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Remembrance, Identity Politics and Political Transitions: a Comparative Study¹

Abstract: The paper presents findings of the comparative study on relationships between remembrance story-telling and the transitional reconstruction of political identities. It identifies in which areas and fields of impact governments tend to use interpretations of the past to promote new leadership visions of society. Moreover, it verifies theoretical hypotheses related to the politicised remembrance and its role as a political asset during transformations, as well as it considers the theoretical framework of democracy-building (and a common prediction of its universal character). As a result, the study offers a detailed picture of the way remembrance narratives are transformed into explanations, justifications or legitimisation of new, post-authoritarian identities based on qualitative-to-quantitative analysis of the intensity of story-telling and its links with transitional identity politics. In the conclusion, the Authors present their consideration of research findings, and they discuss it with reference to the nature of transitional government's remembrance policy as a sphere of social influence.

Keywords: *democratisation; transformations; collective memory; remembrance policy; new elites; transitional justice; social stratification; symbolic roles*

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Politicised Remembrance and Political Transitions

In the contemporary world, remembrance narratives have become the essential political asset that makes it possible to influence citizens' attitudes, behaviours, choices and decisions. The politicised remembrance is an instrument of control and compliance. It exploits the human's basic need – to narrate an identity with reference to experiences. It gives a citizen some illusion of sense and predictability. It creates symbolic relationships between the past and the present, and it draws links between them presenting the history as a process that develops a state and a society (Wawrzyński et al., 2015, p. 126–127).

The history of nations is a story of humankind's permanent pursuit of consistency. The history is not made by accident, it is made intentionally – it is a derivative of countless reasonable choices and decisions. The history is linear and organised in chronological order. Yet, the declarative monosemy of the history subordinates the past to the politicised remembrance, and it makes the history a tool of political manipulation. Always, the present state of a nation can be explained through simplified and unambiguous interpretations of the past, as it is a basic characteristic of humankind to narrate the past in a way that justifies the present. The politicised remembrance – thanks to the culture – enables a government to transform events into narratives, to recreate figures into role-models and to change the entropy into a coherent process. As a result, these stories become independent cultural contents that help a government to control how citizens reconstruct, interpret or imagine the past, and – what is even more important – to regulate how they link past experiences with the present state of a society (Mead, 1917; Luhmann, 1995).

The nature of collective memory deeply influences the way in which a government narrates the past, as its primary objective is to promote stories that will imitate social-shared narratives of collective memory. There are seven lasting effects of this cultural 'masquerade'. Firstly, the reason why a government involves itself in narrating the past is to influence significant cultural contents that are shared by a nation. Secondly, the established government's remembrance policy is a collection of stories and interpretations of past events that are recognised by the political leadership as real, true and correct. Thirdly, the politicised remembrance influences a nation's political identity as it identifies what is relevant for a national community. Fourthly, it defines and labels political behaviours and it regulates understandings of ideas, norms and values through the management of symbolic links between the past and the present (Smith, 2003, p. 56–59; Koczanowicz, 1997, p. 259–260). Fifthly, it is future-oriented. Sixthly, it enables a government to select what will be remembered and what will be forgotten. Finally, it inspires emotions and it uses the affect to establish a recipient's

symbolic participation in a narrative (Labanyi, 2008, p. 120–121). In general, the politicised remembrance's main objective is to deliver simplified interpretations of the reality that citizens may use as a source of knowledge in the decision-making process (Marszałek-Kawa et al., 2016, p. 109–110; Westen, 2008, p. 41–49; Wawrzyński, 2015, p. 160–166).

