

Romanian memoirs of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) between realism and constructivism

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Abstract: *This article examines the Romanian memoirs of the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 as a medium of communication and documentation of the events, with a focus on the question whether such writings can be tied in realism or are rather a product of constructivism, in order to establish their possible historiographical value. A relatively recent theory in communication science, constructivism – together with the concept of social construction of reality – highlights how knowledge, experience, media, and culture contribute to modeling reality (accurate or distorted), or to its construction. Considering the individual imprint of the writer – as a participant in the recorded events –, along with other factors such as the difficulty of war experiences, we demonstrate that memoirs can represent constructions of reality, making them prone to moving away from realism and factual objectivity.*

Keywords: *Balkan Wars (1912-1913), Romanian memoirs, constructivism, realism.*

Introduction

Despite the 100 years past from the two wars, their subject still creates interest, remaining partly unsettled in the eyes of many Southeastern Europeans. As is the case of many wars, the history of these events seems to be constituted from a com-

position of national histories, which oftentimes contrast with each other. Beyond the historiographical perspective, lie sources whose incorporation within the official history has been oftentimes disregarded in favor of the accredited discourse. In a context marked by a tumultuous start of the twentieth century followed by the terrible circumstances of the two world wars, economic recessions and totalitarian regimes, alternative sources of information – such as memoirs – are barely acknowledged and interpreted, with many books destroyed, forbidden, and moved to secret library funds.

The article is based on the study of memoirs as a communication means through which the events of 1912-1913 have been documented and represented to the public, in order to explore the potentially historiographical and documentary value of such sources. As a main focus, the present analysis investigates an important premise regarding the reporting of the Balkan Wars through memoirs: Can these writings be tied in *realism* or are they rather a product of *constructivism*? Given the controversy arising in the last decades around memoirs, this appears to be a recurring question. Especially, when such sources are studied from a documentary point of view, issues as complex and blurred as the one at hand need to be considered.

Along with interpretations of the information and functionalist theories, another approach that can be applied to the study of memoirs as medium of communication is epistemology, a branch concerned with the nature and purpose of knowledge and focused on the questions: what is knowledge, how do we acquire knowledge and how do we know what we know? Within this theory, empiricism, rationalism, and constructivism are specific conceptions of acquisition knowledge. A relatively recent theory in communication science, constructivism, together with the concept of social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 2008), shows how knowledge, experience, communication, media, and culture contribute to the representation of reality (accurate or distorted) or in this case to its construction.

The study covers a selection of 13 memoirs, as follows: Constantin Argetoianu¹, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri* (*Memoirs. For those of Tomorrow. Reminiscences from the Times of those from Yesterday*); General I. Atanasiu, *Avântul țării* (*The Impetus of the Country*); Al. Brătescu-Voinești², *În slujba păcii* (*scrisori*) (*In the Cause of Peace – Letters*); General G.A. Dabija, *Amintirile unui atașat român în Bulgaria* (*Memories of a Romanian Attaché in Bulgaria*); Dimitrie Dimiu³, *Amintirile*

1 Constantin Argetoianu (1871-1952) – renowned politician of the 20th Century, prime minister of Romania (1939), lawyer and successful businessman. Descendant of an old aristocratic family, Argetoianu entered politics in 1913 with the Conservatives, but exchanged several parties during the interwar period.

2 Ioan Alexandru Brătescu-Voinești (1868-1946) – well known proser; awarded by the Romanian Academy in 1945.

3 Dimitrie Dimiu (1875-1927) – professor and editor-in-chief of *Ziarul științelor populare și al călătoriilor* (*Newspaper for Popular Science and Travelling*).

