

Fragments of memories. Representations of forced migration during occupations

Elizabeth Carnegie and Jerzy Kociatkiewicz
University of Sheffield

Abstract

"ghosts" inevitably emerge: odd fragments of memory that wander homeless in the wake of social and individual efforts to render the past coherent. (Leshkowich, 2008: 5)

Our analysis in this paper is based on an ongoing ethnographic study of recent history museums in Central and Eastern Europe. Here we concentrate on three sites: Museum of Occupations in Tallinn, Museum of Occupation in Riga, and Museum of Genocide Victims in Vilnius which focus on roughly the same period (1939 to 1991). As memorial museums, their aim is to commemorate and reclaim the unique suffering of specific geographically located individuals, and to project a united present and renewed sense of nationalism. They focus on Soviet and Nazi occupations of these countries which also led to forced migration and deportation. These museums are thus consciously seeking 'ghosts', and this paper, considers how individuals, families, peoples are reclaimed through bringing back to their nation state objects, fragments of memories, which were carried by their owners when forced to leave their homeland. Objects, and indeed people, within these three Baltic museums, are also reclaimed from within films and photographs, often taken by the occupying forces, giving new meanings and interpretations and (re)located and reshaped to suit the political present. Through examining the interpretation of such objects and other media, and drawing on interviews with staff and visitors, we determine how these nation states seeking to create nationally sanctioned or endorsed narratives, must both draw on the imaginaries of place (and indeed displacement) and fix those narratives so they are rooted in actual, and ideally symbolic, spaces.

Leshkowich AM. (2008) Wandering ghosts of late socialism: Conflict, metaphor, and memory in a Southern Vietnamese marketplace. The Journal of Asian Studies 67: 5.

Claessen, C. and Howes, D. (2006), The museum as sensescape: Western sensibilities and indigenous artefacts, in Edwards E, Gosden, C and R B Philips Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture, Oxford: Berg 199–222.