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Othering and Otherness in Tunisian Arabic: Manifestations and dimensions

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ABSTRACT:- It seems clear that the emergence of post modern perspectives together with the crisis of belonging that has featured our globalized world since the 80s have enlarged the scope of interest in the other and otherness. Worldwide, media and literary productions as well as the academia have started to pay more and more attention to diverse figures of otherness such as sexual minorities, the disabled, etc. Thus, questions concerning others' identification have received an intense interest among scholars working in a remarkable array of disciplines ranging from social science and humanities, political science, comparative politics, to international relations. There has been increasing emphasis upon the ways in which others' identification provides a context for changing understandings of self and other. Consequently, the concepts of representing the other, inclusion and exclusion, for example, have received primary focus. Moreover, the concept of others' identity has become at the center of lively debates within political science. In comparative politics, this concept plays a central role in works on nationalism and ethnic conflicts. Additionally, when it comes to political theory, identity of the other, marks numerous arguments on gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity and culture in relation to liberalism and its alternatives.

The paper is expected to widen our understanding of some mechanisms of self- identification and other-identification placing a special focus on the diverse ways of representing the other in Tunisians' everyday language along side with the different dimensions associated with such representations.

Keywords*: identity, other, self, representations, inclusion, exclusion*

I. INTRODUCTION

Following Hall, (1996) and other scholars' observation of the tendency within human societies to organize and collectively define themselves along dimensions of difference and sameness, it is through the perception of internal sameness and external difference that people make sense of their world in interaction with the others which leads to consistently different perceptions of in-group and out-group members.

For Anderson (1983), perceiving internal sameness and external difference is identifiable through the expressions- the words, acts and illustrations people use to identify with whom they are grouped and separate themselves from others not belonging to their own group.

In the recent decades, there has been a continuing rise of the attention given to the concept of otherness. Thus, it comes of no surprise that an expanding literature on the definition and meaning of the concept has been produced to account for a vastly increased interest on the part of scholars working within a broad range of sciences and disciplines.

Worldwide, in everyday discourse as in social debates, the concept of otherness seems to be among the most widely used words to the extent that there is no way to measure the contexts in which it pops up, or easily quantify the uses of this term.

Yet, despite the intense interest the concept of otherness has received in recent years in diverse fields of investigation ranging from political science, or international relations to comparative politics, otherness remains a complicated and an unclear term whose role in ongoing debates about issues of membership, belonging, and expected behavior, is central.

In an increasingly globalized world marked with mobility and mass communications, the questions of otherness and marginality have become even more and more exigent and meaningful. Hand in hand with this, the discourse of segregation, exclusion, racism, and unity as opposed to inclusion, diversity, and common sense of purpose, has recently received amplified prominence.

As a matter of fact, it comes no surprise that at both levels national and global, forms of group-based conflicts are deeply rooted not only in the recent political discourse, but also in the media and in the internet where the narratives of racial, religious, and cultural hatred find a suitable environment to spread.

That said, there can be no doubt that such rhetoric which enhances segregation and exclusion will give

rise in innumerable ways to real and symbolic violence, bring about significant damage to the values of difference and diversity, and threaten society as a whole and its functioning structures at all levels: economic; social and cultural.

It is in this mood that this paper sets out to explore the process of othering and otherness in Tunisian Arabic, address how they are constructed and manifested, present their possible effects on group and individual based interactions, and more importantly think over ways to counter the damage they are said to cause to the values of difference and diversity.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Othering and Otherness

In keeping with Bauman's (1991) statement that no group is immune to the othering process, creating social categories, distances and differences is a remarkable phenomenon portraying interpersonal relations. Generally speaking, these differences and categories are created by dominant groups and applied to groups with less power, minority groups and other outsiders.

Throughout history, people have labeled those who are different. People have been labeled 'other' because of their differences of religion, gender, geography, politics, colour, caste and class, et cetera. The concept of 'otherness' refers to setting boundaries of acceptability in society. This idea outlines the relationship different groups have with each other. One's 'self' is defined and strengthened as it is compared to the 'other' who is considered an outsider or different.

