

Transnational community

The notion of the transnational community refers to "communities made up of individuals or groups that are established within different national societies, and who act on the basis of shared interests and references (which may be territorial, religious or linguistic), and use networks to strengthen their solidarity beyond national borders" (R.Kastoriano, 2000,353). The transnational community appears in the wake of the nation-state. The phenomenon can be viewed as post-colonial and post-national, because it arises from emigration from territorialised nation-states, whether they are centralised as in Turkey or federal as in Mexico. It calls into question the relationships between territory and nation-state, the very concept of citizenship, and the principle of a single allegiance expected from members of a political community. This is a "new social space" based on transnational "networks" connecting the home country and the country of residence, and fostering the participation of the immigrants in the life of the two national spaces. The transnational community is structured by political action in both countries. It circulates ideas, behaviours, identities and other elements making up to the social capital. It constructs its own identity. "Transnationalism makes the home country an identity pole, the country of residence a source of rights, and the new transnational space an area of political action associating both countries, and sometimes others as well" (R.Kastoriano, 2000, 358). The associative dimension is fundamental, with an organisation in networks. This is a process whereby immigrants construct and sustain numerous social relationships between the society from which they originate and that in which they have settled. Transmigrants sustain these many relationships across borders, and their particular situation can be fully defined neither within their country of residence, nor within their home country, it can only be defined within the social sphere formed in between. In this perspective, citizens of a nation-state may live dispersed within the boundaries of various other states, but they still belong to it socially, politically, culturally and often economically. These relationships are positioned in a space that associates central states that are economically hegemonic and peripheral states that are dominated. Spider's web networks link these transmigrants within a construction of hegemonic domination among these various states. The identity of the different social groups then requires reconsideration, since they are no longer territorialised, nor are they included in spaces clearly delineated by "borders", or spaces that are culturally homogeneous. The concepts of nation and ethnic group in this case no longer refer to stable entities that are clearly delineated. Identities are increasingly defined by reference to dominant powers, and in opposition towards them, and boundaries that are not strictly defined. Identities are shaped according to hegemonic categories such as race or ethnic group, and are profoundly implicated in the process of constitution of these nation-states. Thus it can be seen that we have moved on from national categories and dominant "ethnic groups", since these transmigrant populations have started to construct de-territorialised nation-states, which supposes a social construction that is different from that of a "diaspora". Diaspora space, whether centred or not, can be compared to transnational community spaces. These were formed in the second half of the 20th century from a migratory patterns developing in relation to a recent nation-state, such as Turkey, Columbia, Granada, Mexico, the Philippines, or Algeria. Their main characteristic is that they are closely linked to the nation-state in question, which seeks to use its migratory flows to become a transnational state, i.e. possessing as strong an interaction as possible with its migrants, which it seeks to maintain as citizens, even if they have special status. These transnational spaces do not have the historical depth of diaspora spaces. "Diaspora" spaces do not owe their existence or their organisation to any particular nation-state, they rather pre-exist these nation-states, and sometimes they have created them. There have indeed been attempts by one or other nation-state to gain control over what is seen as its diaspora, but what typifies a diaspora, longstanding or otherwise, is the will to preserve its own organisation and autonomy, even if it entertains privileged relationships with the nation-state. This is the basic difference between a diaspora and a transnational community. A diaspora has an existence of its own, outside any state, it is rooted in a strong culture (religion, language, etc) and a long history; it has created and developed its community and associative networks. The transnational community on the other hand arises from the migration of workers who retain their family base in the nation-state from which they have come, and they travel between this base and one or several countries where they have settled. They retain a strong anchorage in the place of origin, as well as citizenship or institutional links with their country. In a diaspora, this anchorage and any strong links have often disappeared following a catastrophe, or they may have been entirely re-shaped over time. The transmigrant is far too dependent with on the nation-state from which he originates as well as on the state in which he has settled to become autonomous and creative in the manner of a member of a diaspora. The social group to which he belongs is most often restricted to his original community and the transnational network of its migrants, while a member of a diaspora has the feeling of belonging to a nation in exile, dispersed worldwide, and to be entrusted with an ideal.

Bibliographie