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Women's Narratives on Learning through Migration

The article focuses on the migration experiences of women as a source for research into learning. The theoretical framework for the phenomenological research comprises biographical and transitional learning, i.e., biographical learning that takes place at life transitions. This kind of learning is considered as a process that occurs during experiences in everyday life that involve the reconstruction of identity, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Transitional learning theory is used because migrations represent important life passages that are complex heterogeneous experiences, creating possibilities for learning which are experienced in various ways by different individuals. The research is empirical, being based on the analysis of selected narratives of women who have immigrated to or emigrated from Slovenia. From the narrations themes are inductively designed that define learning as a cumulative process. The analysis of each thematic section identifies the strategies of learning and the types of knowledge involved. On the basis of these findings, a model for interpreting migration-related biographical learning is formed.

Keywords: migration, biographical learning, women, (auto)biographical method, narration.

Ženske pripovedi o učenju skozi izkušnje migracije

Članek obravnava učenje in oblikovanje identitete pri ženskah z izkušnjo migracije. Teoretični okvir za fenomenološko empirično raziskavo temelji na biografskem in tranzicijskem učenju. Migracije predstavljajo pomembne segmente življenja, ki prinašajo kompleksne in heterogene izkušnje, kakor tudi možnosti za učenje, ki jih posamezniki uresničujejo na različne načine. Empirična raziskava temelji na analizi pripovedi izbranih žensk. Naše ugotovitve potrjujejo obstoj štirih strategij tranzicijskega učenja, ki so pomembne za izgradnjo znanja. S pomočjo le-teh smo izoblikovali model za interpretacijo z migracijami povezanega biografskega učenja.

Ključne besede: migracije, biografsko učenje, ženske, (avto)biografska metoda, pripovedi.

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1. Introduction

Migrations represent important life passages that create possibilities for learning. In our analysis, this kind of learning has been defined using the biographical (Kožar Rosulnik & Ličen 2015) and transitional (Tedder & Biesta 2007, Alheit & Dausien 2002, Wildermeersch & Stroobants 2009) learning theory. The theory of biographical learning is derived from social constructivism. Biographical learning is a holistic development which changes an individual through a combination of processes such as thinking, feeling, and acting. Through the learning process, experiences, knowledge, skills, norms, new ways of thinking, feeling and acting, as well as the construction of an identity – all may form or transform a person. In examining biographical learning during experienced events, various conceptualizations are used, among them transitional learning; this is examined by Stroobants (Wildermeersch & Stroobants 2009) in her research on the transitions between employment and unemployment. For the interpretation of biographical learning during migration, we use in our research the model of transition learning; this is understood as a type of biographical learning that occurs at some kind of transition; this last term is used to mean a biographical disjunction, i.e., a period when the individual is faced with unpredictable changes in the dynamics between the course of his/her life and its context. This theory introduces four different strategies of learning that come into play when one faces new situations, that is, during integration into new sociocultural settings, either by adapting new social roles, or by experiencing passages through different life phases. These strategies are: adaptation, growth, distinction (the development of an individual life style), and resistance (Wildermeersch & Stroobants 2009).

In order to categorise the types of knowledge that are created because of the migrating experience, we follow P. Tynjälä (2013), who classifies knowledge as follows: theoretical or conceptual knowledge, practical or experiential knowledge, self-regulative knowledge, and sociocultural knowledge.

The purpose of our research is to find out how a woman who has been exposed to migration uses various learning strategies to construct her knowledge and (re)construct her identity. We were interested in finding out which types of knowledge we encounter given various strategies. Moreover, we wanted to highlight an area of research that has long been neglected, i.e., women as the agents of migration processes. In the most recent decade they have become a subject of research interest in the Slovenian area, particularly with the efforts of feminist researchers (Cukut Krilić 2009, Milharčič Hladnik & Mlekuž 2009, Lukšič-Hacin & Mlekuž 2010, Antić Gaber 2011, Vidmar Horvat 2014).

This research was designed with the help of the principles of phenomenological methodology and grounded theory. By analyzing the selected narratives, we tried to find out what the life of our respondents was like in their countries of origin, what their motives for migration were, how they perceived the crossing

of borders, how migration influenced their (non-)self-empowerment, what their lives are like in the new country (society), and how – according to their accounts – their identities have changed. On the basis of these data we attempted to create a model for the interpretation of biographical migration-related learning, and thus point to the importance of knowledge that is generated through the migration experience.

