

## BUKOVINA OF MEMORY. NARRATIVITY AND CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

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*Abstract: There is a clear distinction between the historiography and memoirs. The first one claims to reconstruct the past more rigorous, based on the methods considered by historians as "scientific", descending deepest in the past, where the individual memory has not the access. Even so, the historians cannot ignore the memoirs approach as an expression of identity or as part of the identity discourse in Bukovina. In the former Austrian province's case, the collective memory functions as a framework within the individual memory is structured and its coordinates are geography and ethnicity. Most of the time, the "real geography", with a precise territorial representation, is transformed into a "personal geography" which draws further in a past created on a set of family memories called "memories of memories". The result is the capture of memoirs in a geographical area, physically, with homes, meadows, boulevards, roads or streets, with luxury restaurants, cafes, and summer gardens. The memoir's sequence is more authentic when the description is separated from stereotypes, clichés and, in general, from everything that hinders the spontaneity. Regarding the "place of memory" in the writings of Bukovinians, this is more than a "place of history". It is characterized by mobility, plasticity, objectivity, and illusion. Its understanding is rather a philosophy of history, rarely practiced by historians who prefer to start their research on strictly empirical facts. Although it may describe the same "place", there is not just one version. Even if the past event is unique, it can appear in multiple versions. In such a plural space, like Bukovina, there are two possibilities for the positioning of identity. Some writers understand that ethnicity has a key role in the community life, spreading a positive image of the "other" to convince that tolerance and respect are the conditions for a peaceful coexistence. In some other works, the meeting with the "other" is negatively valued. It creates a mental image uploaded with derogatory stereotypes, with reserve and fear.*

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In a time when multiculturalism and plural dimension of a geographic area motivate all kinds of meetings, the interest in Bucovina's history remains a current one. The "eternal present of memory", as it is shown in memoirs and autobiographical novels, reveals, in Bukovina's case, the convergence of cultures, historical data and facts with their illusions, stereotypes and clichés. It is well known that Bukovina is considered "peaceful, flourishing, in which 11 nationalities live together in harmony, happy under the Habsburg dynasty" [Grigorovici 2002, p.163]. In other words, it is almost an incredible space, and a beneficial province. In this sense, there are selected examples that can argue a good economic development, effective institutions, and obviously an intense cultural life. Yet, there are also preferences for contrasting aspects; in some works are drawn especially the conflicting situations or those that highlight examples of injustice, persecution, etc. Which of the two images of Bucovina is true? No one - would say Lucian Boia - for there is no real historical image [Boia 2006]. However, each of them wants to be credible as long as it provides tools justification for writing itself.

### **Methodological/ explanatory note**

First, we must make some considerations about the place and role of memory in "building the past", especially since the authors of this type of narrative – named *non-fiction writings* – have a clear, specific goal in mind. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, the communication phenomenon on *self* (through *stories of life*) raises a number of issues; they are related to the documentary status because of the uncertainty, veracity of the story,

and because their dependence on both the historical context of the story. The historical criticism shows some skepticism about these types of sources. It says that the narrative style, identity, and authenticity of the text are elements that should lead to a careful reading and a reserved interpretation of these sources.

Between anthropology and history, literature comes to fill the possible “gaps”. Analysis of literary discourse that does not ignore the chronological, ideological, and political context can be one of the options given to the interpretation of texts. Whether they belong to a *subjective literature*, to a *frontier literature*, to a *literature on the self* or *ego-graphy* - thanks to the varying degrees of fiction given to the reality by the narrator, in a form of its own - a text is constructed under an event’s impact, because of the *labor of memory*, as Ricoeur recalls. Nevertheless, calling on memories, the author could be accused of bias or inaccuracy. Maurice Halbwachs believed that reproduction of memory is not retrieval, but rather a reconstruction, as well as the “world memory” (an imaginary world) mixing the real faces with the imaginary, and shaping the individual identity in accord to its own role [Halbwachs 1980].

