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Welcoming meaning(s). Values
circulation between citizens and
institutions about migrants' reception in
Barcelona

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the circulation of welcoming values between local institutions and the civil society, regarding asylum seekers and refugees' reception between 2015 and 2020. What values are promoted by the institutions? How are they transmitted and how does the civil society respond to it? This work first explores the awareness-raising policies put in place by Barcelona City Council and the government of Catalunya, in order to sensitize the population to the necessities of being “welcoming” and to propose a “participation model”. The paper then focuses on the civil society role. The latter is in fact the one who first promoted welcoming values in 2015, through massive street demonstrations or numerous letters and solicitations, urging then local public authorities to get engaged in reception processes. But nowadays, many citizen collectives criticize these institutions' attitudes, and try to propose other values regarding the reception context in Barcelona.

Keywords

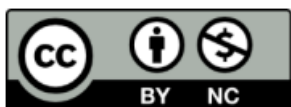
Refugees' reception, participation, local public action, civil society.

Author's biographical note



Louise Hombert is a PhD student in Political Science at Paris Dauphine University-PSL* Research University, and a fellow of the Institut Convergences Migrations (2018-2021). Her work focuses on “refuge-cities” and their migrants' reception governance, including NGOs and citizen collectives' influences in the construction of local welcoming policies. For her doctorate, she is conducting a comparative analysis of Paris and Barcelona's situations, regarding the European reception “crisis”. Her research also led her to study city-to-city dynamics, including city networks specialized in migration issues. She is also a Scientific member at la Casa de Velázquez - EHEHI (2020-2021).

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Introduction

From 2015, and in the following years, the European Union (EU) experienced an increase in arrivals on its territory, often described in the media and political arenas as a "migration crisis" or "refugee crisis". In this context, several European cities have seen their reception infrastructures saturated. Among these cities, we can mention Paris and its makeshift camps in France, Athens and Lesbos in Greece, or Catania in Sicily, located near the largest European reception centre for asylum seekers (closed in the summer of 2019), a symbol of the security orientation of the European asylum policy (Bassi, 2015).

In this context, Barcelona has long been an exception. Indeed, in 2016, when many European cities were experiencing difficulties in receiving all the people exiled on their territories, the Catalan capital was asking for refugees, notably by proposing a direct system for relocating people, between itself and Athens (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016). It was only in 2017 that the city experienced a sharp increase in the asylum requests on its territory (+92% compared to 2016¹), to the point of having to open a second branch of the Service for Assistance to Immigrants, Emigrants and Refugees (SAIER) in autumn 2019. However, Barcelona has not waited for this change in its migration situation to declare itself a "refuge city" and develop reception policies. Local institutions, such as Barcelona City Council —the *Ajuntament de Barcelona* in Catalan— and the *Generalitat de Catalunya*², are thus promoting values of solidarity and hospitality and highlighting their duty to welcome.

However, these institutions are not the only local actors to define how to be a “refuge” and which values should be promoted in this context. This article aims to analyse the Barcelona case by questioning the circulation of welcoming values between local institutions and the civil society, regarding asylum seekers and refugee reception: are these values communicated from institutions to citizens or from citizens to institutions? And how are they transmitted? Much previous research in migrants’ integration policies has focused on the transmission of values and norms directed at newcomers through integration courses (Goodman, 2010; Joppke, 2007). Contrary to them, this study focuses on the formulation of values directed to inhabitants, and not to newcomers nor other professionals in the migration field. But how does the civil society respond to it?

This work first explores the awareness-raising policies put in place by Barcelona City Council and the government of Catalunya - *la Generalitat*, in order to sensitize the population

¹ Figures produced from the 2017 SAIER activity reports and the document “Memoria del Pla “Barcelona Ciutat Refugi” 2015-2019” (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2019; SAIER, 2018).

² *La Generalitat de Catalunya* is the political institution representing the autonomous community of Catalonia.

of the necessity of being welcoming and to propose a “participation model” (I). We will see that the first institution proposes values constitutive of a “morality of care”, when the second institution is more oriented towards a “morality of justice”³, even though there is no strict division between these two organisations speeches. The paper then focuses on the role of civil society (II). The latter may be in fact the one that imposed welcoming values to the institutions four years ago, through massive street demonstrations or numerous letters and solicitations, urging then local public authorities to get engaged in reception processes. But nowadays, many citizen collectives criticize these institutions’ attitudes, and try to propose other values regarding the reception context in Barcelona.

