PERCEPTIONS, DISCOURSE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS in a Madrid neighbourhood

SUMMARY

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Presentation

I am pleased to present the English summary of the study **"Perceptions, discourse and attitudes towards immigrants in a Madrid neighbourhood"**, conducted by GEA21 with the aim of deepening knowledge about social motivation, the reasons for change, and new trends in Spanish public opinion that explain racism and xenophobia.

To undertake this work, it was decided to circumscribe the area under study to Madrid's Puente de Vallecas district where an attempt was made to identify social sectors, essential issues and discourse underpinning and explaining favourable or unfavourable opinions of protection-seekers, refugees and more generally, migrants. This is the first diagnosis that enables us to conceptually demarcate the terrain and ascertain the main currents of public opinion together with the feelings and trends that may help describe the social climate in the neighbourhood.

The study, which can be extrapolated to neighbourhoods with similar characteristics in Madrid or even other cities, was published in Spanish in 2019, and funded by the State Secretariat for Migration.

The Puente de Vallecas district was chosen due to its socially complex fabric, representative of many other neighbourhoods that have suffered both from the impact of the economic downturn and a cultural crisis whose manifestations we have yet to fully grasp. It was also chosen because it has a Refugee Reception Centre (CAR) whose objectives include raising the awareness of the inhabitants of Madrid about the nature of refugees and asylum, and combatting xenophobia and racism which can thwart social, housing and labour integration of those received. The CAR enabled detecting variations in attitudes and social discourse regarding refugees. While one cannot speak of a change in trend among the inhabitants who had shown themselves to be integrating and tolerant over the last several years, there are indications of social discomfort that can manifest itself in the form of rejection of or intolerance towards foreigners.

Racism and xenophobia are complex social phenomena, inseparable from cultural and social changes, and opinions, attitudes and behaviour do not always align. This means that not only are quantitative data necessary, but that the phenomenon must be tackled qualitatively with broad participation.

In order to ascertain what affects opinion and change of course, it is crucial to understand the context of the discourse: ideology, housing and work situation, income, age, social mobility, interaction with foreigners and rootedness. All are variables that come into play when we speak of racism and xenophobia.

This knowledge is important to provide guidance and direction for both practical action and communication which we as institutions with competencies in migrant reception and inclusion and prevention of racism and xenophobia can tackle. This will allow us to stay a step ahead of potential conflict and improve social interaction. And this study affords us keys to be applied to different urban contexts.

Hana Jalloul Muro
Secretary of State for Migration

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1 Methodology

An exploratory methodology to reach the non-organised population

An open, exploratory methodology was used in order to ascertain the significant changes taking place in the interaction of those living together in Vallecas, chosen as a model of an originally working-class neighbourhood that currently has a high immigrant population. The idea was to draw up a social map classifying different social groups according to their views on immigration and asylum. Speaking of racism and xenophobia means speaking of social structures stratifying groups according to their opportunities, but also according to their tremendously segmented, disperse and volatile opinions as things stand today.

The method consisted of identifying informants outside both the cultural, trade union or neighbourhood fabric, and outside shared public spaces. These people lead private lives and their sources of information, intellectual spheres, and personal networks vary greatly and are tremendously fragmented and contradictory. Finding people for the fieldwork was therefore a highly delicate task requiring indirect, anthropological approaches.

An indirect approach to put discourse on racism and xenophobia into context

The approach to the matter under study was always indirect, i.e. questions were asked about the changes perceived in the neighbourhood, discussion was generated about the future of those interviewed and that of their children, including their expectations of social mobility. The very nature of racism and xenophobia, tremendously complex phenomena, requires an indirect approach:

- Ambivalence permeates everything surrounding racism and xenophobia. Cultural or racial borderlines are flexible, mobile, and often used to different ends.
- Racism is difficult to detect because, as it is socially undesirable, it is denied and concealed (Cea D´Ancona, 2009). Racism based on the colour of one's skin or race is severely frowned upon. However, social acceptability changes when one refers to foreigners as 'backward' in what are considered universal values: women's equality, for instance, or secularism.
- Opinions expressed do not always match attitudes, which in turn do not always fall in line with behaviour. It is important to mark a distinction between them because their effects on the interaction of those living together are very different.

