**Trials as Messages of Justice: What Should Be Expected of International Criminal Courts?**

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**Abstract:** This article addresses the question what—if anything—we can and should expect from the practice of international criminal justice. It argues that neither retributive nor purely consequentialist, deterrence-based justifications give sufficient guidance as to what international criminal courts should aim to achieve. Instead, the legal theory of expressivism provides a more viable (but not unproblematic) guide. Contrary to other expressivist views, this article argues for the importance of the trial, not just the punishment, as a form of expressivist messaging. Specifically, we emphasize the communicative aspect of the judicial process. The final section, acknowledging the limited success of international criminal justice so far in terms of fulfilling its expressivist potential, diagnoses the main obstacles to, and opportunities for, expressivist messaging in the contemporary practice of international criminal justice.