

The uses of disorder

URBAN strategies of foreigners in a situation of administrative irregularity

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[Summary]

This article is part of the result of an ethnographic research project carried out in Barcelona between October and December 2007. The assignment required a qualitative approach to the relationship between the labour market and the immigrant population in a situation of irregularity.

The data were obtained from 14 interviews carried out, a discussion group and participant observation in the public space, commercial premises and the associations of the Raval neighbourhood of Barcelona. This article is thus the result of the analysis and interpretation of these data. In particular, it deals with the strategies devised by foreigners who have in common, on the one hand, that they are or have been in a situation of administrative irregularity and, on the other hand, that they all come from Africa, Asia or Latin America.

An approach has been shaped from two theoretical suppositions: the cultural capital theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, and those of Erving Goffman and Richard Sennet on the perception of social (dis)order and how its interstices are taken advantage of. This approach concerned the question of the perceived specificities of social order and disorder. From this viewpoint it is stated that “immigrants” contribute an important wealth in terms of *cultural capital* and that this leads to a specificity when it comes to perceiving the interstices of the social order. This, in turn, is due to the temporary nature of foreigners in an urban society.

The resultant approach will analyze the data obtained and will divide them into three parts: *The capital*, the section where the data on the origin of education and of cultural skills will be interpreted. The next section, *Cross-border networks*, will set out and interpret the data on informal resources such as friendship or country networks. The final section, *The uses of disorder. Making yourself invisible*, will deal with the ways in which the population studied tries to make the stigma which condemns them imperceptible: being legally dissimilar, being foreigners in a society which bases its democratic principles on the assumption that all its members are equal according to the law and in reality.

Introduction

These pages are the result of fieldwork and the subsequent analysis and interpretation of the data collected. The data selected deal with a question on the strategies elaborated by foreigners in a situation of administrative irregularity in order to achieve their personal, labour or family objectives.

The result is organized into three sections, *The capital*, *Cross-border networks* and *The uses of disorder. Making yourself invisible*. The objective is to shed light on a social space highly charged with notions which are unthinkable or elaborated with political or economic interests. In this respect knowing the less visible practices of this population can help to understand the different processes and the numerous options that this population is capable of handling.

The conclusion drawn is that although the administrations and the Aliens' Law may excessively hinder the normal participation of this type of population in Catalan society, it should be taken into account that many of the successful narrations deal precisely with two elements which normally go unnoticed. On the one hand, most of the immigrant population has educational levels, what we would call "social or cultural skills", higher than the state average. On the other hand, the new relations and the actions which they carry out driven by their condition as an "immigrant" position these citizens at the tip of not only economic¹ but also social and cultural development in the sense that they produce a critical reading of the order and question, precisely because they are "not from the place", the naturalized order of the city of arrival.

¹ The Applied Economics professor from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Josep Oliver, states in his latest study published in 2006, that immigration already participates in 40% of the generation of gross domestic product (GDP) in Catalonia and its participation has multiplied by four in the last five years. Also see OGLETTI, G. (2006) "Los beneficios económicos de la inmigración en España" in Revista Pueblos. Internet resource <http://www.revistapueblos.org/>

The capital

As indicated in a previous article², and as we have just stated, the foreign population tends to have educational levels higher than the national average. In this same respect, they suffer doubly from the situations of declassing linked to jobs below their educational levels.

Even so, the fact that the majority of this population has higher educational levels or, for example, aided by the learning of other languages, skills to interpret the codes implicit in a job interview or to adapt to what is expected of them, gives them resources to join the labour and social world of their place of arrival with greater guarantees of success.

The whole amalgam of knowledge involved in these skills learned is what Bourdieu called *Cultural Capital*³. This notion is linked to that of *social reproduction* and what it means is the volume of non-economic resources that the hegemonic *social classes* have in order to reproduce relations in the social structure which perpetuate their privileges and the authority of this class over the rest.

In the case of *foreigners* – understood here as those non-national citizens who have just arrived in a city -, we will use the notion of *cultural capital* stressing another issue which will be very useful to shed light on the data obtained. Cultural capital is inherited in an identical way to economic capital and provides its holders with specific skills to successfully complete the different trials to which they may be subjected as foreign citizens. We can see an example of this type of skills in the following account:

And in a trip to France with the children that I was taking because there I worked from the age of 17 with the Senegalese scouts. And I still do. This has allowed me to do social work, contact with other people, with leaders, voluntary workers. In

² FERNÁNDEZ, M. “Treballadors invisibles, ciutadans il·legals”. Revista IDEES. Centre d’Estudis de Temes contemporanis

³ BOURDIEU, P., PASSERON, J.C., (1970) *La Reproduction : éléments pour une théorie du système d’enseignement*. Paris : Éditions de minuit, cop.

