

Joining the human towers? Immigration and social organisations in a small town of Southern Catalonia¹

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Abstract

This article approaches the actual and potential significance of human towers' organisations for immigrants social integration in Valls - a small town of a rural county in Tarragona province. Thus, firstly, a brief theoretical approach to social organisations is outlined. Secondly, a bibliographic review on current foreign immigration in rural areas and small towns of Spain is offered. Thirdly, an approach to the general characteristics of the small town of Valls and the rural county of Alt Camp is noted. Fourthly, an analysis of qualitative interviews done in a fieldwork that has been carried out in this area is undertaken. Finally, a few considerations for future comparative research are suggested.

Introduction

Even if today foreign immigration is a relevant dynamic in a wide variety of territories in Spain, during the last decades most academic research on this issue has been focused on the metropolitan areas and the capital cities. When small towns and rural areas have been studied, most of the attention has been paid to spectacular conflicts like the one occurred in El Ejido in 2000 or to the working conditions of temporary labourers in agriculture. Instead, social participation processes in small towns and rural areas of Spain are less known. One way to approach such dynamics in these wide and diverse lands is to select a few counties and localities in order to study them via a qualitative fieldwork. As an initial step, the small town of Valls and the rural county of Alt Camp were selected. This was due to the existence in this area of both internal immigration occurred during the 1960s and foreign immigration arrived during the last years, while there was a lack of studies on them. One of the main findings during the fieldwork was the actual and potential significance of human towers' organisations for the social integration of immigrants in Valls. This article approaches the situation in this small town, a place where the human towers' teams are very influential in social life. The human towers are a kind of traditional social activity that can be an entry door for immigrants in the local society. Their participation there can be also a way of putting into practice mutual help and competition with other people.

1. Approaching social organisations

Mutual help among human-beings and the diversity in social organisations only re-emerged to the public arena in a relatively recent time. As the geographer Peter Kropotkin (1902)² noted, diverse kinds of associations re-appeared during the nineteenth century in Europe (after three centuries of tough restrictions) and, among other factors, this was possible due to the importance of mutual aid:

All these associations, societies, brotherhoods, alliances, institutes, and so on, which must now be counted by the ten thousands in Europe alone, and each of which represents an immense amount of voluntary, unambitious, and unpaid or underpaid work - what are they but so many manifestations, under an infinite variety of aspects, of the same ever-living tendency towards mutual aid and

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² Kropotkin published a book subtitled *Mutual Aid*, in order to demonstrate that, against most sociological works based on Darwinism, in the struggle for the means of existence the struggle of every human-being against all other humans was not a 'law of nature'. Instead, Kropotkin underlines the overwhelming importance which sociable habits play in nature and the possible progressive evolution of the animal species, including human beings.

support? For nearly three centuries men were prevented from joining hands even for literary, artistic, and educational purposes. Societies could only be formed under the protection of the State, or the Church, or as secret brotherhoods, like free-masonry. But now that the resistance has been broken, they swarm in all directions, they extend over all multifarious branches of human activity, they become international, and they undoubtedly contribute, to an extent which cannot yet be fully appreciated, to break down the screens erected by States between different nationalities. (Kropotkin, 1904: 221-222)

According to him, society is based on a conscience of human solidarity, on the unconscious force that is borrowed by each human-being from the practice of mutual aid, on the close dependency of everyone's happiness upon the happiness of all, and on the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his own. Solidarity is based on mutual aid and it may be a basic tool to boost social integration, although today, in the age of Toyotism, systemic team work may be disguised as mutual help. In any case, on the one hand, Kropotkin was aware of dangers such as what in Britain was called 'joint-stock individualism' and 'co-operative egotism', not only towards the community at large, but also among the co-operators themselves (although he considered it could be overcome). On the other hand, he was also aware of the limitation of the Christian Church because instead of mutual aid 'it has preached *charity* which bears a character of inspiration from above, and, accordingly, implies a certain superiority of the giver on the receiver' (although at the end of the day, he considered an immense number of charitable associations as an outcome of the same mutual-aid tendency). Finally, he also underlined that, although there was notorious evidence of lack of solidarity between 'the rich' and poor people: 'among themselves, in the circle of family and friends, the rich practise the same mutual aid and support as the poor' (and beyond that, he also noticed the possible philanthropy of some rich people).

