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in Social Representations and Communication
International Lab Meeting - Spring Session 2015**



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The “Anthropological”, “Narrative”, “Dialogical” and “Subjective” paradigmatic approaches to Social Representations

**at the European/International Joint PhD in Social Representations & Communication
Research Center and Multimedia LAB**

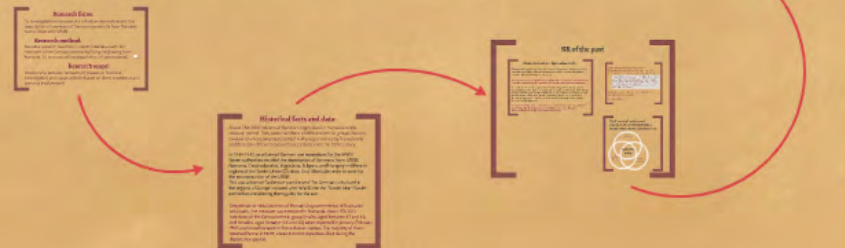
26th - 29th April 2015



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

Narrative truth and factual truth in the memory of forced labour of Germans from Romania deported to the USSR

Lavinia Betea, Alina Pop



Thank you very much for your attention!

Narrative truth and factual truth in the memory of forced labour of Germans from Romania deported to the USSR

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Research focus:
To investigate the memory of a collective trauma event, the deportation of members of German communities from Romania to the USSR after WWII.

Research method:
Narrative research based on in-depth interviews with 50 members of the German community living/originating from Romania (26 survivors of the deportations, 14 descendants).

Research scope:
Relationship between factual truth (based on historical ethnographies) and narrative truth (based on direct experience and personal involvement).

Historical facts and data:
About 786,000 citizens of German origin lived in Romania in the interwar period. They were members of different ethnic groups (Saxons, Szeklers, ethnic minorities settled in the regions Bessarabia, Transylvania and Banat) in different colonization periods since the 12th century.

In 1944-1945, as a form of German war reparations for the WWII, Soviet authorities decided the deportation of Germans from USSR, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Hungary in different regions of the Soviet Union (Dnieper, Ural, Siberia) in order to work for the reconstruction of the USSR.

This was a form of "collective punishment" for Germans who lived in the regions of Europe included after WWII into the "Soviet bloc". Soviet authorities considered them guilty for the war.

Despite some initial protests of Romanian governmental officials and politicians, the measure was executed in Romania. About 70,000 members of the German ethnic groups (males, aged between 17 and 45, and females, aged between 18 and 30) were deported in January-February 1945 and forced to work in Soviet labour camps. The majority of them returned home in 1949; about 10,000 deportees died during the deportation period.

SR of the past

Historic truth vs. Narrative truth

Historic truth is based on objective facts and data, while narrative truth is based on subjective experiences and personal involvement. The relationship between the two is complex and often contradictory.

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Narrative truth

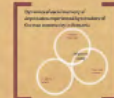
Narrative truth is based on subjective experiences and personal involvement, while historic truth is based on objective facts and data. The relationship between the two is complex and often contradictory.

Memory of Germans' deportation to USSR

The narrative truth about deportation was the only available for more than 40 years during the communist regime, so it almost completely replaced the missing factual truth.

The "official" narrative of the communist Romanian state (actually a non-narrative) denied the deportation ("nobody should not speak about it; it should be called reconstruction of the USSR").

For the Germans originating from Romania, life-stories and family stories constituted (and still constitute) the main factor which shaped subjective (and social) reality about the deportation.



Research focus:

To investigate the memory of a collective traumatic event: the deportation of members of German community from Romania to the USSR after WWII.

Research method:

Narrative research based on in-depth interviews with 50 members of the German community living/originating from Romania (36 survivors of the deportation; 14 descendants).



Research scope:

Relationship between factual truth (based on historical investigation) and narrative truth (based on direct experience and personal involvement)



Lavinia Betea
Cristina Diac
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The long way to nowhere. Germans from Romania deported to the USSR

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Project no. 2011 – 3342/001-001, 2011-2012**

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SR of the past

Historic truth vs. Narrative truth

"History is willing to change a narrative in order to be loyal to facts, whereas collective remembering is willing to change information (even facts) in order to be loyal to a narrative" (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008, p. 324).

