

Idealist or Realist Transitional Justice: Which Way for Zimbabwe?¹

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KEYWORDS Realist. Idealist. Transitional Justice. Zimbabwe. International Criminal Court. Human Rights Abuses. Victims and Perpetrators

ABSTRACT There are two dominant theories that elucidate the broad choice of transitional justice mechanisms available to societies with a history of gross violation of human rights, the realist and idealist theories of transitional justice. While realists advocate for the use of political processes such as the adoption of truth commissions, idealist believe in the supremacy and primacy of the law in dealing with past human rights abuses. This paper discusses the two theories' applicability to Zimbabwe while positioning endeavours of citizens who are using their everyday modes of life such as family healing mechanisms to seek historical accountability and reconciliation. When both law and politics fail to initiate mechanisms that deal with histories of gross violations of human rights, it can be said that 'natural' alternatives emerge. The conclusion of the paper is that there is need to conceptually broaden the scope of transitional justice away from presenting it as competition between peace/justice, realist/idealist, politics/law toward an inductive one that recognises an array of everyday activities that have turned into transitional justice mechanisms.