

# A Psychoanalytic Look into The Effects of Childhood and Adolescent Migration in Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*

Fernanda Carrá-Salsberg<sup>1</sup>  
York University

## Abstract

This article takes a psychoanalytic, philosophical and socio-linguistic approach to the understanding of the short and long term socio-emotional effects of child and adolescent migrations. Through a close analysis of Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*, the author examines the subjective meaning of a primary tongue in relation to migrants' acquisition and internalization of his/her second language. It begins with a look into the developmental meaning of language and then studies the ways in which early migrations influence subjects' short and long-term perceptions of their internalized languages, as well as the relations newcomers hold with their first and later love objects. In this article migrants' stages of culture shock and integration are discussed and contrasted with the methodical textual division presented in Eva Hoffman's memoir. This work examines the significance of retrospective constructions and highlights the way in which Hoffman's recollections exemplify the inevitable wish to restore ruptures and synthesize life-long conflicting introjections. This article draws attention to the way in which migrants' initial unsettlement, which derives from preliminary and subsequent stages of linguistic, social and cultural immersions, gives way to a sensed trauma and resulting defenses. This paper suggests how with a good enough environment, emigrants' experiences often lead to integrations, as well as psychic and social growth. It asks: What occurs to the ego when its' primary language becomes lacerated following an early migration? How do individuals respond to the loss of its socio-instrumental and affective function? How do migrants' cultural experiences influence the reconstructed memory of their mother tongue? How do such memories or truths affect newcomers' initial and later conception of the host language? And, in which ways do such conceptions play a role in the fluid construction of migrants' language-related identities?

I cannot walk through the suburbs in the solitude of the night without thinking that the night pleases us because it suppresses idle details, just like our memory does...I cannot lament the loss of a love or a friendship without meditating that one loses only what one *has* never had...

Jorge Luis Borges, "A New Refutation of Time"

---

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Fernanda Carrá-Salsberg, Department of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics, York University, Toronto/Canada. E-mail: fcarra@yorku.ca

## Introduction

When reading language related accounts written by migrants, I am often left with the assumption that no matter how different symbolic codes may be, or how dissimilar circumstances that infringe upon each subject and language are, within varying perceptual degrees, all lived symbolic codes are universal in their dichotomized effects upon their users. As seen with many language related memoirs, and as I will soon discuss with Hoffman's text, an acquired language has both the intrinsic ability to release a sense of liberation, and expose an inexplicable trace of otherness within the self.

In a round-table discussion published in *The Ear of the Other*, Claude Lévesque addresses Jacques Derrida (1985) when describing his attachment to Quebecois, his primary tongue, as one that is impossible to appropriate. By reading the claims posed by this speaker, one can deduce that his connection with his mother tongue is affected by the gap that exists between the ideal and real perceptions he holds with regards to a primary language. Lévesque begins to construct his argument by giving voice to projected idealizations and corresponding beliefs. According to this speaker, a mother tongue should represent:

...a dream of fusion with the mother, with a tongue that is like the mother, that is nearest at hand, nourishing, and reassuring. It is a dream to be at last joined in body with the mother tongue, to recognize himself in her who would recognize him, with the transparency, spontaneity, and truth of origins, without any risk, contamination, or domination. (p. 143)

This speaker describes his libidinalized conception of a primary language as the object that should evoke the wholeness, safety and nurturance of a caring mother. We may suggest that through this illustration Lévesque offers a model of a mother tongue, which, as asserted by Akhtar (1995), "is a link to the earliest maternal imago" (p. 1069). Even though we understand that a primary tongue is an element that traces back to our origins, to our early beginnings and thus to times of dependency, need for love and fear of loss, we notice that Lévesque's dream of being as one with a highly romanticized object, creates a tension. For this speaker, the fantasized image of his mother tongue leads to a dichotomy or splitting that takes his claim to opposing grounds: from the comfort of love, reassurance, recognition and belonging, and to the clash of disappointment and alienation.

In his address Lévesque speaks to the incompatibility that exists between a desired image and the politics that shapes his colonized language. According to this speaker, in actuality, Quebecois is a tongue that is felt as "incomplete", as a "translation language", as a symbolic code that is "not purely French", "an irreducible other" (p. 143). What matters most to this article's discussion is that through a discourse that describes the particularities that embrace his symbolic code of meanings, this speaker taps into a universal aspect of language by addressing a singularity that informs all

speech, regardless of socio-political and/or personal circumstances. Lévesque epitomizes the perception of a natural, and yet impossible illusion and an ongoing human need that together give way to a sensed otherness. The incompatibility of his idealizations yields to perceptions of incompleteness and inner estrangement, to insights that knowingly and/or unknowingly dwell within all tongues.

With a focus on the relation between language and the unconscious, one may suggest that Lévesque's utterance, at least in part, embodies the anxieties that stem from an unfulfilled, deep-rooted desire. Lévesque both addresses and testifies to an emotion that can be easily annexed to what Freud (2002) called an "oceanic feeling": "a feeling of something limitless, unbounded...a purely subjective fact...a feeling...of being indissolubly bond up with and belonging to a world outside of oneself" (pp. 3-4). The oceanic feeling is a perception that Freud linked to religion and to subjects' universal need to belong, to feel protected and loved. It appears that Lévesque's words pronounce this very dream. His words express an inner desire that rests within the illusion of being adjoined to a transitional language that relates to, while signifying, a libidinal world which is part and yet outside of the self.

In view of Lévesque's argument, Derrida replies by stating that although the Quebecois language's political circumstance is singular "...not one of us is like a fish in water in the language he or she is speaking...it would be amusing to analyze the complexity, the internal translation to which our bodies are continuously submitting here, at this moment" (p. 146).

In his response Derrida refers to the otherness that erupts through our use of language and through the hopeless attempts to translate and therefore make sense of the poorly understood feelings that become symbolized and entrenched within the essence of a symbolic code. Through his brief response, Derrida highlights the conscious limitations of language and the inner estrangement that taints while highlighting speakers' irreducible perceptions. He denotes an impossible attempt to translate by signifying that language is marked by misrecognized anxieties, masked and unmasked desires, conflicts, defenses, imprints and, correspondingly, repetitions.

As seen with Lévesque and Derrida, the otherness that rises through language often gestures to a sense of strangeness within the self, to an inescapable feeling that erupts through subjects' "distinctive accents" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 5), such a feeling may come to the conscious surface by means of words and symbolizations that are carried through a lived tongue and, in agreement with Felman (1987), born from within a poorly understood unconscious (p. 105). What becomes, in my opinion, puzzling about such a perceptual definition of language is its sharp contrast to many migrants' memories of their primary tongue. If language uproots while exposing the otherness within the self, why do migrants' memory of their primary language offer its subjects a returned sense of wholeness? Why do individuals experience melancholia from a primary language's instrumental loss? Why may a sense of guilt rise in place of its replacement? Finally, how can the memory of a primary tongue, of a language that can no longer offer its speaker a subject position within the wider, host speaking community, shed light on an immigrant's post-traumatic reality?

