing process.

If an issue is deemed problematic, agents work to contrive a *damage control* strategy in Stage 2 (response formulation) to counter and discredit the policy initiative. Thus, instead of utilising corrective tactics, such as amplifying core elements of the frame to craft the most compelling argument, agents work to *reduce* the frame using discursive simplification tools. This includes *cropping* parts that are inimical to the actor's interests in order to propagate a selective and decontextualised account of the issue that is sequestered from contradictory or detrimental facts. It also entails *polarising* identities into distinct categories to delimit boundaries. This technique resembles Hunt, Benford, and Snow's concept of 'boundary framing',[75] referring to the act of assigning collective identities to societal actors by grouping them into so-called 'identity fields'.[76] These heuristic labels are used to sort individuals into socially constructed categories (for example, good/evil, self/other, victim/perpetrator) to eliminate in-between groups. It may further be combined with *scapegoating* and *personification* tactics to discredit key actors and voices.

In Stage 3 (strategy implementation), rather than use motivational framing techniques to muster public support and see through a policy change (as in the landmine ban example), actors use what I call 'distortional framing', which I define as a preventive discursive strategy designed to selectively present the facts concerning an issue with the intention of subverting a policy initiative. While I am operationalising this model for a TJ context, in a broader sense, it is applicable to any policy campaign, such as a multilateral treaty.

How does distortional framing shape transitional justice processes?

When high-ranking members of a government (or its allies) risk being implicated in serious abuses or wish to bolster their legitimacy as victors, they have an incentive to frame wartime events in a way that elides potentially embarrassing or incriminating facts in order to sidestep

[74]For other examples, see Radoslav S. Dimitrov, Detlef F. Sprinz, Gerald M. DiGiusto, and Alexander Kelle, 'International nonregimes: A research agenda', *International Studies Review*, 9:2 (2007), pp. 230–58.

[75]Scott A. Hunt, Robert D. Benford, and David A. Snow, 'Identity fields: Framing processes and the social construction of movement identities', in Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph R. Gusfield (eds), *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), pp. 185–208.

[76]Ibid., p. 186.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

accountability. As Lischer remarks, '[a]cross all cultures, remembering and retelling plays a central role in shaping the identity of a society'.[77] Drawing on this work, I argue this framing strategy rests on two distortions: (1) to set temporal limitations on discussions of the past to politically expedient periods; and (2) to delimit the range of perpetrators to insulate political elites.

Politicising and instrumentalising the timeline of an armed conflict has been effected in many settings where all sides have perpetrated serious crimes. Under these circumstances, abusive regimes are incentivised to set the frame to skip over these periods, as in the earlier examples of Rwanda and Uganda. They also have an incentive to frame wartime identities in a way that creates a clear division separating victims from perpetrators. 'For a postgenocide government', Lischer writes, 'a great deal of legitimacy rests on claiming the identity of either "victim" or "liberator" – and avoiding the label of "perpetrator"'.[78] The objective here is to discredit the opposing side by polarising identities and assigning blame for *all* abuses to the 'other'.[79] Personification, in particular, offers a potent discursive simplification tool that abusive regimes can wield as the storyteller to reduce the conflict to a simple black-and-white narrative that delegitimises the other.

While it is tempting to ascribe distortional framing to authoritarian dynamics in states like Rwanda and Uganda, where it is perhaps unsurprising that local TJ simply filters through an authoritarian prism, the reality is more complex.[80] Indeed, this framework can be relevant in contexts where an actual democratic transition has occurred – what Pádraig McAuliffe refers to as 'the paradigmatic transition'.[81] For example, Joanne Wallis, Renee Jeffery, and Lia Kent have detailed the overt politicisation of local reconciliation efforts in Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea.[82] Another example is the enactment of so-called 'memory laws' in Eastern Europe, starting with Poland in 1998. Legislative actions criminalising statements about the past, such as Holocaust negation or denial of communist-era crimes, have accompanied many of those countries' transitions to democracy. However, as Nikolay Koposov has written, given 'a considerable portion of post-communist elites in Eastern Europe had no interest in objectively exploring past tragedies (not least because of their own collaboration with the Soviets)',[83] such laws have served ulterior motives in several of these states, such as in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, and Latvia, which is to 'shift the blame for both Nazi and communist crimes to others and to sanitize their own national narratives'.[84] In fact, the turn towards such a 'manipulative politics of memory'[85] has only accelerated with the expansion of right-wing populism in the region during the past decade. Finally, the case of post-Franco Spain presents one more example of the framework's applicability to nonauthoritarian contexts. Here too political actors have silenced and distorted deliberations of atrocities committed between 1939 and 1975 during the brutal Francoist dictatorship.[86] A key consideration in distortional framing is, therefore, whether members of the government or important allies risk being accused

[77]Lischer, 'Narrating atrocity', p. 809.

