

A Special Double Session: Homeland and hostland: Armenians and Jews compared

Organized by Eliezer Ben-Rafael

The Armenian and Jewish diasporas share many sociological, political and historical features. In both cases, diasporans widely outnumber the citizens of their original homelands; in both cases, diasporas existed long before independent states were created on parts of the territories that people referred to as “homelands”; in both cases, an allegiance to a particular religion constitutes a component of the diaspora’s traditional singularity and identity – even though many people in either group has removed themselves from the religious faith; not less importantly, Armenian diasporans as well as Jewish diasporans cultivate the memory of a genocide that took place in the 20th century. Sociologically, it is also to underline that while diasporans of both groups tend to concentrate in affluent societies which play a central role on the global scene, their respective homelands is situated in peripheral areas. Moreover, while the diasporans themselves often belong to the well-established strata of their “hostlands”, homelands still represent societies investing their best to reach and keep up with Western standards. This list of similarities does not exhaust yet all of them, and because of these very similarities, one may expect that delving into the comparison of Armenians and Jews under the angle of the dynamics of the relations they experience between diasporans and “homelanders” should be of special academic interest. This comparative discussion should throw a new light and offer new insights for the general study of transnational diasporas in this era of their becoming a prevailing feature of contemporary societies.

1st Part.- Chair: Richard Giragosian, Armenian Center for Nat. and Intern. Studies, Yerevan

I) Homeland-Diaspora Relations: A Theoretical Perspective

Gabriel (Gabi) Sheffer, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

It is true that some diasporans and diasporas are assimilating or integrating into their hostlands, but at the same time, there are numerous incipient, growing and reawakening historical and modern diasporas. Thus, the diasporic phenomenon is far from disappearing. Among other factors, due to globalization, the easiness of traveling and the new means of communications the numbers of diasporans and diasporas are increasing. Consequently, their cultural, social, political and economic roles in their countries of origins (homelands), in their hostlands and in the international system are also mounting and becoming more effective. A combination of all these and other factors revive and boost the interest and involvement of many homelands and of diasporas in the various aspects of homeland – diasporic relations. Thus, for example, an increasing number of homeland establish special ministries to deal with the diasporas. The presentation will focus on the general aspects of the relations between homelands and "their" diasporas (indeed one of the questions that will be dealt with is the extent to which homelands really "own" and govern their diasporas). It will deal with both sides – the homelands and diasporas – and with the various cultural, social, political and economic aspects of their relations. Some of the questions that will be discussed in the presentation are: The impacts of ethnic-national-religious identities and basic interests on these relations? When, why and how homelands intervene in the affairs of their diasporas and in their relations with their hostlands' governments and societies? What are the impacts of homelands - hostlands relations on the diasporas and their relations with their homelands? What are the types of positive assistance and negative inputs that diasporas provide to their homelands? What are the sentimental, ideological, organizational and behavioral characteristics of these relations? Some practical and theoretical conclusions will be suggested at the end of the presentation.

II) From Exile to Diaspora: The Jewish case

Yosef Gorny, Tel-Aviv University

In this paper I follow the change in the historical status of the Jewish people out of their motherland to a people with a national state in their historical land. The paper will underline the unique historical phenomenon – the return to homeland – in three historical periods: the exodus from Egypt (1300 B.C.); the return from Babylon (536 B.C.); and the Zionist enterprise since the 19th century, which led to the founding of the State of Israel. This extraordinary historical phenomenon and achievement raise the question: Does the Jewish Diaspora still have unique features compared with other Diasporas, such as the Armenian one. From this aspect, the relations and the interplay among the Jewish people between religion, cultural ethnicity, and relations between Diaspora and the national state will be considered. Which leads to the predominant question: Has the Jewish exile come to its historical end?

III) Politics of Memory: Genocide "discourses" Holocaust in the Armenian Diaspora of the Armenian quarter, Old City of Jerusalem

Yona Weitz, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The Armenian genocide or the Armenian shoa as it is referred to by many of the Armenians residing in Israel, constitutes an historical, social, political and personal traumatic event for the Armenian people. Collective memories and commemoration practices of the Armenian genocide have evolved and developed through complex ideological and socio-political frameworks both in Armenia and in the Armenian diaspora. Influenced by residing in Israel and by the prominence of social-political profile of Holocaust memory, the Armenian diaspora in the Armenian quarter of the old city of Jerusalem has constructed, as an eminent part of genocide commemoration discourse, a unique discourse in which genocide "discourses" holocaust. This unique discourse, enhanced by various mnemonic practices, touches on issues of memoropolitics, competing narratives and denial. Social memory studies research the various ways in which interpretive meanings of the past are conceived, organized and constructed by the dynamics of cultural, social - political and personal frameworks. Arguing diversity of interpretive narratives, thus reflecting diversity of social groups and times, it is important to emphasize, especially in the case of the Armenian genocide that is subjected to politics of denial, that the claim that social and/or personal memory is constructive and narrative does not mean that it does not include valid claim concerning historical reality. The paper presented is based on anthropological field work carried out as part of the author's PhD dissertation entitled "The collective memory of the Armenian genocide in the Armenian quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem".

