



History Unwanted:

Testimonies, silence and public memory

Narratives Competing for the Public Space in Post-Soviet Russia: A Case Study in Challenges to Transitional Justice



Unlike in post-Nazi Germany, in post-Soviet Russia, there are no “*stolpersteine*” (stumbling blocks) with the names, birthdates, and arrest, deportation, and/or execution dates of victims of the Stalinist terror in the sidewalks in front of the homes where they once lived. Quite the contrary, in post-Soviet Russia, there is a persistent trend to manage national and public memory by repressing the memory of repression. This trend is characterized by the ongoing struggle to determine which truths are admitted to the public space. Victims’ organizations’ efforts to assert their narrative of the Stalinist past have met resistance, which in one case led to the closing of the only Gulag museum on a former labor camp site. This museum was but one of the many recent battlegrounds for the clash of narratives, as old repressions become recycled into new ones. This talk will explore remembrance and civil society’s efforts to publicize the history of repression amidst the state’s parallel efforts to co-opt it. It will look *at* as well as *through* Russia to identify impediments to transitional justice that are similar to those found in a number of post- and still-repressive societies that have been unable, unwilling or resistant to embrace transitional justice measures.

Nanci Adler is Professor of Memory, History, and Transitional Justice at the University of Amsterdam and Director of Research at the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences). She is the author of ‘Keeping Faith with the Party: Communist Believers Return from the Gulag’, ‘The Gulag Survivor: Beyond the Soviet System’, ‘Victims of Soviet Terror: The Story of the Memorial Movement’, and numerous articles on the consequences of Stalinism. Her current research focuses on transitional justice and the legacy of Communism.