“Does the Truth Pass Across the Fire Without Burning ? »
Transitional Justice and its Discontents in Rwanda’s
Gacaca Courts (Abstract)

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publication: 2007
39 pages

The modernized tradition of the Gacaca courts has become the key mechanism to deal with the past in Rwanda. Due to the design of the Gacaca tribunals, truth telling is the cornerstone of the transitional justice framework. Nevertheless, popular narratives and survey results reveal a problematic quest for the truth. Based on 18 months of fieldwork in rural Rwandan villages, we demonstrate that the state-sanctioned speaking of the truth goes against established social practices. Our exploration of the truth problem further brings into focus the socio-political environment mediated by a culture of deceit and dominated by a war victor as the context of the truth; the confession and denunciation policy as the source of the truth; the decentralized and ‘traditional’ setting as the locus of the truth. A concluding section sketches the contours of the truth and questions the possible consequences of the truth.

Descriptors : Rwanda, courts, judicial system

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