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Notes from the Field

'Taking Responsibility for the White Collective': Implicated Subjects and Transformative Justice in the United States

Bretton J. McEvoy*

ABSTRACT∞

Transitional justice largely ignores that majority of actors who, though not directly responsible for violence, are structurally implicated in systems of injustice that (re)produce violence. Their absence is incompatible with the normative goals of the 'transformative justice' agenda, which include targeting the causes of (structural) violence, a project decidedly shaped by the presence of implicated subjects, especially in cases of historical injustice. This article engages a select group of implicated subjects – anti-racist white activists in the United States – to examine what their endeavours and struggles to reckon with their implication in the ongoing histories of racism and white supremacy can tell us about the boundaries of a transformative justice model. Drawing upon nine months of participant observation and 30 in-depth interviews within predominantly white activist spaces in the Greater Boston area, I contend that viewing transitional justice from the lens of implicated subjects serves to trouble the field's transformative aspirations.

KEYWORDS: Implicated subjects, race, responsibility, transformative justice, United States

INTRODUCTION

The transformative goals of transitional justice are increasingly recognized as normatively salient in the field, but the question remains, *how* are such goals being implemented in practice? One

*Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Bayreuth, Germany. Email: bretton.mcevoy@uni-bayreuth.de

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particular challenge concerns the populations being targeted by transitional justice interventions. Whereas traditional conceptions of transitional justice have focused on the relationship between direct perpetrators and victims, the 'transformative turn'[1] towards structural violence implicates a much broader set of actors beyond the confines of victims and perpetrators. Especially in cases of historical injustice, where the victim–perpetrator binary does not adequately capture the structural-genealogical legacies and continuities of violence, the potential for transformative justice would seem to demand a set of processes that also engage that larger group of individuals who, while not directly perpetrating violence, may nevertheless enable, perpetuate and benefit from regimes of domination that help to (re)produce situations of violence, or what Michael Rothberg has termed, 'implicated subjects.'[2]

This article pays close attention to a group of implicated subjects operating outside the traditional confines of transitional justice – namely, anti-racist white activists in the United States – to examine what their[3] endeavours and struggles to reckon with their implication in the histories and present-day injustices of racism and white supremacy can tell us about the boundaries of a transformative justice model. While numerous scholars have critically engaged with the progressive ambitions of the transformative justice agenda,[4] the challenges and opportunities that arise look quite different when viewed from the perspective of implicated subjects. With racial justice uprisings protesting anti-Black police violence and deep-seated white supremacy in the United States,[5] there has been growing interest in the relevance and potential of transitional justice to serve as a framework for addressing systemic racial oppression in the country.[6] For that justice to be transformative, we must also attend to the roles, responsibilities and repercussions of implicated subjects.

Drawing upon immersive field research within predominantly white anti-racist spaces in the Greater Boston Area of the northeastern United States, I begin by grounding this study in the pursuits of a select group of white activists organizing alongside activists of colour within the historical boundaries and socioeconomic realities of the city of Boston. Long committed to racial and social justice organizing, these particular white activists are not your typical bystanders unaware of their complicities within systems of injustice. Rather, their progressive-radical politics stem in part from a meaningful recognition of their very embeddedness in such systematic reproduction. As they succeed and fail, it is this tension between their normative aspirations and their embodied realities that may shed light on the complexities – but also the possibilities – of realizing a transformative justice agenda.[7]

This article proceeds from the conviction that (some) white people are necessary for transformative justice to become realizable in the United States. The relational fact of racism and white supremacy means it is not *enough* to invest in communities of colour *without white people also* divesting of privilege and power. Utilizing white activists' own articulation of a political orientation that seeks to 'take responsibility for the white collective,' I outline how these anti-racist

[1] Wendy Lambourne, 'Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding after Mass Violence,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 3(1) (2009): 28–48.

[2] Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

[3] While I engaged as a co-activist as part of my participant observer ethnography, and also identify as white (and cis male / middle class), I chose to use third-person pronouns throughout this article to make clear the distinction between myself as researcher and the activists under study.

[4] Dustin N. Sharp, 'What Would Satisfy Us? Taking Stock of Critical Approaches to Transitional Justice,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 13(3) (2019): 570–589.

[5] While racism and white supremacy are oppressive to all people of colour, this study has focused on anti-Black racism.

