

Migrations' Memoirs – the Migrants' Memories in France

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From the rest of Europe's viewpoint, France is looked on as a former immigration country. While some countries had seen their populations emigrate for ages, France has become, since the middle of the XIXth century, a host country for a large number of foreigners. The very notion of "immigrant" began to form its current sense in those days : while the law on nationality passed in 1889, thought was particularly given to it. Immigration is also a continuous phenomenon of long duration. We notice at fifty years interval the same proportion of foreigners among the census-made population of the territory : little more than 7 % at the beginning of the thirties, just before the repercussions of the 1929 crisis, similarly as in the middle of the seventies, former to the oil crisis.

We can evoke the different migratory influxes which followed one another in France up to the present day : the Belgians in the last century ; then the Italians who came in a body until after the Second World War ; the Spanish workers or exiled republicans ; the Polish hired in the mines during the interwar years ; the workers from North Africa called during France's Thirty Glorious Years (Trente Glorieuses) ; the Turks and Kurdish, the south American and the south-east Asian refugees in the seventies ; let us not forget the West African populations as well as the Chinese Diaspora.

To ponder nowadays over social memory concerning such a phenomenon, is also a way of giving a new awareness of what is at work in that history. Indeed, attitudes and commemorative discourses linked to immigration must be analysed.

- Let us first of all look at what is at stake in the historical representations in relation to the social integration of a migrant community.

- Then analyse the French migratory phenomenon's current memorial forms.
- Lastly, let us consider this journey's memory and commemoration within the immigrant community itself

HISTORICAL MEMORY AND THE MIGRANT COMMUNITY'S INTEGRATION

These questions concerning memory have a long history. For this kind of movement lies, since its beginning, within the framework of a certain historical fantasy, or rather of crossed historical fantasies which take part in making sense of it. The migrants' arrival must always be compared to something familiar. As if the event or the phenomenon under way needed precedents so as to be grasped, understood, and accepted maybe. The manner in which such a movement shall be perceived is then connected, among others, to the collective representations concerning the past and history.

Let us take an example. On the morrow of the Great War, France's south-west region was depopulated of its inhabitants. Men were lacking to farm the lands of the Garonne's basin. After many unsuccessful endeavours to make rural migrants settle down in that area, a migratory phenomenon of increasing scale started up. In a few years only, about 40 000 Italians came to settle. The majority of the people were farmers who had brought along their families. Their coming was also wished by the local notables, the agricultural leaders, the authorities and the local ruling party. As the region was seriously depopulated, they generally made the immigrants welcome.

It is well worth noting here the references made to historical memory which came to light at the same time as this influx began. They came incidentally within the scope of the speeches elaborated upon the subject of immigration by the time's republican élite, regional press articles, and key figures. They put the present event (the original migratory influx) back in a historical context where the past and present were linked by a chain of historical precedents.

The influx was related to a more ancient movement as the migratory fact was symbolically taken over. Points of comparison were sought after so as to find the event's roots. Stress was laid with exaggerated emphasis on any historical episode which lent itself to this symbolical take-over. The twenties' leader writers, who were particularly keen on classical culture, accounted for the ancientness of Gascony's and Italy's bonds by recalling the roman age and the common civilisation it bred. However, they had also rediscovered all the Italian figures who had migrated in the area by the time of the Renaissance: priests, artists, tradesmen or bandits. These characters came to personalise the contemporary migratory mobility's ancestors. They then composed some kind of Latin - Occitany region pantheon where immigration had become the heir of a fantasised tradition of exchanges, bound by a symbolical ancestry.

We could tell in detail how this fantasy connects, how it is reappropriated by each party. Fantasy takes part in its way in making commonplace of the current immigration and even maybe in furthering acceptance. For, fantasy is made use of to make known age – old closeness between both autochthonous and migrant populations. To illustrate the truth of this, one has only to mention this last anecdote. In the meanwhile of the interwar years, each Italian catholic mission organised and expanded an “annual emigrant pilgrimage” to a local shrine. Concerning the Marian pilgrimage to Notre Dame de Marceille (Aude), an Italian missionary of the time upheld that the area's name was linked to the eponym mercenary - Marcellus - who had founded ages ago a roman colony : in that way, he had connected the secular tradition as a heirloom to the Italian emigrants...

