

Tiina Kinnunen

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The contested memories of the Lotta dress in 20th century Finland

Part of session 'Clothes as emotional objects in oral histories' (Tiina Kinnunen, Liisa Lalu, Kaisa Vehkalahti & Sigga-Marja Magga)

The paper presented by Kinnunen discusses the overall theme of the session "Clothes as emotional objects in oral histories" from the view point of politicized memories of clothing. The session as a whole addresses the issue of "emotional objects" – topical in the history of emotions – using oral history (written testimonies and interviews) as a method and source material. Furthermore, the memories and narratives of the objects – in our case clothes – and the emotions associated with them, will be put in a political frame, reflecting the many layers of political tensions and processes and the related memory communities in Finnish society in the 20th and 21st centuries. In bringing together emotional objects, politics and remembrance the session combines topical discussions in the history of emotions, oral history, political history and Sami studies

Kinnunen's paper addresses the memories and narratives about the Lotta dress and the related politics of remembrance from the 1920s until today. The dress is still today an emotionally strong symbol for the values of the organization which was banned in 1944. The paper focuses on the positive memories of being a Lotta and how these memories are in many cases are associated with the dress. The dress is laden with values and meanings of patriotism and collective service for the nation. On the other hand, also the negative meanings attached to the Lotta Svärd will be discussed and how the dress is used in challenging the legacy of the organization.

Liisa Lalu

University of Turku, Finland

Young girl in a blue shirt. Clothing as identity politics in personal narratives of radical left women in 1970s Finland

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Lalu's paper discusses the role of clothing in making the (identity) politics in the personal narratives of former radical left women activists in 1970s Finland. The source and the method are political narratives (interviews and written life stories) and the focus is on the clothes and accessories that narrators remember and describe important and meaningful, clothing as emotional objects. The paper analyses how clothing can be linked to processes and practices of social identification: social identification that reinforced the emotional bonds that unite groups and therefore also inform political choices. Clothing is also remembered as one factor that constructed the sense of identity, who is 'us' and who is 'them'. Bitter memories can be evoked too: one symbol of political engagement in 1970s Finland was the blue association shirt of the opposition of the Communist Party. It became the symbol of division of the Party and the striving between the opposition and the majority: in the meetings and events the power relations of could be concluded with one glance.

Sigga-Marja Magga

University of Oulu, Finland

Fluctuating ideas of resistance in traditional Sámi clothing

The paper presents a tentative project about the use of clothing in the Sami resistance in the 21st century Finland. The focus is on the transgenerational transfer of ideas about the politics of clothing within the Sami (memory) community. The paper develops methodology how to use oral history in gathering memories about the politics and practices of clothing, on the one hand, and discusses the use of oral history in the transgenerational communication within the Sami community, on the other hand.

In presenting the topic and developing methodology the paper links to the overall idea of the session which addresses the issue of "emotional objects" – topical in the history of emotions – using oral history (written testimonies and interviews) as a method and source material. Furthermore, the memories and narratives of the objects – in our case clothes – and the emotions associated with them, will be put in a political frame, reflecting the many layers of political tensions and processes and the related memory communities in Finnish society in the 20th and 21st centuries. In bringing together these aspects, the session combines topical discussions in the history of emotions, oral history, political history and Sami studies.

Kaisa Vehkalahti

University of Oulu, Finland

Men's suit as a symbol of masculinity and adulthood in oral histories of the early-20th-century Finnish culture

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Vehkalahti's paper discusses the cultural meanings of men's suit as a symbol of masculinity and adulthood in the Finnish early 20th century culture. The paper analyses an emotionally laden autobiographical narrative about the first suit written by a man born in 1924. In the early 20th century Finnish culture the first suit, which was often bought for the confirmation school, was a visible sign of adulthood. The same suit was used in dances and other public events, reflecting the status of the person. The narrative written by an author with a humble social background exemplifies the multilayered political meanings attached to clothes, as well as the significance that clothes have as carriers of intimate emotions and memories. By remembering the precious suit the narrator makes an emotional travel to his youth. By talking about his poor clothing he addresses the touching emotions connected to poverty, identity building, self-esteem and class hierarchies.

Maarit Sireni

University of Eastern Finland, Finland

Materializing the loss of home: Domestic objects for remembering and producing re-memories of ceded Karelia

After the Second World War, parts of eastern Finland were annexed to the Soviet Union. The population of the ceded Karelia was evacuated and resettled within the borders of the newly defined Finnish territory. Most of these people were farmers who were given land in rural areas where they set up their new farms. The Karelian people's feelings of the forced displacement did not receive public attention for several decades, as they were expected to adjust to their new geographical and cultural contexts.

This paper explores how the experiences related to the loss of home have been made visible in domestic material cultures of the descendants of Karelian people. In particular, it analyses the role of domestic objects in remembering and producing re-memories of lost places and landscapes in the ceded Karelia. The paper draws on ethnographic research in a remote village founded by a group of settlers, who were Orthodox by religion, spoke the Karelian language as their mother tongue and differed from the Finnish population in terms of their cultural traditions.

The paper shows that homes in that particular village have been reconstructed as the sites of memories and re-memories for the descendants of the Karelian people. It illustrates how the children and grandchildren of the original settlers have maintained and created the material evidence of their families' painful experiences in their daily environments. It discusses domestic spaces also as the important sites of resistance by this group living in a diaspora.