

**ETHNIC RIOTS IN FRENCH *BANLIEUES*:
Can ethnic riots in the French *banlieues* be explained by low
school achievement or high school segregation of first and
second-generation migrants?**

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INTRODUCTION

Migration in the XXIst century is an international phenomenon, and not only confined to traditional immigration countries, as in the United States. Now all the member-states of the European Union have become emigration-countries and the Mediterranean sea has become a dangerous border in the same way as the Mexican-USA border. All member-states of the European Union are confronted with the unexpected sociological consequences of this migration; consequences that run across second-generation migrants who become fanatics (the London-bombers; the murder of Theo van Gogh), the new ethnic dividing lines within their societies and the rise of an ethnic underclass. One of the manifestations of these unexpected consequences of emigration are the urban riots of ethnic youth, which most recently have occurred in French *banlieues* in 2005.¹ Many observers blamed the lack of success of integrating migrants into the French society and claimed that other European countries were more successful. Other observers blamed the strong social segregation of the migrant and native population in the *banlieues* of French cities and schools. This segregation would be stronger in France than in other European societies. Finally, most French observers blamed the bad social-economic position of second-generation migrant youth for the riots, implicating that the social-economic position of French immigrants is worse than that of migrants in other European countries. However, empirical evidence of all these observers was very thin: only impressions, but hardly any

hard evidence, especially of the possible exceptional French situation. This contribution is devoted to providing some empirical evidence of the degree of integration of first and second-generation migrants into various European societies (France, Germany, the Netherlands, United Kingdom). I add the United States as an external point of reference of success of integrating migrants in the intra-European comparison. As the first criterion of integration, I use the school achievement of first and second-generation migrants relative to that of native youth, and as a second, I use the degree of school segregation of migrant youth also relative to that of native youth. Education is a very important sector of modern societies and can thus efficiently serve as a good indicator of the functioning of these societies.

Despite the international nature of migration, there are very few data-sets, which allow for cross-national comparisons of success of migrants in a large number of European countries, but also between countries on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Van Tubergen (2005) is one of the first who analyzed various aspects of success in the labor market of first-generation migrants, originating from a large number of countries of origins, in a sufficient number of countries of destination.² However, success in the labor-market of first-generation migrants is not a good indicator of the degree of integration of all migrants, because first-generation migrants will experience, by definition, negative effect of their migration to another society (loss of human capital, settling and transaction costs). The best indicator of integration of migrants in general is the success of the second-generation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The lack of competent comparable intra-European data on the labor market position of migrants makes it impossible to estimate the crucial degree of integration of the second generation in the member states of the European Union.³ In their book *Ethnic Minority Disadvantage: Comparative Perspective* (Heath & Cheung, 2006) the authors apply the single yet unsatisfactory solution for this lack of good data: analyze separately labor-market success of second-generation migrants in various European countries without direct comparison. Nor does competent intra-European data on the educational achievement of migrants exist. This absence is incomprehensible, because current immigration is not directed to a specific European country, but rather to the European Union as an economic unity. This is dangerous

because, due to the large mobility of migrants between the European countries, the success of integration of migrants in one member-state depends heavily on the success of integration in other member-states.

DATA

In this contribution, we use the only available data-set to compare cross-national school achievement of second-generation migrants: PISA-data of the OECD from 2000 and 2003.⁴ These PISA-data contain standardized scores⁵ on comparable reading and mathematical tests, taken by representative samples of 15-years old pupils in all OECD countries.⁶ Also, a number of socio-cultural characteristics of these pupils, their parents and their schools are available. The PISA 2000 and 2003 data have already been used to analyze school achievements of migrants: Schnepf (2004), Levels & Dronkers (2005) and Marks (2005). We refer to these publications and the PISA website for more information about these data and the general results. Here, we focus on the comparison of school achievements of migrants in four European societies in order to see whether the low level integration of the second-generation French ethnic youth (low school achievement, high school segregation) could explain the riots in the French *banlieues* and the absence of ethnic riots in other European societies. A distinction within migrant populations based on country of origin is impossible because that question is not asked in PISA 2000. In PISA 2003 the country of birth of the pupils and their parents is only asked in Germany and Scotland, but not in England/Wales, France, the Netherlands en the United States.⁷

Four countries are compared: the three major European countries with enough migrants: Germany, France and United Kingdom and a small European country the Netherlands. The reason for the latter is its fame as a multicultural and tolerant society with a low level of inequality.

