

## Migrants in Spain and Andorra. Some Thoughts After the French Events

Joan Obiols-Llandrich

**Abstract** *The events that took place in France in the autumn of 2005 in the urban ghettos all over the country were followed with great interest both in Spain and Andorra as neighbor countries of France.*

*In Spain the immigrant flow is seen as a growing and overwhelming phenomenon happening in a country not used to be a host destination. On the contrary, for a long time, Spanish people migrated to other European countries or South America. In Andorra, instead, the immigrant population is about 70% of the whole population and, for decades, the country has been accustomed to receive foreign people. The concern about the French events has been notable in both countries.*

*Urban violence is not a new phenomenon and some examples of the U.S. events of the 60's and 70's will be useful to relate those facts to some concepts proposed by cultural psychiatrists like anomic depression or culture deprivation.*

**Key words:** Migration; Violence; Cultural Psychiatry; France; Andorra; Spain

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**INTRODUCTION** At the end of October 2005, after the accidental death of two adolescents that were being chased by the police in Clichy-sous-Bois, in the neighborhood of Paris, violent riots began and spread through the whole country. For many nights, France was shocked by the unending violence, mostly caused by young people. The majority were French citizens but most of them were of second or third-generation migrant origin, living in the poorer areas of French cities. After three weeks of violence, the situation calmed down and the French police was able to declare that things seemed to be under control.

The final balance was of one dead person (besides the initial two young people dead), 126 injured policemen, thousands of arrested people. Some of them were expelled from the country as they were foreign people illegally living in France. About 19,000 cars were burned during these wild nights and many buildings were destroyed (schools, public buildings, libraries, stores, etc.) with a global estimation of material losses in between 200 and 250 million Euros.

It is interesting to remark that burning cars seems to be a sort of “national risk sport/entertainment” in France as a mean of 90 cars are burned every night and a total of 28,000 cars had been burned from January to September 2005. So the police statement about pacification meant also that car burning had returned to the usual level.

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These events, by the intensity, the duration and the fact that the actors were migrant or young people of migrant origin, have deserved much attention, both during and after they happened. It has even been said that the media covering and great attention (newspapers, radio and TV stations) was one of the reasons of the rapid spreading throughout the whole country. It might be partially true as we know the crucial role played by the media in developing mimetic behaviors in an epidemic way in our modern society.

Anyway, there is also a general agreement that, in spite of some claims made by some politicians, the riots were a spontaneous movement and no obscure complots by unknown forces were behind the violent outburst. This does not mean that there is no explanation for such apparently irrational facts. This paper intends to look for some explanation through some theories coming from cultural psychiatry and after analyzing the present social and cultural situation in France.

**THE FRENCH “BANLIEUES” PROBLEMS** “Banlieue” is the French word for the suburban areas in the surroundings of the cities where much of the growing migrant population that has been arriving in France since the 60’s has been allocated. The state itself has contributed to make big lodging buildings at reduced prices where many migrants from the Maghreb and Black Africa have settled down. Their children and grandchildren are the main protagonists of the events.

Sociologists consider that in France there are 752 Urban Sensible Zones (USZ). They encompass a total of 5 million people. The peculiar situation of these zones can be shown through the following figures. Compared to the rest of France, crime is 50% higher, unemployment is two times higher as is school failure. Family income is 40% lower and the number of health centers is one half of the French mean. This makes obviously think of a ghetto, in the sense of an urban deprived area where the migrant population - or people of migrant origin - is predominant and has strong difficulties to overcome the situation.