Language dwells within and becomes ingrained as an intricate part of subjects' conscious and unconscious realities. Migrants' descriptions of their affective relation

to their primary and later languages may thus be best elucidated through an analysis of the perceived, personal changes that result from immersions within a host-foreign language and culture. Accordingly, through the analysis of Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* this study looks into the ways in which the psychological becomes integrated with language learning. I examine the way in which the shock, crises, defenses and overall dilemmas associated with early migrations become part of subjects' transformational experiences within—and outside of—their language(s).

### **Analyzing Salient Socio-Linguistic Patterns within Monolingual Newcomers in Eva Hoffman's "Lost in Translation"**

In this classic immigrant memoir, Hoffman offers her readers a glimpse of perceptual experiences of a life that, since the age of thirteen, has been lived between languages. Her text can be defined as a proclamation of a migrant's struggles, a need to belong, to translate and to grasp a sense of social and psychic integration. It is a testimony of linguistic estrangement, loss, internal and social dislocation. Hoffman's text is a manifestation of culture and language shock and a newcomer's need for mourning. Her main themes typify the early experiences that are often conveyed by monolingual newcomers. Towards the end of her memoir, moreover, Hoffman's narrative focuses on occurrences perceived twenty years following her socio-geographic and linguistic relocation. She transitions into a statement of long-term change, creativity, dialogic acceptance and ensuing personal rebirth.

In a memoir written at least thirty years following her emigration from Poland<sup>2</sup>, Hoffman separates her avid recollections into three sections that highlight the psycho, social and linguistic stages of her journey. Against the text's structural format, and for reasons I will eventually address, I first examine the retrospective core of Hoffman's perceived experiences, and then move onto the two remaining parts of her memoir. I thus begin with an analysis of her second section entitled *Exile*, continue with section one, *Lost Paradise*, and then examine the descriptions provided under *New Life*, which is the last segment of Hoffman's self-narrative.

### **The Vicissitudes of Migration: Identity and Relations of Power within Language in Eva Hoffman's "Exile"**

I have no map of experience before me, not even the usual adolescent kind...I don't know what one can love here, what one can take into oneself as home – and later, when the dams of envy burst open again, I am most jealous of those who, in America, have had a sense of place. (p. 159)

---

<sup>2</sup> *Lost in Translation* was first published in 1989. As explained under *Paradise*, she departed from Gdynia, Poland to British Columbia, Canada in 1959 (p. 3).

In a September 2012 conference titled *Strange Lands: Location and Dislocation: The Immigrant Experience*, Salman Akhtar shared his notion of migration by drawing upon psychoanalytic theory, his clinical work and his personal experiences and understandings as a migrant and analyst. This speaker's discussion focused on the subjective aspects of relocations and on the effects and complexity of the psychosocial processes that are inherent to migration. A significant observation shared by this speaker involved the correlation between migration and emotional crisis. Specifically, this psychoanalyst and psychiatrist stated that: "no matter how smooth the transition from one country and culture to another may seem, all migrations infringe upon subjects a cumulative trauma" (Akhtar 2012).

Interrelated with this assertion, Akhtar explained that: "despite skin colour, subjects' differences are not so different at all when we focus on our human needs and problems". Regardless of demographics, personal and shared histories, and juxtaposed push and pull factors that may have resulted in subjects' short or long-term socio-geographical move, all subjects are equal in their basic requirement for safety, identifications, love and temporal continuity. Akhtar suggested that the interruption of these needs poses a threat to the migrated subject, resulting in an array of anxieties and, correspondingly, in the ego's development of defenses or psychological responses, which, at least initially, destabilize subjects' inner and social worlds.

When studying current migrations to Canada and to the United States, we may consider physical safety to be part of the one universal need that is uncompromised upon migrants' socio-geographic relocation to either host country. However, as I will soon address, by becoming immersed within a host-foreign language and culture, migrants' identifications become challenged and significant libidinal relations and sense of temporal continuity become interrupted. Thus, even though physical safety is either unhampered or, in some cases, improved, during the initial stages of immersion monolingual emigrants undergo successive crises and resulting anxieties that inevitably threaten their wellbeing and sense of psycho-emotional safety.

With Hoffman's memoir, we notice recurrent themes that parallel those described in other phenomenological self-narratives on immigration. If we commence with migration's implication for language, for example, we see its congruent effect on the self. We understand that a lived symbolic code is conditioned by, and representative of, individuals' socio-affective histories. It is the vehicle that connects the self to a third space: to a conscious-unconscious area of experiencing, in which subjects' inner and social historical worlds collide. Our language thus becomes a space driven by object relations, unknown, dialectical and opposing desires, needs, transferences. It is a fertile ground for ongoing and often unwanted repetitions. Similarly, and as explained by Britzman (2006), our third space, which is for the most part governed by language, is an area of inevitable introjections and projections, where subjects knowingly and unknowingly respond to others as others respond to them (pp. 42-44, p. 49).

With Britzman's conceptualization of the third space we can comfortably say that such terrain is an area in which subjects' "I" becomes ontologically formed, where individuals experience, borrowing from Lacan (1977), the deceptiveness of language<sup>3</sup>,

---

<sup>3</sup> This description of language is taken from Claire Kramsch, who quotes Lacan's *Language and Psychoanalysis*, 2017, 6 (1), 10-32  
14  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7565/landp.v6i1.1565>

the estrangement that often becomes unveiled through self-other relations and by means of understandings and misunderstandings rooted from within the complexity of our divided selves. Through the interpersonal ‘give, respond and take’, the imago of the individual’s reality-evoking subjectivity emerges, a subjectivity that is directly and indirectly built and contained within one’s language.

Understanding the “omnipresence of language” (Derrida, 1996, p. xx) and its significance to self-other relations and to the formation and representation of the self leads us to ask what occurs to the ego when one’s mother tongue becomes lacerated? How do individuals respond to the loss of its social and epistemological function? How do monolingual newcomers react when faced with an abrupt shift in their socio-cognitive reality, social positioning and resulting sense of self?

In *Lost in Translation*, Hoffman recollects her formal socialization during her initial moments within the public Canadian school system. She describes how, through her interactions with classmates and teachers, she felt that her heritage culture was incompatible with that of the host community. As her previous notions of herself and others became challenged, she recalls feeling overcome by uncertainty and inhibition. This is evident in “Exile” where she writes: “Since in Poland I was considered a pretty young girl, this requires a basic revision of my self-image. But there’s no doubt about it; after the passage across the Atlantic, I’ve emerged as less attractive, less graceful, less desirable” (p. 109).

From a post-structural perspective we can argue that all identities are fluid, multiple, constantly moving, changing and often conflicting. Yet we cannot ignore how the sudden change in identity experienced by migrants within all—or most—aspects of their lives makes them feel disoriented. In addition, newcomers feel othered by the lack of understanding of the language and of the cultural rules that govern their newly imposed reality. Their sensed crisis relates to the fact that the continuity of their subjectivity, of their relation to their maternal imago—which is tied to their heritage language and culture—become challenged, demoted and perceptually lost within an unattainable past.