A comparison between the measurement of year 2000 and 2003 is important because of the events of September 11, which has changed the relations between migrants and natives in a number of European countries.⁸ This change could have brought about stagnation or even a reversal in the integration of migrants. This contribution therefore compares the school achievement of both years separately.

INDICATORS

“First-generation migrant pupil” means that both the pupil and parents were born outside the country wherein the 15 year-old pupil is attending school. “Second-generation migrant pupil” means that the 15 year-old pupil is born in the country where he or she attends school, but that the parents were born outside that country. This description deviates from that of Portes (1996) who also includes those second-generation migrants who arrived in a country before they went to school. We believe that Portes’s definition is less valid, because it undervalues the importance of earlier socialization during childhood for the success of integration into another society.

Given the level of mobility between the member-states of the European Union, migrants according to this definition come not only from faraway countries and continents, but also from neighboring countries. Moreover, a part of these European migrants can belong to the elites of their societies, because European elites (especially nobility: Dronkers, 2001) have a long history of cross-national marriage.⁹ As said earlier, we do not have the country of origin of migrants for most countries. Most Afro-American pupils in the United States are not migrants in this definition and they cannot be distinguished within the PISA data.

An additional distinction within these two generations of migrant pupils is the language they speak at home. We can distinguish whether they speak the language of the country where the pupil is attending school at home. This additional information leads to four categories of migrant pupils: first-generation speaking the country language at home or speaking their own language at home; second-generation speaking the country language at home or speaking their own language at home.

As an indicator of school achievement, we use the average of all standardized plausible values on reading and mathematical tests of both years separately. This average also has a mean of 500 and standard deviation of 100. For each migrant pupil, we compute the difference between his/her school achievement score and the average school achievement score of the native pupils.

In order to estimate the social-cultural and the ethnic school segregation separately, we compute the average parental educational

level of all 15-year old pupils and the percentage of migrant pupils in that school. In the next step, we compute for each migrant pupil the difference between the two school segregation indicators of his/her school and the averages of the two school segregation indicators of the schools of the native pupils. Thus, analyses focus on the differences between migrant and native pupils relative to these three indicators.

We use two indicators of the social background of the parents of these migrant pupils: the highest educational level of the parents (measured by the international ISCED scale, which distinguishes six educational levels, running from “no formal education” to “completed university study”) and parental occupational status, measured by the *standard international socio-economic index of occupational status* of Ganzeboom, de Graaf, Treiman & de Leeuw (1992), which runs from 16 (chamber maid) up to 90 (judge).

DIFFERENCES IN SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

In this section we estimate the degree of integration of migrants into the French society in comparison with other European countries with the arrear of their school achievement. We also take the social-economic position of second-generation migrant youth into account which, according to most French observers, is the cause of the low level of school achievement of French migrants.

Table 1 gives the differences in school achievement between various generations of migrant pupils and average native pupils in the Netherlands, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States. If the figure in the table slot is negative, this means that this migrant category has a lower school achievement score than the average native pupil in that country and in that year. Hence, first-generation migrant pupils in the Netherlands who speak Dutch at home have a lower school achievement score of -57 in 2000 and of -64 in 2003.¹⁰ In the United States this category (first-generation migrant pupils who speak English at home) have only a small difference in school achievement scores in both years (-9, -13).

In the first five rows of Table 1, we do not control for parental education and occupational status. The school achievement differences of this part of the table give the scholastic arrear of migrant pupils, as observed directly by the inhabitants of that country.