Antonio Gramsci (1930-35) considered that the 'other so-called private initiatives and activities' may compose the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes. This perspective was adopted in the context of analysis of 'the state' both as an 'educator' (it tends to create a new type or level of civilisation), and as a developer of the apparatus of economic production. Of course, both characteristics are related. Writing about the idea of the 'ethical' state, Gramsci (1930-35: 258) noted that,

every State is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes. The *school* as a positive educative function, and the *courts* as a repressive and negative educative function, are the most important State activities in this sense: but, in reality, a multitude of *other so-called private initiatives and activities* tend to the same end -- initiatives and activities which form the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes. [italics are mine].

For Gramsci, in any given society nobody is disorganised and without party, provided that one takes organisation and party in a broad and not formal sense. In this *multiplicity* of private associations (which may be of two kinds: natural, and contractual or voluntary) one or more predominates relatively or absolutely - constituting the hegemonic apparatus of one social group over the rest of the population (or civil society): the basis of the state in the narrow sense of the government-coercive apparatus. It happens that individuals belong to more than one private association, and often to associations which are objectively in contradiction to one another (Gramsci, 1930-35: 265). When this Italian author thinks of informal organisations, for example, he suggests that the readers of a given newspaper also form an organisation. Thus the kind of organisations one may find in a given place or related to a specific human group is very diverse. Furthermore, some 'private' associations may be used by governments for reaching its aims, becoming part of the state (for Gramsci the state is composed by government plus civil society).

In a previous research project on integration processes of foreign immigrants and the most relevant organisations related to them in big cities of the Iberian peninsula (Morén-Alegret, 1999, 2002), my main focus was on Non-governmental Organisations of solidarity, foreign immigrants' associations, religious charities, workers trade unions, employers organisations, women groups, and neighbours associations. However, in Spain the situation of these questions beyond the metropolitan areas is less known. In the next section an overview of the recent academic literature on foreign immigration in rural areas and small towns in Spain is undertaken in order to contextualise the phenomena.

2. Foreign immigration into rural areas and small towns in Spain

During the last two decades most of the studies on international immigration in Spain have been focused on the arrival of foreign immigrants in metropolitan or big urban areas. However, a few authors have also paid attention to the situation of foreign immigrants beyond the edge of cities. As it has been recently analysed elsewhere (Morén-Alegret; Solana, 2003), most authors dealing with foreign migration into Spanish rural areas and small towns have studied the working and residence conditions of foreign labourers in agriculture, linking them in some cases with 'integration' or segregation processes. There are a number of them that have focused on specific rural areas³, being Andalusia one of the most studied regions. The most studied territory is the small town of El Ejido and other close areas of Almería province (Azurmendi, 2001; Castaño, Madroñal 2002, 2000; Chattou, 2000; Checa, 1995a, 1995b; Cózar Valero, 1993, 1995; Gómez López; Martón Díaz et al., 1999; Pumares et al., 2000; Roquero, 1996; Ruiz, 1996; Segrelles Serrano, 1993, 1995; Sempere Souvannavong, 2001). El Ejido and surrounding areas (*Poniente almeriense*) appeared in the headlines of the mass media in early 2000 due to a social conflict involving Moroccan immigrant workers and other local residents. These areas are characterised by a very productive and money-making intensive agriculture that is partially based on the very hard working conditions and low salaries of foreigners labouring under greenhouses made of plastic. Other Andalusian counties that have been studied are the olive countryside of Jaen (Martínez Chicón, 2002), the fields of Huelva (García Castaño, Márquez, 2002; Gordo Márquez, 2001; Gualda Caballero; Vázquez Aguado, 1996, 2001; Montaña Medina, 2002) and this last area compared to the Northwest coast of Cádiz (Cruces Roldán, Martín, 1997).

In the countryside of Extremadura, Domingo Barbolla (2001) has studied Talayuela's area, in Cáceres province, a territory where foreign immigrants working in agriculture are relevant and where internal immigration from other parts of Extremadura was significant some decades ago. In his study, this author pays attention to the tobacco plantations demand of labour as an attraction factor for Moroccan immigrants.

There are many studies as well on Eastern Spain rural areas, like the agriculture fields worked by foreign immigrants in Murcia (Beltrán Campillo, Miñano Martínez, 1996; Gómez Espín, 1995; Pedone, 2000; Pedreño Cánovas, 1998; Sempere Souvannavong, 2001; Serrano Martínez 1993) and in a few areas of Valencia's region like the Castelló plain and the Oriola Valley (Avellá, 1992, 1991a, 1991b; Giménez, 1994; Jabardo Velasco, 1993; Viruela Martínez 1993). Among these studies, we underline a couple of them because deal with under-researched issues: the piece of work written by Pedone (2000) is focused on the international migrant workers networks, and the article of Pedreño Cánovas (1998) approaches the relations between the labour structure and the agro-industrial sector.