This paper examines all these dimensions by relying on an inquiry mixing an ethnographic approach through interviews with local leaders and citizens’ associations, and an analysis of grey literature —municipal and regional reports, politicians’ press releases, interviews, and city council debates. Three field surveys in Barcelona were carried out between 2018 and 2021, lasting respectively 3 months, one month and 7 months. Then, an analysis of public discourses will allow us to draw up a sociology of the hospitality moral economy, which corresponds to “the production, distribution, circulation and use of emotions and values, norms and obligations, in the social space” (Fassin, 2009 : 1257) in relation to hospitality. This concept then leads us to question first how institutions constituted a group of “welcoming” values and emotions and try to promote it as legitimate to the inhabitants, and secondly how these values are received, reappropriated and criticized by civil society.

1. From care to justice: the institutions' citizen awareness policies

1.1 The Ajuntament’s values: learning to be welcoming

Although the city of “Barcelona is not the epicentre of the [refugee] crisis” —to use its own expression (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015b) —, the *Ajuntament* decided to build a plan to receive these populations. Launched in autumn 2015, the “*Barcelona Ciutat Refugi*” plan aims to develop a local reception policy and it includes a line of work dedicated to “Citizen participation and information”. Let’s take a close look at it.

³ Although these expressions are part of the sociology of gender (Flanagan & Jackson, 1987; Gilligan, 1982; Spader, 2002), the aim of this paper is not to carry out an analysis of these institutions discourses regarding gender issues, as there are too few elements to allow us to draw any conclusions on this aspect. However, we chose to use these two expressions as two practical tools for our analysis.

a) Defining hospitality: the policy of "good neighbourliness and small acts of kindness"

One of the objectives of this axis is to "raise awareness [among citizens] about the issue of refuge" —in Catalan "*sensibilització en matèria de refugi*" (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015b)— and it is therefore necessary to define what is meant by reception and refuge. To support its reception policy, the City has created a website with the same name —Barcelona Ciutat Refugi. This digital platform constitutes an essential tool for the *Ajuntament* to develop its space in the hospitality moral economy: it is a privileged space for expressing and claiming a set of norms and values that define the conception of the "refuge city". It is then the policy of "good neighbourliness" that is put forward, as explained in the paragraph below, taken from the Barcelona Ciutat Refugi platform:

“Participating does not just mean giving, it means, above all, being part of. In that sense, the participation model that "Barcelona, Refuge City" promotes is one that follows the logic of good neighbourliness and small acts of kindness. The main aim is that refugees can build a small social network, like all of us, and that they can integrate into the city as one more neighbour. Being supportive and welcoming means letting these people be a part of our day to day lives” (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015c).

This paragraph is particularly emblematic of the City's hospitality conception. The *Ajuntament* explains here both what it means to be welcoming, and then how this hospitality is to be achieved. For this institution, being welcoming means the ability of everyone to let the foreigner be part of his/her daily life. The welcoming citizen must allow the exile to find a "social network" above all, by carrying out with him a whole series of ordinary actions that are "small acts of kindness": "go for a coffee", or "go for a walk and help getting to know the city" (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015c). We are dealing here with a very localised concept of hospitality. The City Council invites the inhabitants to act on their own individual scale, both temporal —in their daily life— and geographic —in their neighbourhood: “[...] we invite you to participate, especially in the area closest to your everyday life. [...] Closeness can help to meet one of the most important shortcomings of these people who have come to our house, that of having a close social network” (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015c).

Here, wanting to help with the migrants’ situation in Europe does not necessarily mean carrying out large, spectacular or particularly costly actions. One of the reasons for this reception’s relocation is that many Barcelonians expressed their willingness to help refugees in

Greece, following the dramatic images relayed by the media. The City Council then stressed: "Making Barcelona a refuge city means making a city that is welcoming towards the people who are still to come as well as those who are already here" (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015c). For several years, the city had been receiving refugees from Ukraine and Honduras, for example, but who did not fit the "Syrian refugee" label portrayed in the media. The hospitality participation model proposed by the City therefore refocuses the citizens' ambitions on the local level, and on the contrary emphasises the accessibility and simplicity of this hospitality, by promoting constitutive values of a morality of care based on internal and personal sentiments ("kindness", "closeness", "close social network", "small gesture", "supportive") (Gilligan, 1982).

