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1 The Narrated Life Story: On the Interrelation Between Experience, Memory and Narration

GABRIELE ROSENTHAL

Summary

Interested in the experience of people as well as in their present reconstructions of their experiences in the past, we as biographical researchers have to deal with the distinction between the narrated personal life as related in conversation or written in the present time and the lived-through life. When reconstructing a past (the life history) presented in the present of a life narrative (the life story) it must be considered that the presentation of past events is constituted by the present of narrating. The present of the biographer determines his or her perspective on the past and produces a specific past at times. In the course of a life with its biographical turning points new remembered pasts arise at each point. This construction of the past out of the present is not, however, to be understood as a construction independent from the respective experienced past. Instead, memory-based narratives of experienced events are also constituted through experiences in the past. So narratives of experienced events refer both to the current life and to the past experience. In my paper I will present a gestalt-theoretical phenomenological concept of the dialectical interrelation between experience, memory and narration. Using an empirical example, namely the biography of an ethnic German from the former Soviet Union, I will discuss this distinction between the life history and the life story as one that must be taken into account in all narrated and written biographies.

Introduction

As a biographical researcher and sociologist, I am not only interested in the present day constructions, but I also try to reconstruct the process of the genesis of these constructions. The underlying assumption is that in order to

understand and explain¹ social phenomena we have to reconstruct their **genesis** – the process of their creation, reproduction, and transformation. Although still believing in the reality outside of the text, ie. the reality the text is referring to, I am not so naïve to take the narration as an incorrect image of the experience. Stories of self-experiences could be more or less based on a process of recollection, but memory is not a fixed and deficient storage.

Edmund Husserl rejected the idea that something is stored up in memory and remembered incorrectly depending on the situation of recollection. Memory, as Husserl has set out before, is rather based on a process of reproduction where the past is subject to a constant modification according to the present of the situation of recollection and the anticipated future:

... memory flows continuously, since the life of consciousness flows continuously and does not merely piece itself together link by link into a chain. Rather, everything new reacts in the old; the forward-directed intention belonging to the old is fulfilled and determined in this way, and that gives a definite coloring to the reproduction. (Husserl, 1990: 56)

Just as the past is constituted out of the present and the anticipated future, so the present arises out of the past and the future. This interrelation between past, present and future has also been emphasized in a decided manner by George Herbert Mead in “The Philosophy of the Present” (1932). Mead illustrates the determinate character of the past that is irrevocable as well as revocable:

... the past which is expressed in irrevocability, though there has never been present in experience a past which has not changed with the passing generations. The pasts that we are involved in are both irrevocable and revocable. (Mead, 1932: 36)

Above all, Husserl makes clear that the temporality of our perception is different from the temporality of our memory. The phenomenon of the difference between the order of experience and the order of recollection, and therefore also the structure of the narrative of remembered situations, deserves special reflection in the field of biographical research (cf. Fischer 1982, 1985; Rosenthal, 1993, 1995). It is particularly important to consider that in the process of narrating one’s own experiences the parts of the narrative that are

¹ ‘Understanding’ and ‘explaining’ are understood here in the sense used by Max Weber and Alfred Schütz. According to Weber’s postulate of subjective interpretation, scientific explanations of the social world must refer to the subjective meaning of the actions of human beings and thus explain their actions in their interdependency with the actions of others. According to Schütz (1962), sociological constructions have to be based on constructs of everyday life.

made up by recollections can vary significantly. Not every narrative of a self-experienced event is based on a process of recollection while narrating. For example, a story that has long turned into an anecdote which I have already related many times and which I have modified with respect to the experiences of interaction, can simply be retold without being based on a recollection process in any way. Likewise, in the present of the narrative I can fit together different experiences, my own ones or others that were handed down to me, to form a story about a situation.

By contrast, if we engage in an off-the-cuff narrative, and if we permit ourselves to enter into a flow of narration, we increasingly find ourselves in a stream of memories; impressions, images, sensual and physical feelings and components of the remembered situation come up, some of which do not fit in our present situation and which we have not thought about for a long time. The narration's proximity to the past thus increases in the course of the narration, and perspectives entirely different from the present perspective show themselves, which becomes clear in the argumentation parts or also in the narrated anecdotes.