2001 I went to France to do social pedagogy, on an exchange, in a work camp and I was a leader. It was a seminar on rights and obligations of children. Of course in France it was a bombshell, a Senegalese man coming to talk about the rights and obligations of children in France. I had a command of the subject.

From this quote, the first thing that stands out is that the informant, born in Senegal, makes fluent use of the other official language of Catalonia, Catalan. It should be recalled that the majority of the population that comes from the African continent has a command of several languages, some of them European. By definition, this makes it relatively easy for them to learn new languages, without mentioning the benefits in terms of structuring of thought granted by a command of different languages. The informant, just in this quotation, already lists a series of knowledge and skills acquired which allow him, for example, to widen his network of acquaintances (in the terms of Bourdieu we could call this *social capital*) and likewise this network is an essential possibility when it comes to the individual travelling to Europe. He also indicates specific knowledge which leads him to be invited to France to give a talk on pedagogy in a congress or seminar. The most important aspect of his account is distance between this capital which he accumulates and the expectations that his national origin causes among other participants. In other words, the possibility of turning prejudice in his favour: his broad knowledge of a specific subject is even more valuable, when national or racial prejudices presuppose scarce educational levels.

It is in this respect that, according to Bourdieu, it is observed how the added value of this capital is precisely its invisibilization. This capital is embodied by the individual in such a way that, for example, his capacity for understanding, or his skill on having a command of the codes of communication in different types of conversation, are perceived as natural. What is interesting from this reflection is that the accumulation of this *cultural capital* - as a result of a certain learning process (which can also be reflected in certificates or academic qualifications) - has more possibilities of *offering a return* inversely proportional to its invisibility, to its appearance as intrinsic to the subject in question.

In this respect, the skills involved, incorporated and invisibilized as natural, will

be the key which will allow foreigners to overcome some of their specific obstacles. This cultural capital is also expressed in tools to cultivate and take advantage, in the words of Goffman, of "the art of handling impressions"⁴, of dominating the image of oneself in a specific relationship, of being able to interpret accurately the range of communication codes that are used in interpersonal relations and to anticipate the expectations they may create themselves. The result of these skills can help the individual in question to have more autonomy in relation to the specific limitations associated with their condition as a foreigner.

One of the ways in which this provision of resources is expressed is in knowledge and the associative experience. The associations of citizens are one of the most specific forms of urban life⁵, and therefore for people joining the new social and labour fabric, this expertise provides an important volume of new opportunities linked to the networks of mutual aid, to the ability to establish relations of certain reciprocity with the public administration – although often this relationship is mediated by national citizens who act as social workers or educators – and to be able to receive, for example, public subsidies. The associations are also a space of protection and even, in psychosocial terms, a space of comfort which mitigates the feeling of total rupture with primitive spaces of sociability – their school, neighbourhood, family, etc. – or particularly important for the individual as maintained by Dominique Schanpper⁶ and Rebeca Grinberg⁷, here as general theories on recreation of cultural microclimates outside the place of origin.

Then in the association I found an atmosphere which encouraged me to stay here.
Because there were people who shared my principles [Ahmed]

⁴ GOFFMAN, E (1994). *La presentación de la persona en la vida cotidiana*. Buenos Aires Amorrortu: Buenos Aires.

⁵ TÖNNIES, FERDINAND, *Comunidad y asociación : el comunismo y el socialismo como formas de vida social*. Barcelona, Península: 1979

⁶ SCHNAPPER, Dominique. "Modernidad y aculturaciones a propósito de los trabajadores emigrantes". In T. TODOROV, EDS. *Cruce de culturas y mestizaje cultural*. Madrid, Júcar: 1988

⁷ GRINBERG, LEON AND REBECA, *Migración y exilio : estudio psicoanalítico*, Madrid : Biblioteca Nueva, cop. 1996

As Peñaranda Cólera indicates⁸, the idea of a network begins to be built in the meeting spaces of the foreign population, as we will see below. They can begin in phone centres, bars, hairdressers' where, for one reason or another, foreigners meet with country or residence links, etc. The role of the formal or informal associations of citizens should moreover be taken into account, as they add more elements to assist in settling in the city of arrival.

