Reviews and Annotations
Рецензии

MIGRATING MEMORIES

Migrating Memories 2: His Story, Her Story, Their Stories edited by Rodica Albu Brno/Nis 2010

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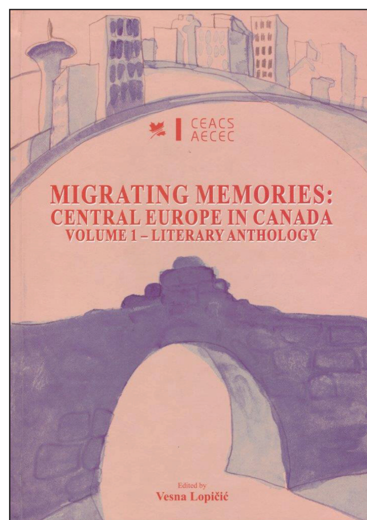

The first volume dedicatedly edited by Vesna Lopesic focuses on the writings of immigrant writers of Central European descent in Canada, while the second volume, which is the subject of this review, outlines the oral history of the immigrants as represented in their interviews with members of CEACS research team. The volume, Migrating Memories 2. Oral Histories, painstakingly and lovingly edited by Prof. Rodica Albu from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, reflects the work and findings of the oral history team of the CEACS diaspora research group.

The objectives of this long-term project as highlighted in Rodica Albu's introduction are to:

(1) create a database of recorded interviews with immigrants originating in the countries of the ex-Communist Central-European geopolitical space;

(2) use this database as a source of empirical data for further studies of an interdisciplinary and comparative nature or for studies tackling the issues from different perspectives (e.g., demographic dynamics, literacy, adult education, integration, socio-ethnic networks in Canada; immigrants as mediators of Europe-Canada contacts); and

(3) (tentatively) in the long run, detect a well-documented typology of immigration, specific to the analysed geopolitical space. (p. VII)

According to the definition of oral history presented on the website of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic "[…] the main priority of oral history

is not the collection of information about a historical event – it is the narrator himself and his individual story, his emotions, the decisions he made in complicated and everyday situations, his personal motivations, and so on". (p.79-80)

The approach used by the team members was fairly flexible: the interviewees were free to choose the language of the interview and to speak their minds freely, without any constraints of a linguistic or ideological nature, which may account for some differences in the formatting of the interviews of different teams.

At the same time, it was equally clear to different teams that as it has been aptly put by Rodica Albu, "While exploring the dynamics of a diasporic ethnic community, one cannot separate the socio-anthropological from the linguistic perspectives. Acculturation stages … usually go hand in hand with their expression in language". (p. 162). Whereas most of the interviews were conducted with individual immigrants, the Slovenian researcher, Urska Strle, chose a different approach – interviewing groups of related people.

It will hardly be an overstatement to describe the project as unique in terms of its scope of research, of the cooperation of the research teams of different nationalities as well as of its theoretical and practical implications. The book undoubtedly may serve as a very important tool for those who study Canadian history and politics as well as for anthropologists, sociologists, historians, linguists, psychologists and experts in different domains of culture studies (especially those to do with identity studies of any nature}. Besides, as an ongoing project it is sensitive to further areas of research. While the approach of different teams understandably was not uniform, the volume as a whole creates a remarkably coordinated impression – with different approaches complementing each other. Thus, the Bulgarian team adopted a practical approach. It has made a selection of six interviews illustrating the most diverse experiences of people whose ages range from 25 to 76. The interviews recorded by Diana Yankova were later processed by Alexandra Glavanakova-Yaneva and Andrei Andreev. The practical and factual stance with some theoretical conclusions was adopted by the Czech team. According to K. Kunesova's comments, the Czechs appear to have adjusted better than other immigrants, with the surprising conclusion in one of the interviews – "The quicker the adjustment the easier the loss of identity… was the case with the Czechs."

On the other hand, Milena Kostic of the Serb team selected a 'well-entrenched' theoretical framework for analysis, namely, Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, which was successfully applied to the analysis of appropriate interviews illustrating the six divisions suggested by Bennett and grouped in "Ethnocentric Stages" (Denial, Defence/Reversal and Minimization) and "Ethnorelative Stages" (Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration). In contrast, the Slovak, Yana Javorcikova, chose to emphasize immigration as a linguistic problem and analysed the break-down of its specific influences on such linguistic areas as grammar, vocabulary, morphology and lexicography.

All sets of interviews are preceded by an overview of different waves of immigration to Canada and a description of different ways of preserving the identity (church meetings, social clubs and other community activities).

Unlike the United States, where the general policy of the "melting pot" amalgamates all immigrant cultures, the Canadian official policy is that of incorporation ("salad bowl", "cultural mosaic"), i.e. of multiculturalism. The so-called Canadian mosaic means encouraging the preservation of cultural diversity. Probably this stance accounts for the support given by the former Canadian government to this unique project.

