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CULTRABAND: HOW TO RESEARCH “CULTURAL CONTRABAND” AND THE IMPACT OF MIGRANTS’ VERNACULAR KNOWLEDGE ON THE HOST CULTURE

This article is a polemical description of strategies for researching cultural contraband. I propose to refer to cultural contraband by the acronym cultraband in order to avoid confusion. Cultural contraband (culturbanda) is a positive phenomenon, a way of disseminating ideas, as opposed to smuggling/contraband of cultural property, which is a crime. Cultraband falls within the field of cultural studies, while smuggling/contraband of cultural property falls within the field of legal sciences. I propose to investigate the mechanism of cultraband through the study of migrants’ vernacular knowledge and practices, verified through the study of migrants’ humour. The article proposes three research directions, each with its own methodology and tools, its own focus and object.

Keywords: *cultural contraband, migration, vernacular practices, vernacular knowledge.*

1. Introduction

In one of her interviews on the occasion of the release of her book “Contraband of Hoopoe”, Ewa Chrusciel, an American poet of Polish origin coined the term “cultural contraband”: the process of transferring certain aspects from the migrant’s native culture to the host culture. Icelandic writer Ásgeir H. Ingólfsson specifies that the objects of cultural smuggling are words and ideas (Ingólfsson). As an immigrant to the United States herself, Ewa Chrusciel mastered English in order to write literary works in it. At the same time, her native Polish cultural experience made the field for literary experimentation wider, allowing her to integrate Polish ways of writing fiction into American literary speech. This enrichment of the artistic arsenal that happens at the meeting point of cultures not only makes experimentation possible, but also changes cultural practices. Being integrated at first as an individual experiment, the practices gradually become accepted by more and more people. The process of cultural transfer thus adapts and transforms the host culture. The migrant artist acts as a mediator between native and host cultures, but, as a rule, their role is the embodiment/institutionalisation/verbalisation of the collective unconscious experience of the carriers of the original culture in the new environment. Certain aspects of “cultural contraband” – though the term itself was not used – have been explored in connection with Irish influence on English culture (O’Sullivan), and there is also, for example, the practical art-project “CULTURE SMUGGLING: smuggling words and ideas” (The Smuggler – Culture Smuggling) by Ásgeir H. Ingólfsson, where journalist and writer uses different languages for transferring cultural knowledge and practices into other cultural/lingual context.

Cultural smuggling/contraband is a phenomenon that is poorly studied and needs a separate study. However, the peculiarities of the subject and object of

research force us to search for original ways to interpret and verify the data. In this article I will make some pre-project remarks regarding the study of cultural contraband. In order to avoid confusing cultural contraband with contraband of cultural property, I propose to call cultural contraband by the acronym “cultraband”. Cultraband is a transfer of ideas that makes host culture richer, stimulate development of the culture. That’s why cultraband has a positive meaning, in contrast to contraband of cultural property that is criminal trafficking cultural objects.

2.Object

The research is based on the assumption/hypothesis that vernacular practices/knowledge of migrants bring changes in the cultural perceptions of the carriers of host culture, and thus change the configuration of the culture itself, adding a new lens to it. The task of the study is to record and analyse the changes that occur in the culture under the influence of immigrants’ cultural influx, to identify the sources of these changes in the collective vernacular practices of immigrants, and to reconstruct the mechanism of such influence, which I am planning further call “cultraband”. This process precedes cultural transfer [Espagne & Werner 1988; Schmale 2003]. Transcultural history [Schmale 2010], which deals with the study of cultural transfer, focuses on the interaction between Cultures, such as, for example, Ancient Greece, Europe, etc. Cultures in the conception are most often understood as high culture of known historical civilizations. By considering migrants as agents of Culture, transcultural history deprives migrants of their own subjectivity. Transcultural history considers migrants as mere carriers of knowledge and skills, in a sense likening them to a virus. In contrast to transcultural history, our project is oriented towards the synchronous analysis of changes and proceeds from the network character of culture, each carrier of which has its own agency/subjectivity, acts as an actor, and influences the configuration of culture.

