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Diaspora as a multi-tiered resource for migration policy and its confrontation to migrant strategies: the case of Omsk

As labour migrations became an issue of public policy and a quite disputed matter of public debate in the Russian Federation by the mid 2000s (Vitovskaya & al. 2009 ; Zajonchovskaya & Tjurjukanova, 2010, Le Huérou & Regamey, 2007, Schenk, 2010) the implementation of those policies and their relation to migrants experience is also a key to understand the position of “new” countries of emigration – Central Asia and to a lesser extent the Caucasus in their relation to the Russian State and society.

Once Republics with proclaimed equal rights inside the Soviet Union, they had been nevertheless part of the Soviet nationalities policy and thus submitted to a set of rights and duties, promotion and repression policies, embedded in complex processes of modernization and domination. We can choose to stress the colonial nature of the Soviet statehood with its proactive construction of (Hirsh, 2005) , to point the emancipatory features of the “affirmative action Empire” (Martin, 2001) or to suggest no more but a “family resemblance” (Beissinger, 2006) between the Soviet Empire and other imperial experiences, but we cannot anyway escape the fact that today’s new independent States of Caucasus and Central Asia have inherited a specific place in their relationship to the new Russian State. Partly due to Tsarist Russia and Soviet legacy, this place has been and is being also renegotiated since 1991 according to multiple factors.

Based on field research in the Omsk *oblast* (Western Siberia, bordering Kazakhstan) in 2009 and 2010, my communication will focus on the multiple ways the notion of “diasporas” is used and perceived in the migratory policy management and implementation in the region. Having studied various elements of the local authorities’ migration policy (UFMS, regional and municipal economic bodies...) and looked into employers and migrants’ strategies and attitudes, I happened to be, in the course of my research, more and more puzzled by the fact that *diasporas* were appearing in many discourses as well as in concrete attempts to manage migrant workforce.

I decided to choose this angle to see how it helps in understanding the conducts of the different actors (authorities, employers, labour migrants, intermediary of different kinds...) in the migration field in the way they are embedded into a scheme that includes a lot of “old style” Soviet constructs and stereotypes, - often similar to the colonial stereotypes we can find in the attitudes towards migrants in European countries (at least France). Meanwhile, they also include new “post-soviet” features, built in the two past decade, that reflect the evolution of the Russian state and society (new xenophobia mixed with a liberal approach to the labour market needs), the type of relations settled between the Russian Federation and the migrants’ countries of origins and the more globalized economy and migration field.

I will not discuss here the essence or the validity of the concept of *diasporas per se* but use the term because and in the way it is used on the ground by the authorities, the employers or by migrants’ communities for their ambiguous search of a balance between flexibility, security and control.

I- My first point will address the way both authorities and employers use, voluntarily or not this concept of diaspora or so called diaspora.

a) Local authorities : ensure flexibility and control

After 2006, Migration policy in Omsk has followed the line of the general federal trends and has elaborated mechanisms that try to simplify procedures for migrant workers thus allowing a more flexible scheme for the needs of the labour market that can be qualified as more “liberal” for the employers (in terms of extending quota and simplifying procedures), as well as more protective for the migrants (fewer dependence from employers, legalizations of large numbers of migrants in 2007 and 2008 before the crisis...).

Thus, as it resorted from the interviews I conducted as well as from regional media and official documents or reports, it is possible to say that Omsk regional authorities are quite proud of their policy. They describe it as an example of clever and moderate approach that could be followed. Besides the everyday bureaucratic job of issuing residence or work permits by the UFMS¹, and besides the task for municipal and regional economic authorities to establish lists of firms asking for migrants quota, investigating their needs, according or refusing them etc., local branch of Federal Migrations Service, has established an advisory council (*Obshchestvennyj sovet pri FMS*), which they like to present as a corner stone of their policy.

¹ Not so routine job if taking into account the big scandal that led to the dismissal and arrest of the Head of UFMS in 2010 on corruption charges implying the Chinese diaspora

- What is interesting to notice is that apart from law enforcement agencies and representatives from the employers' side (mostly people from the local entrepreneurs Union) they have convened representatives of non Russian religious authorities and "diasporas". The creation of advisory bodies under administrations is the result of the general reform of administration implemented in the Russian Federation in the middle of the 2000s, giving the civil society a possibility to have their say and even to exercise a kind of control (often called *obshchestvennyj control*) over the work of administration. In the case of the Omsk, the council comprises mainly representatives from "nationalities" or "local communities" who are part of the Russian Federation, such as Siberian Tatars, local Kazakhs, or even long settled Armenians who become Russian citizens years ago. Those representatives who are not concerned by migrations issues more than any Russian citizen, are asked to approve the UMFS policy or to formulate recommendations. The construction is done as if their "ethnic" status gives them a special mandate or a special capacity to do so.