[6] Collen Murphy, 'Transitional Justice in the United States,' *Just Security*, 16 July 2020, https://www.justsecurity.org/71236/transitional-justice-in-the-united-states/ (accessed 19 December 2023); Yuvraj Joshi, 'Racial Transitional Justice in the United States,' in *Race and National Security*, ed. Matiangai Sirleaf (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

[7] It is important to emphasize that the struggles of such white actors are *not* equivalent to those of people of colour, who often have no choice when it comes to fighting racism and white supremacy.

actors are contending with their implicated subjectivities as 'white' people. I conclude by considering what these racial justice projects in the United States might tell us about transitional and transformative justice.

ANTI-RACIST ORGANIZING OF WHITE PEOPLE IN BOSTON

Within the long history of racial justice movement work led by people of colour in the United States, there have always been (a minority of) white allies. In more recent years, however, there has emerged a more explicit effort to organize white people *as* white people, a practice originating from calls by some within the Black liberation movement of the 1960s for white people to organize for racial justice within their own white communities in accountable relationship to communities of colour.[8] Community Change Inc. (CCI) grounds this work in the city of Boston, having focused on the 'roots of racism in white culture' since 1968, and now being one of the longest-running anti-racism organizations in the country.[9]

A northeastern city and elite university community, Boston is often (self-)identified as a 'cradle of liberty.' Yet its history exposes deep roots in the enslavement of Africans, with wealth created through participation in the business of human trafficking and its related industries forming the bedrock of Boston's economy. While slavery was abolished much earlier in Boston than in most of the rest of the country, white Bostonians continued to uphold a system of court-enforced segregation in housing and education for more than a century afterwards.[10]

CCI emerged out of the civil rights movement and amidst the racial tension visible within many cities across the United States in the late 1960s. Despite the small minority of white people activated into anti-racist work at the time, violent white opposition soon erupted in response to the push to desegregate Boston schools in 1974, piercing the veneer of the city's claims to a socially liberal identity. Now almost 50 years later, Boston remains one of the most racially segregated and gentrified cities in the nation.[11]

The evolution of CCI is also one driven by changes in the national landscape, where the growth of white caucus organizing for racial justice has expanded significantly in recent years, especially since the establishment of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ). Founded in response to the backlash against the Obama presidency, and expanding with each (publicly exposed) act of police violence and the emerging leadership of the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), SURJ is a national network of groups organizing white people to act for racial and economic justice. With CCI stewardship, a local chapter of SURJ formed in 2015, and SURJ Boston (SURJ-B) became an action-orientated wing of the CCI infrastructure.

Building upon a small set of studies on anti-racist white activists in the United States,[12] my research accompanies long-committed white activists from CCI and SURJ-B in their endeavour to challenge the systems that give them unearned power and advantage at the harmful, often violent, expense of people of colour. I approach this community of activists and their city of Boston as an 'exemplary case'[13] of the tension between the purported will to undo white supremacist social structures and the embodied 'realities' of whiteness, or what Jennifer Harvey refers to as 'the moral crisis of being white.'[14]

[8] Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).
[9] Community Change Inc. (CCI), 'Home Page,' https://communitychangeinc.org (accessed 19 December 2023).
[10] Equal Justice Initiative, 'The Transatlantic Slave Trade,' 2022, https://eji.org/report/transatlantic-slave-trade/ (accessed 19 December 2023).
[11] The Spotlight Team, 'Boston. Racism. Image. Reality,' *The Boston Globe*, 10 December 2017.
[12] Mark R. Warren, *Fire in the Heart: How White Activists Embrace Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[13] Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[14] Jennifer Harvey, *Whiteness and Morality: Pursuing Racial Justice Through Reparations and Sovereignty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

I rely on data collected from nine months of sustained participant observation as a volunteer and co-activist, 30 in-depth interviews with experienced white activists and activists of colour and self-reflexivity.[15] As CCI and SURJ-B each address the role of white people in (re)producing racial injustice, activists involved in both organizations are predominantly white. While all grapple with their unique roles in perpetuating racism and white supremacy, that work is also enabled and complicated by their intersectional social locations.

With a significant majority of the groups' members being middle class and college educated, a number of activists acknowledged a pernicious 'middle-class culture' that pervades group behaviour, yet a small working-class contingent is also prominent in its impact. Many of the activists are also female and/or queer, making them (on average) more likely to be attuned to the oppression of others, yet some (notably female, femme and nonbinary people) also pointed to the deployment of female victimhood as a tool to deflect from taking racial responsibility. As a middle-class white man myself, I also encountered a not-insignificant number of male-identified people engaged in these spaces, yet relatively few other cis-hetero white men. Most members were aged between 25 and 45, though a few long-time activists were in their 50s to 70s.