Central to this paper is how Hoffman’s memoir links descriptions of recalled emotional despair with existing theories in applied linguistics and psychoanalysis. Her illustrated occurrences, for example, are concurrent with Brown’s second stage of culture shock<sup>4</sup> in which, as quoted by Block (2007) in *Second Language Identities*, “the individual feels the intrusion of cultural differences into his or her image and security” (cited by Block, p. 60). In *Lost in Translation*, Hoffman not only gives voice to the crises that rise from experiencing a sense of not belonging within a newly imposed environment, she also expresses the manner in which the sudden introduction to an unwelcomed reality triggers an alienating sense of self-estrangement.

---

essay: *The Mirror Stage as Formation of the I* (Kramsch, 2009, pp. 94-95).

<sup>4</sup> Brown’s first stage, that of “elation or euphoria over the newness of her surroundings” (p. 132), is not described by Hoffman through her illustrations. Instead, Hoffman’s emphasis is on the pain and loss that stemmed from having been forced to migrate. I assume that the lack of association with this initial stage provided by Brown may relate to the writer’s anticipatory/ depressive feelings of exile, which permeated her recollections related to her arrival.

In addition, the recollections of the preliminary stage of her host-foreign immersion substantiate the relationship that exists between language, thought and our bodies. She recounts how being a non-proficient host-language speaker—and therefore feeling as an outsider- affected how she saw herself and interpreted other’s response to her presence:

Because I am not heard, I feel I’m not seen. My words often seem to baffle others. They are inappropriate, or forced, or just plain incomprehensible. People look at me with puzzlement...the matte look in their eyes as they listen to me cancels my face, flattens my features...I can’t feel how my face lights up from inside; I don’t feel from others the reflected movement of its expressions, its living speech. People look past me as we speak. What do I look like here? Imperceptible, I think; impalpable, neutral, faceless. (Hoffman,1990, p. 147)

In agreement with Kramsch (2009), trying to embody another language alters the learner’s reflexive view of the self (p. 5). Hoffman’s quote also attests to how our language, the manner in which an individual sounds and how s/he is able to express her or himself “grounds the subject’s social existence” (Bohórquez, 2008, p. 49). For Hoffman, not only is the language or her emotional make-up inadequate as a form of expression within her newfound reality, but her attempts at translating herself within a foreign tongue triggers her sense of being in a state of cumulative crises. Such state, moreover, makes her feel that her new language and reality suddenly estranges her from her past known self.

Furthermore, Hoffman’s description marks a discernible association between language and Winnicott’s (2005) psychoanalytic theory on the development of an organized personality, as well as, quoting from Hoffman’s autobiography: “language as a class signifier” (p.123). Winnicott argues that individuals are affected by dynamic interactions with the other. As proposed in *Playing and Reality*, the existence of the self is postulated by having details reflected back (pp. 82-83). For Hoffman, the sensed inappropriateness of her speech, her lack in host linguistic proficiency and resulting lack in spontaneity became etiological factors that fed into the phenomenology of her physical and psycho-emotional perceptions<sup>5</sup>. Evidently, the vicissitudes imposed by

---

<sup>5</sup> The emphasis on the emotionality of second language learning is evident in well-known articles on language socialization. It is read, for example in the works of Guiora (1972), Brown (1973) and, most recently, Block (2007). These researchers highlight that for young migrants there is a relation between language acquisition, native-like pronunciation and speakers’ transformation within the second language (Guiora, 1972, pp. 421-422; Brown, 1980, pp. 53-54; Block, 2009, pp. 51-52). This stage of language acquisition, however, is one that follows subjects’ preliminary—natural—resistance and rejection of their new reality within a new language. As seen here with Hoffman, prior to the acquisition and internalization of the host language, *Language and Psychoanalysis*, 2017, 6 (1), 10-32  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7565/landp.v6i1.1565>

Hoffman's recalled reality became internalized. Such an internalization, moreover, came into conflict with her pre-migrational introjections and, consequently, with her subjective disorientation.

Hoffman's memoir also describes how language, knowingly and unknowingly, classifies the speaker. In her text, the retrospective rationalization of her reality reads as follows:

Sociolinguists might say that I receive these language messages as class signals, that I associate the sound of correctness with the social status of the speaker. In part, this is undoubtedly true...I know that language will be a crucial instrument, that I can overcome the stigma of my marginality, the weight of presumption against me, only if the reassuring right sounds come out of my mouth...Yes, speech is a class signifier. (p.123)

With Hoffman's words we cannot overlook Foucault's post-structural view on language and power. As a young migrant, Hoffman is caught within an invisible framework that is communicatively produced: one that gives native speakers an upper-hand, while diminishing subjects with lower language proficiencies. Following the newcomer's initial rejection of the language and culture that places her at a disadvantage, a common response is the host-language learner's aggression and desire to absorb and even master the language that is directly linked to her subjectivization.

## **Migration and the Epistemological Internalization of Language**

Based on my own memories as a new migrant, what adds to a newcomer's cumulative trauma is the emigrant's eventual realization of the emptiness caused by her primary language's eventual loss of internal meaning. During the initial stages of host-language exposure, the emigrant's primary language, aside from losing its emotive function, becomes disconnected from the migrant's new social reality, an interruption that creates an unquestionable sense of internal void. As discussed by Hoffman, when an individual's first language no longer corresponds to her social reality, the consistency of its inner significance also becomes lost. This is a period that marks a subject's psycho-emotional linguistic laceration, which is described by Hoffman as one of language's "loss of a living connection":

---

learners sense an internal void and disconnection with the host-foreign language. Under a psychoanalytic lens, this rejection is salient until the host-foreign language is introjected and thus internalized: Until synthesis occurs and the challenges undergone by migrants are resolved, the ego perceives the host language as a foreign, translation language that bares no relation or connection to the self.

...the worst losses come at night... I wait for the spontaneous flow of inner language, which used to be my nighttime talk with myself, my way of informing the ego where the id had been. Nothing comes. Polish, in a short time, has atrophied, shrivelled from sheer uselessness. Its words don't apply to my new experiences; they are not coeval with any of objects, or faces, or the very air I breathe in the daytime. In English, words have not penetrated to those layers of my psyche from which a private conversation could proceed...Now, this picture-and-word show is gone; the thread has been snapped. I have no interior language, and without it, interior images – those images through which we assimilate the interior world, through which we take it in, love it, make it our own – become blurred too. (pp. 107-108)

The highly affective description of Hoffman's nightly disconnection with Polish, her still dominant language depicts a tumble of linguistic meaningfulness and the subject's resulting perception of emotional crisis. Through this passage the writer describes her mourning for the living connection of the language to her affectual make-up. Through her narrative Hoffman bears witness to the way in which a linguistic dislocation leaves a deeply rooted void, silencing the self. A host-language learner's anxiety escalates when words of one's internalized language are replaced by the emptiness of a foreign tongue.

