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Diasporas and the Narratives of Nation.

Tensions, contradictions and spacial complexities of/on Algeria.

Les Diasporas et Les Narratives de Nation.

Tensions, contradiction et espacialités complexes sur/de l'Algérie.

NOTE- Ce texte c'est en anglais mais la présentation sera faite en francais.

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Diasporas and the nation.
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a.

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INTRODUCTION

This work will focus in the complex relation between the Narratives on the Nation and the Diaspora(s). This theme is exemplified by the Algerian case in this crucial moment of reconfiguration of national identity in (post-Civil War and current debates of national reconciliation).

I will talk about the present tensions between the Diaspora participation in the national debates about identity, the process of national reconciliation, and the reconfiguration of the state and its constituents¹.

The study of the Algerian Diaspora has been frequent the last years. However, given that the reconciliation process is being discussed just now, there is not an easy explanation about its participation in the reconstruction of Algerian identity and state.

Therefore it is an excellent opportunity to explore the tensions and contradictions between the constitution of a national Diaspora, its influence in the homeland's internal

1 The Algerian case will be the fundamental object of study but the theme of reconfiguration of the nation would let us question a complete different case: for example the debate about citizenship and its tensions with the Diasporas (in France and England mainly) of Tunis.

dynamics, and the homeland agenda's pressure on the Diaspora.

THEORETICAL FRAME AND METHODOLOGY

The main concepts and variables we can discuss for this theme are: Diaspora, Nation, National Narrative and Alternative Narratives.

In this case the Diasporas are studied in a theoretical frame in which the hegemonizing national narrative and, above all, the possible alternative narratives on the Nation, will be at discussion. That is, we are going to analyze the complex participation of Diaspora in national debates and its encouragement, confrontation or contradictory activity in view of alternative narratives of the nation and the official or preeminent narration.

The postcolonial studies (and its critics) are the basic perspective of analysis, with works about Diaspora and nation like Axel's *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of the Sikh "Diaspora"*² or Botelho's *Brazilians in the United States: Negotiating U.S. Culture, and Reconstructing Cultural and National Identities* as the main inspiration.

2 Brian Keith Axel *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of the Sikh "Diaspora"* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press), 2001.

Paula Botelho: *Brazilians in the United States: Negotiating U.S. Culture, and Reconstructing Cultural and National Identities*. **National Conference on Brazilian Immigration to the United States**, March 18-19.

See too: Worham, Stanton *Education in the New Latino Diaspora: policy and the politics of identity*. Greenwood, 2001

This paper presents parts of a research currently in process; it is not final, then in the conclusions. Despite it is not possible to present with details today, the performance of this research uses a methodology centered in discursive analysis and the ethnographic work in the principal cities of origin and destiny of Diaspora in Algeria and France³ (with regular talks procuring to call attention about the national reconciliation process and the possible return of the ‘migrants’); in the discourse analysis of official declarations about the process of national reconciliation and the reaction of the national press and the spokesperson of Diasporas associations.

A national narrative is a discursive formation to define nation; it is no a complete discourse and it searches for being hegemonic – it is surely not hegemonic in Gramscian sense, that is why we call it better hegemonizing –. It plays as preeminent role for the continual conformation and transformation of the national (see Bhabha, 1994b and D. Pense, 1998).

We talk of a discourse as a social process or construction and not just as a linguistic formulation (See Laclau, 2004).

There is a narrative on the nation, then, that is more successful achieving the hegemonic place. This is what can be considered the Hegemonic Narrative on the Algerian Nation.

3 I will be an analysis of relations of Diaspora with the rest of the nation through an ethnographic study in cities like, in one side Alger, Oran and Bejaia in Algeria and, at the other side Marseille or Paris in France. The study for Tunisian case will be concentrated in Tunis capital and its environments and Paris or Marseille as well.

I argue that there are other narratives on the Algerian Nation(s) and these are which have more interest for me because of the tensions they have with the hegemonic one. This is where the Diaspora comes to the frame: The Algerian populations living in other countries (in this case France) can have still an impact in the (trans)formations of Alternative Narratives on the Nation and, of course, have a tension relation with the continuities and changes of the Hegemonic⁴ Narrative.

The term Diaspora is now applied to all kinds of migrants who possess a sense of self-identity and cultural traits that distinguish them from the majority communities in the host countries (Singh Jodhka, 2002)⁵.

Inside this new meaning, Axel (op. cit.) contests the common notion which looks Diaspora communities as homogenous people, united by their 'place of origin'. Such an understanding would assume that Diaspora is essentially produced by the homeland.

As Axel does, I assume that Diaspora is historically produced, in a crossing of spaces between the references to homeland and its insertion in the politics of the new places.