Memories are related to the social frameworks in which the individual has grown and socialization occurring due to communication with other members of the group. This explains why memories belong the writer and to others, at the same time. The author thinks about a particular audience, knowing that someone, sometime, will read his or her lines. Many of the narratives are published during the author's life, which explains the omission of certain aspects, the invention, or the embellishment of others. Hence, the narrativity of text - otherwise, a quality of narrative - defined by Livia Polanyi as a response to questions such as: “What is worth telling, to whom and under what circumstances?” [Polanyi 1979, p.207–241] Hence, the historians’ dilemmas on the analysis and interpretation of the literary discourse are in relation to chronological, ideological, or political context. Anthropology, history, and literature can build collaboratively the profile of individual and collective identity, of identity in national, family, ethno-linguistic, cultural, religious, psychosocial, and generational hypostasis. How an individual or group receives (or refuses!) otherness, how it is hidden (or not) within literature, how to build a portrait of an entity; there are so many ways to approach the issue of identity.

#### ***From the real geography to a personal geography***

The places’ geography represents one aspect in the narrative construction of Bukovinian’s identity. “Bucovina of memory” is a utopian and mixed province, an “ideal base” for nostalgics and dreamers. It is a “special place”, emotionally invested: the country of “Snows of Yesteryear” by Gregor von Rezzori [Rezzori 1991], a crossroads of East and West, a paradigm of a multifaceted society. This space of cultural symbiosis knows a competition among different groups or communities that (at least until 1918) do not exceed the limits of “civilized rivalry”, encouraging “parade of nationalities” which, according to Karl Emil Franzos, displays its “tamed “difference [Corbea-Hoişie 1999. p.117].

Texts about Bucovina offer a complex picture, not so much of a geographical space, but especially of a conceptual area bounded with an imaginary one. A.J.P. Taylor considers that Bukovina is a “forgotten province”, that “can not be claimed as homeland by any nationality” because of its lack of “a history of disputes that can be worn” [Taylor 1965, p.200-201; Livezeanu 1998, p.66-67]. Behind this statement, there is an intricate reality, differently appreciated by the ethnic groups in Bukovina. Some descriptions present Bukovina as a “colony of punishment”, “a terminus station for ministerial and military careers”, and an “end of the world” [Hofbauer, Roman 1995, p.112]. From the perspective of the measures adopted by the Hapsburgs, Erich Zöllner wrote: “The inhabitants of Bukovina had no reason to complain about change of the state ownership. A very sparsely populated region, complete rundown was transformed by the Austrian government - through

hard work, over several decades – into a model country of the monarchy” [Zöllner 1997, p.390]. Although modernisation is accepted and recognised by all historians, for some of them a words such as “model country” remains questionable, considering the oscillations of Court of Vienna on Bukovina’s politico-administrative and judicial status [Olaru, Purici 1996, p.7; Iacobescu 1993, p. 116, 128, 130]. Overall, the economic, cultural, and political progresses were directly connected to a climate of coexistence and tolerance. This explains Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki’s discourse: “Our country has been from the very beginning a model of peaceful co-existence and harmonious continuous blossoming” [Luceac 2007, p.263].

The paradigm of “space” enables a comprehensive view of the “perfect homeland” myth, with its potential of membership, socialization, and identification. The homeland brings a specific symbolism charged with “lack”, “search”, “utopian hope”, all in relation to time and space relationship of a reconstructed memory during these searches. In Weiner’s work, for example, Bukovina is a territory “disconnected”, with a geography loaded with symbols of a bygone memory: “When I am asked what country I was born in, I often hesitate before answering. Am I supposed to name the country to which the city in which I was born belonged at the time I was born, or the country it belonged to when I left it? Or, perhaps, the country to which it belongs now? Or rather the country it belonged to just 12 years before I was born, the country where my parents and grandparents were born, the country of my mother tongue?” [Weiner 2008, p. 5]. These questions reflect the ironic nostalgia, highlighting the alienation, both as a literary function and as a mode of existence: “only within the fifteen years I lived there, the place where I was born changed “ownership” three times. This frequent, and for most of its citizens, tragic change is reflected in the following joke. Two people meet for the first time. After a few minutes of conversation, they ask each other where they are from. It turns out that one of them is from Czernowitz. The other, who had never heard about Czernowitz asks: “Czernowitz, where is this?” “Sorry,” is the answer, “I am not sure, I haven’t read today’s newspaper yet” [Weiner 2008, p.5].