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2. Method

Migration experiences in daily practices create challenges which we – while wanting to phenomenologically[1] understand personal experience as a source of learning – often analyze with the use of ethnographic and (auto)biographic methods (Eastmond 2007, Trifanescu 2013).

The empirical part of our research follows the principles of the phenomeno-logical approaches to researching personal experiences (Moustakas 1994, Price 2013). Our research, which was conducted in 2015, included 27 women. These women left Slovenia and emigrated to Great Britain, the Netherlands, United Arab Emirates, Luxemburg, India, Canada, Belgium, Ethiopia, Germany, Cyprus, Denmark, Sweden, and Japan. Women who came to Slovenia, left France, Spain, Ukraine, Russia, Kosovo, Canada, Nigeria, and Finland. Their ages were between 24 and 76. For most of our interlocutors, this was not their only migration experience.

Of our interviewees, 3 finished high school; most had been educated at the university level, and 4 had a Master's degree and 4 of them had PhDs. The fact that most (24 of 27) were educated at the university level could be seen as a limitation in this research, as we do not know what the results would be if we had had a more dispersed sample, in terms of women's formal education. All the women were purposely selected with the help of the snowball sampling method (also known as chain sampling).

We collected our data in two ways, using:
(a) narrative autobiographical interviews (4 face-to-face and 1 by Skype) and
(b) electronic interviews (22 interviews by e-mail).

A narrative interview is an unstructured or partially structured detailed interview that is frequently used in social science or migration studies research (Edwards & Holland 2013, Milharčič Hladnik 2007, Pajnik & Bajt 2009, Petitmengin 2006). We were particularly interested in the migration experiences and migration-related practices, so we prepared some guiding questions.

Since our sample also included women who left Slovenia, conducting face-to-face interviews with the complete selection of women was impossible. Hence we decided to collect our data also via e-mail; this is a research procedure that had been used before (Ramšak 2004, Meho 2006, Milharčič Hladnik 2009,

Ratislavová & Ratislav 2014). With this method the research subjects themselves create the conditions, the time, the depth and the scope of the communication, all adjusted to whatever makes them feel most comfortable. This technique gives the respondents the necessary time and privacy, as well as the opportunity to additionally reflect on their thoughts and edit what they have written. We corresponded with all via e-mail, as this enabled us to ask for additional explanations.

This technique of data-collecting has its shortcomings. We faced the challenge of creating a proper kind of trust, as this is much easier to achieve with direct contact. Despite our efforts to gain trust, some women did not want to open up in the e-mail interviews when they wrote about their life paths and past experiences. Some answered with only one word or a brief sentence, so we could not have any insight into their lives before migrating.

When the documentation was collected (autumn 2015), we analyzed it and defined thematic sections[2] based on the learning timeline (before and after migration), and on the change in personal status of these women (sense of self-empowerment, sense of one's own identity):
(1) life in the country of origin and the decision to migrate
(2) travel abroad to a different life
(3) life in the new society
(4) change of personal status: (non) self-empowerment
(5) process of change of identity: multiple belonging

Within each of these thematic sections, we searched for characteristics and then classified the strategies of learning and the types of knowledge. We introduce these findings in separate thematic sections.

3. Results

3.1 The decision to migrate: multiplicity of motives

Most of the time, the reason for migrating was connected with several factors, and this also influenced the knowledge that these factors help create. The respondents often listed as a key factor the connection of the desire to obtain an education and/or to work and/or to pursue a sports career with the desire to live with their partners. "I decided to move to pursue the study of classical singing. I very much wanted to broaden my knowledge outside Slovenia, somewhere in Europe. The fact that my then boyfriend was Dutch contributed to me moving to the Netherlands." (Klavdija).[3] "As a skier, I got a chance to join a university team and continue with my sports career as well as my education. This was possible in Slovenia, as I'd have to set aside one thing or the other. I moved together with my husband who also skied and continued skiing on our university team." (Tanja).

Not all the respondents linked their migration with their relationships and marital life. Mateja and Sonja decided to move because they were unemployed. Each migrated alone.

Apart from the explicitly noted rational and emotional migration-related factors, personal characteristics also co-influenced the decision to move. These characteristics were: curiosity, openness, courage, a desire to learn, self-confidence, adjustability and the like. In a few cases only, the motive behind migrating was explicitly connected with economic reasons (despite the fact that we are experiencing an economic crisis and difficult job market conditions). This low proportion goes against the so called classical migration theories' presuppositions; these include, e.g., the push-and-pull migration model, which has been among researchers of migration a kind of standard classical model. According to this model, individuals are supposed to migrate particularly for economic reasons (Anthias 2000).

