

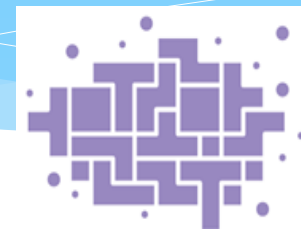
# Family History and the ‘Conspiracy of Silence’: gaps and falsehoods in oral history testimonies of children born of war (CBOW)

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PROJEKTI

# Who are CBOW?

- \* **CBOW definition:** a child born to a local parent and a member of a foreign military force.
- \* This is a phenomenon, and also now a field of study, that spans continents as well as contexts.
- \* After the war, these children are often **stigmatized**. They experiences a stigma related to their ethnic or racial origins, stigmas related to their mothers 'loose morals,' and, crucially, for many a stigma of having been born of an 'enemy' soldier and a 'collaborator.'



Wedding day, 1946 (M10, Riga, 26  
February 2018)

# WWII CBOW

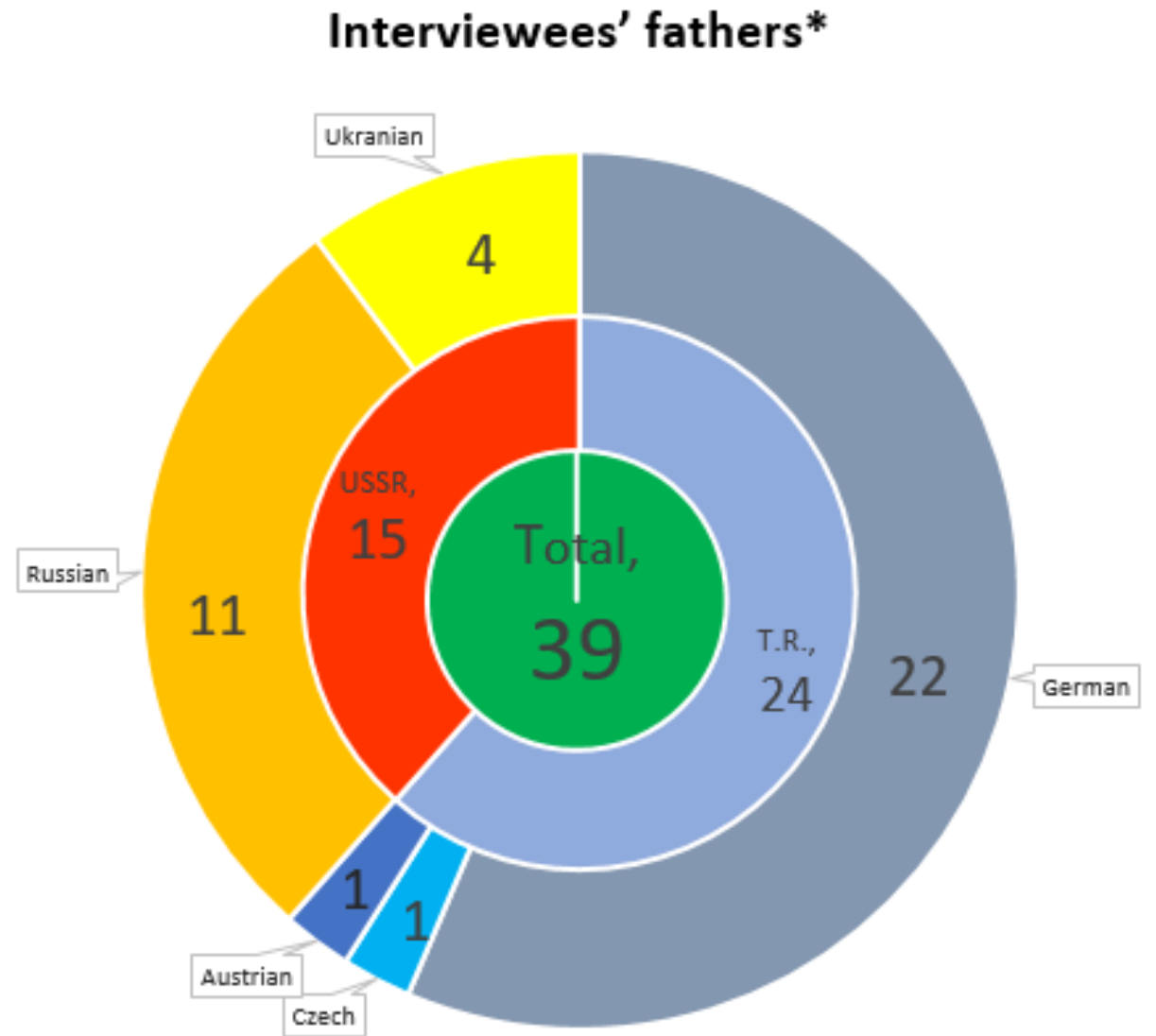
- \* For the purposes of my study, for lack of a better approach, I have come to use the terms “Third Reich” (TR) and “Soviet” (USSR) CBOW to speak of children of not only German and Russian soldiers but also those of other nationalities serving in those armed forces.
- \* Little is known of CBOW in post-communist Europe.



