



MEMORY and CITY CONFERENCE

Johannesburg, 14-16th of September 2011

- **Call for papers:**

Please send via email a 500-1000 word abstract in any language to Mr Thibault Hatton (comm.research@ifas.org.za), mentioning your name and affiliation, and specifying in the subject of the email "Memory and City proposal, YOUR NAME" before April 25th.

The language of the conference will be English, but we might organize sessions in French provided we have enough proposals in this language.

Circulation of the call: Feb 9th – April 25th 2011

Selection of the papers: **May 2011**

Feedback to the authors: **May 25th 2011**

- **Conférence Description :**

With a few exceptions (for example some cities on the Swahili coast, see Abungu 1998), the issue of heritage in Africa remains, in academic literature as well as among institutions in charge of the economic valorisation of heritage, very much attached to rural areas and societies. African cities, still widely considered alien in the landscape of a continent essentialized as rural ever since colonisation (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1993, Freund 2007), are nonetheless important spaces for the construction of memory and heritage (which are not necessarily interchangeable terms). The topic of urban memory and its meaning in the making of neighbourhood identities and development strategies (linked to tangible and intangible heritage) produced by local and municipal governments and international donors, has only recently come under investigation by researchers in Africa. What image of these neighbourhoods is promoted and for what purpose? What selections and processes operate, as far as representations of these neighbourhoods are concerned, so that they acquire, in the long run, distinctive traits and stereotypes? In cities experiencing rapid transformation, often connected to new patterns of migration and mobility,

what is the role of memory and nostalgia in the making of local identities? To what extent does this nostalgia serve the purpose of regeneration/gentrification policies – a phenomenon that has been particularly prevalent in Johannesburg?

In South Africa, memorial efforts since the democratic transition have mainly focused on the evocation of the (mostly urban) battlegrounds of the struggle : emblematic areas and neighbourhoods wiped out during the forced removals and resettlement policies led by the Apartheid regime (such as Red Location, Sophiatown, District 6), are today the object of memory enterprises which are, arguably, intended to contribute to the construction of a national identity rooted in memories of violent abuses committed under Apartheid (Saunders & Kros 2004, Didier et al. 2007). The question of the link between these memorialised neighbourhoods and the population currently living in them has, however, not yet been explored in depth. Above all, not only do these evocations of memory tend to occlude contradictory voices (Nieftagodien 2009) but little space is left for “ordinary” memories (as described by Hayden 1995). What space do ordinary, everyday or unspectacular memories have in the making of territorial identities? How do they articulate with grand memorial narratives promoted for the sake of national identity?

The event will consist of a two day colloquium, organized at the University of Witwaterstrand (Wits) and University of Johannesburg (UJ); one day of site visits to some of emblematic neighbourhoods of Johannesburg as far as the subject of urban memory in South Africa is concerned; and a film screening and debate at the Alliance Francaise in Johannesburg. It is anticipated that the academic fields represented will range from urban history, geography, anthropology, heritage studies and urban sociology. The intention is to go beyond the frame of “African studies” and to connect experiments and reflections from all corners of what is now a global issue: for instance, the recent progress of French memory collection works in the Paris suburbs, under the impetus of the DIV (Inter-ministerial Delegation for the City) since 2005, reflects the relevance of the theme even for cities that would appear to have come to terms with the issue of memory a long time ago. This would allow us to put into perspective the specificities of research work on memory in “African cities”. We hope to initiate a real dialogue between researchers on this topic.

Suggested sessions for the colloquium:

Session 1: Memory, heritage and development

The themes approached in this session concern the status of urban memory as heritage in Africa. The notion of urban history and memory is often used as an instrumental tool of socio-economic development strategies, initiated both by international donors and local governments. This use of heritage raises several questions about the kinds of narratives that are chosen as representative of memory, and which are occluded or seen as less useful; as well as questions regarding who has the power to use memory and for what purposes. The issue of nostalgia (of what, of whom?) in regeneration processes for instance will be under specific scrutiny in this panel: nostalgia appears nowadays to be a global construct (Appadurai 1996), participating in the worldwide circulation of urban models, and it is put to use in various urban development strategies, from gentrification to the setting up of cultural precincts.

Session 2: Theories and methodologies in urban heritage

This session will seek to unpack some of the problematics and debates around theoretical bases and methodologies for studying and inscribing memory in cities, in Africa and elsewhere. What kind of discourses and languages exist for speaking about memory? What does it mean to study “The African City” in this way? What kind of methods, both traditional and new or inter-disciplinary, exist and are being developed as means of studying urban and neighbourhood memory, including oral history, visual anthropology, different forms of mapping, and so forth (for instance the work of Dibwe in Lumumbashi, 2008, and Jewesiewicki 1982)? This session invites both methodological critiques and the sharing of new methods and theories in the study of urban memory.

Session 3: Mobility, migrations, memory

The acceleration in patterns of economic migration, forced migration and the rapid growth of cities and urban populations over the past 20 years has made African cities important transit spaces with major implications for identities and the construction of urban imaginaries (see for instance the ANR programme 2006 “MITRANS” on transit migrations in Johannesburg): this session will reflect on the role of memory and life histories in the integration process of migrants in the city, with a particular focus on migrant neighbourhoods or enclaves.

Session 4: The politics of urban memory

This session will approach a well-documented theme in South Africa and will try to put its hypothesis to the test in other urban contexts. Under this theme we invite reflection on the articulation between grand narratives and national or collective memories, and what could be termed “ordinary”, neighbourhood or local memory, including private archives and localised oral histories. How do processes of power and politics impact on the construction of memory in cities? Whose voices and which narratives are heard, and how are they represented? Who holds ownership of urban memory and what does this tell us about balances of political power, both on large and small scales?

Organization committee:

Dr. Sophie DIDIER, *French Institute of South Africa (Research Director)*

Prof. Natasha ERLANK, *University of Johannesburg (Department of History)*

Naomi ROUX, *University of the Witwatersrand (School of Arts)*

Dr. Mfaniseni SIHLONGONYANE, *University of the Witwatersrand (School of Architecture and Planning)*