We use the phenomenon of the increasing closeness to the experienced past due to the process of narrating and recollection with the technique of the biographical narrative interview as it was introduced by Fritz Schütze (1976). With this technique we encourage the interviewees to extend their narrative sequences and try to support them during the process of narrating and recollecting (cf. Rosenthal, 1995, 2003; Wengraf, 2001; Hollway and Jefferson, 1997). However, even in the case of a spontaneous memory-based narrative of experienced events we have to assume that there is a difference in general between the experienced event in the past, the recollection thereof and the narrative. The translation of a recollection into the linguistic form of a narrative already gives rise to a significant difference.

When analysing the interviews, particular attention has to be paid to the differences between experience, memory and narration. This means that as biographical researchers we have to deal with the distinction between the narrated personal life as related in conversation or written in the present time – the life story – and the lived-through life – the life history. In order to come to terms with this distinction between the life history and the life story, and in order to develop some tools for the reconstruction of life stories, I use concepts from the gestalt-theoretical phenomenological approach (Rosenthal, 1995, 2005), as it was presented by Aron Gurwitsch (1964). The combination of gestalt-theoretical concepts and the phenomenological approach helps to deal with all aspects of the dialectical interrelation between experience, memory and narration.

In order to draw methodical consequences from these considerations, which I will briefly address in the following, I have developed a method of

analysis in which the distinction between life story and life history plays a central role. In biographical case reconstructions sequential analysis represents a procedure where the temporal structures of both the **narrated** and the **experienced** life history are analysed. Based on the given text, we try to reconstruct the sequential gestalt of the life story presented in the interview, and in a subsequent step the sequential gestalt of the experienced life history. As well as the question of the sequence and textual sorts used by the biographers to present their biographically relevant data, this approach also examines how the individual biographical experiences have layered chronologically in the experienced life history. In the reconstruction of the life history we try to break down the genesis of the experienced life history, and in the analysis of the biographical self-presentation we try to break down the genesis of the representation in the present which differs in principle in its thematic and temporal linkages from the chronology of the experiences.

In the approach I developed in combination with various other methods (cf. Rosenthal, 1995) it is crucial to investigate the two levels of narrated and experienced life history in separate analytical steps. This means that the goal of reconstruction is both the biographical meaning of past experiences and the meaning of self-presentation in the present.

The Case of Sergey

In order to give you some insight into the method, and in order not to be too abstract, I will connect my considerations with one empirical case that was part of a research project on three-generation families of migrants from the former Soviet Union with German ethnic family background (Rosenthal, 2006). What distinguishes the interviews of this sample in contrast to other samples is that in many cases we only get a few spontaneous narratives; many interviewees do not allow an extended narration and recollection process to happen. Many times the narratives are *exemplifying narratives* that add plausibility to a line of argument. In spite of repeated narrative questions in an attempt to elicit more detailed accounts, surprisingly little is mentioned with respect to family history. It appears that very little can be told. Instead, collectively shared stereotypical accounts pertaining to certain elements of the family history are presented as well as, in part, a collective historical past. This collective historical past most likely has its origins in a time period prior to the *orally* transmitted past of relatives from preceding generations. The narrative difficulties that arise can be attributed to the repeated reinterpretations of the past as well as to elements of the past that are considered taboo resulting in a damaged communicative memory. My assumption is that due to the changing historical circumstances the ethnic Germans still born in the Soviet Union rewrote or had to rewrite their family history and life history several times with

respect to the respective dominant discourses of society. Because of that, allowing a recollection process becomes not only more difficult, but also threatening.

I will present an interview where the auto-biographer hardly enters into recollection processes. I would like to show with this that the interview text still presents traces of the past and that we can break them down above all by reconstructing the present perspective and the rules of self-presentation in the interview. If we succeed in determining which interest of presentation and which present perspective guides his or her self-presentation, we get the opportunity of learning something about the experiences in the past.

