RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NORTH-AFRICAN DESCENDANTS AND THEIR ORIGIN COUNTRY: THE END OF IDEALISM

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**Introduction:**

Everybody knows that North-African immigration in France as in different European countries continues to raise a number of questions, mainly concerning their integration into French society. However, North Africans have been living in France ever since the World war I; the first immigrants arrived at the end of the 19th and in beginning of the 20th centuries, in particular Algerians from the region of Kabylia. The arrival of immigrant families, authorized by the ordinance dating from 1945 concerning the conditions of entrance and stay of foreigners in France, have provoked social, cultural and political consequences on French society. If immigrants were considered as foreign workers, their children born in France have definitively changed the face of this immigration and the fundamental objectives of the scientific debate. One important concept is used to symbolize the nature of this debate, it is the concept of “the integration process”. What kind of citizens are the Maghrebians descendants? Have they succeed to participate in all the spheres of French society? Do they benefit from a social, and professional insertion? My communication will try to analyse one aspect of the integration process: the citizenship.

The objective of my paper is to analyse the relationship between North-African descendants and their country of origin. During my PhD research, I have studied the political identities of Maghrebians descendants and the fundamental aspect of my thesis tries to demonstrate the impact of the ethnical identity on the construction and the (management) of the political identity. In other words, the main question is to known whether belonging to a community with specific characteristics can influence the political participation, the opinions and the ideological membership. In the intention of resolving this question, I have selected social and cultural characteristics like religion, citizenship, social and professional integration and political socialization. An empirical work has been done: I have made 48 interviews in South East France with North-African descendants. This study is based on people who obtained
French citizenship either by birth or naturalization. Thanks to the interviews, I have gathered data on nationality and political informations like their representations, their participation and their opinions on the political system of the country of origin. Through the observation of their national identification and their relation with both French and origin citizenship, I have tried, primarily, to define their national identity and, secondly to underline the link between their citizenship and their implication in the political sphere of the country of origin.

One of my conclusions explains that we can’t really understand the relationship of Maghrebians descendants with their country of origin unless we dispose of clear explanation of their citizenship. Four categories have been delimited : a category of Maghrebians descendants declaring only a French citizenship, a category of people who adopt a status of foreigner in France, a category of persons who express their affiliation to France and the Maghreb, and lastly group of people who reject all the forms of national identity. After a description of each category, I’m going to demonstrate why I’m referring to the end of idealism to describe the relationship between this population and their country of origin.

Citizenship and political identity:

Among the social features of North-African descendants identified as constituting elements of their political identity, citizenship is a fundamental one. In 1998, a demograph, Jean-Luc Richard¹, published a study about the descendants of North-African immigrants in France. In this study, the author focused on their citizenship declarations in the 1990 census, and pointed on the particular situation of young people. Indeed, the children of North-African immigrants born in France, like any other children of foreigners, become French citizens at the age of 18 by virtue of the French Code of citizenship. Yet, the 1990 census and the results of Jean-Luc Richard’s study have shown that North-African descendants who are 18, 19, 20 years still

consider themselves as foreigners whereas legally they are French citizens. They become conscious of their citizenship gradually, mostly when they are confronted with the French bureaucracy (for example during school enrolment, when applying for a job or when registering for a military service). What is the meaning of these declarations? For example, when a North-African descendant considers himself as a foreigner, does it mean that he refuses to participate in the French political area and that he tries to develop a proximity with his origin country? During my survey, I was confronted with population who have French citizenship by birth or naturalization. Many of them also possess the citizenship of their parents’ native country. French citizenship is transmitted through of “jus soli” and the citizenship of country of origin through of “jus sanguini”. North African immigrants, who have constituted the first waves of migrant workers, have refused to apply for naturalization. Thus, their children have inherited their citizenship. Although, there is no accurate account of the number of persons who posses a dual citizenship in France, this legal status is very common among this population. Furthermore, since French legislation on citizenship is allowed the conservation of the origin citizenship, it indirectly favours this situation.

