

# Migration and the Uses of Memory

***7 November 2013***

**AFTERNOON SESSION: 14:00-17:00 (Room: 27.0.47)**

## **PhD thesis workshop**

PhD students working on migration related subjects are invited to give a 15 minute presentation of their project which will be then be discussed by a panel with senior researchers from KU and guest speaker, Professor Alessandro Triulzi, Dipartimento Asia Africa Mediterraneo, Università di Napoli "L'Orientale".

PhD students interested in participating in this event should contact:  
Dr Peter Leese (leese@hum.ku.dk)

***8 November 2013***

**MORNING SESSION: 09:30-12:00 (Room: 27.0.09)**

## **MIGRATING MEMORIES OR REMEMBERING MIGRATION**

**Birgitta Svensson** (birgitta.svensson@nordiskamuseet.se)  
Professor of European Ethnology  
Stockholm University

## **THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE IN MEMORIES OF CHILEAN REFUGEES IN DENMARK**

**Anne Marie Ejdesgaard Jeppesen** (ejdesgd@hum.ku.dk)  
Associate professor, ph.d., Centre for Latin American Studies  
ENGEROM, University of Copenhagen

## **LANGUAGE AND MEMORY: NORWEGIANS IN SPAIN**

**Ann Elisabeth Laksfoss Hansen** (Ann.e.hansen@uis.no)  
PhD Fellow, Department of Cultures and Languages  
University of Stavanger, Norway

## **THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN MIGRATION LITERATURE IN ITALIAN.**

**Pia Schwarz Lausten** (Lausen@hum.ku.dk)  
Associate Professor, Italian Studies  
ENGEROM, University of Copenhagen

# Migration and the Uses of Memory

*8 November 2013*

## **AFTERNOON SESSION: 13:00-15:00 (Room: 27.0.09)**

**A short film on Lampedusa by Alessandro Triulzi.**

### **PROCESSING AND ARCHIVING MIGRANT MEMORIES IN ITALY: THE LAMPEDUSA DUMP**

**Alessandro Triulzi** (triulzi@unior.it)  
Dipartimento Asia Africa Mediterraneo  
Universita' di Napoli "L'Orientale"

### **MIGRATION, UTOPIA AND MEMORY: LETTERS FROM CUBAN BALSEROS.**

**Jan Gustafsson** (bjt982@hum.ku.dk)  
Associate Professor, Center for Latin American Studies  
ENGEROM, University of Copenhagen

### **BOLEX AESTHETICS: THE MEMORY FILMS OF ROBERT VAS AND JONAS MEKAS**

**Peter Leese** (leese@hum.ku.dk)  
Associate Professor, Department of English  
ENGEROM, University of Copenhagen

# Migration and the Uses of Memory

**Seminar Convenor:** Peter Leese (leese@hum.ku.dk)  
Associate Professor, Department of English  
ENGEROM, University of Copenhagen

In her 1990 essay on 'Metaphors of Self in History' Virginia Yans-McLaughlin argues that migration history methodology should be reconsidered. Moreover, she recommends a textual analysis of migrant lives as expressed in 'personal documents' (letters, interviews, diaries etc). Since Yans-McLaughlin's statement narrative interpretation techniques have quickly developed across the human sciences, for example in oral history, which increasingly incorporates thematic, structural and performance analysis. Similarly, histories of collective memory have begun to describe through detailed case studies of war, for instance, the procedures by which group recollection emerges and evolves across generations. This seminar considers the sources and methodologies of 'memory work': the ways it might allow us to supplement, personalise and enrich more established approaches to the migrant past, and methodologies for a cultural history of migration.

## **MORNING SESSION: 10:00-12:00 (Room: 27.0.09)**

### **MIGRATING MEMORIES OR REMEMBERING MIGRATION**

**Birgitta Svensson** (birgitta.svensson@nordiskamuseet.se)  
Professor of European Ethnology  
Stockholm University

There is a long tradition within the Swedish cultural history museums of collecting oral histories as well as personal documents like letters, interviews, diaries etc. Connected to this material is the tradition of narrative interpretation/analysis by ethnologist. This paper will use the latest collecting of oral histories in the archive of Nordiska museet in Stockholm, that has focused on remembering migration, e.g. from people coming as immigrants to Sweden. I will use memories from Latin American refugees as well as from Iraq. It is obvious that rather trivial memories can play an important role in 'memory work' connected to identity construction.