Our project explores the cultraband of collective vernacular knowledge by migrants. On the one hand, the focus of the research is on the artistic ways of embodiment of collective cultural experience, and on the other hand, on the vernacular knowledge and practices within the migrant community. This dual perspective on vernacular practices allows us not only to record the changes in the culture influenced by migrants, but also to investigate their origin/sources.

Understanding the peculiarities of immigrants’ vernacular representations makes it possible to adjust policies towards immigrants, to promote faster integration, as the complex of representations represents the most important aspects of culture, ignoring which leads to ethnic and cultural conflicts.

By providing a comprehensive overview on how cultraband works and how both migrants and host culture can benefit from it the project opens up new perspectives on integration patterns. The research will show how cultraband can make the integration process more successful due to the potential benefits it can bring to the host culture in the long term. However, we are planning also explore

the ways cultraband can cause segregation in the short run when the experiences of migrants' clash with the established patterns of host culture. We argue that cultraband is one of the factors that conditions the interrelations between migrants and the host culture both on individual and the collective level.

3.Design

The research work within the research will be carried out in three directions, for each of which a special team of researchers participating in the research will be organized. Each of them will separately collect and analyse data of great academic interest, but which, when compared with each other, will supplement each other. All the data obtained in the aggregate will make it possible to reconstruct the mechanism of cultraband.

In this perspective, difficult-to-identify vernacular knowledge needs robust verification to avoid presumptions formed by the interviewer and imposed on respondents. Such verification is possible if there is an additional verification step in which the focus is shifted to pragmatics or, according to Kozintsev (2010), to “the third world of reference”, realized in humour. In other words, a humour survey of the respective migrant communities will reveal the same significant aspects of vernacular knowledge that have been identified in direct research (interviews and questionnaires). The humour survey is not usually used as a verification tool, so this approach needs to be further tested and answer the questions, if the humour of the local community is identified, understood and valued, and if it has any influence on the ideas that immigrants form? This is a new aspect of the project as humour is not usually used in studies of cultural contraband. At the same time, we plan to test whether humour is part of the hybridity of vernacular knowledge.

Changes taking place here and now and at the same time allow us to identify conflict points between attitudes, knowledge on the one hand and the host culture on the other. In order to research more particular forms of this vernacular knowledge it is planned to investigate a spatio-temporal complex of knowledge, which does not cover all knowledge, but is key to the construction of a picture of the world. The proposed complex is a construct that artificially separates these knowledge/practices and the following are extracted from the total knowledge:

- spatial vernacular representations (vernacular space, mental maps, cultural reputations of place),
- representations of time (mental calendar, representations of time),
- memorial representations (cultural trauma, commemorative practices, cultural memory).

3.1.Vernacular spatial representations

The combination of vernacular spaces (*places*) [Hutton 2011], transit spaces, which Marc Augé (1995) called “*non-places*” [Buchanan 2005] and blind zones, which we called “*voids*” or lacunas [Troitskiy & Tsarev 2022], creates a mental map [Schenk 2013]. The concept of the “mental map” proposed by Kevin Lynch (1960) was used to avoid replacing subjective experiences of space with political,

ideological, research, etc. expectations, so mental maps were made from memory, outside the mapped space. Bin Jiang argued that the image of the city (or mental map) emerges from the scaling of urban artefacts and locations [Jiang 2012]. Developing C. Lynch's methodology, Haken and Portugali developed an informational view which argued that the face of a city is information [Haken & Portugali 2003] conveyed through various artefacts and includes both "objective" and "subjective" semantic information [Portugali 2011: 167]. As a result of this combination of "objective" and "subjective" information, it turns out that the general principles of the organisation of the city space carry less information about it than the local unique symbolic information [Portugali 2011: 185–186], which makes the city unique and mastered at the mental/vernacular level. The vernacularisation of space occurs through the emotional/affective inclusion of place in the individual and cultural environment of the city dweller. The reputation of a place as a set of emotionally non-neutral representations framed in narratives allows a place to become collective, i.e., emotionally non-neutral for other residents too. However, places for an individual are not equal in importance among themselves, but on the contrary, they create a topographical hierarchy that includes places as objects of topographical preferences and as objects of avoidance caused by negative emotions. Spaces that are emotionally marked fall out of both the mental map and the topographical hierarchy; they have no cultural reputation.