In Catalonia, the pioneer rural areas in hosting foreign immigrant workers were the Lleida plain (Fuentes Botargues, et al. 1988) and specific counties of Girona province like La Selva (Crespo, López, 1995) or Empordà (Hoggart, Mendoza, 1999; Mendoza, 1998). The Lleida province became pioneer in establishing triangular special agreements between governments, workers' trade unions and agriculturalist employers associations for organising the labour contracts for African and South American immigrants during the harvest season. The Girona province has become a referent in foreign immigration issues. In the late 1980s the first adults' school, especially created for African immigrants in Spain, was set up in Santa Coloma de Farners (the Samba Kubally school) and in 1992 a joint effort of several NGOs from diverse Girona localities launched a Manifesto that was later used by the Catalan and Spanish governments in the making of Immigrants Integration Plans (Morén-Alegret, 2002). More recent it is the arrival of foreign labourers in the so-called Ebro river lands of Southern Catalonia (Blanch Sedó, 2001; García Coll et al., 2002).

Other publications deal with working and residence conditions of foreign labourers in agriculture as well, but studying wider geographical areas as all the Mediterranean side of Spain (Avellá, García, 1995; Berlan, 1987). Just a couple of authors have approached the arrival of foreign immigrants in agriculturalist areas of Spain as a whole, although in this case just taking into account those who are temporary labourers (Gozálvez Pérez; López Trigal, 1999). Instead, Ubaldo Matínez Veiga (1997) is one of the few academics in having compared the working situation of foreign immigrants in a diversity of agriculturalist areas (including rural and metropolitan ones) like el Ejido, el Maresme or la Vega Baixa del Segura, to the situation in a mining area like el Bierzo, and to the characteristics of a big metropolitan area like Madrid, where domestic services and building industry have been the usual sectors of activity.

Taking into account other aspects of foreign immigrants working in agriculture beyond the labour dynamics, there are a few studies on social stratification processes in rural areas. Thus Suárez Navaz

³ In this article we do not consider the studies on foreign immigrants working in agriculture within metropolitan areas (for instance, a pioneer agriculturalist area in hosting immigrants like Maresme – Barcelona Metropolitan Area- is not taken into account here).

(1998) has analysed the impact of capitalist modernising legislation and the following police control in the stratification of local social relations in an agriculturalist valley of Granada province; and Izcará Palacios (2002) has studied how useful the concept of 'underclass' could be to understand both the increasing presence of foreign workers in the Spanish agriculture and the still significant number of Spanish temporary agricultural labourers.

Even if today people living in rural areas work in a diversity of economic sectors and not just in agriculture, there are just a few studies that have analysed foreign immigrants' involvement in other jobs out of agriculture. Their participation in daily life activities beyond the labour market is also often neglected. Thus exceptional among the studies on the Spanish countryside it is the work of Miquel Novajra (1996) who carried out an anthropological study of the Moroccan population in Sa Pobla, a village of Majorca island, in relation to the rest of the local society. His work included social intervention through a workers' trade union and the social services of the local government. More recently, Farjas (2002) has studied the Gambian immigration in small towns like Banyoles and Olot (Girona) paying attention to a variety of social issues too.

On the other hand, publications linking tourism and foreign immigration from enriched countries are relatively hard to find. Thus it is exceptional as well the work of Raúl Lardies (1999, 2000) on the settlement of North Western European immigrants into Catalan tourist areas located beyond the Barcelona metropolitan region. Other works on this kind of immigration have been focused on more urbanised areas like Costa del Sol, in Andalusia (Barke, France, 1996; Betty, Cahill, 1998; Eaton, 1995; Rodríguez Rodríguez et al., 1998a, 1998b; Natera, 1995; O'Reilly, 1995), and Alacant southern coast (Casado Díaz, 1999, 2000). At the same time, other works have approached this issue taking into account a wider geographical perspective (King, Warnes, 2000, 1998; King, Patterson, 1999; Warnes, 1991; Warnes, King 1999; Williams, King, 1997).

In summary, the publications found that are focused on foreign immigration into rural areas and small towns can be grouped in three wide thematic areas:

- Working and residence conditions of foreign salaried workers in areas where agriculture is one of the key economic activities;
- Social stratification processes affecting foreign workers in agriculture;
- The relation of tourism and Northern European immigrants in coastal areas, mainly focusing on the factors that attract them and the impact on the housing market.

