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### **The Turning Points of South Korean History in the Autobiographical Writings of its Political Leaders: Analyzing Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun's Memories**

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**Abstract:** *Emerging as an independent nation in 1948, South Korea went through a difficult phase of political development: shifting from a martial and authoritarian regime toward a liberal-democratic one. The April Revolution in 1960, the May 16 coup in 1961, the October Yushin in 1972, the Gwangju Uprising in 1980, and the June Democratic Uprising were some of the key turning points in South Korean history, which changed the political landscape of the state and extensively influenced its future. The successful democratic transition has provided substantial grounds for various interpretations of the critical moments in the contemporary history of Korea. Although the official historical discourse has become more democratic and critical in recent times, it still leans toward conservatism. The collective memory of important historical events has been continuously constructed by a wide range of educational tools, cultural products, and governmental programs in South Korea. The collective memory comprises individual memories of the past, but these individual memories are subordinate to the collective memory because they are subject to generalization and objectification, which result in the adoption of commonly shared views of the past.*

*The present research focuses on the autobiographical writings of two outstanding political figures, the former presidents of South Korea, Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008). The study aims to define how individual memories of the past are interwoven with collective memories and how these memories are reflected in life narratives. The preliminary results of the research show that the individual memories of two politicians regarding significant historical events considerably contest and criticize the official historical discourse. Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun have used different forms of autobiographical writing, autobiography and memoir, to record their private recollections, which are testimonies of the authors' past experiences. In this regard, they are especially helpful resources for understanding how collective memory of the past has been formed and mobilized in South Korea.*

**Keywords:** *autobiography, political memoir, collective memory, individual memory, life narrative*

## *Introduction*

Autobiographies are one of the oldest literary genres. Although the term “autobiography” appeared relatively late in English literature, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, memoirs and diaries, both autobiographical forms of literary expression, have a much longer history. Throughout history, people have recollected and reconstructed their personal lives through individual memories, capturing the most significant events of the past in various types of autobiographical writings. In everyday life, the “autobiography” and “memoir” (reminiscence) are often used as interchangeable notions because both of them refer to recollecting the past events of an individual’s life. However, there is a small difference between these two terms. The “autobiography” is a shaping of the past, and, as such, it “involves the reconstruction of the movement of a life, or part of a life, in the actual circumstances in which it was lived” [Pascal, 1960, p. 9]. An autobiographer focuses on the self, whereas the author of a memoir tends to recollect his own life in the context of the others who have influenced it. This difference in approach to recollecting the past implies a difference in the structure of a memoir versus an autobiography. As a rule, an autobiographer recollects the past events of his life from childhood to the most significant events of the recent past. In a memoir, there are no rules that strictly prescribe the order of narration: an author is absolutely free to choose those events that seem to him as the most important. Hence, in a memoir the chronological coherence of narration is less meaningful than in an autobiography.

Autobiographical writings are quite difficult to analyze because their authors are not bound by specific rules or formal requirements of narration. As James Olney correctly noted in his theoretical essay on autobiography, the autobiographer is restrained by neither necessary models nor “obligatory observances gradually shaped out of a long developing tradition” [Olney, 1980, p.3]. The obvious simplicity of autobiographical writing resulted in a large number of memoirs, personal essays, letters, diaries, and autobiographies. The absence of specific rules or formal requirements of narration in autobiographies should not be misunderstood to mean that there are not any rules of narration at all.

The autobiographer needs to be cohesive and accurate in his representation of the facts. Being an account of one’s own life, the autobiography as a literary genre imposes certain restrictions on its author; thus, accuracy, impartiality, and inclusiveness are the basic requirements of autobiographical writing [Howarth, 1974, p. 364]. Style is also an important device of the skilled narrator, but in regard to autobiographical writing, its significance is less meaningful. Although many autobiographies are written in the simplest style, it does not make them less interesting for a potential reader. Moreover, the simplest stylistic choice sometimes permits one to achieve “larger effects, like those of metaphor and tone” [Howarth, 1974, p. 366].