As a cultural historian my methodology wants to show the three dimensional possibilities in using pictures, things and text together in analysing the meaning of memories.

Questions will be put about what is most important in transnational lives and identities, is it migrating memories or remembering migration. This will be discussed in relation to concepts like cultural and collective memory. Can these memories be understood as a heterotopic space in the new country or are they created as an institutional memory like cultural heritage.

### **THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE IN MEMORIES OF CHILEAN REFUGEES IN DENMARK.**

**Anne Marie Ejdesgaard Jeppesen** (ejdesgd@hum.ku.dk)  
Associate professor, ph.d., Centre for Latin American Studies  
ENGEROM, University of Copenhagen

The Chilean exile after the 11th of September 1973 military coup against the elected government of Salvador Allende spread the narratives of repression and of left wing experiences with democracy and a socialist government to the rest of the world. This paper discusses reflections on the overall framework that the exiled used to construct their narratives and memories during the first period after the coup and how this has been changed by their experiences in the receiving

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countries. One point is to discuss the way the constructions of memories constantly reflect the needs of the present. Another concerns the construction of the general overall narrative about the 'exodus' which may be similar among refugees in Europe, but which may be very different from the one existing in Chile. The paper is based on an interview with a Chilean refugee in Denmark who reflects on his own experiences, his political activism, the experiences from prison and torture, the first period as a refugee in Denmark and the gradual and successful integration into the Danish society. How does he see the Allende government now? Has he changed some of his political ideas? What does he think of the way the Chilean refugees reacted when they came to Denmark? What does he think of the Chilean society he meets when he travels to Chile today? The memories of the Chilean refugees are of forced migration, of 'longings' and constructions of belongings where past and present combine in a creative process of reflections of a life in which being politically active had a high price. The connection between the personal, individual and the collective memory is one of the topics also touched upon.

### LANGUAGE AND MEMORY: NORWEGIANS IN SPAIN

**Ann Elisabeth Laksfoss Hansen** ([Ann.e.hansen@uis.no](mailto:Ann.e.hansen@uis.no))  
PhD Fellow, Department of Cultures and Languages  
University of Stavanger, Norway

As a part of my PhD thesis project I interviewed two Norwegian consuls in Benidorm about their personal and professional pasts. In this presentation I analyze these interviews to understand how and why informants use several languages to present their stories, and some of the complex ways in which migration and language are related. The paper is part of a larger project about Norwegian migrants in Spain.

Lifestyle migration in Spain has led to transnational lives: one of my informants is a Holocaust survivor who lived in Pakistan before moving to Spain; the other studied medicine in Spain, and moved back and forth between Norway and Spain. Their testimonies exemplify the importance of language and cultural skills for understanding both the sending and the receiver society. One of my informants, for example, uses the present past extensively. Both are bridge-builders and problem-solvers with one foot in each culture. An important part of their experience as migrants and a critical tool for survival is, therefore, the development and deployment of language skills. In my analysis I compare and contrast these two accounts with a special focus on vocabulary. I consider, for example, how my informants are reluctant to talk about problems, negativity or disappointments; how emotional reactions lead to silences; and the ways in which words and silences shape their transnational memories.

Methodological questions are also raised by these testimonies. For example, about how each of these informants understand their position as an oral source; how communication flows based on a 'respectability' and social position; how both seek to confirm the validity of their experience, as well as how the interviewer acknowledges and legitimizes both informant and information.

### THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN MIGRATION LITERATURE IN ITALIAN.

**Pia Schwarz Lausten** ([Lausen@hum.ku.dk](mailto:Lausen@hum.ku.dk))  
Associate Professor, Italian Studies  
ENGEROM, University of Copenhagen

Abstract to follow.