unui rezervist (*Memories of a Reservist*); V. Dragoșescu⁴, *Amintiri din războiu* (*Memories from War*); Constantin Gane⁵, *Amintirile unui fost holerici* (*Memories of a Former Cholera Sufferer*); Nicolae Iorga⁶, *Orizonturile mele. O viață de om așa cum a fost* (*My horizons. A man's life as it was*); Alexandru Marghiloman⁷, *Note politice* (*Political Notes*); Theodor Râșcanu⁸, *Spre Sofia cu Regimentul 8 de artilerie* (*Towards Sofia with the 8th Artillery Regiment*); Mihail Sadoveanu⁹, *44 de zile în Bulgaria* (*44 Days in Bulgaria*); Mihail Sadoveanu, *Războiul balcanic* (*The Balkan War*); George Topîrceanu¹⁰, *Jurnal de campanie* (*Campaign Journal*). From lawyers to professors, writers and journalists, generals and politicians, supporters of the government or of the opposition, the variety of narrative perspectives builds a great picture of the events. Moreover, most of these authors who have reported their experiences during the campaign in Bulgaria later developed into first-class writers of Romanian literature or famous public and political figures.

The balkan wars and their memoirs

The Balkan Peninsula – often referred to as the intersection of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa – finds its origins in the name of the Balkan Mountains, etymologically confirmed by the Turkish word *balkan*, which designates a “mountain range”. Ever since ancient times the identity of the Balkans has been dominated by their geographical location: the crossroads of several cultures, bridge between Latins and Greeks, between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, and at the same time, between Christianity and Islam. Among the numerous conflicts that shook this region, The Balkan Wars were two of the most important events that left their mark on the history of Europe in the beginning of the twentieth century, thus ending the five-century-rule of the Ottoman Empire in the peninsula. Labeled as a key precursor to World War I, due to the increased Serbian power seen as a threat by the two Central Powers Austria-Hungary and Germany, the two conflicts have been characterized as having changed the course of European and world history.

4 Dr. V. Dragoșescu – doctor, major.

5 Constantin Gane (1885-1962) – appreciated writer of prose and memoirs, awarded by the Romanian Academy in 1933. Romanian ambassador in Athens.

6 Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940) – literature critic and historian, documentarian, playwright, poet, encyclopedist, memoirist, professor; politician and Prime Minister of Romania between 1931-1932.

7 Alexandru Marghiloman (1854-1925) – politician, lawyer, leader of the Conservative Party, prime minister (1918).

8 Theodor Râșcanu (1888-1952) – writer, journalist, genealogist, and memoirist.

9 Mihail Sadoveanu (1880-1961) – novelist, short story writer, journalist and political figure. One of the most prolific Romanian writers, remembered for his historical and adventure novels, as well as for his nature and character descriptions.

10 George Topîrceanu (1886- 1937) – poet, short story writer, and humorist.

The First Balkan War started in October 1912, when the Balkan League attacked the Ottoman Empire, fighting for territories and populations under Ottoman sovereignty. Although with certain reservations, Romania declared its neutrality. The Balkan League won the Ottoman territories of Macedonia and most of Thrace and then came into conflict over the division of the prey. The Treaty of London (May 30, 1913) put an end to the First Balkan War, but the territorial disputes remained unresolved. As a result, on June 16, 1913 the Second Balkan War started when Bulgaria declared war against its former allies Greece and Serbia. This time, Romania intervened with military troops in Bulgaria. Shortly after the Romanian army entered Bulgaria heading towards the capital Sofia, without having had any confrontation with the Bulgarian troops, the initiators of the war called a truce. The peace treaty of Bucharest at the end of July obliged Bulgaria to give up the territories acquired in the First Balkan War. Romania obtained Southern Dobruja, occupied during the 1913 campaign (later restored to Bulgaria in 1940). The arrangements were, however, once again short-lived, given that only 10 months later, the conflict resumed with WWI.