The variables used: social status, gender and age, rootedness and interaction

Although quantitative sources showing trends and key aspects to be addressed were used, the study employed a qualitative methodology, serving as a groundwork. The qualitative research involved taking samples of the social structure in the neighbourhood, and listening to and analysing ideological and motivational trends, often inexplicit and not recognized by their own actors. In order to obtain social discourse, one-on-one and group interviews were used as well as informal conversations with persons living in the district, shopkeepers, and people providing social services there. The following variables were chosen to distinguish and classify these people into groups:

Social class or status and its dynamics

Education was used as the basic criterion for differentiating between social classes because, when they can afford it, families choose their children's school and thus distribute themselves selectively based on their expectations of upward social mobility. Five different schools reflecting different social status in Vallecas were chosen for the groups.

Gender and age

The study focused on two age groups: youth, for which young people who gather as *bucaneros* (supporters of the district's Rayo Vallecano football team) were interviewed; young university students (from different neighbourhoods around Madrid); and unemployed youth often meeting at a bar in Vallecas. Adult men and women were represented in the other groups. Gender was a very significant variable included in the analysis of currents of opinion.

Rootedness: old and new residents

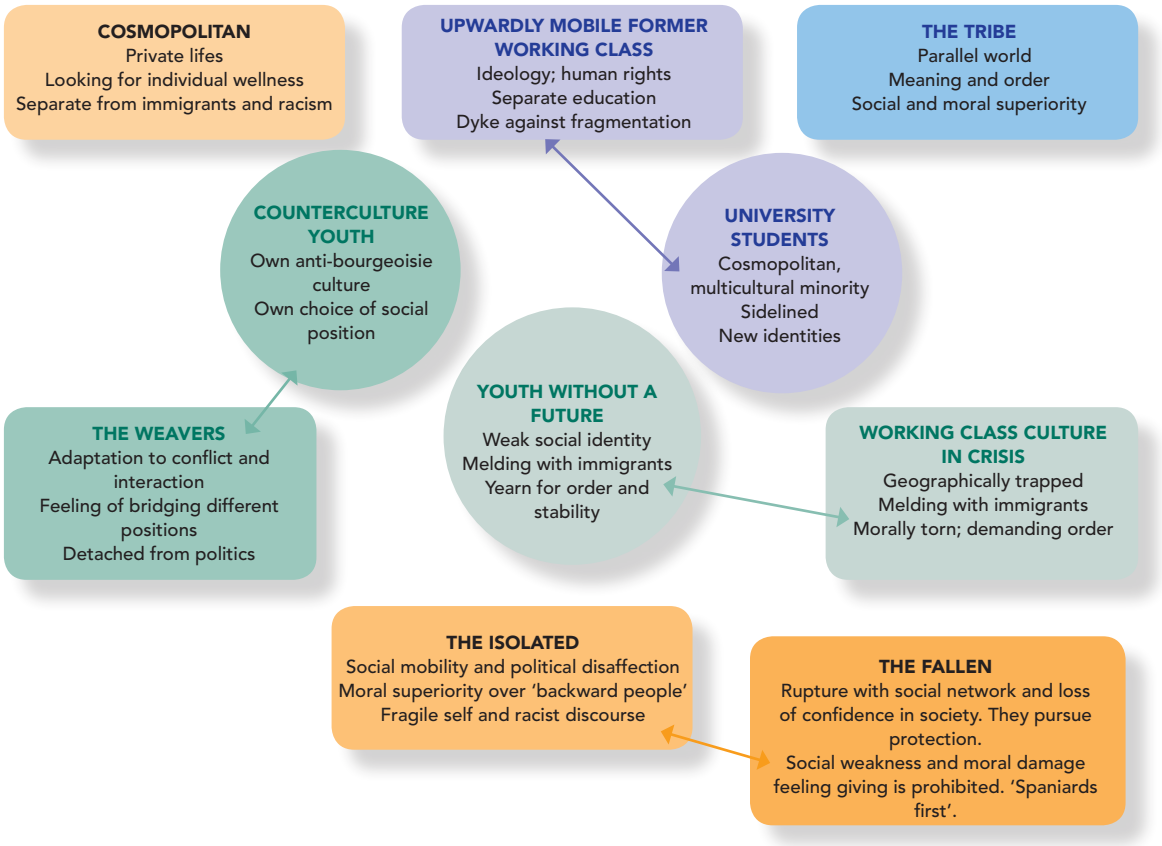
To make a distinction between old and new residents, the study sought out people who had been in the Vallecas bars, shops and hairdressers "forever", while new residents were sought in recently opened shops in the neighbourhood and newly built residential areas.

