

Memories of migrations and historical time

Conference to be held 22nd - 24th November 2012

Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration (CNHI, National Centre for the History of Immigration),
Paris

Call for papers

For the past thirty years, memories have become ubiquitous in the public sphere and a recognised field of enquiry in historical studies and the social sciences. Within this framework, migrants have a particular

place: in France, they have been actors of these memorial mobilisations but have not always done so on behalf of their origins. Research-wise, studies on memories of migrations have already shed light on a group or a particular event but defining and exploring the historicisation of such memories remains to be done.

Thinking of memories of migrations - in the plural - enables us to consider both emigration and immigration but also the different categories of migrants regardless of their status. Furthermore, it implies a plurality of memories according to groups, their reasons for leaving, conditions of departure, places of settlement and time periods.

Lastly, the term broadens the definition of what constitutes memory and moves beyond the expression of individual memories.

The first series of questions relates to the place of migrations in this memorial resurgence. Which memories of migrations are being expressed here? How do they articulate with the general societal evolution of the relation to the past? Do they emerge, as in other contexts, from claims for recognition or reparation? Do they have a specific temporality, when compared to other memorial mobilisations? Are they expressed and transmitted in different ways? The expression of such memories today cannot be understood without being placed within a longer-term process during which the relation to the past has taken different forms that also need to be analysed.

However, beyond these contemporary mobilisations, it is important to reflect more generally on the role played by memory in the history of migrations since the nineteenth century, especially regarding the formation of group identities and the establishment of transnational and diasporic networks.

This conference aims to stimulate reflection by focussing on five main, albeit overlapping, areas.

- Event, temporalities and transmission

“Generation” as a concept forms a central question. How does transmission take place from one generation to the next? With regards to political mobilisations, does memory function like a palimpsest, with each generation imposing its memory and erasing the previous ones? Or do mobilisations in fact inherit from the past, nourished by previous struggles? How is memory transformed when the lived experience of the migrant generation is transmitted to those who have not migrated? The issue of memory transmitted from one migratory flow to another will also be addressed: do the most recent groups develop memorial practices with regard to more established migrant groups? Most probably, it will be important to distinguish between the kind of transmission which is linked to public migration-related mobilisations and that which draws from

intimate experience. Does the family hold a central place within these transfers across generations? It may be useful to use the notion of “post-memory”, put forward by Marianne Hirsch with regards to memories of the Second World War and the extermination of the Jews, and broaden it to the case of migrations. Finally, from a comparative perspective, the conference will reflect upon how the different migratory flows relate to memory.

- Geographical territories, social spaces, mobilities and levels of analysis

The construction and the circulation of memories can also be analysed through geographical territories and social spaces. Firstly, the aim is to consider the relevance of a national framework and to vary the levels of analysis, from the local to the international, transnational and diasporic. This varied topographical focus also encourages the study of memories seen from the migrants’ country of origin as well as the memories of returnee migrants.

The reflection on the geography of memory can feed useful comparisons.

Between country of origin and that of settlement, do we see similarities between the relation to memory, its expression in the public sphere, and the introduction of policies relating to symbolic memory-related demands or, instead, are there national specificities?

“Mobilities” allows analysis of the different ways of considering all that circulates in the construction of memories: men and women, but also material objects such as photographs, letters or diaries, and that also raise the question of sources. The diversity of spaces and social backgrounds involved requires reflection on the “borders” that exist between the different social spaces of memory: private and family spaces, public or semi-public spaces (associations, dancehalls, cafés, migrant hostels, etc.). It will be interesting to see how memorial processes manifest themselves in such spaces and what aspects are specific to memories of migration.

- Identities and multiple belonging

Migrants’ memories cannot be dealt with solely in reference to migration. It is important to compare such memories to the theoretical framework (itself changing with time) developed by Maurice Halbwachs in the inter-war period, and to see the roles played by political, territorial, religious, social and gender affiliations in how migrants construct their memories. These memories can effectively be regarded as an interactive process arising from relations between individuals and groups but also between different social groups. The role of memories in identity construction and the value such memories are given by host societies can also be compared. For example, while European identity now allows European Union (EU) migrants to belong simultaneously to different identities, multiple belonging is often denied to non-EU migrants.

- Symbolic policies and heritage

Since the 1980s, the symbolic policies of public authorities have responded to memorial mobilisations in the field of migration and elsewhere. Such interventions have in turn produced further initiatives.

Thus, by activating, supporting but also preventing activities, public authorities participate in the construction of memories through cultural policies and funding. What are the recognition processes at work? Are there other processes to be identified? Are public authorities concerned by memory or by the ‘management’ of minorities? Does the EU have a particular influence through its system of grants and the definition of issues that transcend the national framework?

What role does heritage play and how is this manifest in the recognition process? This question leads on to others: which roles are assigned to migrants and which roles do they claim? We will focus in particular on different kinds of museums, as well as on artistic creativity, taking into account how these memories are used within cultural production, how they are mediated and in turn received by the public.

- Historians of immigration and memories of migrations

Historiographical debates of the past decades have involved reflecting upon the role of the witness and of memory in the writing of the past.

Such debates have also focused attention on the history of those who leave few archival traces, thus contributing to greater reflection on sources and on other ways of writing history. At the intersection of these developments, it would be useful to analyse how memories influence the works of historians and the historiographical debates on migrations.

Organisation

Proposals for papers should be sent in French or English (Word format or as an rtf attachment).

Proposals should include a title and abstract of 3,000 characters (450 words), as well as your contact details (surname, first name, post and institutional affiliation, email and (home) postal addresses, telephone numbers) and a short biography.

Final papers should be submitted at least three weeks before the conference to be read in advance by the discussants.

Several types of proposals will be particularly welcome: those favouring a long-term historical analysis across the centuries; those considering mobility between social or geographical spaces; and finally, those developing a comparative perspective between country of origin and receiving country. More widely, this interdisciplinary conference embraces all proposals incorporating an epistemological reflection.

Submissions by doctoral students and early career researchers are particularly welcome.

Contact details

colloquememoires@histoire-immigration.fr

Time scale

Deadline for submissions: 25 mars 2012

Conference Committee makes final selection of papers: May 2012

Deadline for written conference papers: 31 October 2012

Expenses

Speakers' travel and accommodation expenses will be covered by the conference organisers; further details will be sent out in June 2012.

Conference committee

Marianne Amar (Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration), Michèle Baussant (CNRS/EHESS), Hélène Bertheleu (Université de Tours, CITERES), Yvan Gastaut (Université de Nice Sophia Antipolis, Urmis), Nancy L.

Green (EHESS, Centre de recherches historiques), Jim House (University of Leeds), Tony Kushner (University of Southampton), Marie-Claire Lavabre (Institut des sciences sociales du politique, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense), Sabina Loriga (EHESS, Centre de recherches historiques), Denis Peschanki (Centre d'histoire du xxe siècle, Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne), Laure Pitti (Université Paris 8, CSU-CRESPPA), Henry Rousso (Institut d'histoire du temps présent), Scott Soo (University of Southampton), Laure Teulières (Université Toulouse-Le Mirail / FRAMESPA).

The conference is organised by the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration, in partnership with the research centres Framespa (CNRS / Université Toulouse-Le Mirail) and Citeres (CNRS / Université de Tours) _____