For the respondents, the learning in the pre-migration phase was mostly connected with the gathering of general information: about the country and the city to which they were about to move, about the economic and political situation, the climate, culture, and employment possibilities. They started learning a new language, or they revised the linguistic knowledge they had already acquired. The learning topics and themes were mostly connected with the motives behind their migration. It is interesting to note that those women who went abroad for purposes of work put less effort into their preparations for their life abroad.

The pre-migration learning process of our respondents was also influenced by the type of migration with regard to periods of time. When migration was only temporary, there was less learning and less adaptation going on; when migration was long-term or permanent, the desire and motivation to learn, to collect information in the pre-migration time was stronger.

Almost all of our respondents had either visited or had even (for a short period of time) lived in the country they moved to. This way, they gradually familiarized themselves with the new way of life, they collected the necessary information out in the field. The respondents gathered most of the information they needed prior to moving via the internet, or with the help of acquaintances, relatives, and friends who lived in the country they wanted to move to. One of the respondents pointed out the importance of experience. Getting information over the internet, or visiting a specific place as a tourist, meant something different from the actual life in a foreign country.

I've always wanted to live here and that was because my idea of this country was completely unreal. Visiting a place as a tourist is nothing like actually living in a foreign country, leading an actual life there. However, you don't really know that unless you try. I was lured by false glitter. I'd never seen misery until I came here. By misery I mean people being uneducated, class divisions, as well as the carefree attitude of these people when they don't do their jobs properly and yet confidently ask for payment. I thought

that anyone could succeed. Success is sadly closely linked to the nationality listed in your passport -USA, Canada, UK, Australia. (Ida, Bachelor's degree in Economics; moved with her Egyptian husband to the United Arab Emirates).

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In some case, we also noticed a non-learning, or an unwillingness to learn. The latter was most frequently connected with dissatisfaction caused by the move to a new country. The non-learning happened when the immigrants made their employer responsible for their move, and later on, for settling in a new environment.

3.2. Across the Border to a Different Life

In general and in various writings, the concept of the border has been explained and interpreted quite variously (Friedman 2007); in our analysis it is postulated as a state border. Our respondents experienced the crossing of the border merely in relation to bureaucratic procedures that followed their migrating. Those who migrated within the EU did not face serious problems, while some others were exposed to various procedures. This implies a great deal of learning related to those procedures. Our respondents mostly perceived them as an obstacle and not as learning experience. Julija, who moved to Slovenia from the Ukraine, was told about her need to marry in order to gain rights to live in Slovenia and to choose her citizenship:

> Regarding citizenship: unfortunately, Slovenia does not have an agreement with my country, namely, I have to renounce my citizenship and only then I can get Slovenian citizenship. The procedure is long-lasting and calls for a lot of documentation, a lot of nerves, and lastly, a lot of money. (Julija).

Renouncing her primary citizenship could prove to be problematic if Julija wanted to return to her homeland, as she would need to once again face the complicated and tedious procedures of re-gaining her Ukrainian citizenship.

In some cases, the bureaucratic procedures were so long and mentally demanding that some of our respondents did not even choose to go through with them.

Migration is a special kind of dislocation that requires adjustments to self-image and influences the forming of self-knowledge. Our respondents mostly experienced fear, excitement, loss of security, pride, curiosity, joy, as well as sadness and a feeling of being lost. These feelings were really strong and influenced the women's perception of themselves. The respondents were therefore creating knowledge about themselves. They mostly talked about their feelings:

> After living for twelve years in a small village and then moving to a large international city, I felt fear and loss of safety. Great excitement, joy and curiosity, aroused by

everything new, unknown, a desire to be independent. Also, I felt proud that I succeeded. And I was in love / … / that too goes with it. I feel that for two years I kind of tried to find myself, I was drifting here and there but then slowly everything in me started to calm down. Such a step is a mirror of your own personality and personal growth, which is a wonderful thing, but sometimes also something hard. A feeling that every slip, as well as every achievement, in such situation is bigger and stronger. Everything seems extreme. (Klavdija).

Klavdija talked about her feelings related to her failing a few times. These feelings were intensified in the process of migration. If the same event (falling in love, marriage, unsuccessful studies and the like) had happened in her home environment, her feelings would not have been as intense as they were during migration (which she defined as a two-year process).