Significantly, CCI and SURJ-B have also been guided by the visionary leadership of a minority of people of colour, including the two women of colour who have led CCI for most of the past decade. Both groups also rely on local partnerships and the broader social movements led and inspired by people of colour, including perhaps especially, but by no means exclusively, the M4BL.

With white socialization in the United States profoundly distorting white people's racial awareness and self-understanding,[16] white activists aspiring to live out anti-racism are often torn between a critical distrust of themselves and an accompanying recognition that structural change demands white transgressive agency. To help steer the course, many of the white activists come to ground their politics in an ethic and epistemology of 'following the leadership of people of colour.'

At the same time, in practice, 'people of colour' are far from monolithic, and deferring to people of colour also functions as an excuse for white people not doing their own work. Therefore, white activists must ultimately make their own decisions about how they can most effectively contribute to racial justice possibilities from their implicated subject positions. For the long-committed anti-racist white activists whom I accompanied, their years of participation in the internal, interpersonal and collective work of white caucus and multiracial social justice organizing as white people led to the emergence of a common ideological praxis. Anchored in the relationships and needs of people of colour as its guiding philosophy, that praxis consists of three core elements: (1) acknowledging one's implicatory ties to the white collective; (2) working to capacitate the self-determination of people of colour; and (3) engaging, challenging and catalysing other white people. A number of activists referred to this three-pronged process as one of 'taking responsibility for the white collective.'

'THIS IS (NOT) US': ACKNOWLEDGING WHO 'WE' ARE

After the 2016 election of Donald Trump and the 2017 white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, Aba wrote a letter to her local editor. A queer Black female and first-generation immigrant who grew up in the racialized class divides between her private school and working-class communities in Boston, Aba is a long-time social justice educator, organizer and executive, and a (former) board member at CCI. Her letter was a reaction to the common refrain heard within

[15] I received approval from the Tufts University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 24 September 2017 (with several subsequent approvals under continuing review) to carry out this research with human subjects.

[16] Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

white liberal circles across the nation after Charlottesville: 'This is not us.' Instead, Aba declared, 'Yeah the f*** it is. Own it. This is us. And if we're gonna pretend like it's not, we're not gonna get anywhere.'

Most people socialized as white in the United States are exceedingly unaware of the profoundly violent histories and pervasive realities of racism and white supremacy that continue to structure the nation today. Gross misrepresentations of national history permeate school classrooms, mainstream media and public imagery, with whiteness serving to invisibilize privilege and (re)produce ignorance towards the disadvantaged experience of others.[17] Yet whereas ignorance of the breadth and depth of racial injustice is widespread in the white imagination, white denial does not primarily function to contest the *existence* of racial injustice. Rather, the liberal response to Trump or Charlottesville exposes a distinction between what Stanley Cohen calls 'literal denial' and 'implicatory denial,' where the latter framing does not dispute the facts, but denies or minimizes the psychological, political or moral implications that follow.[18] In other words, 'this is not us' can be seen as a rhetorical device employed by liberals to, on the one hand, recognize the racial discrimination and violence that emanates from the words and actions of Trump and his followers, while at the same time distancing themselves from their own implication in the systems that brought Trump to power.

Alex's story helps to further the point. A gay white male in his 30s who came of age within the diverse spaces of his university experience, Alex was seen, and saw himself, as 'not your typical white guy.' He found community among other students who also 'didn't feel normative' and joined a brotherhood in which he was the only white guy among men of colour. These experiences and relationships brought him into more personal contact with the realities of racism, leading Alex to begin participating in some forms of anti-racist activism. Yet despite his increasing awareness of racial injustice *out there*, he soon found that he was enacting many of the same problematic behaviours he was seeking to contest.

Within the model of collective responsibility taking, it is not enough for white people like Alex to acknowledge that racism harms people of colour. They must also acknowledge the implications that follow for white people. That means confronting the liberal ideology of individualism and its culture of impunity that serves to distance white people from their collective roles in reproducing structural injustice.

For US-Americans with privilege and power – particularly white males – claiming a group or collective identity entails the sacrifice of uniqueness, individuality and unmarked normativity.[19] Despite his initial steps towards engaging in anti-racism, Alex still found himself hiding in his individualism, or in the non-normativity of his queer identity. Positioning himself as separate from the broader white collective, he adopted the identity of a 'good' white person, thus inherently labelling other white people as comparatively 'bad.'