The subject of memory recovers all of its importance for this migratory influx right after the Liberation. Indeed, the dark years' disagreement cast its shadow for a long time and the Second World War's aftermath seemed then not likely to fade. The French kept on blaming the Italians for the “ stab in the back” that had meant for their country Italy's entry in war in

June 1940. Public rumours accused the immigrants of having collaborated with the enemy during the German Occupation as well as having taken advantage of their protected status to grow rich buying and selling at the black market. Actually, a great number of trivial events displayed the strong Italophobic feelings that lingered on in public opinion. In such a context, the immigrated Italian community had brought great discredit upon itself. It thus needed to recover legitimacy in the French population's minds.

As in most cases, the essential economic part the immigrant Italian community would play in the post-war years, as its working skills and its tact favoured its acceptance. However the symbols at stake were quite present. Indeed, quite a few Italian partnerships attempted to show a more flattering image of the immigrated community, struggling against the very negative widespread stereotypes. Propagating an antifascist image as well as glorifying the blood shed by the Resistance fighters was one of the ways they actually fought prejudice. Equally, this set of theme could be observed already in some illicit pamphlets before the Liberation. When a young Italian was put to death in June 1944 for acts of terrorism, pamphlets titling "*He died so France could live!*" were published and distributed some time after by his Resistance fellow countrymen fighters¹. The text praised this immigrants' son, descended from that hard-working agricultural population who had come to bring back to life the lands of France's Midi, who had been so heroic that it had "*shed its blood in sacrifice to its host country*".

Commemorations formalised in the post-war years. In fact, it is the memory of a few Resistance heroes which shall make sense of the remembrance's demonstration. From the fifties, the Italian regional resistance workers arranged for an annual commemoration day in Toulouse. They would walk in procession to the War monument, to Silvio Trentin's and to Rosine Bet's commemorative steles. The organisers would display the meeting as an expression of all that united in friendship the Italian immigrants and the French hosts. Those

two edifying personalities composed an ideal and symbolical pantheon. The fact is, Trentin the intellectual embodied international antifascist commitment. As a political exile in Toulousan Midi, he had inspired part of the French Resistance's movement and died while taking part in the supporter war for Italy's liberation. A bomb planted in a German-frequented cinema by Rosine Bet mutilated her to death. She personified that integrated second generation whose resistance commitment had been entirely fought in France. Therefore, the Second World War commemoration was in fact a performance ritualising the immigration's process. We recognise in it all the rhetorical elements of the speeches : about blood ties, joint ordeals, common fate, war veterans solidarity, french-italian friendship...

However, this particular case involves its own limits for it only considers ancient European migration, settled down in agricultural activities. The arrangement is very different when you consider other migrant groups (North Africans and Africans) who arrived more recently, to settle mainly in urban areas. The relation to history and to national recollection weighs heavier on the balance : the relationship between the ancient home country and its colonies, Independence Wars' aftermath, fantasies about the "exotic" otherness in an occidental society, etc. Nevertheless, if the memory at stake here is different, it is not to be given less importance. What matters here is to remember the general idea according to which these stakes are to be taken into account as soon as an immigration phenomenon starts up. They always mark the current encounter. Social memory takes part in the conception of the representations which condition the social integration of a particular immigration.

HOW DOES THE NATION COMMEMORATE THE MIGRATORY FACT ?

Whatever the country you consider, important memory stakes are brought about by immigration that differ from what is traditionally and officially considered as National History. How we make out the present depends on what we acknowledge of the past. In the case of immigration, it indeed comes down to "*making some room in National History for the*

populations who still encounter difficulties in imposing themselves legitimately upon the local people"².

