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The Remembrance Policy and Political Identities during Post-Authoritarian Transformations

Book Review: Joanna Marszałek-Kawa, Anna Ratke-Majewska & Patryk Wawrzyński, *Polityka pamięci i kształtowanie tożsamości politycznej w czasie tranzycji postautorytarnej. Analiza porównawcza* (Tom 2). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Difin 2016 (pp. 167). ISBN 978-83-8085-209-9. Price: 50.00 PLN.

The examination of the past enables us to explain reality as well as to observe its role in a forming of a society's political identity. It is so because of a remembrance policy and its tools, which give the government a possibility of influence the idealised vision of a country and a nation (Wawrzyński, 2017; Marszałek-Kawa & Wawrzyński, 2016). It causes controversy related to the selection of events and a possible 'cover-up' of inconvenient facts and circumstances. The complexity of this problem leads to a situation where it becomes one of the critical issues concerning the socio-political life. Its scientific analysis turns out to be a challenging task.

The effect of such study is the second volume of the book *Polityka pamięci o kształtowanie tożsamości politycznej w czasie tranzycji postautorytarnej. Analiza porównawcza* by Joanna Marszałek-Kawa, Anna Ratke-Majewska and Patryk Wawrzyński. In the first part, the authors described relations between history, politics and identity during post-authoritarian transformations in six countries: Chile, Estonia, Georgia, Spain, Poland and South Africa (Marszałek-Kawa et al., 2016a). By these examples, they illustrated the ways how politicians play with strategies for remembering and forgetting. Selected cases represent various cultures and different political realities of transformation. As a result, Marszałek-Kawa and associates developed the theoretical model explaining links transitional identity politics and remembrance policy in a context of post-authoritarian change.

The book includes two parts consisting of five chapters. The first part introduces the reader to the subject of study, the framework of the project and the research hypotheses. It outlines the methodology and theoretically explains the relation between the remembrance policy and its influence on the forming of a new political identity. The authors aim at defining the role of the remembrance narratives in the process of reconstruction of a nation and a society during democratisation. They focus their attention on two research problems: the first one concerns the dilemma of using new narratives during the transition; the second one expresses a question on the models of the remembrance policy which are the building blocks of the identity politics of change. The authors conclude that there exists a universal model of transition from the authoritarian system to the democratic one. Countries are believed to use this model in the process of creating a new political identity. The authors demonstrate that it is of no importance what the local political, economic or social conditions are; countries use new remembrance narratives to legitimise position of a privileged social group. They concentrate on the presentation of the processes that continue the national tradition and concern to the glorious history of the nation. They also mention that in the time of transition a country restrains its interest in the authoritative past and focuses on utilising the past as a means of investigating the historical truth based on democratic reforms. The social science methodology, especially the descriptive statistics analysis, institutional, legal analysis or process analyses are used by the authors who performed an insightful analysis of transition of the remembrance policy in six different countries.

The concluding element of the first part is a universal model of using the government's remembrance policy as a means of constructing a new political identity of society during transitions. It constitutes essences of the research, and it answers the questions asked in it. It describes what the transitional politics of memory is, what are its universal properties and what the role of the remembrance policy is in forming a political identity at the time of the systemic change.

The authors pay attention to the general functions of the transitional remembrance policy, emphasising: the legitimization of taking over and exercising authority by a new leadership, the presence of representatives of the authoritative regime in a democratic state, dealing with the past and transitional justice, legitimisation of the social and economic costs of transformation, legitimisation of new political and social standards. Remembrance narratives can, according to Marszałek-Kawa and colleagues, be used as a tool for presenting symbolic roles of democratisation as a grounds for intergenerational agreement or a tribute to our ancestors, as well as funding of the need for national unity. The authors considered three models of changes: a self-reform of a regime, an agreement between a government and an opposition or multilateral negotiations. Then, they used Pearsons correlation, to find out that the shape of transitional remembrance policy is related to the objectives of democratisation (political system, the legal system, an organisation of the state, a new model of society). They investigated other factors: domestic, political violence or visions of new 'Ideal Self' of a nation.

Marszałek-Kawa and associates discussed a role of political violence in the course of democratisation of a system. It causes the narratives to be implemented more intensely in the process of reconstruction of the social identity. The book constitutes a considerable contribution to the development of political science for it explains the remembrance policy as an instrument of authority¹. The showed that it is used to create a 'predefined' vision of a state and redevelop the social identity during democratisation. There are plenty of books that consider politics of memory, but presenting the complexity of dependencies within it and using different models of the remembrance policy, is a novelty. The indication of similarities and dissimilarities in the usage of the remembrance narratives, which was a tool of the post-authoritative administration, is an added value of the study. It also explains the relationship amid the practice of remembrance story-telling and the formation of society's political identity. The genesis of the narrative type and its influence on the democratisation of states is also of significance.

The authors' observations give a new insight into the remembrance policy which is a crucial element of democratic changes while overthrowing an authoritarian government. They demonstrate that using history in the context of the future-oriented transitional politics is a shared characteristic, present in all of the six selected cases. Each of the post-authoritarian governments used the remembrance narratives as a means for the legitimisation of new political order. The reviewed book constitutes a brand new look at the role of the remembrance policy in the functioning of a state. Its interdisciplinary nature links many fields of social and political science which help to analyse the problem. It enables to use the research not only theoretically but also practically.

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¹ See also: Marszałek-Kawa & Wawrzyński, 2016; Wawrzyński, 2015; Wawrzyński, 2017; Wawrzyński & Stańco-Wawrzyńska, 2016.

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