Instead, taking responsibility for the collective means recognizing sociality and granting that 'I' do not exist entirely apart from a 'We.' From such a standpoint, these white activists are endeavouring to take seriously 'their' history of racialized violence and the collective reckoning it demands. For Alex, that means participating not only in racial justice movement building in solidarity with people of colour but also in the individual and interpersonal work of 'owning' his whiteness, or recognizing and working to undo the problematic behaviours and consequences of being socialized as white in the United States.

[17] Charles W. Mills, 'White Ignorance,' in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

[18] Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 8.

[19] Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

While the move towards internalizing collective responsibility can be a key shift for implicated subjects, such a reorientation is not absolute. Collectives are not homogenous, and responsibilities will differ depending on intersectional social positions and life experiences. But within a US culture that has consistently and across generations disregarded the role of structure in constraining agency, particularly for African-Americans,[20] many white people – especially those who are class advantaged and/or cis male – would do well to also acknowledge the role of structure in *enabling* their agency.

CAPACITATING BLACK SELF-DETERMINATION

In the summer of 2016, a Boston area chapter of Black Lives Matter organized a shutdown of its local City Hall. Cole was one of the four white accomplices supporting the two young Black women leading the action. With their[21] deep commitment to trusting in Black and youth leadership, Cole was initially reluctant to push back on decisions made by the organizers, recognizing that they were 'just another white person in the room who couldn't necessarily be trusted.' Yet once they had developed a commitment to one another, where it was clear that they were each taking significant risk and 'in this together,' a different dynamic of collaboration and trust evolved that made the project into a more collective undertaking.

Contrasting sharply with the ideology of individualism, Cole's disposition here as a white person is orientated towards trusting in Black leadership. Yet they also acknowledged the limitations of identity politics, where 'Condoleeza Rice is a Black woman and I'm not going to take leadership from her.' What is critical, they tell me, is subscribing to a shared value system and building in systems of accountability, grounded in relationality, that don't allow for leadership that reinforces power imbalances.

Relational accountability functions as a core element of white activists' endeavour to reconstruct moral relations with the people of colour in their lives. While such a rationale may help to motivate white responsibility taking, what Cole so deftly demonstrates is also a willingness to be in active solidarity *without* placing demands on people of colour and their relationships. Furthermore, and as stressed by numerous white activists, leaning into collective responsibility is to recognize that their implicated subjectivities make them particularly unfit to determine what justice for people of colour ought to look like. Instead, a truly transformative justice would support people of colour's self-determination to decide for themselves.

The *capacity* to be self-determining, however, is dependent on people's social and material conditions.[22] Cole displays one method of helping to enable people of colour's self-determined resistance work by putting their body on the line. But on a larger scale, and for many white activists, collective responsibility taking ultimately demands the move towards material redistribution, or reparations, to bring about transformative justice possibilities.

Whereas most academic texts emphasize legalistic notions of harm repair or symbolic conceptions of relationship repair, Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò finds that Black activists and political organizations calling for reparations consistently emphasize self-determination as an organizing principle for advancing Black liberation. Especially with reparations claims grounded in world-historical defining events such as trans-Atlantic slavery and colonialism, where the reasons for reparations are not only backward looking but also bound up with the *present-day living conditions* of potential recipients, reparations must be rooted in what Táíwò calls a historical view of distributive

[20] Jack Turner, *Awakening to Race: Individualism and Social Consciousness in America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

[21] Cole identifies as a queer and trans/nonbinary person and uses the pronouns they/them.

[22] Nkechi Taifa, 'Reparations and Self-Determination,' in *Reparations Yes!* eds. Chokwe Lumumba, Imari Obadele and Nkechi Taifa (Baton Rouge, LA: House of Songhay, 1989).

justice. From such a perspective, redressing past grievances is insufficient without also restructuring the world towards justice, thereby making self-determination for affected individuals and groups meaningfully accessible.[23]

While reparations in the US-American imagination are often confined to cash payments to African-American descendants of enslaved peoples, these Boston-based activists were largely aligned with Táíwò's call for a constructive view of reparations, where redressing past grievances is a necessary but insufficient component of a broader project aimed at restructuring the present world towards justice. To enable such large-scale change, the role of white people may be, as Kelly intimated, the work of 'supporting the possibility of there being a community which can support reparations.'