These both informal and formal spaces initially act as places of mutual support and springboards to enter the first social networks and consequently the labour market. This type of organization may be of any type although a certain predominance is held by those which revolve around group demands regarding human rights, national issues current in the countries from which this population comes, etc.

[In Senegal] I was always in the life of associations so as not to get bored.[Ousseynou]

I have also discovered [In Cornellà de Llobregat] that there is a militancy, a fight for the entity. It is something in which in Morocco already ... at university, I was already involved [...] After a while I joined the association *Sense Fronteras* [...] A friend's brother who I didn't know. [Ahmed]

Another of the situations which is overlooked when it comes to speaking about this kind of population is its political activism before arriving in Catalonia. In this case, the fact of belonging to certain political parties can also contribute an element of *transnational* affinity and thus offer new resources which these individuals can take advantage of.

[I found work] in the neighbourhood. Lucky I'm left-wing and I found people from left-wing parties who helped me, from the Revolutionary Workers' Party, I had contacts.[Yjub]

In this case, the social networks around a political party, which is moreover internationalist, can be established as a space for mutual aid and the

⁸ PEÑARANDA CÓLERA, MA. CARMEN (2005) "El locutorio como espacio social transnacional: una mirada psicosocial "Athenea Digital", tardor, número 008 Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona

collaboration which is appropriate to find work or receive consultations on the administrative processes in which they are immersed.

Cross-border networks

All the people interviewed position access to the (formal or informal) labour market as the priority issue. And this first need can be met thanks to social networks⁹ in which foreign workers are one more node. The network can also support workers who, for example, have had an occupational accident and cannot work and therefore obtain a salary. These networks are often begun in the countries of origin of the foreigners arriving in Catalonia. These initial networks are the result of the so-called *migratory chains* and help the new population to access the housing and labour market. The result of these chains is precisely the concentration of families and even single peoples transferred largely to towns or neighbourhoods of Catalonia¹⁰. This situation, during the initial moments and always temporarily, is necessary and helps the person who has just arrived to invisibilize their condition as a foreigner by joining, as soon as possible, the basic social structures such as the neighbourhood, the school or the labour market.

In the case of one of those interviewed in a situation of administrative irregularity who suffered from an occupational accident which incapacitated him from working in construction, it is the same relatives, fellow countrymen or friends who help him:

AND HOW DID YOU SURVIVE?-family, people, cousins... My nephew. [aziz group]

The population interviewed coincided on pointing out how social networks have been a fast and easy resource to join the labour market. The high volume of

⁹ DOMINGO PÉREZ, CONCHA AND VIRUELA MARTÍNEZ, RAFAEL “Cadenas y redes en el proceso migratorio español” in *Scripta Nova* N° 94 (8), 1 August 2001

¹⁰ So as not to lose sight of the common points and the similarities between many migratory processes, it is interesting to read the thesis of Angelina Puig which explains how a neighbourhood of Sabadell was established almost exclusively for population from the same village of Granada, “*Pedro Martínez*”. PUIG, ANGELINA, *De Pedro Martínez a Sabadell: l'emigració una realitat no exclusivament econòmica. 1920 – 1975*. doctoral thesis, Bellaterra,

informal work in Catalonia¹¹ - excessively concentrated on a very labour-intensive production model which does without high investments in research and technology – allows them to join the labour market quickly and closely adapted to demand:

Yes, and after two weeks I began to work. Quick. I always worked in cleaning, in the houses of families...(Elisa)

As just mentioned, these social networks allow effective access to the labour market, to housing and to the coverage of basic needs such as food and clothing. Even so, it should not be forgotten that they also have fast access because, in the majority of cases, an almost unconditional attitude of acceptance of the labour conditions imposed is adopted as a general rule in the informal labour market.

and on arriving in Cornellá I stayed with Fátima's family, who fed me, looking for work as a painter, doing everything, they paid me 30 euros when they wanted and to get to work I had to pay 7.50 euros, so I was left with 22 euros (laughs) and, well, ah, I worked to live. I worked with another who said "there's someone who needs a bricklayer", when I went to university I worked a little in the summer, I went north to work in construction, they got some tools together for me and I went to work as a bricklayer, first day, second, and it has lasted, I worked with this man 3 months, he didn't pay me everything, I worked with another for a month, his friend, he didn't pay me everything either, (Yusuf)

The *country* networks, that is the links of solidarity based on common geographic or national origin, can operate at the same time as supporting someone with economic problems.