In his article *On Learning a New Language* Erwin Stengel (1939), an adult migrant and psychoanalyst, argues that when there is a change in objects' appellations from one language to the other, or from the familiar to the unfamiliar, a language learner's relation to the object in question becomes altered (p. 474). This is a topic touched upon by Hoffman. While describing her exposure to the sensed emptiness and strangeness perceived through her introduction to English words, Hoffman states:

...the signifier has become severed from the signified. The words that I learn now don't stand for the same things in the same unquestioned way they did in my native tongue. "River" in Polish was a vital sound, energized by the essence of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in rivers. "River" in English is cold—a word without an aura. It has no accumulated associations for me...it remains a thing, absolutely other, absolutely unbending to the grasp of my mind. (p. 106)

It is of no surprise to note that in *The Multilingual Subject*, Claire Kramsch (2009), who is also a migrant, chose to analyse Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* when discussing migrants' second language acquisition. While building on Antonio Damasio's theory on emotions and the somatic relations of body and mind, Kramsch explains that as a newcomer, Hoffman's English language "was reduced to its referential meanings without the symbolic aura that gave the subjective meaning and relevance" (p. 67). During the initial stages of foreign language immersion, Hoffman's English words could not transfer to her Polish river. For Hoffman English nouns had no experiential reference and accordingly, no affective trace. Stengel explains this occurrence when arguing that the resistance to the sounds and words of a new language is strongest with objects that are nearest to the subject's feelings (p. 474). Accordingly, when recalling the Anglicization of her sister's and her own name, Hoffman writes:

We've been brought to this school [referring to herself and her sister]...we've acquired new names... Mine 'Ewa' is easy to change to its nearest equivalent in English, 'Eva'. My sister's name—'Alina'—poses more of a problem, but after a moment's thought, Mr. Rosenberg and the teacher decide that 'Elaine' is close enough. My sister and I hang our heads wordlessly under this careless baptism...a small seismic mental shift...The twist in our names takes them a tiny distance from us—but it's a gap into which the infinite hobgoblin of abstraction enters. Our Polish names didn't refer to us; they were as surely us as our eyes or hands. These new appellations, which we ourselves can't even pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags...names that make us strangers to ourselves. (p. 105)

The rejection of her new name speaks of the way in which the host language further estranged her, by way of appellations, from the perception of her childhood self. Hoffman's description, moreover, gives voice to the inevitable relationship that exists between language and identity, as well as language and sometimes guilt. As interpreted by Hoffman, to receive new names in a language they can barely pronounce further highlights the initial sense of self-estrangement. Her new appellation implied a loss of her old subjectivity and the consequent guilt that comes in place of the subject's disconnection with the constructed self and the language that connects to her maternal imago.

### ***Childhood and Adolescent Exile***

Following our study of the universality of the social, emotional and psychological dimensions that correspond to the transformative phenomenon we know as migration,

we must account for the relevance that age and degree of choice have on the subject's initial and later adjustments to the host language and culture. Hoffman's *Exile* exemplifies a migrant's loss, nostalgia, need for mourning and desire to make sense of the memory of a preconscious rupture. Hoffman's descriptions of an emotional geography of the social and inner tensions undergone by migrants, brings me to analyse how the self experiences a heightened sense of loss when feeling inconsolably expatriated from her primary language and homeland.

Even though Hoffman's parents were marginally<sup>6</sup> free to exercise their will when migrating with their two daughters from Poland to Canada, the title "Exile" speaks to the way the author felt after having to renounce her childhood linguistic, social and affective continuity. Consistent with this writer's perceptions, Akhtar explains that all minors are exiled, regardless of migratory circumstances. In *A Third Individuation* Akhtar (1995) quotes Grinberg & Grinberg who state that: "Parents may be voluntary or involuntary emigrants, but children are always 'exiled'; they are not the ones who decide to leave and they cannot return at will" (cited in p. 1054). Adults often choose to move away from their homeland in hopes for a better life for themselves and, if applicable, for their immediate family. This long-standing decision is commonly linked with hope, a hope that allows for the subject to better adjust to the adversities of their new life.

Based on my own recollections as a migrating child and, later as a migrating adolescent, young emigrants' initial distress and anger often follow their need to adjust after venturing outside of their known and retrospectively cherished way of life. Their negative feelings as newcomers also relate to their genuine lack of choice in migrating and in returning to their homeland at will. The sentiment that results from being choice-less is examined by Freud who in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" explains that being unwillingly passive intensifies the individual's unpleasure<sup>7</sup> (pp. 141-142) and resulting deployment of defenses that are meant to counteract the sensed helplessness.

At the end of *Lost Paradise*, after recounting the comfort of her perceived past, and the anxieties that evolved in anticipation of her journey to Canada, Hoffman pronounces her emotional upheaval and resistance towards the language that correspond to an imposed, but helplessly rejected reality. When hearing others practice English on the ship, she recalls thinking: "I can't concentrate; I don't want to let the sounds in. I don't think I like English" (p. 90). For Hoffman, feeling forced into becoming a migrant affected her negative attitude toward the English language. Hoffman's response toward her perceived deterritorialization coincides with Kim Butler's explanation of the socio-emotional and psychological effects of exile. In *Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse* Butler (2001) explains that an exilic position

---

<sup>6</sup> Hoffman's family left Poland a few years following World War II. Anti-Semitism drove her parents' diasporic 'choice'. Under "Paradise" Hoffman describes their departure as one that was neither entirely chosen, nor entirely forced (p. 83).

<sup>7</sup> Children's shock relates with Freud's description of surprise in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: the occurrence of being plunged into danger without being prepared for such an experience. Such unpreparedness, argues Freud, taxes the ego's ability to adapt, which in turn increases the individual's sense of displeasure (p. 138).

“creates its own ethos of migration” by influencing subjects’ sensed hardship and their initial aptness to embrace their new reality (p. 201). For Hoffman, becoming tossed into a perceptually unfair, life-changing situation increased her sensed emotional trauma.

For migrating minors, their sensed crisis is also heightened by the element of shock that accompanies their sudden linguistic and geographic change and by their sense of feeling lost within a reality that defies their parents’ authority. This is an emotion that may be better understood by reading Hoffman’s descriptions of post-migrational family dynamics, specifically when she writes:

I adjure my sister to treat my parents well; I don’t want her to challenge my mother’s authority, because it is so easily challenged. It is they who seem more defenseless to me than Alinka, and I want her to protect them. Alinka fights me like a forest animal in danger of being trapped; she too wants to roam through the thickness and the meadows. She too wants to be free. (p. 146)

As a former adolescent migrant, I feel torn by Hoffman’s words. The sudden demotion of my parents’ authority and the switch in roles that such demotion entailed was, at least for me, extremely difficult to negotiate. I remember, for example, becoming a young translator for my parents during doctor appointments: the one who showed my mother where to sign school-related permission slips and report cards without her questioning what she was signing; being the one who felt embarrassed by my parents’ low levels of linguistic proficiencies; and, the one who, despite of my rebelliousness, was regrettably forced to fend for myself, take extended time away from school and grow up too fast.