However, migrants and native pupils do not have the same social background, due to the selectivity of migration processes. In order to estimate the 'pure' achievement arrear of migrant pupils, we need to take differences in social background into account. In this contribution, we control the arrears in school achievement for parental education and occupational status of the migrant pupils.¹¹ The results are given in the last five rows of Table 1. Hence, the observed arrear in school achievement score of -57 of first-generation migrant pupils in the Netherlands who speak Dutch at home, decreases to -43. About 15 points (or 20%) of the observed scholastic arrear of this migrant category is a consequence of lower parental education and occupational status. Controlling for parental social background increases the arrear in school achievement first-generation migrant pupils in the United States who speak English at home by 9 points (from -13 to -22). The school achievement differences of this part of the table give the scholastic arrear of migrant pupils, that cannot be explained by their social background and parental resources. They can be interpreted as a 'pure' indicator of the lack of integration of migrants.

The arrear in school achievement of all migrant pupils in all four European countries, not corrected for parental social background, increases significantly between 2000 and 2003 from -29 to -45, while it remains more or less stable in the United States. However, corrected for parental social background the arrear in school achievement of all migrant pupils in all four European countries decreases significantly from -43 to -36, while it remains more or less stable in the United States. Hence, there is a contradiction in results: observed arrears in school achievement of migrant pupils in these four European countries increases, while the 'pure' integration of migrants as measured by corrected school achievement improves. This contradiction can be explained by the significant fall in the education level of the parents of migrant pupils between 2000 and 2003.¹² In addition, the occupational status of the parents of migrant pupils declined between 2000 and 2003, but only significantly in France, Germany and the Netherlands.¹³ Apparently, the quality of migrants in Europe, indicated by their education and occupation, decreased during the 1980s, due especially to the sharp decrease in the educational and occupational levels of the parents of the second-generation migrant pupils. These pupils, born between 1985 and 1988

in the countries of destination, are thus children of parents who migrated to these countries before this period. During this period, European countries hardly had any control on the quality of incoming immigration, partly because the political class ignored the phenomena, partly because immigration was defined as a humanitarian problem or legal problem (for instance family reunions, refugees) and not a sociological problem.

This decrease in 'pure' arrears in school achievement between 2000 and 2003 is restricted to a significant decline of the arrear in school achievement in France and the United Kingdom. This decrease in France was only found among first-generation migrant pupils who speak no French at home (24), while the decrease in the United Kingdom is only significant for first-generation migrant pupils who speak English at home (48).¹⁴ The arrears in school achievement in the Netherlands and Germany remain unchanged between 2000 and 2003, with the second-generation migrants in Germany who speak German at home as an exception. Their arrear has increased significantly in this period (-52).

The differences between arrears in school achievement of migrant pupils in the four European countries are significant. Migrant pupils from Germany (-53) and the Netherlands (-52) have the largest arrears, even if corrected for parental educational level and occupational status. The figure for migrant pupils in France (-39) is significantly smaller than in Germany and the Netherlands, but larger than in the United States (-28) and the United Kingdom (-15), also after correcting for parental social background.

Thus, France is not the less successful European society in integrating their migrants, as measured by the arrear in school achievement. Germany and the Netherlands do more poorly than France. The United States and the United Kingdom have lower arrears in school achievement of migrant pupils than France, but that is not a sufficient explanation of the riots in the French *banlieues*. Given the arrears in school achievement one would expect these riots in the Netherlands or Germany. The bad social-economic position of second-generation migrant youth in these various European societies is not a good explanation for their low school achievement. Moreover, controlling this parental social-economic position does not change the French level of integration compared with that of

Germany or the Netherlands and thus cannot explain the occurrence of riots in France. Thus, most French observers were wrong: the bad social-economic position of the parents of second-generation migrant pupils does not fully explain their educational arrear and thus the ethnic riots in the French *banlieues*.

DIFFERENCES IN SCHOOL SEGREGATION

The strong social segregation of the migrant and native population in the *banlieues* of French cities and schools is also blamed as a cause of recent riots. This level of segregation in France is said to be higher than in other European societies or the United States.

Table 2 shows the degree of differences between migrant and native pupils in school segregation with two different dimensions: average parental educational level and the percentage of migrant pupils in their schools.