However, immigration has been for a long time a disruptive factor for national consciousness in France. In fact, this situation combined many impediments, some of which resulted from the socio-political reality of a Jacobinical and centralising state. Indeed, such a Unitarian cultural model tended to dismiss differences and to favour common references : see, for instance, how the regional languages and culture had been wiped out. There is also a fact that must be remembered, that is the assimilative vocation of a country which tends to naturalise foreigners, since the access to citizenship traditionally joined the right of kinship (*jus sanguinis*) and the right of "ground" (*jus soli*). Several prejudices inhibited thinking out a national identity. Since the Third Republic and the instilling school system it expanded, the French people contemplated their national identity in accordance to a couple of main representations³. First of all, the one of a more or less everlasting France, her Culture, her ideal geographic setting (the famous "Hexagon"), her linear destiny of a Nation – State marching towards unity ever since Charlemagne and the Middle-age dynasties. The one, too, of an even populating, resulting from a felicitous fusion between Celts, Franks and Latins. These genealogical figments were epitomised in this expression learnt at school : "The Gauls our ancestors".

This point of view has prevented history for a long time to go closely into the question of immigration as a field of study. It only noted that the host country would take over the non-native contribution. The immigrants' story faded out as they became gallicised. Until the eighties, France refused to accept itself as a society of immigrants and still remained "*an unconscious host country*"⁴. Indeed, it had "*magically wiped off a history which didn't agree very well with the native heath mythologies*"⁵. Paradoxically, this set of theme reached, on the contrary, more and more violently into the heart of the public debate. The far-right, who was

beginning to overrun the political scene, made of it its prime subject of controversy. We somewhat realise that what allowed to give expression to every fantasies about the present, was the lack of historical references concerning immigration.

Historiography developed important progress during the next decade such as it prepared the ground for further, broaden advancement. Actually, a great number of scientific works have been published - some whose titles explicitly made show of memory - as the forerunner works dealing with the “unknown Polish”⁶ and the later, more recent doctoral thesis dealing with, for instance, the “seized memory” of the Moroccan miners⁷. This recovery of historiography, as well as its stages, its conceptual shifts, its debates and its deficiencies could be analysed in detail⁸; however, our remarks are specially aimed and interested in social memory rather than in scholarly reconstruction done within academic coteries.

Nevertheless, this abundance of research was involved in the global context's transformation. Ever since the nineties, certain pieces of work were favourably considered by quite a broad readership and some were even written for the general public. Besides, the publishing activity of historiography expanded all-out, as can be noted in the creation of specialised series by the publishing houses - the most emblematic being certainly *Autrement's* “French from elsewhere, nearby people” - or in the work carried out by such partnerships as *Au nom de la mémoire* (“In the name of memory”) or *Generiques* who has just published a survey of the available record sources on the subject⁹. Other initiatives work on etching these progresses in the society, for instance, by helping the secondary school teachers to tackle the subject with their pupils¹⁰.

Above all, these questions are starting to move more than ever the general public. We can indeed look at many television reports debating on this subject, as, for example, the recent resounding documentary film “Immigrants' Memory”¹¹. Three sets of interviews pieced together the North African immigration: “The fathers” about the workers, the exploitation of

labour, and the loneliness in the fifties and sixties ; “The mothers” on how the families gathered together in the seventies, about recollection of the shanty towns and on how bewildered the women felt when they joined their spouses ; finally, “The children”, so as to give awareness of what is currently going on: a feeling of double membership, how the children relate to Islamic religion and how they relate to their future within the French society. Such promotion through the media covers economical, political and moral concerns. They are expressed every day : the fact that a Radio-France station broadcasts a radio report on the Parisian Portuguese community, making a point in talking about a contractor “nicknamed in his youth, the little Portos”¹², the day before the European Football Cup’s France – Portugal quarter finals, is particularly revealing...

However, what is recalled here and according to what speech ? Immigration’s collective memory is indeed at the crossing of various representations : those regarding former immigrations, distorted by the subsequent reconstructions, and those regarding the current situation, soiled by the state of tension the public and media discussions are in.

Generally speaking, what can be collectively recalled of the foreigners’ integration process ? How shall we commemorate what has long since been viewed in France as an assimilation, that is the complete take-over and finally removal, of the migrant group ? As in some golden legend, it is commonly acknowledged that all ancient migratory influx had become integrated without the least bit of tension. This looms up a posteriori as a “miracle” of integration, under the influence of compressed turns of phrases due to a certain analysis that is found cleared of any temporality¹³. These representations eclipse the harshness of the migrants’ working and living conditions, while, on the other hand, a couple of model paths are glorified as successful social outcomes. These factors pay for the necessary tribute of integration. In some way, that’s the price of oblivion, the price one has to pay so that one can lose one’s foreigner status¹⁴... The memory one has to inhibit so one doesn’t become a

foreigner again by calling attention on oneself in a controversial way. Thus is a manner of imposing invisibility, of tolerating just acceptable differences who are reduced to a few traces of a mere outlandish identity. Such view of things is very much related to the current debate and puts forward a tacit comparison with more recent immigrations.