- This is particularly salient - from the civil council activity reports - in the way regional FMS legitimate these "diaspora" on the public security agenda. This position given from outside is reinforced when administration or law enforcement agencies expect some disorders linked (or supposedly linked) to labour migrants (massive arrests in a market, street fights, aggression or murder reported by local media...).

- The protective mission is not forgotten, and UFMS also praise the work with "diaspora" as a very useful collective intermediary to warn and denounce abuses against labour migrants, would they come for local policemen, employers or even fake or dishonest intermediary firms/individuals.

- Local administrations try also in some way to be in contact with representatives of the labour migrants communities, mostly through those who have acquired Russian citizenship and often act as middlemen. They ask for their practical assistance in translating instructions posted in UFMS offices or in giving to their fellow nationals some basic information about policy changes. More unofficially, law enforcement agencies do have some informants from the migrants community especially through those who have become intermediaries.

- An other elements that I did not investigate further² could be mentioned to add as a part of this approach: the amount of expertise, opinion polls and monitoring that are ordered by regional administration to different academic or independent research centres about the "interethnic" climate and/or tensions in the region, and that encompass labour migrants together with Russian citizens considered as "ethnic minorities" (Savin, 2010).

Should we conclude from this that "local minorities" are embedded as symbolic go-between between labour migrants and administration? At least partly yes, and trying to understand the reasons for this, we could suggest that the local administration's efforts for achieving efficiency and pragmatism appear to be constrained by traditional Soviet schemes giving a particular weight to nationalities constructs and to their representatives supposedly organised in *diaspora*³. There is also a probability for a kind of discrepancy between the political and proclaimed policy at the federal level and the way it is implemented on the ground, local authorities resorting to people and modalities they are used to deal with.

In this respect, it could be interesting to go further on the way Soviet nationalities policy and its scientific construction of nationalities (Hirsch 2005) could still have an influence in the administrative practices. Some French scholars suggest a strong relation in the building of the "inner enemy" in the French society for the French police as a result of the Algerian war (Rigouste, 2009) and in the elaboration of the French migration policies in the 60s and the 70s by high ranking civil servants infused with representations and administrative practices inherited from the colonial times (Laurens, 2009).

b) Employers

Employers of labour migrants play a very important role in the dissemination of perceptions at the local level. Those we interviewed during field research were often retired military officers or policemen who have turned into small/middle range business. Interviews allow to draw a contrasted picture: on the one hand, their career background leads them to perform views that are not very far from administration representatives' in terms of acquired stereotypes about minorities and/or migrants. On the other hand, their present professional position get them to adopt a much more pragmatic attitude that can be summarized by the basic idea that for their practical needs, labour migration is not so much a problem but a solution.

Regarding observance of the migration laws, they often try to take advantage of some of them (bargaining for official quotas,...) but also often bypass law, resort to deals with middlemen (*brigadiry*) from migrants communities who provide them with migrant workforce. Being reliable, hardworkers and cheap, migrants do have a comparative advantage, on the condition that they remain quiet, the less visible as possible, in order to not attract attention of law enforcement agencies and not creating any public trouble.

² Interviews and documents consulted, July 2010.

³ See also the more recent creation of the National Cultural Autonomies (Erofeev, 2010).

Though they live quite close to them, - they are often small size firms-, and though migrants and their employers were not long ago part of the same Soviet society, the latter demonstrate very vague knowledge and idea of the migrants life or cultural habits, often confounding their country of origin and their language, speaking of them as a collective using the plural, or put forward quite unexpected comparisons: a former criminal police officer⁴, law abiding and sympathetic to the few Kyrgyzstan workers he employs regularly, complains about employers' abuses toward migrants. He immediately attempts to equalize this situation with the one the Russians who were subjected to "massive labor slavery" by people from the North Caucasus, some case he witnessed when he was on duty as a policeman...

Xenophobic attitudes and acts that have become widespread in Russia especially in the last decade, are also becoming more and more marked by confusion between , the more no difference is seemed to be made between labour migrants and Russian citizens of non "ethnic Russian" or "Slavic" appearance, as demonstrated the events of the Manezh Square on Dec. 11th 2010. Nevertheless, public discourse, media coverage, misused statistics (Malakhov, 2007, Shnirelman, 2008), show that there is also a specific anti-migrants attitude that has grown further after 2008 crisis. Thus, the problem of xenophobia is both related to old recipes linked to Russian nationalist discourses, but also to contemporary ways to raise in the political arena migrations issues. This can be observed in Western states living in liberal and globalized economies. So is the fact that Russia has "joined" the club making it to be an ordinary Western state conducting post-colonial policy? There is no doubt about a certain rapprochement of Western and Russian policies.

