

Ghost Memories
Photographic Memory and Diasporic Imaginings
Salle de Conférences, Bâtiment Max Weber, 15-16 avril 2026,
Université Paris Nanterre

Long before the era of digital cameras, telephones and other means of recording memories, photos were a rite of passage in the diasporic journey. Whether they be photos immortalizing faraway places or new encounters, images which testified to the comfort of a new home, or photos for which people posed, sporting carefully chosen outfits to make a statement about their new-found prosperity, as in Ernest Dyche's photos of the South Asian and Caribbean diasporas, photos remain part and parcel of the individual and collective memory of diasporas.

However, these material fragments of fleeting moments were themselves subject to loss or destruction. Sometimes it may even be that the result one had anticipated turned out to be a disappointment due to one technical glitch or other. When he took photos of the newly arrived Windrushers at Waterloo, Howard Grey did not suspect that it would take some sixty years for some of his overexposed negatives to be developed. In 2014, a new technique allowed him to retrieve the long-lost figures in his photos.

Taking its cue from this particular example, the conference will investigate the presence of photos with regard to the shaping of individual and collective memories of diasporas.

The conference will investigate the role played by these photos in the creation of an individual as well as a collective memory of the home country, one which either “refossilizes” the fragment of the lost homeland or takes account of the newly redefined diasporan, paying particular attention to the photos’ haunting quality. From the moment they are taken, and long before they are developed and printed, photos already haunt those who pose for them and the photographic memories which they subsequently become sometimes continue long after they are lost or destroyed.

Proposals should be sent to: f.kral@parisnanterre.fr

Deadline for proposals: February 2nd, 2026

February 2026: evaluation of the proposals by the conference committee.

End of February, 2026: notification of the decision to the authors.

We invite **abstracts (between 200 and 300 words in English, accompanied with a short biodata)** on the following topics:

Photos reproduced in memoirs and literary texts

Photos mentioned, imagined and described in literary texts

Photos taken by artists and everyday photographers

Digital diasporas and family archives

Tunes that have become emblematic

Framing and the actual process of taking a photo, as a prerequisite to remembering

AI and the creating of alternative memories

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