The interviewee I would like to introduce and whom I call Sergey Wolf was born in Siberia in 1967. He belongs to the middle generation we interviewed.² Sergey Wolf's grandparents belonged to the generation of ethnic Germans who were persecuted and banished during and after World War II.³ One grandfather of Sergey died in 1942 when he was recruited to the "labour army", and the other one was sentenced to hard labour in a camp until 1956 and consequently died in 1960. Further significant biographical data of this case are:

- Sergey's parents were born shortly before World War II.
- Sergey studied from 1984 until 1991 education and English at a college of education, ie. during the years of *Perestroika*.
- During his study time he was recruited to the army for two years (1985-1987).
- Between 1991 and 2000 he worked as a lecturer for English at the Russian military academy.
- During his time at the university he married a Russian woman, their daughter was born in 1989. His wife was in a high position in the government.
- In 1996 Sergey applied for an exit visa for him, his daughter, his wife and his father. In 2000 he got the visa and migrated to Germany with his wife,

² The interview was conducted by Anne Blezinger. She also interviewed his father and his daughter.

³ In 1941 the Soviet Union imposed a collective sentence on all Germans, and the ethnic German population was banished to the Ural region, to Siberia and to Kazakhstan. Men and women were drafted into so-called labour battalions where they were used for forced labour. The living situation of these people only gradually returned to normal from the middle of the 1950s. From 1956 on, the ethnic Germans were allowed to leave their special settlements, but they were not allowed to return to their former home regions. A partial rehabilitation took place in 1964.

his father and his daughter. His mother died shortly before they got the exit visa.

- In Germany, his and his wife's university degrees were not recognized.
- Today, the 38 years old Sergey is studying social work.

The First Step of Analysis

The so-called *sequential analysis of the biographical data* – starts by analysing the biographical data in the temporal sequence of the events in the life course. The interpretation of the data is initially independent of the self-interpretations and accounts in the biographical interview. Here in particular it is helpful to initially avoid looking at the interviewee's self-interpretations and their plausibility, but instead to first investigate other possible interpretations; also in the context of the historical data and archives research. When we later examine the text with this spectrum of possible interpretations in mind we will be able to find many more possible readings between the lines.

Within the context of this paper, I can only briefly address this step of analysis. When looking at the biographical data, we particularly notice that Sergey's choice of partner as well as his successful professional career clearly points at an integration into the Russian society and the government institutions. Considering this, the question arises about the motives for his application for an exit visa and his migration. We can put forward various hypotheses: For example, that the development of the Russian society in the 1990s did not meet the expectations of Sergey or his family. This could have been due to a variety of reasons. Anyhow, in this connection we can set up the hypothesis of the occurrence of a biographical turning point from integration into the Russian society to an increasing dissatisfaction in the course of which Sergey began to think about a future in Germany.⁴

Such a turning point or point of interpretation (Fischer, 1982) can be triggered by developments of society and the accompanying social discourses as well as changes in the family system or biographical turning points. Points of interpretation lead not only to a reinterpretation of the future, but also of the past and present. This means that in the course of a life with its biographical turning points new remembered pasts arise at each point.

In the present case we can also formulate the hypothesis that with the consideration of a possible emigration to Germany Sergey's ethnic belonging

⁴ We should take into consideration here that the mass emigration of the ethnic Germans from the Soviet Union started at the end of the 1980s. Since 1986 the Soviet Union has allowed a large-scale emigration, and following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, more than 900,000 ethnic Germans immigrated to Germany (cf. Bade, 2003; Dietz, 2000).

became increasingly important to him, particularly as it could allow him and his family to immigrate to Germany. This would have also changed the way in which Sergey looked back on his past and how the experiences appeared in his memory.