The other and the notion that derives from it, otherness, is an interdisciplinary concept par excellence. As such, it has been dealt with in fields as as diverse as psychology, sociology, philosophy, linguistics but also theology, history and gender studies.

Originally coined within post-colonial theory, othering is a theoretical concept used to describe a process whereby social identities are defined as social identities always situated and conditioned by specific social contexts. Spivak (1985) describes the process of othering as a multidimensional process, in the sense that it touches upon several different forms of social differentiation.

In accordance with Spivak's identification of the concept, Anderson (2010) uses the concept to describe the racialization processes that affect first generation Europeans. Lister (2004) equally defines othering as a process of differentiation and demarcation, by which the line is drawn between 'us' and 'them' – between the more and the less powerful.

This concept is perhaps most succinctly defined by Schwalbe who conceives of othering as '…the defining into existence of a group of people who are identifiable, from the standpoint of a group with the capacity to dominate, as inferior' (2000, p. 777), or as '…the

Process whereby a dominant group defines into existence an inferior group.' (Schwalbe et al. 2000, p. 422).through which social distance is established and maintained' (2004, p. 101)

Johnson (2004) conceives of othering as a problem that can negatively affect individual and group based interactions due to the exclusionary matrix it creates. That matrix treats the other as inferior which gives rise to inequality, tension, dissent and conflicts. Therefore, this matrix can easily turn out to be a mentality based on the ''us versus them'' dichotomy excluding and alienating those who are different.

Johnson's (2004) conceptualization is in accordance with Schwalbe et al (2000) use of the concept when looking to otherness as a process that produces and problematizes differences in the sense that the group which is othered is also defined as ''morally and intellectually inferior'' (p. 423). This dimension of othering which reduces others to a few negative characteristics and ultimately dehumanizes them is further highlighted by Riggins (1997, p. 9)

In line with this, Jensen (2010) considers othering as discursive processes by which powerful groups, who may or may not make up a numerical majority, define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups. Such discursive processes affirm the legitimacy and superiority of the powerful and condition identity formation among the subordinate.

According to Saltaga (2017), although othering can be given many definitions, it essentially manifests itself in treating individuals or groups as though they are lesser based on perceived or actual differences of some kind. Equally Gillespie (2007) claims that "othering occurs when Self represents Other in terms of what Self is not (and in terms of what self does not want to be) in a way that is 'self-aggrandizing'" (pp. 3-4).

For Gillespie (2007), even though othering as a treatment may be enacted in diverse ways and degrees, it ultimately adopts a single direction, namely, favoring and protecting the Self "literatures on othering, self-esteem and intergroup bias point in the same direction: toward a widespread tendency to differentiate in group from out group and Self from Other in such a way as to bolster and protect Self" (p. 4).

a.   Othering and Identity

The idea of othering which basically taps upon the presence of others in our societies is very much related to the concept of identity. According to Dervin (2015), othering has been central to the constructions of nations and national identities ever since the rise of modernity. Research concerning national identity has illustrated examples of the role of othering in the discursive construction of national identity.

As Wodak et al, 2009) pointed out the perception of being under a threat was crucial for the construction of Swedish national identity, and the discourse of danger has also been shown important for the process of othering. Equally, Göl (2005) emphasizes the role of a threatening Armenia Other in constituting and developing of a Turkish national identity in the nineteenth century. Making claims to the territory Anatolia, Armenia was perceived as a threat to the nation and to Turkish national identity and homogeneity.

Another example reported by Idevall Hagren (2016) and Hogan & Haltinner (2015) reveals a common tendency in Sweden and elsewhere to produce and perpetuate a discursive construction of the other as a threat or a danger to society and to the national identity. Such common discourse has been crucial for the process of othering and therefore for developing a national identity.