The resentfulness and later guilt that stem from the sudden demotion of our parents’ authority can be hard to conceptualize when feelings are entrenched within the fabric of our own lives. As read with Hoffman, some children feel the dire need to protect their parents from the vulnerability that migration evokes, while others, like Alinka, rebel while trying to free themselves from the dynamics of a situation perceived to be unjustly imposed. Seeing our parents’ struggle within a language and culture they barely understand affects our view of them. They are after all our first love and as such we do bestow upon them our highest regard. The disillusionment adds to children’s and adolescents’ crisis, one that is imposed by the clash with pre-migrational introjections and with children’s and adolescents’ unspoken, yet sensed, right to feel nourished, reassured and protected as someone’s child.

### ***Migration and Trauma***

One of the most interesting aspects of Hoffman’s text lies in the vividness in her descriptions that may conceal the writer’s trauma and corresponding “inability to integrate the magnitude of perceived loss” (Van der Kolk & Van der Hart, 1995, p.

162). Indeed, with migrational narratives, just as with the memoirs of any trauma, we note that through the act of writing individuals are able to grasp and express their emotional knowledge. In the preface of *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*, Susan Brison writes that “piecing together a shattered self requires a process of remembering and working through in which speech and affect converge in a trauma narrative” (p. x). Brison sheds light onto the isolating character of trauma and the manner in which literature allows for subjects to remake themselves and to connect with others by giving voice to and making sense of past, dislocated occurrences. While making reference to her own history within a violent, horrifying experience, she explains that:

Saying something about the memory *does* something to it. The communicative act of bearing witness to traumatic events transforms traumatic memories into narrative that can then be interpreted into the survivor’s sense of self...it reintegrates the survivor into a community... (pp. x-xi)

Through self-reflective narratives, writers are able to name occurrences that were shock-evoking and life-changing: experiences that do not fit into their pre-existing schemas. A writer’s narrative becomes a belated attempt to reconstruct and integrate a dissociated, emotionally charged reality: a reality that uprooted the subject’s need to feel accepted, understood and reconnected with the world that, at least in part, rests outside of the self.

Likewise, Hoffman’s narrative embodies an attempt to make sense of the extent of her original sense of loss, helplessness, guilt and of the many voices and juxtaposed histories that exist within the complexity of her being (Kramsch, 2009, p. 275). Hoffman’s testimony reveals a need to mourn and heal. One can also say that her memoir is a developmental process that gives way to, while explicating her eventual hybridity.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* Cathy Caruth (1996) argues that a traumatic event is an unpleasant occurrence that tends not to be fully grasped as it occurs. Caruth states that:

...beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event –which remains unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight – thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness

and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing. (pp. 91-92)

As seen in Hoffman's memoir, the intrusion of unpleasant, inexplicable and belated emotions trigger the need to understand—by way of reconstruction- the events that may still influence the writer's present.

Theories that point to Hoffman's trauma are also found in definitions of memory. In "The Intrusive Past", for example, Van der Kolk & Van der Hart (1995) propose that unlike traumatic memory, ordinary memory is an aspect of life that is adaptive and thus easily integrated to other experiences. It is a variable social act, easily retrieved and shared. They explain that traumatic memory, on the other hand, is rooted in a frightening and novel experience that does not make sense and, in its anxiety-evoking uniqueness, resists integration (pp. 160-163). However, a key feature of psychoanalytic theory is that traumatic memory can vary. It is either a 1) non-social act: not addressed to anyone or a solitary, invariable and inflexible activity that becomes automatically triggered under conditions or situations evocative of the original, traumatic experience, or, as explained to me by my supervisor, 2) a non-integrated experience: invariable and thus repeated with particular vividness (Britzman, 2012).

These theories of trauma and memory conform to Akhtar's (2012) psychoanalytic discussions. In *Strange Lands: Location and Dislocation: The Immigrant Experience* Akhtar highlighted migrants' failure to formulate the extent of many past, transformative experiences. He explains that emigrants' traumas are preconscious and therefore 'never' forgotten. As such, immigrants' dissociations, he adds, are evident, for example, when individuals describe living in a temporary haze or a cloud. Akhtar's suggestion is brings me to highlight Hoffman's recalled reality, specifically when she writes that while on the ship she felt as if she was "living in a fog" (p. 90). Her disorientation and incapacity to negotiate a reality that in its subjective singularity was perceived as unreal is illustrated further: "The journey....makes me feel I am not quite myself and temporarily existing in a denser, more artificial medium than what I've known as ordinary life" (p. 91).

Analysing Hoffman's memoir leads us to conceptualize how her writing composes narrative memories. The experiences that are linked with the raw emotions described in *Exile* and in certain recollections offered under *Lost Paradise* embody aspects of traumatic or unformulated memories. However, when looking into most scenes described under "Paradise" and, to a lesser extent, in *New World*, the idealizations exposed through Hoffman's writing suggest that her text also offers reconstructions of implicit memories, or narrative truths, that are genuine in their perceptual and seemingly remembered disclosure. Her recollections give us an insight into the struggle to probe meaning in a new language and into how her writing performs a working through of these meanings. Thus with Hoffman we see how the literary then becomes a symbolic frame to hold her disparate parts.

Another interesting aspect of Hoffman's narrative that denotes underlying trauma is grounded in the writer's descriptions of intra-subjective splits, which, according to *Language and Psychoanalysis*, 2017, 6 (1), 10-32  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7565/landp.v6i1.1565>

Freud as well as Van der Kolk & Van der Hart, is a common phenomenological response to subjects' deep-rooted crisis (Freud, 2006, pp. 137-139; Van der Kolk & Van der Hart, 1995, pp. 175-176). As defined by Bohórquez (2008), these occurrences are the "here and there, now and then that disrupts the subject's sense of continuity" (p. 13). Feeling disoriented by the profound discontinuity of experience comprises a migrant's present and this in turn impacts the subject's ability to envision a cohesive future. This feeling, annexed with individuals' radical dislocation from their past, evokes a sense of being fixed in a never-ending present.

Not surprisingly, Hoffman's notion of temporal rupture is illustrated across the first two sections of her memoir. Under *Exile*, for example, she writes: "I can't afford to look back and I don't know how to look forward" (p. 116). In *Lost Paradise*, moreover, she discloses the affective and cognitive consequences of her initial inability to cope when describing that "...everything is [was] happening out of time and out of space" (p. 91). Following her eventual migration to Canada, Hoffman is explicit in describing the break in continuity when, with the use of metaphors, she says, for example, that "the tram wheels of Vancouver...cut like scissors through my life" (p. 100), and most specifically, when she describes feeling doomed by her instability to imagine a possible future: "I come across an enormous, cold blankness—a darkening, an erasure, of the imagination, as if a camera eye has snapped shut, or as if a heavy curtain has been pulled over the future" (p. 4).

A recurrent theme in migrants' recollections is the perception of a newly encountered alienation: a sense of homelessness within their new homes, and a recurrent desire to return in order to reverse their indisputable rupture. In a later essay entitled *New Nomads*, Hoffman universalizes her story when she observes that for migrants, the story of their pasts "becomes radically different from their present...the lost homeland becomes sequestered in the imagination as a mythic, static realm. That realm can be idealized or demonized... [becoming] a space of projections and fantasies..." (p.52).

