

Eva-Clarita Pettai, Vello Pettai, *Transitional and Retrospective Justice in the Baltic States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 375 p. ISBN 978-1-107-04949-9

Two political scientists from Tartu University in Estonia, Eva-Clarita Pettai and Vello Pettai, published an important comparative study a few years ago about the political regulation of historic justice and associated practices in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Their book might easily be considered a study on the politics of memory. However, the authors avoid this kind of attribution, and have chosen categories to conceptualise their theme that have been used for numerous decades by researchers who write mostly about the attitudes of post-dictatorial and post-conflict regimes towards the former overturned regime. So, in this book, the authors have written about the ‘politics of truth and justice’, ‘transitional justice’, and ‘retrospective justice’ in the post-communist period. They use the latter two concepts to identify the temporal dimensions of the same phenomenon covering the recent and more distant past. Another third dimension, post-transitional justice, is also identified, but they do not really analyse it further.

The book’s strongest feature is the authors’ ability to present a strong, empirically backed study, offering theoretical innovations, by bringing in sources written in Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and other languages. They draw attention to a wide spectrum of questions: the legal prosecution and criminal trials of perpetrators; the public exposure of perpetrators, their condemnation (lustration, etc), and victims’ acknowledgement of having suffered; the legal rehabilitation of victims, compensation for the harm they suffered, and the question of the restitution of property; symbolic measures in the politics of truth and justice that cover the political regulation of memory, the activities of museums, and other aspects; and ultimately, they discuss the attempts by Baltic politicians to transfer the requirements for restoring truth and justice to a pan-European level, in the ‘battle for the memory field’ where the approaches that Europe and Russia choose to have with the dictatorial past should be seen from contrasting positions.

The strong empirical backbone of the research is enhanced by a sophisticated theoretical approach. Its most important achievement is the authors’ arguments about the existence of patterns in the politics of truth and justice in post-communist countries. Supplementing the insights of earlier researchers, the authors have created a 12-cell table (matrix) as an analytical tool, which distinguishes measures in the politics of truth and justice that have been applied separately to perpetrators and victims in

two cases, transitional and retrospective, and are expressed at the criminal-judicial, political-administrative and symbolic-representational levels. In this way, the authors have combined legal practice analysis, political science, cultural research and historical approaches. A comparison of how specific measures were applied at which time, in what way, and how they were combined with one another in a particular country, has allowed them to grade three countries according to certain patterns: from the non-interference, 'inactive' or 'hands-off' pattern that prevailed in Estonia, to the strong state regulation ('etatist' or 'hands-on' pattern) evident in Lithuania, seeing Latvia in the middle as a 'mixed' version.

The empirical part of the book is not fundamentally new, partly (and only partly) because the authors did not manage to use all the studies about the politics of memory, truth and justice in the Baltic countries that appeared before the publication of the book.¹ Thus, many of the individual facts and theses presented, such as the issue of the specific definition of the concept of 'genocide' in Lithuania, are already known from earlier studies. But the book's strong point is unquestionably the combination of a whole set of questions and comparison of three cases that were hitherto viewed as individual (including, for example, in the dissertation of one of the authors, Eva-Clarita Pettai²). The fact that the result of this comparison, the theoretical summary, allows us to state that, in implementing their own politics of truth and justice, the three Baltic countries did not take one path, neither were they synchronised, and nor did they act with the same level of intensity, is of no less importance. In the conclusions, however, when trying to explain the different patterns in the politics of truth and justice, the authors have concentrated on historical reasons. In these explanations, much less attention is put on the dynamics of changing political and social actors, the impact of the combination of factors in domestic and foreign policy. There could have been more space devoted to these factors in the book. Nor are the historical reasons themselves explained precisely in all cases. For example, when discussing Lithuania, it says that local communists earned 'a certain degree of credibility among Lithuanians' due to 'the successful limitation of mass immigration from the Soviet Union to Lithuania'. However, the Party was 'made local' not only and primarily due to the limitation of immigration, which began considerably later, but due to other factors. By 1953–1954, Lithuanians outnumbered Russians in the Communist Party of Lithuania, and this was the result of the Party's conscious nationalisation policy, implemented at least until the late 1950s.

¹ I have in mind, first of all, the great deal of Lithuanian research, published in various languages, which it appears the authors were unaware of.

² E-C. Onken, *Demokratisierung der Geschichte in Lettland. Staatsbürgerliches Bewusstsein und Geschichtspolitik im ersten Jahrzehnt der Unabhängigkeit* (Hamburg, 2003).

Of all the dictatorial experiences in the book, most attention is given to the relationship with the communist past. This is understandable, given that in all three states, this period of experience was the longest. Issues of truth and justice relating to the experiences of the Nazi occupation are analysed to a much lesser degree in the book. The issue of (a lack of) a relationship with the authoritarian interwar regime experience which appears to be just another feature of the politics of truth and justice in the Baltic States that has received extremely little attention in research so far, has basically been overlooked in this study as well.

The theoretical tool the authors created, the 12-cell table, is an interesting offering, which, it seems, could be tested in other comparative studies as well. In many cases, however, the measures entered in the different cells are repeated, so it remains unclear whether it was necessary to make such a strict distinction between transitional justice and retrospective justice, if the measures by which they are realised display major differences in only a handful of cases. Despite being based on examples from the Baltic countries, the matrix of measures which the authors suggest would probably not be very suitable in the non-dominant yet most controversial cases, when those who would be viewed on one hand as victims (of the Soviet regime) would later become perpetrators (of the Nazi regime), and vice versa.

Despite this, the authors should be congratulated on the well-thought-out structure, the rather understandable style, the harmony of an analytical model and empirical data, and the balanced attention given to all three states. Despite being analysed as one 'Baltic region' in this book, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania appear to have much less in common than was earlier believed. Compared to the existing research about the justice of the transitional period in East Central Europe,³ the research by the Pettais gives us a significantly more thorough picture of the three countries than we have seen so far. However, the fact that the authors have analysed Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania by taking an extended approach should now encourage us to use this approach to analyse other post-communist states: only this kind of comparison can offer some clarity as to how, for example, Lithuania looks in terms of the larger regional area. In any case, the current research by Eva-Clarita Pettai and Vello Pettai should be of interest not only to those who are interested in the politics of history, justice implementation practices, or 'Baltic State' comparative policies. It

³ For example: *Transitional Justice: How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes*, *Country Studies* Vol. 2, ed. N.J. Kritz (Washington DC, 1995), pp. 533–770; A. Voiculescu, *Human Rights and Political Justice in Post-Communist Eastern Europe: Prosecuting History* (Lewiston, New York, 2000); *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Reckoning with the Communist Past*, ed. L. Stan (London, 2009); *Transitional Justice and the Former Soviet Union. Reviewing the Past, Looking toward the Future*, eds. C.M. Horne, L. Stan (Cambridge, 2018).

also offers empirical and theoretical knowledge to those who are interested in how the new East Central European states handled questions relating to the reinstatement of truth and justice in the 20th century. During the previous century, these questions were relevant not only in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

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