Autobiographical writings reflect the memories of the authors about their pasts. Thus, life narratives are the places in which someone’s memories are recollected and organized to contribute to an evolving story of the self. Historical narratives and individual and collective memories are so closely interwoven in autobiographies that none of them can remove the influence of the other. The autobiographical genre determines to a certain extent the way in which the memories will be reflected in the text, but it cannot influence the process of recollecting a past. As a result, when analyzing political memories in autobiographical writings, we must take into account not only the particular form of narrative that the memories follow but

also the process of recollecting events. This approach allows us to understand the links and interconnections between narrative, individual memory, and historical conscience (collective memory).

In the contemporary life narrative/oral history interpretive theory, there are three general strands according to which written/oral narratives are analyzed: cultural, social, and psychological forms of analysis. The cultural form of analysis attempts to define how individual memories draw upon archetypal myths that are embodied in the collective memory and, then, follow particular narrative forms. The social and psychological forms of analysis “focus upon the context within which remembering takes place, and upon shared psychological imperatives underlying the construction of stories about the past” [Green, 2004, pp. 38-39]. All three forms of analysis commonly share a theoretical assumption of Halbwachs: individual memory is mainly subservient to collective memory, and, hence, can hardly escape from the templates of the latter. Halbwachs wrote that “our memories remain collective, however, and are recalled to us through others even though only we were participants in the events or saw the things concerned” [Halbwachs, 1980, p.23]. The continuous presence of others in our individual lives influences the process of remembrance so that even the succession of our private memories should be explained through the changes that occur in our relationships to various collective milieus [Halbwachs, 1980, p. 49].

In this study, I explore the interdependence of autobiographical narratives with individual memory based on an analysis of Kim Dae-jung’s written memories of the liberation period (1945-1948), the Korean War (1950-1953), and the April Revolution (1960) and based on an analysis of Roh Moo-hyun’s oral recollections of the April Revolution (1960) and of the May 16 coup (1961). Carried out in accordance with the basic elements of cultural, social, and psychological forms of analysis of oral history, this study argues that the individual memories of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun differ considerably from the collective memory of past events, particularly in those parts of the life narrative that reflect the author’s specific experience of the past. Through these disputed points, private remembrances manifest their capacity to contest dominant historical discourse and, thus, resist the templates of collective memory.

#### *Critical remarks on the autobiographical writings of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun*

To determine how historical events are recollected by individual memories in an autobiographical writing, it is important to understand the goal of the writing and “the author’s standpoint of the moment at which he reviews his life and interprets his life from it” [Pascal, 1960, p. 9]. It is also important to know the individual conditions surrounding an autobiographer when he writes his memoir. The last one is especially significant for political memoirs because they are written by professional statesmen and politicians whose consciences and memories are strongly dependent on the current politics. In addition, we must distinguish what kind of memories we are dealing with – oral or written. Oral memories are reflected in the text in a different manner than written ones, and, as a consequence, it causes a different perception of the author’s recollections of the history.

Kim Dae-jung wrote his autobiography after his retirement in 2003. His political career was practically finished, and he had enough time to think over the past, to reevaluate, and to reconstruct his life in the autobiography. The full edition of Kim Dae-jung’s autobiography in

two volumes was published in 2010, one year after his death (August, 18, 2009). The preface opens with commemorative letters from his second wife, Lee Hee-ho, the ex-president of the USA, Bill Clinton, the ex-president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the ex-president of Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker. It also contains Kim Dae-jung's general reflections on his life and the aims of his autobiography. In the preface, Kim Dae-jung clearly stated that he wanted to become a president who would change the world. He was completely convinced that a political leader significantly influences the historical development of a country by his actions. It was for this reason that Kim Dae-jung took part in the presidential elections four times, and, as a consequence, was accused by his political opponents of "being sick with president's illness." However, as Kim Dae-jung noted, he never worried about such accusations [Kim, 2010, p. 21].

During his long ascent to the presidency, Kim Dae-jung met many people who went through sufferings and hardships to help him and those who even sacrificed their lives for him. In his autobiography, he wanted to recall the names of these people once again to thank them. This was the first aim of his writing. The second purpose was to educate the next generation so that they would not repeat the mistakes that he had made during his political career. This purpose of autobiographical writing is formulated within the framework of the traditional Korean historiography in which the most important aim of historical writing is to educate the statesmen on how to justly and impartially govern. As a consequence, Kim Dae-jung's autobiography may be interpreted as his last message to the people, and especially, to the future political leaders [Kim, 2010, p. 23]. It exemplifies the instructive character of his life narrative; it is full of personal comments on the past and moral instructions.

