



The Algerian immigration in France

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Abstract

Immigration is one of the oldest phenomena in the world. People have always immigrated for various reasons. Normally immigration is not pleasant and people do not immigrate willingly. They are forced to leave their cities or their countries while psychologically every person aspires for stability. This is why immigration does not happen in a pleasant condition. Politics always plays a very important role in migration. Sometimes language is also one of the factors driving immigration. When the language is common between two countries, it can become a common identity. This article examines the immigration of Algerians in France because it is a very important happening in the history of the world. This article relates the history of Algerian immigration in France; its causes and consequences on Algerians, French and current immigration.

We will reflect on the effects of this immigration on current French society and the identity of immigrants in French society. We will also see the living conditions in Algeria, the main cause of immigration having a significant impact on memory and the identity of immigrants in general. Immigration will be explored in Francophone literature which is a window to see the world in a new way.

Keywords: migration, history, causes and consequences, news, identity, politics, living conditions, language, literature

Introduction

Immigration is a very interesting topic to explore. This phenomenon has profound effects on society in general. There are many immigrants in France but the number of Algerians immigrants is much more than other immigrants. Since 19th century the Algerians come to France affecting the number of 100000 in 1924 and this number has not decreased except during World War II. To understand the reason for this immigration we must get back to the past. France shares a long history with Algeria. The French have colonized Algeria, the largest country in Africa in the 19th century. Together Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco are called Maghreb. France has colonized all three countries of Maghreb. Because of the colonisation Algerians suffered immensely. They managed to have independence in 1962. During the colonization the “pied-noir” harassed the Berbers, indigenous inhabitants of Algeria. In the novel “Incendie” of Mohammed Dib we see how the Algerians have suffered under the colonists. Poverty pushed the young Algerian population towards France where they worked as the workers in the cities of France. They lived in the horrible conditions as seen in the novel “La Terre et Le Sang” of Mouloud Feraoun. In this novel a young Algerian named Amer works in the coal mines in Paris. Immigrants are still searching for their identity in the world. They belong neither to their own country nor to the country where they live. We can see this identity crisis in almost all immigrants. It is very difficult for Algerian immigrants to be integrated into French society. Even though they speak the same language, they have a lot of differences between them. Integration always raises the question of identity. Sometimes immigrants want to keep their own identity, sometimes they want to adapt a new identity.

History of Algerian immigration in France

This story begins with the colonization of Algeria by France in 1830. Many French people went to Algeria to take

advantage of the wealth of this great country. Most of land is acquired by settlers also called as “Pied-noir”. The Algerians have become more and more poor. In the trilogy of Mohammed Dib, famous Algerian author, includes the big house, the fire and the weaving craft, we see how the main problem of most of the Algerian society is hunger. They cannot earn enough money to even eat. Hence people start to migrate in France for earning their living. Algerians as French-speaking people arrive in France in thinking they would have a better life but the French do not include them in their nation and they treat them as foreigners. Algerian immigrants are treated very badly in the French society therefore they decide to return to Algeria but it is even more difficult to survive in the contemporary living conditions in Algeria. Immigrants lose their identities and they begin to lose their memories too.

Some Aspects of Algerian Immigration in France

Since the earliest times the Mediterranean area has been crossed by pilgrims traveling to sanctuaries, sacred places, and looking for new opportunities and new markets for trade. Nowadays, as in earlier times, this pilgrimage goes on, but it involves prevalently the people living in the South of the Mediterranean who are bound for the new sanctuaries of globalization: large European cities. These pilgrims, like their predecessors, bear hopes for a better future that is often impossible or difficult to realize in their homeland, because of economic problems and sometimes fratricide wars. Music accompanied the journey of ancient pilgrims towards the sanctuaries.

Today it accompanies immigrants during their hard journey towards new hope. The immigrants may not have much in their backpacks, but audiocassettes of music from their homeland often make up an unforgettable part of their precious belongings.

Music seems to represent a strong symbolic bond between immigrants and their homeland, and has always followed immigration, at times characterizing it like a soundtrack (Gilroy 1997: 300-348). Thus, music is an identity tool, an emotive contact with the homeland, a symbol of a possible return. Moreover, as I am suggesting in this article that music can be used to express the new identities produced by immigration itself. Emigration from Maghreb towards France and its capital Paris is one of the most important and continuous emigration flows which have crossed the Mediterranean. Many Algerians - from the time of colonization up to today - have reached the land of *liberté, fraternité, égalité* more or less voluntarily (Liauzu 1996).

This immigration - sometimes during wartime it was referred to as deportation - involved predominantly men who worked in factories. Many Algerians remained in Paris in spite of the retaliations of the French against Algerian immigrants and the massacres of Algerian protesters during the Algerian Liberation War (Liauzu 1996: 126) - such as in October 1961 when many protesters were murdered and thrown into the Seine.

In 1975 the French government changed the immigration law and authorized the families of Algerian immigrants to join them in France. Therefore "Les Maghrébins représentent en 1982 38,5% de la population étrangère, mais c'est moins désormais l'entrée de travailleurs que le regroupement familial qui joue, l'immigration de main-d'œuvre a tendu à devenir une immigration de peuplement" (Liauzu 1996: 122). The families brought their children, and more children were born in France, producing a second generation. French people call this young generation '*jeunes issus de l'immigration*' or *beurs*. *Beurs* have a different identity both from Algerian immigrants and from French people of their age group.