The question of immigrated women must also be taken into consideration. They've always been present, nevertheless they had remained for a long time unseen. They formerly joined in immigration in important numbers : when census was made in France in 1946, they represented 42 % of the foreigners and then in 1990, they were 48 %. However, only the male side was known for a long time : the worker side. Once again, it was the feminists' critics against the exclusive point of view (though put forward as neutral) of these analysis, that gave a whole new insight into the problem. If man is universal and global, then the female foreigners are the minority of the minority group. One must recognise the material difficulties of the task for the historian regarding this particular subject. The women rarely appeared and left any traces in the written sources as public records, administrative documents or newspapers. The oral transmission prevailed¹⁵. Yet today the context being more open-minded, thought is given to it in its global and diverse phenomenon. New questions and new approaches allow now to make room for the women and to take into consideration the parts they played in the different family lives. Even if the immigrated women's history still needs to be written, it has now been at least established that migration isn't just men's business.

Another problem needs to be stated. How does one recall the darkest episodes of immigration's history ? How does one look these episodes straight in the face and what must be shown of them on the social stage ? Our era seems certainly more capable of investigating the national memory's dark areas. Breaking with former taboos, our Republic's president acknowledged a couple of years ago, the state's responsibility in the Vel-d'hiv's roundup against the Jews during the Occupation. This is the context in which must be grasped what is

newly visible in the various given elements of immigration's history. It is more generally admitted that justice must be done and that a "memorial duty" must be carried out. The distance is far from being travelled though there is some progress. In the President Bouteflika's journey to France, it seems meaningful that an official visit to Verdun, where a great number of Algerian soldiers died, had been organised the 14th of July. For all those who were left behind from national history, certain novelists played for the first time the spoilsports part writing books which mingled investigation and fiction. The October 1961 Algerian demonstration in Paris which were lethally suppressed, is an example of the kind of episode the novelists inquired about. Indeed, it had been silenced for a long time, but was nevertheless revealed to the general public thanks to a detective story¹⁶.

But it was above all the immigrant groups or refugees who busied themselves recalling the facts of the past. Thus, when the Federacion de Asociaciones y Centros de Españoles Emigrantes en Francia (FACEEA) realised that the Liberation's Fiftieth anniversary commemorative events didn't rightly pay homage to the republicans and guerilleros, it decided to restore the witnesses' speech arranging for a symposium on the subject¹⁷ and recording their oral remembrances.

The epoch is in such a turmoil that it sometimes reveals the recollections' conflicts. Titled "Argelès-sur-Mer remembers : the *Retirada*, the camp", this town arranged during the summer 1999 "a tribute week to the memory of the 1939 500 000 exiled republicans of the Roussillon". The goal was to tell the people about the accommodation conditions the Spanish suffered as soon as they had entered the French territory - the barbed wire fencing on the beaches of the Pyrénées-Orientales - as well as to tell about their persona non grata long-bore status. However, during the discussions, a controversy burst between the parties : those who, like the mayor, only wanted to evoke and name the event "internment camps" while the Spanish wished to keep the original name of the epoch "concentration camps".

LOCAL CULTURAL INITIATIVES

Even if some people keep crying out in indignation about an overshadowed history, the image of an immigrant-fertilised France can today be favourably expressed. The French society's interest for its immigrants comes more and more from a "will of making an inventory of a multiethnic inheritance"¹⁸. The most ancient migratory influx passed into the common heritage, the local society's common references. It is essentially not only the perception of a realised and effective integration, but also the one of a valuable heirloom, deserving commemoration.

Even so, no big national site neither big national commemorative demonstration are arranged for. Besides the reluctance to clearly identify national representations, various obstacles took part in making those absent. It is difficult to bring into play a memorial day. Even more when there is no real symbolical date, immigration being rather a continuous process, and only a few specific memory sites. The Toul Center (in Lorraine) where the East European immigrants passed in transit, can be assimilated to the Ellis Island where the immigrants were sorted out before entering the American territory. However, nothing is left of it there today. These places are too distressing to see, as well as the internment camps for foreigners during the Second World War were.