Most of such publications are located in the first kind of issues, being quite rare the studies on the social participation of foreign immigrants residing in small towns and rural areas. Thus this article aims to contribute to put some light in this less known question approaching the situation in a specific small town, Valls.

3. Valls, a small town in a rural county

The town of Valls is the capital of Alt Camp, a county (*comarca*) of the Tarragona province. The Catalan government included Alt Camp as an area of the LEADER Plus Programme⁴. The LEADER programmes foster a territorial dimension for local development, promoting new meanings for the concept of 'rural' (Del Canto Fresno, 2000). As it is noted in the Alt Camp Rural Development Programme elaborated by *Consell Comarcal de l'Alt Camp* (2000), the area of this administrative *comarca* is 544.7 Km², this is 1,7% of the territory of Catalunya. It is an inland county, located in the Tarragona plain although it has some mountains in the northern, eastern, and western periphery. It hosts significant physical-biological diversity and there are a few spaces with special natural interest.

Alt Camp has been traditionally an agrarian land. However this county is following the general trend consisting in a loss of agriculture economic importance both in absolute and relative terms. Thus, according to Unió de Pagesos (the main agriculturalists organisation in Catalonia), the number of peasants in Alt Camp was 1.105 in 1994 and 763 in 2002⁵. At the same time, there has been a significant expansion of the industrial areas of the county (Lamas, Martí, 2003). And according to the Consorci del Transport Públic del Camp de Tarragona, in early 2004 there will start a public transport prices integration between the counties of Alt Camp, Baix Camp and Tarragonés⁶ (this may be a path towards metropolisation). However, according to the *Consell Comarcal de l'Alt Camp* (2000) one of the main

⁴ See the Resolution of 19 December 2001 by the Agriculture, Farming and Fishery Department, Generalitat de Catalunya.

⁵ *Diari de Tarragona*, suplemento "Tradiciones payesas", enero-febrero de 2003.

⁶ *Diari de Tarragona*, 26 abril 2003, p. 10.

priorities for the county development is high quality rural tourism. This is a way that many rural communities are following today. In the Alt Camp case they take advantage of its built historical legacy and spaces of natural interest.

If the focus is on the local population features, according to the local census (*Padrón municipal*), in February 2003 there were 38,414 people residing in Alt Camp, 57.06% of them were concentrated in Valls, this is 21,920 people. During the last years, the number of foreign immigrants registered has increased becoming 6% of the population and this fact has led to the creation of a County Plan for Immigrants Integration - *Pla Comarcal d'Integració d'Immigrants de l'Alt Camp* – promoted by the Generalitat de Catalunya – i.e. the Catalan Government - in several areas across the country.

In relation to the foreign immigrants nationality, according to the data gathered by the authors of such plan, in early 2003 nationals from Maghreb countries were 55.3% of the foreigners in Alt Camp (among them 90.9% were Moroccans). They were followed by population with nationality of Latin American countries (17.5%), Eastern Europe (13.2%) and other European Union countries (9.7%).

This immigration has in Valls the main locality of residence in the county. Valls is the town where the *castells* - a kind of human towers typical of Catalonia – were born and one of the key places from where the spectacular expansion of this associative movement started three decades ago.

4. The human towers' teams and the immigrants social integration in Valls

“What are the human towers?

The human towers are prudence and impulse, individuality and collective involvement, root and sufferance, land and fly, dance and sport, shout and silence, tradition and creativity, matureness and youth; authority and discipline, ideal and reality, pray and swear, sufferance and joy, courage and fear, grace and restlessness, strenght and frailty, risk and fortitude...” in Pere Català i Roca (1981), p. 568 [translation from Catalan is mine]

As a small town that is the capital of the Alt Camp county, Valls hosts the presence of the main trade unions at Spanish scale (CCOO and UGT), a employers' council, the main agriculturalist union (Unió de Pagesos-COAG), religious NGOs like Càritas, and neighbours associations. However, at the light of the information gathered during a fieldwork carried out in the area⁷, the most outstanding social organisations in Valls are not those mentioned above but the organisations of the human towers' movement: *Colla Vella dels Xiquets de Valls* and *Colla Jove dels Xiquets de Valls*.