TR soldier with a Latvian nurse; Source: The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (OML)

# Participants

- \* 39 interviews total
- \* 24 w/ 'Third Reich' CBOW
- \* 15 w/ USSR CBOW
- \* 33 w/ CBOW
- \* 6 w/ direct relatives



# 'Conspiracy of Silence' in the West: the Social Suppression of Memory

- \* TR CBOW in the West, as well as, USSR CBOW for that matter, have been shown to have psychological, psychosomatic and also physical problems.
- \* The **situational mechanism**, the social pressure, for caregivers to conspire in silence in the private sphere often comes to inhibit the transmission of TR family memories in the West.
- \* Such social pressures results in **socially-suppressed** memories in the public and often the private spheres.

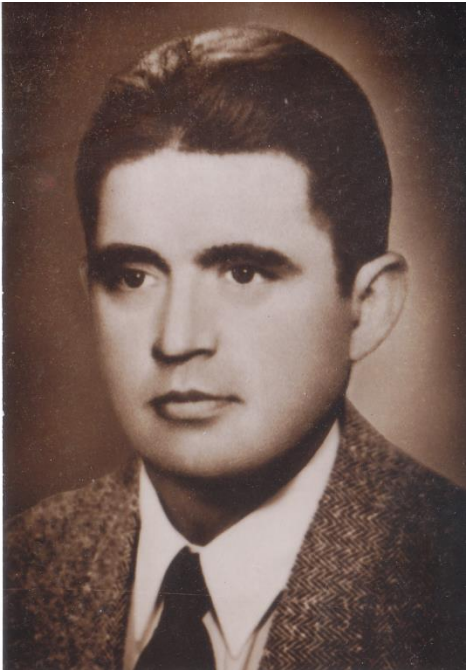
# 'Conspiracy of Silence' in the East: the Oppression of Memory

- \* As a foundation for our discussion, we can note that in post-war Latvia **fear and terror was all-encompassing**: for example, of all my participants, TR and USSR CBOW, 71% reported Soviet state-led repressions in their families, including 66,6% of the USSR CBOW testimonies.
- \* After the war, with the second Soviet occupation, the harshest Soviet repressions occurred. While I have not found any definitive proof that the regime conducted repressions against TR CBOW or families for this sole fact, repressions were so widespread that fear as a topic is prevalent in all of my interviews.

# The Oppression of Memory (Cont.)

- \* Of my TR subjects show direct attempts made to conceal CBOW identities from the state. Examples include fake names on BC, grandparents positioned and registered as parents, mother's first husband (who had died, were lost in the war or were in Siberia at the time) are registered as the father, step-fathers positioned and registered as the real father, or in one extreme case where a child was hidden for two years before being registered (during this interview, we came to realize that the birth year the CBOW had cited was likely false- adjusting it by two years not only came to explain the story of her mother's pregnancy but also why the 'child's' first memories were from "the age of two").

# Erasures and Augmentation of Cultural Memory



The SD uniform has been photo-shopped out in the US and returned to LV.



Of all my subjects, the only photo with mother and TR Father. Small, grainy, never augmented.



Photo of mothers first husband. Insignia has been coloured over.



Insignia has been cut out.



# Conclusions

- \* Essentially, we may say that while TR CBOW and their families in the West had their memories **socially suppressed**, in occupied Latvia they were primarily **institutionally oppressed**.



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# Thank you for your attention and I appreciate your comments!



[www.CHIBOW.org](http://www.CHIBOW.org)

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