The first part of Table 2 presents extra social-cultural school segregation of migrant pupils. It shows that migrant pupils in the Germany, France and the Netherlands attend schools with lower average educated parents than native pupils. In itself, this is not strange, given the lower education and occupational status of migrant parents. Social-cultural school segregation of migrant pupils is the strongest in Germany (-.49), France and the Netherlands have significant lower social-cultural school segregation (-.39), while the social-cultural school segregation is lowest in the United Kingdom (-.06). Moreover, social-cultural school segregation of migrant pupils has become stronger in Germany, France and the Netherlands (-.43; -.20; -.18), while that in the United Kingdom has become significantly smaller (.24). Finally the social-cultural school segregation in all four European countries together is strongest for migrant pupils who speak their own language at home and for first-generation migrant pupils.

This result shows that there is no exceptional high social-cultural school segregation in France. Also the social-cultural school segregation in the United States has the same level as than in France.

The second part of Table 2 shows that migrant pupils in all four European countries attend schools with higher percentages of migrant pupils than the average native pupils (23% to 25% more). The differences between these four European countries are not truly

significant. The level of ethnic school segregation increased significantly in Germany and the Netherlands, while remaining stable in France and decreasing in the United Kingdom. Finally, ethnic school segregation in all four European countries is strongest for migrant pupils who speak their own language at home.

This result shows that there is no exceptional high ethnic school segregation in France. On the contrary, ethnic school segregation in the United States is significantly higher than in the four European countries (34%). Given the high level of ethnic school segregation in the United States, one would expect ethnic riots in the States and not in France.

The last part of Table 2 shows the level of ethnic school segregation that remains after taking into account the degree of social-cultural school segregation. This 'pure' ethnic school segregation does not deviate strongly from the 'observed' ethnic school segregation. However, it is important to note that differences between the four European countries change by taking into account social-cultural school segregation. The 'pure' ethnic school segregation is the highest in the United Kingdom (26%), followed by the Netherlands and France (22%; 21%), while it is significantly lowest in Germany (19%). The United States has the significantly highest ethnic school segregation (32%), even in comparison with the United Kingdom, and this is true for both generations of migrant pupils, whatever languages they speak at home. Finally the 'pure' ethnic school segregation in all four European countries is strongest for migrant pupils who speak their own language at home.

This result shows that there is no exceptional high 'pure' ethnic school segregation in France or in Europe, compared with the United States. Again, given this high level of 'pure' ethnic school segregation in the United States, one would expect the ethnic riots not in France but in the States.

CONCLUSION

The comparison between school achievements of various categories of migrant pupils in France, Germany, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and the United States clearly shows that educational position (achievement, segregation) of migrant pupils in France is not worse than that of comparable migrant pupils in other European

countries. Indeed, data shows the opposite: the relative school achievement of migrant pupils in Germany and the Netherlands is worse in comparison to France. Given these differences in arrears, there would be a higher probability for ethnic riots in the 'black quarters' of Amsterdam (Slotervaart, Bos-en-Lommer) and Berlin (Kreuzberg, Wedding). Moreover, ethnic school segregation in the United Kingdom and the United States is higher than in France. Given differences in arrears, there would be a higher probability for ethnic riots in the 'black quarters' of London (Brixton) or Washington DC (Columbia Heights) than in France.

Thus, many observers of the French ethnic riots who blamed the low level of integration of migrants into the French society have a weak empirical base because Germany and the Netherlands have lower integration levels of their migrants, but no ethnic riots yet. Other observers who underlined the strong social segregation of the migrant and native population in the *banlieues* of French cities and schools also have little empirical evidence because school segregation of migrant pupils is not exceptionally high in France. French observers who blamed the bad social-economic position of the second-generation migrant youth for the riots were also mistaken because the social-economic position of French immigrants does not explain the educational arrears of French migrant pupils being better than in other European countries.

The better school achievement of migrant pupils in the United Kingdom and the United States compared with continental Europe can be explained by differences in regions of origin of migrants. The migrants in continental Europe come more from North-Africa and West Asia, while those in the United Kingdom and the United States come more from East and South Asia. Levels & Dronkers (2005) show that migrant pupils from North-Africa and West Asia have substantial lower school achievement than the migrant pupils from East and South Asia (also if controlled for migration generation, country of destination, social-economic background of parents, school segregation). Unfortunately this explanation of better school achievement of migrant pupils in the United Kingdom and the United States cannot be tested: the authorities, responsible for collecting the PISA 2003 data in England, France, the Netherlands and the United States refuse to ask for the country of birth of pupils and parents, contrary to the authorities in Germany and Scotland.

