SLOVENIAN WOMEN'S STORIES FROM AMERICA

Mirjam Milharčič-Hladnik

COBISS 1.01

INTRODUCTION

I collect life stories of Slovenian women migrants and their female descendants as part of my work on the research project titled *The Role and Impact of Women in Preserving the Cultural Heritage among Slovenian Migrant.* It is a large three-year study of the Institute for Slovenian Emigration Studies covering The United States and Canada as my working fields and a selection of European and African countries and Australia which have been researched by my colleagues from the Institute. The main goal of the study is to highlight the woman's roles, efforts and achievements in preserving the Slovenian cultural heritage in the family, in the community and at work -from the historical and contemporary perspective. The »Slovenian cultural heritage and the woman's role in preserving it« will be defined by the women migrants and their female descendants themselves. In the research process they are the main source of information, definitions, interpretations and narratives collected through in-depth interviews, conversations, life story telling and women's written (auto)biographical texts.

The research core presupposition is that the role of women in preserving cultural heritage is specific and special. Demographically and culturally of the same origin, men and women immigrants have lived very much the same life. Nevertheless, women's responsibilites, opportunities, roles and experiences at work, at home and in their community are very different from that of men. Many studies have discovered very much the same as Donna Gabaccia sums up in the following sentences: »First as community activists and later as socializers of children and organizers of family and religious rituals, immigrant women reproduced and transformed cultural traditions through their labors. Men at first sought women's help in reproducing ethnicity but then abandoned it, leaving it increasingly to women and their domestic roles. It is scarcely surprising that women, more then men, continue to view ethnicity and their immigrant 'roots' as an important influence on their lives.« (Gabaccia 1994, p. 131)

In studies and surveys, Slovenian women immigrants in America do appear ocasionally. In fact, another prominent scholar in this field, Maxine Seller, starts the introduction to her book on immigrant women with a famous quotation from Marie

Prisland's recollections *From Slovenia to America* (Seller 1994, p. 1)[1]. Also a few books were written by the Slovenian immigrant women themselves and were published in the United States or in Slovenia. In spite of all that, the role of the Slovenian migrant women in preservation of the ethnic life-style, values and identity is yet to be documented and proved. I have to underline that this research study of the Institute for Slovenian Emigration is the first of its kind in Slovenia and we can only hope that it is not the last.

I have joined the project very enthusiastically for two reasons. As a sociologist involved in women studies, I find collecting the obscure, undocumented life stories and participating in the analysis and theoretical reflexions on the fairly unknown experience of the Slovenian immigrant women very challenging; and second, I am a migrant myself and having lived in New York for the last three years I myself reflect on this specific experience on a daily basis. I have been collecting women life stories and different information on Slovenian immigrants to the United States for a year now and in this essay I am going to outline some problems concerning the methodology I use and a few preliminary observations I have made so far.

1. IS THERE ANYTHING IN A WOMAN'S LIFE WORTH TELLING?

Methodologically speaking, I adopted a pragmatic and eclectic approach in a consistently qualitative manner of research work. From different kinds of oral history interviews, I have chosen the individual life story, which is recorded mainly in one-to-one encounters and enriched by photos and other kind of memorabillia. It has happened however a few times that I interviewed a group: once, there were four sisters sitting in my hotel room, talking about their lives more or less simoultaneously and enjoying it tremendously; a few times I had a mother and a daughter sitting together in their living room, the daughter waiting patiently for her turn to speak; and once I listened to two sisters recalling together their childhood in an extended Slovenian family. The choice of women I ask to participate in the study is not restricted by their age, generation or year of migration, by place of residence, level of education, social status, or their engagement in public life. I try to collect stories of elderly women first but in general there is no selection or preferred group of women that I want to interview.