Ida felt lost and unprepared for life in a totally different cultural environment. She felt fear, confusion and pressure. Her self-image lost continuity:

To be an independent person in Slovenia and to start operating in a new country is extremely difficult. In an instant, you feel like you know nothing and everything you know cannot be applied to your new life, and keeps getting more and more complicated. You feel incompetent and dumb because you are not open to and ready for all the 'niceness' that is happening to you on a daily basis. (Ida).

Some of the women we selected also spoke about their feeling of social lone-liness. Migration is an event that cuts through social structures and forces one to re-establish one's relations. Elira initially attributed her loneliness to a sensitive phase of her life, related to her age, as well as to the change of her living environment: "Once you are done with high school, it is more difficult to connect, especially in a foreign environment." (Elira).

With our respondents, leaving the safe environment and entering the unknown triggered intense emotions and sensations as well as the self-reflection which is an essential part of biographical learning. They experienced feelings of fear, incompetence, inferiority, sadness, loneliness, but also curiosity, joy, and enthusiasm. Stressful events related to their move cut into the continuity of self-image and caused its change. It was mostly those women who considered themselves to be indecisive and shy that perceived in their narration a changing attitude towards self-perception. After crossing the border and defeating fear and formal barriers, the women started perceiving themselves as brave and proud. The crossing of the border not only brought formal knowledge but also – through (self-)reflection and personal growth – knowledge about oneself, or, in other words, a reconstructed identity.

3.3. Life in a New Society

By moving to a new environment, the women faced many challenges: learning a new language, facing new, unknown situations, learning new roles, lack of social networks and loneliness. Their strategies of adjustment and of integration played out on various levels, and hence we will analyze them according to various sub-thematic sets.

3.3.1. Language Learning

Almost all the women pointed to language learning as an important, in some cases even the most difficult, part of their integration into the new society. The reasons for this difficulty were several and they differed. Most of them went to official language courses, some hired private teachers or started learning the language by themselves or with the help of their partners or friends.

Nataša admitted that her not knowing the new language was her biggest obstacle while looking for a job. She learned some German in high school and, after she had decided to move, learned more at a language course; her knowledge was, however, not good enough for successful operation in the new linguistic environment. Learning a new language, as is normal, took time and connected to this was the realization that she could not learn the language unless she actually started working in the new environment. Once she had a job, her language skills improved fast.

Klavdija learned Dutch merely through listening and conversation. She often asked her friends to correct her mistakes. After three years of learning on her own she became fluent. Julija found it of great help to talk to her child, who mastered Slovene quite fast. She also received a lot of help from her Slovenian husband.

While learning the new language, they also felt somewhat uncomfortable, i.e., they noticed feelings of shame, stage fright, actual fear. Nataša's fear mostly stemmed from her thinking that she might embarrass herself. She was still hurt every time people laughed at her mistakes. When this happened she often just switched to English.

The knowledge of a foreign language, that of the new environment, is key for successful operation therein. Some women did not choose to study the new language, but simply used English. Spoken language in most intercultural relationships is English. Our women pointed out that they most easily expressed their emotions in the language that – apart from their native language – they had managed to master best. There was less interest and less need for learning a new language in places where English became the everyday language (i.e., for communication at home and at work).

3.3.2. Facing New Situations

When asked what situations they considered to be completely new and unknown, the women talked mostly about different traditions, mentalities, life styles, and ways of socializing.

Janja married into a very traditional Indian family, and this transition asked for a lot of adaptation to the new way of life; still, she gained a lot of sociocultural knowledge in this way. Before migration Indian culture had been entirely unknown to her, so everything new that she encountered was hard to understand. She described the Indian connection of everyday life with religion and various religious practices. The days were filled with prayers and rituals. There were many holidays there, too, connected with special rituals, and our respondent was gradually getting to know them. Also the way of life was different from what she imagined.

For Klavdija new situations in a different cultural environment meant an opportunity for personal growth, for searching of answers to questions, such as: Who am I? What are my wishes? What matters to me in life? Who do I want to become? The international environment and her separation from her parents contributed to self-reflection.

In addition to describing the differences between cultures and new sociocultural findings, individual women also spoke about the feelings that they faced in the new environment. For some, the foreign land meant peace, tranquility, and freedom; to others, it brought on feelings of anxiety and depression.

Anastasija felt safer in Slovenia than she did in Russia. She liked Slovene spontaneity and the peacefulness of the cities. She was very happy for her children who feel more relaxed in Slovene schools.

Metka had already during her studies and previous visits become familiar with the cultural environment that she moved to, so she never experienced any kind of cultural shock. However, she did face the feeling of non-belonging, not fitting in. In Slovenia, everyone kept asking her When will you go back? and she felt like a foreigner, being distinguished from the locals already because of her appearance.

