

CFP: Transitional Justice without Transition? Redressing Past Injustices under State Socialism

Discussion published by Amanda Shuman on Saturday, July 21, 2018

Call for Papers: Transitional Justice without Transition? Redressing Past Injustices under State Socialism

Venue: Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies

Date: February 21-23, 2019

Organizer: Prof. Daniel Leese, Institute of Chinese Studies, University of Freiburg

The question of how societies cope with the legacy of past injustices and atrocities has attracted enormous scholarly and political attention in the past three decades. The concept of “transitional justice,” denoting various types of judicial and non-judicial approaches to aid societal reconciliation after mass conflict or state crimes, is often used to frame corresponding research. While the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials are commonly cited as pioneering this approach, the “age of transitional justice” (Adler 2018) only began in the 1980s, when the global ascent of human rights discourses underpinned attempts to establish institutions and practices that could help overcome legacies of repression and dictatorship. It is therefore unsurprising that underlying most studies invoking the notion of transitional justice is a normative precondition to include only transitions from dictatorship to democracy. This narrow definition has hindered comparative perspectives on the functioning of amnesties and rehabilitation of victims, administrative lustration, trials against perpetrators, and the politics of historical memory in non-democratic transformation processes. Recent examples, especially in the Near and Middle East, reveal that selective employment of institutions and rhetoric associated with transitional justice may even be used to strengthen authoritarian rule.

In the history of the world communist movement, there are two major examples of redressing injustices committed under Communist Party rule: First, the Soviet “thaw” following Stalin’s death in 1953, when hundreds of thousands formerly persecuted cadres and citizens were rehabilitated, and when most Gulag prisoners were granted amnesty. In the wake of de-Stalinization, most East European communist governments preferred handing out amnesties or they offered rehabilitation in secretive fashion rather than providing legal recourse through the codification of rehabilitation in law (McDermott/Stibbe 2015). The second major instance is the reversal of verdicts in the People’s Republic of China after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. The Chinese Communist Party leadership around Deng Xiaoping had been closely involved in countering the impact of de-Stalinization back in 1956 and now drew their lessons by prioritizing “stability and unity” and “looking toward the future” in the transformation process. While consciously drawing inspiration from international examples such as the Nuremberg trials, stepping up efforts to strengthen socialist legality, and publicly announcing millions of rehabilitations, the leadership simultaneously drew a clear line between emerging human rights discourses and the reversal of so-called “unjust, false, and mistaken” cases.

To help rethink the functions and processes of administering historical justice under state socialism, we invite papers that address topics including, but not limited to:

- **Comparative case studies and theoretical approaches:** Comparisons between state socialist attempts to redress past injustices and procedures favored by transitional justice advocates;
- **Regime legitimacy and state capacity:** Comparisons between long- and short-term aims and outcomes of redressing injustices under state socialism, as well as differences between routine procedures for correcting miscarriages of justice and the transformative potential of major “thaws”;
- **Politics of memory:** The role of propaganda and the handling of divergent narratives about past injustices within controlled public spheres, and the role of art and culture in the production of social and political representations of illegitimate pasts;
- **Restitution and resources:** Material dimensions of coping with past injustices, including compensation for seized or destroyed property, as well as forms of socio-economic rehabilitation such as restoration of salaries or payments to victims;
- **Temporalities:** Linkages between narratives of historical justice and political visions of the future; alternative/counterfactual approaches to “transitional justice with socialist characteristics” and context-specific conditions for and understanding of “democracy” in particular;
- **Methods and Sources:** Critical discussions regarding the role of research and (digital) documentation in transitional justice or state socialist attempts to redress past injustices;

Keynote speakers:

Prof. Nanci Adler (University of Amsterdam)

Prof. Jörg Baberowski (Humboldt University of Berlin)

Prof. Han Gang (East China Normal University, Shanghai)

Interested paper-givers should submit an abstract (300 words) and a short bio (100 words) by **15 September 2018**. Notification of acceptance will be sent by 30 September 2018. Costs for economy class travel and local accommodation can be covered for confirmed participants, but self-funding is encouraged where possible. The deadline for submitting full papers (6000-8000 words) is **15 February 2019**. A selection of the papers will be chosen for publication in an edited volume with a peer-reviewed publisher. The conference language will be English.

Please direct all questions and papers to Ms. Man ZHANG at man.zhang@sinologie.uni-freiburg.de.

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