The obvious ethicized and racialized stereotypes that leak from all the absolute majority of the sayings and attitudes from both employers and local authorities is a / shared inheritance from the Colonial component of the Soviet empire construction, with the 2 faces of the mirror - affirmative action and elite promotion as described (Martin, 2001) and help by scientific knowledge (Hirsch 2005) to construct a classification and hierarchy of nationalities.

In any case, it shows quite a strong State capacity to construct and implement norms of public action even when it is towards "liberalization". In this latter case, it will be by establishing close ties with emigration neighbouring States, that are to control that law enforcement and security apparatus is still closely tied to their Russian counterpart. In this scheme, a new form of management by diasporas can be seen as a rather clever tool to ensure social control over the migrants, and political security between the States.

That will be the subject of my second part.

II/ The revamping of traditional diasporas into useful intermediaries

We had the opportunity to observe at least two organisations that have seemed to us emblematic of this tension observed in the State and Employers' practices. Representatives of the local migrants communities - or self-proclaimed ones- can act as intermediaries at different levels and with different strategies between migrants and authorities as well as between migrants and employers.

a) Local Kirgыз diaspora :

Run by a resident of Omsk since he completed university in the 60s, an explicit Soviet Union nostalgic, the official Omsk Kirgыз diaspora appears to be a part of the Soviet scheme of nationalities management but got adapted to the new conditions, by including younger people who work as recruitment intermediaries, interacting with migration service or law enforcement when facts of abuse are found concerning workers from Kirgызstan, and hoping to be enlisted by a local politician close to United Russia who promised to invite diasporas to participate in the new municipal legislature as a part of the civil society.

The complete achievement for Kirgызstan citizens working as middlemen and at the same time active members of the official Kirgыз diaspora organisation will be the Russian citizenship they were waiting for, still they were already integrated and self-assured to the point that they became unnoticeable for the police, who "think they are Kazakhs".

b) The Centre for migrants' recruitment (Centr po trudoustrojstvu migrantov) AND society for Uzbekistan friendship (obshchestvo sodruzhestva Uzbekistana): matching offer and demand?

The organisation, founded in 2007 and registered in 2009, happened to be at the crossroads of almost all issues and interactions⁵. Created and run by a ex-member of the *prokuratura* and former *Afganets*, coming in the late 1980s from Uzbekistan⁶, but born in Tajikistan and "ethnic" Kirgыз, the organisation is oriented mostly

⁴ Interview, July 2010.

⁵ And also a real blessing for the field researcher !

⁶ The Head of the center insists on the fact that he is also a deputy president of the Kirgыз diaspora and was at the time of the interview (July 2010) creating the *Society of Tajikistan Friendship...*

towards Uzbekistan and Uzbekistan citizens - of all "ethnic" origins including Russians. It reveals a new model of hybrid institution, mixing at the same time several activities: doing business controlling, protecting. The organisation seeks to be indispensable with employers and the authorities, in selecting and recruiting migrants directly from Uzbekistan, "cleaning the place" from non verified intermediaries and trying to avoid the arrival by train of "unwaited workers", establishing ties with official Uzbek migration agencies in several regions. The center was also hoping to extend its activities in other *oblasti* of the Siberian Federal District, using *Afgantsy* networks in the regional administrations and legislatures.

The "diaspora" part of the job – the two being located in the same house- is more oriented towards cultural activities, generally organised in an official way in official premises and with official blessing from both sides; but Community control is also an important dimension of the activity, since the organisation is regularly required by law enforcement authorities to control potential unrest inside the community or between them, such as in June 2010 when violent clashes in Osh took place. this kind of organization certainly matches the interests of countries of origin and receiving country - Russia.

In this example we can see working a quite specific post-soviet model of co-operation and co-production in the sphere of migration policy, suitable for nearly all the "players", since it meets the search both by the Russian state and the migrants' countries of origin of a control and regulation of the work force circulation through the creation of more institutionalized bodies. The closed relations between the States and the life-paths of many of the actors who did a Soviet career – real children of the "Affirmative action empire", especially in the security apparatus is undoubtedly an enabling element for this particular social and administrative construction.