While Anastasija and Metka found peace abroad, some of our respondents faced anxiety and depression when they moved. For some of the women, new situations caused an identity crisis.

When dealing with and adapting to the new environment, the women acquired certain sociocultural and conceptual knowledge. New situations, new roles and conditions enabled personal growth and the acquiring of self-knowledge. What surprised us was their reports on unpleasant feelings, such as anxiety, depression, panic attacks, the feeling of non-belonging. They tried to control these unpleasant feelings by themselves, either through activity (sports), or dedication (they kept their life style, they respected the habits of the new

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environment, but they stuck to their own routines rather than accepted the new ones). The strategies of learning were thus varied and the types of knowledge the women acquired also varied. These women searched for answers to questions, such as: who they were, what were their wishes for the future, what their life path would be like. They were getting to know their bodies, their responses to stress related to migration and the ways to combat stress. The learning process was happening on the level of knowledge about self-guidance (socio-emotional knowledge).

3.3.3 Ways of Adapting to Life in a New Environment

Most women pointed out that socializing helped them adapt to a foreign environment the most, especially socializing with people who themselves migrated from somewhere. After that came adopting the traditions and holidays, going to local celebrations. Some of our respondents said that they recognized cultural differences and they still respected them, but they never wanted to adopt them, internalize them, as they felt this would be too big a diversion from their own values. They formed an alternative life style.

The change of the environment cuts off previous daily social relations and calls for establishing of new ones. Most of the times, these women found new friends – new social connections – at language courses. When they were in the company of other immigrants, they saw that they were not the only ones facing social integration issues. Mateja migrated alone, so her sense of loneliness was that much stronger. She said that one had to surpass one's own limitations when one found oneself alone in a foreign environment, when one had to start a new life in an unknown environment when already middle-aged. She tried to integrate through the expatriate community association. Helena wanted to surround herself with people of similar beliefs, so she attended various events. She went to various workshops where she felt safe and in this way she created her social network. She also used the Meetup.com portal.

Emma also searched for friends over the Internet. She created her profile on the language exchange website and got in touch with a Slovene girl who wanted to talk in English.

Janja adapted to the new cultural on every level of her life, as she knew she was a newcomer. She adapted the Indian way of dressing, completely accepted their eating habits and their way of life:

> Many times my colleagues tell me that I could be an Indian from the North and that they never feel like I come from another country. But the fact is that we are a few worlds apart and that in seven years I have not managed to become close friends with a single Indian female, with the exception of those who have lived in the West for at least a few years and thus extensively broadened their horizons. (Janja).

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The process of adopting new ways of living seems normal and expected to her, because she is of the opinion that the newcomer should adjust one's life to the new circumstances. Moreover, she thinks that those with a broader capacity can adjust more easily: "For instance, my mother-in-law / ... / it would be pointless to try and make her see my point of view, as she just can't and won't understand it." (Janja).

She used to ask herself whether, due to her constant adjustments in her life, she might be losing her identity, but in time she realized that the new life only made her a better, more mature and a stronger person. The strategy of adjustments, sometimes even subordination, led Janja towards personal growth, towards the reconstruction of her identity.

Ida, however, also faced the issues of personal growth and reconstruction of identity, but not so much because of adjustments, but because of her opposition to the new culture. She explicitly said that she did not want to integrate into the new culture, but in order to function better in everyday life, she changed herself: "I became aggressive, demanding, and determined. You can't survive otherwise." (Ida).

The women tried to adjust to the new environment mostly through creating new social contacts, the kind that gave them a sense of security. We noticed that their social networks mostly consisted of people with an immigrant experience. Through self-reflection and getting to know their new culture, they were able to find out whether the values and norms of the new culture matched their own values and norms. When they found the new values to be similar or in some cases even totally in line with their own values, they decided to adopt the new culture: new ways of acting, new norms and values, new ways of dressing, eating, language learning. When the dissonance between the two sets of norms was too great, the women opted for an alternative life style. Despite the fact that some explicitly claimed that they did not want to change, this does not mean that the changes were not happening. It is possible that they stayed at the level of tacit knowledge, i.e., the kind of knowledge that is not articulated by the subject, but it is used in the situations in which the subjects finds themselves. Identity reconstruction happened when these women practiced self-reflection, the investigation of their identity, their values and norms and thus decided what kind of individuals they wanted to become.

