Diasporas, transnational spaces and communities
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The term diaspora, long used only to describe the dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the world, has in the last thirty years elicited unprecedented interest and has attracted attention not limited to the academic world, but also from the media and is now part of everyday speech. It has come into such generalised use as to be applied to all forms of migrations and dispersion of a people, even if not as a result of migration. The connotation of this term corresponds not only to a development and generalisation of international migrations throughout the world, but also to a weakening, or at least a limitation, of the role played by nation-states, at a time when globalisation has become a dominant process. It is typically a term taken both from social sciences and everyday speech, which causes wide confusion as to its precise meaning.

We shall try to define first the notion of diaspora by differentiating from those of migration, minority, transnational community, and territory of movement – a definition that will lead to four major types of diasporas. Our hypothesis is that the notions of diaspora and transnational community could be applied to different types of trans-border or transnational societies and could help to understand the different processes of their establishment in time and space.

The notion of diaspora

A diaspora exists and is reproduced by relying on everything that creates a bond in a place among those who want to group together and maintain, from a distance, relations with other groups, installed in other places but having the same identity. This bond can come in different forms, such as family, community, religious, socio-political, economic bonds or the shared memory of a catastrophe or trauma suffered by the members of the diaspora or the forebears. A diaspora has a symbolic and “iconographic” capital that enables it to reproduce and overcome the – often considerable – obstacle of distance separating its communities (M. Bruneau, 2004, 7-43). Every member of a diaspora join to his present place of settlement the whole of micro-places (city neighbourhoods, villages…) occupied or crossed by those whom he recognises as his owns. Each of these places performs as a centre in a territory where social proximities suppress spatial and temporal distances. The diaspora is a socio-spatial network necessarily in territorial expansion because it aggregates places of memory and places of presence (J.-M. Offner, D. Pumain, 1996, 163).

Diaspora areas and territories must be gauged first in the host country, where the community bond plays the essential role, then in the country or territory of origin – a pole of attraction – through memory, and finally through the system of relations in the network space that connects these different poles. The term diaspora often has more of a metaphorical than an instrumental role. We can narrow down the different criteria suggested by most authors (R. Cohen, 1997, G. Sheffer, 2003) to four essential ones:
- The population considered has been dispersed in several places, and in any event, in more than a single territory, not immediately neighbouring of the territory of origin, under pressure (disaster, catastrophe, famine, abject poverty).

- “The choice of countries and cities of destination is carried out in accordance with the structure of migratory chains which, beyond the oceans, link migrants with those already installed in the host countries, the latter thought of as conveyors towards the host society and the labour market, and guardians of the ethnic or national culture.” (S. Dufoix, 2000, 325).

- This population is integrated without being assimilated in the host countries, i.e. it retains a rather strong identity awareness linked to the memory of the territory, of the society of origin and its history. This implies the existence of a strong sense of community and community life. It is an “imagined community,” one that relies on a collective narrative that links it to a territory and to a memory, like a nation (B. Anderson, 1996, 20).

- These dispersed groups of migrants (or groups stemming from migration) preserve and develop among them and with the society of origin, when the latter still exists, multiple exchange relations (people, goods of various natures, information, etc.) organised under networks. This reticulated space connects non-strictly hierarchical poles, even if some of these poles are more important than others. Relations tend to be horizontal rather than vertical.

For a diaspora to be able to live on by transmitting its identity from one generation to the next, it must, insofar as possible, have places for periodic gathering of a religious, cultural or political nature, or for all three at once, in which it can concentrate on the main elements of its iconography. Such sanctuaries (churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.), community premises (conference rooms and theatres, libraries, sports clubs, etc.), monuments that can be used for commemorations, perpetuate memory. They also include restaurants and grocery shops, newsagents and the media (newspapers, community magazines, local radio and television stations, websites). These various places can be concentrated in the same “ethnic” quarter, the same locality, or be dispersed throughout a city or a larger territory.

Against this concept of “community” diaspora, Christine Chivallon (2004) sets that of a “hybrid” diaspora, distinguished very clearly from any “centred model.” This “hybrid” model was defined by Anglo-American authors on the basis of the black diaspora of the Americas, in relation to the post-modern approaches of cultural studies. These authors, Stuart Hall and Gilroy chiefly among them, refer to the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and to the image of the rhizome as opposed to that of the root, i.e. to a world of dissemination and interbreeding, as opposed to a world of filiation and heritage. There is no hard core of identity nor of continuity or tradition as in the community model, but variable formations, at odds, obeying a logic of interbreeding. This hybrid diaspora rejects all reference to the nation and to nationalist ideologies.