The preserving role of remembrance as a political asset is clear in consolidated political regimes, but during political transformations a government's use of remembrance narratives may support a peaceful change and protect the promoted vision of a post-transitional society. Then, the government's remembrance policy becomes a valuable tool to transform political culture, and – what is even more important – a tool that is fully controlled by a nation's political leadership. Its narratives make sense of the uncertain times they present the reality as a plurality of organised and coherent processes that will lead to some bright future. Moreover, the politicised remembrance gives the government a broad control of public debate – it informs a society what is relevant to the newly-established order, it teaches what these orders mean and how to become a part of the historical process of political change, it adapts social-shared collective memories to new conditions, it defines proper attitudes and behaviours, as well as it regulates emotional responses to transformations that helps a leadership to prevent intergroup conflicts. However, the transitional value of remembrance narratives is a result of their future-orientation and influence on a nation's political identity. Interpretations of the past support imaginations of the future nation's 'ideal self'. Transitional conditions enhance the politicised remembrance's authority as a credible source of knowledge on reality and collective identity, since interpretations of the history are considered as reliable, certain and true – that is essential in the uncertain times of political transformations (Marszałek-Kawa et al., 2016, p. 110–112).

Objectives and Methodology

In this paper, we present research findings on the way in which the politicised remembrance is used as a political asset during democratisations. Its objective is to discuss the intensity of remembrance story-telling and its relationship with transitional identity policy with reference to the outcome of our comparative study. As a result of our investigations we present a draft model of the transitional remembrance policy and we explain major differences and similarities between various areas and fields of impact of historical narratives. Therefore, we draw a picture of the complex process of a government's control over interpretations of the past to promote a new vision of a post-authoritarian society.

The paper is based on the qualitative-to-quantitative narrative analysis of six post-authoritarian transformations in Chile, Estonia, Georgia, Poland, South Africa and Spain. The selected samples represent different types of democratisations, different political traditions and cultural backgrounds, different paths of transition and various visions of the post-authoritarian national identity. It offers a broad perspective on democratisation in general, as well as it limits the impact of a particular types of remembrance narratives – as there was no common story shared by transitional governments of all six countries. The study is based on the analysis of different sources presenting political leadership's interpretations of the history, including legal acts, official documents, policy statements, parliamentary proceedings, transitional justice documentations, public speeches, educational curricula and school textbooks, as well as the topography of memory and (re-)organisation of the national holiday calendar. As a result, we were able to address all major instruments of the government's remembrance policy that can be used during democratisations (Wawrzyński & Schattkowsky, 2015, p. 76–80).

The applied methodology was a fusion of the quantitative comparative analysis and the qualitative-to-quantitative narrative analysis. On the individual cases level, our investigations were oriented to identify a degree in which remembrance narratives were used to legitimise: (1) the dominant position of new elites, (2) the presence of former elites in the nation's public life, (3) procedures of transitional justice, (4) the social and economic costs of transformations, (5) adaptation of new social and political standards, (6) symbolic roles of democratisation, including its trans- and intergenerational character, (7) the need for national unity and (8) the new state's identity in international politics. The answers to these research questions were based on the measurement of a relationship's intensity in 37 fields of impacts (second-degree detailed research questions). The construction of this tool resulted from the multi-factor analysis of transitional identity politics, the careful review of the existing literature on political transitions and the unification of knowledge on democratisation with previous studies on the politicised remembrance (Marszałek-Kawa et al., 2016, p. 23–29).

Qualitative data from case studies were transformed into figures thanks to the application of the simple coding system. We used the five-level Likert-type scale to distinguish relationships between the very low degree of remembrance narratives' use in transitional identity politics (1 point), the low degree (2 points), the moderate degree (3 points), the high degree (4 points) and the very high degree (5 points). The very low degree stand for the lack of observable relationships between stories and popularisation of the nation's new 'ideal self', the moderate degree for the presence of remembrance narratives as one of justifications, and the very high degree for the

role of historical arguments as a principal and essential legitimisation of the new political identity, while the low degree and the high degree represent transient levels of the scale. Then, transformed quantitative data was analysed with basic statistical instruments to compare cases and to observe general trends in the selected sample. Finally, our investigations lead us to draw draft models of the transitional government's remembrance policy, as well as to discuss its structure and major characteristics.