3.4 Change of Status: (non-)self-empowerment

Migrating in itself is an act of opposition to powerlessness, i.e., it is an act of empowerment, taking control over one's life. We wanted to know if the migration improved or worsened the women's situation, predominantly with regards to social power, in the context of their family life, relationships, work, and education.

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Most of these women obtained jobs abroad that were in line with their professional qualifications. Some of them had the opportunity to hold very responsible job positions which, in their opinion, they would never obtain in their homeland. Sara, for example, found a job at the international news agency Reuters and was eventually promoted to a TV program editor. As the only woman working at a sports program there, she is in charge of a team made up of men only. Her work is demanding and responsible, but she is motivated by results, achievements, praise, and a good salary. She would never get such an opportunity in Slovenia.

Mojca, the sole provider for her family, secured a job at the Slovenian Embassy in Denmark. In order to fulfill her wish to work in diplomacy abroad, she needed to move to another country. Her job brought her more social power, and this also has a positive influence on the micro social environment (the family): "When we moved, our family became even more connected, as we could only rely on each other; we didn't have any relatives or friends in this country, that is." (Mojca).

Some of our respondents did not find a job in their field of expertise after the move, or, for various reasons, they gave up their careers. Ida, who holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics, never found a job in her new country. She felt completely lost in the new cultural context, as life there was totally different from her expectations. Her degree and her work experience were of no help in the new environment because she could not use them there. Due to the loss of inner power, her self-image was completely destroyed: "I've become dependent, I've lost self-confidence, I'm full of anger, at times depressed …" (Ida). But while she felt miserable because of her job situation, she still felt fulfilled in her partnership: "My husband is better than all the Slovenes I've met and we have a wonderful relationship." (Ida).

Migration changed almost every aspect of our respondents' lives: work, education, family, partnership. For some of them, the new environment brought improvements, for others, the situation worsened. Regardless of the outcome, for these women, a reconstruction of identity was taking place, mostly through self-reflection and the strategy for personal growth; the sense of power and control over their lives grew. Also, those women who were overqualified to do the jobs that they found still felt that they had control over their lives, because they were making more money, for example (greater financial power). When interpreting their social power and the way in which they handled their lives, the women showed changes in their views and judgments, for instance, the way they viewed the meaning of connectedness in their micro-social group – the family – in relation to their professional lives. Some were not employed in their field, but they felt socially empowered in their environment because they themselves chose their way of operating within their family (the possibility to choose). In their accounts, they frequently connected their learning and various kinds of knowledge (of a foreign language, of a foreign culture, of worldliness) with an

inner feeling of control and power that normally complements the process of self-empowerment.

3.5 The Process of Identity Changing: Multiple Belonging

My heart is torn. / ... / I don't feel at home anywhere anymore. / ... / I don't belong anywhere; I live between two worlds. / ... / These brief thoughts are taken from the accounts of our respondents and point to problems with a sense of belonging; those are the questions that most immigrants face – where they belong and who they are. Some of our respondents said that they did not belong anywhere anymore – not to their country of origin and not to the new homeland.

Janja expressed her sense of non-belonging to the new society and a very strong sense of belonging to her original society, but she also stated that she became too Indianized to be able to live in the old society again. She felt that she had outgrown it and that she could not really return to it anymore.

Because of her love for the society in which she now lives, one of our respondents, Metka, decided to study sinology and Japanese. At first, she identified strongly with the new culture, but this gradually turned into resentment. The resentment was caused by her feeling that she had lost too much when she left Slovenia:

> I miss Slovenia and the people I care about; they are far away – some of them are getting older and they might die before we come back. I have a feeling that I am becoming indifferent to Japanese arts and culture which I, once, very much appreciated and admired. I have a feeling that I can't make myself love it again, because my heart is torn between Slovenia and Japan. (Metka).

On the other hand, when she visited Slovenia, she felt that she could not subscribe to the values that most Slovenes hold, as these were no longer her own values.

These examples point to the fact that, when faced with the new culture, the respondents became aware of their own values and were constantly engaged in thinking about whether the values of the new country were in line with their values. Their identity got reconstructed by (auto-)reflective analysis of their experiences, findings and emotions in the space between the two cultures. Their frame of reference was tied to this mid-space; and through it they perceived and interpreted themselves and the world. This space between the two cultures, the so called mid-space, enabled them to absorb elements of both cultures, which led to the connection with and transformation of a frame of reference which was not in line with either culture. This could make some of the women feel joyous or angry. In some other cases, this mid-space created a symbolic field within which the women felt their belonging to several cultures at the same time; they felt at home in several cultures.