Yes. If there are problems with a fellow countryman, we help him, this money goes to that person.[...] . Some don't have work. But if they know... if there's a job, we get them. [Elisa]

The country networks can operate to replace the family networks. The mutual aid is justified by customs or by reciprocity.

And a person, if there is no brother, there are other relatives, friends from the street,

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 1990

¹¹ Again see FERNÁNDEZ, M. (2008) where some data are provided which point out that in Catalonia approximately 20% of the production is informal, non-declared.

from work, from school, they ask for help, they give money, that's our custom. Then when another asks for help: they all give him help. [Yjub]

As already mentioned, the labour conditions of the first jobs are generally the toughest. This population is capable of accepting them initially.

at the beginning [my husband] was exploited enormously: he worked in a fishmonger's and he worked a lot, they didn't pay him for holidays, or sick leave, if he missed a day they deducted it... he earned hardly 600 euros [Elisa]

These networks are organized across national borders. In this case, an attempt is made to avoid the difficulties imposed by the Aliens Law¹² on geographic mobility. As can be deduced, if the foreign population in a situation of irregularity leaves Spain they run the risk of not being able to return.

HAVE YOU GONE BACK IN THESE TWO YEARS?[...]Exactly one year ago, in December, to bring my daughter [...] HAVE YOU HAD PROBLEMS ON A LEGAL LEVEL?[...]No. I left my country, I got a passport which didn't have the entry stamp in BCN and I came in again [Elisa]

It is very interesting to see how this population is capable of avoiding strict border controls, of moving legally from one country to another in order to avoid the obstacles that each of the countries imposes. At the same time they may take advantage of the fact, for example, that in one European state the situation is regularized while in another they can obtain higher salaries:

I was in France for a time, in 2005, I heard about the regularization in Spain, I arrived at the end of 2004, October 2004. I hardly know anyone here, I don't have work, I need papers to look for it. [Ahmed]

Indeed, this is not the only example, on the contrary. Calculating the possibilities of regularizing their administrative situation they can live in different European countries and one of the determinant elements, when it comes to deciding in which country to stay, may be access to their regularization even more than better labour and salary conditions.

¹² Both contracting at origin and access to regularization through social settlement mean that the person hired must stay in the region and the productive sector until they obtain the permanent residence permit.

And if not, stay here [in Cornellà de Llobregat] if I was OK. But once here, I have seen very bad things: the aliens' law of Spain, of France. In France there is no light, it is impossible to obtain papers, there are people who have been there 10 years and haven't managed. There they were talking about the election and the change of government, the exchange of people without papers, work... So I decided to stay here to try to get papers and to study here. [...]

The comings and goings between countries of origin and different European countries allows this population to take advantage, for example, of grants to study or to obtain higher salaries in France, while in Spain they process the residence or work permit.

One month, I enrolled [with the University of Marseilles] and I went back to Morocco. In 2002. In 2003 I obtained another tourist visa from the consulate in Germany, but I didn't go to Germany, but to France. The idea was to reach France with the German visa. Try to enrol in France and return to Morocco to obtain the long-term visa, but I didn't manage, so at the end of 2003 I came to Barcelona. [Ahmed]

There are also different salaries and social benefits within the European Union. Given that renewing permits in Spain is linked to a minimum contribution to the Social Security system, sometimes the population in this situation can become *cross-border workers*. This concept is included in the Aliens' Law and is used to refer to workers who live close to the border of one country and work in another. In so far as this is of interest for this reflection, these cross-border workers pay their contribution to the Spanish state and work and live in France, in Belgium or in Germany where they can earn more money in less time.

Many people who work in France have the permit from here, because in France they charge more, but they leave the card here to obtain the 3 months, it is compulsory to pay contributions for 3 months to be able to renew it.[GRUp]

As this testimony shows, residence and work permits may be used by friends, acquaintances, fellow countrymen or other foreigners but whose situation is not regularized. This population can then work as if their situation was regularized.

Thus, so as not to lose the card, they leave the card to someone without papers and they thus continue to make contributions.[GRUp]

Some of these workers who have a trade with high demand for labour in the place of arrival do not have special problems when it comes to finding work.