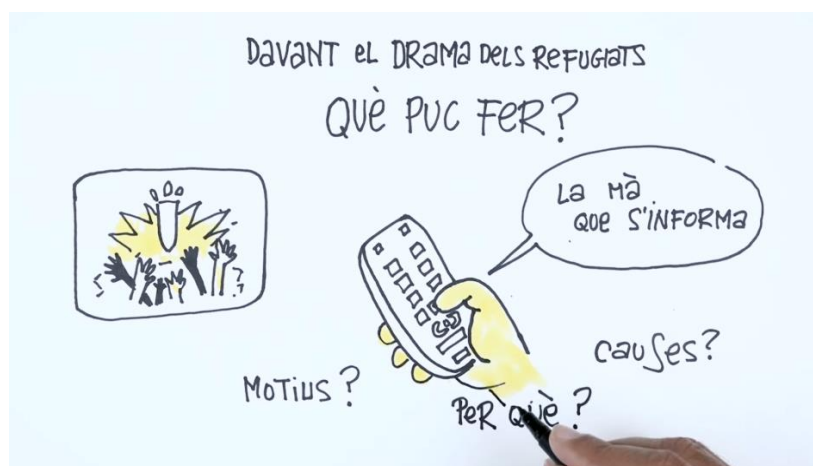
This policy of "good neighbourliness" to conceive the migrants' reception can be analysed as a part of a "specific public philosophy of immigration" in Catalonia based on citizenship (Zapata-Barrero, 2006: 191). The first Citizenship and Immigration Plan (2005-2008) is emblematic in this, through the creation of the "residence citizenship" concept: "Residence becomes the basic criterion for defining the concept of citizenship and, consequently, the beneficiary of public policies"⁴ (Zapata-Barrero, 2011: 71). The concept is therefore simple: as soon as you live in the Catalan territory and have registered in the *padrón*⁵, you are a Catalan citizen just like a native. On Barcelona's scale, this same philosophy of integration into everyday life and of non-distinction between foreigners and inhabitants is found in the City Council's governance system of migration issues, based on the interculturality concept. This notion is established on three key principles: equity (which translates notably into equal access to the city's services for all residents), the recognition of diversity as an asset for all, and the importance of positive interaction between residents (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2010). These principles do not take into account the question of the legal status of each person: a person in an irregular situation can thus access city services on the same basis as a Catalan, required that he/she provides proof of residence in Barcelona. The concept of hospitality as defined in the City of Barcelona's reception plan must therefore be seen in the continuity of these specific local migration policies, which already established proximity between the newcomer and the inhabitant.

⁴ Personal translation from French to English.

⁵ The *padrón municipal* is the register in which all the inhabitants of a municipality have been registered since 1858. A residence permit is not required to register in the *padrón*. Registering in the *padrón* - the *empadronament* - allows access to the health system, schooling and even regularisation.

b) Learning to welcome: awareness-raising policy and solidarity-based "good practices"

After defining what it means to be welcoming, the Ajuntament's reception plan proposes to citizens to put it into practice. The Plan's axis on citizen information and participation is materialized through the "Take part" tab (*participa*) of the Barcelona Ciutat Refugi platform, divided into four parts: "Civic space", "10 ideas for getting started", "Post-it space", and "Messages from ordinary citizens". The page "10 ideas to get started" is particularly interesting to observe the practices and modalities of action proposed to the inhabitants to achieve this hospitality. The user is immediately invited to watch a video co-created by the *Ajuntament* of Barcelona, *LaFede.cat*⁶ and *Fons Català de Cooperació al Desenvolupament*⁷. The video retraces the journey of a Catalan citizen's hand, from the hand watching the news on television and seeing images of the "refugee drama", wondering what they can do, to the hand reaching out to the Other: it is a hand that first did not know what to do but learned it —literally, with "the hand that learned to give"—, following the recommendations proposed on the page "10 ideas to get started".



Screenshot of the video "Dóna un cop de mà! #BCNCiutatRefugi":

"In the face of the refugee drama, what can I do?"

⁶ It is a gathering of more than a hundred Catalan organisations mobilized for more "global justice" (political, economic, social, etc.). More information on www.lafede.cat.