[78]Ibid., p. 825.

[79]For more on 'othering', see David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[80]I thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

[81]Pádraig McAuliffe, 'Transitional justice's expanding empire: Reasserting the value of the paradigmatic transition', *Journal of Conflictology*, 2:2 (2011), p. 33. McAuliffe opposes applying the term 'transition' to initiatives in ongoing conflict situations or authoritarian regimes.

[82]Wallis, Jeffery, and Kent, 'Political reconciliation'.

[83]Nikolay Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 139.

[84]Ibid., p. 176.

[85]Ibid., p. 146.

[86]See Rafael Escudero, 'Road to impunity: The absence of transitional justice programs in Spain', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 36:1 (2014), pp. 123–46.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

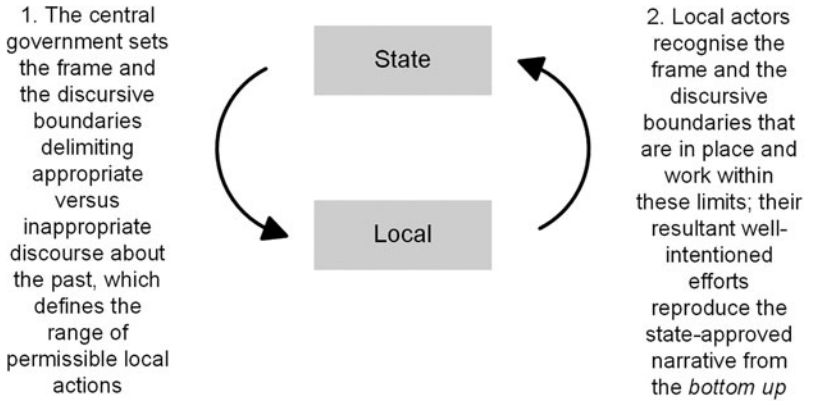


Figure 2. State-local distortional framing feedback loop.

of war crimes, crimes against humanity, or other grave wartime abuses, and/or what political currency might be gained from reinforcing such distortions.

This raises a second question about the scope conditions of the theory, which is how does an abusive government enforce such a distortional frame, especially *locally* where it is expected to have little influence? While Lischer's analysis highlights the role of international determinants in propagating atrocity narratives,[87] and other analysts emphasise state-level actions,[88] I branch off from these earlier works and extend their analysis by focusing on the effects of subnational dynamics. I follow these studies in conceptualising framing as a largely top-down process with the central government setting the discursive bounds and, in doing so, delimiting the range of permissible actions and discourses locally (see Figure 2). Local actors, in turn, recognise the frame and the resulting limits that are in place, delineating appropriate versus inappropriate discourse about the past. Cognisant of the inherent risks of overstepping these boundaries, local actors make a pragmatic decision to 'take what they can get' and work within these limits. This dynamic creates a feedback loop, where perfectly well-intentioned local TJ initiatives and discussions of the past reinforce the state-sanctioned atrocity frame, but from the bottom up.[89] This conception of framing as a feedback loop recognises a tacit agreement between the government and independent activists, where well-meaning local TJ measures proceed, but remain within the state-approved parameters. In doing so, their actions reproduce (rather than challenge) the regime's distortions.

This interaction effect is not possible in every context. It requires a strong patronage network of gatekeepers[90] – often local party officials who are loyal to the government and/or have their own skeletons to hide – to enforce the frame and discipline discourse when necessary. These local gatekeepers are 'connected to bureaucratic webs and domestic audiences'[91] at the state level. Meanwhile, they are positioned locally to scrutinise, shape, or veto unwanted initiatives. Organisers and participants, for their part, are wary of the *perceived* costs of overstepping the implicit discursive boundaries that are in place (for example, personal harm and social exclusion for individuals, decertification and loss of access for CSOs). As a result, cognisant of political allegiances to the central government at the local level, they adopt self-regulating behaviours and internalised constraints.

[87]Lischer, 'Narrating atrocity'.

[88]Susanne Buckley-Zistel, 'Narrative truths: On the construction of the past in truth commissions', in Susanne Buckley-Zistel et al. (eds), *Transitional Justice Theories* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 144–62.

[89]This exemplifies a conception of power in a productive sense.

[90]See Marijke Breuning, 'Roles and realities: When and why gatekeepers fail to change foreign policy', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 9:3 (2013), pp. 307–25; R. Charli Carpenter, 'Governing the global agenda: "Gatekeepers" and "issue adoption" in transnational advocacy networks', in Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan K. Sell (eds), *Who Governs the Globe?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 202–37.

[91]Breuning, 'Roles and realities', p. 313.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

As the Cambodian case study shall reveal, it is through such subtle and largely indirect practices of discursive boundary formation that local TJ efforts are undermined.