A class-advantaged nonbinary white person who, like Táíwò, emphasized that reparations – while not theirs[24] to define – ought to be self-determined, Kelly was quick to caveat that their understanding of who is to be burdened, and how, required an intersectional lens:

> I do think, in a very unsophisticated sense, that I should give money to people of colour, just straight up. To me that's more about class than about race. I don't think poor white people should give money to people of colour, for instance. I think they should give other things – like labour, emotional engagement, being a white body in front of the police, that sort of thing. But as a white person with a lot of class privilege, I think I should also be giving resources and support to other white people because I can.

Kelly's analysis aligns closely with Táíwò's, who stresses that the endeavour to reach a just future by burdening the poor or less powerful beyond a reasonable means is a contradiction in terms.[25] Yet whereas differentiated positionalities may suggest different forms of responsibility, it *is* the role of white people as a class of implicated subjects to try to act individually and collectively in ways that make people of colour's capacity for self-determination meaningfully accessible.

Of course, such grand visions from implicated subjects can ring hollow when not accompanied by meaningful action in the real world. While each activist I accompanied engaged in some level of leveraging their privilege, taking risks and shifting material resources in the struggle for racial justice, one can disagree on the relative value of white people participating in individual- or even caucus-level action. But regardless of *how* implicated subjects are engaged, the point to be made here is that, in a transformative justice project, which aims to shift *relations* of inequality, implicated subjects are *necessarily* engaged and affected by virtue of their positionalities. Reparations, then, cannot be confined to legalistic notions of harm repair or symbolic conceptions of relationship repair, as neither adequately addresses the regimes of domination that reproduce structural injustice, which are themselves enabled and perpetuated by implicated subjects.

ENGAGING, CHALLENGING AND CATALYSING OTHER WHITE PEOPLE

Letting racism be someone else's problem for a long time, Justin didn't get involved in racial justice work until his mid-30s. He described his former self as 'Bernie Sanders before he had his Black Lives Matter moment,' having believed that society's ills and solutions could all be captured in the language of class. Now a mainstay within CCI and SURJ-B, Justin can often be found marshalling at anti-fascist rallies in the city and its surrounding suburbs:

[23] Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, 'Reconsidering Reparations,' in *The Movement for Black Lives*, ed. Brandon Hogan et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).
[24] Kelly uses they/them pronouns.
[25] Táíwò, supra n 23.

> Now I'm not one of these people who is excited about punching Nazis. I'm still personally on the side of non-violence all the way. But I think we need to show up in public and stand up to fascists when they come out. We can't create a situation where it's socially acceptable for these people to turn up in public and try to recruit people. White people need to make time for this work if they can.

Challenging and engaging other white people is a third core component of collective responsibility taking for white activists, and it is significant that Justin is one of the relatively few cis-hetero white men I regularly encountered during my time within CCI and SURJ-B. With extreme forms of misogyny and homophobia often accompanying virulent expressions of racism,[26] a number of activists suggested that the work of confronting far-right and white supremacist views ought to be undertaken by cis-hetero white male activists in particular.

But working against racism within white communities is much broader than showing up at anti-fascist rallies. Indeed, Dr Martin Luther King, Jr famously wrote that the white moderate may be a greater obstacle to Black freedom than the Ku Klux Klanner.[27] Having acknowledged that the problem *is* also 'us,' white activists taking responsibility for the collective means also locating anti-racist organizing within their own (white) families, networks and, in particular for CCI and SURJ-B, the city and its local suburbs.

That work can seem insidiously slow, with a great deal of scholarship highlighting not only white ignorance, denial and defensiveness[28] but also the tendency among white people initially awakening to 'race' to want to distance themselves from other white people.[29] Even seasoned white activists acknowledge the impulse to want to separate themselves from the less woke white people in the room.

Yet while there are clearly limits to white affinity organizing,[30] most of the activists with whom I engaged saw their efforts with other white people as necessary components of their broader racial justice work. That work is grounded in deep listening, trying to first 'meet [white] people where they are,' and ultimately in a belief that white people have a shared interest in a world without racism.[31] These efforts are complemented by a relational culture that works against the competitive and perfectionist takedown culture that has often constituted anti-racist organizing spaces for white people.

Instead, Jon – a queer white cis male in his early 30s with a mixed middle- and working-class upbringing – spoke for many when he stressed the importance of moving *towards* other white people when they make mistakes:

> I think [white people taking collective responsibility] means not being afraid to face our responsibility, *and* not discarding each other. So, if I'm supporting a white organizer, and then a person of colour calls this person out publicly because they did some inappropriate thing, I'm not about to jump on the bandwagon and claim that person is a 'bad' white person. Hell, no. I'm gonna have that person's back. I'm gonna treat them like they matter to me. I'm gonna treat them in an accountable way.