⁷ Fons Català de Cooperació al Desenvolupament is a grouping of Catalan city councils and municipal institutions that earmark part of their funds for actions in support of disadvantaged populations abroad.



Screenshot of the video "Dóna un cop de mà! #BCNCiutatRefugi":
 "The hand that learns to give"



Screenshot of the video "Dóna un cop de mà! #BCNCiutatRefugi":
 "The claiming hand" and "The fighting hand"

The video ends with the image of an outstretched hand accompanied by the following sentence: "Give a hand. A welcoming municipality is people reaching out"⁸ (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015a). This awareness-raising tool is particularly inclusive, as the internet user can easily project himself/herself into the initial situation of the hand in front of the television, an inclusion accentuated by the use of the first person — "què puc fer?" meaning "what can I do?". We then find the idea of the simplicity and accessibility of the reception, accentuated by the colloquial expression "giving a hand" — "dóna un cop de mà". The video summarizes in two minutes the ten recommendations of the City Council to act as a welcoming citizen. Expressed in the imperative, a mode of conjugation that expressly pushes for action, here are

⁸ In Catalan in the video: "Dóna un cop de mà. Un municipi acollidor és gent que dóna la mà.". Personal translation in English from the author.

some examples of proposed actions: “Accept migrations”; “Call on the various political parties and public authorities to press ahead for getting refugees relocated and attended to”; “Collaborate with the organisations and platforms denouncing the migration policies of the EU”; “Get trained, inform and make people in your circle aware”; “Call for your taxes to be used for international protection and refugee policies”; or “Offer to assist refugees”. The municipality mobilizes here a whole network of actors and associations to support and supervise the citizen in this process of learning how to welcome people.

Finally, one “idea” particularly caught our attention: “Accept migrations. They are an inherent part of the human condition. No one abandons or flees their country without good reason. Remember the Catalans who were forced into exile and emigration between 1939 and 1975 and think about the people who are leaving now” (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015a). Here, a parallel is directly expressed between Catalan migratory history and contemporary history, Catalonia having been a refuge for more than 300,000 Spaniards fleeing the rise of Franco's troops (Consell Municipal de Barcelona, 2017; Ledesma, 1999). Following the fall of Barcelona in 1939, almost half a million people crossed the Pyrenees and sought refuge in France where they were received in excruciating conditions (Beauchemin & Ichou, 2016; Dreyfus-Armand, 2016). The municipality plays here on the collective memory of exile, very present among the inhabitants of Barcelona, and seeks to create a feeling of proximity, and therefore of solidarity, between the Barcelonian and today's exile who is living the same situation as the Catalan ancestors.

1.2 The Generalitat values promotion: facts, laws and politics

In Catalonia, and therefore in Barcelona, there is a second major political institution: the *Generalitat de Catalunya*. We have chosen to take a close look at its welcoming refugees policy, especially since this institution claims exclusive competences in terms of in the area of immigrants first reception, by virtue of the Autonomy Statute of Catalonia (Zapata-Barrero, 2011).

a) Reception as a democratic duty and for the respect of human rights

The Generalitat de Catalunya has in fact created its own migrant's reception policy, distinct from the Ajuntament's one. While the first had a definition of hospitality based on feelings of closeness and solidarity —via “good neighbourliness” and “kindness” of small everyday gestures—, the *Generalitat* offers a hospitality model conceived as a socio-political

duty based on absolute respect of democratic values. We have chosen to focus mainly on the Committee for the Reception of Refugees in Catalonia and its productions to analyse the *Generalitat's* hospitality conceptual framework, as this Committee concentrates almost all of these institution's reception measures.