There are many ways how humans have played to put ones over the others in many parts of the world since very ancient times. However, as Josep Bargalló (2001) notes, in the late XVIIIth century and the early XIXth century, in some areas of Southern Catalonia (Camp de Tarragona and Penedès), some popular festivities incorporated what today is known as ‘castells’, the human towers (or human castles⁸). These folk activities are characterised by being complex human buildings of several ‘floors’ (it is often considered that a human tower to be considered as such needs to be at least six-storeyed). Traditionally the first specific documented reference of a human tower is a pillar rised in Alcover, a village in Alt Camp, in 1789. However, the first reference to stable teams of human towers (*colles castelleres*) are referred to Valls in 1805, where there was one team composed by peasants and another one composed by workmen (Bargalló, 2001). In fact, during many years the human towers were known as *xiquets de Valls* (i.e. boys of Valls) even if it was performed by people from other localities (Amades, 1934). Following

⁷ From November 2002 to May 2003 I carried out a fieldwork in Valls and other localities of Alt Camp that included over 20 qualitative interviews to key informants linked to social organisations and public authorities, as well as participant observation with local inhabitants and the gathering of a diversity of local publications and materials.

⁸ Jordi Gomà i Cortès (1995) included in his Mphil Thesis a dictionary Catalan-English and English-Catalan for the terms that are specific to the culture of “castells”. He translates “castell” as “human tower”. In this article, in general terms, I follow his linguistic proposal.

Bargalló, the origin of this social activity was based on the tradition of guilds and it is confirmed by the existence some decades later in the town of Tarragona of a team composed by peasants and another one composed by fishermen. However, since those early years the human towers have been affected by many transformations. They had times of splendor from the 1850s to the 1880s, when groups of agriculture and industrial workers left their homes in Valls and other places during the summer - when there was less employment available in the region - and became temporary travellers from village to village⁹ performing human towers in many local summer festivals. However, the socio-economic changes in late the XIXth century (agriculture crisis, emigration, railway connection with Barcelona) and the cultural shift (expansion of the bourgeois model of festivity) led to a age of decadence for the human towers (the last nine-storeyed human tower of the XIXth century was built in 1889). During the period of decadence the human towers level went down and the only place where human towers were performed was Valls. The recovery started in 1926 when new teams were created in towns like Tarragona and Vendrell. At that time the agrarian economy of the Tarragona region had improved and the bourgeois festivity model was in crisis. The 1930s were a period of consolidation of that recovery (up to eight-storeyed human towers were built again) and the increasing organisation of people in human towers teams was a sign of the rich social life of Catalonia before the Spanish Civil War. However, the war put a dramatic end to many things, among others the recovery of the human towers. In any case, little time later there was a re-organisation of a few teams and a new recovery started. Since the 1950s, and specially in the 1960s, there was a consolidation of this new recovery with the creation of new teams in several towns and villages of the traditional area, in those decades there were teams in places like Valls, Tarragona, Vendrell, and Vilafranca. During the 1980s this recovery becomes expansion with the creation of human towers teams in many places beyond the traditional area (reaching even the Girona region, the French Catalonia and the Balearic Islands) and the raising of the first nine-storeyed human tower of the XXth century in Valls in 1981, which was followed by many more of its kind. This decade is considered the second golden period. However, in 1992 a ten-storeyed human tower was built, the Catalan mass media started to pay attention to the phenomena, including TV coverage of the human towers festivals (Suárez-Baldrís, 1998), and during the following years new teams were created in other localities consolidating the geographical expansion (Bargalló, 2001).

This growth has surprised many people, because it happens in a moment of crisis for many associative movements in Catalonia. Since the consolidation of liberal democracy in Spain, associations entered a period of crisis due to the decline in people's interest in politics. However, the human towers success is due to the contemporary character of the current teams: they offer a ludic alternative to the boring and bureaucratic political associations, and they included competition, risk, collective participation and an opportunity of social integration for uprooted individuals. As Josep Bargalló (2001) notes, the human towers teams are not linked any more to a specific social group, but they foster the social integration of a diversity of people located in places under continuous transformation. From being considered a rural curiosity they have become an urban way of association as well. Much of the human towers expansion that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s was possible due to the inclusion of immigrants in the teams. They arrived from Southern Spain to a diversity of Catalan localities. Furthermore, after the irruption of women in the Spanish public arena, the incorporation of women in the human towers teams also occurred during the 1980s. In this sense, the human towers movement has followed many changes of the society to which they belong¹⁰. What is happening with the new arrival of foreign immigrants? Are the human towers teams of incorporating them? Are human towers a key tool for social integration? At the light of the information gathered in Valls it seems so, but there are different patterns according to the geographical and religious background of the diverse immigrant groups and the specificities of each human towers team. Thus, according to Lluís Selva, president of *Colla Vella dels Xiquets de Valls*, the presence in the

⁹ The counties where human towers were performed at that time were Camp de Tarragona (it includes the current *comarcas* of Alt Camp, Baix Camp and Tarragonès), Penedès, Conca de Barberà and Garraf, with sporadic presence in Anoia and Priorat. All these counties belong to the so-called "New Catalonia" (this is the name for the lands that remained for longer time under muslim rule in the middle ages) where since the mid XVIIIth century the religious local festivals were transformed into the local "festa major" incorporating new secular elements.

