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Diplomacy in the ‘Age of Trauma’

Book Review: Erica Resende & Dovile Budryte (Eds.), *Memory and Trauma in International Relations. Theories, cases and debates*. Abingdon-New York: Routledge 2016 (pp. 280). ISBN 978-1-138-28949-9. Price: £28.99.

The constant development of international relations theory offers us more and more advanced understanding of politics. For centuries, step by step, it adds new factors which influence relationships between states. Now, the picture is complicated and vivid; it includes various elements from military and economic power or natural resources through alliances and international organisations or labour force and innovations up to culture, tradition and ‘soft power’. However, it is impossible to complete the image, as the social, political and economic world is on the move, and societies, economies and other institutions are changing in time. Last decades opened us to a new approach, which attempts to integrate findings of memory studies into the IR theory.

The reviewed book edited by Erica Resende and Dovile Budryte (2016) tried to popularise this new perspective and advanced position presented in their work by Jeffrey K. Olick (2007; Olick & Robbins, 1998) and Duncan Bell (2006; 2009). Moreover, it reopens three critical questions from the borderlands of international studies and memory studies. Firstly, it discusses connections between public expressions of remembrance and trauma with the globalisation. Secondly, it considers foreign policy-making and diplomacy as inspired by national historical debates and shared understandings of past events. Finally, the publication aimed at investigation of the production of memories as a process influencing the distribution of knowledge within the international community. Therefore, it is worth to emphasise that the book edited by Resende and Budryte contributed to the ‘unfinished’ picture of IR theory with a small but significant part related to the role of remembrance as a source of shared knowledge, values and ideologies.

The question of dependencies between memories or historical traumas and international politics has its exceptional meaning in the 21st Century. European relations are full of emotions fuelled by resentments, unfinished conflicts and historical injustices. The conflict in Ukraine is not just a war over resources and territories, it is also a clash of two narratives on the past and two contradictory interpretations of history – Crimea's or Donetsk's identity can be either Ukrainian or Russian, and this dichotomy cannot be reconciled (Averre & Wolczuk, 2018; Lachowski, 2017). The European Union is either a successfully realised vision of post-war peace and economic integration, or a bureaucratic leviathan willing to destroy nations states to enslave their inhabitants (Ágh, 2016). Developing historical trauma into a political asset cannot be limited just to Europe – in Resende and Budryte's book, there are valuable chapters presenting case studies of this phenomenon in Germany, Haiti, Lithuania, Nicaragua and Turkey. In the last one, Brent E. Sasley (2016, pp. 150–152) discussed two remembrance regimes in the country – the Kemalist and the Islamist – and showed how the conflict between them implicates transformations of national identity and Turkey's identity in international politics. On the other hand, Budryte (2016, p. 180) in her study on Lithuanian narratives on the Second World War concluded that conflicting interpretations can result in a productive collision of perspectives, which results in a production of transnational, inclusive stories (as it was in the case of post-communist memory in Eastern Europe). These examples prove how common is addressing vital political issues with remembrance remedies, and that healing trauma itself may be a core of (international) politics.

The integration of memory studies and IR theory is essential for understanding relations between remembrance narratives and state's identity in international politics. In my previous work with Joanna Marszałek-Kawa, we noticed that – during democratisations – interpretations of the past are crucial as justifications for country's membership in intergovernmental organisations and that a government uses them to present new foreign policy as a fulfilment of transformations (Marszałek-Kawa et al, 2017, pp. 62–65; Marszałek-Kawa & Wawrzyński, 2016, pp. 16–17). However, as we have noticed in the case of post-apartheid South Africa, there are countries, in which addressing historical traumas and injustices promotes less commitment to international relations, what Douglas J. Becker missed in the chapter on memory and trauma in foreign policy-making (Wawrzyński & Stańco-Wawrzyńska, 2016). In fact, the authors also missed valuable findings presented by Dominique Moïsi (2009) in his study on different strategies of coping with (politicised and collective) trauma in international politics. As a result, a discussion on emotions as a variable in observation of dynamics of remembrance is somewhat limited, while it is confirmed that affects play a significant role in using interpretations of the past in political debates (Wawrzyński, 2015; 2017).