In the view of Feldman, (2001); Göl, (2005); Hogan & Haltinner (2015), constructing and developing a national identity can be understood and interpreted as reactions to perceived threatening and dangerous other positioned as a strategic source of legitimacy to create and unify national identity, as well as managing social phenomena that are perceived as threats to the whole imagined community.

b.   Forms of Othering

In The literature, many and varied forms of othering have been identified as Dhamoon (2009), Dervin and Gao (2012) report. Principal among these forms are the "national" and "cultural" other identified through the following labels: essentialism, racism, neo-racism, ethnocentrism, exoticism, islamophobia, orientalism, Occidentalism.

Dhamoon (2009), Dervin and Gao (2012) contend that while othering is a universal phenomenon, there is a tendency in today's research to accuse the West of othering the rest of the world. Whether or not these forms of othering are neutral, they have in common some specific flaws, namely, their concentration on differences between people while neglecting a lot of similarities which can exist, a one-sided and very general description of culture, race and religion, and an impression that only their culture, race or religion influence their opinions, actions and attitudes. Such discourses of othering can in daily interaction lead to various forms of dreadful acts such as hatred, discrimination, prejudice, killing, power imbalance, terrorism…

Examining the possible outcomes of othering practices, Powell (2016) conceives of othering not to be about liking or disliking someone, but to be based on the conscious or unconscious assumption largely driven by politicians and the media that a certain identified group poses a threat to a favored group. More importantly, Powell considers the problem does not lie in the attributes of who gets defined as other, rather in how these attributes may be made salient and how they can be manipulated. Manipulating these attributes will always activate people's fear and anxiety around a perceived other, leading to the creation of new processes of exclusion and dehumanization.

c.   The power of language in othering people

Language is to be seen as an important element of socialization, individual and collective, provides knowledge about feeling, aspirations, claims Amara (2002). Moreover it defines us, as we are and as we wish to be seen. Following Berlin's words that "language is a pluralistic and complex system of signifying practices that construct realities rather than simply presenting or representing them" (1992, p. 19).

Because language is structured around differences, whenever we define something, we are at least implicitly defining it in terms of what it is not, it becomes clearly obvious that it is in and via linguistic choices semantic stances are encoded. This fact about the relationship between language and critical stances is further highlighted by Fairclough (1994) who states that the link between language and the social difference reflected in such language is subjective and bi-directional.

While there have been debates among language theorists over whether language reflects divisions or creates them, the fact remains that language is built around the very idea of difference. This idea of difference becomes particularly pertinent when thinking about human relations.

Consequently, it is thought that at the fundamental level, all languages have ways of distinguishing between groups not through the definition, the denotation or the meaning of specific words such as ''us'' and

''them'' which contain no indication of power structures, but through the connotations these words tend to acquire when used by different groups.

Language is not just used to "other" people who come from elsewhere, but also to mark out anyone perceived to be different due to their race, gender or sexual orientation.

In other words, the linguistic choices that people make encode and sustain social differences. Therefore, it is in and through language that meaning is conveyed, the world is categorized, social group dichotomies are represented; groups are included or excluded, categories are created, stereotypes and clichés about minority groups and other outsiders are propagated as Bauman (1991, p 75) stresses.

If language with its inherent polarities is to be viewed as the basic medium of understanding and categorizing the world, it is no wonder then that meaning is conveyed and social realities are represented in dichotomous terms. Consequently, linguistic choices will reflect discursive stances which Sartre (1985) succinctly highlights when speculating on the polarizing nature of language "The Other is the indispensable mediator between myself and me" (p. 189) for as he concludes "I need the Other in order to realize fully all the structures of my being" (p. 190).

It is certainly not by chance that a number of researchers have considered this categorizing principle of language extremely meaningful in the context of exploring the link between linguistic choices and binary demarcations that ultimately either overtly or covertly end up in favoring one group position and privileges over the other. Bauman '1991) explained this fact: "Being a stranger means, first and foremost, that nothing is natural, nothing is given of right, nothing comes free."

Manifestations and dimensions of Othering

Udah and Singh (2018) suggest that othering as an imposed state of difference is intensively marked with binary, dualistic thinking, making divisions into two opposing categories such as 'I' and 'You,' 'We' and 'Them,' 'Self' and 'Other.' It is often based on difference in terms of race, skin color, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, language, name, dress, and religion or other differential characteristics.