A mental map is a certain individual idea of space as a set of places (points) that are significant for an individual; each mental map contains a complex of individual ideas, stereotypes, memories, patterns, etc [Schenk 2013]. Of course, we can transfer a mental map to paper or a screen, but such a visible map will be derivative of individual perception and cannot be reduced to "an image of the area made by the informant at the request of the researchers" [Veselkova 2010: 6; Strelnikova & Vanke 2017].

Though we are talking about individual ideas about space, idiographic topography, etc., all the subscribers of the online groups under study understand each other even while using unofficial (folklore) toponyms. When one renames a topos, they appropriate the space, bringing the name to the level of common parlance, the language of everyday speech, devoid of external normativity and free of the official narratives. The renaming indicates the significance of the topos and its presence on one's mental map. In other words, the folklorisation of a topos confirms its significance and presence on the mental map, and folkloric toponyms are markers of the emotional/affective involvement of a *place* in the individual environment [Hutton 2011]. Not only *places*, but also some "*non-places*" undergo folklorisation to "confer a sense of place" [Buchanan 2005: 28], thus they become partly *places*, although they retain their functionality as transit spaces. The status of space is very fluid, especially in the context of "fast" communication, thanks to the Internet and social media. They allow us to form and maintain the reputation of a place, to use folklore mechanisms of constructing meanings and narratives more intensively than in the conditions of traditional folklore forms.

3.2. Vernacular temporal knowledge/practices

Migrants transport across the border their conceptions of time, which are arranged as various kinds of calendars: memorial, religious, family, professional, political, etc. These calendars are not, as a rule, official calendars, although the official holidays of the country of origin are included and observed much more strictly than in the home country. Such calendars organise time, unite people into communities, and at the same time they are mixed with the calendar of the host country [Fialkova & Yelenevskaya 2013: 147]. Despite the personal nature of immigrant calendar events, they influence spaces, everyday practices and life trajectories in the host country. One of the most indicative is the changes in urban space during Muslim holidays in regions with a massive influx of Muslim immigrants.

The events that make up the calendar are divided into several types according to the duration of impact, encompassing all perspectives of time assimilation.

The prolonged perspective, comparable to infinity for human temporal reception, is covered by a continuous infotainment event, an event that does not stop. It is this ongoing event that proves to be the most stable, so all fewer stable elements are adjusted to it. In archaic vernacular time, this ongoing event is comparable to the agricultural cycle (reproduced by the cyclic time of the cosmos) as a whole, to human life; in Christian vernacular time, to the life of the state, to the time until the second coming. Any state policy of memory is built on the basis of this perspective. History (the dominant narrative of history) as part of the politics of memory is “a social construction rooted in the needs, interests, beliefs and aspirations of the present, as well as the events of the past” [Eglitis & Ardava 2012: 1034]. The duration of history is ensured by the events reproduced in commemorative practices and is, in fact, a single event of domination of a particular community. In the case of migrants, migration is usually such a lasting event.

The medium-term perspective is provided by timestamps the stability of which is based on their recurrence. The calendar and its periodic reproducibility contribute to time marking but breaks the enduring event into stages, the ritual calendar is embedded in the enduring event. Calendar events, expected dates are placed outside the calendar complex and act as independent events. The ongoing event introduces new meanings, sometimes even opposite to those that were embedded in this date. Such instability of interpretation deprives the event of its conditional immutability, although it retains its calendarism as a property that allows us to expect its repetition in a year.

The short-term perspective is provided by events that are non-repeatable, but vivid, causing impulsive reactions. In all such events one can notice their constructedness. Some events end up being included later in the calendar, but most of them will remain as a one-time flash of vernacular time, as an asset of the past with a small media trace, at best as an asset of the personal memory of individuals. The particularly significant ones are constantly present in the messages under study, and reactions to them are prolonged over the entire duration of the study.

Events are not comparable in their importance for the further course of history: some have a huge impact, others, on the contrary, look as if their significance is momentary, and if it were not for the media reaction, would hardly be noticeable.