Besides significant contribution to the vivid picture of the IR theory, the strong side of the reviewed book is its attempt to theorise transitional justice (TJ) in the international context. It is clear that the way in which a government decides to deal with its authoritarian past partially determines a future shape of civic society or a path to consolidated democracy

(Marszałek-Kawa & Wawrzyński, 2016, pp. 15–19; Koczanowicz, 1997; Krotoszyński, 2017). In the chapter on dependencies between international politics and TJ, Hun Joon Kim concludes, that “two conditions are critical for adopting transitional justice measures: first, the development of democracy and its consolidation are important preconditions for achieving further accountability measures; second, strong and resilient domestic and international activism is a key to achieving transitional justice” (Hun Joon Kim, 2016, p. 41). This observation points out in a direction which should inspire IR scholars – how profoundly does international pressure forces politicians to seek for reconciliation and closure for national traumas?

Memory and Trauma in International Relations is a publication which presents new approaches to studying IR, but – as in the case of Hun Joon Kim’s piece on TJ – it also raises questions that may be answered in future studies. The book includes fourteen various chapters, seven theoretical investigations and other seven case studies. It starts with a relevant and inspiring chapter on memory, trauma and ontological security (in the context of state’s identity in international politics) by Alexandria J. Innes and Brent J. Steele. They claimed: “collective identity, constituted via a collective (auto)biographical narrative, can be a particularly revealing focus in times of social change. [...] When social change occurs, and the routines of particular society are disrupted in a traumatic way – for example through violent revolution – the need to recreate a sense of ontological security is all the more evident. The security might be regained by turning to ethnic, religious or cultural identifications – themselves resources not only for identity, but also for *narratives* about the Self” (Innes & Steele, 2016, pp. 28–29). This understanding of IR is then developed by Erin K. Wilson and Roland Bleiker in their chapter on political apologies and Becker’s part on foreign policy-making. Also, it corresponds with theoretical discussions on the reconciliation by Renata B. Ferreira and the role of truth by Laura K. Taylor.

However, the book edited by Resende and Budryte includes at least three highly innovative chapters which open fresh perspectives for IR scholars. In the first one, Vanessa Pupavac discussed narratives on natural disasters, focusing on their fundamental typological division into acts of God, acts of nature and acts of man. She observed that “political identification with apocalyptic natural disasters has modified its meaning here and reflects the decline of mass radical politics. Politics of recent years increasingly invokes catastrophic events to galvanise policy enforcement and public compliance, as opposed to a positive vision of future” (Pupavac, 2016, p. 90). For a political scientist, it is clear that the Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and Japan’s tsunami disaster in 2011 were breaking points in the global debate on environment protection, climate change and threats of natural catastrophes. However, Pupavac proved global disaster politics are not only meant to raise awareness, but the debate may also result in a more progressive international agenda for humanitarian aid and environmental protection. Pedro Fonseca addressed these issues referring to a case of climate justice and climate security in his chapter on remembrance and the climate change prevention. He went even further than Pupavac and claimed that experience of natural

disasters should inspire debate on the reorganisation of relations between the developed and the developing world. Therefore, we should consider living in the age of dramatic climate change and consequences of economic inequalities between the global North and the South as reasons for the necessity of reconstruction of the international order.

Finally, the book includes a pretty unique chapter on a role of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in global politics of memory by Ritu Mathur. She argued that this organisation “has deliberately constituted itself as an ethical witness with a testimony that is carefully deployed to mobilise nation states to regulate and prohibit the use of particular weapons” (Mathur, 2016, pp. 198–199). The study emphasised the significance of non-state actors in international politics, showing that as politics of memory on the national level, the international discourse of memories cannot be limited to governments and their agencies. There is a recent work by Aleksandra Gliszczyńska-Grabias and Grażyna Baranowska (2016) in which they show how profoundly the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights influenced European memory. Both studies showed that IR scholars should understand that in the globalised and multipolar world where social media are a crucial source of information, non-state actors become caretakers of public emotions and managers of social concerns. Even if a government still can execute its narrative powers, the influence is limited by expanding social frameworks of memory.

In general, the book edited by Resende and Budryte is a valuable contribution to the IR theory, especially when we notice that the authors tried to theorise associations between collective trauma and international politics. The publication offered new approaches and raised new questions – it showed that social constructivism still can be a productive and prospective theory (as it has been in a crisis recently). For a political scientist interested in politics of memory, identity politics, post-conflict reconciliation or international politics and diplomacy *Memory and Trauma in International Relations* is obligatory reading. Resende and Budryte did a great job editing this volume – the book is diverse but comprehensive; it combines more traditional perspectives with new and radical approaches. Finally, lectures may use it as a handbook and introduce students to the complexity of dependencies between remembrance narratives and international relations.

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