As compared to the number of books written about Romania's 1848 Revolution and its War of Independence (1877-1878), the Balkan Wars have not received the same attention in the writings of the time. Followed almost immediately by one of the most significant moments in history – World War I – the eyewitnesses' memories of the Second Balkan War hardly managed to materialize in the form of memoirs. Although a significant number of Romanian writers were mobilized in the Bulgaria campaign, Romanian literature is not abundant in such records. Whether war diaries, letters, articles, reports or literature works, only a few books made their way through the printing press in the years before the First World War. After 1920 the number of published memoirs on the topic on the subject is visibly declining, leading to the general opinion that the military campaign of Romania was ignored. As shown by Ilie Rad in his analysis on Romanian war memoirs (1999), especially after the Second World War, "the official political line after 1944, which condemned the war, did not allow the study and valorization, possibly anthologization of this literature" (p. 95). Moreover, post-war times have brought a new obstacle to this approach: many books were destroyed or transferred to secret library funds. Insisting on the traditional Romanian-Bulgarian friendship cemented during the "socialist democratic era after 1944" (Rad, 1999, p. 93), the political regime has imposed this discourse – or lack thereof – which seems to have perpetuated to this day. Similar to a taboo topic, Romania's involvement in the Balkan Wars was "deliberately omitted from Romanian history" (Rad, 1999, p. 93), missing from history textbooks and possibly the collective memory of Romanians.

A view on memoirs

Ofentimes compared to fiction, memoirs can be circumscribed to a border literature genre, in an “uncertain and loose area”, along with other hybrid species such as journals and literary letters (Petrescu, Sîrbu, Manolescu, & Steinhardt, 1996). Similarly, it can be said that the war memoirs lie at the border of literature and history, due to its orientation towards documentation, although its historiographical value is highly contested. Ilie Rad (1999) traces out the characteristics of this genre, observing that among the various confessional species, the memoirs, and diaries in particular, are documents lacking the literary intent that could jeopardize the feeling of authenticity. These writings reveal rather a documentary, historiographical purpose, urged by the authors’ interest of reproducing the truth and arising from “our ‘concern for the truth’ against the so-called ‘text book heroism’” (Rad, 1999, p. 6), which we quite often come across with in historical accounts.

The diversity of opinions regarding memoirs has led to strong controversy, especially on the relationship between memory and truth, despite the appreciation given to this publishing genre in Europe and overseas. According to popular belief and expectation, memoirs must contain the truth, reported in the most precise manner possible. Generated through a recollection process, memoirs are, nevertheless, subject to inaccuracies and even deliberate distortions, brought about more or less intentionally by the authors’ aims (e.g. political interests and affiliations). Critics of the genre claim that memoirs are selective representations of memory and not of history, reflecting emotional, personal, and associative processes. While naturally, any memoir oscillates between subjectivity and objectivity, what we can affirm with confidence is, however, the testimonial essence of such writings. That desire to record and share a witnessed experience otherwise inaccessible to the reader is often originated from a need for justification or even a responsibility of the witness for relating the truth, as the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga pled: “If you have seen historical facts, you are obliged to keep them in the form in which they unfolded in front of you.” (Rad, 1999)

The different views on the accuracy of memoirs are, however, not a new topic. Ilie Rad records a statement of Camil Petrescu, who asserted that “All the heroic and effervescent like soda water war literature is false. False patriotic songs, false advancements with trumpets and drums as if going to a wedding. [...] The apologetic literature is a deception” (cited in Rad, 1999). On the other hand, many voices affirm the contrary, although they cannot deny the inherent subjectivity of memoirs. The often contentious mixture of fiction in memory and memoirs is not an unusual issue, especially in present times, marked by a growing criticism against the genre. However, as suggested by the newspaper *Gazeta Transilvaniei* (*The Transylvanian Gazette*) in an article from 1916, we can interpret memoirs as an “opportunity to know different details and circumstances about which one could not find anything

from other books of contemporary history”:

Such pages are specific to portraying historical life in such manners, that we will vainly seek in the rigid letter of official documents or in the drapery of the phrase often too solemn and adorned for the sake of some educational purposes [...] If memoirs are written without egocentric tendencies, which could urge their authors to coquet with the public opinion of posterity, their value as sources of information and guidance may be superior to fragments of official documents, withered among the archives' dust. (*The importance of memoirs in literature*, 1916, p. 1)