I call the women I speak to narrators as I find this description the most accurate in regards to the method of work: instead of asking them a set of predetermined ques-

[1] She chose the famous anecdote in which Marie Prisland described how in 1906 she and a group of Slovenian immigrants waited for the inspection at the Ellis Island. Somebody asked for the water and when the guard returned with a pail he gave it first to the women with a simple explanation: »Ladies first!« Hearing this unbelievable principle for the first time in life, one elderly woman stepped forward and happily exclaimed: »Živela Amerika, kjer so ženske prve!«. However, there is a cruel irony in this exclamation, as Seller puts it, because for a majority of immigrant women it meant they »were first to be underpaid, unemployed, and abused« (Seller 1994, p. 2). Marie Prisland was a brave and determined exception to this rule.

tions and recording their replies I ask them to tell me their life story which I listen to, record and, if necessary, encourage with an occasional question and/or comment. I find it very important to make the interviewee feel as a narrator as this turns her into a subject in control of the telling of her life experience and the interview becomes a listening of her narrative. However, even though this method results in detailed and personal accounts of life experiences, it also creates a few problems.

Betty Rotar, Sophie Matuch, Marion Slejko and Vida Zak are the four sisters who have been active in the Slovenian community in Cleveland since childhood. The photograph was taken at the Slovenian Workmen's Home where they regularly help as volounteers in preparing and serving the traditional Friday "fish and chips" dinner. (Photo: Mirjam M. Hladnik)

First, as in any research, it is necessary to understand how our own interest in the research and our approach to it shape the other's narrative, no matter how independent the narrator's position is. In other words, it means that »just as treating women as narrators requires interpreting the telling itself, understanding how the researcher's interest and assumptions shape the narrative requires interpreting the interaction itself.« (Chase and Bell 1994, p. 80). Second, we have to remind ourselves more than once that what we are listening to, recording and going to use as our study material is not the woman's actual life experience but only her narrative about it. Which, again, makes it more, and less, interesting and useful at the same time. Let me illustrate this with an example: my very first narrator was my friend's aunt who lives in New York and my friend even helped to establish the first contact. When I went to see her I had already known a few things about her life as my friend felt compelled to tell me a few facts she regarded relevant. The aunt's narrative, however, left those facts out entirely. A couple of weeks later, I talked to a priest of Slovenian church in New York about this study. When I mentioned her, he smiled and told me about her exceptional role during the time immediately after the proclamation of the Slovenian independence. As a well-respected person in the community who knew a lot of people she was the main force behind the activities they organized to help Slovenia, and on the ocassion of the demonstration in

front of the United Nations Building she even held a speech. In her narrative, she never mentioned any of this either. The first methodological question therefore is: when an obscure, undocumented life experience is recovered by the woman's own recounting of that experience, how should I represent it? There are at least three options: first, I can publish the life story as it was told (if I get the permission to do this); I can interpret the recounted experience and put it in a wider historical and personal context; or I could use only some particular parts of the narrative just to illustrate my own version of immigrant woman's life as I creatively imagine it according to my own research interests and assumptions.

Collecting stories is based on the principle of an open invitation to the woman I choose to interview. The woman is given all the information about my research, its aims, my track record and an explanation about the method of work in advance. I also make it clear I am interested exclusively in the woman's perspective on the migrant experience rather than her political background. As I openly declare I have no interest in the political aspect of their stories, women generally drop their concerns and fear in this respect. So far, very few have refused my invitation for an interview. I believe this is due to my approach, which is one of naïve curiosity as well as to some personal and professional characteristics which make me suitable for this task: being a woman, a Slovenian, a migrant, a mother and a researcher. Even if I rarely experience a rejection and almost never hostility, problems do occur all the time. My incapability of asking potencially embarassing questions and my fear to manipulate the narrator into conflicting topics which are important for the study but might be a taboo for her is one of them. Another problem, a more objective one, is the intersubjectivity itself. It often happens that the narrator does not understand why her life is interesting to the researcher, and it is quite common that the narrator and the researcher only assume that they understand each other's motives and purposes in this complicated communication situation. There is always the possibility of a fatal or funny misunderstanding. A very succesful woman of Slovenian origin who could hardly squeeze our interview on her busy schedule is a good example. When we met in the lobby of the hotel in Pittsburgh she looked at me in disbelief and said:« Well, I expected an older woman with grey hair and a scarf.« She came prepared to tell me just a a couple of facts about her life (which she had to read from a tiny scrap of paper), but as I obviously didn't meet her expectations she seemed to have a problem even with that. I will always wonder if she nevertheless told me more than she had intended when she realized I was not a Slovenian peasant woman of a hundred years ago.

