



Sociologie Românească

ISSN: 2668-1455 (print), ISSN: 1220-5389 (electronic)

***IDENTITY HERE AND THERE. MIGRATION AS RESOURCE FOR
IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION. PRO UNIVERSITARIA, BUCHAREST, 2019.***
ALEXANDRA DELIU

Mădălina MANOILĂ

Sociologie Românească, 2023, vol. 21, Issue 1, pp. 191-193

<https://doi.org/10.33788/sr.21.1.13>

Published by:
Expert Projects Publishing House



On behalf of:
Asociația Română de Sociologie

***Identity here and there. Migration
as resource for identity construction.***
Pro Universitaria, Bucharest, 2019.
Alexandra Deliu

Mădălina MANOILĂ¹

Abstract

“Identity here and there. Migration as resource for identity construction”, by Alexandra Deliu, discusses identity building in the context of Romanian international migration, using narrative analysis as its main analytical approach. The author describes a comprehensive picture of how migration experience is employed in conjunction with other discursive resources to account for the identity of the self and of others.

Keywords: international migration, identity, ethnicity, religious affiliation.

“Making intelligible”, “accounting for”, “positioning oneself and others (in the social context)”, “using discursive resources”, “presenting”, and “constructing” – these are words and phrases that belong to one of the main lexical fields that describes Alexandra Deliu’s book. And it is not accidental that I referred to lexical fields, since we are dealing with a book about Romanian migration, and identity building, which uses as its main device narrative analysis.

In the book, the individual act of migration is treated as embedded in several social milieux within the wider context of the local community. The author uses the example of migration networks from two rural communities (Păunești in Vrancea county and Seaca in Teleorman county) to show how personal characteristics and group identification are associated with access to particular networks which lead to different types of migration from the same locality. In turn, accessing the resources of a specific migration network and not of others has visible consequences for the individual and their family (e.g., whether they can earn enough money to invest or can only cover living expenses at home). This also has consequences for how the individual is perceived as a migrant in the community but also in his/her own

¹ Research Institute for Quality of Life, National Institute for Economic Research “Costin C. Kirițescu”, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, ROMANIA. E-mail: madalina.manea@iccv.ro.

eyes (e.g., “the respondents associate migration with the transition from «a gypsy in Romania» to «a serious worker in Spain»”) (p. 46).

The book begins appropriately with a story, a concise depiction of the life story of a former migrant, now retired, who lives in Seaca. Various elements of this story are used to introduce main concepts that are developed throughout the book (identity, ethnicity, migration experience, transnationalism). This is followed by a brief review of some of the necessary instruments a reader should be equipped with in order to make the most of the book. First, it includes a theoretical introduction drawing on social identity theory, assimilation and segmented assimilation theories, transnationalism perspective etc. Second, the three major dimensions used to map people’s accounts of their identity (ethnicity, religion and migration experience) are described. Finally, we are acquainted with the migration context of the two rural communities.

The second part of the volume is dedicated to discussions about migration from Păunești to Italy (chapters IV and V), and from Seaca to Spain (chapters VII and VIII). In-between, the sixth chapter bridges the experiences in the two communities. The entire analysis is guided by the principles of narrative analysis. Furthermore, chapter IV (Stories of Alterity in Migration), defined by the author as “a constructivist exercise”, is an example of narrative analysis with didactic components, which could make for a particularly useful classroom reading.

The common denominator for these five chapters is the exploration of what the author calls “narratives of difference” – between self and others, between groups one identifies with and others, but also between here (the Romanian rural community) and there (abroad). A central topic addressed throughout is what it means to be a migrant, what sort of identity shifts occur across the borders (who they are at origin, who they are at destination), and what makes a migration experience successful. In this respect, the author shows that pre-existent social categories defined by ethnicity, religion and even gender are rendered qualitatively different by migration (particularly in chapter VII) and how different lenses are used for the evaluation of the self and of others (p. 76).

The epilogue is used to draw parallels between the two communities used as research sites. The author emphasises that despite their many differences, they have comparable migration history and practices after 1990. Moreover, the migration narratives identified have similar structures and fulfil similar functions in the communities. Having been originally written as a PhD thesis, the book ends with appendices where readers can find supplementary methodological details.

It is with acute sense of observation and astute way of interacting with the interviewees and with the data that Alexandra Deliu gives the reader access to some of the ways migrants present themselves and their experiences. In part, the originality elements of the book stem from the rich description of the context in the two communities, the incorporation of non-migrants’ points of view, from the quasi-intersectional approach, and from the use of narrative analysis. Moreover, it is

the author's merit of showing how perceptions of the same personal characteristics that lead a person to a specific migration route change in migration and return, as well as how the different migration networks coexist without overlapping in the same community.

The chapters can also be read independently, the main ones having been published previously as articles or book chapters in Romania or abroad. However, by putting them together, the author connects the missing dots and uses the threads that link the chapters to describe a comprehensive picture of how migration experience is employed in conjunction with other discursive resources to account for the identity of the self and others.