With the increasing importance of “me being German or my German origin”, Sergey will turn to completely different events in his memory than before. Through this act of remembering, which Edmund Husserl calls *noesis*,⁵ not only do different events from memory become more dominant, but they also appear in a new way. A new memory *noema* emerges as Husserl calls the object that appears in recollection, the remembered as such (Husserl, 1931: 258). Between *noesis* and *noema* is an intimate relationship. The recalled experience varies in terms of when and from what perspective it is remembered: “In the process of recalling an experience, for example, shadings are clarified; details are added; refinements bring new voices, sounds, and visions” (Moustakas, 1994: 72). On the other hand, each appearing *noema*, which already sets a structuring, determines the *noesis*, as it has been shown above all by the gestalt theory. In addition, in the process of recollection features of the experienced situation – like emotions, physical sensations - can become dominant that, according to the present perspective, were not intended and which could also be incongruent with the present perspective.

Let us come back to Sergey’s case. On the basis of the biographical data we can assume an additional point of interpretation, namely that the lack of recognition of his university degree in Germany not only changed his future job perspectives and expectations, but also the way he was looking back to his professional past and the process of decision-making leading to migration. A possible way of dealing with it could be the devaluation of the education and work in Russia or even a critical view on the decision to emigrate.

Let us now see how Sergey presented his biography in the interview and in how far we could find some traces of such points of interpretation and processes of reinterpretation. Sergey was asked, according to the method of the narrative biographical interview, to tell his family history and his life story. After this initial question his biographical self-presentation, the so-called main narration, lasted 70 minutes. In this period he was not interrupted by further questions from the interviewer. Only in the second phase of the interview that lasted in this case another hour and in a second interview with him the interviewer posed questions.

The first sequence of Sergey’s self-presentation was a report. He started in the following way:

⁵ “Husserl differentiates between the intentional object, the object that appears in consciousness and the actual object” (Moustakas, 1994: 70).

Good, well then I will start, my name is or yes ((laughing)) I will say first/, my name is Sergey Wolf and I am, uh an ethnic German from Russia or in other words a German re-settler from Russia, I was born in 1967 in the city of Omsk in Siberia, in West Siberia, into an ((sighs)) ethnic German family, and uh so, uh: well, my life was actually typical for, uh many people, uh of that generation and I uh went to middle school after middle school I went to university uh a teacher training college and there I studied education for five years and (2) ((slightly sighing)) English language, uh then I uh was drafted into the Soviet army, served for two years in the a- uh army, well after that I uh: so after my degree I worked for ten uh nine years at the (2) m- ((laughing)) military academy, uh: as a teacher at the foreign language department, taught English, and so uh, well, yes, in May 2000 uh May 2000 uh: I came with my family to Germany.

With this first sequence of his biographical account Sergey presents himself with biographical data on his ethnic belonging and mainly data on his educational and professional career and his migration to Germany with his family. He does not speak about his wife or his daughter. We could say that he frames his occupational career with his ethnic belonging and the consequences of it, i.e. the migration to Germany.

At the beginning of a biographical self-presentation or life story the following question, like in every other interview as well, arises: **Why is Sergey presenting this sequence and the following sequences in such a way?** In the second step of analysis, the so-called *thematic field analysis*, the general goal is to find out which mechanisms control selection and organization and the temporal and thematic linkage of the text segments. Above all, we also try to find out to what extent this particular presentation is due to the interview situation or the current life situation, and in how far it also points to biographical relevancies in the past.

The first sequence of his interview, the way he begins his biographical self-presentation, regardless of whether we know about its continuation or not, lets us suggest various hypotheses which are not necessarily mutually exclusive:

1. The sequence, the selection of these biographical data and the sequential order of them are *mainly due to the context of the interview* and the knowledge of Sergey that the interviewer is carrying out research about German re-settlers. So next to others, we could put forward the hypothesis that for Sergey himself his educational career is of more relevance, but that he tries to live up to the relevancies ascribed to the interviewer and therefore starts to talk again about his ethnic background. According to the method of abduction (Peirce, 1933; Rosenthal, 2004), for each hypothesis a follow-up hypothesis is considered according to what comes next in the text, if this reading proves to be plausible. A follow-up hypothesis in this case is eg. that Sergey will continue to be torn between his biographical

relevancies and the ones he ascribes to the interviewer. Meaning that he will time and again come back to talking about his professional biography.