Following the Catalan government agreement of September 22nd, 2015, the *Generalitat* created the Committee for the Reception of Refugees in Catalonia - *Comitè per a l'Acollida de les Persones Refugiades* (CRR). It is a transversal coordination body between the Catalan government, local administrations and social organizations working with asylum seekers and refugees. This Committee has produced numerous documents explaining the contemporary migratory situation in Europe, thus legitimizing its own creation. These documents expose the question of reception and hospitality from a specific angle: human rights respect and responsibility, as shown in the following extract from the Refugee.gen.cat platform⁹, a virtual space intended both for refugees and for Catalan citizens:

“We are pleased to welcome you to Catalonia, a country in solidarity with the people, committed to the promotion of human rights and building peace. [...] Catalonia wishes to take decisions and assume its responsibilities. The defence, protection, reception and support of people arriving in Catalonia are essential elements in the construction of a country that can freely decide its future and they constitute a duty for all democratic countries; a country committed to the needs of people, especially the most disadvantaged, and a generator of opportunities for all; a respectful welcoming country that promotes its culture and values [...]. We invite you to contribute to making Catalonia a welcoming and democratic country, in the vanguard of the defence and protection of human rights in a Europe where everybody lives in peace and can enjoy full citizen status” (Generalitat de Catalunya, s. d.-c).

In this paragraph we find the values of solidarity, aid to the most deprived and the promotion of cultural diversity, as could be read in the *Ajuntament's* discourses. Only here the regular references to democracy and human rights stand out clearly, when they were almost

⁹ This website was one of the Committee's production objectives and was designed "as a useful tool for giving information about and disseminating the resources available to administrations and institutions alike for citizens as a whole and especially refugee" (Generalitat de Catalunya, s. d.-d). It is currently inaccessible or closed. Last Consulted in September 2019.

absent from the City Council's words. For the *Generalitat*, being welcoming is above all a “duty”, a “responsibility”. This responsibility would be due to the democratic status of Catalonia, which, as a democracy, is "committed" to respecting human rights and protecting peace. Within this framework, Catalonia would necessarily be obliged to respect international conventions such as the Geneva Convention of 1951, which establishes the duty to protect every person seeking refuge on its territory. But, since Catalonia is not a State, it is not a signatory to the Geneva Convention: it is Spain, as a signatory, which imposes compliance with this Convention throughout its territory. However, it is interesting to note, in the context of Catalonia's demand for political autonomy, that the *Generalitat* does not specify this detail and therefore tends to adopt the same arguments based on logics of accountability as the European states: the *Generalitat* wants Catalonia, like any other state, to respect its democratic commitments. The mention “a country that can freely decide its future” is here a clear reference to the “right to decide” —“*el dret a decidir*” in Catalan—, which is one of the main arguments of the Independence movement in Catalonia and also constitutes a Catalan Parliament resolution (Catalunya, 2013; Ridao, 2014). In this context, we can then assume that promoting the refugees' reception became here another tool for the Catalan government for legitimising its own statehood.

The independence aspect apart, the same democratic and justice rhetoric can be found in the short leaflets aimed at Catalan residents, as shown in the extract below:



Image extracted from the *Generalitat* prospectus entitled “Acogiendo personas refugiadas. ¿Cómo puedo ayudar?” (*Generalitat de Catalunya, s. d.-a*)

This image is representative of the *Generalitat* welcoming conception. Catalan residents are represented here —a diverse group to the left, and a white family to the right— wondering what they can do to help welcoming exiles (*¿Cómo puedo ayudar?*). Here, the institution explains to its citizens that welcoming refugees makes them people who "respect human rights and improve the quality of democracy"¹⁰. In this sense, the values promoted by the *Generalitat* are essentially oriented towards a morality of justice, based on more external and rational values ("improving democracy", "respecting human rights" and the international commitments Spain have taken) than the internal and the relational-emotional ones emphasized by the *Ajuntament* ("kindness", "closeness", etc) (Flanagan & Jackson, 1987; Gilligan, 1982). This duty of welcome - a democratic obligation to respect human rights - is also legitimate according to a second type of argument that was also found in the *Ajuntament's* speeches: the memory of exile.

"In Catalonia we are conscious of the historical debt owed to the international community by the thousands of Catalan men and women obliged to go into exile during the Civil War and the Franco era [...]. [The humanitarian crisis] is felt especially here at home, where we still vividly remember the Civil War and the subsequent dictatorship, as a consequence of which many Catalans had to take the long road to exile. In the light of this reality, [...] Catalonia wishes to take decisions and assume its responsibilities." (Generalitat de Catalunya, s. d.-d)

This extract from the Refugee.gen.cat platform exposes a rhetoric which directly links the situation of the Catalans, and more generally of the Spanish people fleeing Franco's regime in the 1930s, and the situation of contemporary exiles arriving in Europe. Creating a cycle of donation/counter-donation (Mauss, [1925] 2007), being welcoming today means repaying your "historic debt" to the international community by welcoming foreigners into your home. Being hospitable then signifies taking one's "responsibilities".

