

Research project

Bodies Across Borders: Oral and Visual Memory in Europe and Beyond - BABE

ABSTRACT

Our study of new forms of European identity, in an increasingly diasporic world, engages both native and 'new' Europeans. Intercultural connections are woven through memory, visibility and mobility and concern the movement of people, ideas and images across the borders of European nation-states.

CONTACT

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The BABE project is funded by the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP/2007-2013) / ERC Grant Agreement n. 295854

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Project Description

Mobile Bodies and Memory across Borders

The BABE project considers contemporary Europe a crucial point of arrival in a global network designed by mobile human beings and, increasingly, a postcolonial space. The project aims to explore the changes induced by global mobility into visual memories of Europe, focusing on visual art production and on the traces of memory produced by mobile people (oral and visual interviews, maps, objects, drawings). It compares two nations, Italy and The Netherlands, chosen for both their similarities *and* differences in relation to past and present movements of people, as this “tension” allows for a productive comparative study. The approach to cultural memory, as reflected in various cultural products and material cultures produced by movements across borders, foregrounds the intersection between memory, visibility and mobility as one of the key concerns of our research which intends to connect the visual and the oral in the study of memory. Offering a critical account of stories and practices of movement in, out and through Europe, the research aims to shed new light on the multiplicity of meanings of mobility by examining the interlinked histories of emigration, colonialism and immigration that for long were considered as separate fields of scholar enquiry. In this perspective, new and old forms of intersubjectivity – across both spaces and temporalities – represent also a starting point for a critical assessment of differential mobility regimes and the ways in which stillness and motion are spatialized. While keeping a firm stand within cultural history, we plan to draw on the expertise of colleagues engaged in research on the economic and social geographies/histories of migration in/to Europe. In pursuing the search for links between mobility, memory and identity, we will make use of a variety of methodological tools and sources, such as oral interviews, mapping drawings and photographs taken by interviewees, art products and fiction and docu-fiction films.

Theoretical-framework

The Babe Project intends to contribute to the history of European subjectivities by studying transcultural memory and processes of identity formation, engaging both native-born and ‘new’ Europeans. One of the assumptions on which the project is based is that contemporary movements of bodies across European borders give rise to forms of memory which are not only imbued by various cultures but incorporate within them an archive of their relations in the past.

In this perspective, the redefinition of the time-space nexus represents a central feature of the politics of memory. In engaging with mobile ‘bodies across borders’, our effort will be to envision memory in transnational and transterritorial terms. By engaging with individual biographies and itineraries, in the frame of wider historical geographies and political economies of mobility towards and within Europe, we will seek connections across time and space. The research will aim at going beyond national and European boundaries, and at establishing comparisons spanning different time periods, with particular reference to the history of European colonialism and European identity.

Looking at the constellation connecting memory, visibility and mobility to study sociocultural relationships in a historical perspective we consider:

transcultural and diasporic memory as methodological and theoretical tools, able to set up innovative approaches by taking into account various forms of dislocation as an intrinsic feature of memory processes.

visibility as the battlefield shaping the relationship between the movement of bodies and their spatial and subjective representations, which points to the link between subjectivities and a plurality of forms of visibility.

mobility as an experiential and embodied process foregrounded on a multiplicity of heterogeneous micro-productions of mobility, whether 'real' or imagined/envisioned.

Practices across borders represent also a central focus in terms of the exploration of new research procedures. In this sense, the main aim the project is not only to establish cross- and transdisciplinary approaches to the connection between memory, mobility and visibility, but also to situate them in the context of the relationship between oral history, anthropology, visual studies and geography, as well as between various fields of knowledge such as academic/critical research, school and community-based settings, and the contemporary arts.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork component follows various directions of work and is articulated around three main areas:

Individual interviews

The individual interviews are carried out mainly with migrants from the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and Peru and collected in Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. The goal is to focus on various journeys and migratory experiences of different subjects (based on their social status, age, gender, working conditions, etc.)

