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Focus: Regimes of Memory

Interpreting Regimes of Memory

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This introduction gives a brief account of the conceptual framework and the topics of the case studies, especially the connection between the psychological concept of trauma applied in the social sciences and the characteristics of the historical analysis of traumatic events or processes, the link between the patterns of consolidation and the regimes of memory, and the context of the chosen case studies of this focus.

Historical Trauma

Coming from psychology, the concept of *trauma* has been successfully applied in social psychology and also in the sociology of law.[1] In the historical analysis, therefore, a traumatic event or process engenders a discourse of grievance (transmitted through the media, literature, popular culture, and so on). Representatives of such discourse are seen or see themselves as victims. Their discourse permeates organizations, influences political life, and elicits institutional responses – matters that can be subjected to empirical investigations in their own right. Should a trauma not develop into a full-fledged discourse, it may still enter the realm of collective memory patterns or even the national *Grand Narratives*, be passed on to future generations and so opened up to reinterpretation. The conditions under which a past event or process is reinterpreted as a traumatic inheritance can also be studied empirically, as can the social awareness obtained by it.

The political languages and narratives of such experiences have been held together by elite-generated identity models, by images of preceding conflict, interpretations of the recent past, of the self and the inner *alterity*, and the blueprints of memory. Indeed, they have been the building blocks of the patterns of consolidation, the underlying assumptions for turning divided societies and fractured political cultures into one political community. Each one of them has had its share in the 'European civil wars'.

The patterns of consolidation of established political regimes leave strong imprints on individual, group, and nationwide collective projections. In some cases, as in the aftermath of civil wars in Ireland, Finland, Poland, Greece, Italy, and Spain, consolidation was framed by the victorious party, which secured its ascendancy for many decades.

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The analyst is therefore compelled to take a critical stance examining the particulars of every case. Consolidation should not be approached only 'from above' or by focusing on its hegemonic drive. This is because its patterns always breed antagonistic political languages and different narratives of the recent past and previous conflict in particular. The different interpretations and reinterpretations, selections and taboos, of historical tradition tend to divide themselves into establishment and alternative types. The ways regimes seek to homogenize the fractured and often contradictory elements of their political cultures draw separate, sometimes opposite blueprints informed by disastrous historical experiences. Their frozen pasts appear embodied in real and symbolic spaces, the very structures and centres of cities, monuments, sacred places. Alternative pasts end up being rekindled in collective rituals and processions influencing and often poisoning personal consciousness, individual and collective life strategies, and also inter- and cross-generational contacts and transfers.

Regimes of Memory and Consolidation

Regimes of memory are institutionalized ways of setting and managing the supply and demand of remembrance in historical contexts. The concept points beyond the more usual 'politics of memory' or 'collective memory' insofar as it implies a governance of the issues relating to the past in modern societies; on the one hand, discourse on the past is produced by the state, its institutions and various other organizations (clubs, associations, and so on), leaders of opposition parties, opinion makers and other informal networks of communication; on the other hand, memory patterns also produce social identities demanding public recognition. A regime of memory is the way both ends are met, politically and culturally. Regimes of memory impel dynamics: the supply and demand of memory are usually not in a state of 'general equilibrium', so that there is always some kind of friction that, as contexts change, give way to the elaboration of discourse and the reinterpretation of past events as traumatic. A regime of memory usually makes room for different, sometimes incoherent, even contradictory discourses on the past.

Patterns of consolidation and regimes of memory relate to each other in complex dialectics. Compared with regimes of memory, consolidation affects many institutional realms and cultural, social and political processes of a given society other than the social management of the past. Regimes of memory are established as consolidation takes place, and there are important differences in the way the past is socially managed depending on the pattern of consolidation. Once instituted, however, regimes of memory foster dynamics that affect the endurance and stability of patterns of consolidation. Given that social and political groups partially build their identity through memory patterns, the institutionalization of regimes of memory unleashes struggles for recognition; eventually coalitions for memory policies are enacted that may even reorganize political agendas.

Policies on their side may oscillate from celebrating traumatic events as victories of a part of the community over the other, to sending into oblivion certain historical processes. All of these on their part cause the marginalization or subordination of certain discourses on the past. In sum, a regime of memory deals with how the past is managed in the present,

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whereas a pattern of consolidation reveals the way the present is influenced by the past. Both a regime of memory and a pattern of consolidation are comprehensive, feasible and reliable tools for organizing evidence and fostering theoretical reflection on these issues. In any case, one of the objectives of the project would be to test and refine them critically.

Contextualizing

In choosing case countries and contexts for study, it is useful to avoid standard regional and historical dichotomies (North versus South, West versus East, developed versus backward, core versus periphery, etc). This implies finding representative countries and contexts of almost every regional and historical type occurring in the continent in the period under study. As political units, France and Spain have had *longue durée* statehoods. Belgium was established as a state in 1830. It happened to be a brief decade later that Greece declared independence from the Ottoman Empire. Germany and Italy formed unified states in 1870–1871. Ireland, Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary had ceased to be visible as independent medieval kingdoms in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. The *Rzeczpospolita* was erased from the map for more than a hundred years. The four joined the community of independent European states again as republics in 1918, exactly when Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Yugoslavia (including Bosnia-Herzegovina) appeared among the European states as independent partners. Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and its successors, the Czech and the Slovak Republics, became independent countries again from Soviet rule in 1989–1991. In constitutional terms, France and Belgium have had long-term stable representative governments evolving from liberalism into democracy; whereas Italy and Germany have experienced periods of totalitarian rule and the crisis of liberalism. Spain and Greece have had longer periods of authoritarian rule combined with liberal or democratic experiences. Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia had partly authoritarian, partly democratic systems in the interwar period, while Czechoslovakia was the only liberal democracy in the region. Except for Yugoslavia and Finland, which were in between the two camps, they were all forced to take on the Soviet model for more than four decades, and exhibited different patterns of democratic resistance. In spite of their marked differences, all these cases share the influences of regimes of memory and patterns of consolidation in their long-term evolution as political and cultural units. It is, however, only retrospectively that their effects on present-day affairs can be assessed.