The real geography, with its accurate local representations, is transformed into a personal geography that draws on, a set of heirlooms, as so-called memories of memories. The result is capturing the memory in a geographic area, with house, meadows, boulevards, streets, restaurants, cafes, and summer gardens [Rezzori 1991]. Although most of the times, the geography is emerging as more mundane, its coordinates are from the subconscious, loaded with free expressions of subjectivity. Walking “on the road, leading to Robinson”, Traian Chelariu remembers Cernăuți by comparison: “A silhouette of the hill, just like Țețina; at the foot of the hill, Banileul, Roșă and Clocucica; behind us, the mound of Fort Chatillon, the Dominic, autumn’s rare vegetation. I had to logical resist to the impression that possessed me for a few minutes. Although it seems like you are in Cernăuți, you find yourself near Paris! And yet” [Chelariu 2007, p.157].

The place of memory is more than a “historical place”; it is characterized by mobility and plasticity, by objectivity and illusion. Although the texts present the same “place”, there is not only one version; even if past events are unique, their interpretation is plural. That is the case of Cernăuți, a “little Vienna, with the same architecture and the same buildings” [Hofbauer, Roman 1995, p.114], an “oasis of peace” with more languages and people who lived “in a mutual understanding, a forced sympathy, and a frightening alienation” [Colin, Rychlo 2006].

#### ***Narrativity, identity, and intercultural exposure***

The narrative construction of identity in Bukovina contains the “individual experience” that differentiates the author from others [Lavenne, Renard, Tollet 2005, p.114]. Patrick Charaudeau talks about a discursive identity that prefigures the identity model suggested or explained by an intra-textual reality. The meaning of the term given by

Charaudeau shows how the subject is responsible for its past, how the solidarity is created, and how the language constitutes a necessary element for collective identity. It is not about the morphology or syntax, but the way of speaking of each community, how to use words, how to reason, to stories, to argue, to joke, to explain, to persuade, to seduce [Charaudeau 1994].

In general, there are two possibilities of positioning identity in “Bukovina of memory”. Some of the writers understand the essential role that ethnicity plays in the community, spreading the positive image of the “other” to convince the public that tolerance and respect are conditions for a peaceful coexistence: “We were living in a cosmopolitan city, where five languages were currently speaking and were heard on the street. It was normal, not abnormal. Everyone knew them, being Romanian, knew German, Ukrainian and Polish. Depending on nearest neighbors, even the small children learn them. Being Ukrainian, knew Romanian and German and so far” [Ilușca 2000]. In fact, the conversation in the “other’s” language is seen in the writings of Emanoil Grigorovitză, who “for the sake of friendship” had come to speak, write, and read “Jewish”, otherwise, a useful thing, that helped him several times [Grigorovitză 1905, p.93]. The friendship with Vladec and his sisters makes Grigorovitză child to learn Polish. He recalls that the “Almighty of Storojineț”, a foreigner (“as everyone besides him”), was “a good man at heart, to put it on the wound”, he learning Romanian as well [Grigorovitză 1911, p.69].

The reminiscences of the “Hapsburg myth” can be found in the display of the province’s cosmopolitanism, of the multicultural and multi-lingual environment of “the city of five languages”, of the deconstructed ghettos of traditional culture. The “tarock table” allegory, belonging to Adolf Armbruster, is already a well-known one and it belongs to the canons of the “Hapsburg myth” [Armbruster 1991, p.226]. In such a melting pot is created *Homo bucovinensis*, an entity that accumulates the ethno-cultural diversity of the province, as image of the “universal identity Bukovina”. Such an intercultural resource identifies the inhabitants of the province with its special features. The Bukovinian does not give up his/her identity, whether ethnic or religious; on the contrary, it is preserved and strengthened into a new one, on the foundation of “common consensus” [Ausländer 2004; Prelitsch 1956; Turczynski 1995/1996]. The other side of this image appears when authors highlight the relation of “we / us” in terms of ethnicity. Positioning otherness allows the emergence of doubts on the central cultural category that belongs to the “fatherland” and “nation” terminology. In Chelariu’s work, for example, a certain confusion and discomfort is shown in his diary pages: “The German language, learned in childhood, is persecuting me, as well as the drawback of spoken Romanian much” [Chelariu 2007, p.59]. For another author, the Romanian language “existed between eight o’clock in the morning and one o’clock in the afternoon. Enough time to do my homework and then I would forget it until the next day” [Heymann 1994].