Four major types of diasporas

The different diasporas are deployed on a world scale at the beginning of the 21st century, with an unequal degree of globalisation and at times a more or less confirmed continental tropism among them. In every diaspora, the folklore, cuisine, language and culture in the wide sense (literature, cinema, music, press), community life and family bonds play a fundamental role. But the absence or presence of one of these characteristics is not
Family connections constitute the very fabric of the diaspora, in particular those stemming from Asia and the eastern Mediterranean, which are characterised by the existence of extended families. Similarly, the community link is always present in and constitutive of every diaspora. The most distinguishing characteristics are the unequal degree of their structuring and their organisation, and the more or less decisive influence exerted by their nation of origin, when it exists. Religion, enterprise and politics are the three major fields through which these two discriminating characteristics manifest themselves. At the current state of research, we can only sketch a typology according to these criteria from the example of some diasporas.

1) A first set of diasporas is structured round an entrepreneurial pole; everything else is subordinated to it or plays only a secondary role. The Chinese, Indian and Lebanese diasporas are the best examples of this. Essentially because it is diverse, religion does not play a structuring role. The nation-state of origin does not exercise any decisive influence, either because it is pluralist (Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China, South-East Asia in the case of the Chinese), or because it is deliberately discrete and intervenes only in case of extreme difficulties (the case of India), or because it is too weak and divided (the case of Lebanon). Entrepreneurship constitutes the central element of the reproduction strategy of these diasporas.

2) Another set of diasporas is that in which religion, often associated to a language, is the main structuring element: this is the case of the Jewish, Greek, Armenian and Assyro-Chaldean diasporas. This religion is monotheistic and strongly connected to a sacred language, be it Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, or Armenian. In the case of the Jews, this language was long only a sacred language, but its identity-shaping force was such, that it was chosen as the national language for the Jewish state, Israel, in 1948. Greek and Armenian are taught in schools alongside religion in the schools of the diaspora. Enterprises play a very important role in the life of these Jewish, Greek and Armenian diasporas, but they are not the central pole that ensures the reproduction of the diaspora in the long run. That pole is religion: the synagogue and the church, with a pronounced ethnic tint, are the constitutive elements of these diaspora communities. On the other hand, ever since it has existed, the nation-state has had an increasingly stronger influence on its diaspora. Nevertheless, even in the Greek case, where this influence is the greatest, the diaspora, the cohesion of which is secured by the Orthodox church, has managed to preserve a relative independence, after the Holy Synod of the Athens Church (1908-1922) to take hold of the Greek communities in the United States, and the restoration of the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Since the independence of Armenia in 1991, the Armenian State has also exerted a growing influence but has not, for the moment at least, acquired the weight of the Greek or of the Jewish State in respect to their respective diaspora. Religion remains the main element of Armenianness, the Apostolic Church the best defender of the language, culture, memory, and the “Motherland.”

3) A third set of diasporas, on which we have observations on a shorter duration, is organised chiefly round a political pole, when the territory of origin is dominated by a foreign power and the main aspiration of the population of the diaspora, is the creation of a nation-state. We may cite the example of the Palestinian diaspora, which had succeeded in establishing a real state in exile, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), whose objective to establish a nation-state next to the State of Israel has already been partially achieved by the creation of the Palestinian Authority endowed with territories that it has administered since 1994. The religious content of the national identity of the Jews or the Armenians is absent among the
Palestinians who are Muslims, but also Christians. Their collective memory is rooted in the historical events that mark estrangements, the main one of which is the catastrophe (nakba) of 1948. This is “the core event of their imagined community, the criterion of its alterity and the main founder of the diaspora” (B. Kodmani-Darwish, 1997, 194). The Palestinians had no religious or linguistic support that could replace their attachment to the land, and so “their structuring pole is exclusively political. In this respect, the PLO has had a vital function in imposing itself not only as the central, and even exclusive, seat of identity, but also as a player and artisan of the reconstruction of the identity-shaping bond” (B. Kodmani-Darwish, 1997, 196).

4) A fourth set is organised round a racial and cultural pole; this is the case of the black diaspora, on which hinge several ways of defining identity. Centred on the notion of negritude, its originality in relation to the foregoing lies first in the fact that this diaspora has no direct filiation with the society or societies, or territory or territories of origin. This diaspora stands out first by the continental scope and the diversity of its territory or territories of origin: the coasts of West and Central Africa as a point of departure of the exodus, but also the very vast continental hinterland that is very difficult to define, going as far as Ethiopia and Sudan, and even Egypt (C. Chivallon, 2004).