b) Awareness policy: informing about migration facts and host societies' obligations

To transmit these values —democratic duty, historical responsibility, respect for human rights— the *Generalitat* has thought of a whole range of measures in its reception policy to raise public awareness. The CRR thus has an "Awareness-raising and education for

¹⁰ Author's personal translation of the Spanish sentence written above on the leaflet: "*Respetamos los derechos humanos y mejoramos la calidad de la democracia*".

development” working group —*Sensibilització i educació per al desenvolupament*. The objectives of this working group are numerous, but one part is of particular interest to us: the production of “documents used to build a communication campaign for the entire population” (Generalitat de Catalunya, s. d.-b)¹¹. Among these documents, we find the prospectus cited above, which can be compared in the intention to the “10 ideas to get started” and to the video “*Dóna un cop de mà*” by the *Ajuntament*. There is a question asked in the first person singular —here “how can I help?”, and no longer “what can I do?” —, then a set of recommendations for taking action, some of which also being formulated in the imperative: “give or rent accommodation to these [refugee] people”; “Register for the Mentorship Program of the Generalitat de Catalunya”; “And also collaborate with NGOs” (Generalitat de Catalunya, s. d.-a). The same particularly inclusive rhetorical processes can thus be observed as in the Barcelona City Council awareness-raising speeches. A notable difference is still the type of actions highlighted. Here, the welcoming citizen is the one who enables the refugee to meet his/her first needs —to obtain accommodation and work—, and who then becomes involved in a second stage in an official structure —public or associative— in order to further this aid. The *Ajuntament* proposed a much more militant form of hospitality to the inhabitants, based on a logic similar to an associative advocacy: a “fighting” and “claiming” hand, putting pressure on the public authorities, demonstrating, and so on. We can find here a trace of the Mayor Ada Colau’s militant career —and part of her municipal team too— who had participated in many social struggles before arriving in *Ajuntament*, a career that is a basis of her political representations as an “activist” and a “humanitarian” (Castelo Heymann, 2018).

The *Generalitat*'s awareness-raising policy then pursues a second objective: to inform citizens about migration and host societies’ obligations. Among the documents of the “Awareness and Education for Development” working group, there is a note entitled “Some key ideas about refugees” (“*Idees clau al voltant del refugi*”). The document sets out in 10 points the main issues at stake in asylum right. These include a definition of refugee status, an explanation of forced population movements, and details of the 1951 Geneva Convention. This document allows us to see how the *Generalitat*'s reception approach is much less focused on sentimental values than the *Ajuntament*'s one: here the ideas are above all a succession of figures and a reminder of the laws. Only the last point of the document provides a more subjective vision of hospitality, mobilising the values of solidarity and empathy:

¹¹ In Catalan in the original text: “*documents que són la base d’una campanya de comunicació pública adreçada al conjunt de la població*”.

“X. The best way of collaborating with refugees is to facilitate their inclusion in our society. This entails recognizing refugees as citizens with full and equal rights in our towns and cities, as it is in the public arena where human relations are built through everyday coexistence and mutual interests. The public spaces of our towns and cities facilitate the creation of bonds of empathy and solidarity.” (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2016)

Finally, it is possible to consider that transmitting certain values is also to prevent others from spreading. Indeed, both the *Generalitat* and the *Ajuntament* have assigned a part of their welcoming policy to the fight against prejudices and xenophobia. The *Generalitat* explains in the previous document from the CRR calling for a “special sensitivity among opinion leaders, political leaders and the media to prevent acts of xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia” (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2016). On the other hand, the *Ajuntament* proposes in its “10 ideas to get started” to “challenge rumors and stereotypes”, in particular by mobilizing a resource that the City had already developed in 2010, the Barcelona Anti-rumours Network, a tool that had already proved its worth in the framework of the City's intercultural policy (Zapata-Barrero, 2017). By proposing certain values and standards of hospitality and by officially rejecting others, these awareness-raising and education programs of Catalan institutions thus bring to light the framing challenges (Gilbert & Henry, 2012) played out around the public problem of the so-called “migrant crisis” and the reception of refugees.

