

Memory, resentment and the politization of trauma: narratives of World War II (Danube Swabians, Entre Rios, Guarapuava – Paraná)¹

Méri Frotscher[1], Marcos Nestor Stein[1], Beatriz Anselmo Olinto[2]

Abstract

This article addresses narratives about the Second World War published in *Deutsches Wort*, the supplement in German language of the *Jornal de Entre Rios* (Guarapuava, Paraná, Brazil). The article focuses on an interview produced in 1984 with an immigrant of the Entre Rios colony, Guarapuava, deported to Ukraine during the war. This interview was carried out in 1984, although edited and published by this journal only in 1994, when the 50 years of the expulsion of the “Danube Swabians” from Romania, Hungary and ex-Yugoslavia were remembered. The construction of an overcoming sense and of a collective memory about these events, by editing and standardizing the traumatic memories of the witnesses, was assessed.

Keywords: trauma; collective memory; witness.

Memória, ressentimento e politização do trauma: narrativas da II Guerra Mundial (Suábios do Danúbio de Entre Rios, Guarapuava – PR)

Resumo

Este artigo aborda narrativas da Segunda Guerra Mundial publicadas no *Deutsches Wort*, suplemento em alemão do *Jornal de Entre Rios* (Guarapuava, Paraná). O foco é a narrativa de uma moradora da colônia de Entre Rios, deportada para a Ucrânia durante a guerra. A entrevista foi produzida em 1984, porém editada e publicada por esse jornal somente em 1994, quando a colônia comemorava os 50 anos da expulsão dos “suábios do Danúbio” da Romênia, da Hungria e da ex-Iugoslávia. Analisamos o trabalho de construção de uma memória coletiva e a composição de sentidos coletivos de superação por meio da edição e da padronização das lembranças traumáticas das testemunhas.

Palavras-chave: trauma; memória coletiva; testemunha.

Memoria, resentimiento y politización del trauma: narrativas sobre la II Guerra Mundial (Suabios del Danubio, Entre Rios, Guarapuava – Paraná)

Resumen

Este artículo aborda narrativas sobre la II Guerra Mundial publicadas en el *Deutsches Wort*, suplemento en alemán del *Jornal de Entre Rios* (Guarapuava – PR). El foco central es la narrativa de una habitante de la colonia de Entre Rios, deportada para a Ucrânia durante la guerra, producida en 1984, pero editada y publicada apenas en 1994, quando a colônia comemorava los 50 años de la expulsión de los “suábios del Danúbio” de Romênia, Hungría y ex-Iugoslavia. Analizamos el trabajo de construcción de una memoria colectiva y la composición de sentidos colectivos de superación por intermedio de la edición y la padronización de los recuerdos traumáticos de los testigos.

Palabras clave: trauma; memoria colectiva; testigo.

Mémoire, ressentiments et politisation des traumatismes: récits de la deuxième guerre mondiale (Souabes du Danube de Entre Rios, Guarapuava – PR)

Résumé

Cet article traite de récits sur la deuxième guerre mondiale publiés au *Deutsches Wort*, Supplément au *Jornal de Entre Rios* (Guarapuava, Paraná). Le texte se concentre sur le récit d'une résidente à la colonie Entre Rios, qui a été déportée en Ukraine pendant la guerre. L'interview s'est déroulée à 1984, mais n'a été éditée et publiée par ce journal que en 1994, quand la colonie se souvenait les 50 années d'expulsion des «Souabes du Danube» de Roumanie, de Hongrie et de l'ex-Yougoslavie. Nous avons étudié la construction de la mémoire collective et la composition du sens collective de dépassement par l'édition et la standardisation des mémoires traumatisantes des témoins.

Mots clés: traumatismes; mémoire collective; témoin.

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[1] Department of History at Universidade Estadual do Oeste do Paraná – Unioeste – Marechal Cândido Rondon (PR) – Brazil.

E-mail: merikramer@hotmail.com; marcosmancha36@yahoo.com.br

[2] Department of History at Universidade Estadual do Centro-Oeste – Unicentro – Guarapuava (PR) – Brazil. E-mail: bialinto@hotmail.com

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Introduction

We became poor. We were destroying the heritage of humanity, and often we had to pawn it for a hundredth of its value, in exchange for the insignificant coin of the “current”²

In the early years of the 21st century, Tzvetan Todorov tried to distinguish the speech of an historian from the speech of a witness and of a commemorator, indicating the possible complementarities between the first two and the unbending opposition between the first, who has an impersonal and problematic true as a perspective, and the last, who is not subject to the tests of truth imposed on the historian and the witness. For the author, memory, a word understood here as mnemonic traces, would create meanings and an identity for a witness. But the collective memory produced by commemorators would not be a memory, but a discourse that evolves in the public sphere and “reflects the image that a society or group within the society want to express of themselves”³

The media economy has become the key spot for producing and consuming (co)memorable events. Conservation has replaced modernization and remembering has become an obligation. But remembering what and how? If memory implies oblivion, its constitutive trait, it is also a work of selection.⁴ In a regime of presentist historicity, as the contemporary, the duty to remember and maintain the collectiveness manages to fill the void of meaning between what is experienced and what is expected. According to François Hartog, this expanded present proves unable to fill the space between experience and expectation. Then, one seeks the terms that allow the creation of an identity in the memory, in the heritage, and in the celebration.⁵ The cultural production of the collective memory unites and simplifies the knowledge about the past, which the writing of history splits and discusses.

It is with this perspective of analysis that this article seeks to address narratives about the World War II from people of German origin self-denominated *Donauschwabern* (Danube Swabians), who were expelled from Hungary, Romania and the former Yugoslavia, and immigrated to Entre Rios, in the town of Guarapuava, Paraná, in the early 1950s. Oral sources constituted through interviews in 1984–1985 and 1993–1994 with people who experienced the expulsion were edited and published in 1994 in *Deutsches Wort*, the German supplement of the newspaper *Jornal de Entre Rios*, when the 50 years since the flight and expulsion from those territories were being remembered. One of the narratives, from Katharina Hech, is the focus of the article. Born in 1927, she not only experienced the expulsion but also was deported by the Russians to Ukraine in late 1944.

²Walter Benjamin, “Experiência e pobreza”, In: _____, *O anjo da história*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2012, p. 90.

³Tzvetan Todorov, *Memória do mal, tentação do bem*: indagações sobre o século XX, São Paulo, ARX, 2002, p. 155.

⁴*Ibidem*, p. 149.

⁵François Hartog, *Evidência da história*: o que os historiadores veem, Belo Horizonte, Autêntica, 2011, p. 139.

In the end and immediately after the end of World War II, millions of Germans and descendants who lived in the east and southeast of Europe fled or were expelled from their territory by *partisans* and by Russian troops. Among them, there were also descendants of Germans who had colonized lands located southeast of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries and later became known as *Donauschwaben* (Danube Swabians). Although immigrants from Entre Rios identify themselves that way and associate their history with the emigration to the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, this collective designation was formulated only in 1922 by the geographer Robert Sieger of the University of Graz, Austria.⁶

During the World War II, the Danube Swabians supported German troops that occupied the territories where they lived, and many joined the *Waffen-SS* division “*Prinz Eugen*”, created in 1942 to fight the Communist *partisans*, led by Jozep Broz Tito, who resisted the invasion.⁷ After the withdrawal of the German army in 1944, most of the Danube Swabians fled westward in large *treks*, and those who failed or could not run away suffered violent retaliations. In late 1944, Tito’ government deprived the Danube Swabians of their civil rights in Yugoslavia.

In the contemporary West, the destitution of civil rights came along with the destitution of human rights, according to Giorgio Agamben. For the author, “in the nation-state system, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of men were stripped of any protection and any real meaning at the moment that was not possible to characterize them as rights of the citizens of a State”.⁸ These rights were an acknowledged aspect since the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, formulated at the beginning of the French Revolution, which associated citizenship with the human condition itself. This hypothesis was tragically proved during World War II, from the Nazi policy of denationalization of German Jews and the Holocaust to the expulsion of the Swabians.

The 200,000 Danube Swabians who had stayed in Yugoslavia were subjected to massacres, torture followed by death, rape, deportation, and confinement in camps. According to Fritjof Meyer, 9,500 people were killed between the autumn of 1944 and the spring of 1945. In eight transportation trains, 8,000 women and 4,000 men were deported to labor camps in the Soviet Union, with 1 in every 6 dying. The remaining 167,000 were confined in camps, where many died of hunger, cold, and diseases.⁹

⁶The term “Danube Swabians” is a reference to Swabia, where most of the people who migrated to the Austro-Hungarian Empire supposedly came from, using the Danube river as navigation means. About the origin of the term, see Anton Scherer, “Seit 42 Jahren heißen wir Donauschwaben”, *Volkskalender 1964*: Ein Jahrbuch des Gesamten Donauschwabentums, Ulm, 1964, p. 64-68, and Albert Elfes, *Suábios no Paraná*, Curitiba, [s.n.], 1971.