2. The first sequence is *mainly due to his present biographical situation* that is strongly constituted by the fact that his university degrees are not accepted in Germany and that he could not work as a lecturer or researcher at a university. Sergey concentrates his report on the educational and professional career because these became questionable after the emigration.
Follow-up hypothesis: He will time and again come back to talking about his professional career.
3. The beginning of his biographical self-presentation is *mainly due to the public discourse in Germany about migrants*, that means that Sergey has the need to stress he is not like other migrants, but German and an educated man.
4. The report is also *mainly due to his past perspective*, meaning that his educational and occupational career was already in the past of high biographical relevance for him. Here we have to take into account that he is the first member of his family with a higher school education and a university degree.
5. Another hypothesis regarding the first sequence is that this segment is *mainly due to the need to hide his past perspective*: by framing his occupational career with the theme of his ethnic belonging, he tries to present his migration against this background. In other words, he wants to present his migration as motivated by his ethnic belonging. Maybe this is supposed to cover up completely different motives that e.g. have to do with his time in the army and as a teacher at the military academy.
Follow-up hypothesis: When talking about the topics “reasons to emigrate” and “life within the context of the army”, we first of all expect the text type ‘argumentation’ and less ‘narration’.

With these different hypotheses, which we have to test with the analysis of the following sequences, I formulated hypotheses which have to be considered during each analysis of the narrated life story. Generally, each life story presents us with the interrelation of the present perspective, the experienced past, the different past perspectives in different life phases and the different discourses connected with it.

When reconstructing a past (the life history) presented in the present of a life narrative (the life story) it must be considered that the presentation of past events is constituted by the present of narrating. The present of the biographer

determines the perspective on the past and produces a specific past at times. The present perspective conditions the selection of the presented experiences and memories, the temporal and thematic linkage of memories, and the type of representation of the remembered experiences. The general goal of this second step of analysis (following Aron Gurwitsch I call it thematic field analysis) is to find out which mechanisms control selection and organization and the temporal and thematic linkage of the text segments. The underlying assumption is that the narrated life story does not consist of a haphazard series of disconnected events; the narrator's autonomous selection of stories to be related is based on a context of meaning – the biographer's overall interpretation. The narrated life story thus represents a sequence of mutually interrelated themes, which together form a dense network of interconnected cross-references (Fischer, 1982: 168). In the terminology of Gurwitsch, the individual themes are elements of a thematic field. While the *theme* stood in the "focus of attention," the *thematic field* is "defined as the totality of those data, co-present with the theme, which are experienced as materially relevant or pertinent to the theme and form the background or horizon out of which the theme emerges as the center" (cf. Gurwitsch 1964: 4).

The past event chosen in the present of narrating and the event chosen from memory in the present of recollecting represent the topic that is embedded in a thematic field, but which still can be modified in the course of recollecting and narrating. The field not only constitutes the topic but also the topic the field. The thematic field of a life story is therefore constituted by the present perspective of the biographer, his manner to deal with his past, thus the *noesis*, but also by the appearance of the remembered, thus the *noemata*. In my opinion, the gestalt theorists have presented important observations and also empirical experiments concerning the dialectical interrelations between the present of the recollection and the past of the experience. Kurt Koffka, Wolfgang Köhler and Max Wertheimer oppose convincingly associationistic concepts of the memory. They contrast the idea of an associative connection between single elements with the connection of pattern and assume that the memory first of all links with whole properties and structural connections, as Wertheimer states in 1922 (55f). Deriving from the association hypothesis that when a content A frequently appears together with a content B there is a tendency to remember B when A comes up, Wertheimer (1922: 49) permits himself the humorous statement that his friend is associatively connected with his telephone number. But as Köhler (1947: 156) made clear "between the name and the number there are no specific relations; they do not tend to form a group spontaneously". According to a gestalt-theoretical concept, one does not remember single events because of an element appearing in the present but rather bases oneself on organized processes or units that in their whole property call to mind the whole properties of memory units (cf. Köhler, 1947).

The choice of a past experience from memory “depends upon the similarity of pattern between excitation and trace...”(Koffka, 1935/63: 464).