2. When citizens dictate values

We have seen that Catalan institutions, both the Barcelona City Council and the *Generalitat*, have partly relied on an awareness-raising and training aspect in their various reception policies. Both have developed very active communication strategies, built a certain vision of the exiled populations' reception and therefore defined the figure of the “welcoming” citizen by putting forward specific values (good neighbourliness, kindness, solidarity, or even democratic duty and respect for human rights). Each has thus set up a “humanitarian government” by deploying sentimental and moral values to mobilize the population in favour of their policies of hospitality: indeed, “moral sentiments have become an essential force in contemporary politics” (Fassin, 2012: 1), because they serve as a criterion for legitimizing practices, and generating strong support among listeners, particularly when it comes to policies concerning “the poor and the dominated”. However, at the same time, the Catalan inhabitants

are often presented in these institutions' speeches as those who would have pushed them to act, through a strong mobilization and numerous requests for commitment: would the institutions not have taken on board the values finally first promoted by the citizens?

2.1. They would be at the origin of the hospitality duty...

Indeed, it would be interesting to focus for a moment on the Barcelonians' image the institutions draw up. In a somewhat paradoxical way, the *Ajuntament* and the *Generalitat* each thought of programs to raise awareness of the hospitality challenges intended for inhabitants, even though they recognise their intense and first mobilisation.

a) The Barcelonian, a naturally "welcoming" citizen?

In the declaration of March 30, 2016, the CRR stresses being "grateful to the citizens of Catalonia for their constant expressions of solidarity" (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2016), when the *Ajuntament* explains it created the Barcelona Ciutat Refugi platform "in order to channel [the citizens] offers received from the start" (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015c). In other words, a citizen dynamic that pre-existed these reception policies and that needed to be organised. Various respondents also highlighted the fact that these initiatives came after the numerous requests from civil society in favour of reception, as presented by one of the *Programa de Refugiats*' managers in the Red Cross Catalan branch —*la Creu Roja*: "The first thing that happened in Barcelona was that there were a lot of demonstrations, a hundred thousand people demonstrated for the right of refugees. There was a lot of pressure from the citizens. So, the Catalan government wanted to give an answer to this situation and they created the CRR" (Respondent 1, 2018). Afterwards, this citizen pressure could serve to legitimize these reception policies. According to a founding member of the Casa Nostra Casa Vostra movement —which is at the origin of the biggest European demonstration in favour of welcoming migrants¹² — this popular pressure "was good for them [politics], to have the pressure from the street, they were trying to develop politics in this area, to put money in it, and so they needed this strength from the street to realize these politics" (Respondent 2, 2018). The City Council itself seeks to highlight this civic pressure, by posting messages received by its residents who wanted to help on its Barcelona Ciutat Refugi platform. According to a person responsible for the Barcelona Ciutat Refugi plan, the *Ajuntament* had received "hundreds and

¹² The event, which took place in February 2017, would have brought together at least 160,000 people in support of welcoming migrants (Congostrina & Mouzo Quintáns, 2017).

hundreds of messages" from citizens (Respondent 3, 2018), before the City Council announced its welcome policy in autumn 2015. A person from *Federació Catalana de Voluntariat Social* (FCVS)—a platform that gathers volunteer requests from citizens in Catalonia—describes it as an “avalanche of offers from the general population” (Respondent 6, 2020).

Thus, it would seem that Barcelonians, or even Catalan citizens in general, are spontaneously welcoming. This almost natural obviousness of the hospitality duty is an element that regularly came up in interviews with various actors in the migrants’ reception field in Barcelona. This spontaneous willingness to welcome is all the more questionable since, unlike cities such as Paris or Berlin which have experienced the presence of makeshift camps in public space, the Barcelonians were not confronted with the existence of suffering exiled populations at the foot of their buildings and therefore knew no compelling need to act to resolve the situation. In Paris, proximity to migrant camps yet was one of the main factors explaining the mobilisation of citizens engaged in collectives (Coutant, 2018; Hombert, 2021). Two explanations could then be given to analyse this reception spontaneity among the inhabitants of Barcelona. The first is that they would be convinced of the immigration merits for their society:

“Most people are welcoming people, because we have a recent history in Spain in this area. Maybe 20 or 30 years ago, we didn’t have any refugee or migrant in Barcelona, we had 2% of immigrated people in the early 1980s, and now we have 25% in Barcelona, and this has been a successful story about welcoming these people, making our economy grow. We had the highest rate of migration and at the same time the lowest rate of unemployment. So, it’s a success, and people have learned it from our history.” (Respondent 2, 2018)