Emma is one of them. Because of her triple citizenship, her childhood was marked with the question Who am I? She was born in Canada, her mother is American and her father is Slovene. Her father had a huge influence on her education, so she most of all felt like a Slovene during her childhood. However, she was also influenced by the socio-cultural environment in which she lived, so she was often unsure about her sense of belonging. She decided to temporarily migrate to Slovenia to find out who she really was. During our interview which took place shortly before her return to Canada, she said: "I am three people. I have three identities." (Emma). During her nine-month period of learning and discovering of herself, she realized that she can be all three things together – a Slovene, a Canadian and an American – without denying either one of these identities.

A sense of belonging to the new society was achieved more easily and in a faster manner by those women who, already before they migrated, felt a stronger sense of belonging to multiple cultures and societies at once. Nataša was one such example and she was not ashamed of her double belonging:

> I'm certainly proud to be a Slovene with Bosnian roots and I'll never be ashamed of this. Maybe it's been a little easier for me, as I've been used to double identity; I've been exposed to it since my birth. This makes it easier for you to integrate when you come to a new environment. I am a Slovene with Bosnian roots who lives in Germany now. / … / I will start feeling German when I master their language. (Nataša).

She connected her belonging with citizenship, her roots, and, in the new society, with speaking the new language.

It is common that when people live abroad their affinity for their homeland strengthens. This also happened to Ida, who could only identify with Slovenia. Yet, she always wanted to leave Slovenia, as she never felt closely connected to it. But now she changed her opinion:

> I'm Slovene and I can't identify with an Arab country that doesn't have its own identity, or rather, its identity consists of top-notch American marketing and surreal realities. I will never identify with Egyptian identity, because they are simply heading really quickly back into the Middle Ages. (Ida).

Some of our respondents did not feel any kind of belonging based on citizenship or geographic origin; rather, they identified with other groups. Elira feels most connected with universal values:

> I can't really see myself waving a flag from the top of Triglav or the Šar Mountains, even though we all sometimes find ourselves involved in these mass rituals supporting national symbols. I'm skeptical towards the 3S multiculturalism: even though I eat

burek or the Carniolan sausage, and I sing Albanian or Slovenian songs, I'm not doing it out of some need to confirm my identity on a symbolic level, but simply because I like doing these things! (Elira).

Adults don't strengthen their identity on purpose; our identity is formed by means of informal learning which can be either conscious or subconscious. We gather from these accounts that our respondents were mostly interested in learning when it was connected to things and places they liked, and which made them feel good, calm, and accepted. The last-mentioned respondent explicitly stated that she did not like flags with symbols (visual markers), but instead, she liked songs (sound). However, that does not mean that her sense of belonging was not formed also through that which she refuses.

In their accounts on the construction of their identity through language, our respondents pointed out the emotional characteristics of belonging. Both emotional and process aspects of belonging are characterized by a high degree of uncertainty. This has proven to be true with our respondents who expressed their non-belonging to both their original culture as well as their adopted culture, and also in cases where they expressed their belonging to the original country but at the same time admitted that they would no longer be able to live there, as they had outgrown those cultures. They realized that their values in the new environment had changed and were not in line with those held by the majority of the population. The insecurities of life paths of this kind are common for most immigrants.

Those respondents who were already aware of and openly talked about their combined identity in their country of origin found it easier to face insecurities related to the construction of their sense of belonging. Those women more easily and quickly started feeling at home in the new society, as they had created a symbolic field within which they felt they belonged to several cultures at the same time. The same goes for those women who mostly identified with their professional life and activities and not so much with their national belonging.

4. Discussion: A Model for the Interpretation of Migration-related Biographical Learning

In this concluding part we create a model for interpreting biographical learning which is based on strategies and types of knowledge. At first sight, it seems that learning while emigrating into a new environment is connected mostly with adjustments; our respondents, however, used four strategies of learning: adjustment (i.e., adaptation), growth of identity, development of individual life style and resistance. Learning was carried out under the influence of several factors: environment, daily practices, knowledge, beliefs, values and personal traits. We now focus on the key characteristics of learning.

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With the adaptation/adjustment strategy, the women put emphasis on social demands within which they developed the kind of knowledge that was called for by the environment. They adapted to the new environment through language learning, adopting certain habits and ways of dressing, and by abiding the rules and the norms. We have to bear in mind that this kind of adjustment was a consciously chosen strategy, hence we can speak of active adjustments of women as doers. This sort of adjustment was not connected with devotion or passive behavior; the women were active in their acquisition of knowledge.