Therefore, it is created a balance between the nostalgic mythization of history and its debunking by exposing the most diverse prejudices, egos, and interests. Ultimately, they shaped the historical development of the province, where “a dozen of the most diverse nationalities jostle each other and a good half-dozen of religions, fiercely hostile to one another, live in a snarling agreement born of a mutual hatred and of common commercial relations. Nowhere were fanatic people tolerant and tolerant people more dangerous” [Rezzori 1989].

### ***Negotiating the construction of identity***

In the texts on the “former Bukovina”, the narrative techniques give some indication of interpretation. We can talk about identity negotiation as a way of establishing personal boundaries or of conquering the beliefs of others. The negotiation of identity is both fixed (personal characteristics) and variable (such as social conventions). As identity is not

something finite, it can be understood as a process, as becoming. Some authors expose their own childhood and youth as a comparison, in an attempt to emphasize the purely personal and subjective nature of the story. Shared sense of belonging is always constructed through a series of oppositions that generate social and symbolic borders between “us” and “others”. In general, the individual identity is constructed in a home atmosphere and in the daily interaction with neighbors or colleagues, at school. The acquisition of identity codes, sometimes restrictive, create confusion in a diverse culturally area as Bukovina. In Mali Haimovitch-Hirsh’s memory can be found the image of a Christian family who lived near her home. Time spent with the two girls is resumed in flashes on the “courtyard swing”, the play “with coverlets” in a room where there “was a pine tree, decorated with bulbs and silver paper”, which she “liked very much”. The scene that follows is specific to the community, but also illustrates the Jewish attitudes towards non-Jews in a particular manner: “The family sat around the table and I was also invited to eat. My mom came in suddenly and called me home. Walking with Mom, I told her about the tasty foods, that I just ate. Mom became horrified: “What, you ate pork?” The following day, Mom gave me a nice dress to put on and we went to the Rabbi. When the Rabbi realized what I have done, he took up his eyeglasses and began to scream: “You have eaten pork?” I began to cry and stammered: “No, Rabbi, I ate food...” “In this case, since you didn't know, it will not harm you”, said the Rabbi finally, and he got up from his chair” [Haimovitch-Hirsh 2002]

However, along the ethnicization of childhood, the memories also present the image of “the other” inside the ethnic group, which generates more and diverse anxieties. So is the case of “Shabbes goy” who came to turn on the light and stove on Saturday (forbidden to religious Jews); and “*a goy is not a mensch*”, meaning human being. Hence, the author’s conclude: “all my life I have observed that intolerance is not one-sided” [Hirsch 1989, p.10].

Negotiating identities is often behind masks and in a confusion of roles: author-actor-character. Donning a mask is one of the means to report identity or any changes of it. Obviously, the masks are not pure images of objects or beings they portray, but rather symbols and signs of identity. They are semiotic systems that are connected by their conventional use in disguising, converting, or displaying a certain identity. There is a certain fluidity and reciprocity in this exchange of roles and not by chance, there are so often homogeneous or stereotypical representations of the past, which block or stimulate the mechanisms of social contacts. The memories show the multivalent representations of the Romanians - they are colorful, childhood, hardworking, full of prejudices, anachronistic, pathetic, pitiful, religious, while the Germans are punctual, cool, happy, nostalgic, tenacious, and Jews are stubborn, reluctant, resourceful, tolerant, funny etc.

