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Diaspora a new possibility in a country of displaced people

The concept of “Diaspora” has been used mostly to represent groups from the same place of origin, race, culture, or any other common characteristic that situates them in similar circumstances when living outside their nation. As an example of people who can illustrate this phenomenon pretty well, Jews have been studied as a model of diaspora *par excellence*. From very ancient times, Jews have experienced processes of migration, when trying to constitute and reconstitute their home. In genealogical terms, in their long trip looking for a home, going outside their home, or returning home, they have faced the conditions of being one and non-being when living among people who see them as outsiders. As Robin Cohen wrote in Global Diasporas An Introduction, “[...] the diasporic experience of the Jews is considered, the people who provide the source for most characterizations of the diasporic condition.” (xi). Their recurrent travels can show to other migrants what to be nomads mean. Even though, this nomadic characteristic has been ideally constructed. Jews have been studied from a biblical perspective of those ones looking for their promised land from which they were expelled throughout the centuries, as it has been established by God.

By following this predetermination, they have kept their traditions and beliefs alive while being far from their place of origin. Cohen says that, “The idea that diaspora implied forcible dispersion was found in Deutoronomy 28:58-68” (xi) explaining that the divine punishment was pursued by the first Jews and that is how it has passed from generation to generation. In a similar way, Arabs, Algerians, Indians and Africans have

been taken into account when talking about groups that perpetuate their traditions no matter how close or how far they are from their motherland. From this point of view, diaspora, as a phenomenon of migration has been seen as a transplantation of certain cultures into other societies. Nevertheless, the most important fact is not the transplantation itself as much as it is the idea that these people even though being in another territory have not changed much of their original conceptions about life, religion, beliefs and traditions. Following this interpretation, migrating groups not only have struggled to keep their traditions alive but also have they maintained a strong connection with their motherland. The link with what can be thought of as the original home has been important in this type of analysis, since this attribute shows how people have been attached to their ancestors, customs, and lifestyles even though living in a different geographical space. However, analyses embedded in this type of representation have put aside other layers that emerge as part of the movement process. It seems that this type of discourses have forgotten that these travelers also have contact with host communities and in that interaction the external world of the diaspora also plays an important role. Migrants do not exist completely isolated from other members of the host city or town they are inserting themselves, but on the contrary live between two or among many cultures. The *in between* space, using Hommi Babha's terms, creates the interaction with others as a crucial fact. This new environment influences the practice of the foreigners as they influence the local everyday routine. In the daily cultural exchange with the host communities, outsiders can be transformed into insiders while incorporating themselves into the reality of the new space in their quotidian habits.

This cultural exchange demonstrates that the concept of diaspora goes beyond the experiences of Judaism. The diasporic condition does not exist merely as a transnational crossing border experience but also as a concept that can frame other

experiences of traversing margin lines. To expand this idea a little more, it would be convenient to observe that travelers facing similar problems to the ones illustrated by Jews in their way for their promised land exist in different levels of society, in time and in space. This means that diasporic characteristics may not always be approached from one level of representation but from many levels that can illustrate how complex this phenomenon is. Rethinking diaspora as a concept can probably take us to analyze other communities that in similar situations of expropriation have struggled with the problem of being and non-being. This phenomenon could be seen in connection with communities that erupt in local societies in comparable circumstances to those ones of the Jews as well.

Even though local migrants might not necessarily have to be perceived as those ones inscribed in an ideal community of travelers, they can still exemplify the implications of being seen as aliens when leaving or returning to their motherland. In this sense, the process of analyzing diasporic groups requires an interpretation that looks beyond the surface level of the traveling experience. Perhaps these groups may be read not from the international borderland conditions but from the national mini borders that show other possibilities of exclusion. In migratory procedures as the ones pursued by local travelers it is important to observe what the social implications are. In this type of movements the internal travel shows another conflict between the migrants and the host communities. In these particular cases, most probably, the idea of the motherland from which these types of travelers were expelled or are trying to reinhabit has a different connotation. Diasporic groups living in their own nation do not deal with the scheme of the aliens struggling for acceptance of people from different cultures but with the approval of their own fellow citizens. The necessity of being in touch with the place of

origin does not always exist in the same dimension of the Jews and even can be disseminated throughout the time.