The aims of the autobiographical writing exemplified the special author's standpoint in which Kim Dae-jung analyzed past events. Being a politician, he factually wrote the political memoir, recollecting his life in the context of the ongoing political situation. A very small part of his autobiography is devoted to his life before he had started to actively participate in politics in 1954. Throughout his storytelling, Kim Dae-jung focused on those historical events that occurred as the result of unreasonable, selfish, and corruptible actions of the governing political elite. Thus, he wanted to emphasize the close interconnection between civilians and politicians and between society, its development, and the role of a political leader. In this regard, the most significant events, from the author's standpoint, are those in which people become a victim of the unreasonable, unfair policies of the political leadership. If these types of events are caused by the subjective will of politicians, there are also others that occur objectively as a consequence of multiple factors, e.g., the Korean War and the April Revolution (1960), etc. The narration of Kim Dae-jung's autobiography is structured around these two types of events, which makes it coherent and logical.

Roh Moo-hyun's memoirs were published after his death on May, 23, 2009. In this year, the Institute for Future Development (한국미래발전연구원) and the Roh Moo-hyun Foundation (노무현재단) published a series of works in memory of the deceased president. Although most of the writings were formally published on behalf of Roh Moo-hyun, factually, they were prepared for publication by Roh Moo-hyun's colleagues and friends. These works included Roh Moo-hyun's letters, interviews, public statements, and articles written by him during and after his presidency. One of the most noteworthy publications is the book, "Success and Frustration" (성공과 좌절), which contains the diary entries and memories of Roh Moo-hyun. The diary

entries appear in a chapter entitled “Success and Frustration.” The title of the chapter clearly reflects the content of the published memoirs. In this chapter, Roh Moo-hyun expresses his ideas on the subject of success (i.e., What is success? What does it mean to be a successful president? How to achieve success?), the historical development of Korea, and various political issues. Roh Moo-hyun’s memoirs were published preserving the author’s style but with a revised orthography. The diary entries are not dated. According to the editorial remarks, the content published in “Success and Frustration” was written after Roh Moo-hyun’s retirement during his stay in his home village of Bongha. His last diary entry in this chapter is dated May 20, 2009 (three days before his suicide).

In addition to the diary entries, “Success and Frustration” contains Roh Moo-hyun’s notes, which were originally posted on the web pages of the Roh Moo-hyun Foundation with limited access to only those members of the Internet cafe, “Bongha Gulmadang” (봉하글마당), and the Society for Study of the Progressive Democracy (진보주의연구모임). In comparison with the diary entries, these notes are dated March-May, 2009. The last note placed on the web page of the Internet cafe is dated May 21, 2009. The defining theme is the future of progressive democracy in South Korea. Roh Moo-hyun raised the question of what types of problems Korea encounters in the process of development; he also discussed what countries could be useful to study for settling the current developmental issues.

서식 있음

The third types of writings that were included in “Success and Frustration” are Roh Moo-hyun’s oral recollections of his childhood, his days as a practicing lawyer, and the policies of the “*participation government*” (참여정부) during his presidency. Throughout his presidency, Roh Moo-hyun was harshly criticized by the conservative mass media in South Korea for the “bad policies” of his government. To neutralize the negative assessments of the *participation government*’s policies, Roh Moo-hyun decided to record his memories that reflected his own vision of the government’s initiatives. Therefore, in the Blue House (the president’s residence) from September 2007 to January 2008, the officers of the presidential administration recorded Roh Moo-hyun’s memories of his childhood, political activities, and some reflections on the future development of Korea. Some of these records were used in the documentary “The President Talks about the *Participation Government*” (KTV, November 11, 2007) and in the DVD-film “Five Years of the *Participation Government*” (February, 2008). However, for the first time, the full records of Roh Moo-hyun’s memories were published in “Success and Frustration”.

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As noted, the autobiographical writings of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun include different types of memories – written and oral. The oral memories of Roh Moo-hyun, as a rule, are very fragmented and emotional. Oral memories reflect, first of all, the individual’s impression of the historical event witnessed. For example, recollecting the April Revolution of 1960, Roh Moo-hyun (he was 14 years old at the time) remembers an incident when his school director – during a lesson on morality – unexpectedly wrote on the desk a slogan in English, “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Roh Moo-hyun was deeply impressed by the director’s criticism of that political regime because before he had always praised president Rhee Syng-man [Roh, 2009, p. 121]. Roh Moo-hyun stressed in his memoir that this impression stayed with him long after it had happened.