Henceforth, it is now locally that cities and neighbourhoods want to symbolically grasp their heritage. They wish to make this visible through demonstrations or cultural products. They often aim to make social dynamics get under way. To recover one's immigrant memory becomes the means to reconstruct the worker towns' or housing estates' identity. Examples of these projects should be given. They are favourably considered by the public or extra-public financing as the Ethnological Inheritance Mission, Social Action Fund, etc. Equally, various partnerships work along the same lines. One of them was supported so as to collect the oral remembrances of several immigrated generations of slate-quarry workers of the Maine-et-

Loire, linking the first Bretons to the late Turks in the seventies¹⁹. This way of looking at it is interesting because it says what all historians already know: the very first immigrants were, in the XIXth century, only the French population travelling to look for work through other regions than theirs.

Elsewhere, the town's administration take directly the initiative in doing this. The town cultural department of Thionville (Moselle) developed a consistent action program so as to “give more social and cultural visibility to the people descended from immigration and stress the cultural blending, that stems from the intermixing of people”²⁰. This program has followed since 1984 three stages: “time for recognition of immigration”, interest for “cultural values”, and finally interest for “cultural interbreeding”. All of these are made materialised by symbolic acts, displays and shows. Other works are even marketed. Argenteuil's town council in the Val d'Oise thus put together a compact disc presentation box where songs and oral testimonies restore to life the traces of popular, militant and immigrant memory whose scope encompasses the century²¹.

Today's trend aims to report immigration's history in the guise of cultural events. A couple of instances are enough to show the general tendencies. At a militant level, several self-expression means through photography, concerts, cinema, drama and discussions recently crossed under the aegis of the partnership CIMADE, aimed in particular to “give another image of those who had left their country behind” and to show how “migration is a source of exchanges and enrichment”²². However, the title of the exhibition presented a couple of years ago in the renowned “Hôtel des Invalides” sounded like a statement of principles: “All of France”²³. This exhibition put particular stress on the immigrants' contribution to the artistic, cultural, gastronomic and sports fields, in the heart of the shared cultural references of the French people: “*What do Apollinaire, Marguerite Yourcenar, Annie Cordy, Marc Chagall, Picasso, Cavanna, Yves Montant, Marina Vlady, Aznavour, Georges Moustaki, Luis Rego,*

Khaled, Isabelle Adjani, Edith Piaf, Django Reinhardt, Kopa, Zidane, etc...have in common except the fact of being immigrants or the children of immigrants, as one French out of five is!".

Other attempts seem more original in their forms. A single, but striking example of this is the following project supported by the Ministry of Culture's Inheritance department. A partnership has indeed invited the Italian coalmen's children - today all of them being very old gentlemen - to reconstruct in front of an audience a coal site in the forest where their immigrated parents had worked²⁴. The closest possible to true-life, the grasping of immigration's common history comes here along with the self-actualisation of their know-how, which are handed down by the actors themselves or their descent. The memory of immigration is embodied live so as to be shared.

Finally, some twinnings between districts appear as new commemoration forms. If we mention the example of the Italian immigration to the South-east of France again, we note that this twinning phenomenon has expanded from the late eighties. An immigrant was the one who impelled a first twinning. In the summer 1999, Toulouse's consular constituency²⁵ counts 65 towns twinned with Italian villages. In most cases, they make materialise the migratory network between the departure villages and the settling towns. These endeavours give rise to ceremonies who pay tribute to this immigration. The bonds that thus were founded between two European regions were particularly favoured. These migrants' destiny seems to anticipate the integration's movement that societies are living at continental scale²⁶.

In this way, certain town's administration locally appropriate the immigration which marked them. They even praise it as their identity's key element. These customs show that immigration's memory could be made visible in France today in a rather official and formal fashion. Nevertheless, that isn't yet possible unless certain conditions are observed. In this case, the immigration is old now, and favourably considered by consensus. They represent an

important election weight seeing that a great number of them have been naturalised and that their descendants are French citizens.