While an ongoing event tends to routinise the individual's experience of it, to become a background, medium-term and short-term events, on the contrary, tend to become vivid, to overcome routine.

3.3. Memorial knowledge/practices

Immigrants are carriers of memorial representations that synthesise spatial and temporal aspects of vernacular knowledge/practices, such as public memorial narrative, cultural trauma, and displaced knowledge located in the zone of cultural exclusion. The public memorial narrative unfolds in time, but at its core contains an independent internal chronotope that has an indirect relationship to the time and space of the narrative's unfolding. The materiality of sensation infuses mental perception with authenticity and encloses the subject inside the chronotope [Wiedmer 1999: 113]. This chronotope is for the involved members of the social group the ideal place-time of the convergence of past, present and future. The involved members of the social group act, among other things, as actors [Latour 2005; Law 1992], possess their agency, i.e., they can influence the environment of existence in order to transform it in accordance with the chronotope of the memorial narrative, as well as fund the narrative itself, making it "common place", taken for granted, an explanatory frame [Starovoitenko 2019: 132], and thus influence the host culture. The mental acceptance of the public narrative by each member of the social group implies that each produces their own reassembly of it for themselves, based on their own background and own presumptions, which makes the resulting narrative a cloud of meanings. This cloud of meanings determines behaviour, preferences, presumptions, etc., and at the same time is universalised within the community through various commemorative practices [Sokolowska-Paryz 2012: 2] and places of memory [Nora 1984] that are reproduced in the host country. It does not disintegrate because different members of the social group have a network of (partially) overlapping key points and interpretive bundles that fill in the lacunas [Tulli 2011]. The pragmatics of narrative deployment presupposes ready-made schemes for its individuation, which include a set of relevant markers, linguistic and semantic clichés, and a descriptive dummy [Troitskiy, Kurvet-Käosaar & Laineste 2021]. The procedures for deploying a public memorial narrative and the corresponding procedural rhetoric [Bogost 2007] involve not only utilising key points of this narrative [Jewel 2011], but also preserving elements displaced outside it and located in zones of cultural exclusion and borderland [Troitskiy 2018; Nikolayeva & Troitskiy 2018].

4. Methods

The research will use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and process the data.

In order to collect data, we plan to use in-depth interviews that allow us to record changes of culture in real time. It is also planned to diachronically analyse the changes in artistic practices, specifically describing the influence of immigrated artists/writers/philosophers. We mean both the New Immigrants (according to “Integration of Estonian Society: Monitoring 2020”, “new immigrants mean the foreign nationals who have come to live or work in Estonia in the last five years”, [Adaptation... 2020: 1; Erbsen 2018]) and people, who have moved earlier (till 10 years ago).

Both qualitative methods of data collection and quantitative methods will be used to investigate collective vernacular practices. We will interview members of the immigrant community about various vernacular representations, through which a corpus of these representations will be formed, and then the formed corpus will be tested on a larger sample through a quantitative survey. We are planning to interview 50 persons of the most numerous immigrant communities in every country of the project. A comparative analysis of the data between two groups (new immigrants and people who immigrated 5–10 years ago) allows us to record the dynamics and changes in the same national/ethnic group and compare it also between different national/ethnic groups. We are interested not only in what fills this complex, but also in what configurations each representation has. Complexes of representations will be formed along several lines: spatial vernacular representations (vernacular space, mental maps, cultural reputations of place), representations of time (mental calendar, representations of time), and memorial representations (cultural trauma, commemorative practices, cultural memory).

Content analysis and discourse analysis will be used to document the relationship between the vernacular practices/knowledge of immigrants and altered forms of culture, i.e., to document the influence of, and to reconstruct the mechanism of cultraband.

