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**RELUCTANCE OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION WITH THE NAME 'DISPLACED' AND THE QUESTION OF AGENCY**

*Based on oral testimonies of internally displaced people from Donbas, Ukraine, the article analyses narrator's reluctance to identify with the name 'displaced', and a link between agency and the category of 'displaced'.*

**Key words:** internally displaced, Donbas, Ukraine, narrative of displacement, agency.

Цимбалюк Д.

**НЕБАЖАННЯ САМОІДЕНТИФІКАЦІЇ З НАЗВОЮ «ПЕРЕМІЩЕНІ» І ПИТАННЯ ПРЕДСТАВНИЦТВА**

*На основі усних свідчень вимушених переселенців з Донбасу, України, стаття аналізує небажання оповідача ідентифікувати себе з ім'ям «переміщених», а також сполучною ланкою між представництвом і категорією «переміщених».*

**Ключові слова:** внутрішньо переміщені особи, Донбас, Україна, опис переміщення, представництво.

Цимбалюк Д.

**НЕЖЕЛАНИЕ САМОИДЕНТИФИКАЦИИ С НАЗВАНИЕМ «ПЕРЕМЕЩЕННЫЕ» И ВОПРОС ПРЕДСТАВИТЕЛЬСТВА**

*На основании устных свидетельств вынужденных переселенцев с Донбасса, Украина, статья анализирует нежелание рассказчика идентифицировать себя с названием «перемещенный», а также со связующим звеном между представительством и категорией «перемещенных».*

**Ключевые слова:** внутренне перемещенные личности, Донбасс, Украина, описание перемещения, представительство.

This article analyses the identity of the 'displaced', as it is discussed by Katrina M. Powell in her book *Identity and Power in Narratives of Displacement* [1], and self-identification of the narrators from the in-depth interviews, conducted for the *Donbas Odyssey* [2] art project in 2015-2016.

*Donbas Odyssey* is a participatory art project by Julia Philipjeva, Victor Zasytkin and Darya Tsymbalyuk, that was initiated in summer 2015 in Kyiv. For the purposes of the project we conducted 26 interviews with people, who relocated to the capital as the conflict escalated. Each interview is structured around drawing a memory map of the narrator's hometown, thus focusing on the memory of the city, rather than the experience of displacement itself. In this paper, I quote excerpts from several interviews, which were recorded for the project. For the purpose of this article, all names of the interviewees have been changed.

In *Identity and Power in Narratives of Displacement* Katrina M. Powell discusses the danger of imposing a narrative of displacement on the narrators. Powell claims that already 'the naming of individuals as *displaced* (or *refugee*) has functioned as a way to mark them as other. They are therefore discursively bound to narrate expectations of displacement' [2, p. 187]. At the moment, there are two names that are widely used in Ukrainian language which refer to the displaced: the official term IDPs (internally displaced people) and *pereselentsi* [переселенці]. The word *pereselentsi* is composed of a prefix 'pere', which expresses a movement through space/territory and a verb 'pereselyty' (to move somebody to a new place) or 'pereselyty's' (to move oneself to a new place). *Pereselentsi* is usually used as a shorter version of the phrase 'vymusheni pereselentsi', where 'vymusheni' translates as 'involuntarily'.

There are several implied myths associated with the name *pereselentsi*, which appeared as urban legends and were further perpetuated by the Ukrainian media [3]. These myths often merged with another negative stereotype towards people from Donbas, which emerged during the 2004 Orange revolution. As a result of 2004 stereotypes, 'donetski', a neural designator of belonging, meaning 'people from Donetsk', was turned into a synonym of barbarism and banditry [4]. Thus, the name *pereselentsi* has been charged with a number of implied negative stereotypes, among which ungratefulness, separatism and unlawfulness. This in turn led to discrimination against *pereselentsi* simply based on fears and prejudices triggered by the name itself. As a result, some of the displaced were reluctant to identify themselves with *pereselentsi*, being afraid of being prejudiced and consequently – discriminated.

Reluctance to identify with the name *pereselentsi* is also closely linked to the absence of agency, implied by the name. By agency I understand ‘the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power’ [5] and ability to resist circumstances. To paraphrase something one of our narrators, Petro, said off the record after the interview: ‘I am not a displaced/re-settler, nobody displaced/re-settled me, I moved myself’ [‘Я не переселенець, ніхто мене не переселяв, я сам переїхав’]. Another interviewer, Ivan, modified the name *pereselents*’ (singular form of *pereselentsi*) into ‘a conscious *pereselenets*’. When I asked him for an interview, he replied: ‘However I am quite a conscious *pereselenets*’ and I don’t really have any desire to go back. So I am not sure if I fit your project. But I’d be glad to talk.’ [‘Однако я вполне сознательный переселенец и возвращаться назад как-то желания нет совершенно. Так что не знаю, подхожу ли. Ну а поговорить я рад’]. When further asked about his self-identification Ivan replied:

<p><b>Interviewer 1:</b> Listen, why did you write that you are a conscious <i>pereselenets</i>’?</p> <p><b>Ivan:</b> Ah, yes...</p> <p><b>Interviewer 1:</b> What does it mean?</p> <p><b>Ivan:</b> Like, I mean the non-conscious, I understand, that typology is...</p> <p><b>Interviewer 2:</b> Like involuntary...</p> <p><b>Ivan:</b> “Yes, I moved, yes, I want to go back to Donbas, I love to walk around the fields and meadows there, but now I am here in Kyiv...” (laughter)</p> <p><b>Interviewer 1:</b> And conscious means?..</p> <p><b>Ivan:</b> And conscious means: “I was going to go away from Donbas, I did not like it there, I don’t know what I can do there...” “Like that...”</p> <p><b>Interviewer 1:</b> So, the moment came and...</p> <p><b>Ivan:</b> Yes, yes... I mean, the moment came a long time ago, it’s simply that I had an apartment there and everything...</p>	<p><b>Интервьюер 1:</b> Слушай, а что ты написал, что ты сознательный переселенец?</p> <p><b>Иван:</b> Ну, да...</p> <p><b>Интервьюер 1:</b> Что это значит?</p> <p><b>Иван:</b> Ну, как бы не сознательный, я понимаю, что типология...</p> <p><b>Интервьюер 2:</b> Как вынужденный...</p> <p><b>Иван:</b> “Да, я переселился, да, хочу ехать обратно на Донбасс, мне там так нравится гулять по степям и лугам, но я вот в Киеве этом нахожусь...” (смех)</p> <p><b>Интервьюер 1:</b> А сознательный - это?..</p> <p><b>Иван:</b> А сознательный: “Я собирался уезжать из Донбасса, мне там не нравится, не понимаю, что там делать...” “Вот...”</p> <p><b>Интервьюер 1:</b> То есть подошёл момент и...</p> <p><b>Иван:</b> Да, да... Ну, как бы момент давно подошёл, просто я понял, у меня там квартира есть и всё такое...</p>
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In both cases the interviewees emphasise the absence of agency implied by the name *pereselents*’, and therefore are reluctant to identify themselves with it. Even though both narrators moved with the escalation of the conflict, they reject representing themselves as victims of the situation. This decision to avoid self-victimisation and resistance to adopting a victim-identity, which is often ascribed to the displaced, is important for the interviewees who aim to move on and to integrate into new communities. Self-perception as agents helps them to adapt to new circumstances, and in fact both of the interviewees succeeded in it.

In addition to victimisation, implied in the names, the fact of naming and categorising somebody as ‘displaced’ leads to imposing on them a certain story, a frame:

Categorizing, creating boundaries, and defining someone as displaced is inherently violent because of the limits of language in fully representing any experience. When we categorize, which is ultimately violent, we routinely make the other abject simply by ordering, by categorizing, or by (violently) representing [1, p. 8].

Categorizing does not only trigger othering, but also causes the exclusion of everything and everybody that does not fit into a created frame. This exclusion is evident in Ivan’s example and his questioning whether his story fitted our project, just because he felt that his testimony did not correspond to a kind of narrative expected from a displaced person.

There was another occasion of an interviewee expressing her doubts of fitting in with the project. Natalia moved to Kyiv just a couple of months before the escalation of the conflict. We arranged to meet for the interview, and just before I started recording, she asked me whether her story suited the project, since she did not move to Kyiv because of the conflict and therefore did not witness violent events. In both cases narrators compared their experiences against narratives which they assumed were expected from them. The mismatch between the expected narratives and their own experiences led them to doubt their right to tell their stories. Thus, petrification of the identity of displaced potentially leads to silencing voices of those who could not fully recognise themselves in that identity. This in turn, creates a danger of perpetuating the circulation of a single narrative of displacement, the one that focuses on victimisation. Consequently, victimisation further propels othering of the displaced.

Powell argues that the displaced stand for ‘our fears of lack of control over land ownership and a claim to “home”’ [1, p. 189] and that is why we have a fascination with their narratives, and yet we constantly other them. Powell continues: ‘we seek the narrative of the displaced, and come to expect a particular kind of narrative from them, to know that we are not them’ [1, p. 189]. Therefore, despite the fact that it is often aimed to trigger compassion, circulation of narratives of suffering caused by displacement, further perpetuates the othering of the displaced, instead of facilitating their integration into new communities. Moreover, constantly repeating stories of suffering we petrify the narrative of victim associated with displacement, and as a consequence exclude other narratives which differ from it, or suggest different experiences.