The most common problem, however, is that women find it hard to believe that somebody might be interested in their lives. »What can I tell you about me?« they ask, especially when I explain I am interested in their everyday life. Many women feel their everyday life is exactly the thing that is not important and does not call for attention. In their view, there is nothing to tell about the fact they have acted as mothers, wives, employees, activists, volunteers. In the analysis of their stories, it is necessary to take such attitude towards the importance of their work and life into account very seriously.

This modest and humble self-perception seems to be the key element of self-censoring. In other words, this appears to be the main mechanism which sets limits on the richness of stories and will require serious second methodological and conceptual consideration. As I have mentioned before, it is important to reclaim the women's experiences, to record and document them but it is also neccesary to understand how complicated the issue of the representation and intepretation is. Even if we opt for the »creative imagining« option where many details which are absent from the narrative can be imagined and creatively reconstructed, there are still unbridgable gaps in the narratives concerning problematic, embarassing and sad parts of their life experiences which can never be fairly and honestly imagined.

Mary Ann Bebar has been a president of the SNPJ Westmoreland County Federation for six years and is very involved with the Slovenian community in the Pittsburgh area. The photograph was taken in a restaurant where she talked to the author. (Photo: Mirjam M. Hladnik)

Not surprisingly, there are also many achievements and public successes that are never mentioned by the women themselves and are »muted, particularly in any situation where women's interests and experiences are at variance with those of men. A woman's discussion of her life may combine two separate, often conflicting, perspectives: one framed in concepts and values that reflect men's dominant position in the culture, and one informed by the more immediate realities of a woman's personal experience. Where experience does not 'fit' dominant meanings, alternative concepts may not readily be available. Hence, inadvertently, women often mute their own thoughts and feelings when they try to describe their lives in the familiar and publicly acceptable terms of prevailing concepts and conventions.« (Anderson and Jack 1998, p. 157). And though the oral history interview is clearly a valuable method for uncovering women's perspective and experience it is not always easy to hear it, as I tried to illustrate with

my first narrator's example. As Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack beautifully put it: »To hear women's perspective accurately, we have to learn to listen in stereo, receiving both the dominant and muted channels clearly and tuning into them carefully to understand the relationship between them.« (ibid.).

2. WHY DOES SHE PLANT TOMATOES IN FRONT OF HER HOUSE?

I started working on the project in January 2002. Until now, I have visited Joliet, Washington D.C, Cleveland and Pittsburgh, and I work in the New York area full time. I started collecting life stories in Joilet when they celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Slovenian Women Union of America, the largest and oldest Slovenian women organisation in the States. I had an opportunity to visit its Home Office in the Slovenian Heritage Museum, and I held interviews with the members who joined the celebrations from all over America. In Cleveland, I was interested in the second women organisation in America called Progressive Women of America, which was established in 1934. I talked to a number of its members of various ages and background, and I also visited some of Slovenian still active religious and secular institutions in the Cleveland area. Washington D.C. seems to be the preferred place of settlement for the Slovenian migrants who arrived soon after the World War II and this fact made many interviews exceptionally informative from this politically highly charged aspect. Apart from many interesting narratives I collected there, I found Pittsburgh a particularly amazing experience. I went to see the places where the first Slovenian immigrants settled around the steel mills and coal mines and where they had lived in the smallest and poorest houses but nevertheless built as big churches and national homes as any other ethnic group.[2] In New York, I work steadily, mostly talking to younger women of Slovenian background and native Slovenians who have immigrated to the U.S. in the last decade or two. So far, I have collected sixty narratives covering a very wide range of different times and places in which these women have lived.