Many observers point to a threefold crisis:

- a) a social one, as it is evident that this part of French society is living under the national standards;
- b) a post-colonial one, as most of the migrants came as a result of the process of decolonisation and also a crisis of political representation, as the traditional political parties have been unable to promote the participation in the political institutions of this young part of the population. The participants in the riots do not feel represented by any party and maintain a long-standing inhibited attitude when election time comes;
- c) moreover, a lot of political decisions since 2002 have contributed to the worsening of the situation. The budget for social or welfare measures has diminished. Less financial credits for building reconstruction have been given, hundreds of thousands of jobs for young people as “helping-educators” have been annulated, the number of teachers and other civil servants has lessened and local associations have been given less subventions. In instead of developing the proximity police programmes, more Interior Ministry forces are present, often seen as occupation forces, far from the neighborhood interests. The autonomous associative movement is scarcely developed, badly structured, very divided and isolated of the younger generation.

Again, the debate about the way the acculturation process takes place is open in France. Around the 80’s, the tendency was to stress *integration* vs *assimilation*. Traditionally, France has been a country where the newcomers were supposed to be assimilated in the sense of becoming full right citizens, adhering to the so-called republican values and, at the same time, becoming ethnically homogeneous as they supposedly incorporated the cultural French traits and traditions. Integration meant, somewhat, a minor degree compared to assimilation as it was supposed to represent a more respectful attitude in front of the language, the traditions, the religion and the

global culture of the new citizens. The true fact is that integration has failed because it has not really been applied. Cultural minorities always had a hard time in France since the “jacobin” political republican tradition prevailed. For the sake of the nation’s unity, the only common language was French and the French culture was the one and only to be considered. Regional languages like all the dialects of Langue d’Oc, Breton, Basque, Catalan, Alsatian, Flemish or Corse have been neglected and have almost disappeared. We can not expect much respect for cultural forms coming from abroad in a country that has not been willing to protect its own cultural diversity.

A great deal of the November 2005 urban violence in France might then also be explained considering the cultural identity problem. The reason for the riots are probably not strictly material. There is, of course, a high rate of unemployment, a lack of schools and health resources among other problems, but, as some have pointed out, while they are burning cars, all these guys have their mobile phone and might wear expensive tee-shirts. It is not the case of starving mobs fighting for food and let us remind that the French welfare system is probably one of the most generous in the world. The whole explanation, probably, has to be more subtle and seems related, beyond the factors already mentioned, to a deep cultural identity problem. These young people, supposedly full French citizens most of them, do not feel identified with the white, middle class population but they are neither fascinated by the culture of their parents or grand-parents that came from the Maghreb or from Black Africa.

It is worth mentioning that radical islamism does not – at least so far – seem very appealing, neither, to these young people. In general, religious issues do not seem to have played a major role in the banlieue riots. In fact, islamic associations disapproved the violence and made frequent pleas for peace during the incidents.

The young violents exhibit an apparently irrational behavior: burning, destroying, without any real and concrete demands.

What they really lack is a sense of identity and a feeling of confidence in the future. They are hopeless: no job will be available and they feel despised by the white, “really French” population. They feel excluded from the general prosperity and this sense of exclusion and frustration is a very dangerous culture medium as the events seem to have proven.

It is no surprise that they feel attracted by a counter-cultural way of expression: rap music. Rap heroes seem to be the real hidden leaders in a movement characterized by the lack of clear-cut leaders or representatives. Rap singers have been something like the prophets of the movement as, before the riots, they were in some way predicting the things to come.

A couple of instances can give an idea.

Already in 1995, the group NTM expressed in “What are we waiting for” that I translate freely from French:

*It's already years that everything should blast  
What are we waiting for to put fire everywhere ?  
What are we waiting for to break all rules ?  
Burn the police-like state  
Send the Republic burn into the same fire  
We've got nothing to lose because we never got anything...*

Another singer, Magyd Cherfi, said:

*We did not love, so we didn't care for anything  
We were not loved, so we did harm*

Let us now turn to other forms of violence and the explanations coming from cultural psychiatry.

**VIOLENCE IN AMERICA AND CULTURAL PSYCHIATRY** Many of us still remember the violent riots that episodically shocked the United States in the 60's and 70's and even in more recent times. I think they can compare to the French events as both phenomenon share the urban ghetto violent and basically spontaneous characteristics.

