

SUMMER SCHOOL ON TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN CRES, CROATIA

My first introduction to the concept of transitional justice was in the classroom. In my first year, I took a class on “Violence, Media and Transitional Justice”, taught by a media and communication studies scholar. It was a challenging and fulfilling class, as we attempted to work through the complexities of defining “transitional justice” and balancing the trade-offs between different priorities and mechanisms. This summer school program thus enabled me to sink my teeth further into these ideas, and more importantly, helped me to examine some of the assumptions and biases I held. As an intrinsically interdisciplinary field, I realized that ideas of transitional justice can look very different depending on which perch we are on; the good thing about the summer school is that it exposes us to many scholars and fields at one go, and allows us to rapidly develop a road map of the entire field and the main debates within it. In particular, I gained a deeper knowledge of the legal origins of the field, and thought more deeply about the relationship between transitional justice and human rights. Is transitional justice about upholding human rights in the context of transition and scale, or is human rights a subset of transitional justice, and should serve the purpose of reconciliation and moving forward?

A big sub-field of transitional justice is about dealing and remembering the past, and there are few better places in the world to learn about memory politics than in the Balkans. Our lectures came to life in a short day trip to the nearby city of Rijeka and a 3-day field trip to Osijek and Vukovar. The former city is a historically and culturally rich city, carrying the legacy of the Habsburg, Ottomans, Romans, Italians and socialist Yugoslavia, while the latter were the sites of some of the most intense fighting during the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s. Memory politics was all around us. The battle for the narrative extended into street names, choice of language script, to the museums, sites of remembrances, the classroom, the newspapers and even to cemeteries. I was also fortunate to spend the following 2 weeks after the program travelling through Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia – I met amazing and friendly locals in all of these places, but they also told me significantly different accounts of the 1990s conflict, and impressed upon me the intractability of the conflict and its legacies on contemporary politics.

While the program had its grounding in the Balkan region, it also had breadth, and brought in various comparative and international perspectives. Some of the highlights include an overview lecture by Marieke Wierda, a lawyer and scholar who worked for a decade with the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ); a conversation with Joshua Oppenheimer, director of the acclaimed films, *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* which spotlight the culture of impunity following the 1965 mass killings in Indonesia; and a lecture by Mohamed Arafat on the intersections between Islamic law and transitional justice.

In sum, I thoroughly enjoyed the program, and would recommend it to anyone with an interest in the themes of transitional justice, human rights, international criminal law, and memory politics. The unique set-up of the program: a small, highly international classroom located on an island in the Mediterranean Sea, with ample opportunities built into the schedule for off-the-grid conversations with both lecturers and classmates, also helped shaped this into a fun and rewarding program.