**AFTERNOON SESSION: 13:00-14:30 (Room: 27.0.09)**

# Migration and the Uses of Memory

## **PROCESSING AND ARCHIVING MIGRANT MEMORIES IN ITALY: THE LAMPEDUSA DUMP**

**Alessandro Triulzi** (triulzi@unior.it)  
Dipartimento Asia Africa Mediterraneo  
Università di Napoli "L'Orientale"

The paper will report on various forms of processing and archiving migrant memories in Rome, Italy, in order to increase awareness, and leave trace, of the migrant condition and its representations in the country ([www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net](http://www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net)). The retrieval work carried in the last two years on the Island's open dump, retrieving human traces of migrant landings and of their brief transit on the island, intends to contrast, both physically and metaphorically, the hiding or cancellation mechanisms which lie behind the collective unease surrounding irregular immigration in today's Italy and its institutions. The Lampedusa open dump appears to symbolize the careless disposal of unusable and irksome memories within present-day Italian society. Here the remains of rotten boats derived from the repeated landings of irregular migrants on the Island and their human 'waste' – old shoes, clothes, cooking utensils, children's toys, throw-away objects, but also water-stained documents, photos, holy books and individual writings such as letters, memos or diaries – lie to decompose as a vivid expression of what is not to be remembered in the nation's past. The newly-born Museum/Centre of Migrations of Lampedusa intends to collect, analyse and preserve the increasing burden of memory imposing itself on, but also linking together, the local population mostly of migrant origin with the newly arrived migrants – both marginalized in Italian society – in a shared representation of their common human condition and of the multi-cultural mixing and exchange which has historically moulded and enriched the growth of Mediterranean cultures.

## **MIGRATION, UTOPIA AND MEMORY: LETTERS FROM CUBAN BALSEROS.**

**Jan Gustafsson** (bjt982@hum.ku.dk)  
Associate Professor, Center for Latin American Studies  
ENGEROM, University of Copenhagen.

The insular condition is a fundamental part of Cuba's geographical and epistemological reality, including possibilities for undocumented emigration. In the early and mid-1990's, the number of Cuban 'balseros' (rafters) was extremely high, creating a crisis for both Cuban and US authorities and, more importantly, a sequel of personal and family dramas. The purpose of this paper is to examine different representations of this drama, including letters written by balseros themselves some of which are published in the volume *En fin, el mar* (Valdés/Baltazar, eds, Bitzoc, Palma de Mallorca 1995). These texts will be interpreted in the context of a process of subjectivity in which memory, migration and utopia intersect in complex ways. The migration process in itself is linked to utopia in three ways: (i) the 'balseros' intend to escape a utopian socio-political landscape (revolutionary Cuba) that for them is a dystopia, (ii) they leave in search for a new utopia (for most, Southern Florida), and they placed themselves in 'utopia' in the original sense of the term: a 'no-place'. Memory, in relation to migration and utopia, can also be seen in a three-fold dimension: departing from a disenchantment with the present Cuban society, the subject will tend to reconstruct her/his own, as well as the historic past, and also engage in the contemporary contribution to the future social memory of the current

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ENGEROM, University of Copenhagen

The Bolex 16mm was a relatively cheap, easy to use, and readily available cine camera for aspiring film-makers after the Second World War. It did not record sound, nor was it possible to film continuously for more than a minute before the spring mechanism had to be rewound. Yet for two refugees, Robert Vas (b. Budapest, Hungary, 1931) and Jonas Mekas (b. Semeniškiai, Lithuania, 1922), these technical limitations fostered distinctive recollections of their migrant past.

Reflecting on his departure from Budapest following the failed uprising of 1956, Robert Vas commented, 'I had nothing to stay for . . .'; giving a title to his diaries for the years 1944-55, Jonas Mekas settled on *I Had Nowhere to Go*. Both men had painful, dispiriting experiences in the Second World War, both felt themselves stopped dead by the communist authorities of their respective homelands. Yet within two weeks of his arrival in New York Mekas had purchased his first Bolex and begun his film diaries. He subsequently edited fifteen years of these diaries for *Lost, Lost, Lost* (1976). Similarly, soon after his arrival in London Robert Vas was awarded a small grant from the British Film Institute and quickly made his first short film about a Hungarian refugee's first day in London, *Refuge England* (1959).

A camera for home movies-makers and film students, the Bolex easily roved around the city, its gaze was intimate and subjective. Yet Mekas and Vas remembered in different ways, and with different consequences, each subsequently developed an entirely distinct visual language of migratory landscape, feeling and morality. What I want to explore here is two distinctive forms of migrant memory and sensibility initially prompted by the Bolex.