M M M
Memory, Mind & Media

EDITORIAL

Navigating migration, memory and media: Introduction to the collection

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Special collection: Navigating migration, memory and media

This special collection on *Navigating Migration, Memory and Media: Identity Documentation and Identity Dilemmas* was inspired by a workshop[1] hosting people with lived experience of migration who recounted experiences of exclusion. They explained how painful their awakening was to the reality of being identified at face value in a place they had hoped to call a new and safe home. Such episodes illustrate a heart-breaking truth: how prejudice may impact one's need to belong. This and countless other stories have inspired our special collection. We aim to bring to the fore examples of how migrants and their advocates craft auto/biographical narratives and engage in multimodal artistic expressions to navigate linguistic and institutional challenges. We examine how political and cultural factors shape mobility dynamics at national borders as well as their impact on memory practices.

Our collection brings together insights into the interplay between individual and cultural memory, multidirectional memory and travelling memories to explore how memory and identity are key enmeshed concepts to explore in the context of migration. How do migratory experiences shape and transform individual and collective memories? How do psychological processes influence the perception and documentation of identity? In which ways do various media forms facilitate or complicate the narratives surrounding migration and belonging?

Europeans seem to have forgotten their own past of migration. Not so long ago it was us who were going abroad to eke out a living, our grandparents fleeing war, poverty, political persecution, famine… Where have those memories gone? The media and official public discourse seem to be obliterating them, leaving little to no room for empathy to those who now immigrate to traditionally emigrant places like the poorer, southern European regions. This is what scholars refer to as 'colonial aphasia' (Stoler 2016) and that some interpret as evidence of racist border(ing) practices (Paynter 2024):

> The emergency apparatus is a crucial mechanism of the colonial present, or the ways
> that historical colonial campaigns and power relations repeat, echo, and continue to

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[1] In June 2024, the COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Action HIDDEN: History of Identity Documentation in European Nations (CA21120) initiative held the workshop '"Nothing about Us without Us": Identity Documents and Identity Dilemmas' in Brussels.

> structure border regimes and notions of national identity and otherness today. … the
> emergency apparatus shapes migration realities by perpetuating power differentials,
> *refusals of memory*, and related racial logics. (3, emphasis added)

Instead of trying to understand the common ground of migrating experiences across
generations and cultures, this purposeful *collective amnesia or forgetting* across the Global
North, not just Europe, is symptomatic of an attempt to erase otherness, the very opposite of
what Levinas (1981) suggested when he argued for the ethical finding of oneself in the
encounter with an other.

Partial remembrance and memorialisation practices have led to a blatant lack of acknow-
ledgement of the colonial past, and, conversely, negating access to those who need it now.
Without conflating difference into sameness, common ground does exist in migrants'
experiences. And while empathy is never enough and sometimes counterproductive
(Shuman 2005), trying to grasp human experiences before making assumptions or judge-
ments is urgent, in our heavily polarised and politicised world. What then is our role as
researchers interested in identity and how identities are produced, enacted and contested,
when navigating migration, memory and media?

In *We Shall Bear Witness: Life Narratives and Human Rights*, Jensen and Jolly (2014) call on
fellow scholars to actively rethink their commitment to their research and what is in our
hands to do. In the same volume, Whitlock (2014) reflects on the importance of witnessing to
asylum seekers' plight:

> Testimony circulates as a social and political force in the public sphere that commands
> recognition and ethical response from both institutions and individuals, but there must
> be an appropriate political, cultural, and social milieu for testimonial agency to occur,
> for testimony to move and stir its witness into action and appropriate response. To
> thrive testimony must find recognition from others who will register and witness its
> truth. (82)

Following Whitlock, are we ready to be this kind of witness? How do we become the ethically
engaged witnesses that these narratives need?

Adopting the role of the ethical 'co-witness' (Kacandes 2023, 13), we ask: 'What does it
mean, to listen when listening is connected to belonging(s) and memory and how might we
do it? What approaches might we take? What are the ethical implications …?' (Gardner 2023,
40). Several contributors who are migrants themselves seek answers drawing from their
lived experiences and those of their families and communities. Artistic co-creation with
migrants is therefore one of the cues we envisioned in our call for contributions. Taking
inspiration from the journal *Memory, Mind & Media (MMM)*'s drive to diversify the traditional
academic publication range, our collection welcomes reflections and dialogues among other
alternative formats alongside more traditional scholarly research articles. Our aim is that
some of the voices of those who have navigated the complexities of migration are heard,
valued, and respected.

Memory on the move

Memory is a travelling concept (Bal 2002, 182–187). As Astrid Erll (2011, 12) points out,
cultural memory needs to 'travel' and remain dynamic to thrive. The concept of 'travelling
memory' serves as a metaphor; while memories lack agency, their movement across
geographical boundaries is an essential aspect of what we consider 'travelling.' Memory
studies have shown the importance of fleshing out this transnational and dynamic nature of
cultural memory (Erll 2011; Assmann 2014; De Cesari and Rigney 2014; Rothberg 2014). In

exploring the metaphor of collective memory, for example, Schiff (2023, 16) emphasises the importance of 'frames of reference' as the conversational contexts in which individuals interpret their experiences: collective memory thus consists of the everyday exchanges of interpretations as they move between people and various contexts. By examining how meaning is created and negotiated within specific situations, one can better understand memory as a continuous process of interpretation.

Granted, memory travels, but does it ever migrate? Or, better yet, what exactly do we mean by *migrating memories*? How do they surface and what purpose do they fulfil? We are especially interested in addressing memory and migration entanglements, and the interplay of both memory and migration in shaping and reshaping identities, individual and collective. In *Memory and Migration*, Creet *et al.* (2011) reflect on the emotional dimensions of migration, particularly what she calls in the Introduction the 'impossibility of return' (10) and the intensified awareness of memory that accompanies physical displacement. Creet (2011) raises essential questions regarding how migration alters our perceptions of self, others, and the notions of 'home and away' (11). Engaging with these perspectives may offer a deeper exploration of the implications of identity documentation for migrants and non-migrants alike.