5. Conclusion

5.1. The first direction is to collect and analyse data from contemporary representatives of creative professions (writers, poets, artists, philosophers) who have immigrated from other countries. The research team will interview the respondents of the respective reference group. The in-depth interviews will focus on the peculiarities of moving the creators' own and well-established artistic tools into a new environment (in the host culture), on the resulting “gaps” between form and content, on the identification of vernacular knowledge/practices of representatives of creative professions, which become apparent to these people due to the move to another country. An important feature of the research work will be overcoming the language barrier, which arises, firstly, because the language of the host country turns out to be acquired rather than native, and secondly, because narrative clichés do not allow to fully express vernacular knowledge, thus altering the content of the narrative. On the contrary, bringing vernacular knowledge into the narrative reveals some aspects that add up to an internally consistent story, but displaces others. Such a language barrier requires from the researcher not only

good command of the language, but also an understanding of the network of meanings, which is provided only by belonging to the language and its cultural context, therefore, scholars with migration experience are invited to work in the study, among others. The representatives of creative professions embody vernacular knowledge/practices, and make their artworks based on this knowledge/practices in a new cultural environment.

5.2. The second direction is researching collective vernacular practices/knowledge. Since this level of data is more general, it is planned to use not only qualitative but also quantitative research methods. The corpus of vernacular practices/knowledge refers to the whole picture of the human world and under normal conditions it is rather difficult to verify. However, in the conditions of changing cultural environment, when a person is unable to realise their own ideas about the world, vernacular practices/knowledge based on their native culture clash with the new environment demanding other knowledge. However, their own perceptions are not displaced, but are complemented and thus form the basis of hybrid knowledge. At the same time, the influence occurs in the reverse direction too. Immigrants bring their knowledge into the new cultural environment, changing it. The hybridity of knowledge makes it not only "frontier" but also internal. Their gradual absorption into the host culture changes its configuration, but at the same time makes this "new" knowledge commonplace. A striking single example is the integration of the Ukrainian chirpy song "Carol of the Bells" into English-speaking North American culture, which, thanks to various media (particularly cinema), has been widely popularised as an American work [Peresunko 2019], but at the same time it has retained its hybridity, allowing it to become a symbol of support for Ukraine at the beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion in 2022. Investigating the vernacular "knowledge" of immigrants will allow us to capture the cultraband.

5.3. The third direction is the analysis of historical data, the formation of a model of cultraband and the retrospective verification of this model. The working group within this line of work will be engaged in analytical work at the level of generalisation, which can be conventionally called philosophical. Analysing the biographies of specific migrant actors in the context of cultural change will allow us to describe specific instances of the history of cultraband and to identify the common characteristic features, thus making the model of cultraband universal. There are many recorded examples [O'Sullivan 1994; Peresunko 2019; Troitskaya 2017], but all of them are isolated and need to be systematised. This is one of the tasks of this line of work and the relevant research team. Unlike the postcolonial approach, which a priori assumes the possibility of influence of the colonizing state (as a Latour's "large actor") on the representatives of colonized peoples, this study focuses on the process of reverse influence, where the human actor (Latour), burdened with migration experience, influences a "large actor", which, as a result of influence, produces cultural transfer, "absorbing" the object of influence and thus creating a new form of its existence.

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Сергій Троїцький

**КУЛЬТРАБАНДА: ЯК ДОСЛІДЖУВАТИ «КУЛЬТУРНУ
КОНТРАБАНДУ» ТА ВПЛИВ ВЕРНАКУЛЯРНИХ ЗНАТЬ
МІГРАНТІВ НА ПРИЙМАЮЧУ КУЛЬТУРУ**

Стаття є полемічним описом стратегій для дослідження культурної контрабанди. Я пропоную називати культурну контрабанду акронімом «культрабанда», щоб уникнути плутанину понять. Культурна контрабанда (культрабанда) – це позитивне явище, спосіб поширення ідей, на відміну від контрабанди культурних цінностей, що є злочином. Культрабанда входить до царини культурних досліджень, а контрабанда культурних цінностей – до царини юридичних наук. Я пропоную дослідити механізм культуранди через вивчення вернакулярних знань і практик мігрантів, верифікувати за допомогою дослідження гумору мігрантів. У статті пропонується три напрями дослідницької роботи, кожен із них має власну методологію та інструментарій, свій фокус та об'єкт.

Ключові слова: культурна контрабанда, міграція, вернакулярні практики, вернакулярні знання.

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