Nowadays, diasporic subjects are no longer encapsulated in the conditions of the outsiders who live and survive outside their nations without corrupting the internal traditions. At present, diasporas are also responding to the conditions of living in internal liminal spaces, where their daily practices are marked by different socio-historical circumstances. Diasporas can be conceived also as expropriated groups living in very particular local moments and circumstances. The construction and reconstruction of their new space implies a negotiation with the host community not as it is with a foreign culture, but as it is with people from the same culture living in a place they are trying to inhabit. Problematizing this concept a little more, we can ask - which are the criteria that locate internal travelers in a marginal position that as groups embody diasporic characteristics? Can travelers who remain in their own nation be seen as intruders? In order to answer these questions and to rethink the concept of diaspora Colombian displaced people will serve as specific groups that exemplify how different or how similar national and international diasporas are. In this analysis the diasporic borderlands appear as lines that mark divisions between the displaced people and other citizens. In order to make this contrast William Safran's book Diasporas in the Modern society: Myth of the homeland and return will serve as a point of reference. The purpose of going back and forth to Safran's categorization of diaspora is to see if the incorporation of groups that can be seen as an alteration of the homogeneity of the nation can fit into the pre-established classification of the most common idea of diaspora. By looking at the specific features proposed by this author, this analysis look for a different conceptual interpretation of diaspora and not for an analysis focused on the geographical conditions of this type of individuals.

By observing the circumstances that locate people into a diasporic status, this project will explore what type of social situations these people face. Another aspect that this paper would like to take into account are the excluding situations that these groups encounter within their daily experiences. In this sense, the disjuncture that constitutes these groups as diaspora will be particularly studied. Centered on Colombian displaced people, this paper examines how the internal migration creates groups that for one reason or another finish their travel in urban areas where they are seen as outsiders and intruders. This migration appears as a consequence of the socio-political situation of this country and in order to see how this phenomenon is nationalistically inscribed, a national printed media representation will serve as primary resource. The articles of this analysis will show the alterations that the displaced people in their travel create. This representation illustrates how problematic for the stability of the country the emerging situation becomes as it can happen with any other immigrant group. The articles to be examined focus on how people who have been forcedably displaced by guerrillas or paramilitary groups, as a result of the socio-political crisis, has created communities with diasporic features within the country.

Even though these individuals are not in most cases genetically different to those ones of the societies they are inserting themselves in, their presence still creates a rupture. This break shows that a distant point among country fellows marked by different circumstances is reflected in different levels of society. That is to say, in the educational institutions, labor market, neighborhoods, family, and in many other socio-economic environments as well. In a critical reading of the printed representation of this type of subject, it is necessary to observe how stories, history(ies) and History are presented. In order to support this analysis the newspapers act as the mediator to construct this national reality. As secondary resources, ideological conceptions about

diasporas presented by James Clifford, Robin Cohen and William Safran will serve as theoretical support. Nevertheless, their approach will be merely seen as a point of departure of a different perspective; since there are many analyses about groups that illustrate diasporic conditions based on the characteristics of foreigners as outsiders, but there are not many about internal migrant groups that are seen as outsiders in their own nation. From this point of view this essay will show that diaspora condition does not only affect migrants who have left their country but also those ones who have remained too.

The condition of Displaced Colombian people who have left or return to their home land can be studied from three different axis. The first one, from the point of view that illustrates how these situations exist as part of a socio-political crisis that make people create preventive mechanisms, and escape from the social reality that can affect their future generations. The second, from the perspective of the alteration created in the homogenous space of the urban area as a national representation. And the third one from the viewpoint of the citizens that have to face the differences between State and nation policies. While the State is developing reintegration policies the national space shows a strong resistance to this incorporation. In this particular case, the diasporic condition does not appear precisely in groups dislocated by national geographical borders but by internal mini borders literally or ideological constructed.

