

Threat and Defence: Diaspora and the Creation of Ethnoscapes

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Drawing from Manuel Castells’ assertion that in a network society “a logic of flows has replaced a logic of structures”, this paper examines the (re) formation of the idea of national space and national identity in relation to the socio-cultural phenomenon of Diaspora of Kazakhstani and Albanians in Greece as depicted in the films of Constantine Giannaris (“At the Edge of the City”, “Hostage”). Giannaris’ cinema is analysed through the Deleuzian concept of the “assemblage”, which denies the existence of two (or three, or...) distinctive components of cultural interaction and at the same time acknowledges the multiple intermediate components of a dialogue between “host” and “visitor” where youth subcultures, sexuality, public transport and working environments constitute a volatile and instable *ethnoscape* best described in terms of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. How does the *ethnoscape* constitute a threat to traditional notions of national space and identity? What are the defence mechanisms of these traditional notions within the *ethnoscape*?

Introduction

In what Lash and Urry (1987) have called “disorganised capitalism” the new inter-cultural and inter-national terrain needs to be examined as a complex disordered order where structures and systems such as social class, gender, national identity that used to define and in extension determine social agents have lost their all encompassing character. In the network society where “a logic of flows has replaced a logic of flows” (Castells) socio-cultural relations have stopped being objectively transmitted and perceived, and they largely depend on the historical, linguistic and political situation of a diverse assembly of actors. Nation states, diasporic communities and sub-national groupings are part of a process of “radical de-traditionalisation” (Giddens 1999) where the domination of the past in the shape of every day life re-appears in very different way.

This particular set of perspective relations augments Benedict Anderson’s (2006) “imagined communities” to “imagined worlds” (Appadurai) via the creation of ethnoscapes. Arjun Appadurai (1996) coins the term ethnoscape in order to map the landscape of social agents such as tourists, immigrants, exile and guest workers which constitute the shifting world of disorganised capitalism. An imperative element of the network society is that the actors who constitute and live in such “imagined worlds” are in constant struggle to define their territory and their identity. The ethnoscape as an outcome of the global flows of a multifaceted form of capital does not necessarily imply or signal the disappearance of stable communities and the more traditional networks of kinship, labour and leisure but as this paper asserts the ethnoscape constitutes a threat to these so-called traditional forms of community and nationality and at the same generates new ways for their defence.

Whereas Anderson’s thesis reveals the nation as an artefact of cultural processes whose existence is preceded rather than followed by the creation of a sense of nationality (and this occurs in people’s imagination as a cultural construct), the ethnoscape as imagined world, I argue, is an “assemblage” and through the concept of the assemblage the ethnoscape can be analysed. The concept of the assemblage as developed by Deleuze (2006) operates through some sort of censorship where the question what is an assemblage is vehemently replaced by the question what an assemblage can do. The Deleuzian assemblage offers a strategy that denies the existence of two or three (or...) components of a dialogue, of an interaction between hosts and visitor. The dominant feature of the assemblage is the creation of “territories”. Territories designate a space for claim, expression and identity. Territories do not remain fixed but are always being made and unmade – reterritorializing and deterritorializing. The key idea in Deleuze’s formulation of the assemblage is the exteriority of relations. Such an exteriority suggests that not only relations are external to their terms, but also that “a relation may change without the terms changing” (Deleuze 2006:55). The Deleuzian assemblage opposes the Hegelian totality in which the parts are mutually constituted into a seamless whole. In an assemblage – as in the ethnoscape – components have certain autonomy – a relative autonomy – which means that they can be detached from and plugged into other existing social and cultural assemblages.

Threat

The purpose of this paper is neither to provide an account of how the socio-cultural phenomenon is treated in Greek cinema and in particular Giannaris’ cinema nor to comment on the racial politics of it. The purpose of this paper is to design a theoretical framework where the hermeneutical relationship between Diaspora and ethnoscapes can be understood through the concept of the assemblage (and its implications: deterritorilisation and reterritorilisation) by looking closer at Constantine Giannaris’ films *From the Edge of the City* (1998) and *Hostage* (2004). The two films under discussion illustrate the creation of this

volatile ethnoscape where the “stranger” – Simmel’s sociological figure – drifts, trades, is a prostitute, a racist and a victim of racism, in short by making connections without their external qualities changing. The stranger and the host constantly interact on a multifaceted level which deterritorialises and reterritorialises the national space of their interaction. Keeping with Simmel, it needs to be noted that the stranger as depicted in Giannaris’ cinema is beyond the common sense of the stranger – “the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow” – but rather he is “the man who comes today and stays tomorrow” (Simmel 1971:143). The stranger as sociologically depicted by Simmel and cinematically by Giannaris is fixed within a certain national space and a national group whose boundaries are equivalent to spatial boundaries but her/his position within it is exquisitely determined by the fact s/he is not part of it initially and that s/he ascribes qualities to it that are not and cannot be indigenous to it.

Constantine Giannaris was the first director in Greece who explicitly dealt with the phenomenon of the early 1990s Diaspora (of Kazaks and of Albanians respectively). Despite the striking differences between the two films of my discussion I wish to treat them as an entity, as a single cinematic narrative that would be the vehicle for the analysis of Diaspora and the creation of ethnoscares. *From The Edge of the City* follows a group of teenage Kazaks (Russian-Pontic) in their otherwise every day life activities: working at the building site, prostitution, drugs, pity theft. These activities are always accompanied by the group’s anxieties and culpabilities regarding their social and cultural positioning.

