

Project : 'A tale of two twinned cities: Corato and Grenoble'

**Webinar organized by the association Atelier Généalogique on
September 24, 2021:**

“Where do we go from here ?”

"How can descendants of emigrants contribute to the documentation of emigration history, by collaborating in migration studies ?"

(Numbers below correspond to the timing of the webinar recording)

Key address by **Stéphane Mourlane**, lecturer in Contemporary History, Aix-Marseille Université, specialist in Italian migration

00.28.39: Memories and History of Migration between Italy and France

Thanks James. Good evening everyone. First of all, I would like to thank James Smith for the invitation and the initiative of this webinar and I would like to send a friendly greeting to my colleagues Catherine and Matteo, as well as to Professor Salvemini.

My talk tonight is about memories and history of migration between Italy and France. I want to talk about the interest of the project "A Tale of Two Twinned Cities: Corato and Grenoble" from the point of view of memory and history of the historiography of Italian migration in France.

France has been one of the main destinations of Italian migrants since the end of the 19th century. The first foreign nationality in France until the 1960s, Italians were the most numerous in 1931 with more than 800,000 people. They are settled all over France (as you can see on the map): in the Paris region, in the south of France, in Lorraine, in Lyon and of course in Grenoble. As you all know, Grenoble is the city that most Coratini chose as their arrival point for immigration to France, especially in the 1920s.

In public opinion in France and in Italy, this past is often forgotten or distorted. In Italy, the collective memory of migration is marked by conceptions of the past of this emigration between, on the one hand, the positive myth of emigration as a symbol of the great expansionist and colonizing Italy and, on the other hand, a pessimistic and dramatic vision of an emigration of poor people that was badly received in the countries of destination. From this point of view, the emigration 'of misery' is perceived as a hemorrhage, a symbol of the nation's weakness.

But since the 1970s, and especially since the 1990s, Italy has become a country of immigration with the rise of xenophobic feelings, and in this context we are witnessing a movement of, let's say, revival of the memory concerning Italian emigration. The link between emigration and immigration is often explicit. We can refer here to the book by Gian Antonio Stella published in 2003 with the explicit title

"L'Orda. When the Albanians were us", it is a bit like the title of the Coratino immigration book "When the illegal immigrants were us".

Another example is that of museums: there are many museums dealing with Italian emigration (as you can see on the map). Some museums have a national vocation, such as the Commenda di San Giovanni di Pré in Genoa or the Vittoriano in Rome, which was opened in 2011 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Italian unity, but is now closed. Matteo is familiar with it and could talk about it better than I could. In any case, there are also many regional museums. This regional dimension - and Matteo and Professor Salvemini have already spoken about it - is very important in Italy in the relationship with Italians abroad. We can talk about this later in the discussion.

For now, I want to emphasize two points. Many of these museums make the link between emigration and immigration: they are museums of migration like the one in Genoa: see these posters. Another interesting point for us this evening is that these museums highlight in particular the transoceanic migration to the Americas with scenographies and documents; migration in Europe and in France is not very visible in these museums.

In France, even since the end of migration from Italy in the 1960s, Italians have long remained invisible. The French now boast of their cultural proximity to the Italians. Italians are our Latin cousins, are less different than the new immigrants from North Africa: this is the dominant feeling. It is true that they no longer perform in ostentatious manifestations of their Italianness, they abandon for the most part the use of the Italian language outside the home, as well as the religious and dress practices of their place of origin.

During the 1970s, some manifestations of the memory of Italian emigration were observed. For example, the song of Serge Reggiani – *l'Italian* - Reggiani is the son of an anti-fascist from Reggio Emilia, who arrived in France in 1930. The singer evokes the return home of a migrant with a chaotic journey. In this song in French and Italian, we hear all the difficulties of migration and the attachment of migrants to their country of origin. A few years later, in 1978, Matteo had already mentioned François Cavana's book, "Les Ritals", about his youth in Nogent-sur-Marne, near Paris, where there was a large Italian community. The book has been well received by critics and is being adapted for a television film.

The memory of Italian emigration was, let's say, resurrected in those years also thanks to the popularity of an important figure in the world of sports: Michel Platini, the best French footballer of the 70s and 80s. When he joined the Juventus club in Turin, the French press emphasized that it was a return to his parents' country. In fact, it was his grandparents who came to France in Lorraine, one of the main emigration areas. Nevertheless, Platini appears as a symbol of integration, really. Since the end of the 20th century, the context seems to have changed: if multiculturalism is still debated in France, it now appears less negative.

At the same time, there is a strong social demand that is reflected in the frequent mention of the "Duty to Remember". In this context, the descendants of migrants want to rediscover their own history, to see it and know it. French people of foreign origin gather around places of memory - as Pierre Nora said. Places of memory to commemorate the moment of migration. In the case of Italian immigration, it is not

insignificant that the moment when the commemoration begins corresponds to the end of the migration process.