THE MIGRANTS' MEMORIES

As many examples have shown, memory's homecoming, concerning immigration, is strictly dependent on the migrants' and their descendants' attitude. Sociologists have studied the migrants' family memory. They analysed the different transmission patterns which gave life, within the families, to the history of their migratory destiny²⁷. The first generation is marked by emigration, that is the parting between a "before" and an "after". As soon as the second generation, there appears a noticeable difference between the stories passed on to them by those who remain faithful to family history, those who liberate themselves from it, and those who reshape it in their fashion. Finally, the third generation's interest for their ancestors' migratory history is very much reliant on the grade of their parents' social successful outcome.

What is new in this phenomenon now is that the internal transmission tends to formalise. What traces must be left behind so that the family can remember together? How must this unforgettable story be fixed in one's memory so as to hand it over to the coming generations? From now on, a fashion of written stories come to light destined to pass on life's journey to the closest relatives. What is at stake here is existence made story, the founder experience of migration converted in destiny. Those are the ones who write the "novel" of their own lives, providing moreover the historian with new material which requires a specific critical analysis. Other media fulfil the same purpose as photography which should be closely studied, as well as amateur homevideos. They are what file the family memory, which often pass in transit abroad so as to show something of one's life here to one's community of origin.

This growing concern for family memory joins the genealogical quest which comes within the scope of similar preoccupations and logic. This enthusiasm, which even moves the

“founder French people”, is even becoming a market. What the partnership “Italian Ancestors” (founded in Paris) advertises in its leaflets, is the setting-up of a database which makes census of the French-naturalised Italians and mixed weddings from 1820 to the late fifties.

However the immigrated people’s and their descendants’ quest for memory goes beyond, from now on, the simple private sphere. Today they claim a public memory, which could be talked about beyond the family circle or the membership group. It is particularly meaningful that some key figures mention their origins, indeed even openly claim them. This is the case for instance of a former international Rugby player, converted today in a businessman, who talked about his social rise to the press comparing it to his parents who were Italian immigrates that had “*arrived in France with just a plain suitcase in the hand*”²⁸. Is it maybe since a successful autobiography of a little immigrant Portuguese girl who became a singer²⁹, but this destitute suitcase seems ready to typify all of the accomplished journeys. When the people concerned are questioned, many spontaneously take up this symbolical image. Other personalities would rather stress the legacy stemming from a political exile. Once more, sports is a good revealing of the current tendencies. Thus, the official Youri Djorkaeff (the star soccer player) internet site recalls his ancestors’ homecountry - Armenia - and the 1915 genocide³⁰. This reference made to origin may also be a way to commit oneself a bit more. During the political dealings between the right and far-right parties which followed the last regional elections, the president, who had just come out of the Midi-Pyrénées’ regional council, declared himself unable to come to terms with the far-right party, recalling notably, on that occasion, that he was “*the son of a Venetian immigrant chased out of Italy by Mussolini*”³¹.

Many artistic works and/or documentaries achieved by descendants claim processes strictly related to memory bonds. They often declare openly they desire to recover memory

for the group they are born of. The first one who allowed the French South-west rural immigration to express itself again was a woman writer, an immigrants' daughter. Through a novel, an old Italian man's stream of consciousness gives an account of the immigration's remembrances, who keeps turning over his souvenirs as the history's defeated man³². The uprooted being's condition concerns more than formerly. "Stories from our country of origin"³³ account for this singular relation to identity, for this intimate desire to return back to the sources of a family legend of here and elsewhere.

We are getting closer to a notion of a memory which integrates. For, "*it is not the suffering which prevents integration, it is the unacknowledged humiliation*"³⁴. To recover memory is to recover dignity. See for example the Italian film festival organised since 1976 in Villerupt (Meurthe-and-Moselle) by the immigrant miners' descendants. In this steel-making Lorraine, near half the population is still Italian. The festival offers a roundabout manner of recalling the traces left by this immigration. Descendants even produced a documentary on this history: the mine and the steel work, the anti-"wop" xenophobia, the dignity quest, the winning over a speech and a political sphere when one of them became mayor in the late fifties, the fighting against the closing of the mines... One of the authors states that if the humiliated feelings still lingered, they had nevertheless converted them in "cultural fury": "*We wanted to bequeath its history to the population, our parents' one, for they had no words to express it*"³⁵.