For working purposes, I divide the Slovenian migration to America in three waves: the first wave includes immigrants who came between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the World War II; the second wave started soon after the end of the World War II and ended in 1960; and the third wave covers the period from 1970 until today.[3] The difference between the first immigrant wave and the second in regards to

[2] My work at these places would not be possible without a generous help, guidance and hospitality of the SWUA leadership and especially Lynn Zalokar and Jonita Ruth in Joliet, Illinois; dr. Lea Plut-Pregelj and Nika Kovacic in Washington D.C.; Florence Unetic and Joe Valencic in Cleveland and Sharon Ujcic and Joe Lubich in Pittsburgh. I am grateful to them and to the women who participated in the study.

[3] From the first immigration wave I have collected 36 stories: I recorded the life story of one woman who is an original immigrant; 23 narratives were told by the second generation women, 7 by the third and 5 by the fourth generation of the women with Slovenian background. From the second wave I have documented 9 stories: 5 are from the women who left Slovenia soon after the second World

the women's motives to leave their homeland is well known. In the pre-war period it was mainly the economic hardship that drove people away from Slovenia whereas after the war the Slovenians tended to leave mainly for political reasons. The motives of the third wave could hardly be explained by economic or political factors. The young Slovenian women who have left their country in the last twenty years are naming the following motives for coming to America: they wanted to see the world, widen their horizons and get new experience; they wanted to go away from the Slovenian over-controling social rules; they won a scholarship and came to study or just came to study and support themselves by working; they completed their education in Slovenia but wanted to work in a different environment, prove themselves in a more competitive world and learn as much as they could along the way; and, of course, they followed their heart. Many Slovenian women of the third, modern wave don't come to America for the sake of love but quite a lot of them stay because of it.

Initially, my hypothesis was that this could be the main distinction in the motives of the three waves: the first wave left for economic reasons, the second wave for political reasons, and the third wave for quite personal reasons, or rather, for love. However, it quickly became clear this hypothesis did not hold water. It proved very useful, though, as it alerted me to an important point. I realised a large number of women from all waves shared the same motive for their immigration, that is, there were quite a few from the first and from the second wave who left Slovenia for the same reason. The motive for immigration which seems to be prevailing among women of all ethnic groups and from all periods is their man or/and a family. When we look closer, it becomes clear that the difference between the first two waves and the third one lies somewhere else - we should look for it in the changing economic and political situation in the United States on one side and in Slovenia on the other. In the United States, poverty and ethnic intolerance have been replaced by relatively high standard of living and multiculturalism; and in Slovenia today, we are also witnessing a fairly high standard of living and political freedom. The motive which remains the same in considerably changed conditions is the woman's attachment to her existing or potential family. This motive applies to the modern, dynamic, highly educated, emancipated and ambitious women of the third wave as well as to those of the previous eras. My preliminary conclusion therefore includes all three immigration waves and focuses on what they have in common in spite of condsiderable differences among them.

From the point of view of my research, the stories recorded so far confirm that the woman's role in preserving the cultural heritage among Slovenian immigrants is extremely important on the public as well as on the private level. Women are the activists in the Slovenian community, in church and in organisations; they are members of the singing, dancing and theater groups; they work in countless volounteer projects; and they are active in their own women organisations, many of them in more than one.

War and 4 from the second generation women with Slovenian background. From the third wave I have recorded 15 narratives by the women who came to America after 1960 but mainly between 1970 and 2000.

