

IMPROVING THE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRATION: INTERSTATE
COOPERATION AMONG MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES

THE POLITICS OF INTEGRATION IN SPAIN

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A Few figures to start with

Moroccan migration to Spain has been a major subject of analysis, debate and sometimes controversy among Spanish policy makers, media and social stakeholders. High-profile events like the El Ejido riots, the Madrid Bombings or the current financial and economic crisis, prompt recurrent questions regarding the degree of integration of Moroccan migrants in Spain. Despite these continued concerns, major polls, like the recent Metroscopia poll organised on behalf of the Spanish Government maker, continue to portray a very positive impression of the Moroccan migrant vis-à-vis Spain and the possibilities they have to integrate within Society.

The Metroscopia institute has carried out annual studies for the Spanish government since 2006, with findings not differing significantly between years. Moroccan and Muslim migrants in general are deemed to be tolerant, open-minded, respectful of Spanish core values and institutions, and rather satisfied with the possibilities offered to them in order to incentivise integration. In fact, speaking at a news conference to unveil the results of the 2008 study, Interior Minister Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba took pride in the fact that the recession didn't seem to have affected the opinions expressed in that year's survey.

The image of Spain as an attractive country for migration has not suffered, among nationals of Morocco, as a result of the crisis. Whilst 2009 witnessed the beginning of the return of migrants from Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia and Argentina to their home countries, in the case of Moroccan nationals, 2009 brought an increase of about 29,000 migrants. This has placed the total number of Moroccans in Spain at some 770,000 people. Morocco remains the main source of immigration from outside Spain and in absolute terms, is second only to Romania, which has 830,000 migrants. Moroccans represent 16 percent of all foreigners, they have an average age of 27 years, and suffer an unemployment rate of around 27 percent (this data has been rounded up, and bases itself on census data of the "*padron*" records offered by the National Statistics Institute (INE) and has been merged with the results of the 2010 Metroscopia survey).

Obviously, Morocco is not the only country that provides Muslim immigration to Spain, but it is on a different scale to others. Using data from INE, in 2008 Spain had 45 000 Algerian nationals, 48,000 from Pakistan, 45,000 from Senegal and 34,000 from Nigeria. Mauritania, Gambia, Mali, Senegal and other African and Asian countries have smaller numbers of nationals living in Spain who declare themselves as Muslim.

Calculating how many followers of the Islamic faith live in Spain is controversial. However it is no exaggeration to speak of a number close to 1,450,000 individuals, of whom 72 percent (approximately 1.05 million) are foreigners and 28 percent are Spanish. There are about 690 mosques in Spanish territory and 791 registered Muslim communities in the Register of Religious Entities. Cataluña, Madrid, Andalusia and Valencia in that order are the autonomous regions with the greatest numbers of Muslim migrants.

It is instructive to see some of the opinions canvassed by the 2008 Metroscopia poll. Metroscopia interviewed two thousand migrants over a two-week period in late 2008. Eighty-seven percent of the migrants interviewed believe there are many freedoms in Spain, with 70 percent stating that their quality of life in Spain is very good. Three-quarters of migrants believe that all religious creeds are respected in Spain – a perception shared by both practicing and secular Muslims. There was also great admiration for the Spanish socio-political system – with the Spanish democracy given a 7.4/10 average.

Results such as these are sound proof, according to some, that Spain is a success story when it comes to integrating Muslim migrants, especially those of Moroccan origin, which make up the majority of its Islamic community. Others however question the “rosy” picture illustrated by such polls which they say, given the complex reality of Moroccan migrants, both regular and irregular, is “too good to be true”.

Talking about the positive side ...

