

## **Research on the topic and methodology approaches Community of Oleśnica, Poland**

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24.02.2016

### **Culture of Remembrance of World War II in Poland**

#### **Narratives about memory**

It's fair to say that stories have always constituted an inseparable part of everyone's life. Stories/narratives do not require thus "for [their] existence any special creation of a *folklore-origin*". [Łukowska, 1991:53] It is enough when there appears a creator, meaning the narrator, and a recipient, meaning the listener.

The universality of the story then is primarily in the fact that "everyone gets the opportunity to freely express themselves, regardless of the individual narrative's characteristics" [Łukowska, 1991:53]. This means that it gives a personal nature to its content. They are therefore not only records of certain events from the past. Gibbs even says that "the story is defined like: I experienced something which both strengthens presented 'in there' evidences, and says something about the person, its feelings and the way in which the one is experiencing the reality and how he/she evaluates it" [Gibbs, 2011:109]. Importantly, by building a narrative or story, people in an elementary way are organising their own sense of understanding the reality surrounding them. With the narrative, they also gain the ability to give meanings to experiences from the past and have the opportunity to share these experiences with others [Gibbs, 2011:108]. Narratives, without exception, should be treated as an indispensable and extremely common way of communicating, interpreting, and evaluating one's own stories. Among the most common functions of the narrative one can also point to the communication

of some certain facts and conveying of specific information, such as in the stories dealing with personal experiences, and the satisfaction of certain psychological needs. According to Gibbs, narratives are "becoming one of the ways of coping with disruptions of a daily routine (...) All of us need to rebuild a sense of 'order' after periods of collapse, and everyone is trying to make sense of situations devoid of logic" [Gibbs, 2011: 112- 113]. With such stories the researcher has not necessarily got access to the 'past' of the examined person rather to his/her perception of the world, to the way he/she organizes their own reality. I even think that what should be the most interesting for anthropologists is not to stick to the sources of knowledge about the respondent's past reality, but simply to the knowledge of how the respondent is organising their past.

An important fact is to focus attention on searching for the causes, "for which in strategic moments of the interview, respondents organize their narratives or begin to tell stories. It can give insight into what topics are most important to them, and give ideas of directions for further research" [Gibbs 2011:112-113]. Hence the conclusion that choosing the narrative as a source of knowledge should always be done in consciousness of the fact that it cannot be clearly defined or qualified for specific -established by the researcher- structures. The story, thus, becomes an indispensable source of documentation of certain aspects of the subject / personal biography. Tales are "giving the one a voice" [Gibbs, 2011:109]. So then, the one gets the ability to create and maintain the image's identity. With the narrative, that also shows how he/she sees the world and what's more, how the one sees himself/herself. The analysis of such a narrative or biography, in my opinion, is highly valuable for an anthropological research, e.g. when dealing with memory. The attention of the anthropologist focuses "not only on the content of speech investigated whether this what things or events they describe in their statements, but also on how interviewees talk about them, why they said especially about them, and what feelings and experiences they have been through" [Gibbs, 2011:130]. These stories allow the researcher to know the manner in which his interlocutor - becoming the author of the narrative - gives sense to his/her experiences. Thus, "remembering that each of us is an author of its narrative, which makes, that being a narrator and a protagonist of our past, finally we give to it senses" [Kaniowska, 2003:62]. That discovering and giving meanings to the past makes the situation more complex and thus one cannot set an opinion according to which the 'memory as narrative' only describes and explains the past. Because memory as

narrative describes and explains most of all 'who we are', how we think and how we feel. It describes everything that is important to us. Moreover, the memory that invariably constructs the meaning of what is 'past' is still dependent on the moral convictions of the one 'who remembers' and relates to his/her hierarchy of values, beliefs and traditions. These elements construct the sense of content, recorded by memory. This means that reaching towards the stories of someone else's past we do not so much get an accurate record of past events, but a kind of self-portrait of the narrator.

It is worth at this point to consider the question of the layers of memory. Kaniowska writes that "if the memory will be treated as a narrative, then the same should be asked, whether the memory has such a structure, whether we can reasonably talk about the layers of memory. The answer to this question will be easier if we accept the assumption that the structure of the memory corresponds to the structure of a text. This analogy is justified, as soon as the memory we agreed to treat as a narrative" [Kaniowska, 2003:62]. Therefore, if we want to reflect on the memory as a narrative, first, in order to analyse its content, we need to adopt rules governing the analysis of the structure of the text. It is of course possible only when we see the structural similarity of text and memory, as mentioned by B. Skarga. Said similarities are obvious when we take into account four important elements. These are namely the content, language, rules of senses/meanings and Episteme [Kaniowska, 2003:62]. These ingredients should be read as layers of a text or a memory. Their thorough analysis has as its intention to reach some hidden meanings, enclosed either in memory or in a text, and the subsequent understanding of them. The first layer, that is content, refers to any content that we store in memory. It is extremely important to emphasise that these contents are a disordered and dynamic collection. This collection is constantly subjected to the processes of interpretation and reinterpretation. The next layer, as discussed by B. Skarga, is language. Language is considered a component of the narrative, in which the narrative nature of memory reflects. What's more, it decides about the narrative itself. Despite the fact that [language] is not clear, by language it is possible to reach the 'truth of a teller' (the essence of the story). "Rhetoric, construction, emotionality of a language expression presents, interprets and reinforces the message" [Kaniowska, 2003:62].

