

Narratives of Violence and Trauma: Modes of Storytelling and the Politics of Victim and Perpetrator Representation

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Who controls narratives of trauma and victimhood and for whom in international politics and justice? To what extent can different sites and modes of story-telling open up representation and create new possibilities for engagement? Or do they risk falling into the same tropes, where victims are expected to be Elstain's sanitised 'beautiful souls' and perpetrators are uniformly 'ugly'? What constraints does international law and politics place on the types of narratives, and the types of stories that are allowed to be told? What happens when we move from mechanisms of transitional justice – whether courts or truth commissions – to other sites and modes of storytelling? What is the picture of trauma that is being constructed? This panel brings together a set of five papers that engage with these questions of whose story is being told, by whom, under what rules and constrained or enabled by what type of legal and political context, drawing on examples from South Africa, the United States, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia.

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