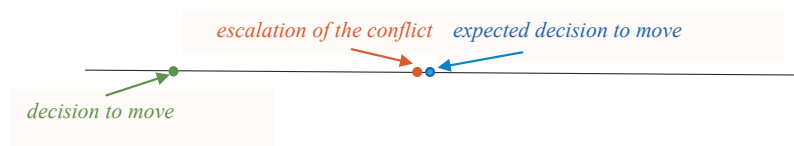
The experience of a victim is already written into displacement narrative by the fact that it presumably begins with the involuntary abandonment of one’s home. The UNESCO definition of displaced person states:

The **displacement** of people refers to the forced movement of people from their locality or environment and occupational activities. It is a form of social change caused by a number of factors, the most common being armed conflict. Natural disasters, famine, development and economic changes may also be a cause of displacement [6].

Many of our interviewees hesitated to identify with the term ‘displaced’ or *pereselentsi*, because they did not claim the military conflict as their only reason for relocation. Several of the interviewees named lack of opportunities in their home cities, as the reason for moving, even if their decision was prompted by the escalation of the conflict. As an example, I provide a beginning of an interview with Mykhailo:

<i>Interviewer:</i> When did the turning point happen, when you realised that you are moving from Donetsk?	<i>Интервьюер:</i> Какой был переломный момент, когда ты понял, что ты переезжаешь из Донецка?
<i>Mykhailo:</i> That I am moving from Donetsk? I guess, when I was 10. Now I am 27, and when I was 10 I decided that I didn't want to live in this city. I mean, all my conscious life I knew... I remember the other moment, I remember the first time I had a thought I could live in this city for my whole life...	<i>Михаил:</i> Я пережжаю из Донецка? Наверное, лет в 10. Сейчас мне 27, а в лет 10 я решил, что не хочу в этом городе жить. Может, раньше... Но сколько я себя помню, я никогда не представлял себе, что я останусь в этом городе жить. Ну то есть всю свою сознательную жизнь... Я помню другой момент, я помню когда первый раз в жизни у меня закралась такая идея, что я смогу в этом городе всю жизнь прожить...

In his answer Mykhailo subverts the narrative I implied in my question: that his decision to move was caused by the conflict. By answering that he was ten years old, he turns my question from the one addressed to a displaced person into a question, that could be asked of anybody who moved to another city for whatever reason. In this short fragment, Mykhailo manifests agency twice: first by changing the meaning of my question and taking control over the narrative, and second time by shifting his decision to move away from Donetsk to an earlier moment in time than I presumed. So, if we had to compare my expectation and his answer in relation to a chronological order of events, it would look like this:



Just like Ivan in the interview I quoted earlier says that he moved because ‘the moment came a long time ago’ [‘момент давно подошёл’], Mykhailo presents himself not as a victim fleeing from the conflict, but as somebody, who decided to move a while ago and finally did it. The escalation of the conflict just prompted the relocation, it was not the main cause of it. Both Mykhailo and Ivan see themselves as agents, not victims.

Another interviewee, Maria, reflecting on her experience of moving claims it being slightly joyful, in contrast to an expected narrative of trauma:

...And once again, it happened with a bit of joy for us, because we... I was always afraid to move. I mean, he [husband] always wanted to bring me here: “Let’s move to Kyiv.” ...Oh, how would we go, where would we go, I mean, I had a stable job here, a normal, paid job, and my husband could not manage... Wherever he went, something would not work, all was wrong, it was difficult to earn something... And I had some sort of stability... And he kept of convincing me to move... And now he jokes, he says: “Until a grenade landed in your yard” – I mean, it’s a metaphor so to say, and he tells me: “you were not going to [move]... It’s good that at least something pushed you to do it...”	...Ну и опять же для нас это происходило немножко с радостью, потому что мы... я все время боялась уехать...То есть он [муж] меня тянул постоянно сюда: “Поехали в Киев.”...Да как мы там, куда мы поедem, то есть тут стабильная у меня работа была, нормальная, оплачиваемая, а у мужа не получалось... Вот куда не пойдет, что-то не клеится, все не так, с заработками тяжело было, в том плане, что не заработать...А у меня какая-то стабильность была... И он тянул, чтоб поехали... Вот это он теперь шутитб говорит: “Пока граната не прилетела во двор” – ну, это так, образно сказать, и говорит: “ты и не сбиралась... Хорошо, хоть что-то помогло сорвать тебя с места...”
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Maria subverts the expected narrative of displacement – of suffering, by saying that for her everything happened ‘with a bit of joy’ [‘немножко с радостью’], thus her representation of the experience of displacement is not purely tragic, but a more complex one: the loss of home is mixed with happiness of finally deciding to move to a place with more opportunities. Therefore, just like Ivan and Mykhailo, Maria rejects self-representation as a victim and manifests agency by shifting her decision to relocate to the days long before the conflict. Here, the conflict pushed her to finally perform the action, but she had the idea before, since her husband always wanted it.