A note on methods and case selection

I use the case study approach to probe the plausibility of the theory of distortional framing in Cambodia, asking whether and how powerful political actors subvert local TJ. The principal methodological challenge in answering these questions is to connect the motivations of state-level political elites to indirect framing methods locally. Process tracing presents an effective tool to address this dilemma, as it allows one to explore complex dynamics and relationships across scales.[92]

As should be clear, the approach taken is *not* to conduct a 'linear, causal analysis between independent and dependent variables',[93] but rather, it is to trace 'a dispersed *process*' that treats frames as social constructs, which have diverse origins and become dominant over time due to repeated interactions between agents, structure, and discourse.[94] The study uses process tracing in an interpretive sense to embed discourses within their social context and disaggregate the framing process into observable stages.[95] In doing so, it provides a suitable methodological framework to analyse how discursive practices are being used and misused to shape justice locally, which can be applied to other transitional contexts.

Cambodia is a timely and important case study for at least two reasons. First, it has a history of mass killings. Given many elites in the current regime were complicit in atrocities, the Cambodian case presents an opportunity to explore and assess the incentive structure for distortional framing in a state where actors have a motivation to obfuscate their role in serious crimes. Second, local TJ efforts have received limited attention in the context of Cambodia. An analysis of community-based and participatory TJ approaches will, therefore, extend the existing body of knowledge on local TJ – an emergent, but still relatively understudied, area of scholarly inquiry.

The article draws on four months of in-depth field research in Cambodia in 2014–15. It makes use of 42 semi-structured interviews with key informants who had insider access to TJ discussions in Cambodia.[96] The interview protocol was designed to: reconstruct how and why the issue was framed in the way it was, assess whether a deliberate decision was made to pursue preventive measures to hide potentially harmful facts, and identify what treatments were enacted. The interview data was triangulated through a systematic document analysis[97] and non-participant observation of community-level TJ events throughout Cambodia to obtain first-hand insights into how power dynamics shaped discourse locally.[98]

Framing the 'truth' about the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia

> Politics plays an important role in people's silence about their own experiences during the Khmer Rouge.[99]

[92]Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'Process tracing', in Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel (eds), *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 3–38.

[93]Audie Klotz and Cecelia Lynch, *Strategies for Research in Constructivist International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 37.

[94]This sentence draws on Autesserre, 'Hobbes and the Congo', p. 255, emphasis added.

[95]Vincent Pouliot, '"Sobjectivism": Toward a constructivist methodology', *International Studies Quarterly*, 51:2 (2007), pp. 359–84.

[96]Informants included government spokespeople, Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia officials, representatives of bilateral donor agencies, CSO and NGO staff, journalists, and independent analysts. I triangulated statements obtained from government officials with other sources to increase my confidence in the findings and offset confirmation bias.

[97]Sources included publicly available government statements and speeches, relevant donor and CSO reports, and articles in Cambodia's two main independent newspapers, the *Cambodia Daily* and the *Phnom Penh Post*.

[98]To counteract selection bias, research sites were chosen to include government-friendly areas (Kampot and Takéo) and Khmer Rouge strongholds (Battambang and Siem Reap).

[99]Interview with Khamboly Dy, Director, Department of Policy, Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 30 January 2014.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cambodia's civil war lasted thirty years from 1968 to 1998. The first phase of the conflict (1968–75) featured a devastating US bombing campaign of the country and a peasant revolt led by a group popularly known as the 'Khmer Rouge' (KR) against the US-backed Lon Nol dictatorship. With over a half-million Cambodians killed and more than 750,000 displaced,[100] and other heinous acts including child soldiering[101] and sexual- and gender-based violence,[102] this episode featured brutal violence and upheaval.

On 17 April 1975, KR guerrillas stormed the capital city, Phnom Penh, ousting Lon Nol. An estimated 1.67 to 1.87 million people perished during the ensuing three-year, eight-month, and twenty-day genocidal rule of the KR (1975–9), commonly known as Democratic Kampuchea (DK).[103] The totalitarian Pol Pot regime ordered the forced evacuation of cities in its radical ambition to transform Cambodia into a utopian agrarian economy. Much of the urban population was relocated to the countryside, where individuals were forced into hard labour working on dams, irrigation systems, and other large-scale projects. Many died from starvation, illness, exhaustion, or due to punishment for real (or imagined) transgressions.[104] Sexualised abuse was rampant in DK, including the systematic practice of forced marriage.[105] Meanwhile, dissidents, defectors, public intellectuals, and other perceived 'enemies of the revolution' were imprisoned and massacred in the regime's now infamous 'killing fields'.[106]

While the nightmarish period of DK ended when Vietnam invaded and 'liberated' Cambodia on 7 January 1979, the conflict persisted for another two decades. KR cadres fled *en masse* and regrouped in remote jungle enclaves, especially in the areas bordering Thailand, from which they continued waging a guerrilla war against the central government for another two decades.[107] The viciousness of the post-1979 phase of the conflict, taken together with a diplomatic impasse at the UN over whether to recognise the newly installed People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) regime, triggered massive internal displacement and brought Cambodia to the brink of a humanitarian disaster. The 1991 Paris Peace Agreement secured a tenuous peace. A peacebuilding mission was established (the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia), which organised multi-party elections.

