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Trauma, Ruptured Memories and Agency in the Context of Global Migration

Trauma Narratives, ruptured memories, and politics of life: an ethnographic research of Iranian Refugees and asylum-seekers in Germany

Reza Bayat, Institut für Kulturanthropologie/Europäische Ethnologie, University of Göttingen

Subject / Abstract

In this ethnographic research, I focus on the stories people tell about their experience of leaving their countries, border crossing and living in another country. This project concentrates on the narratives of people who are represented as crisis or victims of traumatic events like war and persecution and aims to reflect on their own narratives which have been excluded from the media and knowledge production as well as from the politics of care. Borrowing the metaphor “inscription on the body” from Veena Das, this project focuses on border-crossings as bodily experiences and practices. It centers the experiences which people centralize in their narratives, or in other words the experiences that left marks on their body and memory (both literally and figuratively). It includes experiences which can be categorized as traumatic and narratives of leaving Iran, border-crossing, living in camps, being and remaining temporary, the experiences of uprooting and re-grounding and their narratives of hope and precarity related to the discourse of “integration” in Germany. By centralizing people’s narratives and stories, I attempt to emphasize the necessity of writing non-linear, chaotic, and uncertain histories that do not always follow the general scripts of how histories of migration must be produced, documented, or talked about.

Research Questions

- How do Iranian refugees and asylum-seekers tell their stories of border-crossing and living in Germany?
- How do they formulate their experiences? And How they articulate their experiences and ruptures and which parts of their stories do they centralize?
- How do they (re-)construct, legitimize, share, negotiate and interpret their ruptures and ruptured memories?



Fieldwork/ observations

During my fieldwork, I interviewed Iranian refugees for over three years. This has given me the chance to go beyond participant observation. As a result of our encounters, we decided to start a music band with three Iranians who applied for asylum from 2015-2016 in Germany. This has enabled me to contribute and interact in the field with individuals and organization during concerts and rehearsals.

Theoretical approach / analytical framework

This project addresses, on one hand, the construction, propagation, and instrumentalizations of trauma, suffering, and victimhood narratives for the production, regulation, and administration of Iranian refugees as objects of trauma and controllable, racialized others. On the other hand, through following the lives, narratives, and life-stories of groups of Iranian refugees in Germany, this research aspires to both deconstruct the hegemonic narratives of trauma as well as closely examine the different dimensions and aspects that are invoked under the sign of trauma (by the state, individuals, humanitarian organizations, NGOs, and the Iranian refugees themselves). Avoiding general narratives of trauma around people, this project employs ruptures and ruptured memories as analytical concept in order to grasp the sociality of the experiences.

Methods

Based on ethnographic data, this project uses biographical interviews with Iranian refugees and asylum-seekers, participant observations and observative participation as well as narrative analysis.

Motivation, Input Thoughts and Questions

- How can we relate narrative and rupture in the context of migration?
- Does rupture as an analytical concept include the narratives of joy and pleasure?



Contact

Reza Bayat
Institut für
Kulturanthropologie/Europäische
Ethnologie
University of Göttingen

rbayat@gwdg.de

Bio

I am a PhD candidate at the institute of cultural anthropology/european ethnology, university of Göttingen. My research interests are migration and mobility, narratives and storytelling, emotions.