Therefore, ethnic riots in France should not be treated as a kind of French specialty, one mainly caused by deviant characteristics of the French society, but as an event which can and probably will happen in most other European states as well. Further analyses (Schnepf, 2004; Levels & Dronkers, 2005; Marks, 2005) show that there is no continental European society in which the relative educational position of migrant pupils is substantially better than that in France. Thus, integration problems with migrants should be treated as a serious sociological problem affecting all European societies in a comparable way and that need a common policy. There is no easy escape.

NOTES

- [1] Comparable urban riots of ethnic youth happened in the UK during the 1980s.
- [2] A sufficient number of countries of destination is imperative to make valid generalizations. Most comparisons by the economist Borjas lack this sufficient number of countries, because he only analyses North American countries.
- [3] In the current *European Social Survey* (www.europeansocialsurvey.org), financed by the European Commission, one asks only for the country of birth of the respondent. Thus, only labor-market success of the first-generation can be measured with these *European Social Survey* data. See as an example of such an analysis Wanner & Dronkers (2005).
- [4] www.pisa.oecd.org
- [5] Average score of 500 with a standard deviation of 100.
- [6] Non-OECD countries also participate in the PISA project.
- [7] Levels & Dronkers (2005) and Dronkers & Levels (2006) show that the effect of country of origin on school achievement is substantial (half a standard deviation), also after controlling for social, cultural and economic characteristics of pupils, parents and schools. However, Levels & Dronkers (2005) have found that including the country of origin hardly changes the effects of country of destination.
- [8] The 2003 measurement in the Netherlands took place before the murder of Theo van Gogh by a Muslim extremist. The further sharpening of inter-ethnic tensions in the Netherlands is not measured here.
- [9] All members of the Dutch royal family are, according to this definition, second-generation migrants.
- [10] Thus more than half the standard deviation of the tests.
- [11] The PISA data allows for a more extensive control for social background, but parental education and occupational status capture the main differences in social background.

- [12] France 4.5 to 3.0; Germany 4.4 to 2.6; Netherlands 4.1 to 3.4; UK 4.9 to 4.2; USA 4.7 to 4.0.
- [13] France 46 to 41; Germany 44 to 40; the Netherlands 46 to 44.
- [14] The decrease in arrear in school-achievement of the second-generation migrant pupils in the UK, who speak English at home, is not yet significant.

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Table 1: The difference in school-achievement between various generations of migrant pupils and the average native pupils in the Netherlands, Germany, France, UK and USA. First five rows without control (within parentheses standard deviation), last five rows with control for parental education and occupational status (within parentheses standard error).

Generation & home language	Netherlands		Germany		France		United Kingdom		United States	
	2000	2003	2000	2003	2000	2003	2000	2003	2000	2003
Without control										
1st & country language	-57 (100)	-64 (78)	-35 (94)	-54 (90)	-60 (101)	-56 (99)	-37 (116)	19 (93)	-9 (104)	-13 (91)
2d & country language	-34 (88)	-45 (73)	-14 (91)	-66 (85)	-17 (86)	-32 (76)	11 (95)	16 (89)	-7 (100)	-3 (84)
1st & own language	-99 (91)	-84 (75)	-104 (96)	-103 (95)	-89 (90)	-84 (106)	-46 (102)	-35 (93)	-69 (91)	-48 (97)
2d & own language	-70 (80)	-77 (76)	-90 (89)	-109 (94)	-62 (72)	-66 (81)	-41 (92)	-25 (75)	-47 (90)	-42 (83)
Total	-53 (92)	-62 (76)	-55 (101)	-81 (94)	-28 (89)	-50 (86)	-6 (101)	5 (91)	-33 (99)	-28 (91)
Controlling for parental education and occupational status										
1st & country language	-43 (12)	-60 (13)	-35 (8)	-22 (7)	-52 (11)	-44 (12)	-34 (6)	14 (6)	-8 (11)	-22 (9)
2d & country language	-28 (6)	-38 (7)	-20 (5)	-41 (8)	-16 (3)	-17 (5)	4 (3)	13 (6)	-1 (6)	-16 (6)
1st & own language	-92 (12)	-74 (11)	-88 (7)	-67 (8)	-76 (12)	-52 (12)	-52 (10)	-31 (11)	-41 (7)	-42 (6)
2d & own language	-39 (12)	-42 (11)	-70 (10)	-82 (7)	-30 (9)	-25 (8)	-22 (8)	-7 (9)	-25 (7)	-30 (6)
Total	-50 (5)	-53 (5)	-53 (4)	-53 (4)	-43 (5)	-34 (5)	-26 (4)	-3 (4)	-23 (4)	-22 (3)