¹⁰ The human towers teams even organise surveys and school-days to improve their organisational skills, as the *Jornada d'Organització i Economia de les Colles Castelleres*, see VVAA (1998).

team of immigrants arrived from other Spanish regions and their descent is very high but the participation of foreign immigrants is still very low and they are not fully incorporated to the team yet¹¹:

- Hi participa gent nascuda en altres llocs d'Espanya o en altres països?
- "Aviam, si et refereixes si hi ha immigració dels anys 60 a la colla, evidentment que n'hi ha, la colla és una entitat oberta i participativa, ha estat oberta sempre, llavors tothom que s'ha volgut integrar s'ha integrat, en principi són tots gent que els hi agrada la colla i fer castells i venen, jo crec que la dada significativa és que són gent d'aquí Valls que van vindre aquí, potser que hi hagi gent que és d'aquí i gent que ha vingut, això es podria xifrar igual que la població, la població de Valls és 100% autòctona com tres generacions enrera? No, que són 50%? Doncs la gent de la colla serà això..."
- I de gent vinguda d'altres països?
- "La veritat és que no en tenim gaires d'aquests, de gent que respongui en aquest perfil"
- No s'han integrat encara?
- "No, no s'han integrat encara, no perquè no els hagim deixat sinó perquè no estan integrats aquí"
- No n'hi ha cap?
- "Registat com a tal casteller no"

However, for Josep Oller, a speaker of *Colla Jove Xiquets de Valls*, the incorporation of immigrants from other regions of the Iberian peninsula (like Andalusia and Extremadura) was a key reason for the growth of the human towers movement since the late 1960s. Oller extends this trend to the more recently arrival of foreign immigrants, because a few of those from Latin American and European countries have been incorporated into the human towers team where he is active. However, for this interviewed person, Moroccans and Asians (i.e. Chinese) are less well integrated in Valls than Latin Americans and Europeans. He links this situation to the fact that there are not members of the former groups in the human towers teams. In his own words:

- A nivell de l'origen geogràfic dels participants, hi ha gent també immigrada d'altres regions de l'estat?
- "Molta, molta, a totes les colles, és una opinió personal meva però arran de la immigració els castells van recuperar el nivell que han de tindre els castells. Pensa que després de la post-guerra, la guerra civil, els castells estaven ferits de mort, just abans de la guerra s'estaven recuperant els castells de vuit, venien d'una època molt dolenta de finals del 1800 i començaments del 1900 degut a la fil·loxera i la migració cap a Barcelona i Valls va perdre molta gent. I llavors gràcies als immigrants i la integració, les colles han sigut per mi la part més integradora de les entitats culturals que hi pugui haver a Catalunya, doncs hi ha molt agent andalusa, extremenya, d'arreu de l'estat que estan als castells actualment. Aviam a la colla et puc dir que hi ha fins i tot gent de la República Dominicana, hi ha gent de Lituània, a veure hi ha més gent estrangera, hi ha haver gent de Polònia, hi ha hagut algun anglès. A veure, és un fet integrador, una persona quan ve aquí a Valls, això dels castells l'impacta, si és una persona que li agrada es queda en una colla"
- I amb la immigració marroquina?
- "És un cas apart crec jo, hem tingut alguna persona del Magreb, però és que són un nucli molt tancat, no pots comparar la integració que pugui tenir un sudamericà o un europeu amb un magrebí, al menys a nivell de Valls, no és un col·lectiu que estigui molt integrat al que és la ciutat i la tradició de Catalunya, així com gent que ha vingut d'Andalusia s'ha integrat perfectament al que és el folklore català, els del Magreb no són un col·lectiu que s'han integrat gens ni mica"
- Hi ha hagut algun?
- "Hi ha hagut algun però no ha durat gaire temps, no és una cosa que sentin com a pròpia, no sé com explicar-ho, és una religió diferent que no entenen potser això dels castells i que no s'han integrat gens ni mica al fet casteller, a nivell de colla jove o a nivell de totes les colles, descomptant algunes excepcions és un col·lectiu que no es veu per les colles castelleres"
- I subsaharians?
- "A Valls, és que no n'hi ha, de gent de color, que siguin d'Àfrica, no n'hi ha, per exemple amb nosaltres pugem dos nois de color, pugem fent castells però són de la República Dominicana, de subsaharians a Valls no n'hi ha. A Valls el que hi ha són sudamericans, també hi ha argentins a la colla, però el que no hi ha són asiàtics, que aquí Valls també n'hi ha, però el col·lectiu asiàtic tampoc s'integra en la societat i passa com amb els magrebins que fan els seus guetos i no s'integren a la societat, en canvi tot el que és catòlic per entendre'ns i que és sudamèrica i Europa, no hi ha cap problema d'integració, s'incorporen a

