Games of Memory

Personal Narratives of Romanian World War II Veterans

Author(s): Ioana-Ruxandra Frunteată
Subject(s): Cultural Anthropology / Ethnology, Culture and social structure
Published by: LIT Verlag
Wars are liminal experiences that leave their traumatic marks upon people who have survived the daily proximity of violent death. In the period 1995–2013, I interviewed or talked to several Romanian World War II veterans, mainly belonging to rural communities. My goals were to understand their narrative strategies of remembering terribly painful experiences and to figure out some intercultural patterns that explain the possibility of readjusting to life in “civilian society” and coping with the “after-war crisis”. Memory studies and personal narrative theories provided a useful methodological frame for me to interpret the rich collection of materials that resulted from field research (transcriptions of interviews, war journals, letters, and rhymed chronicles). One of the most important conclusions of my research is that truth and reality are always negotiated in cultural terms, as memory and narrative shape each other so that the past may be intelligible to the present. As a consequence, people conceive their war stories according to a narrative logic that is more indebted to their cultural background (or backgrounds) than to what really happened in their individual histories. This is not indulging in self-delusion but works as an ancient therapy to cure the horror of war by the “poetry” of war.