Remembrance Narratives and New Political Identities

In general, our study has showed that remembrance narratives are used as a political asset during political transitions. They are not the most significant instrument of political identities reconstruction, but their influence can be observed and it should be considered as a part of the democratisation's landscape – we have proved that politicised remembrance cannot be eliminated from investigations of political transformations, and it can be a source of diverse political arguments or transitional future-oriented mythologies. On the comparative level, the average result for one field of impact was 2.63 points of 5 points possible, that corresponds with **the low degree of remembrance narratives' use in transitional identity politics** (yet, directed to the moderate strength of the relationship). Therefore, we may state that narrating the past clearly is not a government's priority during transformation, but the new political leadership tends to use it – with alternating intensity – to reconstruct national identity and to promote its vision of the post-authoritarian society. The successful democratisations requires not only controlling the politicised remembrance through commemoration of past events or promoting their interpretations, equally important for transitional governments is to manage a process of forgetting, that is why history does not become the core of political narratives.

However, there are noticeable differences between individual research categories. The highest average we have observed for the use of remembrance narratives to explain symbolic roles of democratisation – 3.07 points that represent the moderate degree of relationship's intensity (SD= 0.86). The moderate degree occurred also in the case of the new state's identity in international politics – 3.00 points (SD= 1.13). The results close to the general sample's average we observed in the case of four categories: adaptation of new social and political standards (2.73 points; SD= 0.67), the legitimisation of new elites (2.72 points; SD= 0.74), the need for national unity (2.71 points; SD= 0.80) and presence of the former authoritarian regime's representatives in democratic public life (2.60 points; SD= 0.65). Significantly lower degree of remembrance narratives' use characterises legitimisation of transitional justice procedures or lack of them (2.17 points; SD= 1.31), which result was on the edge between the low and the

very low levels, and justification of social and economic cost of transformations (1.83 points; $SD= 0.30$), that has an even less significant role to play in post-authoritarian identity politics. Results for the last of the categories lead us to an interesting observation – as the standard deviation proves, in general, transitional governments do not try to explain to citizens why they have to pay some social and economic price for democratic liberties using a reference to the nation’s history. In our study, we have noticed limited government’s interest in possible (symbolic) relationships between the past and social inequalities or injustices, as well as between historical processes and the social stratification re-shaped during democratisation. In fact, the clear case of the politics of transitional forgetting seems to be one of the most unexpected results of our research, especially when we had predicted that this area will be the key sphere of remembrance story-telling (Marszałek-Kawa et al., 2016, p. 115–117). The peripheral role of this category is noticeable in Image 1. that compares the general result with the average scores for individual areas of impact.

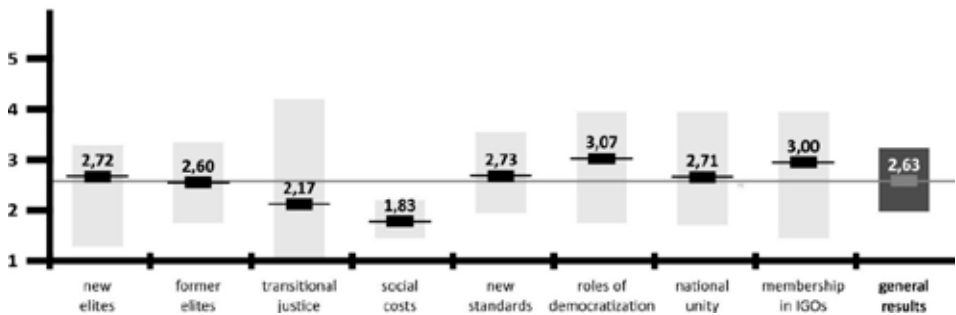


Image 1. The Use of Remembrance Narratives in Transitional Identity Politics.

Source: Marszałek-Kawa et al., 2016, p. 117.

The intensity of remembrance narratives’ used within the areas of impact gives us the general perspective of their role in transitional identity politics. As we have emphasised before, the politicised remembrance is not the key component of democratisation, yet, there are some dimensions of this process where narratives can be transformed into essential political assets. How our findings may help us to understand the rules of this selection? Was the comparative analysis a way to identify some detailed characteristics of the transitional remembrance story-telling?

