The Politics of Memory in Post-Authoritarian Transitions, vol. I: Case Studies, and vol. II: Comparative Analysis

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Rezension von PD Dr. Rafał Riedel Redaktionell betreut von Anna Labentz Dr. Andrzej Klimczuk

The Politics of Memory in Post-Authoritarian Transitions consists of two volumes, the first one covering six case studies, edited by Joanna Marszałek-Kawa, Joanna Plechowiak-Lamparska, Patryk Wawrzyński, Anna Ratke-Majewska, and the second one focussing on comparative analysis, edited by Joanna Marszałek-Kawa, Patryk Wawrzyński and Anna Ratke-Majewska. The two volumes constitute one entity, being the result of a research project funded by Narodowe Centrum Nauki (i.e. the Polish National Centre for Science) and should, therefore, be reviewed together.

The starting point of this publication is the unquestionable statement that the past matters. Path dependencies are interesting from many perspectives; in this publication, the authors focus on their political dimension. The main question guiding the research process is how the past becomes a political asset, especially in the context of democratisation processes. The authors of these volumes analyse the politics of memory of newly emerging policies that are overcoming their authoritarian pasts and building new societal structures and identities. This approach also determines the criteria of case choice. The researchers decided on Chile, Estonia, Georgia, Spain, Poland, and South Africa – a relatively heterogeneous group of countries that share a common denominator in that all of them can be considered examples for a successful transition into democracy. At the same time, such a selection provides the necessary diversity in order to arrive at exemplifications rooted in various continents, cultures, and political circumstances. Based on such rich empirical material the authors formulate a theoretical model in order to understand the role of the governments in their transitional politics of memory. At the same time, this study provides a comparative (qualitative-to-quantitative) analysis allowing to identify the main similarities and differences as well as the factors that determine them.

The general objective of the whole research project is to identify the role of remembrance narratives in the process of the reconstruction of state and society. This overarching goal is tackled in two research problems: one deals with the question as to what degree new remembrance narratives were used in the transition period, and the other one addresses the issue of the particular models of politics of memory that were used to construct a new political identity during the transformation. The main hypothesis is formulated as a statement about the
universality of the model of transition from an authoritarian to a democratic system at the level of the state's usage of remembrance policies to create a new political identity for society.

Memory politics is a salient element of politics both in democratic and non-democratic systems, and therefore studying it becomes crucially important in order to fully understand the political process, especially when societies transform from authoritarian towards liberal and democratic systems. This combined publication is one of the few examples of successful, comprehensive and coherent research projects covering a wide range of countries and providing in-depth analyses. Eight elements in particular are discussed in this context: the legitimisation of new elites, the presence of the previous regime's representatives, transitional justice, the social costs of transformation, the adoption of new social and political standards, symbolic roles of democratisation, the historical need for national unity, and the change of the given state's identity in the international community. Analysing these eight elements helps understand if and how the past matters, how history and its interpretations may become both political resources and effective instruments in shaping the futures of the societies in question. This analysis offers a first attempt at researching such diverse cases of transitional politics of memory in various conditions and contexts.

The key to the case selection is very clear and well defined. All of the aforementioned states are exemplifications of an effective transition from authoritarian regimes. At the same time, they present empirically and theoretically important diversities. Chile is an example of an authoritarian regime established after a military coup d'état, 1988 marking the end of Augusto Pinochet's regime. Estonia – and its "singing revolution" exemplifying the first wave of post-Soviet democratisations – offers an illustration not only of a successful transition from non-democracy to democracy, but also from a homo-Sovieticus type of mentality towards a modern civic community. The Georgian case sheds some light on the second wave of post-Soviet democratisations (belonging to the group of the so-called "colour revolutions"). Interestingly, the Georgian transformation may serve as an example of ignoring issues connected with politics of memory in public discourse. Poland exemplifies the transition of an Eastern bloc satellite country motivated by and aiming at its integration into (or "return to") the West. The Polish case is very informative with regards to the successes and failures of the (re)construction (of the vision) of a new society and its links to historical experience. South Africa serves as an example of a post-colonial democracy in which racist oppression and violation of human rights played a crucial role. Nelson Mandela's politics of memory (re)interpreted the past in order to overcome the apartheid legacy and, at the same time, to promote reconciliation between various fractions of the South African society. Finally, Spain illustrates a transition from an authoritarian regime established after a civil war. Francisco Franco's death opened up a new chapter in Spanish identity politics. Its most essential pillars were a turn from the past, forgiveness, abandoning revenge-driven sentiments and, consequently, focussing on the future.