As far as the relationship between history, reality, and memory, it is important to note that memoirs do not claim to correct history or replace it, but to merely reproduce an individual point of view. The differences between the two genders remain evident. According to French historian Pierre Nora (1989) – renowned for his work on the subjects of identity and memory –, although far from being synonymous, memory (implicitly memoirs) and history are two radically different concepts. The author argues for the superiority of memory and strengthens Halbwachs's statements, according to which there are as many memories as there are groups and individuals. In this respect, against the history which “belongs to everyone and anyone”, memory and remembrance “transforms us into our own historians”. Nora identifies a sharp dichotomy between memory, which is always present and constantly evolving, and history with its always problematic and incomplete representations of past times; memory, which encourages remembrance and history, which is critical and analytical etc. His statements portray history as being “perpetually suspicious of memory and [trying] to suppress and destroy it”, while historiography is the one who “operates primarily by introducing doubt, by running a knife through the tree of memory and the bark of history.” However, memory – always oscillating between remembering and forgetting – remains highly “vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation” (Nora, 1989, pp. 8-10). The documentary value of memoirs and other forms of confessional writings remains undisputable in the eyes of many theorists, despite the fact that they “always require corroborations and verifications” (Iosifescu, 1971, p. 92).

Remembering – construction and reconstruction

The act of remembering holds a central role in researching the past through memoirs. An indispensable process to memoir writing, remembering is more than an act of communication and self-expression. Its function of information retrieval brings into the heart of retrospection a continuous search for answers. As Kihlstrom states, “[R]emembering is a problem-solving activity, where the problem is to give a coherent account of some past event, and the memory is the solution to that problem.” (Kihlstrom, 2007) In his view, the act of remembering should be

associated with the process of building a story and not that of reading a narrative from a book: "memory is not like a book that we read, but rather it's like a book that we write anew each time we remember." (*ibid.*) In this respect, another essential principle of memory, argued by Michael Ross (1989, 1994) and cited by Kihlstrom (2007), is the fact that "people construct their personal histories around tacit theories of themselves, and revise these histories as their self-concepts change." Stressing that "individual remembering does not take place in a social vacuum" (Kihlstrom, 2007), the ideas of memory theorists navigate around the concept of memory as a social construction in which the memory of the past is impelled not only by an individual's background, but inasmuch by the requirements of the present. In the case of the studied authors, it is only fair to presume that their memoirs are molded around internal and external expectations, such as the governmental context and their personal political affinities.

In the writing of memoirs, the author pursues a reconstruction undertaking which may naturally result in errors or distortions in the rendering of information. In this respect, it is important to set forth that memoirs are not simply representations recorded in the human mind, but they are based on a process that is socially constructed according to who we are and what we do. Therefore, such memory reconstructions involve personal narratives which are influenced by reflections of the self and of the society it interacts with. Berger & Luckmann argue that "the self is a reflected reality, which firstly mirrors the assumed attitudes towards oneself and significant others" (2008, p. 180). Moreover, memories record not only information about an event, but also its context and importance to the holder of memory (Kihlstrom, 2007). Because it most often commences from a remembrance of life stories, emotional states, or thoughts once had, and not from the immediate recording at the time of their occurrence, Silvan Iosifescu emphasizes that "[T]he documentary precision of the memorialist information is very uneven. The coefficient obviously increases if the case of memoirs or fragments of memories which recount the event after several decades. [...] The data and details fade, interferences, associations, and confabulations occur." (1971, p. 89)

Discussion

The premise of this article regarding the reporting of the Balkan Wars through memoirs was: Can these writings be tied in *realism* or are they rather a product of *constructivism*? As a starting point of the discussion, both directions appear to be valid. On the one hand, due to the direct participation and observation of the author, memoirs can represent accurate and faithful reflections of reality. On the other hand, however, it is this exact direct implication of the author, together with his individual imprint as eyewitness and selective interpretation of the information that leads to the hypothesis of reality construction in memoirs.