⁷About the National Socialists’ war crimes and the Danube Swabians of the Banat region (Romania), see Thomas Casagrande, *Die Volksdeutschen SS-Division “Prinz Eugen”: die Banater Schwaben und die National-Sozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 2003.

⁸Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: o poder soberano e a vida nua*, 2. ed., Belo Horizonte, Editora da UFMG, 2010, p. 123.

⁹Fritjof Meyer, “Hohn für die Opfer”, In: Stefan Aust; Stephan Burgdorff (orgs.), *Die Flucht*: Über die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten, Bonn, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005, p. 99-102.

Between 1951 and 1954, with the help of various international humanitarian organizations¹⁰ and, specially, the Swiss Aid to Europe (*Schweizer Europahilfe*), an agency linked to the Catholic Church, about 2,500 Swabians who had moved to Austria and lived there, part of them in refugee camps, immigrated to Brazil. They established themselves in the town of Guarapuava, where they founded, under the coordination of the Agrarian Cooperative, the colony of Entre Rios.

During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a significant exodus from that colony, with many people settling in cities such as Curitiba and São Paulo or migrating to Germany. In addition to aspects like bad harvests, this phenomenon can also be explained by the traumas and resentments caused by war. This explanation can be found in the book *Suábios no Paraná*, published in 1971 on the occasion of the 20th anniversary celebrations of the founding of the colony. Its author, Albert Elfes, a German agricultural engineer, divides the Danube Swabians into three groups according to age and “[...] to the effect of the external influences that they have suffered”.¹¹ The first group, he said, was made up of those who fled their homeland as adults:

The younger men had taken part in the war. All of them had fulfilled their fate fully aware of their bitter fortune. For them, Brazil was a hospitable country of asylum — it still is —, offering them protection, a space to live and the basis of economic existence — but never became a second homeland to them. Their ties with their home regions were too strong. They were never able to completely overcome the shock and the consequent nostalgia. And so, despite the final economic successes and the guaranteed material existence, many have failed to take root in the new environment. They remained restless, tending to certain isolation when in a strange environment [...].¹²

The second group consists of people born in Entre Rios. Besides communicating in Portuguese, according to the author, “[...] they truly know the Brazilian conditions, specific of their region, easily overcome any resentments of the group and face the Brazilian future full of confidence if they are old enough for that”.¹³

For Elfes, the third group comprises people of an intermediary age in comparison to the ones previously mentioned. This generation would be:

[...] The most burdened, whose memory is overshadowed by war and its effects. Its members spent part of their childhood and adolescence not within the family, but in refugee camps, and they keep nothing more from the old country than vague imaginings, except through stories and literature. The consequences of the

¹⁰Besides the Swiss Aid to Europe, also participated in the project the *Raphaels-Werk*, from Hamburg, Germany, the *Food and Agriculture Organization* (FAO), the *International Refugee Organization* (IRO), the Red Cross, the *Internationales Arbeitsamt* (BIT), from Geneva, and the *Bundesamt für Industrie, Gewerbe und Arbeit* (BIGA), from Bern, both in Switzerland (Albert Elfes, *Suábios no Paraná*, Curitiba [s.n.], 1971, p. 44).

¹¹Albert Elfes, *Suábios no Paraná*, Curitiba, [s.n.], 1971, p. 93.

¹²*Ibidem*, p. 93-94.

¹³*Ibidem*, p. 94.

disasters were felt with particular strength in the spirit, though meager in those years, of this group. This situation got even worse because of the fact that they grew up at a time when organized and continuous school functioning was nearly impossible: neither in regions where there was partisan fighting, in southwestern Europe, nor, later, in the refugee camps in Austria, nor in the first years after establishing themselves in Guarapuava.¹⁴

In this passage, two aspects of the diagnosis developed by Elfes attract our attention. First, trauma and resentment would have their origin neither in the individual nor in the group, but in the external field, in the relationship with the other — with the *partisan*, with the new environment, and so on. Second, those who presented more severe symptoms would be the ones who were unaware of the past of the group. They would be the people who experienced the war and the expulsion, but, because of their age and of not attending the schooling environment, which could give meaning to the past of the group, did not have the opportunity to understand the suffering they went through in childhood.

The 200,000 Danube Swabians who had stayed in Yugoslavia were subjected to massacres, torture followed by death, rape, deportation, and confinement in camps

In the book, Elfes suggests that school education is an important mechanism to establish and disseminate knowledge, which would make sense of a collective past and articulate it with a particular vision of the future, as well as stimulate the economic development of the colony.

Another author, Walter Gossner, a Swiss, had already analyzed the behavior of the Danube Swabians of Entre Rios in 1952, associating it with the traumatic experiences during World War II and, after that, in the refugee camps in Austria. In a report submitted to the Swiss Aid to Europe, Gossner said that many had “emotional disturbance” (*seelische Zerruettung*) and “fear of the future” (*Angst vor der Zukunft*). For the author, these memories should be faced in order to overcome traumas and resentments.¹⁵

After knowing these diagnoses about the residents of Entre Rios, one can understand the reason behind some investments made by the Agricultural Cooperative, from the second half of the 1960s onwards. The mentioned cooperative supported vigorously several actions to reduce the exodus, among

¹⁴Albert Elfes, *Suábios no Paraná*, Curitiba, [s.n.], 1971, p. 94.

¹⁵Walter Gossner, *Agraria*. Die Siedlung der Donauschwaben im Municip Guarapuava im brasilianischen Staate Paraná. Bericht über die Ergebnisse der im Auftrage der Schweizer Europahilfe durchgeführten Untersuchung, Jundiaí, 1952, mimeo, p. 14-16. Freely translated from the quote of Nestor Stein.

other objectives.¹⁶ One of the measures was aimed at creating a collective memory for those immigrants and encouraging traditions, by supporting groups of typical Swabian dances, creating a local museum, and publishing a paper, *Jornal de Entre Rios*.¹⁷ In such spaces, narratives were created about the past of the group in Europe and in particular in Brazil, as well as interpretations of the traumatic experiences at the end of World War II.

In 1994, by publishing excerpts from interviews with people who had experienced the expulsion, the paper tried to create a collective memory and a sense of overcoming, by editing and standardizing the traumatic memories of witnesses, as we will see next.

Trauma and use of testimonies

In 1994, the community of Entre Rios remembered, with several actions, 50 years since the “flight and expulsion”. Back in January of that year, when the colony was celebrating 42 years of its foundation, the *Jornal de Entre Rios* published a cover story to explain to the reader the “tragedy” experienced by the Danube Swabians from late 1944 onwards.¹⁸ In the next edition, the newspaper reproduced an excerpt from a book in which the author refers to “mass extinctions”, “mass deportations”, and “mass murder” caused by “hunger and forced labor in the concentration and labor camps”.¹⁹ In the same month, the newspaper started publishing a series of “accounts” of “witnesses” (*Zeitzeugen*) who lived in the colony. As the subtitle of the first and of the other “accounts” reveals, the goal was to make the “settlers of Entre Rios narrate (the history) from their lives”.

The first account of an immigrant of the colony is about the flight (*Flucht*) (Figure 1). The text, published in standard German, has a symbolic illustration — with a wagon representing the flight — and a map of the traveled distance to Austria alongside it.²⁰ In the following issues, the theme was the expulsion (*Vertreibung*).²¹

As of February, the paper no longer presented written accounts, but started publishing edited excerpts from the interviews. They all comprise a series entitled “A people fighting for their future. The expulsion of the Danube Swabians. Settlers of Entre Rios report on their lives” (*Ein Volk*

¹⁶Marcos Nestor Stein, *O oitavo dia: produção de sentidos identitários na colônia Entre Rios - PR* (segunda metade do século XX), Guarapuava, Unicentro, 2011.

¹⁷About that and the creation of a collective memory among the Swabians of Entre Rios, see Marcos Nestor Stein, *O oitavo dia: produção de sentidos identitários na colônia Entre Rios - PR* (segunda metade do século XX), Guarapuava, Unicentro, 2011.

¹⁸“Die Geschichte der Donauschwaben. 50 Jahre Vertreibung: Eine Erinnerung”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios-Guarapuava, n. 159, 8 de janeiro de 1994, D1.

¹⁹“Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Beginn der Flucht”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, 15 de janeiro de 1994, D6.

²⁰“Die Flucht. Siedler aus Entre Rios erzählen aus ihrem Leben”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, n. 162, 29 de janeiro de 1994, D1.