IV) Diaspora and collective identities

Martine Hovanesian (URMIS et Paris 8) (hovanesian@univ-paris-diderot.fr)

From the analysis of the bondings of the community structures to the evocation of a principle of a collective self-refoundation, we came to suggest the evolution of « a consciousness of dispersion » (Hovanesian, 2001). We expressly insisted on the project of identity building (Hovanesian, 2007). We emphasized the possibilities that the concept of « multi-faceted » identity offers to understand the social realities while connecting them with identification processes. According to us, identity is a concept expressing a dynamic. According to me, the relevance of the concept of identity lies more in the phenomenon than in its meaning *per se*. The comparison between the Jewish and the Armenian diasporas proves highly useful. The collective memory follows the rambling developments of several muddled narratives between historic memory and the « inner-language of memory ». Diaspora refers to a historic production and to a produced identity that can reflect fortunate solidarities, thought as results of a reversal of discriminating situations that may

have been experienced. Diasporic Judaism establishes a hollowed and decontextualized relation with place, directly linked with the conception of exile. The long history of the Jewish exile confirms the relevance of pursuing a comparison insofar as the religious reference reactivates the themes of remembering and forgetting, two themes that specifically define the exile. The Jewish history also helps understanding the transition between communities born in exile and the constitution of a diaspora ; it shows social practices that always go back on the end and the collapse of a world which only remains in the religious language. The « variabilities of the situations of dispersion worldwide » can not be thought outside the religious interpretation of the Jewish exile from which dispersion finds its meaning . Thus we are back to a national imaginary based on the narratives of memorable events like the loss of the territory and the loss of an historic condition that refers to a transnational meaning of existence that generates other paradoxical myths : the myth of return, the myth of the eternal stateless person. An identity claim movement appeared in exile in the Armenian case as well as in the Jewish one ; these movements tried to create links between the past and the present and to anticipate a future through the utopian aim of reestablishing a memory continuity. The aim is also to show an unresolved politic and national condition, to make visible and readable the politic condition of the massive and extreme exile of the years 1920-1930 which stopped suddenly the movement of the Armenian national emancipation started at the end of the XIXth century. In the Armenian case, it is a matter of an imposed deterritorialization which implied another conception of the « people »'s unity (*Joghovourt*). This deterritorialization implied also a spatial dispersion that leads to rethink politically the future of this unity, mainly since the Independance of Armenia declared in 1991. I conducted regular and consistent work in Armenia for many years to study the role of the independance on the diaspora. Belonging to a diaspora reflects also a culture, that became a margin culture, a culture of caution and negociation between distance and proximity, a culture that evolves into power struggles and which suffered from oppression and persecutions, that suffered from being « without right ». The experience of a new structure raised from the « misfortune » is linked at the same time with the more prestigious dispersion of elites (merchant colonies of the XVIIth century, intellectual elites of the XIXth century), conferring a positive meaning, a historicity to the dispersion. The diaspora is also a authorized place for nomadism, not as a synonym of erring ways signifying a loss of sense and references, but defined as a wandering linked with the space-time continuum of a collective history. This wandering defines simultaneously a place of freedom, a place of transgression, a line of flight, an ideal place where one can better live as a « stranger » being allowed to combine multiple identities. The question of the relation to Other in exile is at the core of the diasporas. « Diaspora requires the effort of otherness sublimation through a whole of answers reconciling multiple requests of loyalty ».

2d Part.- Chair: Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Tel-Aviv University

V) *The Jewish diaspora: The political dimension*

Danny Trom, EHESS, Paris

The abstract of the session « *Hostland and Homeland: Armenians and Jews Compared* » justifies the comparison of Jewish and Armenian diasporas on the basis of a series of strong similarities between two cases. At the heart of the comparison stands the experience of diasporians, especially the relationship they establish with their hostland and its homelander, and with their homeland. Methodologically, comparisons are made to establish similarities and differences. Therefore, I would like to introduce in the discussion a political criteria which singularize the Jewish from the Armenian case and maybe more generally from all other diasporas. Jews made a theory of their exile and invented very early a political framework to make sense of their dispersion and to organize concretely their collective existence in hostlands. This scheme (in the sense of Alfred Schütz), has not the consistence of a political doctrine, but is much more a mixture of ideational representations and practical knowledge. It framed the way the Jews interpreted their loss of sovereignty, their vertical