[26] Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), 'Male Supremacy,' https://www.splcenter.org/fightinghate/extremist-files/ideology/male-supremacy (accessed 8 November 2023).
[27] Martin Luther King, Jr, 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail,' in *Why We Can't Wait* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1964).
[28] Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).
[29] Janet E. Helms, 'Toward a Theoretical Explanation of the Effects of Race on Counseling: A Black and White Model,' *The Counseling Psychologist* 12(4) (1984): 153–165.
[30] Shannon Sullivan, *Good White People: The Problem with Middle-Class White Anti-Racism* (Albany: Suny Press, 2014).
[31] Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper* (New York: One World, 2021).

For Jon in this scenario, his response to the white organizer is not *about* the person of colour. The history and ongoing machinations of white supremacy in the United States make it essential that white people remain open to receiving critique from people of colour, and Jon is not suggesting otherwise. Rather, he asserts that white people taking collective responsibility *also* entails not retreating to the purity of individualism when things get hard.

Such a disposition from anti-racist white activists is decidedly *not* to settle for pragmatism or to compromise with racist views. Rather, the attitudes and behaviours emanating from this disposition are situated within a broader racial justice orientation that foregrounds the relationships and needs of people of colour as its guiding philosophy. In other words, while participating in solidarity action towards capacitating the self-determination demands of people of colour, they are concurrently engaging other white people *so as to* build a larger movement orientated towards racial and economic justice.

CONCLUSION

Transformative justice has emerged as a critical wing within the field of transitional justice, pushing mainstream theory and practice beyond discrete violent events and towards the underlying conditions that give rise to violence in the first place. But if the normative ideals of transformative justice are to be taken seriously, that is, that the goal of transitional justice is *societal transformation*,[32] then the field needs to find ways to integrate implicated subjects, who are collectively decisive in transformative justice possibilities, especially in cases of historical injustice arising out of slavery, genocide and colonialism.

Using 'race' and racial justice movement building in the United States as a frame through which to examine the boundaries of a transformative justice model, my work with anti-racist white activists suggests two primary implications for the field of transitional justice. First, transformative justice from implicated subject positions means moving beyond a narrow conception of individualized responsibility. Singular actors may have outsized roles in the production of harm, but the individualization of blame also services a decollectivization of responsibility.[33] Truth commissions have offered more complex portrayals of responsibility for violence creation *in the past*, but transitional justice needs a language beyond criminal accountability to compel responsibility taking *in the future*. For a field that has emerged alongside (individual) human rights, one solution may be found in the more relational understanding of duties.[34]

It is also productive to note that the field of transitional justice does not hold a monopoly over the term 'transformative justice,' perhaps especially in the United States. In fact, transformative justice seems to have arisen as a sub-field of critical criminology years before its introduction within transitional justice,[35] with a prominent segment of the anti-violence social movement in the United States situating their contemporary practices within its theoretical framing.[36] Similarly anchored in addressing the underlying sociopolitical and economic conditions that enable harms to occur, the transformative justice wing of the anti-violence movement in the United States deviates sharply from 'transformative transitional justice' in its abolitionist refusal to rely on the state and its oppressive institutions.

Relatedly, and second, a field that endeavours towards transformative justice from the implicated subject positions of actors such as 'experts' needs to devote more critical attention to its 'own' constitutive halls of power. Here the transformative justice scholarship gets it right

[32] Colleen Murphy, *The Conceptual Foundations of Transitional Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).
[33] Robert Meister, *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
[34] Samuel Moyn, 'Rights vs. Duties: Reclaiming Civic Balance,' *Boston Review*, May/June 2016.
[35] Ruth Morris, *Stories of Transformative Justice* (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 2000).
[36] Miriame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transformative Justice* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021).

by pointing to the foundational limitations of the (neo)liberal peace that undergird transitional justice.[37] But despite its theoretical eloquence, is transformative justice the right framing for a practice ostensibly geared towards socioeconomic transformation but not substantively engaged in transforming the international political economy, its colonially constituted (racialized) inheritances and the historical conditions of global inequality that fuel the prospects for war? Recognizing that such grand ambitions are likely way beyond the remit of transitional justice, I do think the question gets at the heart of the transitional versus transformative justice debate. An unjust society being transformed implicates many of us. An unjust society making incremental change while continuing to rely on oppressive systems would seem to warrant a label other than transformative.

[37] Paul Gready and Simon Robins, 'From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 8(3) (2014): 339–361.