Many of them find out about the need for labour thanks to direct contact with the employers who phone them when they need them to work, with other acquaintances in the same situation, going, for example, to phone centres or also going to places where illegal workers are picked up.

As I already know more people and as I am a bricklayer I can obtain work as a bricklayer [...] My friend knew a boss, I have phone numbers of some bosses, they called me.[GRUP]

Indeed, phone centres are one of the spaces where a large part of the networks are organized which the foreigners who have just arrived join, and this will be the place where the first contacts will be established beyond the acquaintances from the place of origin. According to the observation made by Peñaranda Cólera, in this respect the phone centres are “centres of resources”, new places which allow new social relations:

Spaces where we find different information, “informal information” hanging from boards inside the phone centre, which offers jobs, housing to rent, information on legal advice, leisure activities, etc. These different advertisements show what types of strategies or of procedures can be followed to move around and operate in the receiving society. The phone centre allows the information to be accessible, to circulate and to incorporate it into your travels around the city so that the movements are simpler, easier and safer. This information is not just “hung” from the phone centre boards, but also circulates among the people who live in the place, and constructs the phone centre as a centre of resources. It is undoubtedly here where the network idea begins to be built.

As Ahmed confirms, phone centres are meeting places where people also go to communicate with their relatives, but the main function is related to the physical space where people meet, chat, recommend a worker or an employer.

Friends or of friends... And also through phone centres, where people meet, talk, about who you know... In front of the phone centres people talk... The people who do not know how to read or write, or to look for work on the Internet, go to phone centres, so see if anyone needs a builder, a bloke... Because they also pull strings. If someone has been on a site for a long time and gets on well with the employer, they find other people for him. [Ahmed]

The notion of *immigrant entrepreneur*¹³ has proliferated in recent years and has

¹³ The first to use the term was Ivan Light. In his ethnography *Ethnic enterprise in America: business and welfare among Chinese, Japanese, and Blacks*. Berkeley [etc.]: University of California Press, cop.1972

been used to indicate the specificities and characteristics of foreigners who, for different reasons, decide to establish their business and free themselves from the social characteristics of the lower parts of the labour structure (Aramburu, 2004; Díaz and Molina, 2006; Moreras, 2006 and Goldberg, 2006). The employers again make progress thanks to the networks of mutual, family, local and transnational, aid. Yjub explains these processes in great detail.

70% of the people who come from Punjab have relations, relatives, who live in rich countries: Germany, England. 95% of Pakistanis here are brothers, several, 3 brothers who first worked all 3, one left the work, set up a shop, if it goes well, another leaves the work, and also sets up a shop. So they set up 3 shops. And they ask for help from relatives in rich countries, they give money, but they don't always give credit. But they do sometimes, because it is not a problem to give three thousand, six thousand euros. So 3 brothers live together, eat like in the 3rd world: lentils and lentils and don't spend much and save a lot of money and set up shops. So there are rumours: why do the Pakistanis set up so many shops? I know many shop owners who only earn 1200 euros. It's better to earn this than to work so hard in construction. There are many Pakistanis who earn very little, but they spend very little. As they are not professionals, they do not speak the language, several brothers get together, they ask for help from relatives from other countries and they set up a shop. That's what they do. And also because they are from the same areas. [Yjub]

This account summarizes several of the things said on the previous pages that it is worth highlighting. The first is to observe that the place of origin always implies a "social class of origin" which is almost always obviated, for example, framing all "immigrants" from Latin America in a homogeneous group and ignoring other variables as important as gender, age or education and work experience. The label "immigrant" thus appears to save the interlocutor from asking what their age is, what education they have or what profession their parents have.

From this point of view we observe immigrant population which does not want to do manual work in intensive production centres (catering, agriculture, etc.) also precisely because of their country of origin and above all for their social class of origin they are dirty or servile jobs. To a certain extent this explains the will and the effort made by many "immigrant" families to establish a business, even if this means many hours of work, many savings and, consequently, what may be tougher living conditions than those of some wage earners. I insist that what is important here is the dimension of a type of work, that the dignity linked to a

certain “social class” drives this person to make a very high investment in economic terms or hours of work, and to sacrifice the leisure linked to consumption, etc... in order to try to maintain the social status from where they come.

One final point which the informant highlights is the role of the transnational networks on providing the minimum investment so that they can start, for example, a company selling foodstuffs. These networks operate with systems of reciprocity and mutual trust which act like small family banks between different countries, whether the parents from the place of birth or the uncles or other relatives and even friends who are already resident in Germany, the United Kingdom or France.