It is unclear to what extent it is suitable for the migrants themselves, though the organisation claims to act also as a kind of trade union, negotiating decent –though under Russian workers rates- wages with the employers. It will be definitely more difficult to find this kind of models in Western countries, though state apparatus could be willing to build such.

In spite of their comfortable position, it remains doubtful that these organisations could be instrumental in the reality of the migrations flows and procedures, and observation and interviews with ordinary migrants show that there is a big gap between their self-legitimizing strategies through economic interest and/or political ambitions ; their legitimization from above by State authorities : the very few regular contacts they happen to have with ordinary migrants who mostly leave quite isolated, who often come through very locally settled middlemen or by family ties.

c) Looking for Kazakhs diaspora: "oni zhe mestnye !"

Investigating migration issues in a bordering region with Kazakhstan can't let apart the question of Kazakh diaspora and Kazakh migration. Our findings in this matter go all in the same direction though they come more from indirect observations and in contrast with the other (real?) migrant communities : Kazakhs are so intimately part of the regional history, landscape and political life⁷ that their position can't be compared at all to their neighbouring citizens from other Central Asian states (Naumova & Larina, 2006, Savin,

During the 1990s, the region indeed witnessed important immigration/repatriation flow from Kazakhstan, with Kazakhs (already a significant minority in the region), Russians and other nationalities - Germans... –joining or rejoining Russian territory. Despite this quite tense immediate Post-Soviet period, close ties remained at both political and economic level. In the 2000s, the situation stabilized and the flourishing economy of Kazakhstan even led to some reverse movements, back to Kazakhstan...

Actually, would they be living in Omsk *oblast* for decades or having crossed the border a few months ago (and often having acquired Russian citizenship), Kazakhs are mostly considered to be "locals" (*mestnye*) or "theirs" (*svoi*) and not "labour migrants". Rules and procedures at the UFMS don't apply to them (or no more than to Russian citizens from an other region), and they are very often compared to Siberian Tatars as to their position and weight in the local society. (own Mosque, slightly different from the Tatar one...). As we have seen before, they are invited as a diaspora to have a look and a say over the regional migration policy ; they are not noticed nor arrested by the police and don't appear in local mass media for causing any kind of public disorder nor they are required in the migrant quota by employers.

Though quite closed, Kazakh community in Omsk appears to be integrated in the sense of administrative status and perception by the local population. They are doing quite well in business, and are indeed perceived in the region as a full component of the regional multinational population, that comprises also Germans and and Siberian Tatars, less likely Chechens and Armenians, even less likely Tajiks or Uzbeks. This observation can

⁷ Kazakhs and Russians in Omsk region have a long history of relationship since the very beginning of the first Cossack settlement in 1716 the Governor himself, L. Polejaev, has worked in Karaganda for a long time and only came back to Omsk in 1987 to become first Party secretary in the region. Several documents exist already for many years, facilitating trade, border cattle husbandry, border crossing, customs exemptions etc.

be an element in arguing that the Soviet style hierarchy of nations and peoples is being reshaped by the contemporary administrative and economic context

Conclusion:

The use of *diaspora* in this regional context shows a mix of perceptions that can resort to Soviet-style national policies and national minorities' representations that tends to further distance labour migrants from the former neighbours or *svoi* they could have expected to be, going to Russia for work.

Not only old recipes but also new attempts are done to shape a new pattern of relationship between Russia and its former southern Republics: thus, colonial type labour force management is combined with economic pragmatism serving market oriented objectives while the remaining strong willingness for social and political control over the workforce makes difficult to speak of a "liberal" model. In fact, the (post)-colonial scheme is at the same time softened and strengthened by the strong legacy of the Soviet constructs.

Could "post" be analytically removed to leave alone:

- Soviet style strongly anchored type of labour management, the migrants representing the ideal achievement of workforce management and of more global social control that has never not really been achieved in the Soviet economy ? The biographic profile of many of the employers interviewed (former military men or policemen having doing part of their career in the Soviet times) has certainly an influence on this conclusion.

- colonial style perceptions, attitudes and practices that are little constrained by State discourse and public opinion general mood. This (post)-colonial attitudes that could be compared – though with a certain "time lag", to some Western European countries experience.

Put together, those two characteristics could lead more surely than the strict importation of the post colonial theory⁸, to look more in depth into the ways history of State formation and contemporary contexts join to ensure complex forms of political and social domination (Hibou, 2011).

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⁸ As is suggested by of J.F. Bayart and R Bertrand : "historical sociology approach must lead us to admit that the most contemporary globalisation is "the daughter of colonisation" but that it is impossible to stop at the postcolonial" (Bayard & Bertrand, 2005, 68-69).

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