²¹“Zeitzeugen. Berichte über die Vertreibung. Siedler aus Entre Rios erzählen aus ihrem Leben”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, 22 de janeiro de 1994, D6.

Deutsches Wort

Beilage in deutscher Sprache
(Não pode ser vendido separadamente)

D1

Nr 162 - 29. Januar 1994

ENTRE RIOS, GUARAPUAVA

Zeitzeugen

DIE FLUCHT

Siedler aus Entre Rios erzählen aus ihrem Leben

Der Frontwechsel in Rumänien, am 23. August 1944, ermöglichte den sowjetischen Truppen den Durchbruch zwischen Husi und Kischinew und ihr rasches Vorrücken.

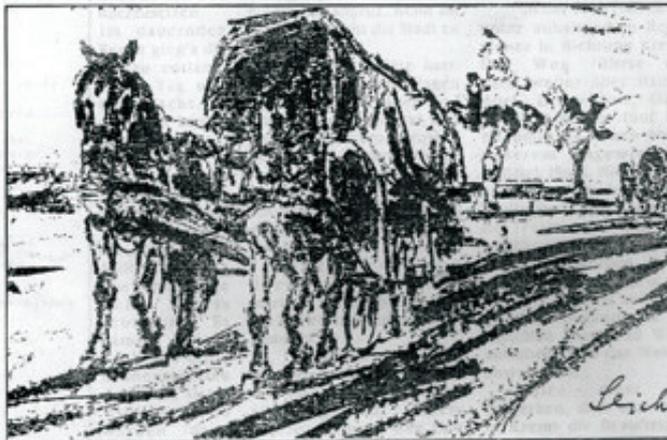
Die Volksgruppenführung hatte zwar für das Banat Evakuierungspläne aufgestellt, doch wurde der Befehl zum Aufbruch, wofür die höheren Stellen zuständig waren, nicht gegeben. Es wurden aber die wenigen Tage zwischen dem 13. bis 20. September genutzt, an denen die deutschen und ungarischen Truppen den grössten Teil des donauschwäbischen Siedlungsgebiets im Banat nochmals besetzen konnten, um die Evakuierung durchzuführen. Doch schlossen sich den ab 15. September aufbrechenden Trecks zur Teile der deutschen Bevölkerung an.

Von diesen kehrten viele nach wenigen Tagen wieder um. Manche Evakuierte blieben in den ersten Aufnahmeorten hinter der serbischen Grenze zurück und wurden dort von der roten Armee überrollt, von der sie dann in ihre Dörfer zurückgeführt wurden.

Ein kleiner Teil der Flüchtlinge hatte aber Erfolg, unter ihnen die Heimatgemeinde Perjamusch im Banat.

So berichtet Karl Lukas, Ortsleiter dieses Dorfes:

"Mit der am 23. August 1944 erfolgten Änderung der rumänischen Politik wurde der bisherige Freund und Verbündete Deutschlands zum Feind. Den deutschen



Einheiten auf dem Gebiet Rumäniens wurde die Möglichkeit gegeben, binnen 48 Stunden das Land zu verlassen. Wer es nicht schaffte, wurde als Kriegsgefangener betrachtet und interniert. Indessen rückten die sowjetischen Truppen erstaunlich schnell gegen Westen vor, unterstützt von den rumänischen Truppen.

Als dann die Front immer näher kam, gab es grosse Bedenken und Sorgen wegen der ungewissen Zukunft. Anfang September wurde für uns die Lage schon fühlbar ernst!

Die Gemeinde lag schon im Bereich der Kampfhandlungen und wechselte ständig den Besitzer. Es waren hartnäckige Strassenkämpfe mit beiderseitigen schweren

Verlusten. Niemand traute sich auf die Strasse. Entweder zog man sich in den Keller oder Luftschutz-Splittergraben zurück. Das Vieh in den Ställen konnte nur in den Gefechtspausen versorgt werden.

Dieses hin und her konnte man auf die Dauer nicht aushalten, und da es auch schon bei den Ortseinwohnern Verluste gab (unseres Wissens 32), sah sich die deutsche Kommandantur veranlasst, die Zwangsevakuierung der Gemeinde zu befehlen.

So wurde ich, wohnhaft in unmittelbarer Nähe der Kommandantur, als gewesener Bürgermeister der Gemeinde dorthin beordert und mir der undiskutierbare, kategorische mündliche Befehl gegeben: "Sie haben

ab sofort Massnahmen zu treffen, dass sämtliche Einwohner, ohne Unterschied, bis morgen früh, den 28. September 1944, um 7 Uhr die Gemeinde verlassen. Wer zurückbleibt, wird erschossen."

Ich wollte einwenden - es sei doch strenge Verdunkelung, wie sollten die Leute packen, wie sie verständigen, usw.

Die Antwort war: "Ich habe deutsch gesprochen und Sie werden es wohl verstanden haben."

Und ich hatte es verstanden. Es kam die unvergessliche Nacht!

Wagen zureichten, im Dunkeln einpacken, die Leute verständigen, Abschied nehmen von denen die bleiben, usw. Die Nacht verging, der Tag brach an. Es war

Source: Deutsches Wort (Supplement of Jornal de Entre Rios), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, n. 162, 19.01.1994, D1.

Figure 1. Publication of an account of the flight, written by a resident.

kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben). The series forms a connection between the history of the people, the Danube Swabians, and individual lives “reported” there. The own sequence of the different witnesses’ narratives, along with their photos, reinforces the relationship between the ethnicity and the individual.²² However, these are not exactly life stories told there. They are in fact testimonies about the expulsion. The witness, according to François Hartog, bears an obligation to memory, he “must be a voice and a face, a presence; and he is a victim.”²³

In the articles of this series, there is a selection of excerpts from interviews that refer to a small part of the lives of the witnesses. Although in the subtitle the verb *berichten* (report) is used, we do not consider them as mere reports, but as narratives. Understood like that, they are creators of new meanings about the facts described there, according to the philosopher Paul Ricoeur. He argues that the actions of individuals in the past are narrated through the mediation of language and its cultural constructions.²⁴

The witness, according to François Hartog, bears an obligation to memory, he “must be a voice and a face, a presence; and he is a victim”

These narratives are published as testimonies. No wonder the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and published in the Swabian dialect spoken on a daily basis. They show tragic details of what was known in the German collective memory as *Vertreibung* (expulsion). From the fall of 1944 onwards, more than 12 million Germans — especially “ethnic Germans” (*Volksdeutsche*) — fled from the Red Army troops or were expelled from the east, midwest, and southeast of Europe, with more than two and a half million people dying in the flight. Many people who experienced these events were represented and/or represented themselves as *Heimatvertriebene* (expelled from the homeland) after the war.

In the German cultural universe, memory policies about these traumatic experiences have transformed the very expression *Flucht und Vertreibung* (flight and expulsion) in a meaningful “realm of memory.”²⁵ This “realm of memory” was the outcome of a very concrete policy, which was developed after the arrival of German refugees and people expelled from the occupied

²²For an analysis of the accounts of the witnesses, see Marcos Nestor Stein, *O oitavo dia: produção de sentidos identitários na colônia Entre Rios - PR (segunda metade do século XX)*, Guarapuava, Unicentro, 2011, p. 234-249.

²³François Hartog, *Evidência da história: o que os historiadores veem*, Belo Horizonte, Autêntica, 2011, p. 209.

²⁴Aldo Nelson Bona, *História, verdade e ética: Paul Ricoeur e a epistemologia da História*, Guarapuava, Unicentro, 2012, p. 352.

²⁵Pierre Nora, who coined the term, intended to analyze the “realms” — in every sense of the term — in which the memory of the French nation had condensed, bonded, or crystallized.

zones, by political speeches, publications, and monuments.²⁶ However, although “narratives of German victims” (*deutsche Opfernarrative*) have an important role in the memory of many families and have increasingly found resonance in the public sphere, there was not a single place in Germany, according to the authors, for the remembrance of the expulsion that could attach collective senses to the past.²⁷

Regarding what is published, although these “narratives of German victims” have become increasingly frequent from the 1990s onwards, only in 2002, with the publication of the book *Im Krebsgang*, written by Günter Grass, there is a breach in the memory field.²⁸ The book is about the sinking of the German ship *Wilhelm Gustloff*, full of German refugees, by a Russian submarine in the late January of 1945.