The French scientific debates on the relationship of the Maghreb descendants with their country of origin have shown how it’s difficult to define with accuracy this phenomenon. A football match between the French and the Algerian teams was organised in 2001, in the Saint-Denis stadium. It was a very special event because the two teams haven’t played together for 40 years and the painful colonialism history linking France with Algeria has given a specific dimension to this occasion. However, some incidents during the match and the invasion of the playground by the Algerian supporters have demonstrated the persistence of a malaise between the two countries. Also the hostility of the Algerian descendants against the French patriotic symbols like the national anthem has shocked the French public opinion. Indeed, numerous children of Algerian immigrants have been present at the football match
and a lot of them were found responsible of provoking incidents. Some journalists have used this event to prove that the Maghreb descendants still consider themselves as Algerian citizens and don’t hesitate to express their rejection of French affiliation. For the sociologist Azouz Begag\textsuperscript{2}, this analysis is false. According to this author, the Maghreb supporters have used the provocation to demonstrate their national pride. In French society, these people are sometimes victims of racism because of their foreign origin, and this sporting event has given them the opportunity to claim their right of an ethnical difference. It’s also in the name of their pride of their culture of origin that Maghreb descendants have celebrated with the Algerian flag the victory of the French football team at the World championship the same year.

So why these North-African descendants still use their citizenship of origin while being at the same time French citizens. They don’t live in Maghreb countries, they don’t perfectly talk the Arabic language, and they just visit the parents’ native country during summer holidays, and not always in good conditions. It’s one of the conclusions of a study made by Michèle Tribalat\textsuperscript{3} on the relationship of Maghreb descendants with their country of origin. Actually, she demonstrated through interviews with these people that they are designated as foreigners by the North-African population because of the emigration of their parents and their settlement in France. In French society, the affiliation of the Maghreb descendants with the country of origin is still interpreted as an ambiguity, an unfaithfulness to the French citizenship. I think that the relationship between these children of immigrants with their origin country is more complex. Actually, if some Maghreb descendants still claim their link with their citizenship of origin it’s because of their exclusion from the French society. In this case, the original identity becomes a solution to their non-integration and a substitute of a French citizenship. This example illustrates more the despair and the helplessness of these individuals.


\textsuperscript{3} Michèle TRIBALAT (1999), \textit{De l’immigration à l’assimilation : enquête sur les populations d’origine étrangère en France}, Paris : La Découverte.
who are confronted with the feeling of illegitimacy in France rather than the expression of a real attachment to a Maghrebian citizenship.

The hesitations and the choice of a foreign identity are also a characteristics of young people. Before their entrance in the adult period, these children of immigrants can use a status of alien only with the intention to demonstrate their originality and their difference. Without irreversible consequences on their future membership, this proximity with their origins is a step in the process of their identity building and citizenship experience.

In comparison with the situation of their parents, the North-African descendants have created a new relationship with their country of origin. Indeed, we can’t explain the sense of this relationship without an observation of their place in French society. They are born in France or have emigrated with their parents during their childhood, they have been educated in a French schooling system, and now they live and work in France. So their link with the Maghreb is not the result of a life experience in this part of the world. They didn’t live there, they keep the contact with this country but they can’t pretend to be a real member, a citizen which share each moment of the country’s present and each project of its future. In this case, Abdelmalek Sayad, a French sociologist specialized in studies on the North-African immigrants, has declared “how can we designate the Maghrebs descendants as citizens of their country of origin when they are disconnected from this nation from the beginning to the end of their lives ?”\(^4\). I’m going to answer to this question and show that Maghrebs descendants have developed different type of relationship with their country of origin. Let’s start with the first category of French citizens.

**Category of French citizens**

A part of North-African descendants don’t hesitate to claim their unique affiliation with French nationality. Despite their Maghrebian origin, they refuse to be associated with the immigrants, the Arabs or the Aliens population. They don’t deny the status of their parents in France but they have just inherited from this ethnical identity without the wish to protect it or to consolidate this situation.

The reference of origin doesn’t represent a significant element of the identity whereas the French population or the public opinion continue to identify them as members of the Maghrebians community. It symbolises the history, their parent’s one, but today they have broken their links with this past. For example, if their parents still define themselves as foreigners and members of their native country, their children have chosen to be only French citizens. If their parents continue to celebrate their culture of origin, their children reject the practice of Islam and prefer to run their life according to the French culture. For the members of this category, it was very difficult and painful to make this identity choice, in particular in a family context dominated by the traditions and the Islamic religion. Thus, this evolution has been possible only by showing an opposition to their family. The analysis of their interviews shows that all the components of their life are coherent with their nationality: they declare to have adopted a way of life, thinking and being inspired by the occidental culture. They don’t respect the Coranic obligations, for example they don’t apply the food restrictions (in Islam, it’s forbidden to eat meat of pork and to consume alcohol), and women of this category insist on their emancipation and their reject of the culture of origin which promotes their inferiority and their imprisonment in the private sphere.