In any case, this does not deny the fact that the Spanish approach to integration is an original one. It is not a carbon copy of the French, Dutch, British or American model. It does contain certain aspects which bare resemblance to the policies of other

countries. It does have unique components that make it better adapted to its particular context. Namely, Spain is one of the few European countries that have enacted a policy of mass-regularization of irregular migrants in their territory. To this effect Spain regularized 688,419 undocumented migrant workers by the end of December 2005. Moreover the possibility of family reunification for regular migrants led to a sharp increase in the number of Moroccan families established in Spain. This has directly contributed to an increase in the feminine proportion within the Moroccan migrant community in Spain. Furthermore, applicants for family reunion have not been put through “integration tests” or “integration pacts” as is the new trend in other European countries.

These pro-immigration policies have been controversial. By late 2006, public opinion polls showed that Spaniards ranked immigration as the most important political issue. To combat a growth in anti-immigrant and racist public sentiments considerable institutional measures were adopted. The Spanish Monitoring Centre against Racism and Xenophobia was tasked to develop policies that could promote multi-culturalism and equality within Spanish society. In February 2007, Spain’s First Strategic Plan on Immigration and Citizenship was launched, proposing 2 billion euros to be spent over a three-year period on integration measures. The strategic plan identified Valencia and Catalunya as key regions for the migrant integration plans.

In addition to proactive measures to facilitate integration, the Spanish judiciary, health services and other public institutions have won the respect of a large part of the Moroccan migrant population. The most highly valued characteristics of the Spanish social assistance system, which contrast with the situation in their home countries, are the free health services and the public support offered to families with new babies. Furthermore, the Spanish law and jurisprudence is flexible enough to allow a certain margin of manoeuvrability for application of the Moudawana, to certain aspects of the migrant marital life, without contradicting the Spanish notion of Public Order.

When it comes to political participation, the Spanish constitution allows third-country nationals to vote and stand in local elections if such political rights are reciprocally granted to Spaniards in the third country. In the case of Moroccan migrants, it is true that they still cannot benefit of this option but there is significant activity

among stakeholders to ensure a better representation of Moroccan migrants in Spanish political dialogue. ATIME, the association of Moroccan migrant workers in Spain is one of many associations created by Moroccans in Spain to defend and promote immigrant's rights. Moroccan migrants are active members within Spanish NGOs.

In general, we should highlight that Moroccan migrants show a high degree of "Institutional trust" in both Spanish governmental and non-governmental organisations. The NGOs get the highest rating in the poll of 7.0/10. Both local and national-level pluralism foundations and cultural mediation bodies have been very successful at helping Moroccan migrant workers and families integrate themselves in Spain. To this avail they are highly appreciated by the migrant population. The Spanish King also gets a 7.0/10 average as in the eyes of Moroccan and Muslim migrants he inspires credibility and respect. The Spanish Parliament gets 6.9/10 while the judiciary is given 6.8/10 whilst the Catholic Church is given 5/10. It is noteworthy that Moroccan and Arab migrants in Spain tend to give the EU a higher rating than their regional organisations, namely the Arab League, and political leaders.

In times of economic crisis and with rising unemployment, it may be surprising that migrants maintain such a positive perception of Spain as that conveyed by the 2008 Metroscopia report. It appears that Moroccan migrants, within the broader Muslim migrant population, feel pleased with their livelihoods in Spain. They profess a very positive image of both Spain and of Western countries and values. Yet the inevitable question that remains is the degree to which the facts portrayed by such polls reflect the reality of Moroccan migrants and their integration in Spain. Is this image of integration too good to be true?

The issue of "social desirability" can play a role in shaping the answers of members of a community that perceive themselves as socially vulnerable i.e. disempowered people may say what they think the questioner wants to hear. Either way, relativism always comes handy with polls and reports of this scope, not to disqualify its core results and tenets, but to merely calibrate the analytical prism through which its results are conveyed. Reports and polls such as the Metroscopia ones may indeed reflect important aspects of social realities in Spain, but by no means could they portray an accurate *image d'ensemble* of the integration of Moroccan migrants.