From these questions, we can reflect, further on, upon the meanings of publishing the series of “accounts” of witnesses of Entre Rios. The titles and subtitles of this series associate past, present, and future, not in that order. Let us consider first the title: *Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft* (“A people fighting for their future”). The verb, used in the present, tells us about a struggle faced at that moment. The subtitle, *Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben* (“The expulsion of the Danube Swabians”), refers to the past. In other words, the subtitle, which generally specifies the title, is not about the present or the future, expressed in the title, but about the past of the expulsion, which happened 50 years before. If we pay attention to the interconnection of the elements of the title with the subtitle, we can apprehend the production of a meaning that links present/future to the past. In the narrative construction, therefore, there is not an upward linear notion of time, because the fighting that occurs in the present seeks a future that refers to the past. These are voices of people that experienced a war in the past and remember it for the sake of survival of the group now and in the future. The narrative of suffering emerges as a possibility of linking different temporalities, in a settling of disruptions and differences between them, because it is the knowledge of the past that reconstructs the present/future of the group.

The selection of the interviews, their transcription, editing and layout, the editor’s comments, and the relationship between these and other editorial elements are part of the work of recalling due to a series of transformations. One of the goals of the series was to reach the younger generations, considering the four decades since the founding of the colony, drawing examples from the tragic history of the war for the new generations. This is apparent in an editor’s comment, included after one of the “accounts”: “Illegal expropriation

²⁶Eva Hahn; Hans Henning Hahn, “Flucht und Vertreibung”, In: Etienne François; Hagen Schulze (orgs.), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte: Eine Auswahl*, Bonn, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005, p. 332.

²⁷*Ibidem*. About different typologies of “narratives of German victims”, see Aleida Assmann, “Deutsche Opfernarrative”, In: _____, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, Bonn, C.H. Beck, 2007, p. 194-202.

²⁸*Ibidem*, p. 194-198.

and deprivation of the rights of the Danube Swabians as a result of the World War II did not discourage these people. On the contrary! They rolled up their sleeves and executed again a remarkable pioneering work”.²⁹ The “Danube Swabians” are therefore represented as victims of a tragedy, the expulsion, transformed into a referential “realm of memory” for asserting an identity of “pioneer” people, which should be maintained.

Leaders of the colony were concerned not only about the reduced frequency in the cultural activities organized by the *Jugendcenter* of the colony, a cultural center for young people,³⁰ but also about their historical conscience of the past. In a comment of the same editor that appears after another passage of a published “account”, the goal of reaching new generations with that series is explicit:

The above account confirms that the Danube Swabians — regardless of where they sought a new homeland for themselves — could guarantee a solid life for their offspring through their proverbial diligence. I want to emphasize that clearly *to show the current Swabian youth that they can be proud of their parents and their grandparents* [emphasis added].³¹

The discourse of the lost homeland is here compared with the affirmative speech of a vocation to the pioneering spirit, which would have created a new homeland in the colony of Entre Rios. It states an overcoming of the past, at least in the economic sense. But the limited extent of the overcoming of the past can be seen in the publication of a series of narratives about the traumatic experiences of the past and in the manifestations of resentment in the stories of the newspaper.

In addition to these internal generational issues in the colony, one can observe the interference from external events in the analysis of the production conditions of that series of “accounts”. It was published during 1994, when the 50th anniversary of the expulsion of Germans living in eastern and southeastern Europe was remembered by various existing Danube Swabians entities around the world to which the cultural leaders of the colony had contact. Numerous reports on meetings of Danube Swabians’ entities around in the world, occurring in Germany, USA, Canada, and Argentina, were published by the newspaper. One of the meetings was even held in Entre Rios, in January 1992, when the colony celebrated its 40th anniversary.³² There were, therefore,

²⁹This and other cited passages that follow were translated by Méri Frotscher in “Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, 26 de fevereiro de 1994, D2.

³⁰“Jugendcenter tenta atrair frequentadores”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, n. 83, 15 de abril de 1991, p. 5.

³¹Oswald Hartmann, “Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, n. 167, 12 de março de 1994, D2.

³²“Dachverband der Donauschwaben”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, n. 100, 27 de dezembro de 1991, p. 1.

shared elements of a “culture of memory” about the war built transnationally among these entities.³³

The initiative to bring the memories of this traumatic past up, at the local level, was also taken in a time frame, since the beginning of the 1990s, when thousands of deaths, mass flights, and expulsions occurred again in the former Yugoslavia, because of the “ethnic cleansing” wars in Bosnia and Croatia, territories where much of the Swabians who immigrated to Entre Rios were originally from. The coverage of these international events by the international media interfered in the local discourses of memory. *Jornal de Entre Rios* itself made direct reference to those events in various reports, trying to relate them with the past experienced by the residents of the colony.

During the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the founding of Entre Rios, in 1992, for example, the president of the Agrarian Cooperative, Mathias Leh, had spoken this:

When I was a child, I had to watch as our people died. I felt the pressure that weighed on all of us in that murderous war of guerrillas, which is only understood now after other people suffered their turn. Between 1941 and 1948, it was “our turn” (referring to the Swabians).³⁴

According to what Leh said in 1994, the Swabians have also been victims of a “murderous guerrilla war”, as the civilian population of the Balkans in the early 1990s.³⁵ This passage provides evidence about the difficulties to understand the events that took place during World War II and shortly after it for people of the colony who had not been witnesses of it.

The series published in the paper two years later and analyzed here addressed this audience. Therefore, the theme expulsion (*Vertreibung*), in the subtitle of this series, refers not only to the events occurred 50 years earlier but also revives the memory, following the needs of the present and the desires for the future of the colony.

The memories of residents who lived through the tragedy are transferred to another sphere when published in the newspaper. They leave their private scope and enter the public space, not for their uniqueness, but for the possibility of generalizing, with the aim of group cohesion. The point is not to show the traumatic experiences of a single individual. One wants to show each as an example of a collective destiny. The exposure of individual suffering in the public space also seeks to transform the readers into witnesses of this experience. But, in order to do this, first you need to select the narrative, frame

³³About the different ways of dealing with the past of war in different countries of Europe, see Harald Welzer, *Der Krieg der Erinnerung: Holocaust, Kollaboration und Widerstand im europäischen Gedächtnis*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007, Christoph Cornelißen; Lutz Klinkhammer; Wolfgang Schwentke (orgs.) *Erinnerungskulturen: Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945*, 2. ed., Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004.

³⁴Discourse of Mathias Leh, In: Heinrich Sattler, “Wirsindanders”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, n. especial, 8 de junho de 1992, p. 24.

³⁵About the conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s, see Jaime Brener, *Tragédia na Iugoslávia: guerra e nacionalismo no leste europeu*, São Paulo, Atual, 1993.

it in time, and cut it in passages, with the goal of reaching an ideal collective reader: the “Danube Swabians”.

Studying the work of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in South Africa after *Apartheid*, Rebecca Saunders discussed the possibilities of translating human suffering to the language of human rights. For the author, this translation enabled the recognition of the events, the identification of victims, and the accountability for perpetrators, but distorted the experience, summarizing it in a previously established standardized language. Saunders points out that this happened because the set priority was the rehabilitation of the community — in the case that she studied, the national community — rather than of the individual, who feels the meaning of his experience reduced.³⁶

This analysis enriches the understanding of the editing work on the individual narratives that turned them into publishable reports in *Entre Rios* in 1994. In it, individual memory is pressed and managed by an interest of collective cohesion. This use of the narrative orients the attempt to share the experience. Thus, the account becomes a cogwheel in the production of knowledge and not a dialogue.³⁷ As it is possible to observe, in the analysis of one of the published interviews, the one with Katharina, she starts to talk using expressions such as “what you want to know ...”, “I want to register...” several times, which shows her awareness of the importance of her testimonial narrative.

Registering seemed like an urgency, and her narrative was driven by that. Personal experience was used on behalf of a collective interest and, consequently, a political interest.

Construction of “victims’ narratives”

Katharina Hech is one of the people interviewed in 1984 whose memories were edited and published in the newspaper. She was born in January 1927 in Setschan (Banat, former Yugoslavia), a town where most of the inhabitants were of German ethnic origin. Katharina was the eldest daughter of a family of Catholic farmers. She had attended agricultural school and helped her family with the work in the fields. In her leisure time, she attended the *Schwäbisches Kulturbund*, the cultural league of the Swabians. After the invasion of Yugoslavia by the German army, her father went on to serve the *Waffen-SS “Prinz Eugen”* division to fight the Serbian *partisans* and left the family taking care of the property. From the beginning of October 1944, with the entry of Russians in Setschan, Katharina, then 17 years old, experienced the most brutal and remarkable days of her life. The interview recorded in 1984, after

³⁶Rebecca Saunders, “Sobre o intraduzível: sofrimento humano, a linguagem dos direitos humanos, e a Comissão de Verdade e Reconciliação na África do Sul”, *SUR: Revista Internacional de Direitos Humanos*, São Paulo, vol. 5, n. 9, p. 52-75, dez. 2008.