Interaction with immigrants/refugees

The variable of proximity and/or interaction with immigrants or refugees was based on concentric circles. The perimeter was made up of long-standing residents and workers at the CAR (refugee reception centre), who at the same time live in the Puente de Vallecas district. The schools and neighbourhoods with the most immigration (San Diego and Entrevías) and those with the least (certain areas of Numancia, Portazgo and Southeast Palomeras) were then taken into account in the interviews and focus groups.

2 Findings: the social map of Vallecas

The qualitative study enabled a series of social profiles to be revealed that had been identified in the different spheres of the neighbourhood. Their different views of society and their place in it may account for their ideas about the foreigners who live in Spain, be they immigrants, asylum seekers, or refugees. The following diagram depicts the Vallecas social map:



Cosmopolitan and upwardly mobile working classes: positive discourse, but divorced from migration

The middle class, with upwardly mobile social expectations, have adopted cosmopolitan discourse and thought. They defend upholding international law and immigration as positive but separate themselves from foreigners in the two variables that most affect social mobility: housing and, particularly, the schools their children attend. This has both positive and negative effects on integration. Their support of public opinion, which in Spain is mostly in favour of solidarity and integration of foreigners, is a positive force. This group encompasses the most active citizens in the neighbourhood known as the "upwardly mobile working class", a politically engaged group acting as a dike against articulated xenophobia and racism.

But this group makes a negative contribution by furthering segregation in their housing and at school. As they do not live side by side with those from other cultures, they avoid conflict, but also lose the opportunity to enrich neighbourhoods and schools through their networking and resources. Their private lives gain prevalence over the public sphere that is weakened by their absence. Here, an ideological notion of defending 'what is public' does not come hand in hand with any real shared space or interests.

The Weavers: action in the face of social change

A second group comprises the so-called "weavers" who, unlike the first group, have been unable or chosen not to avoid living with foreigners, nor do they fear conflict. The economic crisis has led them to construct an ethic of mutual support and resilience that they apply to shared goals as they fight together for better public schools, and neighbourhoods where they live together. They do so not because of an abstract ideal but rather because they need to in order to improve their environment. This means that being "confused" with immigrants or national minorities is not a problem for them. They do not fear downward social mobility, as they have fallen and picked themselves up, which makes them realistic and practical.

They work weaving together what the system very quickly unravels: life out on the streets and boulevards, mingling in schools, the vitality of associations, church groups, and cultural venues that resist social fragmentation. They are natural allies of the public sphere, but also a minority containing the tide of private lives' prevailing.

Very close to this group are the inheritors of the Vallecas counterculture, adults and youth who have maintained an anti-bourgeoise moral, who do not fear downward mobility because they value popular folk culture, resistance, and conflict. They stand as another vector of immigrant integration. Their watchwords are that all cultures and groups are welcome as long as they bolster the people's resistance of the tide pushing towards a neoliberal neighbourhood that undermines and disintegrates local cultures.

Working class culture in crisis: mixed population with a desire for order

A third group is made of those who, be they native or new to Vallecas, belong to the working class as it has been reconfigured by new capitalism. They are the group that suffers the most from social inequality and precariousness in their lives and jobs. Their greatest anguish however is moral. The crisis of the working class, forged by an ability to act in unison with a work ethic, coupled with the

disappearance of a rich neighbourhood life, has left them disoriented and isolated to their dismay. Trust in the future and in public institutions is eroded in this group. If not heeded, their call for public protection and a fairer economic order may be confused with apparent order, or a sort of "order and cleanliness", or with imaginary unity.