Fieldwork in educational contexts

A large part of the work consists of fieldwork in educational contexts, considered crucial for the attempt to understand what the term "Europe" and "memory" may mean today and for future generations. The fieldwork includes educational institutions and community-based and civil society associations based in Italy and the Netherlands, including those with a prevalent number of "native born" subjects (male and female, aged between 14 and 20) and migratory subjects (male and female, aged between 16 and 60).

Visual works and artists

Fieldwork and archival documentation concerning artists and visual artworks is aimed to study various dimensions and connections between memory, mobility and artistic practices. These include: the interplay between artists' biographical itineraries and their visual production; the impact of documentary and the archival turn in the visual arts in a historical perspective; and the political relevance of a visual critique of Fortress Europe.

Methodological Approaches

The main innovation proposed by the project is the exploration and analysis of the changes induced by global mobility into the production of visual memories of/in Europe, focusing on visual art production and on the traces of memories produced by mobile people (oral and visual interviews, maps, objects, drawings).

Individual and collective interviews are conducted by introducing a significant variation into the framework of the life-history interview, i.e. the requests for the drawing of an itinerary of the subject's mobility. Another adaptation is represented by the 'induced reception' of visual artworks.

Visual works: The collection of data and documentation concerning artists' visual works is aimed to disrupt the traditional distinction between primary and secondary sources. This perspective involves various types of data collection: individual and collective interviews with artists (defined as such either by critics and art institutions or by local communities), including both structured interviews and/or informal contacts and exchanges with curators, gallerists, art agents; direct and participant observation during exhibitions; archival and web-based research.

Another relevant methodological challenge is represented by the connections emerging from different fields of research. All the visual and oral material produced will be filed at the Historical Archives of the European Union (EUI, Florence). The issue raised by the archival processing of the material collected resonates with the exploration of a wider meaning of "archive", thematized by contemporary art practices and debates.

Internal seminars and individual exchanges with a group of scientific consultants in visual arts and ethnoanthropology support the work of the research team in establishing the analytical framework. Moreover, a series of workshops is aimed to set up a network of academic exchange with members of the scientific committee, scholars and researchers, in the field addressing mobility and visual studies.

People

Advisory Committee

Reflecting the interdisciplinary approach of the project, the Advisory Committee is composed of specialists from diverse academic disciplines as well as professionals from the art world (film and contemporary art). While some members are acting in a capacity of general consultant, others will be called upon to be involved in the project in a more specific role.

- **Talal Asad**, Distinguished Professor at the Graduate Center of CUNY (City University of New York), USA. Specialisation: Anthropology and postcolonial theories of Islam.
- **Jonathan Boyarin**, Thomas and Diann Mann Professor of Modern Jewish Studies and Professor of Anthropology at Cornell University, USA.

- **Catherine David**, Independent curator, Artistic Director of the documenta X in Kassel, Germany.
- **Pilar Folguera Crespo**, Professor of Contemporary History at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain. Specialisation: History of European unification and identity.
- **Etienne François**, Professor Emeritus at Université Paris-I – Panthéon-Sorbonne, France, and Professeur d'histoire at the Freie Universität Berlin, Germany, where he is the director of the Frankreich-Zentrum. Specialisation: German history and comparative history of Europe.
- **Maria Hlavajova**, Artistic Director of BAK (basis voor actuele kunst), Utrecht, Netherlands. Specialisation: Visual art related to contemporary history.
- **Ioanna Laliotou**, Lecturer in Contemporary History and Intercultural Relations at the University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece. Specialisation: History of subjectivity and migration.
- **Lutz Niethammer**, Professor Emeritus at Jena University, Germany. Specialisation: European identity and oral history.
- **Marina Nordera**, Professor in the Department of Arts et Spectacles at Université de Nice. Specialisation: Cultural history of body movement.
- **Andrea Peto**, Professor of European comparative gender history in the Department of Gender Studies at the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. Specialisation: Oral memory, memory of the Shoah.
- **Sandra Ponzanesi**, Professor in the Department of Media and Culture Studies/Graduate Programme, Utrecht University, The Netherlands. Specialization: postcolonial Europe, Italian postcolonialism, media and migration.
- **Irit Rogoff**, Professor of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London, UK, and curator. Specialisation: Theory of contemporary.