In Frederic Anderson's words, the imagined community for this kind of migrant is reevaluated. The spatial, temporal and national image is seen from the perspective of a State that has a very problematic representation of its community as a homogeneous one. This is highly illustrated when people such as the Colombian displaced people show that even though being from the same nation they are not part of the homogeneity of the country. This means that internal migration processes have presented the

opportunity to reconstruct the diasporic characteristics. By living in a home situated in an interstitial space where both insiders and outsiders need to negotiate their place and role within the nation, a new way to approach diasporic circumstances appear. The incorporation of different subjects looking for acceptance within their own territory opens the possibility to see this phenomenon from other angles while revising the concept of diaspora.

However, the phenomenon is evident in the opposite direction of the one presented by traditional diasporas. That is to say, that in this case the displacement is not seen as that one that occurs from the center to the periphery but from the periphery to the center. By migrating to larger urban spaces and looking for a broader space these people finish encapsulated in liminal spaces within their own nation. The presence of these individuals in spaces that have been homogeneously constructed as an ideal national representation is perceived as that of intruders. This perception made of this group of people can be seen as a way to prove that the issue of borders is not only geographically marked but ideologically marked too. In addition, it is not a problem that touches only international negotiations but local ones as well. At this point then it is necessary to see how real the global village concept is for the displaced people while facing situations as these ones. Is it possible to think that from a sociological point of view the concept of globalization do not touch local realities as these ones.

Following the three axis previously mentioned it is important to think first of all how the relation between outsiders and insiders in the same national space is constructed. In the migratory circumstances, to which Colombian displaced are exposed, is it possible to say that borders are marked within the same nation? If this is possible, it would be interesting to think whose land is it? -how is the concept of motherland appropriated? The second axis takes us to see if the condition of the

displaced is marked as a rupture because of the relation between urban spaces versus rural spaces. In this sense, it is important to see if the concept of homeland is connected with the representation of power. And finally the third axis will take us to think if State and nation rehabilitate the presence of the outsider in public and private space in the same way? -if the nation creates a hostile atmosphere for these outsiders, is it possible to say that these people are and feel at home? While responding to most of the questions proposed for this analysis, it will be interesting to observe if the conformation of an internal diaspora can also show resistance and assimilation processes in the negotiation with the host community and in the constitution of a new home. On the other hand, it will be important to observe if the reality that locates these people in this particular status also places these subjects in the periphery even though living in the urban space.

To see how this interpretation could open the discussion, Safran's distinctive features of a traditional diaspora will serve to exemplify how the Colombian displaced people embody diasporic characteristics in their own level of expulsion and myth of the homeland. It is important to remember that the attributes given to Safran's diasporas most of the times are subverted in the Colombian diasporic groups' conditions. This means that even though the concept of diaspora for Safran has a very specific meaning from the viewpoint of the Jews exiled from their historical homeland, in this case the problem of exile will be seen from another historical moment. Even though Safran's classification pictures very similar characteristics to the diasporic characteristic of Colombian displaced people, the historical perspective works the other way around. In Safran article's "Diasporas in Modern Societies myth of homeland and return" the characteristics of Diasporas are:

- 1- They, their ancestors, have been dispersed from an original center to two or more peripheral or foreign regions

- 2- They retain a collective memory, vision, or myths about their homeland,-its physical location, history and achievement
- 3- They believe that they are not, and perhaps cannot be, fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it
- 4- They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return when conditions are appropriate
- 5- They believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity;
- 6- they continue to relate personally, or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another.