But because an important part of the cultural heritage is preserved at home and in the kitchen, which has traditionally been the woman's domain, the woman's role is wider and its impact on the identity of family members crucial. As a home maker the woman spends more time at home than her husband even if she is employed; she looks after children; she uses the Slovenian language at least when referring to food; she prepares regularly or at least ocassionally Slovenian dishes; she celebrates Slovenian holidays and adds something Slovenian to the celebrations of the American ones; she talks about the people of the same origin and maintains correspondence with the family and friends back home. Even if a woman does not have her own children, it is not unusual that she plays an important part in preserving of the Sslovenian cultural heritage and identity in the families of her relatives. One of the woman I spoke to, for example, has written a detailed family history for her nephews and neices whose parents did not pass it on to them and they missed it.

In respect to the traditional role of women which links preserving the ethnic traditions to the family life and feeding, I find it particularly interesting to see how the two main Slovenian women organisations have developed over the years. In 1926, Marie Prisland founded the Slovenian Women of America because she became annoyed by the fact that women in Slovenian organisations were allowed to work but not hold the leading positions. Nevertheless, the program of her organisation has never been politically oriented, its aim has always been mutual help and support in preserving the Slovenian traditions. Progressive Women of America, on the other hand, was an organisation founded eight years later with clear political aims and purposes. They advocated women education, women's engagement in public life and in charity and they promoted women as public persons. I learned on my visit in Cleveland that their program seems to be completed as women today can and do study, are engaged in public affairs, and the need for charity work for Slovenia has diminished considerably. Not only that, young women increasingly seem to need what the program of Slovenian Women of America has always offered, that is, preserving the Slovenian cultural heritage, and especially one particular part of it, cooking. Florence Unetich, the chairwoman of the Progressive Women of America, and Joyce Plemel who was present when the organisation was founded in the living room of her parents, told me that by far the most successful event they organized in recent years was the demonstration of how to make an apple strudel. It was attended by one hundred and fifty young women (and men) from the area.

This is the situation, which is stressed in the introductory note to the SWUA *Cookbook*: »Sociological research - including my own on Slovenian Americans - suggests that food preferences, together with singing and music, are characterized by remarkable durability. Immigrants may shed their »old country« clothes and some of their customs at the very first notice of ridicule or embarrassment, yet their grandchildren still gleefully refer to the way grandma prepared a dish and don't want her art to be lost.« (Gobetz 1998)[4] Among many other sholars and researchers, this is also what

[4] The cookbook by Progressive Women of America is titled Treasured Slovenian and International Recipies and the fourth edition was published in Cleveland in 1995.

Florence Unetich, the president of the Progressive Women of America, has been a singer, organizer, leader and volounteer in the Slovenian community in Cleveland all her life. The photograph was taken in the garden of her house. (Photo: Mirjam M. Hladnik)

Corinne A. Krause found out when she conducted her well-known study in Pittsburgh. The study was a very serious oral history project, including the life stories of three generation of women in seventy-five Italian, Jewish and Slavic families in Pittsburgh area. Based on two hundred twenty-five women narratives her conclusion is: »Daughters of immigrants, the second-generation 'mothers' [of this book], understood from childhood that a degree of assimilation was essential in order to feel at home in American society. They wanted above all else to be American. Most of their children, the third generation 'daughters', expressed a longing for ethnicity, even though ethnicity no longer served the pragmatic purpose it had for their grandparents. Instead, ethnicity for most third-generation women had nostalgic and psychological value. Comfortable in their American identity, 'daughters' looked to the ethnic group to satisfy a need for intimacy and belonging.« (Krause 1991, p. 208)