Research Associates

- Liliana Ellena
- Leslie Hernández Nova
- Graziella Bonansea
- Gabriele Proglia
- Milica Trakilovic
- Giada Giustetto
- Iris van Huis

Collaborators

- **Dario Cicchero**, video recording and editing
- **Karen Diehl**, text editing, bibliographical research and consultancy
- **Fabrice Dubosc**, scientific consultant in the field of ethnopsychiatry
- **Fabio Franz**, graphic designer
- **Giuseppe Lauricella**, web developer
- **Marco Morello**, visual reproductions
- **Melina Mulas**, scientific consultant in the field of photography
- **Massimo Trini**, scientific consultant in the field of visual arts

Publications

Books and Journals

- **Dissonant Heritages and Memories in Contemporary Europe**
By Tuuli Lähdesmäki, Luisa Passerini, Sigrid Kaasik-Krogerus, Iris van Huis
Part of the Palgrave Studies in Cultural Heritage and Conflict book series (PSCHC), DOI: [10.1007/978-3-030-11464-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11464-0)
- **Bodies Across Borders. Oral And Visual Memory in Europe and Beyond' (BABE): a conversation with Luisa Passerini, Donna Gabaccia, and Franca Iacovetta**
By Luisa Passerini, Donna Gabaccia & Franca Iacovetta
Women's History Review, 25:3(2016), 458-469, DOI: [10.1080/09612025.2015.1071564](https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2015.1071564)
You can access the full article also in EUI Repository [CADMUS](#)
- **Conversations on visual memory**
By Luisa Passerini
You can access the full article also in EUI Repository [CADMUS](#)
- **Memorie migranti. Visualità, sentimenti e generazioni in una prospettiva transnazionale**
By Graziella Bonansea
- **Is the Mediterranean a White Italian–European Sea? The multiplication of borders in the production of historical subjectivity**, By Gabriele Proglia *Interventions*, 20:3 (2018), 406-427, DOI: [10.1080/1369801X.2017.1421025](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2017.1421025)

Blog posts

“The following posts were written for the Babe Blog, which was published on an external platform and was active between January 2016 and May 2018, during the period of the research project”.

Luisa Passerini

- Passerini, Luisa. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Conference ‘Borders in the European Memories’. Frankfurt am Oder, March 5–6, 2015.”
- Passerini, Luisa. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Bouchra Khalili, Foreign Office, 2015.”
- Passerini, Luisa. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Orality, Visuality, and Memory: Wael Shawky at the Fondazione Merz, Torino, Italy, 2016.”
- Passerini, Luisa. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Crossings by Land, Water and Air, opening lecture by Ursula Biemann for Biennale Democrazia, Turin, Italy, March 25, 2015”.
- Passerini, Luisa. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Presentantion of Bodies Across Borders: Oral and visual Memory in Europe and Beyond”.
- Passerini, Luisa. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Luisa Passerini’s introduction to “Is another Europe Possible?” by Fabrice Olivier Dubosc

Graziella Bonansea

- Bonansea, Graziella. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Tra i luoghi del margine. Fotografie e immagini di una Polveriera dismessa nell’area torinese”.

Liliana Ellena

- Ellena, Liliana. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Das Haus der 28 Türen, Bewegung Nurr, Berlin”, 2016

Giada Giustetto

- Giustetto, Giada. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Reflections and actions around the World Refugee Day”, 2016
- Giustetto, Giada. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Color Difference?”, 2016
- Giustetto, Giada. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Turin’s Pan-African Festival 2015”

Leslie Hernández Nova

- Leslie Hernández Nova. *The BABE Project* (blog). “El uso de la visualidad para el estudio de las migraciones entre Europa y América Latina, 2015”

Gabriele Proglio

- Proglio, Gabriele. *The BABE Project* (blog). “MoAD: Stories in Fragments between Visual and Visuality”, 2016
- Proglio, Gabriele. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Exhibitions as visual mapping of knowledge”, 2015
- Proglio, Gabriele. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Mapping Lampedusa: cinema and “emotional geography”, 2017