The post-1991 period was acrimonious. The KR continued to resist, boycotting the 1993 elections, which produced a shaky power-sharing arrangement between the CPP[108] and its main political rival at the time, the royalist Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) party.[109] It was at this critical juncture that the Royal Government of Cambodia wrote to the UN in 1997 requesting its assistance to set up an international tribunal to prosecute the senior surviving KR leadership in an effort to defeat the movement through legal

[100]Sorpong Peou, *Intervention and Change in Cambodia: Towards Democracy?* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000).

[101]Péter Klemensits and Ráchel Czirják, 'Child soldiers in genocidal regimes: The cases of the Khmer Rouge and the Hutu Power', *Academic and Applied Research in Military Science*, 15:3 (2016), pp. 215–22.

[102]Adam Kochanski, 'The missing picture: Accounting for sexual and gender-based violence during Cambodia's "other" conflict periods', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 14:3 (2020), pp. 504–23.

[103]Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79* (3rd edn, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

[104]Ibid.

[105]See Rachel Killean, 'An incomplete narrative: Prosecuting sexual violence crimes at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia', *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, 13:2 (2015), pp. 331–52.

[106]David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution since 1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

[107]Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

[108]The CPP, whose leadership is made up from early KR defectors, has governed Cambodia since 1979 – first, as the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party during the PRK dictatorship of the 1980s and then as the CPP since 1991.

[109]The 1980s conflict featured two other militant groups, which disarmed and demobilised as part of the Paris Peace Agreement: the Khmer People's National Liberation Front and the *Armée Nationaliste Sihanoukienne*, the armed wing of FUNCINPEC.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

means. But within a matter of months the political landscape shifted in the CPP's favour, which ousted FUNCINPEC in a *coup d'état* in July 1997. With FUNCINPEC out of the way, Prime Minister Hun Sen secured defections (and allegiances) from nearly all the remaining KR factions by the end of 1998 through his 'win-win' policy – an arrangement that traded amnesty for integration into party structures or the armed forces. Having defeated or co-opted nearly its entire opposition, the CPP no longer needed an international tribunal and reversed its stance. However, bound by its initial request, the CPP entered into a long and often discordant negotiation process with the UN.[110] An agreement detailing the court's mandate and internal rules was reached in 2003 and it began working in 2006 as the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC).[111]

To be clear, the ECCC is *not* a local process – it is a UN-backed, national-level court. Yet, while the study focuses on non-ECCC TJ efforts, the tribunal's creation is nonetheless relevant because it galvanised local CSOs and donor interest in TJ, triggering a groundswell of initiatives engaging victims locally. Many of the civil parties in the ECCC proceedings have been the primary targets and beneficiaries of these efforts,[112] which have played a vital complementary role in translating the top-down approach of the ECCC to victims at the local level. Hence, far from operating in isolation from the ECCC,[113] local efforts were spawned from the court's complex political history[114] and it is responsible for generating the dominant understanding of what TJ means and what it does not in the Cambodian context: 'The ECCC was the catalyst for [local] activities, so in a way it also sets the frame for them in this political environment'.[115]

Problem identification: Skeletons in the CPP's closet

The CPP has a long and chequered history in the KR and Vietnamese occupation – from its senior-most officials to those at the grassroots. This network includes the prime minister,[116] other leading CPP officials,[117] military generals,[118] and local party elites, such as provincial and district governors, and commune and village chiefs.[119] As a result, it has many reasons to

[110]For an overview of this history, see John D. Ciorciari and Anne Heindel, *Hybrid Justice: The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014).

[111]The ECCC is the centrepiece of Cambodia's TJ framework. A 'hybrid' tribunal, the ECCC has heard four cases concerning whether nine members of the KR committed genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity in Cambodia between 17 April 1975 and 6 January 1979. So far, the court has ruled on Cases 001 and 002, while Cases 003 and 004 are still in the pre-trial phase. The ECCC has generated significant controversy: political interference, allegations of corruption, and international staff resignations have cast a long shadow on the court; Hun Sen has repeatedly denounced the court's pursuit of new cases, warning the country would backslide into civil war; the court's sluggish pace and staggering costs have brought considerable frustration and disappointment to victims, given it has only delivered three convictions. See Kirsten Ainley, 'Transitional justice in Cambodia: The coincidence of power and principle', in Jeffery and Kim (eds), *Transitional Justice in the Asia-Pacific*, pp. 125–56.