Moreover, their proximity with the French population has been developed from the childhood. Indeed, they have insisted on the fact that they didn’t grow by the side of the Arabic
community, and at school their playmates were not children of North-African immigrants like them but children coming from French families.

In 1997, Rogers BRUBAKER\(^5\) has published a book entitled “Citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany” and has proposed the following definition of the nationality of origin among the Maghrebians descendants population: for him, their link with French nationality is utilitarian and functional while their affiliation with their origin is motivated by affection and is symbolised by a combination of religious, cultural and ethnical elements. In the case of my category of French citizens, this description is false. For these members of North-African descendants population, the origin is symbolic and insignificant, contrary to their link with French citizenship.

The distance between this Maghrebians descendants and their North-African culture has a lot of consequences on their relationship with the country of origin. When they evoke it, they highlight their lack of understanding facing the situation in this country and in particular the political crisis and the development of Islamic terrorism. Whatever the origin country, Algeria, Morocco or Tunisia, the members of this category refuse to consider it as a possible place for their life or their future projects. In concrete terms, some of them posses the citizenship of origin because their parents have registered them with the consular authorities in France. In this way, many of North-African descendants have obtained for the first time their identification card and a passport from the country of origin. Today, the children of the immigrants belonging to the category of French citizens don’t accept this fact and claim their right to renounce to this administrative affiliation, in the name of their liberty of choice.

Unable to affirm their original identity, they don’t hold the ability to understand and decode the reality of Maghreb. Indeed, they have lost the ethnical and cultural proximity with the North-African society, contrary to the other Maghreb descendants who have preserved their

affiliation of origin and still express an empathy. Their lecture of political events and of social situation is particularly negative and critical. They condemn the development of the religious radicalism and the collapse of the North-African societies destroyed by the corruption. If this vision of the origin country is relieved by other categories of Maghrebs descendants, the particularity of this category shows their incomprehension and their unquestionable sentence against a country with which they reject all forms of affiliation. It’s the reason why they refuse political implication. Culturally and ethnically incompatible with the North-African countries, the members of the French citizens category are not able to construct a political link.

**Category of Foreigners in France**

In the Maghrebs descendants population, I have identified another category whose identity choices are in complete opposition with the group of French citizens. This component gathers people who present themselves as foreigners in France. Indeed, these persons have legally the French citizenship but consider themselves to be rejected and discriminated by the host society. Because of the racism in France and their permanent feeling of humiliation, they have decided to protect themselves and to adopt this identity of a foreigner as a solution. Victims of this situation, they have renounced their belonging to France and don’t believe that their position can improve. Thus, the only form of protest they use against their exclusion from the host country is to claim a status of an alien and to demonstrate the uselessness of French citizenship. In other words, their strategy consists in accepting the fact of being a foreigner in France instead of their administrative status of French citizens and to add value to their new identity. In their interviews, these people express it in different terms: they talk about their foreign identity, their belonging to Arabs population, their quality of Muslim, and so on. I can characterize the identity of this group through a unique criterion because a confusion exists in
their interviews. They are unable to use one reference and their identity affiliation is the result of a combination between different aspects. Whatever the term they promote, their objective is to prove that being a Maghrebian or an Arab is not a shame or an handicap. On the contrary, they feel a pride and try to reverse the relationship existing in France which permit to French people to denigrate the Arabic people and to assert a dominating identity. By highlighting their foreign identity, the members of this group want to discredit the French population and their cultural and religious characteristics. For these Maghrebians descendants, French identity is not respectable because it is in contradiction with Islam and the Coranic obligations. Indeed, members of this second group are people who claim a strong affiliation with Islam and represent the part of the French Muslim population which exercise more rigorously the religious obligations than the rest of the North-African descendants. It’s why I insist on the fact that their foreign identity is accompanied by cultural and religious choices in accordance with Islam. I have to remind you that Muslim practices consist of five obligations.

- the first is to recognise and assert that there is only one God, Allah, and his prophet is Muhammad.
- the second obligation is to pray God five times a day.
- the third is to fast during the “Ramadan” month
- the fourth is to give some money each year to poor people (it’s a alms called the “zakat”)
- the fifth obligation consists on making the pilgrimage to the Mecca.

