

ABSTRACT

Cycles of Humiliation in Immigrant Families.

(resulting in increases in violence and anti-social behavior)

Samir S. Basta,2010

My remarks are focused on immigrants in European countries and with special attention to what is occurring today in France's immigrant ghettos situated on the periphery of its large urban centers (banlieu).

While several reasons have been put forward for the large rise in violence occurring over the past few years, joblessness, employment discrimination, race discrimination, drugs, ethnic and religious militancy, backlashes associated with the refusal of assimilation, etc., one aspect has been relatively ignored, which is the shame or humiliation of these youths regarding the situation of their parents, often illiterate, relegated to menial jobs, living in cramped, poorly maintained apartments and often ridiculed and disliked by more affluent, white autochthones.

Most of these first generation parents maintained certain aspects of their cultures of origin, such as dress , language, religion and attitudes of inferiority to better-off "outsiders". Their employment as sweepers, garbage collectors, lowly construction workers, cleaning ladies and the

like, ensured, in a society with little chance of upward mobility and riddled with strictures of class that they would remain on the bottom rungs of society; Their relegation to cramped, ugly high rises with subsided rents and resulting poor maintenance, in huge urban developments on the edge of cities, further confirmed their “outsider” status. It did not help that today’s television and internet’s fascination and exploitation of youth with programs lauding affluent “beautiful people” living so much better, increased the contrasts and nailed down their inferiority...

Added to all that, was the attitude of the police and the authorities. In France, there is a “Mandarin” culture, whence state bureaucrats maintain a purposeful aloofness from most of the population. This is especially so in the police services, where the notion of a neighborhood cop, is completely absent. Indeed, when I recently questioned a high ranking police official why friendly, neighborhood cops could not be assigned permanent beats where they could become closer to populations, I was told that this was not recommended, for it would lead to “favoritism”, “intimacy” and conflicts of interest. As a result, high-handedness, hostility and the culture of impunity is legion, which increases the sense of hopelessness and isolation of these ghetto populations.

The shame of their situation builds up. They rebel, join gangs, resort to drugs, crime and drug dealing not only because it is a source of

easy riches, not only to “forget”, but also because it is one of the only ways of “getting back” to that unfriendly society that they are at war with. And, even more important perhaps, these are ways of rising above their parents lowly, humiliating status. They will not become like them. They will no longer obey, lower their heads and accept the employment discrimination (even with university degrees, four out of five of their job applications remain unanswered!) that will force them into menial labor. Their parents have been typecast, they are the results of that typecast and at the root of all their feelings is a profound humiliation of that background.

S.S. Basta

August 2010;