Once the problem of integration has been solved, people of the same origin can look at the past with more serenity and pay tribute to those who made their presence in France possible and can also cultivate, let's say, their Italianness. Under these conditions, language courses, conferences, trips to Italy and other activities proposed by the Italian Cultural Institute of Paris, the Institute of Lyon and Marseille, but also the twenty-seven committees of the Dante Alighieri Society in France (there is one in Grenoble). These committees have reached a wider public, often composed of descendants of migrants who wish to learn more about the country of their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

Another element that we can underline is that the associations are very active in creating twinnings between French and Italian cities that establish transnational links between the host and home communities. As you all know, there is a twinning arrangement between Corato and Grenoble, and the association of Coratini residents in Grenoble is very active.

In addition, exhibitions on the theme of Italian immigration are multiplying, with a local dimension such as "Un air d'Italie" in Grenoble in 2011. We can also mention the exhibition "Ciao Italia - a century of Italian migration in France" at the National Museum of the History of Immigration in Paris in 2017, which tells for the first time on a national scale the history of migration in France. I would like to say that this exhibition is currently touring in France, and also in Italy in Italian. You can contact the French Institute of the French Embassy in Rome to organize the free visit of the traveling exhibition "Ciao Italia".

I would also like to point out that in the art world, many other initiatives contribute to revive the memory of Italian emigration in France, such as the traveling exhibition "Ciao Italia". In 2010, a dramatic work recalls the massacre of Aigues-Mortes. The book of the historian Gérard Noiriel is the basis of this work and I would like to say that within the framework of an idealized memory, the episode was long forgotten in France.

We can also mention the Italian show, "When the emigrants were us". This initiative was initiated by Rocco Femia, dynamic editor of the magazine Radici, from the publishing house Editalia of Toulouse, which aims to make Italian culture better known in France, as well as the history of Italian immigration. There are also other magazines such as "La Voce", "magazine of Italians in France", "Focus In", which aims to valorize all that is Italian in France. With more time, I could talk about radio programs, television documentaries, films in theaters or even Italian film festivals in different French cities. There is one in Grenoble.

I would just like to present two recent comics: one, "Bella Ciao", about Italians in Lorraine, and the other, "Disgrazia", about a Sicilian family in Grenoble. For more details on the memory of migration between France and Italy, I would like to point out the article we wrote with Matteo Sanfilippo in the magazine "Hommes et Migrations" and you can read this article online: you can see the online address on the slide.

This is the moment to say and to emphasize that historians have contributed to the collective memory in France and in Italy. It is important to remember that history and memory are not opposed to each other. Memory is both a source, an archive and an object of study for historians, and as I have already said, history is part of the collective memory. I am not going to give a lecture tonight on the historiography of Italian migration. You can read Matteo Sanfilippo's essays, in particular the one written with Michele Colucci "Guida allo studio dell'emigrazione italiana". You can download it online from the website of the Historical Archives of Italian Emigration.

I would just like to make a few remarks this evening that allow me to understand the historiographical interest of the project "A Tale of Two Twinned Cities: Corato and Grenoble".

The first observation is that Italian historians have long been interested in emigration and French historians in immigration; and that they are now studying, often together, migration in a transnational perspective that links the areas of departure and arrival. The titles of the historians' books are significant of Italian migration, as well as the book by Paola Corti and Matteo Sanfilippo, "Italy and Migration". And I would add that in France, the history of migration is no longer only a history of integration, it is a more global history, a history of circulation between the two countries.

The second observation concerns the regional dimension of studies in France as well as in Italy, and it is clear that the Corato and Grenoble regions are not the most studied by historians. Let us say that the work is open. The third and final observation is the change in scale of studies on emigration. For a long time, studies focused on collective movements, mass migrations; now, historians are trying to study individual or family itineraries and paths in order to better understand the experience of migrants. This is not easy, and from this point of view, genealogy, the work of genealogists, can be very useful.

Therefore, the project of the association Atelier Généalogique seems to me a timely work concerning the collective memory of migration in France. Thank you for your attention.

01.07.50 Stéphane Mourlane

There is a question from Rosalba Palermiti, a question about the emigration from Calabria.

01.10.08 Stéphane Mourlane

I would add that the Southerners emigrated mainly to the Americas. Before the Second World War, Italian emigration to France was from the north of Italy. But after the Second World War, Italian emigration to France was southern emigration because northern Italians emigrated to other more interesting European countries, with better balances, such as Germany and England, etc.

01.13.01 Stéphane Mourlane

As I said before, the history of the emigration from Corato to Grenoble has not really been studied.

I'm thinking of an article by our colleague and friend, Eric Vial, on Coratino immigration to Grenoble, but there aren't many studies.

01.13.58 Stéphane Mourlane

I would add that the cultural history of migration is always a competition, let's say.

We have done the political history, the social history and the economic history of migration. The cultural history remains to be done.