The black diaspora is defined first and foremost by the colour of the skin of its population, by race, not only by culture, the definition and origin of which are subject to various debates and interpretations. There is extensive vagueness on this front, due to the traumatic experiences under which this diaspora formed: the trade and slavery of the plantation estates. These two founding phenomena of the black diaspora have levelled and clouded the identities and cultures of origin to the point of making them disappear in part from the conscience of the populations concerned. These populations define themselves more by their social condition and their race – the only visible element – in the societies into which they were brought, than by their identity and culture of origin, and even less by their nationality, of which they have no clear, if any conscience at all. We can place the Tziganes in this set, as they share many of these characteristics.

Like the Blacks of the Americas, they have no well-defined territory of origin or nation-state to which they can refer. The western perspective invented the Tziganes on the history stage in the 16th century. The men and women who came from the East have retained no memory of the territory whence they came, nor of the catastrophe that may have provoked their migration. Most of the names, they give themselves or given to them, refer to regions where they have lived the longest : Gypsies (the Little Egypt in the Peloponnese), Roma, Rumungre, Slovensko Roma, Sinti Piemontesi, etc... They borrowed a great deal from these lands, which in large measure explains their diversity. But their prime characteristic, which distinguishes them from other populations, is that they are deprived of a native land, whence the name of “travelling people” used in France, even if, depending on the host country, a variable part of them is sedentary. Migration, nomadism, and travel do not constitute a prime component of Tzigane identity, but are rather the consequence of repressions to which the Tziganes have been recurrently subjected; and yet this is part of their identity today, even if all “travelling people” are not Tziganes. This nomadic way of life is at the source of the specific kinds of occupations carried out by Tziganes, as their traditional trades (coppersmiths, horse traders, musicians and string-instrument makers, chimney sweeps, basket makers, merchants, etc.) have to leave them free to use their working time accordingly.

The Tzigane populations maintain a necessary relationship with sedentary societies in which they are integrated, living in their midst in a succession of places (nomadic or semi-nomadic) or in the same place (sedentary), but in a relationship of opposition
Bruneau: Diasporas, transnational spaces and communities

(Tzigane/Gadgé), which is a source of socio-spatial exclusion. The territory of the Tziganes is not rooted in a national history, a land that they love to own, but rather a medium for social interactions that are essential for preserving their identity inside the family and close relations. They are often assigned a segregated place by surrounding society, like Tzigane “colonies” at the edge of Hungarian villages or in the forest, for example. Their segregation is not only in terms of housing, but also of schooling, which they do not share willingly with the Gadgés.

The comparison with the black diaspora is called for through the notion of an acentered community, not unified by the transmission of a tradition or by political organisation, but characterised by the non-hierarchical increase of community segments (M. Molat, 2004, 103-112). The logic of cultural interbreeding comes into full play in both cases amidst highly diverse host societies, and leave its mark, even if Tzigane society is characterised by intermarrying, where mixed marriages are rare when not totally absent. Racial discrimination and a very high tendency towards ghettoisation are also common features, as is the great difficulty to clamber out of the proletariat or even urban underclass condition. The absence of cultural heritage, which values education so characteristic of “classic” diasporas, as well as socio-cultural segregation, have not allowed a massive entry into the middle classes. The elite remain in the extreme minority.

From the migration field to the transnational space: the Turkish example

An international migration field results from the “structured coupling of the places produced by the flows between the different points of the migration system” (L. Faret, 2003, 283). Such a field comprises the places of departure, route, settlement, re-settlement and even the places of return. This notion applies well to the Turkish migration in Western and Central Europe.

In the second half of the 20th century (1957-2000), more than three million Turks migrated to Western Europe, two million of whom to Germany (De Tapia, 2000, 187). It was essentially an international labour migration, often under agreements between States. Nevertheless, this field turns out to be relatively complex when analysed, because the migration of shopkeepers, carriers and various investors, not to mention social migrations such as family reunifications, second and third generation marriages, and collective solidarities have been added to labour migrations. In a subsequent phase, political migrations by asylum seekers acquired an ever increasing importance: Kurds, Assyro-Chaldeans, Armenians, refugees of leftist parties, Alevis, etc. There is consequently a wide diversity in the reasons and causes of Turkish migration. The migration movement is intense inside this field thanks to the transport, road, seagoing and air networks which the Turks run and use. The same applies to communications, various means of which are widely used, but also organised and built by the Turks themselves.