This nostalgic and psychological value of ethnic identity, which is so common among the middle class white ethnic minorities and the »Americans of later generations« has been labelled by some researchers as the »new ethnicity« or even the »dime store ethnicity« (Waters 1990, p. 6-7) It means that today, the identity can be chosen and the choice does not require any serious considerations nor it results in any exsistencial consequences. As many surveys and studies suggest the ethnic identity for the Americans of white European background has become important for symbolic rather than exsistencial reasons. The symbolic identification with their ancestry looks like a leisure time activity and it is not only a matter of choice but also a dynamic part of identity. It can be changed and it can be invented and re-invented again if neccessary. Mary Waters conducted a study about ethnic identification among the third and fourth-generation upper-middle-class Roman Catholic white Americans and her findings are very relevant for those of Slovenian origin: »Part of the reason that ethnicity is so appealing to people is evident in the reasons people give to the question of why they 'like being

ethnic'. Being ethnic makes them feel unique and special and not just 'vanilla', as one respondent put it. They are not like everyone else. At the same time, being ethnic gives them a sense of belonging to a collectivity. It is the best of all worlds: they can claim to be unique and special while simoultaneously finding the community and conformitiy with others that they also crave«. (p. 151).[5] The narratives of the women of Slovenian origin which I have collected echo this kind of thinking about identity: some of the women had not known they were of Slovenian background until their late teens and once they discovered it they fully embrace this ethnic option; others did know but paid no attention to it until they had their own children; some women who are of mixed origin identify more with the Slovenian side because of the positive memories they have about their Slovenian grandparents; and some have recently decided to declare themselves of Slovenian origin just because it is »something special and unique«.

Lisa Kokal is the second generation Slovenian of the second immigration wave who lives in Washington D.C. area. She was one of the youngest narrators of the study. The photograph was taken during her talk with the author in a house of Lea Plut Pregelj. (Photo: Lea Plut-Pregelj)

[5] As the author puts it very clearly, these all does not work for the members of racial minorities, for non-white and Hispanic Americans, whose lives are very strongly determined by their race, ethnicity or national origin no matter how much they choose not to identify themselves in ethnic or racial terms. This is the position in which the first wave Slovenian immigrants and all the other European immigrants of the pre-war period found themselves in America - they were treated as "blacks" and subhuman.

Slovenian women who have moved to America in the last ten to twenty years are in a very different position because for them the question of identity and the choice of symbolic ethnic identification does not exist. It does not mean, though, that this position is not a complex and sometimes very complicated one as some of the collected narratives reveal. A woman who has been living with her family in Washington for twenty years told me that she felt she had lost her roots and was symbolicaly a homeless person; on the other hand, a woman who has been living in New York for the last eleven years defined herself as a 'two-homes' person and asked: »What will become of me when I am sixty? I am not an American and will never be but also I have never lived in my own independent country. When I retire I do not want to live here, but on the other hand, if I go back to Slovenia; I will be a foreigner there«. The young Slovenian women I meet in New York City regard the problem of preserving the Slovenian cultural heritage and maintaining their ties with their home, language, parents and friends as solved to a large extent by having access to the internet. As one of them defines it, her home is her briefcase and her computer. Having an email address allow them to maintan daily communications with their parents, friends, even children; on their computer they keep their photos, albums, letters and other memorabilia; and on the internet they can check the situation in Slovenia, read books and newspapers, listen to the radio and TV programs or join a chat group in Slovenian. If they feel like doing it, of course. Sometimes they do not want to have anything to do with the Slovenian political or everyday situation and they do not like being around the Slovenian immigrants who live in the same area. It is exactly the tradition or heritage that is supposedly nourished or discussed at this kind of meetings which turns them away. As one of them put it: "I have Slovenian friends here in America who would never go out to meet other Slovenian women. Why would you want to talk about recipies?".

However, sometimes their views on the cultural heritage change when they start a family and have children. Even those who feel strongly about preserving their cultural heritage are faced with the questions of cultural and ethnic background, language and tradition in a much more definite way when they are addressing their children's future. It seems that many of them expect their children to learn Slovenian regardless of the ethnic background of their father. The range of replies to a question why this is an important issue for them is very wide: for many of them it is because they maintain very strong ties with the family in Slovenia and visit them regularly; a lot of them are not sure if they are going to stay and an option of going back remains present, especially if they are married to a Slovenian; quite some of them regard the Slovenian identity as a culturally rich and inspiring; and more than one thinks that bilingual kids are smarter and more open minded than others.