³⁷Rebecca Saunders, “Sobre o intraduzível: sofrimento humano, a linguagem dos direitos humanos, e a Comissão de Verdade e Reconciliação na África do Sul”, *SUR: Revista Internacional de Direitos Humanos*, São Paulo, vol. 5, n. 9, p. 57, dez. 2008.

brief biographical data, begins exactly with the description of the Russians entering the village, as we will discuss later. Until June 1948, Katharina remained separated and had no contact with her family. In Austria, the family members were reunited and they stayed there until early 1952, when they emigrated to Entre Rios.

The interview by Katharina, like many others published by the newspaper, was given to Jakob Lichtenberger, also a “Danube Swabian” of the former Yugoslavia, born in 1909 in Neu Pasova, Sirmium. Unlike Katharina, who was 18 years younger and had been deported and subjected to forced labor at 17 in the end of the conflict, Lichtenberger had taken an active role in the war as an officer in the *Waffen-SS*. Lichtenberger was one of the main leaders of *Erneuerungsbewegung* (“Renewal Movement”) in Yugoslavia, which, according to the historian Thomas Casagrande, tried to awaken a sense of ethnic belonging among the Swabians that intended to overlap the horizontal differentiations within the group, replacing them with a vertical delineation of the ethnic group in comparison to others.³⁸ The members of the “Renewal Movement” were ideologically oriented by National Socialism and, with the support of the German National Socialist government, took the lead of the *Schwäbischer Kulturbund*, the Cultural League of the Swabians in 1939, turning it into a mass organization.

In the late 1930s, Lichtenberger had led the organization of German-origin populations in “self-defense units” (*Selbstschutz-Einheit*), called *Mannschaften*, which received weapons from the German government. Those units would later, after the occupation of Yugoslavia by Germany in 1941, form the core of *Bürgerwehr* to fight the *partisans*.³⁹ Lichtenberger and another activist of the movement were recommended by Sepp Janko to the German government to be the leaders of the *Waffen-SS*, with Lichtenberger, therefore, being sent to Germany for training.⁴⁰ During the war, he fought on the Balkans and the eastern front. After that, he fled to Germany fearing that he would be arrested and turned over to the U.S. occupation forces in Austria.⁴¹ After retiring as a teacher in Germany, Lichtenberger came to Entre Rios in 1974.⁴²

At the time of the interview, Lichtenberger was a schoolteacher and a recognized authority in the countryside of Entre Rios. Between 1984 and 1985, he conducted interviews, speaking in dialect, with locals who had witnessed the war as adults, representing them in the brief headings of the transcripts as

³⁸The historian Thomas Casagrande highlights the abuses of ethnicity committed by the leaders of the “Renewal Movement”, whose measures resembled in many aspects the National Socialist policy in the Third Reich. Its program and measures seek to arouse a feeling of ethnic belonging, which should overlap the horizontal differentiations within the group, replacing them with a vertical delineation of the ethnic group in relation to others. Thomas Casagrande, *Die Volksdeutschen SS-Division “Prinz Eugen”: Die Banater Schwaben und die Nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 2003, p. 137.

³⁹Thomas Casagrande, *Die Volksdeutschen SS-Division “Prinz Eugen”: Die Banater Schwaben und die Nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 2003, p. 156-157.

⁴⁰Thomas Casagrande, *Die Volksdeutschen SS-Division “Prinz Eugen”: Die Banater Schwaben und die Nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 2003, p. 143.

⁴¹“Nachruf”, *Revista de Entre Rios*, Guarapuava, março de 2005, p. 7.

⁴²“Nachruf”, *Revista de Entre Rios*, Guarapuava, março de 2005, p. 7. In this obituary published in the local newspaper, Lichtenberger’s biography is described with positive adjectives.

“accounts”. The goal that was implicit in the form and content of the interviews was to create narratives of war victims. The interviews were transcribed and typed without the intervention of the interviewer and delivered to the local museum for safekeeping and preservation.

Only 10 years later, in March 1994, excerpts from the “account” of Katharina were published in two issues of *Jornal de Entre Rios*, in the series mentioned before. In the first edition, the passages refer to the arrival of the enemies and the shootings of Germans that occurred in Setschan (Figure 2). In the second one, the passages refer to her deportation to Ukraine and the forced labor to which she and other Swabians were subjected. Besides the fact that she was a witness to the events that took place during the arrival of the *partisans* and Russians, being one of the deported women made Katharina an ideal and authorized voice to compose a tragic narrative of that people. Even today, Katharina’s name is suggested by other residents of the colony for a testimony about the past of war.

The transcript of the interview originally given, on which the editions were based, has 28 typewritten pages.⁴³ In them, the questions and interventions of the interviewer are suppressed or, in several passages, embedded to the own speech of the interviewee by the transcriber.⁴⁴ Thus, the dialogical process of producing the interview was erased by the transcript, which mischaracterized the interview, transforming it into a testimonial “account”.

The passages quoted in both editions of the newspaper add up to only three pages, which required a considerable selection of excerpts, indicated at the end of the published “account” by the word *Bearbeitung* (editing), followed by the name of the publisher. The cuts are not indicated in the edited text, which, however, has fluidity and consistency for the purposes of the series.

The events addressed in the editions are the most extreme and brutal that Katharina experienced directly or indirectly. Death, humiliation, fear, separation from the family, hunger, cold, and uncertainty about the future are some of the recurring themes. As the transcription of the original “account” advances, fewer fragments were selected to compose the published text. Much of the most brutal events and facts considered relevant were reported right in the beginning, because it seemed clear to Katharina that her speech should be a testimony about the suffering of the “Danube Swabians”.

The part published in the first edition of the paper addresses the short period of three months, from the beginning of October to the end of December in 1944, which comprises the arrival of the Russians until her deportation. At the very beginning of the edited interview, and also of the transcribed interview, Katharina talks about it: “I just want to tell you how it was when the Russians entered [the village]: on the first of October, the darkest day for our village and our family.”⁴⁵ The use of the second person plural pronoun (*eich*: you) as

⁴³Interview with Katharina Hech, conducted by Jakob Lichtenberger. Entre Rios, colony of Samambaia, Dezember 3rd, 1984. The recorded tape and the transcription belong to the archive of the historic museum of Entre Rios.

⁴⁴It was not possible to identify the author of the transcription.

⁴⁵“Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios – Guarapuava, 19 de março de 1994, D1.



Source: Deutsches Wort (supplement of the newspaper Jornal de Entre Rios), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, n. 168, 19.03.1994, D1.

Figure 2. The transformation of the interview in a testimony: the publication of the interview with Katharina Hech.

predicate indicates the awareness of not only talking to the interviewer, but to potential listeners/readers of her testimony.

Although the arrival of the Russians was represented as “the darkest day for our village and our family”, a few lines later, Katharina relativizes her position before them: “With the Russians it was not as terrible as then with the *partisans*”.⁴⁶ In the sequence, she comments on the shootings done by *partisans*, in one of which her uncle was killed. She herself did not watch this. But she talks about other shooting, adding information that she found out later:

Once, we arrived at the train station [probably previously destroyed by the German troops], and we had to take the cement off bricks. Then they [*partisans*] did not let us in. We did not know why. We look through the fence, there was a hole in the board and through it we saw that they pushed twenty, even thirty boys, ages 12 to 14 years old, off a wagon toward the bathrooms. They had already tied their hands with barbed wire, and the eyes and the entire heads were already swollen and bruised by the *partisans*. Then they pushed them again back to the wagon. We still heard a noise. Suddenly everything was silent, and under the wagon blood began to drip. Later, we learned that they had killed those children and buried them in Modosch, on the roadside.⁴⁷

In the excerpt published shortly afterwards, Katharina talks about the fear she felt of being murdered herself. She and other women had been taken to cook for wounded Russian soldiers in a house used as a makeshift hospital: “And when we were standing there cleaning the slaughtered birds, the guerrilla men kept firing guns around us. On this day we thought we would not get out of there alive”. This passage was preceded by the phrase: “And then I have one more experience to tell”, signaling, as with other phrases and expressions present in the narrative, that there was a previous reflection on what would be relevant to narrate.

Soon after that, both in the oral and in the published versions, Katharina again emphasizes the will to register (*nachtragen*) another episode, even though it has not been witnessed by her, as she explains herself:

I want to register something else. It was not I who experienced it, but I have heard it later. In Neusin, our neighboring village, guerrilla men threw a party. They took twenty German men of the villages around Sartscha, Setschan and Neusin. And the highlight of the party was that they massacred those twenty people, cut them into pieces, stacked them in the middle of the hall and danced around them. Later we have heard, from someone who was a witness, that not even with plenty of water it was possible to get the blood off the floor, so much blood there was.⁴⁸

⁴⁶“Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios – Guarapuava, 19 de março de 1994, D1.