Algerian immigrants experience two different aspects of displacement: being up-rooted from their homeland and adapting to a foreign culture; on the other hand, their children - who were born and study in France - experience a displacement of identity. *Beurs* are suspended between the parents' background and the everyday life of French society. Therefore, I have chosen the word 'suspended' since often they are not accepted either into Algerian or French society. In France *beurs* are seen as immigrants, even if they have often a French education and nationality (KHELLIL 1991: 88-105). On the contrary, in Algeria they are seen as French or, if worse comes to worse, as 'traitors' to Algerian culture. The *beurs'* experiences (in particular for girls) of going back to Algeria - for instance, during the holidays with their parents - are sometimes really traumatic. For example, *beur* boys are often called by offensive names, but the *beur* girls are referred to as *amjah* (lost) and *merula* (a woman of loose morals). During my fieldwork some *beurs* told me about these problems stating "in Algeria I'm seen as an immigrant, a foreigner." We may suppose that a lot of the resentment experienced by visiting *beurs* is probably fuelled by jealousy, as very many Algerians cannot leave the country and face long-term unemployment at home.

Great differences in cultural identity and social position separate *beurs* from their parents, relatives and other first generation immigrants. For this reason they have coined the new word *beur* as a linguistic border between themselves and immigrants, between their cultural background and that of French people. The social position of these youth in French society is not easy. They often live in the city's

boundaries (the *banlieue*) not only in the physical sense but also in a social one. In this way, some *beurs* choose a life of crime, do not attend the school and often have clashes with the police. The mass media have given the *beurs* a bad image, suggesting that they are one of the principal problems in French cities (in particular in Paris). In 1983 *beurs* expressed their problems through demonstrations organized by some anti-racism associations, the most important of which was SOS Racism (Jazouli 1986; Amara 1991).

The principal characteristic of assimilation is the up-rooting of cultural differences resulting in the disappearance of many aspects belonging to the culture of origin. The dominant culture is recognized as all-important. Assimilation is a colonialist concept and until 1960 was the model for immigration laws in France. Due to harsh criticism the assimilation concept was replaced with integration. Integration is founded upon five fundamental concepts: equality of rights; the fight against discrimination; compensation for inequalities; participation in political and social life; the right to French citizenship. In spite of all that, Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux (1999) highlights that integration can be interpreted as a 'softer' type of assimilation.

It may seem that these questions are of interest only to sociologists or politicians, but also *beurs* and immigrants have their points of view (cf. Charlot 1981). In this article I'll try to show that *beurs* criticize both those who consider them as immigrants as well as the supporters of assimilation and integration policies. In most cases the *beurs* express their refusal of assimilation or integration through two different types of behavior: on the one hand, they come into conflict with society (including criminal acts); on the other hand, they use art, music, and theater as socially acceptable tools of confrontation.

The causes of immigration

Colonization is the main cause of Algerian immigration in France. Algerians being the French people went to France thinking that they are going to another part of their country. They thought they were the citizens of France but in truth they had no right of citizenship in France. France invited them because they needed low-cost labours. French society has never accepted Algerian immigrants as the part of their own nation. Meeting with the family is also a main cause. When many people immigrated to France, they suffered from the separation from their families. Before 1945 the Algerian immigrants were only men. They suffered a lot due to the separation from their families. As the living conditions in Algeria becoming terrible, they decided to bring their families also to France. The French language is also a main cause of immigration. Most Algerians used to speak in French hence they thought that integration into French society is much easier than being integrated in other societies. When one speaks the same language, one has the feel of fraternity and solidarity. Freedom is also an important cause of immigration. Some Algerians came to France in order to be able to protest against the colonization of Algeria having more freedom in France to protest there than in Algeria.

The consequences of immigration

There are serious consequences of immigration for the Algerians and also for the French. Both societies have lost their own identities. Immigrants are neither French nor

Algerians. The French are not able to retain their own identity because of many unusual and queer ethnicity in France. Sometimes it has been assumed that there are more immigrants in France than people of real French origin. Immigration has not only political and social effects but also psychological. There are good and bad consequences of immigration. The good consequences are adaptability, blending of cultures, patience and adoption of good practices, intercultural exchange and a progressive and global society. The bad consequences are racism, hatred and problems of social integration. Immigration is the cause of the mutations too. Mutations occur when two races mix with each other, when inhabitants of both races live together there is a lot of intercultural union that gives birth to children of hybrid race.

Migration in Francophone literature

We will explore the theme of migration in Francophone literature. Mouloud Feraoun has written a novel, named “La Terre et Le Sang” on the theme of migration. The hero of this novel Amer, is exiled in France for fifteen years. He works as a worker in the coal mines like the other Algerian villagers. Mohammed Dib, a famous author of the Algerian trilogy chose this theme for his novel “Habel” published in 1977. It is the story of Habel, a young Algerian exiled in France. In the novel “Les Boucs” written by Driss Charaïbi, migration is described in a nice way. It’s a good novel about the situation of Algerian immigrants in France.

Present condition of migration:

Currently in France there are so many immigrants that it is very difficult to integrate into French society. There is a lot of pressure on the state to retain them as citizens when the truth is that they do not want to have the responsibilities of citizens; while they just want the benefits. They get a lot of benefits and they don’t deserve them. There are many hybrid breeds in France. Gradually the French people are losing their original identity. Like the other countries of present world, France is also facing the racism and terrorism.

Conclusion

Finally, we can see that migration is a natural phenomenon. Since then, people immigrate to improve living conditions but there is always a risk, the risk of losing their own identity and after a certain time, their own memory, their own culture. The next generations of immigrants do not know the country of their origin and they will never become like the indigenous citizens of this country where their ancestors immigrated. This theme is very well described in «né quelque par», a Franco-Algerian film directed by Mohamed Hamidi. Memory is individual but memory is also collective. Each society has a collective memory but people who leave their country lose their memory. Migration also has a serious influence on the memory and identity of immigrants. One can conclude by saying that migration has a strong effect on the generations of immigrants.

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