To migrate is to have one's psychic-positioning, the way one situates oneself in the world, shattered. A migrant's present is correspondingly overcome by nostalgia and a sense of instability, outsideness (p. 45), and, as previously described, linguistic incompleteness.<sup>8</sup>

In Hoffman's *Paradise* we see the memory of her primary language, one that signals to her need for psychic continuity:

---

<sup>8</sup> In *Representational Practices and Multi-modal Communication in US High Schools: Implications for Adolescent Immigrants* Harklau (2003) discusses how first generation migrants, grown into adulthood while living in the United States often idealize their primary culture. This idealization, argues Harklau, relates to "their distance in place and time" (90). Returning to this paper's discussion, similar to my argument with language, recent language migrants feel overcome by the sensed incompleteness imposed by their new reality. This feeling, in retrospect, alters their recollection of their past, which becomes 'glorified' for representing a lost time of 'fitting-in' as members of a linguistic and cultural majority.

...I grew up in a lumpen apartment in Cracow, squeezed into three rudimentary rooms with four other people, surrounded by squabbles, dark political rumblings, memories of wartime suffering, and daily struggles for existence. And yet, when it came time to leave, I...felt I was being pushed out of the happy, safe enclosures of Eden. (p. 5)

As suggested in this study, since our reality is perceived through language, migrants' memory of continuity and belonging becomes transferred to their first tongue. For migrants, a primary language, at least in memory, represents a depth and a sense of wholeness that an acquired tongue is unable to duplicate. Following migration, a mother tongue becomes the subject of an internalized and highly romanticized geography, of a paradise and childhood innocence that, according to translingual subjects, became perceptually lost through exile. This phenomenon supporting Derrida's (1996) assertion when, in *Monolingualism of the Other*, he suggests that a mother tongue, or at least the illusion that such tongue encompasses, "can only exist in contrast with another language" (p. 36). For newcomers, the otherness that naturally inhabits 'all' languages become absolved and replaced by the constructed memory of psycho-social continuity. Previous memories of language thus become idealized following their moment of psycho-social split. Following the inscription of what Derrida calls "an added mark" (pp. 24-29, pp. 61-69) a migrant's primary language is thus commonly embraced as a nourishing and reassuring object. Such a language becomes part of an imagined transitional phenomenon that can only exist following the fragmentation caused by the psycho-emotional trauma imposed by the life-changing act we know as migration.

### ***Language Migrants' Third Individuation***

In *Strange Lands* Akhtar highlighted the difference between migration and ongoing life-long changes. He explained how our lives are naturally shaped by a series of transformations and by everyday migrations. Life-changing events are varied and ongoing; these are usually not considered traumatic because they either occur gradually, or they are contextual and thus, for the most part 'expected'. When navigating through the chain of predictability, as with choice, our ego tends to be better equipped to adjust and slowly evolve. Instances of predictable changes can be seen with the birth of a sibling, or of one's child for example, with the start of a new school, a graduation and even with the realization that we are growing older. We understand that as we become adults we typically search for new jobs and migrate into new relationships that knowingly and unknowingly uproot while repeating our original object-relations in the form of transferences.

By contrast, the problem of socio-geographic and linguistic relocations is rooted in the subject's initial inability to cope with sudden, unknown and therefore highly unpredictable situations. It lies in the radical change of circumstances that alienate, while infringing upon the subject's sense of continuity. Migration, asserts Akhtar

(1995), “taxes the ego’s adaptive capacities and thus cause drive dis-regulations” (p. 1058). In *Strange Lands, Location and Dislocation* Akhtar (2012) also explained that there is a phenomenological resemblance between migrants’ experiences and subjects’ first and second individuation<sup>9</sup> and that such a resemblance accounts for the repetition of defenses against the loss of love that surges during the earlier periods of individuals’ post-natal lives.

As described in the previous section, when migration occurs, the subject’s past becomes unattainable, as if lost in time. During socio-geographic and linguistic relocations a person’s homeland “symbolic of the mother” (Akhtar, 1995, p. 1058) is separated from the subject’s present reality. In search for comfort, a migrant commonly tries to retain the memory of wholeness, in terms of wishing for an unquestioned living and belonging. Such memories become retrospectively constructed in the form of the defense known as idealization. This is a defense that echoes Levésque’s opening remarks on his desire and need to feel as one with an uncontaminated, idealized tongue that reflects the affective experience bonded with our first love: with the love we all experienced before the introduction of our father, the law of prohibition and the eventual break that leaves us forever searching for an imagined unconditional, and reassuringly perfect love. This libidinal perfection, however, is never found.

Also echoing a response deployed during early stages of post-natal life is splitting, a defense that separates objects into good and bad, and comforting and alienating. With this unconscious regression a migrant experiences dichotomized feelings about his or her two lands and two self-representations (Akhtar, 1995, p. 1058). Stengel addresses this defense when he discusses the commonality of a migrant’s rejection and devaluation of the host language. In *Lost in Translation*, splitting can be perceived in the manner in which Hoffman expresses her dislike and detachment from the sounds of the host language when she states: “I can’t imagine wanting to talk their harsh-sounding language” (p. 105).

Such sense is highlighted in Hoffman’s (2001) essay *New Nomads*, in which she imagines that newcomers commonly feel that “their language is the true language, that it corresponds to reality in a way other tongues don’t” (p. 49). Stengel’s (1939) theory suggests that the refutation of the host language becomes evident when the subject tries to convert others to their primary language and, most commonly and concurrent with Hoffman’s assertion, by feeling that their mother tongue is the only language of genuine expression (p. 475).

Akhtar (1995) expands on this argument by including the devaluation of the host culture and its landscapes (p. 1065). The temporary problem that rises from

---

<sup>9</sup> As explained by Akhtar (2009), the first individuation is a process that occurs during infancy. It involves the infant’s emergence from “existential symbiosis with the mother to [the development of his [or her] psychic separateness and psychic individuality” (p. 262). The second individuation, continues Akhtar, occurs during adolescence during which increased “disengagement from early objects becomes necessary for “extra-familial object relations” to occur. This individuation stage leads to intense idealizations and...struggles around control issues (p. 6).

newcomer's aggression and projected inner turmoil rests in the manner in which it seems to further isolate the individual from the overall host environment, thus providing a temporary setback to the psychic integration of the newcomer's experiences.<sup>10</sup> The rejection expressed by Hoffman is extended to people who form part of the host community. Hoffman's anxiety is expressed, for example, under *Exile* when she writes:

There is too much in this car I don't like; I don't like the blue eye shadow of Cindy's eyelids, or the grease on Chuck's hair, or the way the car zooms off with a screech and then slows down as everyone plays we-are-afraid-of-the-policeman. I don't like the way they laugh. I don't care for their "ugly" joke, or their five-hundred-pond canary jokes, or their pickle jokes, or their elephant jokes either. And most of all, I hate having to pretend. (pp. 118-119)

Another example is presented under *New World* when this writer judges her new friends under Polish standards: "Even a relatively intelligible person, like Lizzy, poses problems of translation. She—and many others around me— would be as unlikely in Poland as gryphons or unicorns" (p. 175). Aside from the projected negativity seen in the manner of her harsh judgements, Hoffman's rejection is extended to her physical environment. She shares her recollections of landscapes and perhaps as a part of an excess in discourse, she mentions the way in which her surroundings, perhaps unwillingly, became part of her physical, and therefore affectual, reality: "These mountain streams and enormous boulders hurt my eyes—they hurt my soul...I can't imagine feeling that I'm part of them, that I'm in them" (p.100).

