Department of Sociology & Anthropology, BGU

Course: Anthropology of Museums: Power, Memory and Identity

Elective M.A. Seminar, 4 points

Lecturer: Dr. Jackie Feldman

Taught 2009-10

Description: In the Western world, museums have served as important cultural institutions which mold taste, and shape social hierarchies, national identities and images of the other and ourselves. But they are also conceived of as dusty old assemblages of junk. By reading articles and visiting museums, we will examine visual display, political processes, the policies of curators, and the reactions of (various) communities to the representations in museums. We will thus enrich our knowledge of the survival and development of museums in an increasingly mobile world, and under changing regimes of the senses.

Among the questions to be examined are:

How did the museum come about and what sectors and interests in society does it serve?
How do curators, objects, architecture, texts, guides and visitors interact in the performative arena of the museum?
How are artifacts selected and for what purposes?
What are the media used by museums to tell a story?
What do museums or exhibits on art, archaeology, science, history, ethnography, the military, and commemorations of wars or catastrophes have in common?
How do museums define the borders of in- and out-groups?
How do museums in the Western world reflect power relations and hierarchies of knowledge and taste?
How do changes in power and entitlement in postcolonial society result in new demands on the museum and how do museums react to them?
What interactions take place between museums and other forms of communication, education, collective memory or entertainment?
What is the relation between museums and the academic or financial world?
Why do people visit museums and how do their [preconceptions shape their experience?
What changes are museums undergoing in the age of the expanding internet and the emphasis on multi-sensory experience?

Course requirements:

1. Mandatory participation in classes and in the excursion, reading, and occasional presentation of reading assignments (10%).
2. Presentation of a report on the excursion and a report on one optional article in class (10%).
3. Presentation of 4-5 page seminar paper outline.
4. Presentation of seminar work in progress.
5. 20-25 page seminar paper on a museum or exhibit in Israel (60%).
Bibliography:


Handler and Gable, *Williamsburg*, 50-77.

Pierre Nora, "Between History and Memory – The Lieux de Memoire", in *Zemanim* 45 (Summer 1993), pp. 2-19 (Hebrew).


Tamar Katriel, "Let's All Be Halutzim: Objects and Stories in a Museum of Settlement History", in *Key Words*, Haifa university, 1999, Chapter 12.


