

Preface

What has to happen after a dictatorship has been overcome? For several decades, lawyers, political scientists and historians in numerous countries have been preoccupied with this question. After the end of the Second World War, this mainly concerned how Germany dealt with National Socialism. However, coming to terms with the past is now an issue worldwide. Under the term ‘transitional justice’, it is no longer exclusively about dictatorships, but also about civil wars, genocides and other politically motivated mass crimes, the legacy of which weighs heavily upon countless societies in Europe, America, Asia or Africa. Whilst the main discussion initially addressed the question of what to do with those responsible for the most serious human rights violations, the focus today is also on compensation for the victims, appropriate commemoration, and institutional reforms to prevent a repetition of similar crimes.

Since February 2020, a project at the University of Würzburg has been looking into the question of which instruments for coming to terms with the past have proven particularly effective over the last decades.¹ In order to determine this, developments in selected countries on several continents are being analysed and compared with each other. The project is based at the Chair of Modern History because coming to terms with dictatorships and civil wars now has a past of its own, which has thus far been insufficiently researched in relation to many countries. It is flanked by a second project dealing with the dictatorships in Spain and Portugal, which ended almost fifty years ago.²

This book presents the first results of this research. At the centre of the volume are seven country analyses prepared by proven experts on processes of ‘transitional justice’. They deal with coming to terms with the past in Albania, Argentina, Ethiopia, Chile, Rwanda, South Africa and Uruguay, whereby all analyses are based on a uniform scheme. The countries were selected in such a way as to permit as many different constellations in dealing with mass crimes to be examined as possible – from the voluntary withdrawal of military rulers in Argentina and Uruguay, via the collapse of a decades-long dictatorship in Albania, to the violent overthrow of the regimes in Ethiopia and Rwanda by armed rebels.

The volume begins with analyses relating to Latin America, which has long been at the centre of research into the area of transitional justice. The political scientist and theologian Veit Strassner examines transitional justice with reference to the military dictatorships in Argentina and Uruguay, while the former Director of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago de Chile, Ricardo Brodsky, looks at

¹ Further information on the project can be found on the bilingual website www.after-dictatorship.org.

² See the project description on the website of the Chair of Modern History at the University of Würzburg: <https://www.geschichte.uni-wuerzburg.de/institut/neueste-geschichte/bmbf-projekt>.

how the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile was dealt with. On the African continent, too, ‘transitional justice’ is illuminated on the basis of three states. Peace and conflict researcher Julia Viebach investigates the topic as regards the genocide in Rwanda; the Research Director of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in Cape Town, Hugo van der Merwe, outlines efforts at reconciliation after the end of apartheid policies in South Africa; and criminal justice expert Tadesse Metekia describes dealing with the Marxist Dergue regime in Ethiopia. The seventh country study is dedicated to a country in Europe that usually receives little attention; namely, Albania, whose coming to terms with its 45 year communist dictatorship is analysed by Jonila Godole, Director of the Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture in Tirana. These country studies are preceded by fundamental reflections on dealing with dictatorships and politically motivated mass crimes from a historical perspective, written by co-editor and historian Peter Hoeres. The volume concludes with a comparative review by the second editor and previous director of the memorial museum located in the former Stasi prison of Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, Hubertus Knabe, in which he elaborates upon which instruments of transitional justice have proven effective under which conditions.

This volume and the research project from which it has emerged would not have been possible without the financial support of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The editors are extremely grateful for the generous support and consistently encouraging guidance provided by the Ministry’s staff. They also thank the authors of the seven country studies for their committed and qualified participation. Last but not least, the translators of the German-language contributions, Kirsten Kearney and Nicholas Nedzynski, as well as Henning Saßenrath, who undertook the technical supervision of this volume, have made the book’s appearance possible through their work.

The editors hope that the studies published here can give new impetus to the discussion on how to deal with dictatorships and serious human rights violations. Even if the world currently seems to be experiencing something of a renaissance of dictatorships following the triumph of democracy in the 1990s, the question as to which instruments of ‘transitional justice’ are the most effective remains relevant – not least because the legacies of these dictatorships will also have to be reappraised at some point.