A brief account of each particular case will in this phase, however, only illustrate the differences and hint at the similarities. The *longue durée* goal is conducting the comparison of the common and different characteristics of the various regimes of memory and the patterns of consolidation.

Case Studies for Comparative Analysis

After publishing the proceedings of the Leuven conference of the Academia Europaea network *Overcoming European Civil Wars: Patterns of Consolidation in Divided Societies*, *2010-1800,* I organized the first of a series of conferences through the Wroclaw office of the Academia Europaea: *Regimes of Memory. Case Studies for Comparative*

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Issues at Wroclaw, 30 October 2012.[2] The outcome of this first conference is a collection of essays on the different regimes and topics of memory. One of the studies shows, analyses and interprets the different regimes of memory in the Netherlands. Another interprets the competing memories of the two world wars in Belgium. An essay digs into the memory politics and historiography in Finland. A case study elaborates on the current dilemmas of the memory of fascism and the anti-fascist resistance of the youth in Italy. Another shows the Civil War mass graves in Spain as a crucial topic of memory and the political discourse. One essay sheds light on and interprets some symbolic spaces of the destroyed/perished communities of the Polish-Ukrainian-Jewish city Lwów/Lvov/Lviv/Lemberg. Another essay rethinks the conceptual framework of the images of the future of the Hungarian communities in the neighbouring countries. Yet another study deals with the criterion and the distortion of making democratic political culture as the basis of the democratic political community. A little known historical document, written between 1965 and 1974 by the eminent political thinker István Bibó (1911–1979), interprets Cyprus as the clashing area between the Greek and the Turkish nation-making processes.[3]

Notes and References

1. Pablo Sánchez León (Universidad del Pais Vasco) inspired me on the subject of *Regimes of Memory* as a whole and as regards details between 2009 and 2011 working on the proposal of *European Civil Wars: Patterns of Consolidation in Divided Societies, 2010-1800*. I am grateful for his ideas. His bibliographical list includes: D. P. Brown, A. W. Scheflin and D. C. Hammond (2002) *Memory, Trauma Treatment, and the Law* (New York: W.W. Norton); S. Felman (2002) *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); A. Sarat, N. Davidovitch and M. Albertstein (2007) *Trauma and Memory: Reading, Healing, and Making Law* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press); K. Campbell (2011) *Testifying to Trauma: The Codification of Trauma in Humanitarian Law*. (2011); G. M. Breakwell, *Coping with Threatened Identities* (London: Methuen); K. Erickson (1994) *A New Species of Trouble: Explorations in Disaster, Trauma, and Community* (New York: W.W. Norton); J. A. Young (1995) *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press); C. Caruth (1996) *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press); B. A. Kolk, A. C. McFarlane and L. Weisaeth (1996) *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (New York: Guilford Press); Y. Danieli (1998) *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma* (New York: Kluwer Academic); D. LaCapra (2000) *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press); R. Leys (2000) *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); S. J. Herman (2003) *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books); J. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N. Smelser and P. Stompka (2004) *Cultural Trauma and Collective Memory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press); P. Wilson (2005) *The Posttraumatic Self: Restoring Meaning and Wholeness to Personality* (New York: Routledge); L. J. Kirmayer, R. Lemelson and M. Barad (eds) (2007) *Understanding Trauma. Integrating Biological, Clinical and Cultural Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press).
2. Iván Zoltán Dénes (2012) *European Review*, **20**(4), pp. 455–525.

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3. István Bibó (b. 1911, d. 1979), political thinker. See: Document. Cf. R. N. Berki (1992) The realism of moralism. The political philosophy of István Bibó. *History of Political Thought*, **XIII**, 3; I. Z. Dénes (ed) (2014) *The Meaning of European Political Development. The Essays of István Bibó* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press).

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Iván Zoltán Dénes is a historian of ideas, initiating research on historical traumas and trauma management in Europe. A member of the Academia Europaea (1995–), he has authored 11 books and edited 42 others. His most recent books and essays in English and French include: *Liberty and the Search for Identity. Liberal Nationalisms and the Legacy of Empires* (editor and contributor, Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2006); 'Personal liberty and political freedom: four interpretations.' *European Journal of Political Theory*, **7**(1), pp. 81–98 (2008); *Conservative Ideology in the Making* (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2009); 'Liberty versus common good.' *European Review*, **18,** S1, pp. 89–98 (2010); 'Reinterpreting a 'Founding Father': Kossuth images and their contexts, 1848–2009.' *East Central Europe,* **37**(1), pp. 90–117 (2010); 'Le mouvement estudiantin à Budapest en 1969.' *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, **42**(4), pp. 37–54 (2011); 'Overcoming European civil war: patterns of consolidation in divided societies, 2010-1800.' *European Review*, **20**(4), pp. 455–474 (2012); 'Adopting European model versus national egoism: the task of surpassing political hysteria.' *European Review*, **20**(4), pp. 514–525 (2012); *The Meaning of European Political Development. The Essays of István Bibó* (ed. intr.) (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2014).

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