The policy of multiculturalism has rubbed off on many immigrants who do not feel threatened or discriminated against in Canada in any way and make favourable comparisons between their immigrant status in Canada and in other countries where they have also lived.

One of the main focuses of the interviews is, unsurprisingly, a switch to Canadian identity or recognition of an inability to do so. The (in many case desired) new identity materializes in different degrees for different interviewees. It determines the choice of the language of the interview, incidences of linguistic choices, such as code-switching and code-mixing, as well as a shift of values or its absence, e.g. the attitude to the immigrants' new home and the prism through which they regard their old home country. In many cases the shuttling experience between different identity layers – situated identities – has become a way of life for the respondents who feel Canadian or Czech, Serb, Bulgarian, Slovene, etc. depending on the setting. By and large, most interviewees acknowledge that though they are not "pur laine" Canadians and feel more at home with other first generation immigrants than with the people they call real Canadians, (see, "my friends were all of other nationalities" – Kalina Grigorova, Bulgarian; "my son's wife is Canadian" –Dragica Spehar, Croatian) they are no longer completely Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian, etc. The degree of Canadianness depends on age and sometimes education, and also on how long they have been living in Canada. Significantly, newer arrivals are sometimes perceived as more Central European, e.g. "more Bulgarian". At the same time, immigrants, even if they moved to Canada as children may "revert to old values" or restore their old identity (See S. Borisov, born 1983, talking about his ethnically Bulgarian girl friend who came to Canada at the age of 4 – p.18).

The material links to the old country are especially salient on holidays, mostly Easter and Christmas, even for self-declared atheists. These links are manifested through language and food. In the words of a Hungarian immigrant: "I cook Hungarian meals and I read Hungarian books. At the same time I love Canada too". (p. 144)

Whereas home values have a nostalgic appeal on the new soil, regardless of the immigrants' attitude to them in the old country, Canadian holidays, such

as Thanksgiving or St Patrick's Day, are often one of the ways to adapt and adjust.

Hence, the interviews may be analysed in terms of the fluid identity theory (similar terms – plural or multiple identity). One of its proponents defines fluid identity as consisting of " […] innumerable defining characteristics that make up the whole of who we are in any given moment. These fragments of self include our sexuality, gender, and sense of belonging to a particular culture, nation, religion, family, or some other group. Our identity includes our looks, personality, beliefs and fears and is an unfolding story (my emphasis – IP)…continually recast in the course of experience." (R. Sennett, "Street and office – two sources of identity", in Hutton, W., & Giddens, A. (eds.) *On the Edge – Living with Global Capitalism*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2000: 177).

Those different identity layers may be sociolinguistically described as **nesting** dolls syndrome, and the dominant, overarching identity in each case involving these first-generation Canadians of different descent may differ depending on the degree of adjustment. For most Central European immigrants – no matter whether they are Romanian, Bulgarian, Slovak, Hungarian or Slovene – this declared and desired identity is Canadian albeit with a strong ethnic undercurrent of different degrees, e.g.: "We live a half-Canadian … life. We are proud Canadians and proud Croatians" (p. 57); You're somewhere halfway (56); "Slovenia is my mother, Canada my wife" (p.402); "First and foremost I am Canadian and my ethno-cultural heritage is Hungarian" (p.124)

It is difficult to count the identity layers but certain differences have emerged between new Anglophones and new Francophones. Some interviewees, who adopted French rather than English, as is the case for many Romanians because of the linguistic and cultural bonds, redefine themselves as Québécois rather than simply Canadian. Others go even further and emphasize their affiliation with the place they live in rather than adopt a more general all-Canadian identity, typical of Anglophones. Thus, a Bulgarian, Kalina Grigorova, thinks she'd rather call herself Montrealaise, than anything else, because she lives in Montreal.

The interviewees were very conscious of new attitudes and values, different to those of their home countries. Those are illustrated by specific examples. Thus, one of the respondents was amazed that a professor offered to drive her, a mere student, to the university and back and ran errands for her, which would be unimaginable in her home country (p. 14).

Another respondent noted that men waiting in line for a bus are unlikely to give seats to women, something she was used to at home. (p. 191) Such attitudes, which take some getting used to, are rooted in the common North American value of equality and may be shocking to new immigrants during the first stages of their acculturation.

According to R. Albu, “the Canadian mosaic […] leads to the same melting pot, especially from the third generations onward, irrespective of the labels proposed by the official discourse. In the long run, the descendents of our interviewees, too, will turn into “pure laine” Canadians”. (p. XII) That may very well be the case, but the strategic value of this unique project is that: “Talking about Canada turns into a dialogue with Canada”. (Kveta Kunesova’s introduction to the Czech interviews, p.80) Without doubt, the findings also make up sensitive material for further research from different viewpoints, such as philosophy of language, sociology of language, cultural and linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, psychology and psycholinguistics.

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