¹¹ In this article the quotes from the interviews are kept in the original languages in order to allow the specialist reader of this monographic issue on immigration in Spain to have access to the original source. The language used in each interview was chosen by each interviewee.

la colla i un més, és un fet que els ajuda a parlar català, perquè trobes curios que hi ha fills que et parlen primer el català que el castellà i són fills d'immigrants, i et fa gràcia veure aquesta gent parlant català, és un fet que t'omple, dius mira gràcies a la colla parlen català i estan molt ben integrats i se senten part d'un col·lectiu”

Thus, for this key informant, enjoying the local folkloric customs, being a Catholic and speaking Catalan language seem to be key factors that facilitate social 'integration' in Valls. Exploring this question is not the aim of this article. Instead what I want to stress here is the actual and potential importance of participating in the human towers movement. The immigrants involvement in these teams is more relevant for social integration in Valls than their participation in trade unions, charities, NGOs or even neighbours association.

The significance of the human towers movement for social integration in Valls is noted by several key informants. Thus when Manuel Arbonés, member of the directory board of Centro Aragonés in Valls (an immigrants' association composed by people of the Aragón region), is asked about their links with other organisations the first that comes to his mind is the fluid link they have with the two local human towers teams:

- ¿Tenéis relación con otras organizaciones?

- “Aquí sí, están los castillos, las *collas*, los castillos siempre nos invitan, y nosotros los invitamos cuando hacemos cosas, o sea que estamos comunicados sí, y el ayuntamiento nos mantiene al corriente y nos invitan a actuaciones oficiales del ayuntamiento. Por ejemplo en las *collas* de los castillos hay muchos socios de aquí pues como en los castillos son todos, pues son castilleros. Incluso ha ocurrido que el teatro estaba ruinoso y teníamos que hacer un espectáculo y nos dejaron su local, una vez cada *colla*, muy bien, reconocidos con unos y otros”

And when Aurelio Hernández, a social worker in Valls City Council dealing with immigration issues, is asked about the possible existence of closer bonds among people living in Valls than among the people living in the big cities and how this may be influential in the immigrants integration, he mentions the human towers too. For him, in a small town like Valls everyone is connected with the rest of inhabitants and a newcomer is always an stranger. However, once this newcomer gets into a local social circle all the doors will be open for s/he and her/his family. This would be different in big cities where the newcomer has to open all doors one after the other. As a key instance of such an initial social circle in Valls, Aurelio Hernández suggests the human towers, although he considers that it is still early for certain groups of immigrants like the Moroccans to participate there:

- “No se puede decir vida urbana en el sentido de desconocimiento, aislamiento, entre las personas, hay una vida, una conexión, un conocimiento de las personas muy importante sí y eso para los recién llegados puede pesar en dos sentidos, es decir, como positivo y como negativo, por una parte son extraños, en la medida en que es una sociedad, un pueblo, muy conectado entre sí, muy conocido entre sí, cualquier extranjero, cualquier extraño es extranjero y es extraño, pero que una vez entrar también facilita, porque la comunicación corre más, es decir, por ejemplo, si una familia recién llegada, que en un principio es extraña, entra en un circuito llámale cultural o asociativo o escolar o sanitario, tiene abiertas muchas puertas, una vez abres unas abres otras, mientras que quizás en una gran ciudad, imagino, tienes que abrir una puerta detrás de otra. Bueno, es un proceso que aquí puede facilitarlo, por ejemplo, hay un fenómeno, supongo que alguien te lo habrá comentado, como es el de los *castells*, las *colles castelleres*, pues una familia, imagínate, a veces lo hemos pensado, si un niño magrebí empezara a subir a un *castell*, tendría abierta muchas puertas, todas las puertas, porque ha abierto una”

- En cambio, eso no se ha dado, he entrevistado a personas de las *colles* y hubo gente magrebí que pasó pero no se ha quedado...