Increasingly more, the reality presented nowadays through various communication media is questionable. From the initial moment in which images were based on reality, the reality-image relationship has been reversed. In present times, reality is the one determined by photographs (Keller cited by Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010). Particularly in the discussion on war, the position of reality is always a problematic one and the truth is difficult to be established. In determining the reality and the "truth" of events, perceptions are vital. But they are not always directly accessible. War is one of the situations in which an intermediary is needed so that the events can be experienced. This mediation – understood as the use of a medium, in a social context, for the fulfillment of the communication process – allows us to partake of happenings otherwise limited by time, proximity, or other factors related to human nature. In their book on *War and Media*, Hoskins and O'Loughlin state that "To know of war, we must depend more on media than on our own experience in everyday life" (2010, p. 63), given our impossibility to participate in them directly. By entrusting this knowledge, whose procurement we assign to the media, we make ourselves, however, depend on media for knowing the truth, the reality of war. Regardless of the medium used to acquire these experiences, it is evident that events are represented, or better said re-presented, from a perspective and the inevitable question is "how were these representations generated?" The answer does nothing more but prove the difficulty with which we can talk about "media re-presenting an original and essential truth of war." (*ibid.*) At the same time, this mediation involves the susceptibility of perceptions to influence and pressure coming from individuals, media itself, and society. Hoskins and O'Loughlin note the sensitivity of memory to external factors: "How, what, and why individual, groups and societies remember and forget is being shaped by technological, political, social and cultural shifts that interpenetrate memory and memories, their makers, deniers and their archives." (*ibid.*, p. 104) Therefore, our perceptions of events such as wars depend not only on the intermediary of the communication process and his re-presentation, but also on how we relate with this intermediary.

Bruner (1986) distinguishes two types of knowledge ("modes of thought"): *paradigmatic* and *narrative*. The first, standing on the rational analysis of logical proof and empirical observations, seeks to explain the cause-effect relationship, to predict and control reality, and to create an objective unequivocal "truth". Narrative knowledge, on the other hand, is created and constructed with the aid of experiences and the meanings assigned to them in the process of clarifying the ambiguity and complexity of life. Therefore, the individual – an eminently narrative being – builds his stories, shaping them from the angle of his own interpretations, beliefs, intentions, expectations, and experiences. However, as also Worth (2005) points out, narrative knowing is "an essential ingredient to our humanity", because "[T]raditional forms of knowledge (knowing *how* and knowing *that*) are not sufficient to cover a third

kind of knowledge (knowing *what it is like*) in the way that storytelling can." An important observation for narrative knowledge is that the narrator represents only the first level at which constructions can influence a discourse. At a second level, the readers themselves interpret the story in a social context, which might confer different meanings to the reading.

Witnesses find themselves in the most pertinent position to recount events as they unfolded before their very eyes. Such people were able to have been physically (and not only) close to the happenings, and it is this proximity that grants witnesses the authority that we seek in accounts about the past. Their knowledge of the events is, still, likely limited to what they have seen. However, the authority attributed to witnesses is to a high degree empower the generation of the "truth" of events. Hoskins and O'Loughlin claim that "To be a witness is to tell somebody. It is in the telling that the 'truth' emerges." (2010, p. 69), just as John Durham Peters postulated the dual role of a witness: "the passive one of seeing and the active one of saying" (Peters, 2001, p. 709). Thus, witness is not only the one who took part in an event, but the one that completes the circle by recounting someone the experience of having been there and having seen the facts. By fulfilling this act of communication, a relationship of reciprocity between the witness and the receiver of the account arises. At the same time, the receiver becomes, in turn, a witness of the story. However, one of the arguments of this article is that this very act of recounting present in memoirs can facilitate constructions of reality.