In a similar way, Bauman (1991) highlights that othering is a crucial notion in order to understand how societies categorize and construct identities. De Beauvoir (2011) considers it a fundamental criterion for any group to set itself up by immediately setting up the other against itself. Canales (2000) similarly considers dichotomy not only as an inherent constituent in the process of othering and therefore in order for the Self to exist, there must be the Other and vice versa, but also usually hierarchical and based on a relationship of power, of inclusion and exclusion.

Addressing basic characteristics of othering practices, Brons (2015) argues that this treatment can be based on the embodiment of an undesirable characteristic by the other/out- group, one which the self/in-group lacks (Brons, 2015). These characteristics include, but are not limited to, anything from skin color to education to disability. The key is that a characteristic, or combination of characteristics, have been deemed undesirable.

The opposition as Brons (2015) explains is more than a set of desirable characteristics versus undesirable ones, but a construction of a superior self competing with an inferior other. For Brons (2015), although inferiority and superiority may not be enacted explicitly, they are quite obvious to both the self and the other and even can easily justify social exclusion, discrimination and subjection.

Brons (2015) suggests a binary way of looking at Othering. He argues that Othering is either crude or sophisticated. While Sophisticated Othering involves or partially depends on self–other identification and misses the defining feature of Othering—attributing relative inferiority and/or radical alienness to the Other (Brons 2015). Crude Othering practices usually manifest in negative portrayal, derogatory slurs, verbal insults and racist discourses about the other.

For Yancy (2008); Bonilla Silva (2014) and Brons (2015), Othering practices legitimize exclusion, marginalization, subordination and exploitation and perpetuate new forms of racism and racial practices.

In Todorov's view (1982) the three characteristics of Othering, include "value judgments (the Other is perceived as good/bad), social distance (the Other is perceived as distant psychologically and physically), and knowledge (the history and culture of the Other is relatively unknown)". In addition, "Otherness is accomplished by means of rules of behavior and the mechanisms of discourse, interpretation, and performance set by hegemoneous groups"

In their effective demonstration of this process of "us" and "other" formation, Hadden and Lester (1978) proposed two processes of identity formation: the process of self- identification and the process of other-identification. These two processes require the use of established "categories of identification" in order to both define the identities of the "us" and the "other" and create social separation between the identity of the "us" and the "other."

Othering in Tunisian Arabic
Tunisian Arabic

According to Ben Abdallah1, Kchaou and Bougares (2020), Tunisia is politically divided into 24 administrative areas. This political division has also a linguistic dimension. Native speakers claim that differences at the linguistic level between these areas do exist, and they are generally able to identify the geographical origin of a speaker based on their speech.

In their view, Tunisian Arabic is a set of dialects used for daily non-official communication with no conventional writing system, and they are considered as being chaotic at the linguistic level including syntax, phonetics and phonology, and morphology. They are commonly known as spoken or colloquial Arabic, acquired naturally as the mother tongue of the Tunisian people.. They are, nowadays, emerging as the language of informal communication on the web, including emails, blogs, forums, chat rooms and social media.

Tunisian Arabic, or Tunisian, is a set of dialects of Maghrebi Arabic spoken in Tunisia. It is known by its 11 million speakers as Tounsi or Derja, "colloquial dialect" to distinguish it from standard Arabic, the official language of Tunisia. As part of a dialect continuum, Tunisian merges into Algerian Arabic and Libyan Arabic at the borders of the country. Tunisian Arabic's morphology, syntax, pronunciation, and vocabulary are quite different from standard or classical Arabic.

Like other Maghrebi dialects, it has a vocabulary that is mostly Arabic with a significant Berber substratum. However, Tunisian has also a significant Latin component as well as many loanwords from French, Turkish, Italian and Spanish. Tunisian Arabic is mostly intelligible to speakers of other Maghrebi dialects but is hard to understand or is unintelligible for speakers of Middle Eastern Arabic. Multilingualism makes it common for Tunisians to code-switch, mixing Tunisian with French, English, Standard Arabic or other languages in daily speech.