Algerian Diaspora, then, is being produced not only by the homeland (and its departure from it) but also by the internal dynamics of the French recipient land (for example, by its politics of integration and exclusion of migrant communities and the implicit logic of national differentiation) and the migrant reactions to them.

4 Which I call Hegemonizing Narrative.

5 For a more detailed and complex analysis on Diaspora see Axel's book, and Ballouf: Diaspora 2004.

This means that the migrant populations are not a passive receptacle of these politics of integration or exclusion – being in the daily practice or in the discursive representation of nationality – but it engages these representations of difference and special division looking for its survival and producing its own representation of itself. Or, at the same time, these populations can adopt a part of these representations to dialogue or face the ‘alive’ homeland’s identity.

Of course, in our case of study, Diaspora is linked to questions of the hyphen between nation and state or, as Arjun Appadurai (1996) sees it, to the tension between nationality and citizenship.

In summary, the issues we propose to take in account are: The government’s reactions and politics in face of the Diasporas’ associations; The relations of these with the homelands populations; The Diaspora’s reaction in front of predominant national narrative; The contingent attitudes of homeland’s population toward national narratives and its perception of the inclusion of Diasporas in it; The nature of its links with the Diaspora’s population and vice versa.

THE ALGERIAN DIASPORA AND THE NATION

The last years has been present an appeal to recognize the immigrant contributions to the (trans)formations of the french nation and state.

This claim for recognition has been presented both as a claim for the existence of 'lieux

de mémoire⁶ as well as vindications for the real implementation of citizenship⁷.

There have been also certain intents to recognize the critical importance of the Algerian Diaspora for the Algerian state and population.

What I try to show you here is the significance of the Algerian Diaspora for the trans(formation) of the Algerian Nation and State but taking this Diaspora not only as a migrant population -and then as a source of remittances – but as a ensemble of groups of migrant origin with special relations and mutual influences with respect both with the country of origin (in this case Algeria) as with the host country.

This means that the Algerian migration can be seen simultaneously interacting with the French and the Algerian societies.

Other authors have already brilliantly exposed the identity transformation that immigration has on the Algerian Diasporas (Azouz Begag⁸, Hélène Cixous). What I will talk

6 See Bencharif, Léla (2000). "Les enjeux d'une reconnaissance sociale des mémoires des immigrations", in *Ecarts d'identité* N° 9 2: "Mémoire, récit de vie, autobiographie Creusée et de la reconnaissance" Mars 2000: w/n 4 pp.

She says for example in her text:

"[...] il s'agit d'impliquer les témoins de cette histoire non pas en tant qu'objets ou sujets de mémoire mais bien en tant que porteurs de mémoire sur la 'scène de l'histoire active' [...]"

Alors, loin de vouloir briser le miroir, il semble important de continuer ce travail de "repossession" des temps et des lieux de mémoire qui fondent l'histoire des migrations (Léla Bencharif, 2000: 3).

7 See: *France Invisible*.

8 And for a theoretical reflection see H. Bhabha, 2004

about here is the political and symbolic effects the Algerian Diaspora produces on the definition(s) of the nation: that means, on the Algerian Narratives (in plural) of Nation.

It has to do with the question of memory, but also with the current transformation of societies and population related with migration.

First, we have to recognize that today the questions of memory are a really sensible issue – and particularly questions of memory related with French history and its relations with immigration. They are embedded of ideological and political debates. That's why some of these questions are brought to the national scene while others have been thrown out, denied or made invisible.

As has been said by Léla Bencharif:

“De manière générale, l'histoire des migrations nous ramène à des événements historiques douloureux, et rarement commémorés, qu'ici ou là on se refuse toujours à considérer comme faisant partie de l'Histoire commune [...] Certains événements névralgiques sont encore très présents dans nos mémoires (drame des colonisations/décolonisations...), ils sont paradoxalement refoulés, comme s'ils étaient hors de l'histoire, étrangers à notre propre histoire” (Léla BENCHARIF, 2000: 1-2).

Both memory of migration and its relation with the Nation(s) are difficult to assess because they are constituted, discussed and transformed in tension with time and generations, with ruptures and continuities, legacies and re-creations.

Then my aspiration is not to give you a final lecture or assessment, but to give a little

contribution to the general Aim of bringing this notion of multiple Narratives on nation and the tense and complex contributions of Diaspora in the trans-formations of them to the social and academic agenda.

Thinking of Diaspora is not only to think about migration and remittances or of 'conflicts and obstacles to integration' but is also about the political effects this peoples have and receive on/of the host and origin countries

Then the proposal here is to see the Diasporas both in the metaphorical sens of Exile and its complex transformation in the integration, and also in the sens of virtual return. Virtual return because even if it is not an actual return they can have a direct influence in moments or critical transformation of the Nation, like it has been the case of Algeria along these last years of civil war, Kabylean 'problems' and debates on reconciliation.