That being said, the Metroscopia poll targeted first generation migrants, rather than their children, born and educated in Spain. It would, by no means, be a surprise if while answering the poll questions, the first generation migrants were drawing parallels between their present conditions in Spain and those in their home countries. It can therefore be presumed that these comparisons may have influenced the positive tone of many of the answers given. Had the poll targeted second generation migrants, in other words, Spanish citizens born to migrant parents, it would have been interesting to see if the answers would have been the same as these interviewees would presumably be comparing their situation to that of other Spanish citizens.

Nonetheless this is a recurring theme that the Pew Center report did cover in considerable detail. 58 percent of Spaniards consider that there exists an inherent contradiction between being a devout Muslim and a member of a modern society. 83 percent of Spaniards associate Islam with fanaticism. On the other hand, 74 percent of Spanish Muslims believe that there's no conflict between their religion and being an active member of a liberal society. The divergence in the perceptions of both sides regarding the Islam-Integration nexus is significant. If anything, this proves the need for improved institutional and meta-institutional communicational mechanisms between both sides of this situation.

To this end, having a representative Muslim interlocutor vis-à-vis Spanish governmental and non-governmental institutions would be a good first step. Moroccan migrants belong to the Maliki school of Islamic thought which is an orthodox, yet open and tolerant branch, of Islam practiced officially in their home country. Given the fact that Moroccans constitute the biggest proportion of Muslims in Spain, any official representation of the Muslim migrants should necessarily include the Malikite voice. Nonetheless, giving a key role to the aforementioned branch of Islam, doesn't mean ignoring the pluralistic, tolerant and inclusive mosaic of Islamic doctrine adapted to the complexities of the Spanish muslim context and its interaction with other key religious and secular agents in Spanish society.

Without forgetting the persistence of stereotypes

It is important to talk about figures and provide data and statistics, because the opinions and attitudes of the Spanish people on immigration depend very largely on the image (often distorted and stereotyped) which is given by the media. Over the years it has become necessary to explain that small boats and “*cayucos*” don’t pave the main route of entry of immigrants to Spain. Unfortunately the media’s negative coverage (tensions, security threats, crime) prevails over the positive side of this phenomenon (coexistence, pluralistic wealth, contribution to the economic growth, etc.). If this is true, in general terms, when it comes to Moroccan immigration, the risk of such distorting, if not downright xenophobic stereotypes, is multiplied. “Moro” remains for Spaniards a derogatory term that condenses this perception as the *total* foreign / *alien* person, perceived in the collective consciousness as a direct threat against the alleged tenets of our identity (see the study of Gema Martín Muñoz “Muslims in Spain. An archetypical Contradiction Between Conflict and Reality”, 2003). Newspapers have a key responsibility, as was demonstrated years ago by Edward Said in his famous book *Covering Islam* and today we are reminded of it by the discourse scholar and professor at the University Pompeu Fabra, Teun Van Dijk. The label “Islamic terrorism”, for example, conveys an image of collective responsibility in the commission of serious crimes. This tends to confuse between Arabs and Muslims, and circumvents the enormous religious, political and cultural diversity within Islam itself, and eventually leads to the association between Islam and terrorism.

The stereotypical image of the Muslim immigrant as being “backward”, “violent”, “aggressive”, “slow worker,” “not results-oriented”, and so on, is also present in the work of one of the most influential political scientists in the Euro-Atlantic academic arena. I am obviously referring to the infamous Giovanni Sartori’s contribution “*Extranjeros e Islamicos*”, an Appendix (written in 2001 before the 9/11 attacks) to his book *The multi-ethnic society*. Sartori sees the migrant of Islamic origin, as “coarse material that is exported to Europe”, possessing a “totalizing, invasive religion” and unable not only to integrate into democratic societies but also unable to feel for these anything other than hostility and detachment. Sartori’s approach does reflect a form of dogmatic thinking which falls squarely within the scope of “Islamophobia”, as is

defined by the famous Runnymede Trust Report of 1997. It stated that this feeling was characterized by the presence of some or all of the following (items):