For Akhtar (2012), a newcomer's rejection of the host country's landscapes relates to a natural response to the individual's loss of his or her previous transitional space. In *Strange Lands* he stated that regardless of migrants' libidinal loss from old relationships, for human beings, it is easy, and unavoidable, to eventually find transferences in other people. What gets lost with migration is the subject's integration with physical surroundings. Thus, following the individual's socio-geographical relocation, a migrant "can recreate people but not the physical space". Akhtar added that the importance given by migrants to previous landscapes rests in their transitional nature: in the way in which spaces once seemed to provide the subject with a "neutral space of experiencing". Childhood landscapes become unconsciously incorporated as an external-internal reality, they are taken-in as a part of the self. These experiences are affectively remembered and often internalized as idealized memories.

The drastic loss of physical spaces triggers within the subject a sense of nostalgia and even a rejection of the places that, instead of representing part of the subject's

---

<sup>10</sup> At a conscious level, however, the projection of aggression comes hand-in-hand with introjections. Together these establish, according to Klein (1975), the basis of object-relations (pp. 49-50).

internalized and highly idealized history, symbolize the physical space in which the new sense of loss and displacement has set in. A reverberation of this theme is found in much of Hoffman's writing. A very specific account that supports this argument is found with the writer's allusion to Vancouver, when she states: "Vancouver will never be the place I most love, for it was here that I fell out of the net of meaning into the weightlessness of chaos" (p. 151).

For migrants, the significance of the phenomenological resemblance of migration and the subject's first two separation-individuation phases rests in the way in which such perceived unconscious repetitions provide the individual with a road map to eventual integrations. Thus following a newcomer's identity crisis and state of psychic flux reminiscent of the adolescent's second individuation (Akhtar 2009, pp. 1052-1053), the subject eventually integrates his or her experiences. Adding to this argument we may also suggest that, if provided a good enough environment, a migrant's third individuation emerges with the acquisition and eventual incorporation of the host language: an acquisition that, similar to that of an infant's primary language, aids in the ongoing development of a subject's personality.

### ***An Exploration into Hybrid Identities through Hoffman's "New World"***

*New World* provides readers with descriptions of occurrences and attitudes that developed twenty years following her arrival from Poland. Grounded in self-acceptance, this section becomes a reverberation of Brown's third and final stage of culture shock: the phase in which an individual "begins to accept the differences in thinking and feeling" that surrounded him or her, and thus the stage in which the subject becomes "more empathetic with persons in the second culture". As seen with Hoffman, during this final stage she experiences what Brown calls a "near or full recovery" (cited by Block, 2007, p. 60). Having gone through the process of acculturation, Hoffman embraces her new subject position, which corresponds to a hyphenated identity<sup>11</sup>, an identity that relates to her new life within language(s).

In a 1964, during an interview on German television, Hannah Arendt was asked about her experiences as a German-Jew following the World War II. To this Arendt noted that in spite of German aggression, what remained for her was her German mother tongue. In *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Giorgio Agamben (2002), reflects on this interview and argues that what tends to remain is its remnant. He grounds his discussion in an explanation of the 'life of a language' and in the way in which a symbolic code is naturally pulled by opposing tensions: by anomia which is the one moving toward innovation and transformation, and by the current within the

---

<sup>11</sup> The changes undergone by Hoffman relate to the age during the time of her migration. As Akhtar (2012) suggested that unlike children and adolescents, "adults' structuralization has already taken place, and drives have attained fusion and genital primacy". This discussion is also prominent in *Third Individuation* in which Akhtar (2009) describes that in adults, the ego is better organized after the post adolescent superego is in place. Therefore, adults' moral, temporal and linguistic transformation as a result of immigration is a matter of adaptation rather than a replicated scenario (pp. 1052-1053).

terrain of grammatical norms which moves toward stability and preservation. The intersecting point between these two currents is the speaking subject or ‘auctor’ who decides what can and cannot be said through “the sayable and the unsayable of language”. When the relation between norm and anomia is broken, language dies and a new linguistic identity emerges (pp. 159-160).

For Hoffman, Polish did not cease to exist. Yet since it became barely spoken and it no longer endured the transformations that influence all internally and socially lived languages. Polish became a symbolic code suspended in time; a fragment of the language of her parents and of her past. It signified the symbolic code that named her rupture, the tongue that became disconnected with her social and inner realities, with Hoffman’s eventual likes and dislikes, her -adult- insecurities and success. As a subject, Hoffman evolved within her new world and thus became influenced by the introjections projections, and establishment of ongoing object relations that, for the most part, existed in the third space that evolved within her English-speaking reality. Thus, in time, through her acquisition and ensuing internalization of English, Hoffman’s new tongue became the system of meanings that allowed for her to adjust as a migrant. Here we may suggest that her sense of linguistic laceration became seemingly effaced through the acquisition of English and its eventual internalization. In time, English was transformed into her dominant language, the symbolic code that gave her freedom and a second chance in world and personal views. English became a transparent medium entrenched within the fabric of her dreams (pp. 242-243) and the medium of her later triangulations.

The final section of Hoffman’s memoir is a testimony of age-related permeability, of the inevitable influence that language, history and culture have on the developing subject.<sup>12</sup> It bears witness to migration as a benign trauma, of our human need and desire for integration and of our ongoing need for subjective growth. *New Land* speaks to our universal drive for integration and organization, which according to Klein (1975), is one of the ego’s primary functions (p. 57). *New Lands* describes Hoffman’s eventual restructuring, one that fits with what both Klein and Kristeva call the work of Eros (Klein, 1975, p. 57; Kristeva, 1996, pp. 80-81).

Through *New World* readers are exposed to the ego’s eventual binding of the psychic division that was caused by the subject’s trauma. Hoffman’s narrative demonstrates how in time, with a good-enough environment, a migrant’s sense of nihilism subsides, her psychic equilibrium becomes re-established and her sense of new continuity can be made. The individual thus regains her sense of temporal continuity, a continuity that allows for the vision of a future to return, quoting from Hoffman (1990), “like a benediction, to balance the earlier annunciation of loss” (p. 279).

---

<sup>12</sup> Similar to Akhtar’s (2012) discussion on migration and the relevance of the age-related structuring of the ego, in *Empathy in Language Learning* Guiora et al (1972) explain that age—and therefore maturation- influences learners’ ability to learn a language and ‘sound native’ (p. 111). When discussing the concept of the ‘language ego’ this article argues that as individual’s age their ego boundaries become solidified, and this, subsequently, impacts their ego permeability, which results in the subject’s ability to assimilate native-like speech and identify with the host community (p. 112). For Hoffman, having migrated during her late childhood allowed her to transform within language and hence to eventually assimilate within the host culture.

