"Have you Just Taken a Picture of Me?": Visual Ethnography as a Tool in Analysing a Complex Life Situation of Migrant Minorities

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Abstract

Visual methods has been gradually more common in migration research. However, the ones that are prioritised are participatory visual methods, with respondent-generated data that allow "seeing the reality through migrants eyes" and are expected to show the complexity of their situation, challenging discourses produced by media (Oliveira 2016; Mannik 2012; Robertson et al. 2016). These discourses focus either on migrants and refugees' vulnerability or on a thread their presence or arrival can bring to so-called "host" societies (Sz'orényi 2006).

This paper aims into discussing the value of researcher-generated visual methods in challenging images of migrants and refugees popular in a common discourse. What is more, it raises a question if researcher-generated visual data can open new angles of analyses of migrants' situation. It discusses opportunities and limits researcher-generated visual data brings, as well as possible advancing of theoretical perspective within migration studies that they enable. Additionally, ethical consideration such research tools may cause are discussed. The aim of the paper is thus three-fold: (1) discussing the use of researcher generated visual data as a tool challenging popular media coverage of migration and comparing its value to the participatory visual methods, (2) focusing on how employment of visual methods can influence theoretical perspectives within migration studies, (3) drawing attention to ethical problems connected to the use of researcher-generated visual data. A method discussed will be mainly photography, and the problem will be analysed in the context of researching urban and rural arenas of exercising transnational belonging by migrants and their descendants in new and ancestral homelands.

Keywords: reseracherGenerated photography, migration studies, urban studies, visual ethnography

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