Some figures might be illustrative. In 1965, in the black neighborhood of Watts in Los Angeles, the five days riots had the tragic balance of 34 dead and about one thousand wounded persons. In 1967, in Detroit, the number of dead people reached 43. The Los Angeles events in 1992 meant the death of 50 persons. Ten thousand people were arrested.

The common features of these examples are that they all took place in black and poor urban ghettos, they occurred in a spontaneous way, without involvement of political groups or parties, they implied a lot of violence and irrational destruction and that, deep inside, they represented an ethnic social conflict.

The slogan "Burn, baby burn" has remained associated since then to this kind of events. The young French rioters seemed to remember it very well. Fortunately, the French events have been considerably less bloody than the american ones. It is also true than getting a gun is much easier in the United States than in Europe.

A different kind of violence and ethnic clash deserves also our attention. I am talking about the indian reservations and the situation of the aboriginal people in Canada and the United States. The idea is to introduce the concept of anomic depression as described by Wolfgang Jilek (1974) among several indigenous people in America.

According to this author, the process of rapid sociocultural change under westernization produces an impersonalization and anonymization of social relationships leading to anomie. This means an open conflict between imported Western notions and the traditional value system that brings cultural confusion.

There is, at the same time, a widening gap between media-advertised Western lifestyle model and socioeconomic reality. This situation brings experiences of relative deprivation.

If we sum-up the three factors: anomie plus cultural identity confusion plus relative deprivation, the product is what Jilek called Anomic Depression. So, based in a sociological concept presented by Durkheim in the XIX century, Jilek complements it with some elements issued from transcultural psychiatry, to describe a pathological situation both for the individual and the ethnic group.

It think this kind of analysis is applicable to the situation in the French urban sensible zones.

The following proposal more directly related to black american ghettos might be even clearer. Ari Kiev, probably sensitized by the violent events taking place in the ghettos, developed a sharp analysis of the situation (Kiev, 1977). For him, there was a situation of uncertainty about opportunities in the black ghettos leading to confusion and a sense of inadequacy by one side. On the other hand, the culture of poverty complicates reservation and ghetto life by discouraging participation in the larger culture and by not providing meaningful traditions or satisfactory interpersonal relationships. In this situation, anomie and alienation flourish. Little by little, chronic apathy and negativism develop and elements of hostility and dependency appear. As a result, the ghetto dweller must contend with discriminatory practices plus attitudes fostered in the ghetto itself that reinforce a negative self image and hopelessness.

There is in the ghetto an absence of constructive channels for aggression. This can lead to a diversion of suppressed aggression into self destructive channels. This sort of behavior might take different forms: suicide, homicide, alcoholism or drug abuse. Again, the noncommitment and withdrawal leads to pessimism about the future and to minimal expectations about achievement. The street becomes an escape and setting for socializing and street heroes become role models.

In this context, Kiev thinks that problems relate to police brutality, lack of jobs, bad housing, poor education, inadequate recreation facilities, among other factors.

I think it is obvious that - beyond some differences - there is an evident similarity between the American black urban ghettos and the French/migrant ones.

This is why I think that the explanation proposed by Jilek and Kiev can fit to the events lived in November 2005 in France.

**MIGRATION IN ANDORRA AND SPAIN** Andorra is a very small country located in the Pyrenees mountains, between France and Spain. The French events were followed with great attention, not only for vicinity reasons, but also because of the high proportion of migrants in Andorra and by the fact that many Andorran families send their students to French universities, specially Toulouse and Perpignan. This last issue was anecdotal as many of my patients recognized that, after the initial worry about their sons or daughters living there, the news they got were of very localized areas of conflict and no involvement of the students.