An essential part of the gestalt-theoretical concept is that it is based on an interaction between sedimented and present gestalten. It permits to avoid dualistic concepts of something that is, on the one hand, stored in memory and, on the other hand, remembered in the present. A gestalt-theoretical approach, as Gurwitsch consequently supports it in his concept of the thematic field analysis, almost certainly leads to the understanding of a mutual constitution of “old” and “new” figures, ie. a constant reorganization. Koffka writes (1963: 524) “that the reorganization of the pattern interferes directly with the recall of the old pattern, ie. it exerts a direct influence upon the old trace”.

I will come back to the interview with Sergey. We have to ask within which thematic field or fields does Sergey present his life history? The thematic field analysis made clear that each sequence of his biographical self-presentation is embedded in a field that mainly comprises the topics “education” and “persecution and discrimination as ethnic Germans”. This field can be formulated as follows: “*my grandparents were already educated people but as ethnic Germans their educational and professional career, and this is also true for my parents, was restricted*”. The only thing that does not fit into this thematic field is his educational and professional career. After the previously quoted, first sequence of his main narration Sergey does not talk about his professional career in Russia anymore. He rather talks in great detail about his family history as ethnic Germans and his own experiences of discrimination as a German in the Soviet Union and Russia.

Finally, I would like to illustrate how strongly his talk, which is mainly a mixture of the text types ‘report’ and ‘argumentation’, is determined by this present perspective but nevertheless shows traces of experiences in the past with a narrated biographical experience from his time in the army in the year 1985. It is about his transfer, probably without being given any reasons, to a different unit after having served in the army for six months.

In the first step of analysis, the sequential analysis of the biographical data, I assumed that Sergey at that point in his life identified with the state and tried to do his best in order to be integrated in the Russian society. The result of the second step of analysis, that he presents his life story in the thematic field of discrimination because of his German ethnicity, calls for a critical view on the source for the narration of this experience. We can also assume that today on the manifest level he will not talk about his identification at that point in time. He rather relates this situation next to many others in order to prove his discrimination as a German in Russia. It is quite possible though that at the time of the transfer he did not regard it as discrimination, but as an indication of a promotion in the army.

In the third step of analysis, the so-called *reconstruction of the life history*, in connection with the analysis and interpretation of the biographical data, we

ask once again about the biographical meaning of the past experience. In order to do this, we embed the experiences related in the present also into other possible thematic fields through thought experiments.

Let us look at Sergey's description of his transfer. As already mentioned, this sequence is an exemplifying narrative from the main narration that is framed with the following explanation:

Only after leaving the army I learned that until nineteen hundred I believe ninety five uh, a regulation well internal regulation uh, existed well existed or rules applied that for example members of certain ethnic groups couldn't be uh allowed in certain units or, so for example I – uh was first drafted in the– uh in a unit.

We can interpret the discontinuation in the last part of the sentence "*I – uh was first drafted in the- uh*" eg. as a way that Sergey uses to slow himself down in order to avoid saying the name of the unit. Let us see how he continues:

Served there for six months but suddenly overnight I was uh called and uh, send to another unit in a different city uh. ((sighs)) so posted I w- was you might say, and I couldn't understand that because I was so ambitious and hardworking.

Here as well, we notice the lack of information about the locations. In this case we can formulate the hypothesis that the unit in question is one that he seeks to conceal today. However, we learn that he could not understand the event. In order to make this sound plausible, he mentions that he was ever so ambitious and hardworking. In other words, at least at that point in time he did not think it was justified to be transferred. Let us look how it continues:

And, uh even from the officer I often heard, you Germans, (2) uhh: ((sighs)) are so hardworking and, uh so faithful to regulations and uh: so with a sense of duty and so on and that's why uh there were uh so many non-commissioned officers that uh were Germans who served in the army.

In contrast to the interest in presenting the discrimination, Sergey now mentions – in conformity with the experiences during the first months in the army – what the officer said about the Germans and that the Germans were promoted to the officer's career. We could ask if he himself was going through the officer's career. He continues as follows:

And uh I was good, I served well and still was uh transferred to a different unit uh unit and there until the end of my service I((sighs)) (3) served ((laughs slightly)) you might say.