The uses of disorder. Making yourself invisible

Both Erving Goffman¹⁴ and Richard Sennet¹⁵ observed the peculiarities of urban life and their continually changeable spaces for sociability. In particular the city – as a society distinctive from rural society – has been a space of continuous variabilities in which the presence of foreigners or of immigrants is its constitutive element.

It is in this respect that, from sociology, we can understand the opportunities that urban life offers to foreigners. In particular the institutions, the latent rules and regulations, as a result of a certain sociability, can go unnoticed initially for the new inhabitants of the metropolis. This situation can represent a range of opportunities which are normally invisible for the rest of the population. The foreigner can thus take advantage of these ambiguous spaces consubstantial to any urban society. I believe that both the space which is left for them to take advantage of and the attitude of contemplating numerous latent regulations but without meaning, often imperceptible, dark or unexplainable, can become an

¹⁴ GOFFMAN, ERVING, *La Presentación de la persona en la vida cotidiana*. Buenos Aires : Amorrortu, 1981

¹⁵ SENNETT, RICHARD *Vida urbana e identidad personal : los usos del orden* Barcelona : Península, 2001

instrument to be used to subvert their situation of disadvantage in relation to the national population.

In this respect, it should be recalled that any process of socialization has as one of its most immediate results precisely the invisibilization of the learning process of which its “natural behaviour” is a result. This natural behaviour, these implicit rules which govern social life, personal relations, and incrustation in the institutions, are just a coherent and reasonable whole for those who have been sociabilized in the different social groups of a city like Barcelona.

From this point of view, the foreigner can become a privileged subject, given that they are capable of seeing the unfinished, incomprehensible and incoherent component of these relations which, for those who have been living in the city in question for longer, go unnoticed to them and appear as unquestionable elements.

In this context the foreigner can use certain spaces, many of them only visible to their eyes, in order to take advantage of opportunities, improve their social status or gain access to better jobs or invisibilize, for example, their condition as a foreigner so that the aliens’ law is not applied to them.

The informants thus explain this strategic use, for example in the adaptation to the formal or informal labour market. Those interviewed explain how, once in the job, if they do not have a contract, these workers also have to get round the inspections of the Ministry of Labour, which does not seem to represent enormous difficulties for those interviewed.

AND DID THE INSPECTORS COME? –Only once, and I went up the ladder, working on the alterations, I went out onto the flat roof and that was it.[GRUP] If someone has been on a site for a long time and gets on well with the employer, he finds other people for them. They work with employers from here using the SS cards of people who are not [...]Or who are in France and are registered twice.[Ahmed]

The question of “papers” is of vital importance, both gaining access to them and renewing them. An extensive strategy is to do “undeclared” work in one job and to contribute to the Social Security with another:

But the boss with which I was already working... I got a pre-contract from a cooperative of couriers, [...] - BUT DIDN'T YOU WORK THERE?[...] No. They didn't need me, but they wanted to do this favour for me. They did me the favour in exchange for buying a motorbike and/or? a van from them.[...] -WELL... BUT ARE THEY GOOD PEOPLE?[...] Yes. But I paid for everything: the contributions, for the SS...

Some of the people who have been involved in an inspection by the Ministry of Labour state that although the search was carried out by the inspector, they could trick him as they use residence permits of some people - who maybe work in another job less likely to be inspected or in another country of the European Union – for others, so the inspector, as the person interviewed relates, can be deceived on observing that they have the same number of residence permits as foreign workers.

[...] the bosses know when they are coming, they warn those without their papers in order to go to another site or not to come on that day and that's it. Sometimes they come and quick: those without papers to the toilet or the bar...[...] Sometimes they give the inspector the number of workers and of permits and that's it, they go. They also advise the workers. If someone without papers is working with someone else's permit they tell him: "you're called Mohammed and that's it, if they ask you, tell them you're called Mohammed and that's it".

The situation of administrative abandonment and the urgent needs to regularize the situation can lead to a situation which favours other types of criminal actions, such as the purchase and sale of contracts of employment, above all when an extraordinary regularization process takes place.