Main dialects and varieties

The main dialect varieties of Tunisian Arabic are Northwestern Tunisian (also spoken in Northeastern Algeria), southwestern Tunisian, Tunis dialect, Sahil dialect, Sfax dialect and southeastern Tunisian. All of these varieties are Hilalian excepting the Sfax one.

Tunis, Sahil and Sfax dialects (considered sedentary dialects) use the voiceless uvular plosive [q] in words such as قال /qaːl/ "he said" while southeastern, northwestern and southwestern varieties (considered nomadic dialects) substitute it by the voiced velar plosive [g] as in /gaːl.

Moreover, only Tunis, Sfax and Sahil dialects use Tunisian phonology Indeed, northwestern and southwestern Tunisians speak Tunisian with Algerian Arabic phonology, which tends to simplify short vowels as short schwas while southeastern Tunisian speak Tunisian with the Libyan Arabic phonology

Additionally, Tunis, Sfax and Sahil dialects are known for not marking the second person gender. Hence, the otherwise feminine إِنْتِ/ ʔinti/ is used to address both men and women, and no feminine marking is used in verbs (inti mšīt). Northwestern, southeastern and southwestern varieties maintain the gender distinction found in Classical Arabic (مشيت أَنت inta. (Mšītī inti إِنتِي مشيتي, mšīt

In a multi-cultural society, where different understandings about norms and objectives co-exist and people have diverse characteristics, the social context is unlikely to be static. The persistent exclusion of people with a shared characteristic can engender movements or counter-cultures.

Broadly speaking, following an 'interactionist model' (e.g. Llewellyn and Kogan 2000, Barnes et al 1999), identities and the values associated with them do not exist in isolation: "My identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others." (Taylor, 1992, p 34). Thus, being a self not only involves identifying oneself with groups, but also being identified with groups by others.

Since differences in social groups are usually revealed through linguistic categorizations, this paper will be an attempt at demonstrating how lexicalization of the 'other' in Tunisian Arabic can often reflect univocal attitudes of ambivalence, derision, exclusion and even dehumanization.

Basic manifestations and dimensions of Othering in Tunisian Arabic

Drawing on linguistic perspectives that people encode and express their views, norms, stances and values in and through linguistic choices, it is important to underline that that talk is to be perceived, not only as an individual enterprise, but as a contextually- and historically-bound practice through which individuals speak as members of various communities ' (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 253).

As the examples that this paper will present, the lexical composition of Tunisian Arabic is replete with linguistic selections and choices, evaluative concepts and attributes which explain and correspond to prevailing understandings of social and cultural divisions.

Therefore, Tunisian Arabic which is a mixture of many dialects spoken in diverse areas of the country including a large number of lexical items that derive from many foreign languages as French, Turkish, Spanish and Italian, identifies the 'Other' in different ways and in terms of the following possible typical features:

Visible Othering

This way of othering consists in referring to visible differences where the visibly different is the unordinary, whereas the visibly similar is the ordinary. People of a different skin colour or those with disabilities, for example, constitute the visibly different. Hence, in Tunisian Arabic, the contrast between the coloured and the non-coloured which manifests through the redundant use of the following terms:" وصيف [w sˤ i:], خادم [xa: dm], أزرق [ʔ z r a q], كحلوش [k a ħ l u ch], وصفان [wusfa:n], كحلة [k a ħ l a], أسمر [ʔ s m r], عبيد [ʕ a b i: d], عبيد [f dm]

Migrational Othering

In Tunisian Arabic, this manifests through referring to the contrast especially between migrants to northern or coastal areas and non-migrants with migrants representing the unordinary and non-migrants representing the ordinary. This contrast includes affiliation and belonging; regional and tribal belonging. In other words, migrational othering heavily taps on the idea of inclusion and exclusion which is about the need for the others to be included in society as opposed to the ordinary, who are already included. The use of the following terms in Tunisian Arabic is very telling: براني [b a r r a: n i:], موش ولد بلاد [m u: ʃ w i l d b l a: d], نزوح [n u: z u: ħ], الباليك البرور [u: z u: ħ], من هاك لبرور [min h a: k lib r u: r], عرب [ʕ r a b], عربان [ʕ u r b a: n], تالويح [t l a w i: ħ], جبري [ʒ a b r i:], من وراء [min w r a: i l b l a: j k], بوعيش [b u: ʕ i: ʃ]

