

Migration by Choice: When Migrating Memories Reshape One's Identity

Margherita Serafini
Independent
Italy

Abstract

When we talk about migration, we normally think of people who are forced to migrate due to conflict in their homeland and what that does to their identity once they build a new life elsewhere. But what happens when people migrate by choice? I am one of them.

Like many international friends and ex-colleagues of mine I did not leave my home country - Italy - due to persecution or war, but because I wanted to explore the world. After living on four continents (the current stop of this personal journey is Belgium), I can say that my identity has been reshaped through migrating memories.

The defining moment of this realisation was when I finally opened in Belgium all the boxes I had stored in my home country after leaving each place I had lived in. As I mainly worked in conflict areas, I did not want to take everything with me to the next destination. I did not want to risk losing it.

When I opened all the boxes I realised that the tangible heritage of my chosen migration (mostly photos, books and paintings from the countries I lived in and visited) was just the reflection of the migrating memories that make me who I am now. I consider these memories the most invaluable intangible heritage I can ever experience in my life. But also the most challenging.

When you migrate by choice, you want to expand your horizons through your quest for self-discovery. As a result, you build an invaluable travelling intangible heritage which, however, has a flip side. While soul searching through different cultures, placelessness kicks in. And you end up paying a high price for it. You will never really belong anywhere.