Through the language we can reach not only the truth of the narrative, but above all, it gives

us the knowledge of the author of a story. According to F. Ankersmit "our experiencing of the world, the way we experience reality, or the way we consider our experience and our sensitivity, experience all of that is steeped in the language" [Ankersmit, 2004: 224]. The third level refers to the rules of meaning. At this level, we can talk about the arrangement of the narrative. "At this layer a specific treatment is made, on the generated plots by the previous two. Organizing of a content expressed in the language, requires such an interpretation, which enables to the one who remembers to seek the meaning, which controls a narrative of memory. At this level is made one phase of interpretation. This requires a certain distance to own memory; distance that can only arise by analysing own experiences, emotions, actions. Such an analysis allows to justify own past, understand the causes and motives of own thoughts and actions, involvement in external dependencies, the forces acting on the one from the surrounding world" [Kaniowska, 2003:62]. Discovering these rules means gaining awareness and sense of one's own identity. It stands also for gaining knowledge about the expression of identity, making it happen through the narratives of memory.

The last layer, the layer of Episteme, is supporting and deepening the rules of sense. "In this phase of consideration an interpretation tool of memory becomes a collection of ideas and values (and it is not necessarily a system) which is always present there, although it is variable in time. This variability is extremely important because it is decisive to a highest degree about the dynamism of memory and, above all, decides the dynamism of the narrative's memory interpretation. [...] The filter of Episteme can distort memory, change the senses and known modes of narration" [Kaniowska, 2003:62].

This means to me that having all four layers of content / memory, one of the most important is undoubtedly the layer of Episteme. For therein is, in my opinion, enclosed the entire of the author's / narrator's identity, values and beliefs he/she professed, as well as the way in which he/she interprets their past experiences. Without understanding the nature of this narrative memory, it may appear as only a simple record of the reality [Brocki, 2003:92]. But when we admit the possibility of treating it equally with a narrative we gain an access to elements which through discovering and understanding will lead us straight to interpret the past reality as a historical narrative. Moreover, this historical narrative "organizes all our knowledge about the certain fragment of a past in a certain way and does it successfully by attaching it to the concrete entirety" [Ankersmit, 2004:42]. This means that the structure of the memorized

content, the way of transmission and the language used for this purpose are the basis for understanding the 'past'. Although K. Hastrup argues that "memory does not preserve the past, but adapts it to the currently prevailing conditions [...] always [beginning] with the reflection of the present and runs back in time" [Brocki, 2003:93-94]. Memory as narrative, therefore, will not be the only one determinant of the past. This is because 'past' treats how our past experiences influenced the process of building an identity, how it influenced us into who we are at the moment. It is important to mention that each time we re-build the image of us as a person. F. Ankersmit even said that "only through speaking and writing can be saved the integrity of the personality; silence would keep the choking trauma of the past" [Ankersmit, 2004:243].

The narrative is a fundamental category in contemporary humanities. This concept functions on the theory of literature and means "a monologue statement, presenting a series of events arranged in a temporal order, linked with characters taking part in them and the environment in which it takes place" [Sławiński, 1989:303]. The narrative may take the form of a story or a description. Narratology, developed in literary studies and thus adapted to the description of texts of the highest degree of complexity, can be used to analyse stories of all kinds, be used in disciplines whose subjects are literary or para-literary texts. Michał Głowiński noted that the research tools must meet certain requirements. According to his thesis, every man creates their own personal biography and individual pattern of life. These patterns are not completely random and there is not an infinite number of these patterns. [Głowiński, 2002]

Prof. M. Nowak - Dziemianowicz emphasises the message of D. Urbaniak - Zajac: "Planning of life takes place in a field of tension between social expectations, individual attitudes and aspirations, and the concrete conditions of life and the interventional influence of the of different institutions". [Urbaniak-Zajac, 2005:123]

One's unique biography is on the one hand an individual record of a lifetime, on the other hand it is like a lens focused on social opportunities and barriers, standards and rules of social order and the available methods given to complying to and to overcoming them. In the individual biography we will also find ways, strategies and capabilities to deal with barriers which the acting and experiencing human encounters in everyday life and he/she has to face. From this point of view, a biography is doubly rich in knowledge: we learn from it something about the person (operator of everyday life) and about the socio-cultural context in which they live.