In thirteen cases we have observed the moderate strength of relationships – therefore, we may assume that there are at least thirteen fields of impact in which the

remembrance can be recognised as a significant source of the nation's new identity. The highest average we have observed for the presentation of the democratisation as a historical process that will result with (re-)gaining a country's appropriate position within the international community (3.83 points, item no. 8–3), that was on the edge between the moderate and the high degrees. Slightly lower results – the average of 3.67 points – characterised another three items: the past as a legitimisation of the new elites' dominant position (1–1), historical arguments for the presence of an authoritarian regime's representatives in the nation's democratic life (2–1) and justification of the democratisation thanks to explaining its trans- and intergenerational character as a long-lasting historical process (6–1).

The moderate degree was also observed in the following cases: presentation of national heroes as democratic and civic role-models (3.50 points, 6–4), historical justifications of the need for national unity during transformations (3.50 points, 7–1), use of the state's continuity to legitimise new elites and their power (3.17 points, 1–2), explanation of the membership in intergovernmental organisations as a fulfilment of historical changes and a result of historical processes (3.17 points, 8–2), use of national symbols and heroes to legitimise new elites and their power (3.00 points, 1–3), presentation of former elite's presence in public life as a historical legitimisation of the democracy and the political pluralism (3.00 points, 2–2), explanation of the limited scope of transitional justice as preventing internal conflicts (3.00 points, 3–4), remembrance as an inspiration for the new definition of patriotism (3.00 points, 5–5) and selection of narratives and their heroes to correspond with challenges of democratisation (3.00 points, 6–3). Therefore, it was the most common to experience the moderate level in the case of new elites' dominant position in new political realities and symbolic roles of transformations, while – on the other hand – it has never occurred in the case of social and economic costs.

Five times we have observed the very low level remembrance narratives' impact on identity politics. The very lowest score, the average of 1.17 points, characterised historical argumentation for new economic attitudes, e.g. entrepreneurship, self-responsibility or initiative (4–2). Only in Estonia, were there some attempts to use the national history to explain citizens why it is necessary to change their economic behaviours, while all other governments did not link the past with the promotion of capitalist self-reliance within the post-authoritarian society. Three other items scored on average 1.50 points – historical justifications of the division between the past and the present as a legitimisation of former elites' presence in the nation's public life (2–5), explanation of adopted transitional justice procedures as a punishment of authoritarian crimes and human rights violators (3–2) and the history as a reason for economic inequalities and injustices in the country (4–3). Closer to the low degree

was the use of remembrance narratives as a source of reconciliation led by new elites (1–5), that on average scored 1.67 points. All results for individual fields of impact are presented in Image 2.

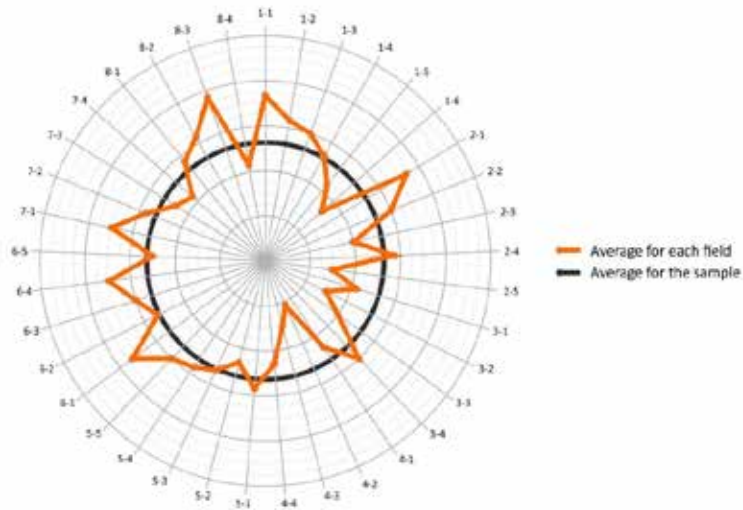


Image 2. The General Model of Transitional Remembrance Policy's Intensity

Source: Marszałek-Kawa et al., 2016, p. 121.

