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BEYOND VICTIMHOOD AND STIGMATIZATION

Trauma, Ruptured Memories and Agency
in the Context of Global MigrationIntangible cultural heritage as coping
resource in context of global migration

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Subject / Abstract

We can say that intangible cultural heritage is portable, since it is tied to people and not so much to the place of origin. According to UNESCO, ICH consists of practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. UNESCO emphasizes that ICH is continuously recreated and it evolves as the community adapt and adjust their cultural practices in response to the environment, so it is important to track the whereabouts of ICH in migratory context. My intent is not only to note the elements of ICH that were practiced and transmitted among the migrants, but also to explore the new narratives that are emerging and impose themselves as a cultural heritage per se. Furthermore, it is necessary to investigate importance of those processes in coping system (or retraumatization) of individuals and among the community.

Theoretical approach / analytical framework
with regard to trauma

In this presentation, trauma will be discussed as a potential part of the intangible cultural heritage of a group, but also as an entity that can be affected by other elements of ICH of the given community. In defining ICH, I use UNESCO's Convention for protection of intangible cultural heritage of humanity (2003), but I also need to incorporate the point of view of the research participants, because they are creator of their own cultural identity. UNESCO continually stresses the importance of ICH barriers to identify and interpret elements of their own heritage. Lastly, ICH will be considered as a lens through which everyone frame, relate to or understand past events. This is very important for the traumatic experiences, especially the ones that were in a way culturally initiated.



Empirical findings / observations

There is a lot of research in the ICH field that concerns migrant communities and victim narratives. Here, I have connected those narratives with the concept of trauma or ruptured memories and tried to find out how those effect cultural identity representation. So, when we consider trauma on context of migrant communities (or individuals) through the ICH perspective we can witness its effects on 1) creating new heritage and recreating cultural identities 2) turning personal traumas into cultural experience, as part of the healing process 3) nurturing culturally relevant connection and lastly 4) retraumatization and entrenching trauma as a concept.

Research questions with regard to trauma & migration

- What kind of ICH elements are preserved in migration circumstances?
- Can intangible cultural heritage element help in coping with trauma among migrants?
- Can trauma become part of ICH in the migrant community?
- How it navigates perception of cultural identity for individuals/groups/public?
- Can holding on to ICH elements be retraumatizing, and harmful? What does it mean for acculturation processes?

Methods

I am basing this presentation on the findings of ethnographic work. In 2014 -2016 I worked with refugees in Vojvodina province, that were affected by war (Yugoslav and Kosovo conflicts), and I incorporated their trauma narratives into ICH of their community. Usage of ICH elements, as well as the definition of trauma, is different within the different groups of migrants: legal, illegal and refugees. Also, levels of trauma are assigned differently to these groups by the public. So, to put together my findings in this matter I have considered narratives of my migrant informants but also media representations, as well as institutional support programs (especially Unesco). I used a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews, narrative analysis, digital sources to access ICH of a person or group that was removed from its usual cultural environment under pressure.

Motivation, Input Thoughts and Questions

As a researcher in the field of Intangible Cultural Heritage, I think that is important to participate in multidisciplinary research of cultural identities of migrants and the role of ICH in coping mechanisms of migrant community members. Trauma among migrants can be understood only with anthropological and ethnological insight, and one of possible analytical tools for obtaining it is ICH.

When we talk about (self-)representation of the migrant community, elements of ICH are playing the key role. This selective representation on both sides is shown to be the main way for constructing trauma as a social phenomenon.



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