

Spanish essays - barcelona and london



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Barcelona and London both attract a lot of immigrants from different places around the world. This foreign population is distributed in different boroughs of the cities, but there are boroughs where the immigrant population is more important and visible than in others. This is the case in El Raval, in Barcelona, and Camden, in London.

However, it seems that the integration of this immigrant population as turned out to be more difficult in El Raval than in Camden, with its population being ghettoised.

Although the history of both boroughs has a lot of similarities and both were marked by recent mass immigration, it seems that different elements, such as history and culture and also the differences between the origins and types of immigrants, as well as their urban developments, led to different types of models in El Raval and in Camden.

The two boroughs of Camden and El Raval, could at first glance be thought as similar places. Indeed they have a number of similarities. Both can be described as multicultural, and popular places, where one can hear all sorts of languages from all over the world, and see faces and clothes representing all kinds of ethnic backgrounds and cultures.

The immigration has been in both boroughs a big part of the local history, reflected in the current proportion of immigrants. According to El País of 13th June 2003, the percentage of immigrants in El Raval, in 2003, was 47%, which makes El Raval the borough with the highest proportion of immigrants <https://assignbuster.com/spanish-essays-barcelona-and-london/>

in Barcelona. In Camden, according to a census carried out in 2001(ONS, 2001 census), the proportion of immigrants is very similar, reaching approximately 47, 8 % of the population of the borough. In both boroughs these immigrants have brought with them their cultures and traditions, and they have opened shops and restaurants selling products coming from their country of origin, and other businesses in relation to their status of immigrants as shops offering Internet access as well as cheap international calls. All these elements make them very colourful places, and a curiosity to the eye of the passer-by.

But the similarity between the two boroughs does not only lie in their current appearance, but also in their history. Indeed both were at the beginning at the periphery of the city. El Raval was, until the 14th century, outside of the walls that were surrounding the city of Barcelona. It was an open field, with a few isolated houses and there was only a very small town gathered around a monastery. The main activity was agriculture. It was then integrated inside the walls of the city but remained a marginalized part of the city where structures that were not wanted in the centre of the city were built, such as hospitals or charities. It then changed with the industrialisation, which brought the first wave of immigrants from the rest of Catalonia. The main activity in the area was the textile industry. New waves of immigration arrived at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, bringing immigrants from outside Spain.

The next transformation of the area arrived when after the civil war and the beginning of the dictatorship, new housing plans led to more accommodation being built in the periphery of the now extended city, with cheaper rents,

leading to a lot of people to leave El Raval and moving to the outskirts of the city. The industries also moved to the periphery of the city. The borough emptied and started its degradation process (Sargatal 2001).

Camden enjoyed a similar history, going from open fields out of the city to a highly industrialised place, with the flourishing of the transport industry and the construction of the canal and of train stations (Withebead 1999: 37). The building of railways and the canal brought the first big wave of immigrants, at the beginning of the 19th century : the Irish. Other waves followed including the Greek Cypriots in the 1930's (Denford and Woodford 2003: 14). Another big industry was the Gilbey's company, first selling wine from South Africa and then expanding to sell all sorts of wine and spirits (Withebead 1999: 60). But this industrial era was ended after the 1st World War. One of the main reasons for that was that the roads and lorries provided cheaper and faster transportation, than the canals and rails. The industries little by little deserted Camden and the people started to leave the borough, as happened in El Raval, to follow the companies and find work (Withebead 1999: 130).

Both boroughs therefore went from being very popular and labour oriented to being emptied and left to degradation. They both were revived afterwards, although through different means. They both had more immigrants coming to settle there, from all over the world. In the case of El Raval, the improvements started after the end of the dictatorship, whereas in Camden the improvements started back in the 70's with the opening of the Camden lock market which really kick started the revival of the area.

But as we are going to see in the following sections, although both areas have been the place of important migration, they did not evolve in the same way, and while Camden Town look like a mosaic of people with different styles, religions, backgrounds and colours, the integration of the different ethnic groups seems more difficult in El Raval.

First of all, we saw above that the proportion of immigrants in both boroughs was almost identical, but there is a difference in the way the various ethnic groups are represented and the proportion of each of these groups. Indeed in El Raval, there seems to be big predominant groups of immigrants such as the Moroccan (25, 39%), the Filipinos (25, 06%), or the Indians, Pakistani and Bangladeshi (17, 10%) (Sargatal 2001). Then in smaller proportions comes the Dominican population, and finally people from different countries of the European Union. The fact that they are big groups of immigrants means that there are more chances that they form communities, stay together, and do not mix with other present populations. Especially so, as the biggest communities come from very different cultures, and are for a big part Muslims, which implies different religious habits, but also different ways of dealing with the family and especially with women. Indeed the Muslim women are scarcely seen in El Raval, and when they do go in the streets, it is to do some shopping but not to discuss or meet friends, as would do women from other cultures, as the Dominicans or even the native Catalan population (Sargatal 2001). In Spain, the Catholic religion is still quite strong compared to other European countries. This fact as well as the long history between Spain and the Moors, between the Catholics and the Muslims, might be significant when trying to explain the intolerance that is generally stronger

towards the Muslims, and more particularly the Moroccans. Indeed they are perceived as very different and unwilling to adapt to the local tradition and culture (González Enriquez 2002).

Some fear that the loss of religiousness that is threatening Spain might help loosening the roots of the culture and help the Muslims to impose their religion and their culture (Capel 2001). Integration for Muslims seems harder, as they not only are victims of more prejudices, but probably have more prejudices themselves against the local culture.

