



Peer reviewed article

## Unfaithful servants? The purge of ‘unnational’ officials in Norway and Denmark after 1945

Baard Herman Borge and Lars-Erik Vaale

### Abstract

After the liberation in May 1945, Norwegian and Danish authorities initiated extensive purges of civil servants and officials who had acted «unnational» during the occupation 1940-1945. Similar administrative settlements were also carried out in several other Western European countries, but the scope and practice varied considerably. This article analyses the background and implementation of the civil servant settlements in Norway and Denmark, aiming to explain why the outcomes were so different in two otherwise closely related countries. The analysis is based on transition theory from political science, where the term transitional justice (TJ) refers to extraordinary legal and administrative measures in the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. Using comparative method, we examine similarities and differences in both occupation experiences and post-war settlements. Our study concludes that the Norwegian purge was more extensive than the Danish one, regarding the proportion of public employees who were dismissed or sanctioned. We argue that the difference may be explained by two main factors: firstly, the differences between the occupation regimes, particularly the Nazification of the Norwegian administration, and secondly, the fact that the civil service settlement in Norway was more characterised by transitional justice. This weakened the rule of law and probably caused a stricter treatment of comparable, less serious cases than in Denmark.

**Keywords:** WWII, legal reckoning, transition theory, purges, public servants.



© Author(s). This is an Open Access-article distributed under the terms given in CC-BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which allows to copy and redistribute remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially given that proper attribution is made, and indicated if changes were made, and that this licence is specified and linked to.