In the case of the Turks today, the diaspora does not antedate the nation-state, but follows it. Is it therefore a diaspora or rather a transnational migration field, a transnational community? The Turkish nation-state is recent (1920); it has not yet completely succeeded in unifying the national identity of the different segments of society round a Sunni or Kemalist hard core. The high segmentation and the internal disparities of the Turkish society appear more in the dispersion and migration than on the national territory. This is a community composed of different socio-cultural milieux which do interact, but have acquired their own organisational and social networks. The divisions are not only ethno-cultural, but also religious or ideological. The Armenians, Jews, and Assyro-Chaldeans have their own diaspora. The Kurds are distinguishing themselves more and more from the other Turks, as their migrations are increasingly political owing to the repression directed against them since the 1980s. They fall under the issue of diaspora more than other Turkish-speaking Muslims.
The Alevis adhere less and less to Turkish Sunni nationalism, without however having territorial claims similar to those of the Kurds. It is therefore difficult to define a diaspora from the economic and political migration of a people stemming from a segmented society and comprising notable differences of identity. The multi-polarity and inter-polarity of relations within the Turkish migration field, the network structure and the migration movement militate for the recognition of a Turkish transnational space. The recent character of migration (since 1957) and segmented type of society constitute obstacles to the recognition of a real diaspora. To take better account of these phenomena, researchers such as Riva Kastoriano (2000) have suggested the notion of transnational community.

Transnational communities

A new notion has emerged: “transnational community.” Countries at the edge of the industrialised and tertiarised world of the major powers of the North (United States, Canada, Western Europe, Japan), which often are former colonies or old countries of the Third World, are sending more and more migrants in search of employment and remittances to their communities of origin, with which they keep strong ties. These are mostly unskilled economic migrants from rural areas. They are organised from a village, a basic rural community, to which the migrants remain very attached and to which they return periodically. The family structure, more than the village community of origin, is essential in explaining the cohesion of the networks. Those from a rural community in a Latin American country or the Philippines, for instance, migrate to more and more urban centres of variable sizes in the United States. A migration movement is established between this place of origin and the places of settlement and work. The migration territory also comprises relay places, most often a large city, the hub of the migratory route network: Dallas or Chicago for Mexicans from Ocampo according to Laurent Faret (2003), Buenos Aires for the Bolivians from the Cochabamba region according to Geneviève Cortes (1998). The strong association with these different places thanks to the movement of the population of one village, where the dominant activity is migration under different forms, constitutes a transnational migration territory.

A transnational community is based on the specific know-how of mobility, a “migration expertise” which is the social capital of the inhabitants of these places, highly marked by migration, who have made it their essential activity. The mobility of these peasants may be based on the experience of mountain peasantry, which has always had to move with the seasons, whether in transhumance in certain cases, or because of several ecological stages in the case of Andean peasants. Peoples with a long nomadic tradition like the Turks or Mongols can also be moulded more easily in these transnational spaces (S. De Tapia, 1995). A transnational community links the global to the local, networking places of highly unequal importance without hierarchy between these different hubs. The role of the border is very highly relativised by a migrant population whose essential element of identity is knowing how to cross the border, passing through the border area, and living beyond it, whilst avoiding expulsion.

These migrants come from a nation-state, where they have lived for a relatively long time, to return periodically, investing part of their income in their village of origin. They left at best to stay there, or if not themselves, at least part of their family. The members of a transnational community seek to acquire the citizenship of their host country, while retaining that of their country of origin. This double affiliation is not only a matter of ease, but also a way of life. Contrary to the diasporas, there was no uprooting from the territory and the society of origin, nor trauma. There is no desire to return, because transmigrants never
actually left their place of origin, with which they retain family and community ties that are much facilitated by the growth, regularity and safety of communications.

The concept of transnational community is also used by researchers, who have studied transnational nationalism, like Riva Kastoryano (R. Kastoryano, 2006). The Turkish transnational community live in a four dimensional space: the immigration country, the country of origin, the immigrant communities herself, and the transnational space of the European Union. The “at distance nationalism” refers to the nation-state of departure, Turkey, which acts on the exile population by the way of language, religion, double citizenship. This nation-state tries to strengthen as much as possible the loyalty of its nationals outside. But the transnational networks of migrant associations can bypass the states acting directly on transnational European institutions. We observe the emergence of a transnational space, characterized by the dense interaction of actors belonging to different traditions (Islamist and laic Turcs, Alevis, Kurds, Lazes…). It is a new space of political socialization, of identification beyond the national societies. For R. Kastoryano, the notion of diaspora should be better applied to populations scattered before the making of their nation-state like Jews, Armenians… from whom the nationalism refers to a mythical place, to a territory to be recovered, to a future state-building.