Their discourse on immigration calls for non-authoritarian order built of different groups' moral obligations towards each other and of government protection. They call for an "order of arrival" and recognition of differences between people. First, the needs of those already in the district must be taken care of, including immigrants who have been living there for a long time, then comes hospitality. The message is that people cannot all be put in the same barrel and that only by making distinctions can solidarity be called for. It is precisely because this group, including Spaniards and foreigners, lives with and competes for the same jobs and social services that they vindicate not being lumped together or all considered as "refugees". Their discourse is far from cosmopolitan as their lives are locally rooted and identify with a local working class. Given the weakening of this social class, their discourse could be swept away by a "Spaniards first" stance.

Their "children", youth with no higher education and whose jobs are even less secure than those of their parents, have already assimilated their position. They have no memory of working class or neighbourhood solidarity to back them. It is up to them to live their lives 'out in the cold', highly disenchanted with the political sphere and lacking the economic or cultural background to enjoy a globalized world. They yearn for meaning and identity. But meaning and identity, which is always cultural and collective, is sought in its simulation, that is, order. This group is multicultural because they live together, but whatever their cultural origins, they yearn for social and personal meaning and identity that, for the time being, they are unable to find.

Those isolated in fantasy and individuality

This last opinion group is made up of those we called "isolated". They are not organised, are distant from class culture, the neighbourhood, or other groups such as the Cosmopolitan group. They only trust their own judgement. Weakened self-assertion owing to this social and ideological isolation finds comfort and compensation in the rich world of social media, continuously echoing their own sentiment. It is in this group that racist and xenophobic sentiment thrives, with varying degrees of contradiction, aggressiveness, or imagined facts. Isolation and the lack of feeling of belonging to a group generate fantasies of superiority that weaving a view of a hostile world where foreigners incarnate all evils and all danger while, at the same time, are the source of envy of everything this group does not have.

Some individuals in this group are isolated by choice, or because they do not attach any authority to any reality other than their own, while others have 'fallen' into social solitude having broken with their networks. Although the two groups may be confused with each other, both groups, the latter being "working class in crisis", spread racist discourse and legend. Their anguish is that poverty has deprived them of their social position in the neighbourhood and the job market, meaning they are unable to "be somebody", in other words, they are unable to "give". The frustration of hospitality and solidarity generates its flip side: anger and rancour, which manifest themselves as "Spaniards first".

The following table provides an outline of the various discourses described and differentiates thought from feelings and action vis-á-vis immigration and asylum, thus revealing contradictions.

Who they are	What they think of immigrants and refugees	What they say	What they feel	How they act	What they expect from the government
Cosmopolitan	They lower the level of education in schools	Human Rights discourse	Individualism and cosmopolitanism	They separate themselves from immigrants in education and housing	To afford them possibilities to choose an open society
Upwardly mobile former working class	They may lead their children to lose what they had: social mobility.	Human Rights discourse. Critical of educational policies that let public schools decline	Commitment towards the neighbourhood and a poor conscience	They separate themselves from immigrants in the educational system.	To improve public education in the neighbourhoods to avoid segregation.
Working class culture in crisis	They compete on a precarious job market with very little aid.	Arrivals need to be orderly and behaviour needs to be common with the rest.	Moral pain caused by the end of a working-class culture, abandonment and lack of security	They co-exist with them and are in the same position as a minority	To protect working conditions and ensure a fairer allocation of public benefits
Unemployed youth out of school	They themselves are the immigrants, rootless and on a precarious job market.	Those who need to should come but under conditions.	Lack of security. They see no future for themselves and no chance to dream.	They are migrants, they are mixed and all live as a minority.	Order and stability in their lives.
The weavers	Immigration is here to stay, and we must adapt to the change and its conflict.	All public systems have problems and ill-adjustment.	Resilience. They fall and get back up, natives and foreigners alike	They are mixed with the rest of the population and act to re-weave social ties in the neighbourhood.	Establish a framework for conflict and support them in their cohesion work
The counterculture	They are all welcome in their counterculture.	Vallecas is a neighbourhood with solidarity that integrates	Proud of being different and belonging to the neighbourhood	They interact and help each other in the face of a common enemy	To maintain the borders… of the neighbourhood
The isolated	Being Spanish and solidarity-minded serves no purpose. Faring no better than immigrants and refugees.	They give everything to them, and no one protects Spaniards.	Abandoned by the government. Broken neighbourhood ties. Moral pain for not being able to give.	They interact, they help and are helped.	To be able to express their anger. More public support and control of immigration.
	Immigrants are different and generally worse, and they are protected by the State	I'm not a racist, "they are people", one on one. All of the aid goes to them. They generate crime, filth, corruption, backwardness.	Individualism, fear of downward social mobility, insecurity and complex of being fragile and isolated.	They separate themselves from them in education and housing, conveying racist messages.	To be able to make their moral and political choices "a la carte" Rejection of immigration. Racism and xenophobia.