⁴⁷*Ibidem*.

⁴⁸*Ibidem*.

The iconic story of the macabre dance with parts of the dismembered bodies and the blood-soaked room, and others that she has heard of and narrates during the interview reveal the sharing of memories of traumatic events among the survivors. The sharing, done orally and reproduced also through publications, fulfills a purpose in the building of a collective identity of victims. The trauma pointed out in Elfes' book and in Grossner's report, both mentioned in the beginning of this article, found its treatment on the composing and editing of memories as the ones from Katharina, fragmented and exposed in public space.

*Being one of the deported women made
Katharina an ideal and authorized voice
to compose a tragic narrative of that people*

The quoted passage also draws our attention to the mechanism of including extraneous information in the testimony. The traumatic memory absorbs them in the creation of an autobiographical narrative. Although Katharina states that she will tell "how it was when the Russians arrived", she narrates these events not only from her experiences but also from information shared later, or even obtained through the reading of books and other printed materials. Katharina becomes a subject of memory, an authorized speech about the past, not only because of her experiences but also because of what she has found out by other means. Hence also the accuracy of some of the data presented, such as the number of dead people in her village:

Our village has a sad balance to register. A quarter of the population died. Our village had two thousand and fifty people, 531 died. Some fell in the front as soldiers. Men, women and children were murdered in the camps of Molidorf, Rudolfsgnad, in the infamous extermination camps, or were beaten to death, or died of starvation, or were poisoned, or died exhausted from overwork or starvation. One hundred and thirteen people from our village were deported to Russia and twelve died in Russia.⁴⁹

The narrative of the passage is structured by the listing of the tragic fates of the inhabitants of her village. These are figures that Katharina would hardly keep in mind without the aid of some support material. Like her, many immigrants in Entre Rios have at home a *Heimatbuch* (*Heimat*: home/homeland; *Buch*: book), a book illustrated with photographs of, among other aspects, the history of the place of origin. These books were organized and published after the war by entities of Germans expelled from the same place of origin, as a result of a whole effort to rebuild the German past of those places and relate it to the history of families.

⁴⁹Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben", *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, 19 de março de 1994, D1.

It is the lost homeland on paper, which many immigrants keep and show when they speak of their native land.⁵⁰ In the three interviews conducted by the authors with Katharina, for instance, in 2005, 2010, and 2012, she showed photos and documents of the *Heimatbuch*,⁵¹ which she kept in her house, in order to illustrate, prove statements, or reinforce arguments in the oral narrative.

Giving a testimony appears to be a process, because making an autobiographical narrative of a past event involves different components of credibility for it to be perceived as a testimony. According to Paul Ricoeur, this process involves first a demarcation of the border between fiction and reality, in other words, it is necessary to deal with suspicions.⁵² Then, the author points out that there is an opacity of the narrative, that is, the interests of the narrator and of the receiver are different, because narrating is always a dialogue; thus, the testimony must face the public confrontation and, in that process, it needs to be constantly reiterated. Only then a narration becomes trustworthy testimony and even a *habitus* of a community. Katharina's speech seems to be able to successfully accomplish this operation when edited and published by the newspaper.

The end of the first segment of the published "account" refers to the main theme of the next issue: the deportation. Katharina and others who were chosen for deportation had initially been informed by *partisans* that they should help harvest the corn plantations in the Batschka region, whose residents had fled before the arrival of the Russians. But, in fact, as the editor announces, everyone would be deported to "Russia." When he clarifies that "[...] *we* will report on this in the next issue [emphasis added]";⁵³ the editor also implies the role of the newspaper in the composition of that "account".

"The thick brown crust": resentment and forgetting in survival

In the next issue of the paper, the "account" occupies two full pages. The issues of deportation and forced labor to which Katharina and other women were subjected for almost two and a half years in Ukraine, in the Soviet Union, are discussed. The beginning lets us foresee the interests of the interviewer in the construction of the testimonial narrative and of the newspaper in the constitution of the "account": "Now you want to know how we discovered that we should go to Russia."⁵⁴ Katharina seems to narrate to a public, not only to the interviewer.

⁵⁰The communicative nature of memory is evident in many of the interviews with immigrants and descendants in the colony through the developed project. Many of them receive the researchers already with photographs, documents, and books arranged on the table, including in their narratives information and interpretations that are in these sources or even building their narratives from them.

⁵¹Peter Grassl, *Setschan: Eine Bilddokumentation*, Esslinger am Neckar, Bruno Langer Verlag, 1980.

⁵²Paul Ricoeur, *A memória, a história e o esquecimento*, Campinas, Editora da Unicamp, 2007, p.172-175.

⁵³"Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben", *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, 19 de março de 1994, D1.

⁵⁴"Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben", *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, n. 169, 26 de março de 1994, D1.

After having walked more than 40 kilometers, Katharina and others entered the Betschkerek camp, a former prison, where they stayed for three very significant days: “What we have seen and heard! There they killed 150 to 200 men a night, night after night, those that they had expelled from the whole region of Banat. In the middle of the yard they shot them and carried them on carts, and the others had to bury them. In the middle of the yard, there was a large, thick crust, and it was brown. Later we discovered that it was the blood of the men who had been killed there. A gypsy was the commander of the camp and he was guilty of all the murders that took place there!”⁵⁵

The blood, mentioned another time, becomes a symbolic element of the sacrifice of the Swabian people, a reference taken from the Christian vocabulary, so strong among immigrants of the Entre Rios community. The “thick brown crust”, which did not come out even after washing, like the blood stain on the floor left by the macabre dance with parts of dismembered bodies, might be understood as a metaphor of that past that could not be erased from the memory.⁵⁶ To avoid forgetting, by the way, was the biggest goal of the series published in the paper.

The passage in which Katharina highlights that the commander guilty of the shootings was a gypsy shows her concern to identify, from ethnic and racial criteria, the perpetrator. In the following excerpt, Katharina lingers in describing the transport of the deportees in cattle wagons. She was conscious of the extraordinary nature of her experiences even within the colony, and that they might attract more interest from both the person to whom she speaks in the interview and the newspaper reader, hence the included passage.

In another passage, Katharina says that people imprisoned in Betschkerek explained to her, later, why there was that brown crust in the middle of the yard. Once again, we see how her narrative is composed by mixing own experiences and information shared later, in a communicative process of creating the memory.⁵⁷

As the social psychologist Harald Welzer and his team show in a study about the memory of the National Socialism and of the Holocaust in German families, the ideas and images that people form of the past are composed of many fragments of very disparate sources, such as history books, movies, conversations in the family and at school, as well as their own individual experiences.⁵⁸ The authors rely on the formulations of Jan Assmann (1995) on the “communicative memory”, a kind of short-term memory of society, through which individuals and groups bring the past to the present, always from a fixed point in the present,

⁵⁵“Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, n. 169, 26 de março de 1994, D1.

⁵⁶By the way, in Entre Rios, every year in the month of October a procession is held to the chapel built for that purpose (*Wallfahrtskapelle*) and dedicated to the Virgin Mary, remembering the dead in the camps in 1946 in Yugoslavia, where “Danube Swabians” were confined.

⁵⁷About the functioning of the “communication memory”, see Harald Welzer, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis: Eine Theorie der Erinnerung*, 2. ed., München, Beck, 2008.

⁵⁸Harald Welzer; Sabine Moller; Karoline Tschuggnall (orgs.), *“Opa war kein Nazi”: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*, 6. ed., Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008, p. 9.

emphasizing how the criteria of truth of their memory are driven by loyalty to the group “we”.⁵⁹ In the case of Katharina, the “we” is the “Swabian people”, who, after the events experienced during the flight and expulsion, also began to share memories based on what they have lived, heard, and read.

The narrative in the interview with Lichtenberger, in 1984, if compared to the interviews given recently to the authors, is more factual and descriptive. The subjectivity is reduced before the objectivity of collective events, except at few places, when she reveals the pain of the family separation caused by the deportation: “On the night of St. Sylvester, we passed [on the train] by our village. It was the last time I saw something of my place of origin. I still heard our dog barking, we used to live not far from the railroad.”⁶⁰ The distance between what can be said about that experience and what it was to bear it presents itself as an irreducible gap.⁶¹

In the middle of the courtyard, there was a large, thick crust, and it was brown. Later, we discovered that it was the blood of the men who had been killed there

In a journey that takes about 30 days, in a dark wagon with a total of 40 people, Katharina was transported to Ukraine. The notion that this was a mass deportation only became clear to her when the people there realized the number of wagons of that transport: “When we passed a curve we saw that we were on a train with over 100 wagons. A locomotive was pushing behind, and there were other two in the front.”⁶²

The deportation of Germans and descendants to do forced labor in the Soviet Union was demanded by Josef Stalin of other allies for the first time in 1943, as a compensation for the destruction caused by the German army. Only from Yugoslavia, 8,000 women and 4,000 men were deported on eight transports.⁶³

In a resentful tone, Katharina recounts her experiences at the Kriwoj Rog labor camp, where she was first taken:

They always gave us political lectures, saying how our life was good because we were deported to Russia, how the Germans did so much more against the Russians, how they were good to us, things like that. This we soon realized, how good they were.