Milica Trakilović

- Trakilović, Milica. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Drawing Conclusions Symposium, Utrecht, June 24, 2015”
- Trakilović, Milica. *The BABE Project* (blog). “We Are Here: A Demand for Visibility through Artistic and Collective Organizing”, 2016
- Trakilović, Milica. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Dialogue between Oral History Projects? Looking back at the *Ongekend Bijzonder Symposium*”, 2016

Iris van Huis

- van Huis, Iris. *The BABE Project* (blog). “Refugees and art in the “Bijlmer-bajes”: A visit to a former prison becoming a *creative*”

Media

Itineraries of Mobile Subjectivities: Young Migrants in an Italian CTP

(CTP, Centro Territoriale Permanente Gabelli, Torino – Centre for the Study of Italian Language and Citizenship) This video is a first montage of some sections of the footage filmed during the sessions of the field research done at the CTP Gabelli in Turin (see Detailed Project Description, and Activities, Luisa Passerini, Presentation of the ERC Research, Part IV). The video includes images from the pilot research done in May 2013 as well as from the sessions in November 2013.

It shows the presentations of the migrants itineraries to the class; related information will be included in this section of the website after consultation with the participants.

School years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014.

- Principal Investigator: Prof. Luisa Passerini
- Research Assistant: Dr. Giada Giustetto
- Direction and Editing: Mr. Dario Cicchero
- “CTP Gabelli” Teacher: Dr Elena Gobbi

In order of appearance:

- EL AMIRI, TARIK, Morocco
- MACKEAN, SARAH JANE, United Kingdom
- BENCHABBA, KENZA, Morocco
- STAN, ARINA, Moldova
- TIMOFEI, CORNELIA IULIANA, Romania
- DANILA, MARIA, Romania
- MANGOUCI, ABDELKADER, Morocco
- KHOUNATI, MOULAY AHMED, Morocco
- TIRDEA, MIHAIL, Moldova
- TABAN, ELENA, Romania
- MADI, HALIMA, Morocco
- LAUSTAKA, INNA, Belarus
- BELIACHYTS, MARINA, Belarus
- GUANOTUNA CANDELEJO, MARTHA MERCEDES, Ecuador
- ALIOUNE FALL, Senegal
- MUNDELE MAKASU, JEAN WILLY, Democratic Republic of Congo
- LINARES, DIANA ELIZABETH, Colombia
- RADOUANE, HANANE, Morocco
- MOUNTASSIR, LAILA, Morocco
- DMITRIEV, LUDMILA, Moldova
- YOUSSEF, MAGDY, Egypt
- CISSE, ABDUL, Mali

Opening of the BABE Exhibition in Turin

The opening of the exhibition was an occasion in which some of the interviewees and their families could meet with the general public and the interviewers. Representatives of the cultural/artistic world and of the municipal administration were present. This video documents not only the visual but also the corporeal dimension of memory as evidenced by the BABE research. 29 March – 30 April 2017, at Fondazione Merz, Turin

[Luisa Passerini's interview](#) on Bodies Across Borders: Oral and Visual Memory in Europe and Beyond

[Watch video](#)

Work Diary

Fieldwork Diary

Fieldwork Diary by Milica Trakilovic and Iris van Huis, Amsterdam 16 December 2016, and by Luisa Passerini and Giada Giustetto, Torino 23 January 2017. Examples of ethnographical diary kept during fieldwork in Italy and the Netherlands. This material will be of great relevance for future scholars and students consulting the BABE archive.

Principal Investigator: Luisa Passerini

The Babe project studies intercultural connections in contemporary Europe, engaging both native and 'new' Europeans. These connections are woven through the faculties of embodied subjects – memory, visuality and mobility – and concern the movement of people, ideas and images across the borders of European nation-states with a focus on Italy and the Netherlands. Our research aims to understand the possibility of new forms of European belonging as they develop in an increasingly diasporic world. [VIDEO](#)

BABE Research Team's meeting (Center Altretalie) Turin, 16 December 2016

A general meeting of the BABE team, holding a discussion on the role of visuality and art in the research project. This a relevant example of the methodology followed by the research team on both the individual and collective levels.

[VIDEO](#)