In fact, these features of identity, generalized and essentialized, reflects the so-called ambiguity of the space, perceived by some as a place of confrontation of the most bizarre influences, and by others as an area of cultural interference: “within society, each nation had its own community cultural centre. There they encountered, organized contests, for example, invited each other, each on his/her nationality, respecting religion, their customs. Neither insults, nor fights. When were large celebrations, they wear “Haisberg” outfit, a student uniform..., and as a part of a certain ethnic group, they put a tag cut from a representing flag, in an angle... And then you did know that that's Hebrew or Romanian (tricolor), Ukrainians with blue-yellow, Poles with white-red and so on” [Ilușca 2000].

### ***Permeability and plasticity of memory***

Another defining element in the construction of narrative - history is the *plasticity of memory* [Bloch 2008, p.100-113] or the *creative reconstruction* of the historical Bukovina, from the perspective of present. A constant “adjusting” of community’s image (or of a settlement) cancels the features of “pure memory” that are also historical reality. Most historians, sociologists, and philosophers believe that the representation of the “past of

memory” is always influenced by present commands. According to this opinion, the whole scaffolding is founded on fragments, “pieces”, or “parts” of memory, more or less accurate. The plasticity of memory is essential in research Bukovina’s past, entering the relation between fiction - creativity and “reinvention” of history in analyzing memoirs as documentary material.

The ability to distinguish the real Bukovina from imaginary Bukovina contribute to a better understanding of the influence of fiction on memory and history, and to revive the past events and experiences through a different way of expression than of the rigorous science. It is clear that literature has a special significance in preserving the memories of the past. Memory and, in particular, collective memory, need support in an attempt to preserve the historical event, and the memoirs may contribute to this process [Reese, Fivush 2008, p.201-202].

In addition, a historical novel could have a wider audience than a historical monograph, thanks to writers’ techniques that are more attractive than the historical narrative itself. Even the tragic moments or painful memories could be more easily exposed in the content of a work on the boundary between history and fiction. In some paradoxical way, fiction can reveal truths that in other circumstances would have remained untold. After reading such works, anyone may believe that it is all imagination. By building characters, circumstances, scenery, transposing into a different period, memoirs may help overcome the inherent barriers, in the historical context of the traumatic moment’s presentation [Lavenne, Renard, Tollet 2005, p.116].

It is true that no community could maintain, on long-term, the “waterproof” to external influences; the multiple examples proving this process. However, it can not be ignored that element of resistance, based on the concept of “identity”, and seen in the valence of belonging to a group, to a distinct community. “I will not deny that there was some animosity between ethnic groups mentioned above, but they were latent, not manifesting actions or activities exacerbated by extreme nationalism. (...) I repeat, however, that these trends did not manifest themselves exacerbated; they live together amicably... I can think of a funny phrase “we cordially hated us” of course, again, with the necessary quotes” [Jemna 2003]. Likewise, when meeting with the “other” is valued negatively, it generates a specific imaginary, full of derogatory stereotypes, of reserves and fear. The dialogue is blocked and instead of tolerance, cooperation, and understanding, it is shown discrimination, marginalization, stigma, exclusion, isolation, and even persecution. The group identity’s frontiers are stiffen, triggering various forms of crisis - from insecurity, blockage, isolation, separation, contradiction, tension, up to escalating a violent confrontation [Colin, Rychlo 2006].

### **Conclusions**

“Bukovina of memory” – represented in various form of texts – promotes exchange between personal memories and those of an ethnic or social group. Not always accurately, these texts are placed at the limits of fiction, as products of the reconstruction of the past in accordance with present’s requirements. Nevertheless, because fiction can be seen as a “site of memory”– with a special ability to preserve individual and collective memory, on a larger scale in time and space – it is a powerful device in the treatment of a traumatic past. It is true that the historiography differs from literature (be it memoirs), by claiming to undertake rigorous reconstructions and deeper down in the past, where the individual memory has no access. However, the investigation into the relationship between memory and history - as well as a multidisciplinary approach - remains a challenge for researchers and a prerequisite for future explorations.

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