3 Conclusion: public action given the dilemmas of integration

This social map aims to steer public action and communication ensuring that distinctions are made instead of lumping together very different phenomena hidden behind discourse on foreigners. Integration policies must make distinctions and, above all, be mindful of the highly complex dilemmas faced in day-to-day life. This is the only way to tackle the deep roots of racism and xenophobia.

The first dilemma sets **cosmopolitan culture against various popular and local cultures.** The former may be multicultural provided that other cultures do not enter into conflict with its values. This is clearly observed when alien cultures stir particularly sensitive beliefs or principles, such as women's position in society. Cultures – by their very nature - always clash and compete, which does not mean that they cannot coexist. However, in doing so they raise continuous dilemmas and moral conflict. The problem with the thoughts and actions of the cosmopolitan middle class is that they may lead to avoidance of contact and conflict and therefore to depriving society of the opportunity for enrichment with their viewpoints of public life.

Cosmopolitan culture, suited to private lives under new global capitalism, is attached to no territory and needs no local roots. It clashes with the working-class culture in crisis which calls for exactly the opposite from the public sphere. Rather than freedom of choice, the working-class culture seeks labour protection and a fairer economic order that materializes in investment and solidarity with neighbourhoods in the south of the city. As opposed to a discourse of rights, it speaks of obligations; as opposed to abstract equality and solidarity, it speaks hospitality and the recognition of each player's position. These two discourses are not incompatible, and, for the time being, both are positive towards immigration and refugees. But they tend to diverge and may even be ignorant of each other's existence. Indeed, there seems to be a contradiction – or at least a dilemma - between more equal and protected societies and those that are more open and unequal.

The weavers or inheritors of the counterculture offer a path out of this dilemma, though fragile. Here, equality is not based on any *a priori* identity, but rather on shared frameworks for action in neighbourhoods, schools, and housing. Here, alien cultures are appreciated not because their values are the same, but because there is a shared resistance to a monolithic neoliberal culture. This aesthetic individualism, able to associate and weave new networks without any common identity, is the way out of the dilemma as long as it finds backing in the city and policies.

We have seen the isolation of persons, either deliberate or out of a feeling of superiority, without any future, or forced because social networks may have broken down, is the greatest danger. A void of meaningfulness, brought by isolation, is always filled. At times partially by hostile fantasies, and at

times by negative solidarity vis-á-vis others. And no one better incarnates those others than migrants or refugees who seemingly have what the weakened subjects most yearn for: an interesting and unique life, a collective identity and protection from the State. This solitude finds its echo in social networks and can consolidate in stronger social trends and political currents. It can even unleash violence.

This is the other dilemma posed by racism and xenophobia: **the opposite of violence is not social peace, but rather conflict**. Only if there are channels to live together, interact and debate can people elude fantasies and build a shared meaning and identity. Sweeping racism and latent hostilities under the carpet will not make them disappear. Anger and goodness, two sides of the same coin of frustration; if they cannot exist socially, must be channelled.