[112]Victims can participate directly in the ECCC's trial proceedings against the accused persons as civil parties. While less than one hundred civil parties were admitted for Case 001, an astonishing 3,866 were accepted in Case 002. ECCC, 'Internal Rules (Rev.9)', Phnom Penh, 16 January 2015, Rule 23.

[113]The ECCC has done extensive outreach and liaises with the civil parties through two offices: the Civil Party Lead Co-Lawyers Section and the Victims Support Section.

[114]For example, both the CPP and the 1997 UN Group of Experts favoured a limited temporal jurisdiction, but for different reasons. The former wanted to restrict the scope of the investigations, while the latter wished to dampen focus on American bombing of Cambodia in the early 1970s and broad international patronage of the KR in the 1980s from the US, China, Thailand, and others. See Rachel Hughes, 'Ordinary theatre and extraordinary law at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 33:4 (2015), pp. 714–31.

[115]Interview with donor official, Phnom Penh, 29 January 2014.

[116]Human Rights Watch, *30 Years of Hun Sen: Violence, Repression, and Corruption in Cambodia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2015).

[117]These figures include Heng Samrin, Chea Sim, Hor Namhong, among others.

[118]Human Rights Watch, *Cambodia's Dirty Dozen: A Long History of Rights Abuses by Hun Sen's Generals* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2018).

[119]Sebastian Strangio, *Hun Sen's Cambodia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

be wary of TJ and want to limit the damage it could bring – any discussion of members' past ties to the KR or to their actions during the PRK dictatorship is not only unwelcome, but would likely be incriminating.

Response formulation: Setting temporal limits and identity boundaries

To obfuscate embarrassing facts and control damage, the ruling CPP has devised and enacted a distortional framing strategy. This frame advances a truncated account of the past centring on two distortions:[120]

- to emphasise solely the three-year, eight-month, and twenty-day genocidal DK period from 17 April 1975 to 6 January 1979, thereby, denying discussion of the antecedents and aftermath of this time when the country was also at war and large-scale abuses of human rights were taking place; and
- to personalise blame and shift responsibility for all human rights abuses perpetrated during three decades of armed conflict onto the senior KR leaders, thereby, delimiting the range of perpetrators to insulate powerful political elites at the national and local levels.

In the next two sections, I discuss the key elements of this discursive strategy: temporal limits and identity boundaries.

Temporal limits

Public dialogue about Cambodia's thirty-year-long war is largely restricted to the DK period covering crimes from 17 April 1975 to 6 January 1979. The CPP routinely references the '7 January' (or 'Victory Day') narrative to remind Cambodians it 'liberated' the country. Other stages of the war receive little attention. The dominant narrative neglects the brutality of the US-supported Lon Nol dictatorship and the impact of American bombing of Cambodia's eastern provinces during the Vietnam War, which stoked resentment at the government and support for the KR. For CPP officials, any focus on this time is highly undesirable: it would embarrass them by revealing Hun Sen's and other elites' past ties to the KR during this period when many were in the group's political and military chains of responsibility.[121]

This frame also leaves out nearly two decades of armed conflict after the fall of DK, when these same CPP elites were key figures in the PRK dictatorship during Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. It is a fact that all sides committed serious criminal acts during this chapter of the war, including the military – the offensives and counteroffensives of the mid-1980s produced significant civilian casualties.[122] Furthermore, it is alleged that Hun Sen personally oversaw the most egregious policy of this period, the 'K5 Plan', as the PRK's Minister of Foreign Affairs.[123] The disastrous project forcibly relocated 380,000 Cambodians from the southern and eastern provinces to the Thailand border area. There they were forced into hard labour digging trenches, erecting rudimentary barriers, and sowing landmines.[124] Many contracted malaria, were maimed by landmines, or suffered from starvation and severe exhaustion; tens of thousands died and

[120]This formulation echoes and draws on existing literature on a dominant 'atrocity narrative' of the KR regime. See Alexander Laban Hinton, *The Justice Facade: Trials of Transition in Cambodia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Lischer, 'Narrating atrocity'; Peter Manning, *Transitional Justice and Memory in Cambodia: Beyond the Extraordinary Chambers* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[121]Human Rights Watch, *30 Years of Hun Sen*.

[122]Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*.

[123]Margaret Slocomb, 'The K5 gamble: National defence and nation building under the People's Republic of Kampuchea', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32:2 (2001), pp. 195–210.