The second strategy was their identity growth. The change of environment evoked existential questions in women. They asked themselves who they were, what their values were, and what sort of individuals they wanted to become. Learning about oneself (i.e., forming self-knowledge) was also done by being different from the others. By getting to know new cultures, mentalities and values, these women became aware of their own values and constantly evaluated them to see which they could identify with and which were too strange for them. Women who did not identify with the values of the new environment used the third strategy, i.e., the strategy of forming their own individual life style. Among them, were also those who, due to their beliefs and/or way of life, felt misunderstood or simply unaccepted in their country of origin. For them, migration was a way of freeing themselves from the expectations of their original society, and a possibility to create a life style that suited them, regardless of the demands of the environment.

The fourth strategy, developed only by a few of our respondents, was a strategy of resistance, which meant active intervention into the culture and society of the new environment. With their social engagement within their diasporic communities, the women clearly expressed their views and beliefs and thus actively connected their new and their original culture and society. All the strategies used by our respondents that we have described led towards acquisition and/or development of various types of knowledge. The content of these learning processes varied: learning the language, adopting new eating habits, collaborating with broader social systems and the like. Each of the types of the learning process was connected with a specific strategy and a specific type of knowledge.

Our respondents developed theoretical and conceptual knowledge, practical and experiential knowledge, self-knowledge and socio-cultural knowledge. Conceptual knowledge developed within each of these categories. The same is true of self-knowledge and knowledge about a specific culture.

With our respondents, we noticed the acquisition of theoretical knowledge mostly in the sense that they acquired new language skills (e.g., the learning of new words and of new concepts), they came to know migration-related bureaucratic rules and regulations (e.g., knowledge related to prepare the necessary documentation). Practical or experiential knowledge involves proce-

dures for the use of knowledge in certain processes or routines; we may therefore call it procedural knowledge or knowledge which helps towards the realization of something. With our respondents, we identified this practical knowledge in the way their prepared dishes related to their new culture, in the way they practiced the routines of the new life, and the like. Self-knowledge mostly referred to existential questions and questions about one's values, thoughts, beliefs, emotions.

With the help of (self-)reflection and (self-)analysis, the women came to know formed meanings, they analyzed themselves, and (re)constructed their identity. Self-knowledge was mostly revealed through their accounts of the problems they had with learning a new language, familiarizing themselves with the new environment, their self-perception, the feelings they faced when their identity was changing. The sociocultural knowledge of these women mostly refers to their understanding cultural specifics and differences, and their adopting views and beliefs that were formed on the basis of their experience in a specific social and cultural environment. The acquired their sociocultural knowledge through getting to know a new culture and society, its norms, beliefs, values, and traditions. This sociocultural knowledge enabled them to integrate and operate within a new cultural and social context.

5. Conclusion

The narratives of the selected women provided us with an insight into the migration-related complexity and heterogeneity of learning and of gathering experience. The women's learning usually started with unpleasant or intense feelings of elation and curiosity (disjuncture), both caused by unknown and often even unpleasant situations and experiences in the new environment. The women were constantly faced with new situations that encouraged in them self-reflection and reflection on their frames of reference and values; thereby they were forced to learn and change. However, a new experience itself did not lead to a learning process. For learning, critical reflection was necessary, followed by a change (or sometimes an absence of change) on the basis of a decision. The learning occurred as a combination of processes in which an individual physically and mentally experienced a social situation; then she perceived the content cognitively, and emotionally and/or practically transformed and integrated it into her biography, which led her to a (re)structuring of her identity, or to her transformation.

On the basis of our analysis of the narratives, we formed a model for the interpretation of biographical learning which stems from the theory of transitional learning (strategy) and the 3-P model (types of knowledge) (Tynjälä 2013), and includes learning as an existential process, i.e., a process of the individual's changing under the influence of the sociocultural environment. The model had

proven to be a suitable tool that can help us analyze and interpret migration-related learning. Our research opens up possibilities for further research; it contributes to our understanding of the way adults (women) integrate into a new social environment and learn in that process, which encourages individual learning; and it sheds additional light on the area of everyday learning.

Notes

[1] Phenomenological approaches are suitable for the model of biographical learning, as we follow someone's experiential living experiences; these lead to the completeness of a living experience which includes — in addition to rational knowledge — also emotional, spiritual, embodied knowledge, studied from the perspective of the individual who is in fact experiencing this knowledge.

[2] The research of T. Učakar (2014) also influenced our naming of these thematic sections.

[3] The names of our respondents have been changed to help protect their anonymity.

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