Any public intervention must be mindful of this principle: disorder and confusion are better than lack of meaning and of relations. Yet this goes against the tide of current trends. What increasingly prevails in urban development is specialized facilities, and the way conflicts are addressed is by sterilization and separation into groups generating ostensible order and social peace.

The results of this study show that only by reversing these trends will the increase of isolated persons living in a social vacuum be avoided. In order to do so, a certain degree of conflict, complaints or dis-satisfaction must be accepted. The government's job is to withstand these complaints and not fall prey to simulations of order and a discourse of false security concealing the severity of our problems.

4 Some highlighted issues

Regarding the research methodology

1. The qualitative approach makes it possible to ascertain and contextualise the various social discourses vis-á-vis a phenomenon as complex as racism and xenophobia in a changing, fragmented society.

2. The main profiles and discourses detected in the Vallecas social map can be extrapolated to other areas in Spain and around the world, except for certain issues that specifically characterise this neighbourhood.

Regarding the findings

3. The autochthonous population draws no distinction between immigrants, refugees and international protection seekers. Given the prevailing confusion here and its effects on discourse, this must be crucially borne in mind by any public policy.

4. It is social isolation and a lack of any feeling of belonging to a group that leads racist and xenophobic discourse to be spawned and to flourish. Individuals' isolation, the lack of public spaces for discussion, and breaking ties with social networks all increase this danger.

5. This isolation is echoed in social media and can consolidate into stronger social trends and political currents. It can even unleash violence.

6. The opposite of violence is not social peace but rather conflict. Only if there are channels for interacting and debating can persons elude fantasies and generate a common sense of meaning and purpose.

Regarding the intervention

7. Many of the needs identified and related to racism refer to specific, grave problems such as economic inequality, the crisis of neighbourhood streets where places for socialization are lost, neighbourhood shops disappear, and schools become segregated.

8. The study identified the sphere of education and public grants as two aspects that most impact interaction and the attitudes of the resident population towards immigration, asylum and refugees.

9. Education, which used to serve to level out the social playing field, is increasingly being separated and differentiated, thus contributing to social stratification and segregation.

10. The distribution of social service grants generates upsettedness due to the gap between perceived needs and the funds allocated. Support should be established together with more legible request forms that are user friendly for those that most need them.

11. It is important for people to be able to easily experience interaction with others to prevent the spectre of saviour fantasies of ostensible order. The spheres of intervention that are particularly effective at positively impacting interaction in the neighbourhood are: lively public spaces, public facilities acting as neighbourhood hubs; a rich fabric of neighbourhood shops; and a strong associative fabric.

12. Conflict management is an essential part of public intervention given that the manifestation and resolution of small-scale differences improves the health of a community.

Regarding communication

13. Official public discourse supporting human rights vis-á-vis refugees and asylum is to be done in an institutional framework that helps set moral and political limits. Rather than attempting to change behaviour, this is a way to stake out society's public moral bounds.

14. The messages conveyed by the media regarding racism may not provide the desired effects as citizens take on their content intellectually, but do not feel alluded to when it comes to their behaviour. Likely, racism should not be mentioned as such, given that people do not perceive themselves as racist or xenophobic. Instead, the causes and effects of racism and xenophobia should be addressed.

Regarding messages

15. Instead of messages speaking of foreigners who reach our borders as a threat to cultural integrity, the notion of Spain –or Vallecas- as a particularly open or tolerant country should be bolstered. Welcoming can be made a hallmark of identity that we can feel proud of. The idea is to show hospitality and harmonious interaction as our own cultural traits and make that "difference" something to take pride in.

16. When speaking of refugees and immigration, portraying "individual people" should be avoided because stripping people of their culture and filiation may generate a negative effect on the foreigners themselves and as well as on those the message is addressed to. Without any culture or filiation, the person becomes a "nobody" and loses all authority and respect.

17. Identification is also often used in communication when referring to foreigners "who are like you". It has been observed that one of the greatest threats perceived by the most vulnerable classes is downward social mobility, loss of distinction and becoming or feeling stateless. It is far more effective to demonstrate different people's positions in society and solicit solidarity from that position than it is to put the accent on shared obligations. You cannot "give anything" if you "are a nobody".

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