It is interesting if we compare their answers with the answers of the women of the same age who are the daughters of the second, post war immigration wave. They rarely speak Slovenian themselves but nevertheless want their children to learn it: one of them would like to spare her children the painful search for their identity she went through because her father did not want her to know his origin; another thinks her deceased

father would want her children to be proud of their Slovenian background; and quite a few of them believe that America today values those of dual ethnicity. In this respect, I was told by one of them, it is particularly flattering that being Slovenian is very special as it sounds so exotic. It is very interesting then what Rose Mary Prosen wrote about the Slovenian language in her childhood in Cleveland, about seventy years ago: »Alas, however, I refused to speak Slovenian. What was a Slovenian? A hunkie. A greenhorn. A dumb Slav.« (Prosen1977, p. 28) Does it mean that we have come full circle?

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that »the dilemma of deciding how much of one's heritage and customs must be sacrificed to camouflage oneself as a member of the mainstream society« (Danquah 2000, p. xv) can never be solved. For the first and second Slovenian immigration waves we can assume that every woman tried to resolve it in her own way. However, for the second and third generations and for the contemporary Slovenian immigrant women in America the dilemma has been turned around. The issue now is how much of one's heritage and customs must be preserved to put oneself as a member of a particular ethnic origin in the mainstream society. Even when a woman cherishes and preserves her Slovenian cultural heritage in a very private and intimate way and does not want to attend any organized activities or events in this regard, she plants tomatoes and flowers in front of her house every year and is proud of it. The turnaround has been possible because Slovenians, as other European immigrants, have climbed in one hundred years to the position of American middle class and acquired in the post civil rights era the status of the whites. Besides, the Slovenian women who come to America today already are middle class, well educated, independent, ambitious, clever and, of course, white. The women narrators are in this context of a special importance because they can tell us about the subtle material that identity is made of. They help us understand the complex ways in which they work as socializers on the public as well as private level, which at the end of the day explains, why there is always something in a woman's life worth telling.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, K., Jack, D.S. (1998). Learning to listen, Interview techniques and analyses. In Perks, R., Thompson, A. (Eds.). *The Oral History Reader.* (pp. 157-171). London and New York: Routledge.

Arnez, J. (1966). *Slovenci v New Yorku.* New York: Studia Slovenica.

Bell, T. (1976). *Out of This Furnace, A Novel of Immigrant Labor in America.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Besednjak M. (2001). *Roža med trni.* Miren: Oko.

Brownstone, D.M., Franck, I.M., Brownstone D. (Eds.) (2000). *Island of Hope, Island of Tears.* New York: Barnes&Noble Books.

Chase, S.E., Bell C.S. (1994). Interpreting the Complexity of Women's Subjectivity. In E.M. McMahan, K.L. Rogers (Eds.), *Interactive Oral History Interviewing,* (pp. 63-81). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Danquah, M.N (Ed.) (2000). Becoming American, Personal Essays by First Generation Immigrant Women. New York: Hyperion.

Donell A., Polkey P. (Eds.) (2000). *Representing Lives, Women and Auto/biography.* London: Macmillan Press.

Futrell, A.W., Willard, C.A. (1994). Intersubjectivity and Interviewing. In E.M. McMahan, K.L. Rogers (Eds.). *Interactive Oral History Interviewing,* (pp. 83-105). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Gabaccia, D. (1994). *From the Other Side: Women, Gender, and Immigrant Life in the U.S.,* 1820-1990. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Gabaccia, D. (Ed.). (1992). Seeking Common Ground, Multidsciplinary Studies of Immigrant Women in the United States. Westport, London: Praeger.

Gobetz, E. (1998). Our Heritage, the Art of Cooking and Multiculturalism. *In More Pots and Pans, A Cookbook of the Slovenian Women Union of America.* Joliet: SWUA.