[124]Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

countless more continue to be impacted by the deadly legacy of landmines in the border region.[125]

Identity boundaries

The second element of this framing strategy is to reduce and polarise the spectrum of wartime roles and identities to delimit the range of perpetrators and insulate members of the CPP. A common tactic has been to lay the blame for all abuses on the KR, even though this does not square with reality. Indeed, as Julie Bernath has remarked, three decades of conflict has 'produced particularly complex, malleable and fluctuating allegiances and identities',[126] with very few individuals fitting within a tidy divide separating victims from perpetrators.

This oversimplification has had two consequences. First, it singles out only the senior-most KR leadership – all of whom are deceased or on trial at the ECCC – as the sole individuals responsible for *all* conflict-related atrocities. Placing the blame on 'a few accused' – even if the actual lived experiences of KR cadres challenge this frame[127] – allows the ruling party to shelter its own members, including at the community level. This wedge has been driven using discursive personification tactics deployed to personalise the violence, a strategy developed during the PRK regime, as Alexander Laban Hinton has explained, to discredit the KR as 'the "Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique" or "traitors", who were "savage", "barbarous", "fascist", "genocidal", and "Maoist" and ultimately manipulated by the "Peking hegemonists" or "expansionists"'.[128] Youk Chhang, a long-time Cambodian genocide justice advocate, and Executive Director of the influential Documentation Center of Cambodia, corroborated this assessment: 'The CPP needs to bolster their separation from the Pol Pot group. They were the ones who liberated the people from the genocide. They need a clear distinction between the criminals and the liberators'.[129]

Second, and related, assigning responsibility to the senior KR leadership serves the additional purpose of absolving everyone else – a category that includes collaborators, rank-and-file cadres, and early defectors who may have committed atrocities as well (among them many high-ranking and local-level CPP elites). By blending these complex political perpetrators together with anyone who suffered at the hands of the regime, the KR has been 'congealed into an entrenched stereotype', even though they were not 'the homogenous group that the truism suggests'.[130] Therefore, while there was a wide-ranging spectrum of roles and responsibilities among KR cadres and different levels of personal cruelty, the present framing leaves no space for exploring these moral 'grey areas' and ensures they are left unexamined.

Strategy implementation: Distorting the frame and the limits of localism

Given the CPP's legacy of abuse, and with this powerful group still in power, officials at the highest echelons of the party to those at the grassroots share a common interest in silencing discourse about conflict-related events outside the three-year, eight-month, and twenty-day KR regime. While local efforts are often suggested as a workaround to political interference, in this section I show how a dominant Cambodia conflict frame has limited community-based and participatory approaches to fit a consistent storyline.

[125]Ibid.

[126]Julie Bernath, '"Complex political victims" in the aftermath of mass atrocity: Reflections on the Khmer Rouge tribunal in Cambodia', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 10:1 (2016), p. 50.

[127]For example, KR soldiers – some of whom had been kidnapped as children – were often forced to carry out violent acts under extreme duress to show their dedication to the 'revolution'.

[128]Hinton, *The Justice Facade*, p. 45.

[129]Interview with Youk Chhang, Executive Director, Documentation Center of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, 30 January 2014.

[130]Kristina Chhim, *'Pacifying Vindictiveness By Not Being Vindictive': Do Memory Initiatives in Cambodia Have a Role in Addressing Questions of Impunity?* (Utrecht: Impunity Watch, 2012), p. 56.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The interconnected processes of truth-telling and psychosocial trauma therapy, and memorialisation form the pillars of local TJ efforts in Cambodia.[131] Local CSOs and NGOs, working with communities and bilateral donor agencies, have spearheaded these initiatives. Drawing on Khmer culture and Buddhist rituals, these locally rooted and culturally adapted practices have been used to promote ends ranging from memory, to reconciliation, to healing, to intergenerational dialogue and education.

A dominant Cambodia conflict frame, disciplined by a network of local gatekeepers, has limited these well-intentioned efforts and oriented them to remind the public that the CPP expelled the KR and its senior leadership (that is, the 'Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique') is to blame for all serious crimes. The radically centralised structure of Cambodian politics has enabled these actions, with the CPP benefiting from an elaborate patronage system that it uses to maintain a grip on power and bureaucratic control all the way down to the village level.[132] As Duncan McCargo has remarked: 'The CPP is a tightly organized party with formidable grassroots networks and a primary appeal to the rural masses'; the party is largely considered unbeatable in rural areas because of its 'tight grip on village-level political structures'.[133] This has been consequential in shaping local TJ efforts. The CPP's bureaucratic infiltration of local party structures means it is able to shape events at the grassroots level through a network of local gatekeepers, who are loyal to Hun Sen and perform an array of bureaucratic and, mostly indirect, social control functions. Aware of the country's tragic cycle of violence, the Cambodian people and local NGOs working on TJ are well acquainted with the costs of challenging the government of the moment and avoid overstepping the state-imposed discursive limits. As a result, their well-intentioned efforts reproduce the government-approved frame, but from the bottom up.