Biography also has a historical dimension because we, the participants in everyday events, are both actors and witnesses of historical changes, events, which then become the subject of analysis and historical studies [Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2008:183]

In biography then we can find the question of how in a situation of a risky, incoherent and discontinuous present, during the differentiation of cultures, the person handles and orients itself in such a complex society. How is it possible to make coherent actions experiencing impacts of so many conflicting stimuli? How copes the person that is not primarily reactive, rather mostly responding to impulses, not only making choices among possible ways of life, not only actively adapting to new conditions, but also setting their own goals, utilises forthcoming occasions, constructs plans and prospects for the future, recalls and dreams, hopes, finds solutions to unconventional situations and knows that one must die. And most importantly gives a meaning to his/her life or begins to doubt the sense. [H. Schütze, *Foundations of statistical natural language processing* commented by [Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2008:183]

Biography, through interpretation, reveals the principles of formation of the structures underlying an action. For biographical researchers the most important question is not why there is an action or what are the biographical motives, but rather understanding the rules of the order of the particular action. Any change in the rules of such action is not only an expression of change in the individual perspective; it is usually also an expression of changes in the social order. From biography, we learn that 'the world' and 'the self' are not a given, but 'are created' thanks to our perception and experiencing abilities. This 'image' created during the course of life is the result of individual interpretation. It may be modified, transformed depending on the subjective ways of interpreting the occurring situations. The basis for selecting and giving meaning to the surrounding reality is through continuously collecting knowledge about the reality of tangible and intangible values and internalising the course of everyday experiences.

New knowledge and new experiences appearing in biographically new situations are compared with earlier images of ourselves and the world. Fractional experiments are related to all of these ideas. If we can agree on them they are included in the existing structure, if not, they become an impulse for its transformation. This form of organising meanings and senses by a

person's activities and from the perspective of the person Marotzki (1999, p. 60) is calling biographization. Schütze underlines that biographical subject is not only the "I" who remembers the past time and reports or records it, subjecting it to earlier interpretations. It is also the "I" which in the course of life builds one or more images of its self and at the same time is trying to pursue these images. In this way, the 'biographical operator' is treated not only as the author of an autobiography, but also as the perpetrator and the result. M. Nowak-Dziemianowicz wrote: "This is most accurately expressed by a sentence of Wittgenstein, which became the motto of my book „Doświadczenia rodzinne w narracjach. Interpretacja sensów i znaczeń” (2004) claiming that: "an essence of man's life is a man".

Biography also allows an overview into what is sometimes called 'biographical competences'. These competences show how man builds one's orientation on how to operate in an inconsistent 'world', full of contradictory possibilities, responsibilities and expectations.

These competences can be based on two types of reflection: diachronic and synchronic. Diachronic type of reflection is focused on the processual, historical building of a sense. "Man is what he regards as his own story of life. In a form of stories we are sketching again and again our 'past' and our 'future'. Me and the story, which I consider as my life, are impossible to separate. The project of a man has got a structure determined by the narrative mechanism of integration" [Marotzki 1999/2006, commented by Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2008:183]

When telling a story of 'I', we try to understand ourselves, the world and our relationships with others. Narrated stories describe our lives and the lives of others. Diachronic reflection occurs then not only in the individual stories. It is also present in the collective stories relating to groups and communities and allows one to situate themselves in the social structures and historical entirety.

Synchronous type of reflection enables to man to biographize, conditioning one's biographical competences and connecting with his/her demand for recognition. The source of this recognition is other people and it is being updated at any time of individual experience. Recognition, which is a man's shared value of here and now, is a kind of protection against one's life's experiences most of which, writes D. Urbaniak-Zajac, "[are] depreciating the value of the action operator." [Urbaniak-Zajac, 2005:123]

The essential need of recognition from the other people, constantly experienced by the one in any single moment and throughout life, is leading to a situation in which expressive form is



limited to a number of available forms and modes of behaviour, and of these the one chooses not those which serve to maintain the existing social norms, but those which protect a personal image of the one in its own eyes.

Biographical auto-narrations, allowing recreating of the rules guiding a human's activity, further provide access to both types of reflection: diachronic and synchronic reflection. Autobiography can be called a storytelling of own life. Its author tries to find the meaning of his/her own existence in the world and to understand himself/herself. One realises that one's fate depends on biological factors but also on social and political factors. Writing an autobiography is a form of dealing with the past; it also has to serve as the creation of a coherent sense of one's own identity. Anthony Giddens (2001:107) points out that autobiography, regardless of whether it was written or not, is the core identity of the individual person in the modern world. Like any other narrative, autobiography has to be developed and this requires not only to recall the events stretching into the layers of autobiographical memory, but also the creative effort. A researcher of autobiography must pay attention to its various aspects.

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## **BRIDGING GENERATIONS**

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission through the EUROPE FOR CITIZENS programme of the European Union.

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