Hoffman's pronounced transformation reflects Kristeva's (1996) understanding of the relation between trauma and creativity. The integration and transformation reveal the extent to which many individuals, after having had their language and "symbolic bonds severed" and after being silenced and thus living "outside of language and inside the secret crypt of silent pain", are able to transform themselves by eventually "rising to the levels of words and of life" (p. 80). Hoffman's *New World* engulfs the period of this writer's new form of expression and growth, as well as the period of re-fuelling and temporary return to Poland, where she realizes that just as her life has changed so too did her country of birth. Equally important, this is a period in which we see that the sense of succumbing to internal colonization and thus complying with a self-imposed notion of a perpetual newcomer ends. For Hoffman, accepting change and thus the integration of multiple affiliations and identities deepen her understanding of language as a medium for migrants' translation.

## Conclusion

Hoffman's memoir brings together the themes of language, child and adolescent translingual migrational memories, trauma, identifications and translingual subject's identity constructions. Her recollections provide us with a discussion on the conflicts between host/foreign linguistic immersions and emotional trauma. This writer's classic migrant memoir exemplifies the subject's unconscious wish to synthesize conflicting introjections, to restore ruptures, and then to narrate socio-affective losses. Quoting from Hoffman's former piano teacher: migrating makes subjects feel fragile as plants with their roots exposed (p. 82). This powerful statement knowingly and unknowingly suggests how socio-geographic, linguistic and affective relocations leave migrants feeling raw and exposed. Such physical and psychic sensations return individuals to their earliest beginnings, to a time that left a mark on their affective histories and to a period during infancy that preceded language. Along with Melanie Klein, I characterize this experience through love and hate, loss, anger, guilt, recurrent anxieties and the urge for reparation.

As seen with Levésque, a primary symbolic code is charged with our human need to belong to something that exists within and outside of the self. For migrants the unconscious construction of an idealized memory of their mother tongue is also driven by a desire to restore and invent the sense of wholeness and unquestioned living they have retrospectively experienced before the marking of their conscious trauma. The otherness perceived by newcomers within language becomes dissipated and replaced by an "illusion for what one has never had" (Derrida, 1996, p. 33). Such assumptions explain why for Derrida the created notion of a mother tongue is a psycho-emotional refuge in exile. A mother tongue, as proposed by both Derrida and Adorno is never inhabitable (Adorno, 1974, p. 87; Derrida, 1996, pp. 58). Instead, it is both an exile and a restorative nostalgia. For migrants, a primary language is an unconscious invention and symptoms of loss can be found in an obsession, a lament, and protection against their abrupt break in social and subjective continuity, initial disorientation, cumulative crises and uncertainty of meaning.

## References

- Adorno, T. (2005). *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a damaged life*. (E.F.N. Jephcott Trans.). London, UK: New Left Books. (Original work published 1974)
- Agamben, G. (2002). *Remnants of Auschwitz: The witness and the archive*. (Daniel Heller-Roazen Trans.). New York, NY: Zone Books. (Original work published 1999).
- Akhtar, S. (1995). A third individuation: Immigration, Identity, and the Psychoanalytic Process. *Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association*, 43, 1051-1084.
- Akhtar, S. (2009). *Comprehensive Dictionary in Psychoanalysis*. London, UK: Karnac Books.
- Akhtar, S. (2012, September). Strange lands: Location and dislocation: The immigrant experience. 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Day in Applied Psychoanalysis, Toronto, Ontario.
- Arendt, H. (2006). *Between past and future: Eight exercises in political thought*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Bakhtin, M.M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. M. Holquist (Ed.), (C. Emerson & M. Holquist Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. (Original work published in 1975).
- Block, D. (2007). *Second Language Identities*. New York: Continuum.
- Bohórquez-Arcila, P. (2008) *Living Between Languages: Linguistic Exile and Self Translation*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from: <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/docview/305041433>.
- Borges, J. L. (2007). A new refutation of time. In D. A. Yates & J. E. Irby (Eds.), *Labyrinths: Selected stories and other writings* (pp. 217-234). (E. Weinberger, Trans.). New York, NY: New Directions Books.
- Brison, S. (2002). *Aftermath: Violence and the remaking of the self*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Britzman, D. (2006). A note on identification with the aggressor. In *Novel education: psychoanalytic studies of learning and not learning* (pp. 41-59). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Britzman, D. (2012, April 30). Conversation.
- Britzman, D. & Pitt, A. (2004). Pedagogy and clinical knowledge: Some psychoanalytic observations on losing and refinding significance. *JAC Online*, 24, 353-374. Retrieved from <http://www.jaconlinejournal.com/archives/vol24.2/britzman-pedagogy.pdf>
- Brown, H. D. (1973). Affective variables in second language acquisition. *Language Learning*, 23, 231-244.
- Butler, K. (2001). Defining diaspora, refining a discourse. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 10, 189-219.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative and history*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1985). *The Ear of the other: Texts and discussions with Jacques Derrida: Otography, transference, translation*. (P. Kamuf Trans.). In C. McDonald (Ed.). New York, NY: Schocken Books. (Original work published 1982)
- Derrida, J. (1996). *Monolingualism of the Other and the Prosthesis of Origin*. (P. Mensah Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1996).
- Felman, S. (1987). *Jacques Lacan and the adventure of insight psychoanalysis in contemporary culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Freud, S. (2002). *Civilization and its discontents*. (D. McIntock Trans.). In A. Phillips (Ed.), *The Freud reader*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Freud, S. (2006). Beyond the pleasure principle. In A. Phillips (Ed.), *The Freud Reader* (pp.132-195). New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- Guiora, A., Brannon, R., & Dull, C. (1972). Empathy and second language learning. *Language Learning*, 22, 111-130.
- Harklau, L. (2003). Representational practices and multi-modal communication in US High Schools: Implications for adolescent migrants. In R. Bayley & S. R. Schecter (Eds.), *Language socialization in bilingual and multilingual societies* (pp. 83-97). Toronto, Canada: Multilingual Matters.
- Hoffman, E. (1990). *Lost in translation: A life in a new language*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Hoffman, E. (1999). New nomads. In A. Aciman (Ed.), *Letters in transit: Reflections on exile, identity, language and loss* (pp. 35-63). New York, NY: The New Press.
- Klein, M. (1975). The origins of transference. *Envy and gratitude and other works 1946-1963*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Klein, M. & Riviere, J. (1964). *Love, hate and reparation*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Kramsch, C. (2009). *The multilingual subject: What foreign language learners say about their experience and why it matters*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1996). Melancholia and creation. *Julia Kristeva interviews*. R. M. Guberman (Ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Stengel, E. (1939). On learning a new language. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 20, 471-479.
- Van der Kolk, B. & Van der Hart, O. (1995). The intrusive past: The flexibility of memory and the engraving of trauma. In C. Caruth (Ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in memory* (pp.158 -182). Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Winnicott, D.W. (2005). *Playing and reality*. New York, NY: Routledge.