In practice, this means any organised public meeting requires prior approval from the appropriate local gatekeeper – either the commune chief or the district governor (depending on the size and location of the event). At this step, the organiser must submit a detailed agenda of the proposed gathering outlining what topics will be covered and who will be participating. The local gatekeeper can approve or reject activities based on this information, which allows them to peer into local TJ initiatives and even indirectly shape them – organisers tend to limit their proposals to topics they perceive to be politically acceptable. This gatekeeping role has had significant consequences for the remit of local TJ. As one practitioner explained: 'It was not easy. Every time we had to explain [to the local authorities] the whole concept, the setting, the target group, the level of discussion'.[134] One donor official described how these dynamics played out on the ground and shaped local TJ:

> Communities do not want to go much further if they know that it could cause trouble. It never reaches the point where it would be controversial, where we would face government repression. The people involved restrict themselves to only what is socially accepted and don't go beyond that.[135]

More concretely, local practitioners and participants limit themselves to the 1975–9 time frame. Given the participant pool is drawn from this time (often from among ECCC civil parties), the stories that emerge are, unsurprisingly, predominantly from the period of DK. At the same time, the frame excludes other conflict episodes from local truth-telling – either because they are

[131]While my focus is on local truth-telling, other analysts have described similar dynamics in memorialisation. See Rachel Hughes, 'Memory and sovereignty in post-1979 Cambodia: Choeung Ek and local genocide memorials', in Susan E. Cook (ed.), *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda: New Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 257–79; Lischer, 'Narrating atrocity'; Manning, *Transitional Justice and Memory in Cambodia*.

[132]Duncan McCargo, 'Cambodia: Getting away with authoritarianism?', *Journal of Democracy*, 16:4 (2005), pp. 98–112.

[133]Ibid., p. 99.

[134]Interview with Im Sophea, Former Head, Victims Support Section, ECCC, 23 February 2015.

[135]Interview with donor official, Phnom Penh, 29 January 2014.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

considered out of bounds or not part of TJ. As Im Sophea, the former head of the ECCC's Victims Support Section, who was involved in local TJ during an earlier stint with a CSO, explained: 'the government holds the answer', as to why the post-1979 period is off-limits from discussion, 'some groups of people, who consider themselves victims, would like to cover the whole scope from 1970 to beyond 1979'.[136] But these stories are denied under the current frame, he continued: 'They want to discuss who's a survivor, who's wrong, who's to blame, and why it came to that scenario'.[137] One donor official concluded that 'it's actually kind of convenient for [the CPP] that it's restricted to that period of 1975–79' and admitted 'nobody really goes that far out of it' for fear of the consequences.[138] This reinforces the idea that local CSOs and bilateral donor agencies are aware of the temporal boundaries that are in place and tailor their initiatives to stay within the implicit state-sanctioned limits.

Local truth-telling efforts have reinforced dominant identity categories as well. When victims speak, they limit themselves to 'safe narratives'[139] they perceive as acceptable. The result is a familiar tale of the paradigmatic victim. Indeed, as one informant explained: 'a lot of the ways the victims talk about their suffering is just repeated again and again – it's always the same'.[140] Furthermore, when former KR cadres are involved, they are encouraged to tell a specific *type* of narrative. In the words of one local practitioner: 'When we work with them, we want to focus on their feelings of guilt, remorse, and shame. As part of the Khmer Rouge, they are not purely victims. They are offenders, perpetrators'.[141] These tales reinforce the distortional frame by polarising and reducing the spectrum of wartime responsibilities into a straightforward victim-perpetrator binary that delimits the range of perpetrators. Hence, rather than probing the diverse roles and responsibilities that former KR cadres had, there is limited exploration of their motives to take part in crimes or to act as rescuers and upstanders.

One informant, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, shared this opinion.

> The government, and so many people in power, are essentially perpetrators, in one way or another, to whatever degree. That really shuts it down. There's not to be any discussion, since a lot of those 'perpetrators' are still leaders in their communities – village chiefs, commune chiefs. Everybody knows that.[142]

Another knowledgeable observer of local TJ efforts in Cambodia echoed this position.