Janezic, J. (1989). *Pepca's Struggle.* New York: Vantage Press.

Krause, C.A. (1991). Grandmothers, Mothers and Daughters, Oral Histories of Three Generations of Ethnic American Women. Boston: Twayne Publishers.

Molek, M. (1976). *Immigrant Woman.* Dover, Delaware: M. Molek, Inc.

Neidle, C.S. (1975). *America's Immigrant Women.* New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc.

Odorizzi, I.P. (Ed.). (1978). *The Footsteps Through Time,* Washington: Landmark Tours.

Praček-Krasna, A. (1978). *Med dvema domovinama.* Ljubljana: Založba Lipa.

Prisland, M. (1978). *From Slovenia - to America.* Chicago: Slovenian Women Union of America.

Prosen, R.M. (1977). Looking Back. In G.E. Gobetz, A. Donchenko (Eds.) *Anthology of Slovenian American Literature,* (pp. 25-35).Willoughby Hills: Slovenian Research Center of America.

Seller, M.S. (1994). *Immigrant Women.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Waters, M.C. (1990). *Ethnic Options, Choosing Identities in America.* Berkley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press.

POVZETEK

ZGODBE SLOVENSKIH ŽENSK IZ AMERIKE

Mirjam Milharčič-Hladnik

V tekstu je prikazano prvo leto dela na raziskavi Vloga in pomen žensk pri ohranjanju slovenske kulturne dediščine med migranti. To je obsežna raziskava Inštituta za slovensko izseljenstvo v Ljubljani, ki obsega nekaj Evropskih in Afriških držav ter Astralijo, in Združene države Amerike ter Kanado, ki sta raziskovalni področji avtorice teksta. Raziskava temelji na predpostavki, da je izkušnja žensk pri ohranjanju kulturne dediščine posebna in specifična in izhaja iz prepričanja, da je edini relevantni način, kako jo dojeti in analizirati ta, da poslušamo ženske, ko o njej pripovedujejo. Temeljni metodološki pristop raziskave, ki jo avtorica izvaja v Ameriki, je zato zbiranje življenjskih zgodb žensk tako v ustni obliki kot tudi v pisni obliki (avto)-biografskih besedil. Tekst je razdeljen na dva dela in v prvem predstavlja nekatere metodološke zadrege, ki so objektivno povezane z vsakim »oral history« projektom ter subjektivne težave, ki nastopijo zaradi osebnih lastnosti raziskovalke. Avtorica opozarja na vsakokratno specifično intersubjektivno situacijo, na osebna prepričanja in predpostavke raziskovalke ter na prevladujočo žensko selektivnost pri opisovanju lastnih življenjskih dosežkov kot elemente, ki jih moramo pri analizi zgodb najresneje upoštevati. Drug problem, na katerega opozori, je sama reprezentacija in interpretacija zbranih življenjskih zgodb in vloga kreativne imaginacije pri tem.

V drugem delu so nanizane nekatere ugotovitve, ki izhajajo iz do sedaj zbranih življenjskih zgodb žensk različnih starosti, poklicev, socialnih statusov in generacij ter obdobij, v katerih so same oziroma njihovi predniki, imigrirale v Ameriko. Pripovedi žensk dokazujejo, da je njihova vloga pri ohranjanju kulturne dediščine pomembna tako na javnem področju, kjer so ženske aktivne in velikokrat vodilne v slovenskih skupnostih, organizacijah, društvih, kot na privatnem področju doma in kuhinje, kjer njihova vsakodnevna skrb za negovanje tracionalnih navad, praznikov, jezika, pesmi, jedi in vrednot odločilno vpliva na izoblikovanje identitet družinskih članov.

Mirjam Milharčič-Hladnik doktorica sociologije kulture, docentka sociologije vzgoje, znanstvena sodelavka Inštituta za slovensko izseljenstvo ZRC SAZU, Znanstveno-raziskovalni center Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti v Ljubljani.