Territories of movement

The territories of movement (A. Tarrius, 2001) link the place where goods are loaded for instance in the Maghreb to the places they are delivered in Western Europe, within what are underground economy networks. They may seem to resemble the foregoing, in as far as they link a formerly colonised country with its former metropolis, where they situate the community of origin at the centre of the mechanism. But they are actually very different.

The transnational community essentially moves people who are going to “sell” their labour and send part of their wages back to their community of origin (remittances). Conversely, in the territory of movement, the cross-border entrepreneurs, nomads, move with goods they loaded in their place of origin to sell them in the different cities of the host country that they are familiar with. For they have at times lived there for a long time and have established a network of acquaintances and support that can help them, as those people belong to a diaspora or a transnational community established in the European country concerned.

They take advantage commercially of the wealth differential between their place of origin and their host place, circulating goods between rich and poor countries. Their expertise in moving and especially in moving goods, by crossing borders and circumventing the taxation mechanisms of the States, is as important for them as the expertise of a Mexican or Bolivian in migrating to the transnational migration territory. Their host places are only points of passage or stages, not places of settlement and integration.

The only essential place for them is that of their origin, whence they leave with their goods, where they return to regularly, and where they invest their earnings. They have actually never left it; it is their only base. They do not have a diaspora identity but a “nomadic identity” based on “partial and short-lived interbreeding” acquired in the course of the selling activity through which they socialise.

In their place of origin, the link is based on family and community ties, whereas, in the host and transit places, well established local intermediaries, “informal notaries” (A. Tarrius, 2001), who have diaspora experience are needed. Without their intermediation nothing is possible and the smuggler cannot maintain his activity and presence on the selling places.

Can we say that the transnational communities, the transnational migration territories, the territories of movement of smugglers, or cross-border entrepreneurs, are on the verge of replacing diasporas? The answer is no, because unfortunately, catastrophes and massacres
due to civil or international wars are not about to disappear. There is even an increase in the number of refugees (political or humanitarian) on every continent.

The territories of movement and of transnational communities are produced by globalisation and result from socio-economic inequalities, which tend to widen (differences in the prices of goods and wages between countries of the North and of the South). They link nation-states in a dissymmetrical situation, of dominating and dominated. The base in the host country, whereas weak in the case of territories of movement, can on the contrary be strong in the case of transnational communities, but, in both cases, the rooting in the community of origin remains very significant and prevails over that in the country of settlement.

**Originality and value of the notions of diaspora and transnational community**

The value of the notion of diaspora is that it shows the sedimentation, in time, often in the long term, of communities dispersed in the world, and more or less diverse depending on the case. These diasporas are characterised by the search for a certain cultural or religious - at times even political - unity. They have been formed, through the course of time, by several waves of migration, each of which could have different or several causes at once. It is this sedimentation in the long run that makes the diaspora, unlike the transnational community, which has been formed recently owing to a call for labour, or unlike smugglers who depend on the underground economy. Each diaspora member, where he is, negotiate his cultural and social unity with the local and national shapes, integration characterising intergenerational trajectories. He produces “mixities”. There are several ways to persevere in exile and dispersion, as diasporas firmly rooted in their various places of settlement have taught us. They have an exceptional symbolic and “iconographic” capital that enables them to reproduce and to overcome the obstacle of the – often considerable – distance that separates their communities. This symbolic capital lives in particular in the shared memory.

Unlike people of the diaspora, transmigrants and cross-border entrepreneurs or smugglers do not seek to establish a social network destined to last, a transnational social group based on the richness of a symbolic capital and a memory transmitted from one generation to the next. They seek first and foremost to build a house in their village and climb the social ladder there, and then in their place of settlement, when such a place exists. Transmigrants are far too dependent on their nation-state of origin and on their host country to become as independent and creators as people of the diaspora. The social group to which they belong often does not exceed the community of origin and the network of its migrants, whereas the people of the diaspora have the feeling of belonging to a nation in exile, dispersed throughout the world, and bearing an ideal. But transnational communities, like the Turkish one, are sometimes bearer of a transnational nationalism, which appears with the interactions of their different actors and try to influence the nation-state of their origin as the one of their settlement. Double citizenship and migratory circulation in the frame of a transnational region like the EU favour the emergence of new trans-borders societies different from the long term diasporas.

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