

Justice, wellbeing and peace building: Definitions, practice and critique from a post-war border

N. de Mel

Department of English, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

The relationship of justice to wellbeing claims a long history of ideas in philosophy, jurisprudence, and diverse cultural thought and practice. It is a correlation particularly emphasized in transitional justice in which recognition of war time harms and justice (accountability, reparation) for these hurts are positioned as pre-requisites for healing, reconciliation and the emergence of ‘a new political subject, no longer in flight from interiority’ (Rose, 2019). From here, the common extrapolation is that justice, and the wellbeing it enables, is foundational to peace building in post-conflict contexts (Allan and Keller, 4). This paper takes such claims as a point of departure to analyse what happens when war victims refuse offers of justice or rather, the law as justice. Using, as a case study, the experiences of residents from Yakawewa, a border village which suffered a horrific bus bombing in the war, the paper’s objectives are to a) provide a situated analysis of the justice-wellbeing dyad, b) ask how we could deepen our understanding of wellbeing and justice as interrelated concepts and c) build an argument for reconsidering current discourses on transitional justice and peacebuilding in Sri Lanka by centering a peripheral village, defeated rather than victorious in the war and its aftermath. Drawing on affect theory, cultural, gender and critical legal studies, extensive qualitative interviews with Yakawewa villagers and Sinhala film and short stories, the paper argues for a more robust triangulation of justice, wellbeing and peace in Sri Lanka’s post-war context.

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