The migratory experience has thus become integrated in a more collective memory supported by a whole group. The community's commemoration ritual plays an important part in this context. Although the former migrant communities only possess a "residual identity"³⁶, what remains of cultural specificity is valued, claimed, brandished, often also reconstructed and reinvented. That is equally true for the third generation youngsters searching for their roots.

A partnership dynamics currently exists. The immigrants' or their lineage's associations or clubs aim to maintain and hand over the identity elements to the group of similar origin. They are also concerned in making these known to the French people of other origins. The most active ones lead a voluntarist policy to pass on language as a cultural connecting point. Many are regionally based, which accounts for ever strong affinities and elective roundups who have learned how to last through time. To grasp at best this phenomenon, the local traces left behind by immigration must be fully sized up. The foreigners, the naturalised people of foreigner origin and the children of foreigners represent in many places a not inconsiderable demographic weight, enough in any case to allow an identity feeling and a curiosity for origins to express and demonstrate itself, if the air of the time allows it. It explains the arrival of lineage clubs, but also of more general associations where immigrant memory was developing a cultural turn.

A variety of ethnical groups carefully worked out communication and link tools. They are first of all community journals, whose positioning is rather cultural for some of them, closer to a Social Action Bulletin for others³⁷. These days, community internet sites tend to appear. They allow a quick and interactive link between members of the same community. By transferring on the Web the migrations' network, they are given a visual expansion. All these points mark a new framework for the personal questioning of the migration's identity questions.

It explains today's arrival of community commemorative forms of migration's history. Now it is a matter of preserving the visibility of the trace left by the immigrants. The majority of these associations wish in turn to pay tribute to memory. The speeches they pronounce, the ceremonies and symbolical acts that are accomplished, translate the will to assert themselves and the seeking of acknowledgement. Thus the Midi-Pyrénées Triveneti's Club presented a honorary medal to its nearly centenarian elder who had been the heroic actors of the pre-war

immigration³⁸. Regarding Toulouse's Italian Catholic Mission, it wishes to co-ordinate the writing of a booklet about this history, to "leave something" after the passing of the year 2000...

The immigrant groups' concern for its collective memory and the need of a memorial speech within the communities are in themselves relatively new phenomenon. The most important fact to remember is the political implication this progress possesses. What is at stake here is recognition of oneself by oneself as well as of oneself by the others. When some community commemorations attempt to appear on the public scenery, it is another memory that tends to come to light. That is the memory of the excluded from official memory. With a militant and controvert aim, "paperless" Chinese chose the French National Republican Day to pay their tribute to the 837 Chinese workers who died in France during the First World War. The general public knows nothing about their existence. Their group placed a spray of flowers the last 14th of July on their grave in the Noyelle-sur-Mer cemetery (Somme region) where they are buried, where could be read : *"To the Chinese workers of 1917-1920 who died for France. The Chinese workers of 1997-2000 excluded by France"*³⁹.

In this way, immigration never really stops requesting and reconstructing social memory. It's one of these reflective questions which become imbued right away with current concerns, and sent back to the current debate. In France today, immigration's memory follows the shift in the collective identity's questioning. We can't say anymore that it is denied or hidden. It nevertheless gives rise to partial, fragmented and sometimes conflicting expressions, who show how difficult it is to link different spheres together : the person, the membership communities and nationality. It also shows, however, that the discussion exists. This memory is thus hard at work and clarifies itself according to the forces which are at work within the society. For, these crossed views looking back to the past always express how we are together currently and how we look forward to the future.

(Translated by Nathalie Tafelmacher)

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- ² DEWITTE Philippe, *Vercingétorix et Abd El-Kader, une histoire plurielle de la France*, Projet, déc. 1996, n° 248, pp. 25-33.
- ³ CITRON Suzanne, *Mémoire nationale, mémoire plurielle*, Hommes et migrations, août - sept. 1988, n° 1114, pp. 14-22.
- ⁴ SCHNAPPER Dominique, *Un pays d'immigration qui s'ignore*, Le Genre humain, fév. 1989, n° 19, pp. 99-109.
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