

## **Report on Research in Open Society Archives**

In this report, I will briefly describe my research experience at the Open Society Archive (OSA), discuss the relevant collections in the archive for my research and share prospects of my research in the future.

My research is concentrated on processes of transitional justice in the late Soviet Union and early years of the Russian Federation (1985-1993). Specifically, I am interested in how Stalinist repressions were discussed during the given period and why this discussion did not lead to the full conviction of the past crimes of Stalinism. I am at the beginning of this research project which supposes to have broader implications. In particular, as a scholar of International Relations, I want to trace the overlap between the failure of the transitional justice process and aggressive foreign policy behaviour in the case of Russia.

I came to OSA to establish an empirical foundation for my research. To do that, I was searching mainly for printed materials for the given period. Thematically, I was looking into collections which contained information about (1) the process of rehabilitation of political victims of the repression, (2) initiatives of organisations such as “Memorial” which were aimed not only towards easing the rehabilitation but also educating Russian about dark legacies of the past. (3) Information about the renaming of cities, streets and other toponyms which contributed to the symbolic aspect of transitional justice processes.

To address the topic of my research, I have looked into several collections of records of Radio Free Europe:

### **1. HU OSA 300-80-1 (Archival Box Number 435)**

This collection was full of late Soviet and early Russian periodicals which helped me to make an impression of the discussion of Stalinist repressions during the given period. While consulting with this box, I have discovered specifics of the rehabilitation of Gulag prisoners, their complaints and wishes. One of the most surprising findings during the work with these files was the role of the secret services (KGB and FSB) in the rehabilitation process. I came across several interviews of intelligence services officials of various ranks who condemned the repressions. At the same time, they provided an underestimated number of victims, perhaps purposefully. There is a conflict of interests since the rehabilitation process was done by the same organisation, which committed the crimes in the past. Moreover, the intelligence services were constantly

denying access to archives of the repressed victims to independent researchers and human rights activists.

## **2. HU OSA 300-80-2 (Archival Boxes Number 27, 28, 29)**

This collection helped me to make sense of one of the most crucial questions of my research, that is, how the Stalinist repressions were discussed during Perestroika. On the one hand, Gorbachev and his supporters understand that the dark legacies needed to be addressed in a wider manner than during Ottepel, but not to the extent which would wholly discredit the communists. My initial thesis was confirmed: although high-ranked officials who were repressed under Stalin were rehabilitated, the process of transitional justice was far from all-encompassing.

## **3. HU OSA 300-81-1 (Archival Box Number 24)**

This box contained a folder with documents from the presidential commission for rehabilitation of repressed ethnic minorities, created by the first president of Russia, Boris Yeltsin. From this folder, I have discovered that the first government of the Russian Federation was paying a special attention to the ethnic dimension of Stalinist repressions in contrast to the process of transitional justice under Gorbachev. Interestingly, cossacks were also viewed as a separate ethnicity which has suffered from the Stalinist terror.

## **4. HU OSA 300-85-40 (Archival Box Number 2) and HU OSA 300-85-48 (Archival Box number 26)**

I consulted these folders to know more about “Memorial”, the organisation which protected the rights of the repressed, published books about crimes of the communist party and gave voice to civil rights activists. Consulting these collections allowed me to grasp a bottom-up movement for transitional justice processes.

## **5. HU OSA 300-80-6**

I was selectively looking at this collection to trace the process of transitional justice in post soviet republics. The clear tendency was that the repression in posts soviet republics (Ukraine, Latvian, Lithuania) was more easily condemned as they were executed by an external power. In contrast, Stalinist repressions in Russia were perceived as a part of the domestic narrative, which lead to struggles in their condemnation.

## **6. HU OSA 300-80-1 (Archival Box Number 652)**

This box contained information regarding the symbolic aspect of transitional justice. It includes renaming (often returns of initial names) various toponyms across Russia. Although this side of

transitional justice did not bring any positive changes in Russian society per se, it signalled about the consensus in Russian society about the inappropriateness of soviet names in the new state of the Russian Federation.

In all, the research at OSA expanded my understanding of the transitional justice process in Russia. Along with reparations to the victims, I also started to think about the lustration of people who committed the repressions. The inability of the Russian government to prosecute people responsible for the repressions left the process of transitional justice unfinished. Also, I think that this topic has implications for the future of Russian society. The moment will come when Russians will *have to* address the crimes of Putin's regime, including those which are currently committed in Ukraine.

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