Table 2: The difference in degree of social-cultural and ethnic school-segregation between various generations of migrant pupils and the average native pupils in the Netherlands, Germany, France, UK and USA. First five rows social-cultural school segregation, next five rows the ethnic school-segregation (within parentheses standard deviation), last five rows ethnic school-segregation with control for social-cultural school-segregation (within parentheses standard error).

Generation & home langua.	Netherlands		Germany		France		United Kingdom		United States	
	2000	2003	2000	2003	2000	2003	2000	2003	2000	2003
Difference in degree of social-cultural school-segregation										
1st & country language	-.33 (.81)	-.42 (.71)	-.21 (.60)	-.50 (.78)	-.15 (.59)	-.35 (.97)	-.13 (.60)	.23 (.73)	-.20 (.50)	-.19 (.60)
2d & country language	-.09 (.60)	-.40 (.83)	-.03 (.54)	-.64 (.87)	-.08 (.60)	-.26 (.69)	-.06 (.54)	.18 (.61)	-.18 (.50)	-.17 (.65)
1st & own language	-.41 (.86)	-.44 (.81)	-.39 (.60)	-.68 (.81)	-.44 (.68)	-.74 (.98)	-.14 (.91)	-.01 (.74)	-.41 (.55)	-.42 (.70)
2d & own language	-.39 (.70)	-.66 (.66)	-.49 (.61)	-1.01 (1.00)	-.47 (.66)	-.60 (.77)	-.49 (.89)	-.18 (.53)	-.63 (.68)	-.63 (.74)
Total	-.22 (.70)	-.47 (.78)	-.23 (.60)	-.68 (.87)	-.15 (.63)	-.41 (.80)	-.04 (.64)	.12 (.67)	-.35 (.59)	-.37 (.71)
Difference in degree of ethnic school segregation										
1st & country language	24 (30)	27 (31)	17 (20)	19 (19)	19 (21)	23 (25)	18 (24)	14 (14)	33 (28)	26 (22)
2d & country language	14 (21)	31 (31)	15 (18)	23 (21)	16 (18)	21 (20)	19 (25)	20 (20)	28 (26)	30 (22)
1st & own language	22 (25)	23 (30)	26 (22)	25 (25)	28 (23)	28 (25)	35 (32)	21 (21)	40 (24)	31 (23)
2d & own language	28 (25)	30 (29)	27 (21)	35 (23)	28 (19)	26 (22)	42 (33)	20 (19)	43 (21)	41 (25)
Total	18 (24)	29 (30)	20 (20)	24 (23)	18 (19)	24 (22)	22 (27)	18 (18)	35 (25)	33 (24)
degree of ethnic school-segregation controlled for social-cultural school-segregation										
1st & country language	22 (3)	24 (3)	17 (2)	14 (2)	20 (3)	21 (3)	19 (1)	20 (1)	33 (2)	27 (2)
2d & country language	16 (1)	30 (2)	17 (1)	17 (2)	18 (1)	21 (1)	23 (1)	25 (1)	29 (1)	31 (1)
1st & own language	19 (3)	20 (2)	23 (1)	18 (2)	24 (3)	20 (3)	36 (2)	24 (2)	38 (1)	28 (1)
2d & own language	25 (3)	24 (2)	23 (2)	23 (2)	24 (2)	21 (2)	38 (2)	20 (2)	38 (1)	35 (1)
Total	21 (1)	24 (1)	20 (1)	18 (1)	22 (1)	20 (1)	28 (1)	22 (1)	34 (1)	30 (1)