Unlike Roh Moo-hyun's oral memories on the April Revolution, Kim Dae-jung's written memories reflected upon the political situation in Masan, Seoul in March-April of 1960 in a sufficiently detailed manner. In this sense, the oral memories of Roh Moo-hyun seem spontaneous and inconsistent, whereas Kim Dae-jung's memories are more precise, coherent, and rational. In regard to these recollections, the division of written versus oral memories seems to be a more complicated classification than that proposed by Halbwachs, which was to distinguish childhood remembrances from adult ones [Halbwachs, 1980]. Roh Moo-hyun's memories of the April Revolution and the May 16 coup are childhood remembrances, and, as a consequence, are fragmented and illusive in terms of Halbwachs' theory. However, if we analyze Roh Moo-hyun's adult remembrances of the past, it becomes obvious that his oral memories reflect his perception of the events more clearly than written memories of Kim Dae-jung. This raises the question: are written memories better suited to the memory-in-process, while oral memories should be identified with the memory of reception? If this is true, then it explains why Roh Moo-hyun's oral recollections are reflexive, discursive, and self-questioning. He does not aim to depict how an event happened; instead, he wants to show his impressions and feelings about it and how the latter influenced his future behavior.

#### *Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun's recollections of historical events*

Kim Dae-jung was 19 when Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule. This started a three-year transitive period, which ended with the division of Korea into two independent states in 1948. In his memories of the liberation period (1945-1948), Kim Dae-jung reflects upon the most significant political issues and figures of the time. Although he had few concerns about politics at that time, he actively participated in the activities of the Mokpo's branch of Preparatory Committee for State Establishing (*Konguk junbi wiwonhwe*). He wrote that having lived in the dark time of Japanese imperialism, he did not understand democracy or communism. Contrary to the further large scale indoctrination of anti-communist views by the Rhee Syng-man's government, most Koreans had no particular disapproval of communism at the time because they had heard much about the desperate struggle of communists against Japanese colonialism.

On more than one occasion, Kim Dae-jung contemplates past events in terms of their historical context, stressing how collective memory evolves to reflect particular events differently over time. He wrote that, at first, the division of Korea did not cause special concern for Koreans because they believed that sooner or later it would be united again. Furthermore, many people did not worry about the American and Soviet troops that were occupying Korea. The more eye-catching issue was the political division between the leftists and the rightists soon after liberation. The political tensions were exacerbated by the different attitudes of the Korean nationalists and communists on the issue of trusteeship. Kim Dae-jung wrote that he was initially against a trusteeship regime, but later he had changed his mind. He said that Koreans' unwillingness to accept trusteeship could result in the division of Korea, and from this standpoint, an adoption of trusteeship was a much better option than a rejection of it.

In order to sustain political consolidation, a coalition movement was formed between the political right and left. One of the outstanding figures of the coalition movement was Yo Un-hyung. Kim Dae-jung supported the coalition movement and even decided to join the New People's Party (*Sinmin-dang*). However, soon after, he withdrew his membership because of the

political beliefs of Korean communists who formed the majority of the party. Although Kim Dae-jung did not share the communist view on nation-building, he could hardly be labeled anti-communist. However, he found the rhetoric of communism and its political radicalism dangerous because he thought they were contradictory to the idea of a peaceful restoration of the Korean state that was based on the principles of national sovereignty and democracy. In this sense, Kim Dae-jung was obviously nationalistic in his political attitudes. However, he never said, as Rhee Syng-man used to, that communism was an evil that ought to be completely extricated from Korean politics and people's consciences. Moreover, Kim Dae-jung never asserted that the various forms of social protest during the liberation period (October uprising in Taegu, 1946, Jeju upheaval, April 1948) were a reaction to a series of upheavals caused by the inflammatory and provocative actions of Korean communists. He appears to be neutral in his political assessment of these tragic events, which resulted in a large loss of civilians.