Social Othering

The contrast between migrants and non-migrants which is a remarkable manifestation of othering practices in Tunisian Arabic, suggests a similar tendency to refer to others in terms of strangers as opposed to natives. Using terms which indicate the others' tribal or regional belonging is a common discursive practice in Tunisian Arabic. Hence, migrational othering becomes visible in the use of the following labels: عياري [ʕa j a: r i:], مرزوقي [m a r z u: q i:], جبالي [ʒ b a: l i:], جالصي [ʒ l a:sˤi:], همامي [h a ma:mi:], فراشيش [f r a: ʃ i:], فرشيشي [f i r ʃ i: ʃ i:], كك ج جماعة [ʒ m a: ʕ t k ʒ b], جماعة [s w a: ħ l i j a], جماعة 08 [ʒ m a: ʕ t 08], عكاري [ʕ a k a: r i:], نفاتي [n a f a t i:], جرابة صافيين [ʒ r a: b a sˤa: f j i:n].

III. CULTURAL OTHERING

Because different practices that identify the other do not occur in isolation, but rather in tandem, cultural othering in one way or another, originates from the other dimensions of othering already evoked. In other words, cultural othering is a result of visible, migrational and social othering. As a matter of fact, the social position of a given community generally relates to a number of norms and clichés which set them apart from others such as spoken dialects, life styles and moral values …

Thus, cultural othering is about the culturally different with respect to commitment to the use of a markedly refined dialect or code expressed in the use of the following lexical items: جماعة القالة [ʒ m a: ʕ t g a: l a], شلوح [ʃ l u:ħ] ; rural as opposed to urban life styles as in the use of the following terms in Tunisian Arabic:; جبري [g u ʕ r], قعر [z g i: r], زقير [m a: z i g r i:], مازقري [m a: z i g r i:]

يحب يكبري و [ʒ a b r i: - w j ħib - j k a b r i:], قعبوط [g a ʕ b u: tˤ], and moral and ethical values as it is the case of the following terms frequently used in Tunisian Arabic to refer to others: لحاس [l a ħ a: s], صباب [sˤ a b a: b], قواد [q a w a: d], صبايحي [sˤ b a: j h i:], بيوع [b a j u: ʕ], يهودي [j h u: d i:], قاوري [g a: w r i:], فرخ حرام [f a r x - h r a: m], عضمة حارمة [ʕ a ðˤ m a - h a: r m a].

IV. CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper was showing how othering is not about explicitly promoting ideas of biological inferiority or explicit practices of segregation and derogation. Rather, it has to do with how people are grouped and minoritised through discursive practices that categorize them as different. The paper also reveals how language has an obvious role, and this might be the tongue or dialect spoken, or the accent and cadences with which it is spoken as Edwards (2009) highlights. "Group identity is based on important narratives and the language in which they are told." (Edwards, 2009: 254)

Having a close look at the examples cited earlier reveals not only how the role of language in this is complex as much as it is important, if not decisive in producing and perpetuating a clear tendency to exclude the other in our every day talk which represents a discourse rife with derogatory attributes that feature the overall evaluative concepts that, in turn, influence lexical selections. Examining the different examples cited above can also lead to the conclusion that the identification of the 'Other' as displayed in Tunisian Arabic has been multiply affected and manipulated by the principles of exclusion and even derogation which indicates that difference is not only recognized; it is simultaneously remarked upon, talked about, interpreted, explained, contested among the users of this dialect.

By and large, this tendency to exclude and derogate can be typically oriented towards a wide range of topics, activity description, goal description, and norm and value description. All of these items are given powerful insights and prominence thanks to the range possibilities Tunisian Arabic is said to have.

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