In the attempt to discover the reality of a situation, we cannot avoid asking what realism is. But also through which means can realism be most reliably represented: a photo, a memoir, a movie? Although most able to give credibility and realism to an account, photos – though stronger than written information – fail to capture the story beyond its visible effects. A memoir brings a particular sense of truth and realism, but under the reserve of the author's subjectivity, from whose point of view the facts are presented. These characteristics are often shown as a contrast to autobiography, which among the confessional genres is often considered the "most authentic because it [speaks] or [writes] from an individual and deeply personal experience that [does] not claim to represent the experience of all those who suffered." (Guerin & Hallas, 2007, p. 7)

As an ideology, realism emphasizes the truthful and objective reflection of reality, using as instrument its careful observation. By convention, realism involves "a closeness between a sign (e.g. a media image) and the thing signified" (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010, p. 65). Often defined in contrast to constructivism, realism asserts that reality exists independently of its observers. However, including in the case of the Balkan Wars memoirs, we cannot deny that "realism is not actually given, but constructed by the form of the text and how the viewer engages with it. [...] The text is not objective, of course, but rather steers interpretation towards particular readings of the story (as we know, for every fact selected, another is not)." (*ibid.*, p. 66)

Constructivism defends knowledge generated by humans through the interaction between their experiences and ideas, and denies the existence of an *a priori* objective reality. The constructivist theorists claim that reality is rather constructed by individuals, just as Paul Watzlawick advocated that the environment is not discovered, but invented by man. Not only memoirs (as a result of the memoirist being a witness of the recorded events), but also historiography (allowing the possibility of a selective interpretation of the facts by both historians and readers) may naturally lead to constructions, slightly moving away from realism and factual objectivity.

Through the interpretation of the constructivist perspective, memoirs, although based on actual events, transcend this information. Thus, under the influence of expectations, knowledge, and beliefs, facts are materialized, as Bartlett put it, into a mixture of knowledge and deduction. As a result, we cannot equate *memory* only with the verb *to remember*, but we also have to include *to know* and, not least, *to believe* (Kihlstrom, 2007). In his work *Media and the construction of reality* (2002), Stefan Weber points out that “«media construct reality» *per se* and always have because it is not possible to do anything else, because the relationship of world and media is, in itself, constructive.”

Moreover, in order to understand another source in the origination of constructions in memoirs, we only have to consider the circumstances in which memories of events were recorded. By nature, military action takes place in an environment characterized by danger, confusion, and great physical tension, called by the war theorist Carl von Clausewitz *friction*: “Everything is very simple in war, but the simplest thing is difficult. These difficulties accumulate and produce a friction, which no man can imagine exactly who has not seen war.” (von Clausewitz, s.a., pp. 38-39) This friction, claims Clausewitz, “is the only conception which, in a general way, corresponds to that which distinguishes real war from war on paper” and “makes that which appears easy in war difficult in reality.” (*ibid.*) It is, therefore, expected that these conditions will have a strong impact on the participants and their perceptions about the events they witnessed. Thus, friction is transmitted further to recounts of the story and implicitly to the crystallized memoirs in the form of constructions. Some examples of friction in the case of the analyzed memoirs include situations such as the daily marches (reported to be over 10 km long) together with the scorching July heat, the rising dust, and scarce food, the constant tension of waiting for the enemy to show himself beyond the next hill, and a most terrifying fight for life against cholera towards the end of the campaign. The cholera episode occupies significant sections in the memoirs, some authors describing it as the true enemy of the Romanian troops. In the case of Topîrceanu’s *Campaign Journal* (Săndulescu, 1969) the fear for cholera develops into an obsession, cornering the author in every moment. An important fact regarding Topîrceanu’s journal, which remained undiscovered until 30 years after the author’s death, is that this is the only work (among those

analyzed) that was not meant to be published by the author. Therefore, it features bare records, written in a hurry, which reflect the poet's most personal thoughts: the insecurity, fear, and despair of a man threatened by a disease decimating the Romanian army.