The main subject of Kim Dae-jung's criticism was politicians, whom he blamed for politically unreasonable behavior, or selfishness, hypocrisy, and lies. Consequently, throughout his remembrances of the liberation period and the political history of the First Republic (1948-1960), Kim Dae-jung sharply criticized Rhee Syng-man. Kim Dae-jung wrote that the election of Rhee Syng-man became possible because of the wrong political course of Kim Gu, who had rejected to take part in the presidential elections of 1948. As a result, Rhee Syng-man was able to gain power, and this was the start of the tragic history of South Korea. Why? Kim Dae-jung says that Rhee Syng-man came to power with the solid support of Korean collaborators, who implemented policies that exclusively satisfied their interests. While the Korean collaborators were successfully earning money and their descendants could get the best education, the activists of the national liberation movement were doomed to poor and miserable lives [Kim, 2010, p. 64]. Kim Dae-jung thought that if Kim Gu and his group had gained power in 1948, it would have prevented the terrible slaughter and sufferings of thousands of South Korean civilians during the Korean War (1950-1953).

At the outbreak of the Korean War, Kim Dae-jung was in Seoul, having traveled there for business. He had heard about the invasion by North Korean troops on the radio, but, as he wrote, he was not too concerned about it. At the time, they had heard much about provocations of enemies along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, but every time an attack occurred, the South Korean government assured people that it was immediately repelled by the national army. As Kim Dae-jung wrote, "I still remember the words of Sin Seong-mo, the Minister of Defense" [Kim, 2010, p. 67]. In addition to Rhee Syng-man's bragging about the South Korean government, Kim Dae-jung recalls Rhee Syng-man's propaganda on the unification of Korea with military force (*pukjin muryek thonillon*). He cites this propaganda as the reason why many people asked when North Korean troops entered South Korea whether it meant that Rhee Syng-man was carrying out his unification plan.

Thus, when war broke out, the South Korean population thought that it would be finished in a few days with a crushing defeat of the North Korean army. "It was not only me, who thought so," recalls Kim Dae-jung, "everyone believed it" [Kim, 2010, p. 68]. However, on June 27<sup>th</sup>, Rhee Syng-man was evacuated from Seoul, and on the next day, the city was occupied by the People's Army. Kim Dae-jung and others were deeply surprised by such a sudden twist, especially because only a day before Rhee Syng-man had appeared on the radio saying that "[w]hatever happens, Seoul will be desperately defended. I wish people not to worry about it."

Thus, began the period of the bloody civil conflict that has strongly influenced the historical conscience of both North and South Koreans. I will not describe in detail Kim Dae-jung's recollections of the Korean War, as it will take too much time. I only want to stress those recollections that are significant from the point of view of forming the collective memory of the Korean War.

Kim Dae-jung was imprisoned by the North Korean People's Army when it occupied Mokpo. He narrowly escaped the death penalty and managed to stay alive, whereas many other prisoners were killed without reason by the North Korean army. Kim Dae-jung explained his survival by a sudden withdrawal of the People's Army from Mokpo at the end of September, 1950. Although some Korean communists remained in the town and could have killed the remaining prisoners, they did not do so because they could have been their relatives. It was not only the Korean communists, the leftists, who killed civilians during the Korean War; the South Korean troops and the rightist groups were also responsible for casualties. Kim Dae-jung recollects the Geochang massacre in which hundreds of unarmed citizens were killed by the South Korean army between February 9 and 11, 1951. According to the latest data, there were 385 children among the 719 victims. He also remembers the National Defense Corps incident, which resulted in thousands of deaths of South Korean soldiers (officially, 50-90 thousand soldiers either starved to death or died of disease during their march southwards on the Korean peninsula). No less impressive was a political skirmish in Pusan in February of 1952 when, in the midst of war, Rhee Syng-man managed to amend the Constitution to keep himself in power. Thus, through violence, torture, and the arrest of political opponents, Rhee Syng-man prolonged and strengthened his authoritarian regime.

Through all of these tragic events, Kim Dae-jung understood how the lives of ordinary people could be easily destroyed by hypocritical, corruptible policies of the political leadership. Kim Dae-jung wrote that "if a state leader is not honest, the society becomes turbid, and if he deceives his own people, it results in the collapse of the state"[Kim, 2010, p. 86]. His observation of the Korean War convinced Kim Dae-jung to take a more active role in South Korean politics. Since 1954, when he decided to stand for election to the House of Representatives, and until the end of his life, Kim Dae-jung was deeply involved in politics. By the time of the outbreak of the April Revolution, he could already witness it through the eyes of a professional politician.