relation to foreign sovereignty (states) and their horizontal relationship with host societies. This political criterion has important sociological consequences because it conditioned the unity of a dispersed people to the observation of law and brought to the metaphorization of homeland. "Being at home" (or a host) needs here to be conceptually redefined to make sense of their collective and individual experience. The example of the Jewish post-secular (and later, post-assimilationist) experience in France and Germany documents how much their situation was (is) ambivalent and still dependent on this scheme. This ambivalence is often noticed, but remains sociologically poorly conceptualized. The similarities with other diasporas, as strong as they may be, runs the risk of hiding the singularity of the experience. I'll try to show that this ambivalence is not a paradox or a contradiction in the experience, nor a common aspect of most diasporas, but a structural tension, inherent to a particular social configuration.

VI) Pluralizing Homelands. The Jewish Diaspora's changing parameters

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It has been recurrently stressed that one of the main characteristics of Diasporas as social formations is the relationship between the present territorial states and contexts where such groups reside and the homeland states and contexts they or their forebears arrived from. Thus dispersed yet collectively self-identified ethnic groups share dual territorial and symbolic referents (Sheffer, Safran). Yet, Contemporary history lies behind a further pluralization of homelands, giving birth to a complex dialectics between place/home (s)of origin; place(s) of residence /home(s) and spiritual and ideological elected home, as is the Jewish case. The latter has acted as a marker of the ethno-national character of wide segments of the Diaspora. Today, narratives and parameters of Jewish identities take place in a context of migration flows and identity revival in which other markers are deeply implicated in the dialectic of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of dispersion, which also entails a redefinition of culture to geographical and social territories. Pluralization of homes has become a substantive trend amidst current transnationalism, in which flows of interactions and relationships continue to be developed notwithstanding the presence of international borders; new patterns of interaction, network building and collective identities that transcend national frontiers are developed (Kahgram and Levitt). Both the transcendence of borders as well as the temporal dimension implied in the concept of transnationalism point to central questions such as the novelty of its Contemporary expressions and/or if historical precedents or analogues can be traced. The ways "bordered and bounded" social and communal units are transnationally constituted and interacting spaces throw light in our case both to past experiences as well as to current significant changes both in the character of the social/communal formations as well as in their interactions and links, expressing and shaping the overlapping domains of Jewish life, their local, regional and global interactions and the plurality of collective realities. Looking at the changing conceptions of Homeland(s) from the perspective of periphery/one-center model vis-a-vis- the concept of frontier (Gilman), as developed in Latin America, new perspectives may contribute to understand old patterns and new trends

VII) Shared and divergent characteristics of the Armenian and Jewish diasporas

Richard Giragosian, Armenian Center for Nat. and Intern. Studies, Yerevan

There are several shared characteristics and determinants of the Armenian and Jewish diasporas, including a historical legacy of dispersion based on the collective traumas of genocide and Holocaust, war and conflict, and pogroms and massacres, all of which constitute "dilemmas of humanity," and an adaptive mechanism based on unique diaspora-defined religious, social, cultural, and political institutions. Similar to the Jewish diaspora, the Armenian diaspora is also marked by a communal effort to sustain a collective identity and to retain a connection to the

homeland. The effort to both sustain and retain ties to the homeland also endows the diaspora with a political agenda. Such a political agenda has been most clearly demonstrated in the activism of ethnic groups, ranging from the role of a diaspora to support the security of their homelands to its financial and economic support for its homeland state, through capital, investment and trade flows and remittances. Thus, the most significant aspect of the shared set of defining components of the Armenian and Jewish diasporas centers on the relationship between the diaspora and its “homeland.” For the Armenian diaspora, the rituals, trappings and psychology of a diaspora whose defining act, the Armenian genocide of 1915 has been long denied by the perpetrator, has assumed a deeply entrenched “proto-state,” endowed with many of the institutions of “virtual statehood.” For such an institutionalized diaspora, the global networks of its “virtual statehood” have also manifested an ethnic-based identity politics, driven by the politicization of the Armenian diaspora’s very tenets of its identity and expressed through its acquisition of significant experience and leverage in lobbying and advocacy efforts. It is from this political advocacy context that the Armenian and Jewish diasporas share a similar political mission, as well as a mutual role in supporting their respective “homeland” states. Yet the two diasporas also differ in focus, as the Armenian diaspora generally pursues a much less critical or demanding role than its Jewish counterpart. Moreover, by virtue of an approach toward its homeland based on more of a blindly supportive role, the Armenian diaspora exercises much less leverage or influence over internal developments within Armenia. This paper will trace the convergence of interests among the Armenian and Jewish diasporas, but will also assess how and why they diverged over their respective approaches toward their homeland states.

General debate