As anticipated, the variety of perspectives in the memoirs results into dissimilarities in the reportings, which could be traced back to constructions of the authors. Individual features and contrasts can be distinguished in the understanding of the events, as well as at various levels of the texts: in the language, writing (orthography, punctuation), or stylistics. Such differences can be ascribed to the professional background of the authors, their personal attitude towards war and this campaign in particular, and nonetheless the difficulty of their experience in the war. All of these factors come to validate the existence of constructivism in memoirs and lead to the conclusion that the events have been perceived differently, through the angle of the memoirists' personalities and experiences. Another source of contrasts rises from the point of entry in Bulgaria. Therefore, the regiments heading to Sofia through the north-west of Bulgaria report their initial impressions of having entered a "desert house whose owner is gone" (Râșcanu, 1914, p. 31) and note the awfully gloomy landscapes in harsh language. On the other hand, those entering Bulgaria through Southern Dobruja face a significantly distinctive experience, being spared of the continuous threat of cholera. An example is Dr. V. Dragoșescu's book in which he mentions families visiting, walks in the surroundings, parties and excellent food available. The differences between regiments are especially visible in their camp life, accounts about the food and equipment of the troops being very contrasting. The western army units denounced poor eating conditions and the lack of supplies (both food and medication). Sadoveanu even dedicated an entire chapter under the name "Shortages" to describe the poor conditions of the campaign.

It sometimes seems incredible how memoirs – some recorded with remarkably detailed descriptions of the events, surroundings, and human characters encountered – creates an image of events (completely unfamiliar to our experience) only through the memoirist's words and most often without requiring or possessing a material image such as a photograph. How and what is remembered of the past remains, however, influenced by not only the events themselves and the context surrounding them, but by their significance at the moment of recollection. A principle applicable to memoirs as well is argued by Berger and Luckmann, who describe the constructivist mechanisms of memory and point out that forgetting is more difficult than remembering:

Since it is relatively easier to invent things that never happened than to forget those that actually did, the individual may fabricate and insert events wherever they are needed to harmonize the remembered past with the reinterpreted one.

Since it is the new reality, rather than the old that now appears dominantly plausible to him, he may be perfectly “sincere” in such a procedure – subjectively, he is not telling lies about the past, but only bringing it in line with the *truth* that now, necessarily, embraces both the present and the past. (2008, p. 215)

Conclusion

The matter of realism and constructivism in the perception and recounting, particularly regarding war memoirs, remains a difficult subject to pin down. Preserving history through the eyes of those who lived it, memoirs cannot be idealized to the point of expecting lack of bias and of constructivism, just in the way that some entirely realistic writings would probably not arouse our interest. On the other hand, even historical accounts were generated by people, themselves guided by beliefs, hopes, experiences etc. Beyond the discussions on memoirs, it should be noted that every story, recorded either as history or memoirs, incorporates a viewpoint, but never all perspectives. From this respect, no discourse can provide a complete representation of an event. Only an inclusion of complementary discourses and sources can lead to the balanced knowledge of a subject.

In addition, the traumatic experiences of war are themselves very difficult to report. Despite this fact, expectations from those who report such events are high: they are asked for objective, balanced, authentic, and realistic stories, forgetting that no means of communication can ensure the long-awaited certainty of the public in the represented information. In this pursuit for the truth it is often overlooked that, most times, we gain knowledge of the war reality as it was felt by those who have fought in one. Despite the ineluctable subjectivity of memoirs and their questionable veracity – born from the intrinsic involvement of the memoirist in the accounted event – the value of these writings emerges precisely from the authenticity of the story, from the fact that the information originates in a unique perspective, which only that person can render.

Notwithstanding, developments in research and science have brought into question the very concept of constructivist realism, therefore bringing to our attention the possibility of establishing new directions of research, arising from the connectivity relationship of realism and constructivism, rather than only their antithesis.

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