

Panel 03: Middle Eastern and North African migrants in postcolonial Europe: a socio-historical itinerary, 1950s to today

Thursday 17, 14-16 Aula 9

Convenors: **Dario Miccoli** (Ca' Foscari University), **Jozefien de Bock** (Ghent University)

Discussant: **Emanuela Trevisan Semi** (Ca' Foscari University)

From the 1950s onwards, the arrival of migrants from North Africa and the Middle East in Europe took place within a new, postcolonial context. Often, these migrants were labour migrants, looking for (better paid) work up North, often but not always directed to the former metropolises (think of the Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian migrants that settled in France, Belgium, the Netherlands etc.). Other times, they were colonial citizens 'returning' to the 'home country' in the midst of the turmoil of those years (think of the French and Italian 'repatriates' from Libya, Egypt and Algeria). Still others were for example North African and Middle Eastern Jews that felt threatened or had been expelled by their countries of origin in the aftermath of the birth of the State of Israel and the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Despite their different causes and dynamics, these migrations all followed the process of decolonisation and the making of a new global and regional order. They also built upon existing trans-Mediterranean circuits of labour migration and mobility that went back at least to the nineteenth century. Finally, these migrations occurred at a time when novel ideas of Europe and Europeanness, as well as the process of European integration and later on new models of Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and cooperation, were being debated and implemented. Taking all this into consideration, the aim of our panel is to look at the postcolonial Middle East and North Africa from the perspective of Europe and through the life-experiences of those North African and Middle Eastern migrants from the 1950s onwards. By adopting a diachronic perspective that connects this relatively recent past to the current situation, we ask ourselves how colonial legacies intertwine with the making of postcolonial migrant/diasporic communities scattered across Europe and at the crossroads of ethnic and national identities. The panel therefore will adopt a decentred and interdisciplinary gaze towards the Middle East and North Africa, looking at it from the outside and calling for the imagining and writing of a new social and cultural *histoire croisée* of Europe and the Mediterranean. As for the dissemination of our research, we have envisioned two possible options: publishing the papers as a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal (e.g. *European Review of History*; *Memoria e Ricerca*) or as an edited volume in the series *Mediterraneans of Edizioni Digitali Ca' Foscari*.

Paper givers:

- 1) **Jozefien de Bock** (Ghent University), *Guest workers moving in a postcolonial world. The changing reality and perception of Moroccan and Italian migrants' mobility patterns, 1950s until today*

Migration from Morocco to Europe started long before the political turmoil of the 1950s. In this period, however, Moroccan migrants saw their position in North Africa (especially Algeria), in France and elsewhere in Europe change considerably. The geopolitical changes

of these years however did not only impact on the lives of these migrants in the receiving societies. They also had a considerable effect on their individual and collective mobility, both in practice and in perception. In this paper, I will set out the first results of a project dealing with the impact of the macro- and meso-economic, social and political changes in Europe and the Mediterranean from the immediate after-war period until today on the real and perceived mobilities of Moroccan labour migrants and their families. In order to better understand the peculiarities of the Moroccan mobility profiles, I will compare them to those of Italian migrants emigrating in the same period, but within a totally different set of contexts.

2) **Dario Miccoli** (Ca' Foscari University), *'Europe from afar'? Egyptian Jewish migrants to France and Israel, 1950s-1960s*

This paper focuses on those Egyptian Jews that settled in France and Israel following the 1948 War, the Free Officers' Revolution (1952) and the Suez War (1956) and their subsequent experiences of national integration. Focusing on a number of autobiographical and literary writings and on my own ethnographic research with Egyptian Jewish heritage associations in Paris and Tel Aviv, I discuss how ideas of Europe and European culture were imagined before and after the migration, and how their pre-migratory history is remembered vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict, the 'Arab Spring' and post-Mubarak Egypt and lastly episodes of anti-Semitism in today's France.

3) **Thomas Richard** (Université d'Auvergne Clermont I), *Repatriates in the movies, the French postcolonial experience*

The aim of this study is to try to understand how French cinema has dealt with the issue of repatriates from North Africa when Algeria became independent, and how this community, involving an important Jewish community, has been represented on screen. As a form of art, cinema has been particularly sensitive to the orientalist and postcolonial issues (Eades 2006, Chibane 2003, Duncan 2008), in regard to the present situation of migrants from the MENA region in France, with directors such as Abdellatif Kechiche or Merzak Allouache. In the same time, the French pieds-noirs have appeared as a community which densely invested the cultural field to shape its memory of the past, while being confronted to the postcolonial experience of directors and actors who themselves have roots in the countries the pieds-noirs had to leave, and who have narrated this experience from their point of view (Ferid Boughedir, *Un été à la Goulette* for instance). At the same time, the repatriates from North Africa of Jewish faith had to face the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to narrate their view of this question in movies in light of their own experience (Alexandre Arcady, *l'Union sacrée*, *Pour Sacha*). As a community which felt unwelcomed when they arrived in France despite deeply attached to their French identity, deprived of its monuments and in an uneasy relationship with the French political authorities, films have appeared as a way for the pieds-noirs community to share and shape its experience of nationhood, of memory of the lost land, and of its arrival in France. As such, it has also been a tool to keep alive cultural elements dealing with their way of life and which could be put in danger when mingling with the French culture at large (cooking, accent, ways of sociability, etc.). From

comedy to drama, the national experience of the pieds-noirs has been filmed quite often, and this study intends to understand how this has contributed to share the memory of this community at large, not forgetting the particularities of its Jewish component. As such, this study aims to understand from the point of view of cultural history, with its amnesia and hypermnnesia, its trauma, and its confrontation with other points of view, the way the pieds-noirs have defined their identity in a postcolonial environment an preserved, or created, a memory, which at the same time French and their own.

4) **Laura Odasso** (Université Libre de Bruxelles), *Colonial legacies and migration management through the voices of Arab-European couples*

The paper explores Middle East and North Africa postcolonial legacies seeing them from the perspective of European migration management and through the voices of cross-national and cross-cultural couples and families formed by an Arab and a European citizen. Based on the outcomes of my PhD dissertation (a comparative research on influence of different forms of racism on the life courses of families formed by a partner that defines himself/herself as ‘Arab’) and on an ongoing postdoctoral research (on the unattended consequences of family migration policies in Belgium, Italy and France on the life courses of binational families formed by a Moroccan citizen), combining a double analytic approach on feelings of belonging and politics of belonging in Europe, the paper questions if and how the colonial domination has been substituted by family migration management. It seems, in fact, that behind the façade of protecting public security, these particular unions and the ‘politics of belonging’ around them highlight the broader question of the selection of who fits and has to be included among the quasi-citizens and, perhaps, future citizens affecting directly the North African and Middle Eastern population in Europe.