> You have such mixing of victim and perpetrator identities … But all of the narrative is based on a sort of 'pure victim' … Sometimes it feels like there hasn't been a lot of exploration of different victim experiences, the myriad ways victimisation can occur. Also some people are victims, but at the same time perpetrators. That's not brought into the narrative at all.[143]

As the informant continued:

> It's important to be more open to other narratives than just 'the bad Khmer Rouge' and 'the saviour CPP', and also 'the poor population who suffered'. At the moment, there is no space for any in-between discussion of grey areas. Some perpetrators suffered or lost family

[136]Interview with Im Sophea, Former Head, Victims Support Section, ECCC, 23 February 2015.
[137]Ibid.
[138]Interview with donor official, Phnom Penh, 29 January 2014.
[139]Julie Bernath, 'Civil party participation and resistance at the Khmer Rouge tribunal', in Briony Jones and Julie Bernath (eds), *Resistance and Transitional Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 118.
[140]Interview, Phnom Penh, 18 February 2014 (identity withheld).
[141]Interview with local practitioner, Phnom Penh, 8 December 2015.
[142]Interview, Phnom Penh, 14 March 2014 (identity withheld).
[143]Interview, Phnom Penh, 18 February 2014 (identity withheld).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

members, but then at the same time they killed thousands of other people – that's an area that has got no attention at all.[144]

These statements suggest the government's atrocity frame has become the *only* interpretation of the conflict and the hegemonic version, and they reveal how well-intentioned local efforts have worked to reinforce a truncated version of history and narrow view of conflict identities. Local gatekeepers have played an integral role in sequestering episodes of the conflict that are inimical to the ruling party's interests, which has helped to insulate state- *and* local-level elites from accountability, while withholding recognition from those who experienced loss and harm before or after the genocide.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the promise *and* perils of the recent local turn in TJ practice and scholarship. While existing research has discussed some of the limitations of the bottom-up approach, it is still seen to hold several advantages over top-down instruments (for example, trials and truth commissions). By unpacking the subtle and indirect ways agents, power, and discourse shape and undermine these initiatives, the case study of Cambodia has revealed some of the limitations of such an approach in settings where the government has also perpetrated abuses.

The findings have several implications for ongoing and future transitions where local TJ might also be considered. First, while the subversion of local TJ in Rwanda and Uganda is well known, the Cambodian case study reveals such techniques are more prevalent than is understood. This raises questions about where else localism is being used as a pretext to mask the truth, insulate powerful political elites, and legitimise abusive governments. While it may be easy to write off distortional framing to authoritarian dynamics, such as those found in the increasingly authoritarian context of Cambodia, the findings caution against the wholesale promotion of local TJ in any context where known human rights abusers remain in positions of power, including in so-called 'paradigmatic transitions'. Indeed, the study invites further inquiry into the factors that might facilitate and counteract justice deflection. Is this merely a function of authoritarian rule or a matter of setting a broader atrocity frame from the outset? Furthermore, the analysis opens avenues to explore the role of distortional framing practices not only in other types of transitions, but also in relation to other non-local dimensions of TJ and peacebuilding.

A second implication is that researchers and practitioners need to be more attuned to how what happens locally has ramifications for the national level. While prevailing literature on norm dynamics tends to focus on how ideas trickle down in a top-to-bottom direction,[145] the empirical analysis illustrates how local agents can reinforce shared understandings of the past, but from the bottom up. Scholars need to interrogate the nature and implications of these micro- and local-level power dynamics in order to acquire a deeper appreciation of how local efforts support or disrupt human rights activists' work at the national and global levels. Are there certain criteria (for example, of international oversight, of strong local capacity and organisation, and so on) that when present or absent are more likely to support a framing that will advance accountability efforts? In particular, the study highlights the important, but largely neglected, role of gatekeepers in TJ processes. Future work should consider not only local gatekeepers, but also other categories of actors occupying gatekeeping positions.[146]

In closing, while recent turns towards the local in the fields of TJ and peacebuilding have invigorated debates about the most appropriate level of action and locus of agency, this article has called attention to how such well-intentioned initiatives can also be undermined. In so doing,

[144]Ibid.
[145]Finnemore and Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics'.
[146]Yakinthou, 'Reframing friction'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

it encourages scholars to be mindful of distortional framing in world politics and how such discursive techniques can manufacture 'truths' that are less fact than fiction.

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank the editors of *RIS*, two anonymous reviewers, Rita Abrahamsen, Stephen Brown, Alexandra Gheciu, Briony Jones, Adam Moore, Jamie O'Connell, Geoffrey Robinson, Chandra Lekha Sriram, Carla Suarez, and Harvey M. Weinstein for their valuable feedback. A special thanks to Roland Paris for his mentorship and our many discussions over the years, which greatly strengthened this work. I thank seminar participants at Stanford University, UCLA, University of Ottawa, and the University of Western Ontario for their helpful questions and comments on earlier drafts of this article. This work was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and was also carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada. Information on the Centre is available on the web at www.idrc.ca.

Adam Kochanski is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for International Peace and Security Studies at McGill University. He holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Ottawa. His main research interests are transitional justice, peacebuilding, and international norms.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cite this article: Kochanski, A. 2021. Framing, truth-telling, and the limits of local transitional justice. *Review of International Studies* **47**, 468–488. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000115