[...] my flatmate has his papers in order [...] And they sold him a contract to regularize his brother. Yes, the majority has bought contracts for regularization.[Ahmed]

The "immigrants" as such try in one way or another to invisibilize themselves as belonging to that category, that of "immigrants", at least in the toughest category, that of "illegal":

I knew some tricks: if you have very clean clothes and a newspaper the police don't stop you.[...] working clothes, overalls for painting, they never stop you. If they see that you are going to work they don't stop you. And I worked in houses, not on building sites or in the street. [Yjub]

In our country, there is the linguistic recourse. Knowing or appearing to know Catalan can act as a "magic word" to start a relationship, even if only superficial,

of cordiality, producing a positive disposition in the interlocutor.

[the tale of Ali Baba and the 40 thieves, the magic word] Abre *som-som*, the word *som-som*, in Urdu: *cul ya som-som*, and the door to the treasure opened. In Catalonia, in my point of view, I am sure, sure, that speaking in Catalan is like saying *cul ya som-som*, it's the way of opening the door to the treasure: you will find more work, more quickly if you speak Catalan than if you only speak Spanish. Someone without papers who speaks Catalan has more guarantees than if they only speak Spanish. If someone comes to the Association, even if they don't have papers, but they speak Catalan, we will give them work. I don't say: we will look for work, I say we will give them work.

While in a situation of administrative irregularity, it is always possible that the police may identify the "immigrant" and accuse them of an administrative offence for not having a residence or work permit. There is also a wide range of signs to identify *settlement* so that the police do not apply a penalty, in this case related to being Catalan.

And once I came across the police but on seeing my university card they didn't know what to do, also the fact that I spoke in Catalan and I said that I had the documentation at home. If it's the Catalan police, and you speak in Catalan, normally you don't have problems. And if it's the municipal police, I already knew that they couldn't cause me problems.[oUSSEYNOU]

Another example where, in this case, it is a popular symbol such as the CAT (Catalonia) sticker on a folder where he simulates carrying work documents, showing that the "immigrant" isn't really one:

Yes, once with a friend, at almost one o'clock [p.m.], in Urquinaona, my friend wanted to phone and at that time there weren't mobiles. He went to look for a phone booth and I was in the car and the police came and asked for my papers. They said: out. And I had a folder with a sticker which put Cat, for Catalonia. And they saw it, they spoke among themselves, and they said, OK, that's all. And they didn't ask for my papers.[Yjub]

Summary and conclusion

Being a foreigner implies a series of demands which can be made of these people, who have a high productive and enterprising capacity. As indicated, an important part of this population has a high *cultural capital* which represents a source of wealth in the cities where they settle.

The first section showed how this population is equipped with skills which we

have called *cultural capital* which grant a large part of this population specific opportunities to do well despite their legal situation. This same capital is supported by and at the same time makes up extraordinarily useful social networks when it comes – in psychosocial terms – to appeasing the will to return through participation in associations, or to joining the informal labour market thanks to the circulation of knowledge in these groups and the establishment of links of reciprocal trust. This is the first important element when talking about social groups or networks.

The second section demonstrated the vital importance of the social networks as a point of arrival but also of departure for the successful incorporation of new population into the city of Barcelona. In this respect, as an important part of the *cultural capital*, the social networks established around “immigrants” paradoxically help this population to be equipped with more tools, precisely to invisibilize their situation as *hyper foreigners* in the city. The networks are effective in this sense in an inversely proportional manner to their link with the public institutions. The latter, in a more or less ingenuous manner, reify the social networks in terms of “communities of immigrants”, converting a network which gives freedom into another which confines the population in a single, fixed, identity. This formula, as has already been demonstrated¹⁶, leaves these groups ready for any partisan use which the public administrations, political parties, press, etc., wish to make of them.

The citizens classified as “immigrants”, rather than producing social disorder, are the first to detect that this is a fundamental element of urban life in which, precisely, a series of meanings taken for granted, of latent rules, illusorily fix an unstable, changing and eminently unpredictable social order. This situation is not seen by any type of citizen better than by the “foreigner”.

To conclude we can say that an important part of this *cultural capital* about which we have been talking is not only exploited, but is also ignored or considered to be useless. These statements may again conceal a symptom of

¹⁶ FERNÁNDEZ, M. (2005) “Immigrants per sempre” in *Els Altres Andalusos. La qüestió nacional*. L’esfera dels Llibre, Barcelona

Catalan society's deficit when it comes to taking advantage of human capitals, whether national or foreign. A productive model more based on research and technological development would have to drive the Catalan economy and society toward levels of welfare and comfort, and most probably toward less unequal and more open societies.

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