TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS
OF MEMORY AND
MIGRATION

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“The report for Education and Skills found that history departments in northern cities had avoided selecting the Holocaust as a topic for fear of confronting ‘anti-semitic sentiment and Holocaust denial‘ among some Muslim pupils. Although teaching of the Holocaust is expected to become compulsory, schools have avoided teaching the Holocaust and the Crusades because they are concerned about causing offence to Muslim pupils or challenging „charged“ versions of history which children have been taught at home (The Guardian 02.04.2007).“

“You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realize that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all … Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing.”
...and migration and integration in the 21st century

Conflicts over cultural and religious diversity

Which integration policies?

Controversial debates about the need for labour migration

Underlying question: how can social cohesion be achieved? Memory research addresses this question on a fundamental level, asks about the role of history in creating a common identity

Dr. Barbara Laubenthal
Outline of the presentation

1. Memory – theoretical perspectives
2. Memory in migration studies
3. Research project „Memories on extra-European soldiers of WWII in France and Great Britain“
Memory – theoretical perspectives

• „...the career of the concept of memory as a meta-concept and a new paradigm of cultural studies“ (Harald Welzer)

• “Man is a social being. Without others, he not only lacks access to clearly collective such as language and manners, but also to his own memory” (Maurice Halbwachs)

• Communicative memory and cultural memory (Jan Assmann)

• “Collective memory links the past and the future in a way that from a specific memory a specific claim, a clear norm for future action is derived. Collective memory is an instrumentalized and politicized memory.” (Aleida Assmann)

• Memory is an arena of negotiation and a field of articulation of interests, actors have different resources
Memory in migration studies

Functions of memory

Creating Identity
Importance of historical migration processes for Europe, question of integration of migrants in national memory, integration by a (common) past
(historical migration research)

Orientation for the future
Historical experience of migration of the nation-state, historical preconditions of models of citizenship
(political science, sociology)

Political-instrumental: Memory as a resource for the articulation of current interests
3. The role of memory in shaping current migration policies – memories on extra-European WWII veterans in France and Great Britain

Sikh soldiers in Italy, 1943

Sikh veterans in London, 2002
Five million soldiers from colonies in British army

Approx. 500,000 in French Army

Discrimination during and after the war:

„In some quarters, black soldiers were not even allowed to be buried next to their European counterparts“ (Somerville 1998)

Since 2000: intensification of claims for symbolic and material recognition

different constellations of actors and varying configurations of migration and memory; however in all cases the issue of extra-European soldiers is linked with current interpretations on the issue of migration
“The Memorial will look more to the future than the past. Many of the descendants of those who fought for Britain are now living in Britain. The Memorial will reaffirm their position within today’s multi-cultural and multi-racial society. The Trustees are planning an education project which is designed to provide a sense of identity and connection to the descendants of the volunteers from India, Africa and the Caribbean who live in the United Kingdom today.”
Campaign for permanent residence rights for Gurkha-soldiers in Britain

Gurkha hero can live in Britain

A former Gurkha who won the Victoria Cross has been given the right to live in the UK.

Tul Bahadur Pun, 84, wanted to move from Nepal for medical reasons but had been told he was unable to demonstrate strong enough British ties.

Immigration Minister Liam Byrne has now said his case is "exceptional" and he will be granted a visa due to a "heroic record in the service of Britain".

Former Rifleman Mr Pun was awarded his medal for World War II action in Burma.

After the rest of his section, the 3rd Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles, had been killed, he carried out a solo attack on a machinegun post.
Political campaigns against religious discrimination

- “In March 2004 a law was passed in France that bans (...) religious symbols in the classroom. (...) Sikh schoolchildren are banned from wearing the Sikh turban. The same people who fought for the freedom of mankind and the world, including France, have been denied their right of freedom. (...) Our forefathers did not give their lives so that their children should suffer. This is a great injustice and Sikhs throughout the World, especially in France are fighting a legal battle”. (www.unitedsikhs.org).
Demands on migration control and integration policies in France

“I don’t expect anything from France anymore, but I am sad that our children are not allowed to travel to France“
www.qantara.de, 25.05.2007.

“People from the colonies (...) are discriminated against in the labour market, in housing, in the health system. They are the first victims of social exclusion. (...) France was, and France is a colonial state. (...) The African soldiers that fought in the Second World War are the victims of a scandalous discrimination“

Appel des Indigènes de la République, 2005
Conclusion

- The politics of commemorating soldiers from former colonies represent a new, transnational mode of negotiating issues of migration and integration policies in European immigration countries.
- Transnationalism is crucial in order to understand the role of memory in current migration policies.
- Memory has an influence both on actor’s structures and on discourses in current migration policies (new organizations, new framings, new demands).
- Cases empirically confirm central hypothesis of memory research that memory holds orientations for the future.
- Historical foundations of European migration and integration policies can only be made visible by developing a transdisciplinary frame of analysis.
- By comparing the cases of France and Great Britain, one can analyze the influence of differing historical, political and organizational context factors on the politicization of memory in the field of migration.
Operationalisation of research question

- comparative international country study comparing the cases of France/Senegal, Mali and Great Britain/India, Nepal. Within the comparative country study, case studies will be carried out that analyze

- (1) memory discourses and demands of veterans, their organizations and civil society supporters, and the public negotiation of these claims

- (2) the interpretations, positions and demands concerning current migration and integration policies that are generated within the context within the politics of commemoration on the issue of extra-European veterans

- (3) the transnational characteristics of these politics of commemoration: which border-crossing characteristics (cooperation of veteran organizations and civil society actors, media coverage of veterans’ claims in both receiving and sending countries, interrelations of discourses and claims in sending and receiving countries) does the field of memory have? How do transnational interconnections contribute to the successful politicization of the issue?

- The empirical investigation is based on a mix of methods: an analysis of secondary literature, narrative-biographical interviews, expert interviews, a document analysis and a qualitative media analysis.
Thank you for your attention!

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