

## BEYOND VICTIMHOOD AND STIGMATIZATION

Trauma, Ruptured Memories and Agency  
in the Context of Global Migration**(Re)living the trauma of migration**

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**Subject / Abstract**

During and after wars in the former Yugoslavia, back in the 1990s, new borders became reality, as well as so-called “population exchange”. Migrations from one to another new nation-state were predominantly forced and based on ethnicity. They were especially large and obvious at the border towns, resulting with personal or direct experience of migration for most of the inhabitants. Twenty years later, after the long summer of migration and closure of the formalized migration corridor, some of those border towns became temporal homes for the “new”, non-ex-Yugoslav, migrants. In my presentation I will focus on Šid, a town in Serbia located on the border with Croatia (and the EU) where migrant children were officially enrolled in schools since 2017. I will discuss the process of integration and inclusion of migrant children while emphasizing the experience of significant number of their teachers, who were refugees themselves. This presentation aims to open discussion on position of some teachers in the inclusion process - as educators, but also as individuals who experienced the trauma of migration.

**Theoretical approach / analytical framework with regard to trauma**

In this research trauma will be discussed through the analytical framework of empathy, the concept based on the idea of people’s ability to understand another’s emotional state. According to Lutz and White, this particular understanding “is effected through the special channels of empathic (and usually nonverbal) communication and is conceptualized as either an intellectual understanding or a more direct emotional one” (1986). Having in mind empathy based on the personal traumatic experience or memory, I will try to analyze its role in the cultural representations of mutual trauma. Moreover, I will discuss further articulation of empathy and memories as bridges, and sometimes as boundaries, in the local context.

**Empirical findings / observations**

Through the narratives we could see the understanding and recognition of fear, anxiety, pain, lack of control and sense of injustice. Those emotions and states were not just associated with migrants and their children, but also translated and interpreted through the lenses of the personal traumatic experience or memory. Empathy towards the “Others” is often emphasized through the memories of “Us” in the refugee columns in 1995. Narrative of the personal trauma also became the method of “teaching empathy”. One interlocutor, school psychologist, pointed out the workshop called “Suitcase” (*Kofer*) he organized in order to prepare students and teachers for the new migrant students. The idea was for participants to imagine they had five minutes to leave their homes and to choose what they would pack in one suitcase. As he said, it was especially difficult since some teachers literally had that kind of experience.

**Research questions with regard to trauma & migration**

- How the previous experience of migration shapes the attitude towards the “new” migrants?
- How cultural representations of refugees and migrants can construct layers of empathy?
- What could be effects of translating someone’s trauma into one’s own? What are the effects on the collective level?
- How anthropologists should articulate narratives of trauma and re-traumatization?

**Methods**

This research is based on media and literature research, as well as in-depth interviews and the fieldwork I did with three of my colleagues in August and September 2020. I interpreted narratives of trauma, memories and experiences of our interlocutors from Šid. Having in mind the topic, I found especially important that 1) all interlocutors, in some way, remember migrations after and during the Yugoslav wars and 2) that all of them are somehow involved in the education process, and have had a chance to interact with migrant children and migrant students in the past five years.

**Motivation, Input Thoughts and Questions**

I am excited to learn more about anthropological perspective on trauma, but also to discover analytical framework of various academic disciplines and views of individuals engaged on the field. I believe that opportunity to be a part of this workshop would significantly improve my understanding of migration, and help me shape the future research. The chance to discuss and share experiences will provide us all with more than important, comparative and global perspective.

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**Bio**

Katarina Mitrović is a PhD candidate, a teaching assistant at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology and a research assistant at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. Her academic research is focused on youth studies, families and aging, urban anthropology, anthropology of migration, and language and identity.