In Camden the population seems more diversified. The biggest immigrant group, according to the 2001, is the group of non-British or Irish white people. Even though this is a big group (33, 5%), this also represents a lot of different countries and cultures. The second group is the Bangladeshi (13, 4%) and the third one the Africans (12, 6%) (ONS, 2001 census). Then comes a lot of different groups from all over the world, with biggest proportions from Ireland, India, China and the Caribbean. This first shows that there are no big ethnic groups as in the Raval, which might ease the living together of all these communities, and lead to a more heterogeneous population. This also shows that the biggest group is actually made of people from other Western countries which means that the cultures are less different, and therefore it is easier for these people to integrate themselves in this new country.

This difference in the composition of the immigrant population also means differences in the reasons of their presence in their new country, and differences in the classes of people. Indeed, as we saw above, El Raval has a

higher proportion of immigrants coming from developing countries. This means that the immigrants might have a higher proportion of people with a lack of education, or professional skills and with a lack of money. Indeed, even if it is now changing with the process of gentrification, El Raval has been for some time the cheapest borough of Barcelona therefore attracting the people with less money, who then moved on to other parts of the city when they could afford it (Sargatal 2001). The lack of education, the unemployment, and the poverty is likely to make the integration in a new country more difficult. The lack of education means that it is maybe more difficult to understand the culture or the language of the new country, making it also difficult for the parents to follow what their children are doing at school. The teenagers living in this environment of unemployment and poverty, might turn to delinquency as a form of rebellion against this society in which their future seems uncertain.

In Camden as we have seen, there is a lower proportion of people coming from developing countries. Therefore, the chances of unemployment, poverty or lack of education are lower, although existent. Moreover, the unemployment is far lower in England than in Spain. Indeed, unemployment in England is 4, 7%, whereas Spain had a 10, 2% of unemployment in 2004. This means that the people coming to England and therefore to Camden will have more chances and opportunities of finding a job, which facilitates the integration in the new country. Also, Camden is not the cheapest borough of London. Cheaper accommodations can be found in other boroughs like Barking. This is therefore not the place of landing of destitute people when they arrive in London, as seems to be El Raval.

Finally, the two boroughs' recent history has evolved differently. In El Raval, the process of gentrification has begun very recently. The renovation of El Raval, and the attraction of higher classes of the population, as well as younger and more dynamic and educated immigrants, might turn it into an attractive and central borough of Barcelona. (Sargatal 2001). So far there has been only housing plans, and renovations of social structures, but no real plan of developing the businesses, or the tourism. Indeed according to David Harvey (1989 : 77), postmodernism urbanisation is characterised by a market-oriented urbanisation, but in El Raval, there seems to have been no such developments, which might help marginalize the population. There are some local businesses. El Raval has seen the creation of a lot of shops run by immigrants for their own communities, as Muslim butchers, or grocery stores offering products from the Caribbean. There are also shops offering international phone calls or Internet services. But rather than helping the social cohesion, this type of businesses is rather isolating each of the ethnic groups which are present in El Raval. The shops seem to be exclusive and not to be welcoming the other communities. They are a place where each community can gather with its fellow citizens, but there is no interaction between the different communities (Sargatal 2001). There are no businesses that might bring new capitals into the borough and attract more middle-class people.

Camden's case is in that respect totally different. First of all, even if these kind of shops run by immigrants exist, such as those run by Greek Cypriots or Indians, they do not sell exclusively products from their countries of origins. They are groceries, selling all sorts of first necessity products, and

products from their home countries as well as from other countries represented in the area. But most importantly, the development of the borough in the last 30 years has been based on its market cultures. Indeed Camden is well known for its different markets. The first of its current markets was the Camden Lock Market, opened in 1973 (Withebead 1999: 137). It quickly attracted all sorts of artists and craftspeople, which would create their work during the week and sell them at weekends, renting one of the cheap stalls available at the market. The area started to be revived, attracted all kind of people, with different backgrounds, styles, religions, and origins. Not only did the area started to attract capitals because of the business carried out in the markets, but the artistic and musical scene began to flourish. It became an entertaining place were people not only came to shop but to meet and enjoy walking around amongst the variety of original products offered on the market. This probably worked as a way to bring social cohesion, as spectacle and entertainment is a great means of social control (Harvey 1989 : 88). Indeed the streets of Camden are a spectacle, as well as being colourful they have been the sight for an original expression of creativity : a number of shops are adorned by giant fibre-glass figures in relation with the merchandise sold or the brand name: giant boots, chairs or fishes can be seen on the walls of shops (Withebead 1999: 140). Camden has also attracted a lot of companies from the media sector, such as TV channels (Withebead 1999: 150)

Indeed in Camden all sorts of people are brought together by the market. A lot of young professionals choose to live there, for different reasons, as its bohemian character, its centrality or the fact that it is still cheaper than

other places. Tourists from all over the world are coming to visit the market. In Camden, the multicultural society does not mean only people coming from different countries but also people with different styles, different backgrounds. All styles can be found in Camden, from gothic and rock people to hippies. With this display of differences, the tolerance seems to become natural. As one of the locals puts it, “ it is impossible not to be tolerant, because of all the nationalities, religions, sexualities and subcultures present”(Vestregard Skot Poulsen and Dlugosch Sonne 2004: 8).

Although appearing to be similar boroughs, with both a big proportion of immigrants, Camden and El Raval have in fact had a different recent history and have evolved differently, resulting in two colourful and multicultural but different boroughs.

While El Raval is made up by big communities that seem to stay quite closed and not to mix with the rest of the population of the borough, Camden has enjoyed a more diversified immigration. The multicultural population of Camden is not composed by big communities, but rather by individuals coming from a lot of different backgrounds, immigrating in an already dynamic borough which has built its identity around its market.

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