Each chapter of the first volume presents its case study in a similar manner, offering a comparative analytical framework. The starting point of each part is a short historical reconstruction of the authoritarian regime in question, its distinct way towards a democratic system as well as the post-authoritarian transition itself. It is followed by a comparison of the authoritarian and democratic political identities in the respective countries with
a special focus on the role of memory as a constitutive element of the societies' self-identifications. At the core of each chapter is an analysis of the governmental use of memory politics during the post-authoritarian transitions. Every chapter describes in detail how remembrance policies were used during political transformations in various settings. The eight categories mentioned above include the following aspects, respectively:

- The legitimisation of new elites and the role of remembrance narratives: the past as a legitimisation of new elites (contrary to Weber's understanding of tradition as the legitimising vehicle), their links with the history of the nation; the reconstruction of national symbols, the pantheon of national heroes, and the landscape of memory; the historical role of the new elites in preventing internal conflicts and their leading role in the respective nation's reconciliation process.

- The presence of the previous regime's representatives: the role of remembrance narratives as the justification of the presence of former elites, amongst others the necessity of the participation of former elites in the new political order (the "rotten compromise" argument); the presence of former elites also legitimises democratic pluralism, diversity and inclusion as the foundations of the new political – truly democratic – community.

- Transitional justice: dealing with the past as the legitimisation of the democratic order and the rule of law; transitional justice as punishment, but also as a source of forgiveness; causes for the limitations of transitional justice.

- The social cost of transformation: here, remembrance narratives serve as an explanation for the socio-economic costs of transition, the new roles and attitudes needed under the new circumstances, the historical origins of the current socio-economic stratification, and as a justification of a capitalist (liberal) turn, including a programme of economic reconstruction (e.g. shock therapy).

- The adoption of new social and political standards (in this case the remembrance narratives contextualise the changes within a wider political process): the role of inter-generational collaboration and agreement, new heroes and legends as role models; balance between tradition and modernisation; new (re)definitions of patriotism (and its validation).

- Symbolic roles of democratisation: the necessity of political transformation; democratisation as a tribute to the victims of authoritarian oppression and to the heroes of the struggle for independence; pro-democratic selections of narratives, interpretations and future national heroes; remembrance as a source of civic participation and a new calendar of national holidays (as a so-called new organisation of time).

- The historical need for national unity: in this case, the remembrance narratives provide reasons for such unity, as well as for reconciliation and forgiveness, the pluralisation of the memory landscape as well as the (re)construction of the pantheon of national heroes and legends.

- The change of the state's identity within the international community: justification and legitimisation to participate in international integration (treated as an extension or the next stage of democratisation); part of a process to reclaim a state's proper position in the European or global community; introduction of new
As a result, the two volumes provide some very interesting explanations about the relations between democratisation processes, politics of memory (or oblivion) and the reconstruction of the societies' political identities. This book is salient in that it provides some important answers to questions, such as: How do politics of memory leave their mark on post-authoritarian transformations? What are the common features of all the analysed cases with regards to the usage of remembrance narratives, and what are key differences? The two volumes also show the complex structures of transitional politics of memory – its shape, intensity, and dynamics. Consequently, and in line with the authors' intentions, this study can be treated as a pioneering attempt to turn the analysis of a government's remembrance narratives, the change of a political system, and the reconstruction of a collective's political identity into a framework of political science. The authors develop valuable elements of theoretical models and therefore offer new useful analytical tools for the research on remembrance narratives during political transformations. Nevertheless, there are some minor deficiencies to be noted in the analyses, often with regards to linguistic incompatibilities, i.e. the usage of the term "politics of memory" or "remembrance policy", which are used almost interchangeably.

The authors' intention was to open up a new field of studies on democratisation, which appears to be a bit of an over-ambitious endeavour. Undoubtedly, the proposed approach offers a new path in researching the processes of democratisation, or - on an even broader level - transitions. However, it merely connects two (or more) strands of academic discourses (while doing so successfully). Memory politics has always been a crucial element of the political process. As its salience seems to grow nowadays, it is legitimate to describe and explain it in a scientific manner. The two volumes contribute to this academic reflection significantly, in being two fundamental bricks of the bridge connecting memory studies on the one hand and transition/transformation studies on the other.

**Zitierweise:**