It is clear that some aspects of transitional remembrance policy are more relevant than others. The General Model shows that the right side of the diagram is more likely to be below the sample's average than the left side of it. Likewise, its bottom side is less significant than the top side. It helps us to understand the nature of transitional politicised remembrance. Firstly, as it is future-oriented, its principal objective is to prevent conflicts, thus all problematic issues have to be eliminated from the mainstream memory discourse or even forgotten. As a result links between the history and the transitional justice are limited, and dealing with the past is rather considered as a way to rebuild a society than as a means to punish authoritarian crimes and human rights violations. Similarly, the debate on social and economic costs of transformations is – in general – limited, and the intended policy of forgetting the price of change is valuable proof of this process. Secondly, remembrance narratives have to strengthen a dominant position of new elites as the only force that is able to guarantee peaceful democratisation. The result of it is often self-contradictory.

The new prodemocratic elites use interpretations of the past to support their power, weaken possible competition and promote obedience to new rules even if the cost of these actions is renouncement of civic education and a reduction of civic involvement in politics. The story of the new elites' heroism is presented as a reason for their control over the country however the reproduction of these narratives may become anti-democratic in its nature what is still noticeable in post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Vejvodova, 2016, p. 56–69; Pałeck, 2015).

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of transitional narratives in the past proved that the politicised remembrance should be considered as a valuable political asset during democratisations. However, its role is rather limited to some essential areas and fields of impact – while, in general, the history is secondary legitimisation of a new democratic 'ideal self' of the post-authoritarian nation, there are some aspects in which without remembrance story-telling there cannot be active promotion of the new identity. Our research enables us to measure the strength of these relationships and it helped us to identify the most significant aspects of this process.

It is clear that interpretations of the past supports the power of new elites, yet – as we have observed – historical arguments for this dominant position explains rather privileges than obligations. The politicised remembrance explains why representatives of the authoritarian regime are still present in the nation's public life, yet, it presents their involvement as a constitution of pluralism and democratic liberties, not as a result of negotiated settlement. Promoted stories – as we have emphasised – limit citizens' interest in relationships transitional justice and costs of change, and they legitimise the policy of forgetting as a prevention of internal conflicts. In general, governments use the past to promote new social and political standards, as well as to popularise symbolic understandings of the democratisation. Remembrance narratives inform citizens what to do to become a member of the newly-established democratic community. They argue why national unity is necessary, yet they explain that the unity can be only achieved thanks to the new political leadership – therefore, we can state that transitional narratives even if prodemocratic, often are also anti-pluralist. Finally, they are used to legitimise change in foreign policy and integration with intergovernmental organisations yet, promoted explanations are simplified and limited to presenting the new state's identity in international politics as re-gaining an appropriate position in the World and a fulfilment of transformations.

This paper discusses only a part of our findings, related to the fundamental research question, how remembrance narratives are used in transitional identity politics. We

have identified general characteristics of these relationships and we have measured their intensity. As a result, we were able to present the General Model that draws a detailed picture of the politicised remembrance's role during democratisation. However, these findings do not close the discussion, quite the contrary they open a debate on general features of investigated links. Further considerations are necessary because we have noticed statistically significant differences between analysed cases and – as a result – we have contradicted a hypothesis on the universal model of transitional remembrance policy. Thanks to our study, we know that ways in which governments use narratives on the past are not the same in different countries, therefore, we can argue against understanding the democratisation as a homogenous process and search for variables that may explain the presence of significant differences between all cases of post-authoritarian transformations. Moreover, our investigations showed that measuring the intensity of narratives' use may be a reasonable way to discover how transitional story-telling is shaping identity politics and how it co-constitutes the democratic vision of society's 'ideal self'.

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