In addition to this fundamental obligation, there are others rituals concerning food like the interdiction to eat meat of pork or meat from animals whose throat haven’t been cut according to Muslim rites (the religious procedure imposes to kill animals with the pronunciation of a Coranic sura). And all these rules are defined by the members of this category as essential principles of life which cannot be violated.
In the same way as the previous category, the group of foreigners have adopted a citizenship in coherence with their deep identity symbolised by both an attachment to their original religion and a feeling of discrimination in France. But their proximity with Islam doesn’t mean the same proximity with the country of origin. Their vision of Maghreb doesn’t become more positive or more laudatory. Actually, they also criticize North-Africa and the political instability of this region but they don’t use the same arguments as the members of the first category. For them, Maghreb doesn’t suffer from the development of Islamic terrorism but is the victim of the Occidental influence. Islamic countries, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia are losing their original culture and are reproducing the Occidental model. People from their countries are abandoning their traditions and are renouncing to apply Coranic precepts. The invasion of the Occidental values in Maghreb is visible by the installation of industries and corporations coming from France or United States in the sector of oil. For example, the Algerian situation is analysed in these terms, and the members of this group insist on the extermination of Muslim believers and the violence against the supporters of Islam.

Furthermore, this Maghrebians descendants consider that discrimination exists both in France and in the Maghreb. If they are convinced as unwelcome in the host society, the North-African countries don’t offer them better conditions of reception. On the one hand, they explain that immigrants and their children are assimilated to opportunists which have won a lot a money in France and don’t hesitate to show their opulence with ostentation and disrespect during their holidays in North-Africa. On the other hand, they are accused to be French people and to have accepted their Occidentalization. And it’s very difficult for the members of this group to be designated as traitors when they claim their affiliation to Islam and their attachment to all the religious commandments. In a French context disrupted by the fear of terrorism and the September 11 events, these persons have insisted on the development of the anti-Muslim racism in France and in the international arena. If we accept the existence
of this phenomenon, we have to be very careful in our interpretation of these testimonies. Actually, this part of the Maghrebian descendants always use a status of victim to illustrate their life experiences: they are discriminated, rejected and accused both in their origin country and the Host society manipulated by the enemies of Islam.

**Category of people with a double citizenship:**

If the group of Muslims descendants prefer to choose an affiliation to a foreign status in France, there exists another category of Maghrebian descendants who adopt a double membership with both French and the citizenship of origin.

In their interviews, these people have described their references to North-African origins with positive arguments. In other words, this strategy of promotion is, partly, an answer to the negative image of Arab population in France. Although they don’t blame the whole of the French population of being racist, they admit that the cultural, religious or ethnical differences are not always accepted and praised. It’s the reason why they want to demonstrate the benefits of the multiculturalism in France. And according to their declarations, for example, people who posses foreign origin are more sensible and understand better the others. By possessing the dual citizenship, these Maghrebian descendants are the incarnation of a cultural mix and have succeed to find a personal balance and harmony. This result has been possible thanks to a coherent management of their ethnical identifications. Symbols of two cultures, they have developed their own identity which gathers their original inheritance and their French experience.

Many studies on the North-African descendants compare their attachment to the original culture with the relationship created by their parents. I don’t agree with this analysis because the immigrants have lived in North-Africa and have left their native country because of economic obligations. Today, the majority of their children were born in the Host society and have just a partial knowledge of the Maghreb. Unlike their parents, they didn’t create a feeling
of guilt towards their country of origin. Indeed, the immigrants have considered and still consider today that they have deserted their family. So, a large part of their life in France has consisted to try to make amends for this situation: one of the solutions was to offer a financial support to their family staying in the Maghreb. Today, the relationship between the North-African descendants and the origin country has other aspects.

For the descendants who claim a double citizenship, their perception of the country of origin has broken with all forms of idealism. Contrary to their parents who continue to defend patriotic discourses and a romantic vision of their native country, their descendants want to judge the Maghreb with realism and without indulgence facing the political instability problem. Indeed, these descendants focus their attention on the democratization process in North-Africa. Actually, for them it’s the main object of their preoccupations. Influenced by their political culture acquired in France, these children of North-African immigrants accuse the political leaders of Maghreb to be responsible for the corruption, the social crisis, the increase of unemployment and the radicalization of Islam. The instrumentalisation of political power by the army is also described as an incoherence of the system. Also a lot of these descendants don’t hesitate to denounce the implication of military services in the massacres of civilians attributed to Islamic and terrorists groups. Since 2000, different books written by previous members of the Algerian army have asserted that the military services have developed a strategy of terror with the intention to discredit the Islamic forces. For that, they have committed murders which have been attributed to the Islamic groups.