The territory created by this assemblage – the Kazaks within the Greek national space is a form of a claim – the claim to public space and an expression and communication of a particular national identity which seeks assimilation and at the same time distances itself from the Greek national notion. The projection of the building site as the predominant immigrants working space, rent boys glorifying masculinity by being misogynists, body trafficking of Kazak prostitutes in collaboration with Greeks and the appropriation of American youth subcultures constitute an assemblage – an ethnoscape which threatens the notions of Greek national space and identity.

The Diaspora of Kazaks in Athens as portrayed in *From the Edge of the City* does not limit itself to the deterritorialisation of the Greek space through the creation of a Kazak territory within it but it is also preoccupied with the complicity of retaining the Kazak roots and classifying the immigrants contained in that space. Through a series of fragmented interviews of the protagonist of the film Sasha (played by Stathis Papadopoulos) taken by the director and through the sequences of reveries of family feasts issues such as racism, misogyny, religion and political conservatism are means for the reterritorialisation of the Kazak imaginary world.

In the second film of my discussion, *Hostage*, the ethnoscape is limited but nevertheless fully embodied in a bus that follows a particular route in northern Greece, near the Greek-Albanian borders. Based on a true story that took place in 1999, the narrative follows a dissatisfied and desperate young Albanian worker named Ellion (played by Stathis Papadopoulos) who takes control of the bus by the threat of his machine gun and grenades and decides to lead it to his hometown, the capital city of Albania, Tirana. The themes of honour and manhood are the driving force of the film whose protagonist seeks to take revenge for a treachery in a gun smuggling business with the border police and his sexual abuse by them.

The bus becomes a claustrophobic ethnoscape through the assemblage of various components like the hostages in their diverse representation as liberal and/or xenophobic, the protagonist’s memories of Albania and his deportation from Greece, the media’s coverage of the event and his mother’s plea to surrender. Eventually, the hijacker becomes a hostage of an

uncontrollable deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, which comes to an end with his killing by the Albanian border police.

Defence

The defence of the more stable, structured sense of national space and national identity derives from the notion that the nation state should make use of its borders (physical and cultural) which the stranger has threatened them. Such a notion of a defence is actually turned to a threat and this move is perfectly exemplified by Nicola Sarkozy's statement "to kick out those families who refuse to integrate" (Hyland 2006). Regardless of the validity of Sarkozy's statement, Mathew Hyland draws on Ulrich Beck's reference to Sarkozy's unofficial statement/policy and points out that is a sleight of an ideological hand. The term integration has been subverted by nation states for the defence of national space and of national identity. Racial integration was mainly a claim and a demand by civil rights movements in the U.S in the 1950s and 1960s addressed to institutions such as education, labour, public transport, local administration and electoral politics. Integration by that time referred to the break down of a racially based or/and racist economy and it was directed at the racial majority. Returning to contemporary Europe, the Europe of Sarkozy, the Europe in Giannaris' cinema, the word integration is directed to individuals and their relation to the racial majority and dominant ideology. The imperative to "integrate" is delivered by the nation state to single subjects. Simmel's stranger – Giannaris' Kazak teenagers and the dissatisfied young Albanian – must integrate into school, working environments and into the grand ideas of national identity if they want to move out from the margins of the nation state. What was a "transitive verb" (eg the state must integrate the school) then, it becomes "intransitive, or implicitly reflexive" (the immigrant must integrate her/himself) (Hyland 2006). The transformation from transitive to intransitive requires the denial of the key feature of the concept of the assemblage which is the exteriority of relations as a vehicle for the understanding of ethnoscapas. The denial of the exteriority of relations is communicated through the feeling of responsibility. The Kazaks and the Albanian hijacker have to deal with their cultural heritage as being responsible for it. Hyland (2006) argues that in this case, responsibility makes culture a far more useful category than race for the defence of national space and identity.

Conclusion

In what Maffesoli (1996) terms "the image of coenaesthesia" (?) which is able to integrate within the framework of "conflictual harmony" a diverse range of national cultures and identities, the notion of the stranger as derives from the Deleuzian assemblage emphasises the founding aspect of cultural difference. Such difference is not a product of a unanimous perspective of tolerance but it is rather caused by what might be called the "organicity of opposites". Giannaris' strangers, young Kazaks and dissatisfied workers turned into hijackers constitute a threat through this cultural pluralism which very often is forgotten or/and denied for the defence of the more traditional notions of national space and identity. This defence aims at the conservation and further creation of entity types, conceived on the basis of homogenous models: unified nations, national identities and so on. The foreign element as generated by the global flows of capital and cinematically depicted by Giannaris actualises a potentiality; the potentiality of cultural diversity that has been neglected but at the same time stimulates new ways for the defence of the nation state. In line with Maffesoli (*ibid.*), the above logic, tension and paradox, the deterritorialisation and de-traditionalisation are thus necessary, "a bit like a graft that allows worn out tress to bear beautiful fruit once again (Maffesoli: 108).

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