Navigating migration

The current border regime in Europe often adopts a hostile stance towards migrants, with some of the policies rooted in the view that migration is inherently dangerous, or even a threat to national security. Populist movements exploit and reinforce this myth, while social media platforms often amplify these views (Triandafyllidou and Monteiro 2024), doing little to address underlying racism, hate speech or fake news. In response, we are committed to fostering genuine and respectful dialogue. Guided by the principle of grassroots social movements 'nothing about us without us', we believe that those directly affected must be at the centre of these conversations. We recognise that there are varying concerns about migration and refugees. We contribute to an atmosphere where everyone feels acknowledged and appreciated by highlighting the complexities of migration and refugee experiences, and encouraging informed dialogue that promotes understanding and empathy.

Our contributors tease out the 'we' perspective, including the potential benefits and difficulties that come with it. We welcome contributions that take this ethical commitment seriously, employing participatory methodologies such as, inter alia, Photovoice, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) that engage migrants' voices directly in the research process (Frisina 2018; Cubero *et al.* 2024). Moreover, we have encouraged autobiographical and autoethnographic methods, without which a project on migrants' narratives might miss a valuable, direly needed perspective.

These narratives, moreover, can help make sense of the lived experiences of escaping war and the feelings of uncertainty and loss. Numerous scholarly works have addressed the healing effect of (life) storytelling (McEntyre 1990; Henke 1998; Khan *et al.* 2021). Fragmented stories can also heal and help shape personal and public memories to '"witness" and critically "analyse" them ... bringing our ghosts or haunted and traumatic memories into the present where they can incite emotional reflection and critical assessment' (Adji 2021, 185). However, such healing does not necessarily occur, even when we adopt a 'we' perspective. Efforts to work together with asylum seekers and let them tell the 'right stories' that fit border regimes and their expectations, do not necessarily lead to healing. Instead, when narratives are shaped to conform to institutional requirements, personal experiences may be compromised, leaving individuals feeling misunderstood, silenced or betrayed once again.

Finally, identity documentation is crucial for individuals to secure their rights. However, its practices vary between authorities, especially in times of war, which can put vulnerable groups at risk of losing rights and even of being rendered stateless (Sosnowski and Hamadeh 2021). Having the right document to prove one's identity, or the right narrative to accompany an asylum claim, is vital (Bohmer and Shuman 2008). When neither of those is possible, how do people on the move and their collaborators navigate these tensions? The border is at the heart of identity (documentation) issues and migration, as a physical barrier that migrants must cross and as one of the loci of the collective memory of migrants. How do migrant narratives deal with remembering and forgetting in a system of increasingly fortified borders?

Navigating memory

Recent studies on digital migration and memory point to the interconnectedness of individual narratives and collective memory, emphasising the importance of creative expression as integral to Europe's evolving collective memory (Horsti 2024, 47). This collection explores the dynamic interplay between traditional and innovative media forms, showcasing personal and societal narratives that challenge and reshape dominant memory frameworks. Amidst rapid developments in AI, new questions arise. Hoskins (2024, 17), for example, speaks of a 'third way of memory' that goes hand in hand with a familiar-yet-strange memory that also gives AI agents greater power, with 'infinite potential to remake and repurpose individual and collective pasts, beyond human consent and control'. How do AI-generated migration narratives affect people on the move, and what ethical concerns arise from these practices? How do Large Language Models (re)shape the portrayal of migrants' emotions and character traits, and how could this affect the authenticity and inclusivity of migrant narratives in this evolving collective memory?

Navigating media

Creative productions, including animated films and photos taken through photo lectures, have become increasingly prominent in a migration context. The media debate on migration is complex, and the media forms used to approach this topic are diverse. Creative outputs interrelate with collective memory in this increasingly multimodal landscape in unexpected ways, as it remains unclear how the individuals represented in these outputs will weave their stories into the fabric of collective memory on a larger scale. As Horsti (2024, 47) reminds us, it is 'necessary to think the ways in which creative productions, such as auto-ethnographies and participatory films of migration, become part of Europe's collective memory in the decades to come'. This notion informs our special collection as contributors explore life stories of both personal and social relevance, reworking memories lived and passed on to them.

This collection explores various forms of media, including animated films, podcasts, AI technologies, and (non-)fiction. How do these different media use imaginative techniques, sound, images, and a combination of these or other forms of technology? How do these influence our understanding of and engagement with content?

The liminality of experiences is crucial in reconstructing the multifaceted journeys of migrants, and in understanding how individual stories can be interwoven within these rich texts, drawing on the perspectives of friends and relatives. Multimodal texts can also play a significant role in exhibitions, serving as 'signcomplexes that convey meanings to visitors through objects, verbal texts, images, sound, etc.' (Insulander 2019, 118). This prompts the question of how stories, fragments of narratives, and multimodal expressions function as integral parts of *auto/biographical curating* both by migrants and those who speak on their behalf. Research on autobiographical meaning-making among refugees has shown that

constructing coherent life stories can profoundly impact psychological well-being after forced displacement (Camia and Zafar 2021). For some – particularly those who have faced less drastic life changes – this narrative construction fosters a sense of self-continuity and helps alleviate psychological distress.

An open invitation

This special collection connects different research areas and explores new ideas about how personal and shared memories relate to migration and the significance of identity documents in shaping one's life narrative. Overall, we encourage a more inclusive and compassionate understanding of identity and migration that builds on the complex connections between migration, memory and media.

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