We do not learn what the rest of his time in the army was like. Regarding the sighing, the three-second pause and the slight laughing, we could formulate different hypotheses, eg. even that after all he might have been promoted rather than discriminated against during the rest of his service time. The passage indicates that the discrimination as a German is a reinterpretation made from a later assumed perspective. The recollection of the situation in the army or that particular time does not offer him the right memory *noema*, ie. he cannot think of an element of the situation that could prove the interpretation that he was transferred because of his ethnic origin.

The assumption that Sergey primarily out of the present perspective tries to find situations in his past that will prove discrimination but that he did not experience those situations in that particular way can be substantiated through the analysis of his other exemplifying stories. Another proof that he states is eg. that a neighbour once asked his wife why she married a German. Nevertheless, all proofs he gives contain indications of his identification with the state system and, in particular, efforts towards a professional advancement. Furthermore, it becomes clear that Sergey avoids giving details because he cannot admit or even denies his involvement in the political and military system of the Soviet Union and later the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). The involvement as well as its denial became very clear in a second interview with Sergey that was carried out after my analysis of the first interview. On the basis of my analysis, the interviewer focused with the help of narrative questions on finding out more about his military and professional career. Among other things, indications were given that Sergey served in a secret military unit.

Not at all do I want to assert with this case that ethnic Germans were not discriminated against in the Soviet Union and later on in the CIS. Above all, I do not want to give the impression that I do not see the burdensome and traumatized family past of these people. On the contrary, I see the trans-generational consequences of this past more clearly than Sergey is aware of them. It would take another paper though to further elaborate on this.

Anyhow, this case makes clear that this man, probably typical of his generation, concentrated on a professional advancement and an integration into the Russian society. He succeeded. We can also interpret these efforts as an attempt to repair the burdened family past. After the significant disappointments that he experienced in Germany, and this is also true for his wife who was very successful in her job in Russia, he is nevertheless trying to interpret his migration as a correct biographical decision and therefore sees his past within the thematic field of discrimination. Furthermore, the interview revealed that both his father and his mother were strongly opposed to the emigration. The father even shows an anti-German attitude and insists in spite of his German language skills on an interview in Russian. The construction by Sergey of his past out of the present is not, however, to be understood as a

construction separate from the respective experienced past. Instead, memory-based narratives of experienced events and generally our presentation of the past are also constituted through experiences in the past. What appears in memory in the present of the narrative has its remembered and each memory *noema* points to other possible *noemata* of the same *noematic* system. This means that each memory *noema* brings along other possible appearances – like in the case of the transfer to another army unit – with which it forms a connected comprehensive complex of possible or obvious thematic connections that are linked to each other. In this basic relation between *noema* and *noematic* system, ie. between the whole and part of it, the interrelation of memory *noema* and experience is reproduced. As each memory *noema* relates to a past event and links to the *noematic* whole system, and therefore to the experience *noema* as well, the past influences the present. It is possible that the experience appears in a different way than before and possibly even “closer” to the past event when recollected again. The process of recalling an experience could always bring something noematically new, that means a new understanding of the experience.

So it could happen that Sergey in a non-defensive recollection process becomes aware of discrimination aspects of past events that he had to erase from the experienced situations due to his desire for integration at that time.

Among other things, the dialectical interrelation between experience, memory and narration means the following: The past events cannot appear to the biographer in the present of the recollection and narrative like they were experienced but only within the ‘How’ of their appearance, ie. only within the interrelation between the appeared in the present of the narrative and the meant. However, it is not only the narrative situation that constitutes the experience that dominates in the narration and recollection process, but also the dominant memory *noema* emerging from memory that already sets a structure.

So narratives of experienced events refer both to the current life and to the past experience. Just as the past is constituted out of the present and the anticipated future, so the present arises out of the past and the future. In this way biographical narratives provide information on the narrator’s present as well as about his/her past and perspectives for the future.

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