

GHOSTS OF FORMER INHABITANTS

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We usually think of ghosts as specters of the dead that haunt the world of the living. But what if we defined “ghosts” as all the physical remnants that bring to light certain overlooked aspects of the past, thus enabling us to understand experiences other than our own? The latter is the approach I adopt in my own research into resettlement, conducted in areas previously inhabited by representatives of one culture who were resettled by representatives of another culture as a result of forced migration. Resettlement is a process that comprises both displacement of one population, and then re-population by another. The former is a relatively well-studied phenomenon, whereas many aspects of the latter deserve greater attention – especially how the new settlers experience the objects and places left behind by the former inhabitants. My analysis will be based on archival and field research conducted in three regions of the Slavic part of Central Europe where traces of former German cultures remain visible, regardless of the efforts to erase them.

Objects appear as ghosts of the former culture, forcing new settlers to interact with the “spectral” presence of those who were displaced. By the same token, the post-resettlement encounter between the new and the old culture resembles a form of afterlife: adopting the style of language and ways of thinking that we associate with the spirit world helps us capture an important aspect of the resettlement experience that has eluded or has been overlooked in other descriptions. Hauntology, the spectral theory of being, allows us to show how the past seeps into the present, and to deal with unresolved questions, thus becoming a tool for studying unexplained phenomena. To hauntology, I also add my own understanding of the notion of recycling, as a mechanism for reintroducing what the displaced left behind into the lives of the new settlers.

My approach will bring a fresh perspective into everyday life in post-resettlement regions, providing a more detailed and coherent understanding of forced migration processes and their constant reinterpretations under various political and ideological regimes. By showing what post-resettlement objects are and what attitudes people have to them, the project will present a case study of what we can learn, from the Central European experience, about the emergence of new cultures. ■



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Since 2007, the ERC has awarded Starting Grants 27 times to researchers affiliated with Polish research centers. Starting Grants can be awarded to scholars with 2–7 years of experience after the completion of their PhD for projects lasting up to five years.

In this edition, Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska is the only winning researcher affiliated with a PAS institute, and one of the two scholars in the field of the humanities. In previous editions, researchers from the Polish Academy of Sciences have received funding for their projects a total of seven times.

Information about the grant and its winner is available on the websites of the National Science Center (NCN) and the Polish National Contact Point for the EU Research Programs.