Kim Dae-jung recalls the development of the political situation in Korea in March-April 1960 in a systematic way. Clearly, he did not personally witness everything that he describes in his autobiography regarding these events. In this sense, Kim Dae-jung's recollections are more than just an author's memories; this is storytelling, which comprises both a specific author's experience of the past and collective memories. Kim Dae-jung reflects upon these collective memories in his life narrative by supplementing them with personal comments and assessments of the unfolding political struggle. As in his previous recollections of the past, the core figures of his remembrances are politicians and people, especially Korean students who played a significant role in the April Revolution. Once again, Kim Dae-jung remembers Rhee Syng-man. The author's impressions of Rhee Syng-man's resignation are interesting. Kim Dae-jung wrote that in spite of the desperate attempts of Rhee Syng-man to hold onto his political power, he was clearly weak and too old at his age (85) to control the situation as tightly as he had done before. In his last public speech on radio, Rhee Syng-man said that if people wanted him to resign, he would immediately. Commenting on this speech, Kim Dae-jung wrote that Rhee Syng-man

apparently did not know (or understand) to what extent the results of his presidential elections were falsified because this falsification is what triggered a series of demonstrations in March-April of 1960 and finally led to the president's resignation.

Roh Moo-hyun's oral recollections of the April Revolution and the May 16 coup deserve special attention. Although they are very fragmented and scarce in comparison with Kim Dae-jung's written memories, as mentioned above, they help us to understand how individual memory operates depending on the type of recollections, narrative form, author's standpoint, and social context. Roh Moo-hyun recalls only the most impressive facts of these historical events. For example, recalling the April Revolution, he tells us that he saw trucks full of men with white bandages on their heads and sticks in their hands, who moved from Pusan to Masan. Or when remembering the May 16 coup, Roh Moo-hyun tells us a story about the destruction of a mass grave containing the remains of the massacre victims from the Korean War. He says that soon after the April Revolution, the people of his home village dug out those remains to try to find their relatives. However, only some of the remains were identified by the villagers, whereas the unrecognizable others were again grouped together and buried in the mass grave. Roh Moo-hyun recalls that after the May 16 coup, someone was ordered to destroy the mass grave and liquidate all the remains. He did not understand at the time why they decided to destroy the mass grave, but this incident made a deep impression on him. Clearly, the Park Chung-hee government wanted to get rid of this negative experience of the past in the collective memory, which would be constantly recreated in people's minds if the mass grave was left untouched. Summing up his recollections of the May 16 coup, Roh Moo-hyun says that whatever we think about President Park Chung-hee, it is impossible to evaluate him positively [Roh Moo-hyun, 2009, p. 120-123].

Roh Moo-hyun was very discursive and self-questioning in his oral recollections. However, he poses these questions not only to himself but also to potential listeners and readers of his remembrances. Thus, he regularly engages the reader in discussions over those issues of the past that he himself finds very important. In this regard, Roh Moo-hyun's recollections are not typical as a life narrative because he focused on the political problems of Korea to such an extent that even his own experiences of the past were also viewed through these problems. He primarily recalled those events that he wanted the Korean people to remember. At the end of the chapter devoted to his remembrances of the May 16 coup, Roh Moo-hyun quotes the words of the German president, Johannes Rau (1999-2004), who said that Germany should never forget the atrocities of Hitler's government. Roh Moo-hyun, echoing this call, rhetorically asks why Koreans must not forget the May 16 coup. The answer is evident – people must remember it forever so as to never repeat what it finally led in South Korean history.

#### *Concluding remarks*

In this study I explored the interdependence of autobiographical narratives with individual memory based on a selective analysis of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun's recollections of the important historical events. The study showed that both politicians tried to be very discursive and critical in their remembrances of the past. By personal comments on the unfolding political conflicts and rhetorical questioning throughout their life narratives the authors regularly contested the official historical discourse, which remains largely rigid and silent about the painful facts of South Korean history. Recollecting their private perceptions of past events, as well as perceptions of the others who also witnessed them at the particular time, Kim Dae-jung