⁵⁹Jan Assmann, “Collective memory and cultural identity”, *New German Critique*, vol. 65, 1995, p. 125-133; Harald Welzer; Sabine Moller; Karoline Tschuggnall (orgs.), “*Opa war kein Nazi*”: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis, 6. ed., Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008, p.12-13.

⁶⁰“Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, n. 169, 26 de março de 1994, D1.

⁶¹François Hartog, *Evidência da história: o que os historiadores veem*, Belo Horizonte, Autêntica, 2011, p. 211.

⁶²“Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben”, *op. cit.*

⁶³Fritjof Meyer, “Hohn für die Opfer”, *In*: Stefan Aust; Stephan Burgdorff (orgs.), *Die Flucht: Über die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten*, Bonn, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005, p. 102.

In February they took us to the river margin, where woods had come down the river from somewhere. And we had to pull that wood to the shore with a hook. Every night we would come home wet to the hips and the uniforms were frozen, stiff from such cold. My hands were so frozen that the bones were showing, the flesh had fallen out.⁶⁴

In the sequence, with a tone of indignation, she refers to the discovery by accident, when working on a road, of a mass grave containing bones of German soldiers: “Often we had to dig in and once a German soldier’s uniform appeared. A little later we saw that there was a mass grave of Germans, feet and hands coming outside of the dirt. They were buried like animals.”⁶⁵

Katharina continues to talk about working in a steel factory where they worked every day eight hours straight without food, and the long journey on foot to the workplace, under extremely low temperatures in the winter and the deaths that resulted from that.

Despite the extreme conditions of life and work in the labor camps and the bitter tone of many passages, Katharina does not treat the Russians as a monolithic category, especially when you hear and read the interview in full, in which some scenes of contact with the Russian population or even with those responsible for the supervision and the control of the work appear. On paper, however, the following is mentioned: “They always told us that the Germans were pigs, and that we lived well among them [the Russians]. In part they pitied us, in part they hated us, so much that they spat on us.”⁶⁶ The editor highlighted the last sentence, repeating it in larger letters inside the published text. Katharina had referred to this subject because of the interest of the interviewer —something perceptible only after listening to the tape recording — about the relationship with the Russian population.

In a published excerpt, Katharina criticizes the attitude of German officers — probably from the Russian occupation zone of Germany — that had tried to persuade her to stay in the Soviet Union, demonstrating repugnance at the supposed lack of loyalty of those to the German “comrades”. In this and in other parts of the interview, her anti-communist position becomes clear:

[...] A commission came, according to them from Moscow, with German officers. They wore the full uniform with all their distinctions, and presented lectures, saying that we should stay in Russia, that our future was there. Germany lost the war and Yugoslavia was totally destroyed, we could not go

⁶⁴“Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios – Guarapuava, n. 169, 26 de março de 1994, D1/D2.

⁶⁵*Ibidem*, D2.

⁶⁶*Ibidem*.

home. But nobody signed the contracts, because we thought it was a bluff, because those who had their uniforms, they most certainly had betrayed their comrades. And that kind of people I despise. Either you stick firmly in favor of an ideal or you do not have any.⁶⁷

For Katharina and other deportees, the war seemed to not be over yet. The Russians were still enemies, which is why she represents those German officers of the Russian occupation zone in Germany as traitors. In this sense, the anti-communism itself can be seen as an element to keep the idea of a group, the “Danube Swabians”, which, during the war, had fought against the communist *partisans* in support of the German army troops.

The expression of a certainty — “Either you stick firmly in favor of an ideal or you do not have any” — is also repeated in larger letters inside the text published by the editor, something very significant if we consider the use of the word people (*Volk*) in the title of the series of “accounts”.

Katharina narrates objectively having been the only one of her shift that had survived, after having unloaded salt under very low temperatures for 16 consecutive hours. Owing to the consequent pneumonia, she received later the news that she had been selected to “return home” (she uses the term *Heimkehrer*, “the one that returns to the homeland”). She and other girls who were also released only believed in “returning to the homeland” when they realized they were passing through Poland. It is an interesting fact that even if the return was not to Yugoslavia, her place of birth, Katharina considers Germany “homeland”: “We only thought that we would really go back when we were in Poland. And really soon we arrived in Frankfurt am Oder”.⁶⁸ However, upon arrival in Germany, Katharina is soon disappointed when she realizes that she had no right to remain there and concludes that all the suffering in the name of “Germans” was not recognized. The expression of this resentment, however, does not appear in the interview published by the newspaper. There, the resentment is only directed against the Russians and Serbian *partisans*.

The description of how she received the information that she could not return to Yugoslavia, for being considered German, given harshly by the guard of the consulate of that country in Berlin, is the last fragment published in the paper. Katharina thus narrates her despair and desolation: “The guard did not even let us enter. ‘You are German — he said this in Serbian — they murdered all of your people, you should not go to Yugoslavia.’ So we sat on

⁶⁷“Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, n. 169, 26 de março de 1994, D2.

⁶⁸*Ibidem*.

the curb in Berlin, with no money, and started crying”.⁶⁹ This outcome is significant, because it expresses the news of the tragedy of her people, the loss of the homeland, the desperation, and the lack of prospects for the future.

It is the editor, at the end, that tells the reader about how Katharina reunited with her family in 1948 in Austria. His closing remarks express the purpose of the publication of that “account” and also of the series itself: “Human destinies that no one makes a denunciation film about, which also would not be in accordance with the guidelines of the associations of expelled Germans: **Forgive, but not forget**”.⁷⁰ The *motto* used, “Forgive, but not forget”, which orients the memory policy of many associations of expelled Germans, hints at the existence of disputes regarding the treatment of the past. The use of the word “denunciation” (*Anklage*) by the editor signals the claim of the victim status for the Danube Swabians, and therefore, the assertion of a “duty of memory” to avoid forgetting. The phrase sets the tone of warning. The comment seems to be a reaction to the making of films about victims of World War II, among which “destinies” as Katharina’s would not be included, according to the editor.

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Considering the globalization of the memory of the Holocaust, ongoing since the 1980s, one can reflect that the editor’s comment is a reaction to memory discourses in the international public sphere that focus on victims of National Socialism. *Jornal de Entre Rios*, therefore, upon the publication of “narratives of German victims”, invests in the politicizing of the trauma, taking into account the resentment toward the past and also the present.

This “past that does not want to pass”, a characteristic trace of trauma in which the repressed thoughts always return, is recalled and politicized in the public sphere. As Aleida Assmann explains, the theme of the “expulsion” in Germany is not a socially tabooed trauma, kept in silence, like the rapes of German women at the end of the war, but a politicized trauma (*politisiertes Trauma*).⁷¹

⁶⁹“Ein Volk kämpft um seine Zukunft. Die Vertreibung der Donauschwaben. Siedler aus Entre Rios berichten über ihr Leben”, *Deutsches Wort* (Suplemento do *Jornal de Entre Rios*), Entre Rios - Guarapuava, n. 169, 26 de março de 1994, D2.

⁷⁰*Ibidem*.

⁷¹Aleida Assmann, “Deutsche Opfernarrative”, In: _____, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, Bonn, C.H. Beck, 2007, p. 184.

In the case of the colony of Entre Rios, the immigrants and their descendants were included in a “memory culture”, which, although had communication links with Germany, also had to deal with the Brazilian reality. However, the supplement of the newspaper in which the “accounts” were published did not aim at the Portuguese-speaking readers, but rather at the German-speaking ones. Here, again, the trauma of the expulsion is politicized, because there is a claim of a victim status for the Danube Swabians and an affirmation of the need for the “rational overcoming” of the past. The politicization of trauma occurs locally in a dialogue with the memory discourses about the war disseminated at an international level. In this movement, the past experienced during the war is politicized by the newspaper.