The migration phenomenon deserves more attention. With a total population of about 76,000 inhabitants, Andorran citizens are only about 26,000. This means that migrants represent almost 70% of the population, a unique case in Europe. Most of them come from Spain (44.4% of the total population), Portuguese people have displaced French people to the third position as they are now about 10.5 % of the total. French people are only 6.8%. The remaining 6.6% come from about one hundred different countries which can give an idea of the multicultural scene present in Andorran society. It would be silly to say that there are no problems in the integration of the migrant population. Some cases of racism and xenophobia have been denounced. We have some reports from schools describing some minor incidents but, globally it can be said that there are no violent social situations related to migration and this globally peaceful scene can be explained by several factors. The first one is, obviously, that even if migrants reach such a high proportion, the actual number is low. The size of the country is so small that there are no big urban concentrations. The biggest conurbation around the capital has about 35,000 inhabitants and we cannot talk of migrant ghettos.

Another important fact is that about half of the Spanish migrants come from Catalonia. This means that they share the language and the culture with Andorran people and there is no cultural clash in adapting to Andorran society. For the rest of Spanish migrants, the proximity between Catalan and Spanish makes also things easier. A third factor to be considered is that Andorra has been receiving migrants for about fifty years, in a gradual and very controlled way. Illegal immigration is almost nil. Last, but not the least, unemployment is almost non-existent. As a touristic destination, hotels, stores and other services offer a number of jobs that makes possible to work for anybody interested.

So, even if French events were seen with preoccupation, it is not likely to have this kind of problem repeated in Andorra.

The situation in Spain is quite different and migration is perceived as one of the main problems in Spanish society. For centuries, Spain has been a land of people who migrated to other places: Latin America traditionally or Europe from the 60's on. But, after the recent economic growth of Spain, the situation has reversed and more and more migrants are arriving. From the total population of more than 44 million people, migrants are the 8.5%, which means 3,731,000 people (and we can possibly add about 500,000 illegal migrants). The peculiar situation comes from the fact of the increasingly growing tendency: from 2004 to 2005 the increase has been of 23% more newcomers.

There are now more than half a million of Moroccan, about half million more of people from Ecuador, more than 300,000 Romanian and 270,000 Colombian. British citizens are 227,000 and

Germans 133,000. From Argentina there are 152,000 people and many others from Latin American countries, Eastern Europe, Pakistan, Philippines, etc.

Of course, some groups have completely different situations. British and German people, for instance, are mostly retired persons, living in wealthy urbanizations all along the mediterranean coast. They are really like ghettos, but rich ones, with their own services system in their own language: they do not feel the need to integrate themselves.

On the contrary, the majority of migrants have to struggle to make a living and they have no chance but trying to integrate themselves to the Spanish society. This integration can be less or more difficult according to the cultural proximity or distance of the newcomer and this means possible language barrier (not for latin american people), religion (muslims have more difficulty) and other cultural issues.

There has been some outbursts of violence in different cities all over Spain related to racist attitudes but, so far, they seem to respond to specific and minority conflicts. Nothing similar to the French events has so far happened.

But many social analysts fear that the growing tide of migration might lead soon to something similar to France unless a big effort is done, on one side to control this massive entrance, and on the other side to integrate this foreign population in the less traumatic way.

**CONCLUSIONS** Even if we probably need more time to correctly evaluate the events that took place in France in the autumn of 2005, the precedent analysis allows us to draw some conclusions that might - of course - be provisional, so far.

- The urban violent riots in France seem linked to some cultural explanation as they clearly originated from persons that do not feel integrated to the general French middle class cultural frame.
- The French model of migrants integration seems to be failing, at least for Maghreb and sub-Saharan (or black African) population.
- The Anomie Model (Jilek, 1977; Kiev, 1974) might be applied to the described migrant/French population and can help to understand the violence outburst.
- The malaise situation is real, even though the events were amplified by the media.
- The migrants situation is very different in Andorra because the size of the country, the small population figures and the integration model.
- In Spain the migrants situation might be potentially explosive as the phenomenon is growing steadily and some integration problems have been detected.

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