During communism, strong political control over what can and cannot be expressed or remembered about the tragic episode lived by members of the German community.

The Germans' deportation episode was a "hidden chapter" in Romanian official history during communism, the intention being to erase it from the collective memory through eliminating the narrative. On their return home, the survivors were destroyed personal memorabilia that could have constituted evidence of the deportation (journals, photographs). They were also forbidden to make any public and private references to the tragic event.

The *historic truth* about the Germans' deportation has suffered successive political redefinitions, due to the practice of rewriting history in the last 70 years. It was first hidden, then suspected and finally revealed.

Methodological challenges for research:

Difficulties to obtain "informed consent"; survivors unwilling to share their stories about the deportation

"If you think every moment that it [the deportation] was so bad, that you lived such a shame, you will destroy yourself. And if you say, the others will say you were a Nazi, a Hitlerist. It's better to shut up".
(M.F., former deportee).

Difficulties related to the age of the survivors who participated to the interviews

Language barriers

The dynamics of social memory experienced by an individual within a specific culture (Hewer and Roberts 2012)



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E.g. Explanatory/synthesis of responsibility for the deportations

Factual truth (historic documents): The Soviet authorities (Stalin) who explicitly requested to the Romanian government to send all Germans who were able to register in the USSR.

Narrative truth (St. of deportations shared by the German community from Romania): Romanians colluctated "sacrificed" the German population in order to fulfill the Soviets' requests to send work force to the USSR.

Family memory – exemplary memory

There is a personal link with the memory of deportation.

Narratives, associating with the past generation due to their explicit sharing a particular image about the history of Romania they had during deportations. Explanatory memory was related to the sociopolitical context during and after WWII.

Deportation is one constituting, more dominant in the explanatory memory of the deportation. Narrative memory (from USSR, Romania, and elsewhere). The "family memory" of the deportations is remembered as a "sacrificial memory" (J. Todorov).

For the German community originating from Romania, deportation is an exemplary memory of deportation which is constituted on the family memory of the deportation. The explanatory memory corresponds to a historic, which could be presented in order to work as an example for the future.

Dynamics of social memory of deportation experienced by members of German community in Romania



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Eg. Explanations/attribution of responsibility for the deportation

Factual truth (historic documents): The Soviet authorities (Stalin) who explicitly requested to the Romanian government to send all Germans who were able to work to the USSR

Narrative truth (SR of deportation shared by the German community from Romania): Romanian authorities "sacrificed" the German population in order to fulfill the Soviets' requests to send work force to the USSR

Family memory - exemplary memory

There is a generational shift in the memory of deportation:

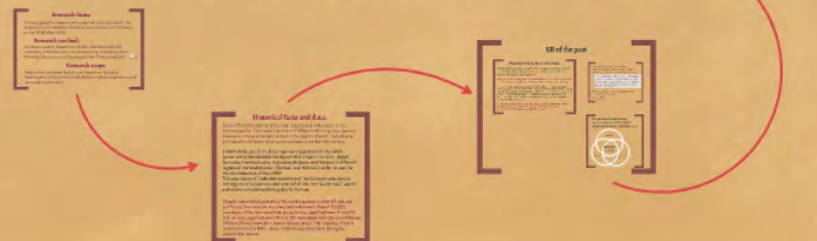
Survivors: conciliating with the past (probably due to their age), sharing a positive image about the ordinary Russians they met during deportation, favoring explanations related to the socio-political context during and after WWII.

Descendants: non-conciliating, more dramatic in the expressed memory of the deportation. Negative image about USSR (Russia) and Russians. The "daily heroism" of the deportees is transformed into an "exemplary heroism" (T. Todorov)

For the German community originating from Romania there exists an *exemplary memory* of deportation which is articulated on the family memory of the deportees. The exemplary memory corresponds to a trauma, which can be generalized in order to work as an example for the future.

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