Maria’s mismatch with the expected narrative of displacement is further evident in another moment in her interview, which I quote below:

<p><b>Maria:</b> <i>Hm.. It's like, maybe that's our nature that we would not like to remember... It's that we turned away from it, and not that... But from the other hand... (we) don't want to remember, what has passed, passed already... I also read many things on Facebook, the way things smell like home, blablabla... And my mother-in-law managed to send us some things... So she calls: "What shall I send you?" And I say: "Try finding that shirt, that skirt... Even though I've lived without them for a year, and I think that I can continue living without them... When I came to Kyiv, I understood, that, God, it is possible to live without all, all things that stayed there and to be OK, to be happy, because the most important thing that you brought with you – your children. And you can manage without a mascara, without a hairpin, or a skirt... That's why...</i></p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> <i>Yes, many people tell me that...</i></p> <p><b>Maria:</b> <i>And so like this... And she sent us those things, and I was so excited, I unpacked them, tried to feel the smell, but they smelled like nothing...</i></p>	<p><b>Мария:</b> <i>Как-то вот мы отвернулись, и не то, что... Но с другой стороны и как.... Не хочется вспоминать, и то что, прошло, так и прошло... Я там начиталась тоже в Фейсбуке, как там пахнут там вещи, тратата, домом там, туды-сюды...И получилось у свекрови возможность передать нам кое-какие вещи. Ну она звонит: "Что Вам передать?" Ну говорю: "Поищите там ту кофточку, ту юбочку, хотя я год без них прожила, и я считаю, что можно прожить без них и дальше...Я когда приехала в Киев, то поняла, что, Боже, насколько можно жить без всего, всего, что там осталось, и быть нормальной, счастливой, потому что главное, что ты взяла – это своих детей... И что можно обойтись там лишний раз без какой-то туши там, лишний раз без заколки, и без юбки, которая висит... Поэтому...</i></p> <p><b>Интервьюер:</b> <i>Да, люди мне многие так говорят...</i></p> <p><b>Мария:</b> <i>И вот как-то так вот... И передала ж она там эти вещи, я ж такая в воодушевлении, развернула, понюхала, а оно никак не пахнет.</i></p>
<p><i>Ah, like it was not mine... So it made me even more upset... I got upset, that... I lived without those things, and the smell, and will keep on living, that those memories were not there, and maybe they don't exist, and maybe I don't need them, I don't know...</i></p>	<p><i>Даже ну, как-то вот, как не свое... Поэтому я так даже больше расстроилась. Вот расстроилась, что ну... жила без этих вещей, и без этого запаха, и еще столько же буду жить, что не нашлось тех воспоминаний, и может их и нет, и не нужны они, там не знаю...</i></p>

Nostalgia is a sentiment, which is often expected from the displaced, as much as feelings of being a victim. In this case Maria tells of the role of social media in making her see nostalgia as one of the core elements of a displacement experience. Having read observations by other people, Maria expected to feel similar emotions when she received things from her home in Luhans'k. However, she did not feel anything, and this absence of the expected sentiment saddens her: 'it made me even more upset' ['я так даже больше расстроилась']. The mismatch between her experience and the one she expected makes her question the presence of her memories, the presence of her past: 'those memories were not there, and maybe they don't exist' ['не нашлось тех воспоминаний, и может их и нет']. Just like Ivan and Natalia were questioning the legitimacy of their stories, because they did not fit into a category of a displacement narrative, Maria questions the legitimacy of her past and the importance of it. At the same time, her absence of nostalgia is a choice, related to her decision to move on: '(we) don't want to remember, what has passed, passed already...' [... не **хочется** вспоминать, и то что, прошло, так и прошло...']. In this phrase, Maria implies that one chooses to remember or not, and her family is the one that does not.

It would be wrong to state that Maria or other interviewees do not express any feelings of nostalgia or separate themselves completely from the military conflict or other displaced in their narratives. All of the testimonies contain often contradictory perspectives and inconsistencies, because there is no fixed narrative that can reflect their experience. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the restrictions that the identity of an IDP or *pereselenets*' and the displacement narrative associated with it impose on everybody, who experienced displacement. Not only do these restrictions compel people narrate their experiences in a certain manner, they also silence the ones, whose stories do not fit into a narrow frame of a *pereselenets*' identity. Maybe, in order to start understanding the experience of displacement, we, as researchers and cultural agents (*Donbas Odyssey*), shall learn how not to overlook discrepancies between expected displacement narratives and stories told us by the displaced. This means learning to listen and interpreting with care, without trying to force our interviewees into a certain frame. Perhaps, when we stop looking for ways to victimise displaced in our representations or try to establish another petrified narrative of their experience, we can also stop othering them by projecting our own fears on their stories.

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