The exile has to do both with the nostalgic sense of loss and absence like is described by Edward Said, but also about the causes of departure.

« L'exil est l'un des plus tristes destins. Dans le temps prémoderne, le bannissement était un châtement d'autant plus redoutable qu'il ne signifiait pas seulement des années d'errance loin de la famille et des lieux familiers, mais une sorte d'exclusion permanente qui condamnait l'exilé, où qu'il aille, à se sentir étranger, toujours en porte à faux, inconsolable sur le passé, amer sur le présent et l'avenir. Il a toujours eu un rapport entre la menace de l'exil et la terreur d'être un lépreux, sorte

de statut social et moral de paria...”.⁹

Like says Jacqueline Arnaud on the definition of exile :

« L'exil, au sens premier, est un état de fait, l'expulsion de sa patrie par une violence politique, et par extension, l'éloignement forcé, ou choisi comme pis aller, quand on ne se sent pas chez soi dans son pays. Entre les deux acceptions, pour le migrant (au sens large du terme), des différences de degré rendent compte du type de violence qui a provoqué l'exil. Il existe un exil intérieur qui peut aller jusqu'à l'aliénation »¹⁰

We need also to emphasize the origins or causes of departure because they demonstrate that even at the beginning the 'future' diaspora (or beginning of diasporization) this migrant reacts to the political events of his country of origin.

“De là, ils commencent à connaître l'exil, l'absence, le tiraillement et la déchirure.. le déracinement. A partir de l'expérience douloureuse de l'exil, ils connaissent tous le rapport perturbé et déséquilibré avec l'espace : l'espace de l'exil, l'espace de la patrie”

(BOU SEDERA, 2005: 64).¹¹

9 Edward SAID, *Des intellectuels et du Pouvoir* (representations of the intellectual), French Traduction by Paul CHEMLA, Paris, Seuil, 1996, p. 63.

10 Jacqueline ARNAUD, « Exil, errance, voyage dans « l'exil et le désarroi » de N. Farès, « Une vie, un rêve, un peuple toujours errants » de M.Khaïr Eddine, et « Talismano » de A. Meddab, in *Exil et littérature*, Grenoble , Ellug, 1986: 52.

ON THE SPACE AND ITS COMPLEX ARTICULATION WITH THE NATION(S) AND
DIASPORA(S)

OR SPACIAL COMPLEXITIES

THE Diasporas are clearly related to more than one space. The original place that rejects or is abandoned by the migrant and the host country or countries.

But these are inhabited spaces and none of these are an abstract or devoid place – even if the initial (and some times permanent) difficulties of the migrants would let us to think in the image of a man thrown in a river of monochrome faces.

The Algerian Diaspora interacts both with the Algerian society (not only the original but also the alive Algeria) from which the migrant feels the absence and nostalgia. But this Algerian Society is also continually transforming, which let us to ask how the migrant reacts to these changes.

We do not need it to think it only in an abstract way, because the Algerian changes since 1992 and also since 2004 can let to see these transformations and the tensions they provoke in the Algerian Diasporas' relations with the actual space, state, society and politics.

Here we have then the first spacial complexity: Algeria as the origin but also as a changing context to which the Diaspora must react.

The second spacial complexity has to do with the Diaspora and the Host Country.

Here is easier for us to understand the tense transformation of the Diasporas relation with this space. The host country and society transforms its relations with the Diaspora changing the identities representation of the later.

The Algerian Diaspora can modify the political imaginary(es), the character and the public politics of the Host countries. There are already many analysis on this. What I want to emphasize is the changing nature of this relation and, above all, the Agency of the Diaspora to transform itself.

The migrant population does not only reacts to the changing contexts but it transforms itself and, in the process, it can transform also its country of origin.

It can transform the political dynamics there (with public declarations intervening in the national debate or with more personal interactions with family and friends debating politics and national identities).

The Diaspora is an important constituency of the Alternative Narratives on nation, not only because its own transformation of identity but also because of its participation in the discussions on the Algerian State's Character, on nationality and citizenship, that is, about what the Algerian(s) nation(s) are (is).

CONCLUSION

Thinking of Diaspora is not only to think about migration and remittances – which are of course an element of its existence and significance – and not only of 'conflicts and obstacles to integration' but is also about the political effects this peoples have and receive on/of the host and origin countries.

Political effects which can not always be definitely measured but they can be seen indisputably as a contributing factor to the existence of Alternative Narratives on the Nation and the State.

The issues we have proposed to take in account in the analysis of Diaspora and its relations with the Narratives on Nation are: The government's reactions and politics in face of the Diasporas' associations; The relations of these with the homelands populations; The Diaspora's reaction in front of predominant national narrative; The contingent attitudes of homeland's population toward national narratives and its perception of the inclusion of Diasporas in it; The nature of its links with the Diaspora's population and vice versa.

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