Voices of Dissent: Case Study of a Digital Archive of Testimonies of Political Oppression

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Abstract : The "Voices in Dissent" initiative aims at collecting and making available in a digital format, testimonies, letters, and other narratives produced by victims of political oppression from different geographical spaces across the Atlantic. By recovering silenced voices behind the official narratives, this open-access online database will provide indispensable tools for rewriting the history of authoritarian regimes from the margins as memory debates continue to provoke controversy among academic and popular transnational circles. In providing an extensive database of non-hegemonic discourses in a variety of political and social contexts, the project will complement the existing European and Latin-American studies, and invite further interdisciplinary and trans-national research. This digital resource will be available to academic communities and the general audience and will be organized geographically and chronologically. "Voices in Dissent" will offer a first comprehensive study of these personal accounts of persecution and repression against determined historical backgrounds and their impact on collective memory formation in contemporary societies. The digitalization of these texts will allow to run metadata analyses and adopt comparatist approaches for a broad range of research endeavors. Most of the testimonies included in our archive are testimonies of trauma: the trauma of exile, imprisonment, torture, humiliation, censorship. The research on trauma has now reached critical mass and offers a broad spectrum of critical perspectives. By putting together testimonies from different geographical and historical contexts, our project will provide readers and scholars with an extraordinary opportunity to investigate how culture shapes individual and collective memories and provides or denies resources to make sense and cope with the trauma. For scholars dealing with the epistemological and rhetorical analysis of testimonies, an online open-access archive will prove particularly beneficial to test theories on truth status and the formation of belief as well as to study the articulation of discourse. An important aspect of this project is also its pedagogical applications since it will contribute to the creation of Open Educational Resources (OER) to support students and educators worldwide. Through collaborations with our Library System, the archive will form part of the Digital Commons database. The texts collected in this online archive will be made available in the original languages as well as in English translation. They will be accompanied by a critical apparatus that will contextualize them historically by providing relevant background information and bibliographical references. All these materials can serve as a springboard for a broad variety of educational projects and classroom activities. They can also be used to design specific content courses or modules. In conclusion, the desirable outcomes of the "Voices in Dissent" project are: 1. the collections and digitalization of political dissent testimonies; 2. the building of a network of scholars, educators, and learners involved in the design, development, and sustainability of the digital archive; 3. the integration of the content of the archive in both research and teaching endeavors, such as publication of scholarly articles, design of new upper-level courses, and integration of the materials in existing courses.
Keywords : digital archive, dissent, open educational resources, testimonies, transatlantic studies
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