1. Islam is considered a monolithic bloc, static and immune to change
2. It is seen as different and as "other." It does not have common values with other cultures, or is affected by them or influences them.
3. It is inferior to the West. It's barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist
4. It's violent, aggressive, threatening and interested in bringing about the clash of civilizations
5. It is an ideology which is used for military or political advantage
6. Any criticism from Islam regarding the West should be rejected *a priori*
7. The symbols and manifestations of Islam justify the discriminatory practices towards Muslims
8. The West's hostility towards them is seen as natural and normal

Not long ago (in May 2010) the director of *Integración de los Inmigrantes* - the Governmental Agency that promotes the Ministry's Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration - complained bitterly in an interview of how difficult it is to promote balanced attitudes, recognition and respect for immigrants, and how easy it is to jeopardize all the efforts made as a result of false controversies and misguided debates. "It's easy", said the director, "to awaken among people the feeling of apprehension, and blame the foreigner for the woes that afflict us and this feeds rejection and hatred."

Studies on the perceptions and attitudes of Spaniards towards Islam and recent Muslims immigrants show relatively low levels of *Islamophobia*. With regard to questions such as those related to prohibiting a student's admission to the school if she wears the *hijab*, or the supporting/condemning of neighborhood demonstrations against the building of mosques, the annual surveys of the CIS-OVERAXE (Sociological Research Centre-Spanish Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia) and the IESA (Institute for Advanced Social Studies) carried on since 2005 show the highest points of anti-hijab views never exceeded 30 percent of respondents, and sympathy with those who demonstrate against the building of local mosques has never exceeded 39 percent.

It would be interesting to see how Spanish attitudes have evolved during 2010, and to check whether the controversy over headscarves in schools and the efforts of certain

municipalities to prohibit the full headscarf have impacted on the aforementioned attitudes. Firstly, it is striking that these initiatives have been led by marginal political groups with a clearly xenophobic tinge, such as the *Partit per Catalunya*, though this is not the only one. Suddenly, support for the ban has spread like a wildfire among the majority of the parties. The lack of rigour and quality of the debate is serious: what kind of restrictions are we talking about? For what kind of clothing? On what basis and scope? Does a municipal authority enough constitutional foundations for establishing regulations on the subject? What's worse is the blatant use of the issue as a means to stir up feelings against Muslim immigration for the sake of electoral profiteering. It has reached the degree of discussing the ban in villages where there were no migrants registered as residents. We should recall that, as a political leader said, in a display of common sense, to continue along this path will lead to more cases of municipal bans on the full veil than the number of women who use it in Spain.

When the value of tolerance as one of the structural principles of a democratic society is forgotten, when debates are undertaken with feelings prevailing over facts, and when you rush aside any concern for the so-called "ethics of the consequences resulting from abstract decision-making" then there is a "cocktail" that can be rather harmful.

Conclusion

Comparing the French "assimilationist" model, or the Dutch and British multicultural models, Spain is a country which has experienced sudden and recent migration and, as result, it is a model under construction. So far it has carried out a generous policy when granting social rights, and has not transferred the implications of citizenship to the stage of general discussion.

While Spain seems to remain an attractive country for Moroccan migration, we should not forget that the ghost of "morofobia" is deeply rooted in the collective mentality. Nor is it worthy to ignore how according to the conclusions of a recent study sponsored by Fundació El Cano and performed by Héctor Cebolla and Miguel Requena ("Moroccans in Spain, the Netherlands and France: diversity management and integration"), the Moroccan migrants were the ones with highest scores of integration among all migrants residing in Spain. Three indicators of integration were considered

by the study - unemployment rate, the degree of endogamous marriages and the level of residential segregation. These results were higher in both absolute and relative terms among Moroccans than with other migrant communities.