Mindful of all these elements of the debate, the Maghrebian descendants don’t want to be blinded by their attachment to their country of origin and are ready to contest the government and its politics in order to defend the democracy in North-Africa. Through these political positions, they also demonstrate that autoritarism, corruption, terror and radicalism represent excesses which are in total contradiction with their personal convictions and values. Free from
feelings of nationalism, these Maghrebians descendants express their interest and their worries for the political situation in their country of origin but are more spectators than actors of the Maghrebian reality.

In my interviews with members of the North-African descendants population, I have tried to demonstrate the existing link with their origin and to discover what kind of involvement is chosen by each one. In other words, does the relationship between the Maghrebian descendants with the origin country suppose a participation to the electoral process in North-Africa? Through the observation of my two previous categories, I have shown that the members of these groups are staying outside the political sphere based in the Maghreb.

For the descendants with a double affiliation to both their French and original citizenship, only a minority admits that they vote in their country of origin. When these voters explain their political action, they use arguments of solidarity. Contrary to the non-voters who refuse to intervene in the political destiny of a country where they don’t live, the voters use their right of vote to support the democratization process. Moreover, they try to persuade their parents to believe in their fidelity towards the country of origin. So, their vote has a double significance: on one hand, it’s a political action with the intention to help the construction of democracy in the Maghreb, on the other hand it’s a mean to prove their loyalty towards their origin, and indirectly to their parents.

**Category of people who reject all forms of national identity:**

Finally, I want to describe a last group of Maghrebians who adopt a marginal behaviour because these people refuse to be associated with both the French and the citizenship of origin. However contrary to the category of Foreigners, they don’t use another identity to define themselves. It’s important to underline that this category represents a minority in the Maghreb descendants population and their identity choice is the result of a process of
exclusion. Actually, these Maghrebians consider to be rejected by the French society, they are not integrated in the social and professional sphere and are convinced to be victims of a treason orchestrated by the Host country. If they denounce the existence of discrimination in France, they also explain that the public institutions or services like school, public housing services, have deliberately organised the exclusion of Arab population. For example, they accuse the school system and its institutions to have provoked their failure, they accuse the police services to use discriminatory methods with them, and so on. If their condemnations against French society are particularly serious still they use the same discourse to describe their relationship with the origin country. The Maghreb is also guilty for the same reasons. The members of this group evoque their experience in North-Africa and the humiliations inflicted by the customs services during their holiday trip in the origin country, or the discrimination they have suffered from.

So, according to their interviews, these Maghrebians descendants are victims, condemned to be excluded in France and in their origin country. Neither French citizen nor Algerian, Moroccan or Tunisian, these individuals fail to find their identity, or a substitute (like religion for example) to construct their existence, their dignity and succeed their integration in France.

**Conclusion :**

To conclude, I need to highlight how the Maghrebians descendants have succeed to develop a new relationship with the origin country. Indeed, contrary to their parents, they have renounced to idealise the Maghreb and today they are able to analyse the social and political situation in North-Africa with affective distance and realism. This phenomenon is the result of the integration process of this population. Actually, if the origin country doesn’t still represent a place where the Maghrebians descendants involve themselves it is because they have found others places or identities in which they can anchor. For some of this descendants it’s a
Muslim affiliation based on fundamentalism and a status of foreigner, for others it’s the affirmation of a French citizenship and an Occidental culture, and so on.

Some French political leaders have claimed that the citizenship of the Maghrebian descendants characterized by an administrative affiliation both with France and their origin country doesn’t permit the same loyalty with the two countries and impose a choice. In response to this declarations, I have to insist on the fact that just a minority of Maghrebian descendants are politically involved in Maghreb. And these political actions don’t have the same as a traditional vote because it is made without a citizen objective but with an affective intention.

And in the public and scientific debate, I think that a lot of wrong arguments about the persistence of an attachment with the origins are still used. I don’t want to asset that the relationship with the Maghreb countries are disappeared but this link can be compared with the one created by the first waves of immigrants. For this last group, their feelings for their native country are dominated by guilty, regrets and traumas. And their descendants seem to manage this situation with more distance and a rational way.
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**Articles**