Safran's purpose by establishing this chart was to illustrate the difference between diasporic groups and minorities. According to him, diasporic communities have a strong link with the motherland, implicitly showing resistance to the host community traditions, while minority groups easily show assimilation processes. But Safran's chart is not only useful in that conversation. Safran's classification from a conceptual interpretation is also fitting for national migrating groups as the displaced Colombian subjects who all of a sudden have been advocated to constitute a diasporic group. Taking into consideration the diasporic conditions that these people have to face, exile exists as a condition and not as a crossing border fact. The alienation for communities such as that of the Colombian displaced people exists from a different conceptual level. Then, the challenge of the social organization in a nation like this one does not necessarily have to deal with the pluralism phenomenon but instead with the differences within the homogeneity. To be more precise, this means than in a situation like the one this people are experiencing in Colombia, it is evident that displaced people

do not emerge from the differences that come with the plurality of many cultures but from the differences marked by the socio-political current moments too. In the Colombian case, coincidentally, the displaced people's dispersion throughout many lands does also signify oppression and moral degradations implied by that dispersion as the groups illustrated by Safran. As it was published in "El Tiempo" one of the most popular national newspaper on [October 23 de 2004 in the article "Política del presidente Álvaro Uribe contra el terrorismo no genera solidaridad en América Latina"](#) it is clear that the migrating situation is an issue for the current political moment:

[...]El general Ospina también se refirió a la oportunidad que han tenido las familias desplazadas de las diferentes regiones, para regresar a sus lugares de origen y poder normalizar sus vidas, luego de que debieran salir presionados por los grupos armados ilegales (conflicto armado, 5)

**President Alvaro Uribe's politics against terrorism is not received with solidarity
in Latin America**

[...] General Ospina also referred to the opportunity that displaced families coming from different regions have had to return to their place of origins and reestablish their lives in a normal way after of the experience of being forced to leave by illegal armies. (national conflict, 5)

In this representation, the myth of the home land appears as a necessity to recuperate the space that these people as citizens have been given for many years. The reestablishment of home is possible through the intervention of the State. The returning desire is not framed in the religious conception, as is the Jews' diaspora, but the idea of recuperating the motherland still exists. The struggles of these families are not marked by identity recognition but instead by different regimes of power in which the possession of land is in the hands of those ones who owns it. The Colombian illegal

armies in their initial ideologies thought that the land may not belong to some privileged people and that everybody had the right to inhabit and share the same territory. In other words, the land did not belong to any chosen or blessed people but to any citizen of that nation.

Now, in a very controversial form, the land is not disputed between the chosen people versus the non chosen ones, but instead, between the civil society not always blessed by regimes of power, versus the illegal army who in most cases represented the denied sons. All of this, to say, that Safran's categories are just a point of departure where multiple meanings emerge behind the nomadic travel of different communities. Displaced people facing this situation show that to be expropriated and homeless is not a characteristic just of people crossing international borders. Another aspect that is not especially marked in the article, but that is very important in this representation is the alteration that these people create in the spaces where they migrate. The idea of reincorporation of these people into their homes emerges from the president's voice. Uribe's politics is by extension the rules of the State in which the necessity to reestablish the displaced homes means not only the physical home of these homeless citizens but also to reestablish the nation stability as a home as well. The social incorporation of displaced people in what has been illustrated as the homogeneous representation of the national order, the capital of the country, Bogotá, or other tourist or industrial cities like Medellín, Barranquilla or Cartagena where these people are migrating to, and, where breaking the social order is problematic.

The unexpected presence of the displaced people changes the image of the country as the State apparatus wants to show it. The imagined community presented in the article previously discussed privileges the State History: A moment when the national army is fighting to give people back their territory. This way, the diasporic

condition acts as a tool that shows the paternal attitude of a State that cares for its citizens. Perhaps what is not registered in the national version is the intra history of these citizens living in an *in between* space. In a liminal space that is not exactly the one of two or more cultures, paraphrasing Hommi Babha, but *in between* a conflict that does not show clearly what their side could be; in this internal war for land possession.

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