

Martínez, Francisco. 2018. *Remains of the Soviet Past in Estonia: An Anthropology of Forgetting, Repair and Urban Traces*. London: UCL Press. 282 pp.

Unlike many anthropological studies about the ongoing processes of political transformation in the former communist bloc, this book shifts the emphasis from conventional practices of memory to broader, more nuanced practices of forgetting. In its examination of the material and social 'afterlife' of the Soviet world in contemporary Estonia, it is concerned less with how residual elements of communism are currently being invoked or commemorated, and more with how people are engaging with these remains through distinct yet interrelated acts of neglect, recovery and repair. It is this focus that singularises Martínez's insightful inquiry into the temporal and affective spaces of what he labels 'post-post socialism' (p. 222). In researching the relational imaginaries of neglected and recovered structures, objects and spaces within various Estonian cities, the author explores existing socio-cultural practices connected to generational change, material culture and temporal regimes, with an emphasis on the experiences of the 'Children of Freedom' generation, or those born after the formal dissolution of the Soviet regime.

Martínez is a deeply self-reflexive anthropologist, acknowledging the process of becoming more personally embedded in his field site through his marriage into an Estonian family. He employs inventive methodologies throughout his fieldwork, interwoven with a range of analytical perspectives to construct a project that proves to be a unique combination of ethnography, cultural critique, reportage and personal memoir. Applying cross-disciplinary methodologies and 'suture-based theory' to examine urban constellations of waste and disrepair, he demonstrates how Estonians are negotiating and actualising their own communist histories in increasingly heterogeneous ways. This type of 'fringy anthropology' (p. ix) facilitates the author's aim to examine the fluctuating global flows of past and present not as a 'straightforward engagement with collective memory or political categories, but as part of the wider process of consumption, reuse and rediscovery' (p. 219). It points to the contested social practices and power relations surrounding any evocation of the past, but also the potential for re-evaluating and redefining its legacies.

Part of what adds to the originality of this analysis is that Martínez becomes an instigator of artistic and playful experiments that supplement his interviews, focus groups and practices of participant observation. For example, during his fieldwork he co-curated an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Estonia and its adjacent gallery, a building that was the city's main energy plant during the twentieth century. For this project, he invited people to create on-site installations, paintings and sculptures referencing the material conditions of the building's own processes of decay and its physical and social transformations through time. In another instance, he asked 23 artists to each choose an ordinary object from a large street market in Tallinn, and then organized an exhibition of these objects at a local art gallery. Relocating these items to such a context served as a means to open up debates around the street market's prevailing associations and forms of representation, and to involve the media and members of the public in new discussions around the market's significance in the past, and its potential forms and roles in the future.

Seeking to move beyond oft-recited official narratives of memory, Martínez probes unusual and unexpected sites to provoke alternative, unscripted accounts of people's encounters with the past. In his research about Sillamäe, a former industrial town that used to be the site of a secret uranium-enrichment plant, he describes a museum of everyday Soviet objects filled with household items, tools, banners, and factory memorabilia, and shows how such material practices of recuperation point to the complex process of reclaiming identities, histories and relationships. He analyses the recently founded Estonian National Museum in Tartu, formerly a Soviet airbase, as a 'memory field,' examining how traces and erasures of the past coexist in an old building that now carries high symbolic and national importance. He discusses the multiple and contested senses of identity and belonging that he encounters in Narva, a place of perpetual peripherality that at the end of the Soviet regime became a border city between Europe and Russia. Martínez also investigates Tallinn's urban 'amalgamations,' charting how forces of globalisation, neoliberalism and Soviet legacies currently coincide within its landscapes. He gives an ethnographic account of the now defunct Railway Street Market of Tallinn, focusing on its 'para-economic activities' and its presence as a space not just for financial transactions but also for meaningful social interactions, a 'meeting point for precarious groups in Estonian society' (p. 86). And he tracks the 'life history' of the Linnahall, a controversial building in Tallinn whose condition of arrested decay is connected to powerful

memories and affective associations, particularly among its current maintenance workers and members of the younger generations. He reflects upon how the building's liminal qualities facilitate alternative memories, which alongside the ruin's current uses and appropriations contribute to its status as an 'involuntary' or 'unintentional' memorial that is unfinished, ambiguous and open to interpretation.

The end of the book touches upon the larger project of how 'generational positionings' are affecting people's current engagements with Estonia's Soviet past. Regarding the youth who have had no first-hand experience with communism, Martínez suggests that their varied forms of appropriating this history, both on local and globalised levels, merit serious consideration, promising new understandings about the varied generational experiences of memory, national identity and belonging. As there is still relatively little research on generational differences in the post-socialist memorial arena, this book would have been strengthened by more comprehensive theorizations of the concept of the generational cohort, as well as more detailed engagement with existing studies of generational patterns of behaviour, outlook and memory in other parts of the world, including border contexts. Discussion of the impacts of generational factors also could have been highlighted and integrated more consistently throughout the previous chapters.

Winner of the 2018 EASA Early Career Award, this book makes substantial contributions to multiple anthropological arenas, both methodologically, in its development of innovative strategies for researching the complex and elusive realms of memory and forgetting; and thematically, in relation to the politics and poetics of the ongoing transformations in the post-post socialist world.

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