According to Aleida Assmann, from the phenomenon of globalization of the memory of the Holocaust, a standardized terminology used in its remembrance was appropriated by other traumatic experiences. When analyzing “narratives of German victims” relating to the Allied bombings and the expulsion of the East, Midwest, and Southeast Europe, Assmann shows how the boundaries between victims and perpetrators are cleared not only by the arguments but also by the use of language itself.⁷² In the case of the Danube Swabians of Entre Rios, for instance, the use of the expression *Vernichtungslager* (“extermination camps”) in interviews and articles in the local newspaper to refer to the camps where they were confined during the war signals the appropriation of language elements of that terminology.

The series published by *Jornal de Entre Rios* can be understood, then, as a kind of “war of memories” at the global level, in which the Swabians are fighting for their recognition as victims of war. This reminds us of an investigation, based on oral history, about the prisoners confined in Sachsenhausen in Berlin, which was a concentration camp during the National Socialist regime and after the war it was transformed into a Soviet special camp for “detention of dangerous people”. During the research, it was noted how the Germans detained in the Soviet camp struggled to be recognized as victims by comparing their experiences with those detained in concentration camps, trying to make their experiences public through the contact with the interviewer.⁷³

The expression of the need for a “rational overcoming of the past”, pleaded by the mentioned editor of *Jornal de Entre Rios*, can be apprehended from this “war of memories”. According to his notion, there was a past to be overcome, not in any way but in a “rational” way. This claim presupposes the understanding that the past would not be seen objectively. The inclusion of the word “rational”, thus, politicizes the duty of memory expressed by the *motto* “To forgive, but not forget”.

⁷²Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, Bonn, C.H. Beck, 2007, p. 187.

⁷³Anne Kaminski, “A integração de conhecimentos históricos na narrativa da própria vida: entrevistas com ex-prisioneiros dos campos soviéticos entre 1945 e 1950 na Alemanha”, in: Marieta de Moraes Ferreira; Tania Maria Fernandes; Verena Alberti (orgs.), *História oral: desafios para o século XXI*, Rio de Janeiro, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, Editora e Fundação Getúlio Vargas; CPDOC, 2000, p. 143-153.

The remembrance of the past and the creation of “narratives of victims”, however, were also served by silencing, since memory and forgetting are part of the same process. In the remembrance of the 50th anniversary of the “flight and expulsion”, the adhesions to the National Socialism and the actions of the troops of the *Waffen-SS* toward the populations of non-German origin, for example, were not among the mentioned topics.

Instead, the series of “accounts” published in the paper transformed “an individual victim into a representative of the Danubian Swabian victims. The individual becomes collectiveness”. Apart from a reaction to a memory discourse in the media and in the movies, in which the “destiny” of victims such as the Danube Swabians was absent, the publication of the series of “accounts” aims at guaranteeing group cohesion locally. Elements of the local and the global, therefore, intertwine in the constitution of a memory discourse. Therefore, the publication of the series may be seen as part of the fight of that “people in favor of the future”, which depended on the fight against forgetting the past. The group cohesion would depend on these investments in the creation of a collective memory.⁷⁴ The “accounts” of the generation of immigrants, understood by the newspaper as reports of facts as they occurred in the past, should be kept for the memory of future generations as a warning.

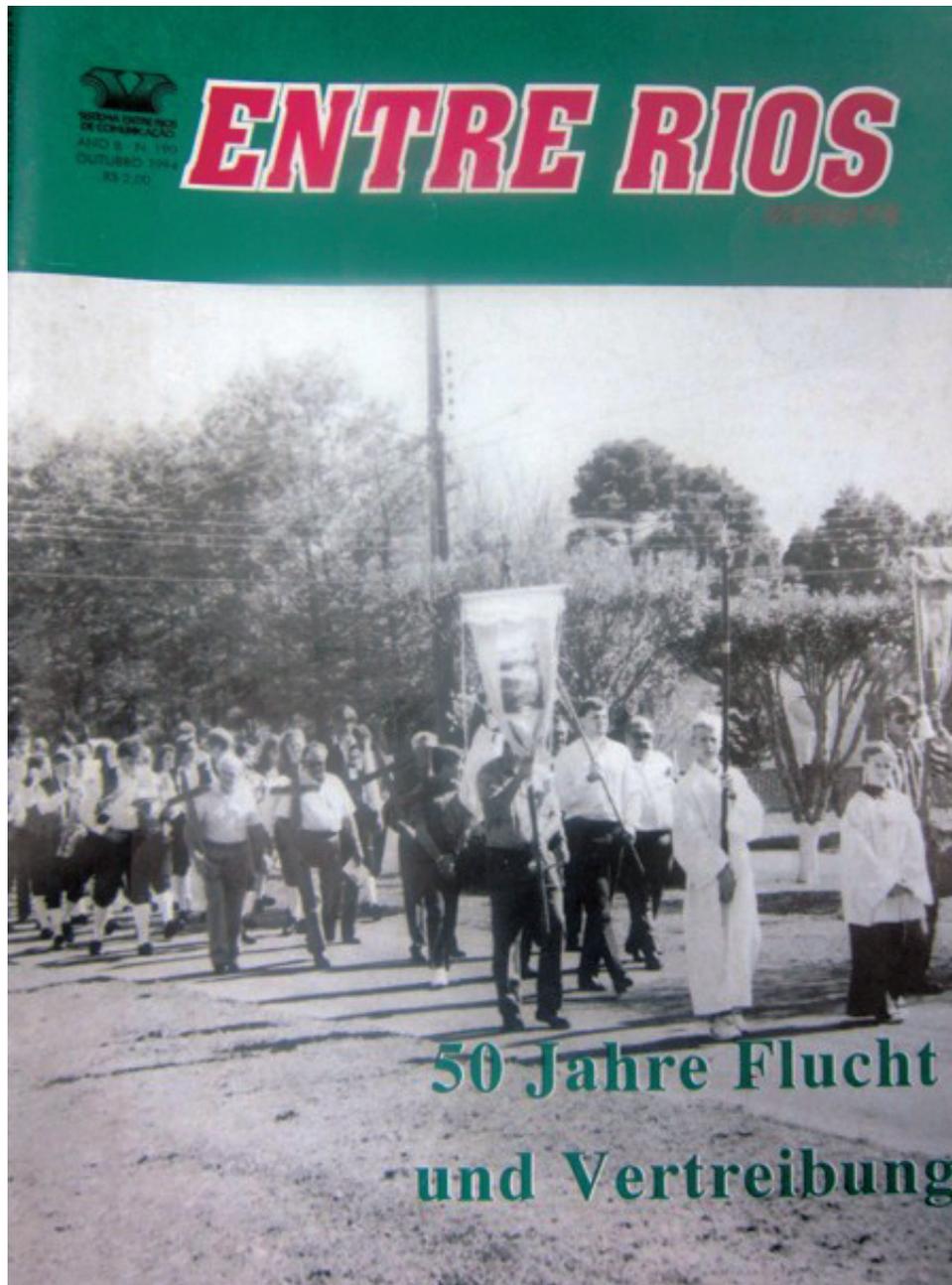
Final considerations

During the collective remembrance of the 50th anniversary of the flight and expulsion in Entre Rios in 1994, traumatic experiences were remembered through the production and publication of “narratives of victims” (Figure 3). We can reflect on the role of that paper based on a question asked by the Argentine philosopher Maria Inés Mudrovcić: “how a community, whose different groups have experienced directly or indirectly traumatic events, ceases to be compulsively attached to its past and transforms the tragic events in exemplary memories to guide present actions?”⁷⁵

The inclusion of the Danube Swabians in Brazil, in Entre Rios, by a colony project that created a diasporic community, favored the emergence of a public sphere in the German language, in which the subject of the expulsion even plays a role in the affirmation of this diasporic identity. The remembrance of the 50th anniversary of the *Flucht und Vertreibung* (“flight and expulsion”), in 1994, occurred in a social and political environment, in which the publication of “narratives of victims” that had experienced traumatic events sought to reinforce the contours of a local group identity. In other words, that remembrance, by editing testimonies and transforming the experience into memory, also affirmed a collective identity for all of the Danube Swabians of Entre Rios and not only for the generations that experienced the “flight and expulsion”.

⁷⁴Marcos Nestor Stein, *O oitavo dia: produção de sentidos identitários na colônia Entre Rios - PR (segunda metade do século XX)*, Guarapuava, Unicentro, 2011, p. 246-247.

⁷⁵Maria Inés Mudrovcić, *Historia, narración y memoria. Los debates actuales en filosofía de la historia*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Akal, 2005, p. 141. Freely translated from Spanish by Méri Frotscher.



Source: Entre Rios Magazine, year 8, n. 190, October of 1994.

Figure 3. Issue from October of 1994 about the “50 Years of the Flight and Expulsion”. In the picture, we see the procession held every year in memory of the dead in Yugoslavia, which is organized always in October.