-“Es pronto, es algo que ha de llegar, pero las condiciones se darán, se van a dar, son ritmos, claro, seguro que va a entrar algún latinoamericano antes que el magrebí a pesar de llevar más tiempo aquí y más presencia pero son diferencias que están presentes”

The difficulties of most Moroccans to participate in such cultural associations are confirmed by Souad El Azhar. She is one of the promoters of a very recently created Moroccan immigrants' association and she is an intercultural mediator at Valls City Council. For her the problem is related to the patriarchal and endogamic shift suffered by a significant part of the Moroccan community in Valls during the last years. According to her own words:

- En las *colles castelleres*, ¿sabes si hay gente inmigrante que participe?
- “Sí, sí que hay, pero dominicanos”
- ¿Marroquíes no?
- “No, qué lástima, ¿verdad?”
- ¿Por qué?
- “Porque la gente [marroquí] dice: de la cultura de esta gente no queremos saber nada de la cultura (...) los padres no quieren saber nada y a veces cuando pasan, cuando hacen alguna fiesta por ejemplo en San Juan¹², la gente [marroquí] cierra las ventanas, las mujeres cierran las ventanas porque no pueden ver por la ventana, está prohibido, dicen ‘es que mi marido no me deja’. Qué pena, la verdad...”

In any case, the participation of Moroccans in the human towers is seen by some locals as a goal to reach when talking about integration. In this sense, the significance of human towers for social integration in Valls is also noted by Jaume Pros Fernández (2003: 35), a local author, in a recent article published in a *comarca*-wide newspaper: “If both autochthons and immigrants we do our best to share this land, maybe sooner than later a head of a human towers team called Muhammad will be seen. This fact, that may make somebody laugh, will be one of the clear signs that immigrants are already integrated in our town” [the translation from Catalan is mine]

5. Final considerations

This article offers preliminary results of a Spanish-wide research project on the basis of data gathered in Valls and the Alt Camp county. It continues the research line on the geography of organisations that are linked to immigration started in previous researches (Morén-Alegret, 1999, 2002). As Kropotkin (1902) studied, social organisations are possible thanks to the mutual-help movement that started a long time ago and that is a key factor for the evolution of life on earth (competition can be a key factor as well, but not the only one). Today there is a wide variety of social organisations and in each specific place the most significant one may be of a different kind. In any case, for Gramsci (1930-35) the civil society was of great help for the educative aims of governments. In this sense, some social organisations can be instrumental to the social and systemic integration of newcomers in a given place. In Valls, human towers teams are the most significant social organisations. In them both natives and newcomers can potentially practice mutual-help and competition with a diversity of individuals and groups. Both mutual help and competition are today, in the age of Toyotism and team work, key ‘needs of the productive forces of development’.

Human towers teams were born in a rural context in the late XVIIIth century, however in their evolution these social organisations have learnt from the urban changes occurred in Catalonia since then (i.e. in Valls the former guild-based organisation has given way to a kind of organisation influenced by sport teams and modern cultural associations offering services to members). Today it is even possible to find many human towers teams in certain neighbourhoods of the metropolitan area of Barcelona. It would be interesting to take them more into account in future studies on social integration in the localities where they are present and to explore if there is today a rural-urban divide in the human towers movement (or other folklore, sport and cultural associations). It would be interesting to know both their composition and the ways they integrate new members. From the data gathered in Valls, immigrants from Andalusia, Extremadura, Latin America as well as Northern and Eastern European countries participate as full members of the human towers’ teams. However, in these teams there is not presence of Moroccans and Chinese people. Religious and cultural differences together with the fact that their presence in Valls is very recent are mentioned as reasons why this is occurring. To change this situation and to facilitate the incorporation in the human towers teams of the young members of the Moroccan and Chinese communities are objectives included in the agenda of some professionals who are working in the social services of the Valls local government.

After the first fieldwork in Valls and Alt Camp, the current step of this research line on “Foreign immigration and territorial change in small towns and rural Spain. Privileged places for social integration?” is to carry out a comparative fieldwork in six other specific rural areas of Spain located in the following provinces: Alicante, Cáceres, Girona, Huelva, León and Rioja. Among other questions, one may wonder if there are significant organisations there that can be compared to the influence of the human towers movement in the social life of Valls and Alt Camp (i.e. local folklore or cultural associations). And if they exist, how are newcomers related to them.

¹² In Saint John day in Catalonia and other countries there are many street celebrations linked to the beginning of the Summer season.

6. Bibliography

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