Although our respondent's figures are approximate, it appears that Catalonia has become a welcoming land for foreigners since the late 1990s. Catalonia is in fact “the Autonomous Community of Spain which received the largest number of immigrants” from 1998 to 2009 (Franco i Guillén, 2011: 84). In the past, this region had experienced only waves of internal migrations of Spaniards. Catalonia continues to be an attractive region and indeed has enjoyed an unemployment rate below the national average for many years (Instituto de Estadística de Cataluña, 2020).

A second explanation, more frequent in our respondents’ answers, would be the memory of welcome and exile, which would stay strongly present in the Catalan collective

memory. References to the *Retirada* are indeed frequent in media and political discourses. For Maria, one of the co-founders of the citizen movement Barcelona Aid Refugee, the sufferings experienced during Franco's regime explain the importance of Catalan citizens' awareness of the current refugee situation:

“Catalunya is a very welcoming region of Spain, in terms of human rights I see people are very active, they are very aware [...]. Also, because they suffered during the Franco's regime, you know, they suffered in their own skins, they know what it is to leave its country, to go where no one speaks your language, they suffered repression, so I think also because of that they are very aware of the importance of liberty”. (Respondent 4, 2018)

This argument is also shared by Angel Miret i Serra, coordinator of the Committee for the Reception of Refugees in Catalonia and associate professor at the Political Science Department of the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona:

“After the civil war, the population [the Catalans] left. About 500,000 inhabitants left for France, Mexico, Venezuela, so there is a memory of parents, grandparents who left to be exiled. [...] The Catalan population has this very important feeling, and not necessarily just on the left [of the political spectrum]. I talk to a lot of people, from the left, from the right, from the centre, and they feel that they have to welcome people who have left their countries for political reasons, for reasons of war.” (Respondent 5, 2018)

Not surprisingly, this explanatory rhetoric of the Committee's coordinator can be found in the outreach documents produced by the same body. But what is interesting is that this argument is mobilized by all types of actors encountered, from political institutions to citizens' movements and associations. As this observation seems to be widely shared, this would attest to the significant role of the exile collective memory in the Barcelonians' mobilization.

b) The citizen mobilizations' values

The specificities of the Catalan situation and history can therefore be important explanations for the Barcelonians' mobilisation in favour of the migrants' reception. It would then be relevant to observe which values they themselves choose to put forward. To do this, we

began by first analysing the citizens' messages published by the *Ajuntament* on the Barcelona Ciutat Refugi platform, in the section "Messages from ordinary citizens". The simple title of this section is already revealing the City Council's communication strategy, which chooses to present these particular citizens as "ordinary": the figure of "the man in the street" is highlighted, in opposition to committed activists —and therefore potentially politically oriented—, or experts on migration issues. Here again, the municipality stresses the accessibility of this opinion: everyone could be welcoming. It is clear though how much this source of content can therefore imply representation bias —particularly through the selection of messages in the first place, only a dozen out of several thousands. However, the Barcelona Ciutat Refugi platform remains the only way to access these citizen statements, directly addressed to the institutions at the beginning of the highly publicised "refugee crisis". Here are a few excerpts:

“I'm 39 and not working at the moment, which makes it difficult for me to help financially, but what I can do is offer my services as a pastry cook, cook and seamstress, plus all the warmth and affection of my family [...].”

“I'd like to help all those I can. I can't believe what's happening and I think we all have to give a hand because this situation is intolerable.”

“I'm a teacher and there are several of us from different schools who feel a duty to collaborate any way we can with the #ciudadesrefugio initiative [...].”

“I'm writing to express my solidarity with the refugees from Syria [...]. I want to collaborate with the refugees [...], they won't go short of food, affection, clothes, hygiene, but, above all, understanding.”

“[...] Though it hurts me, my circumstances will not allow me to take in these poor people, who are only doing what they can to escape from hell, just as many of our ancestors did [...]. I'm confident that, between us all, we can demonstrate something as simple as the fact we are all people and the human spirit is not lost.”(Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015d)

Here we find the values of solidarity, the exile memory, the feeling of the duty to welcome or to act (“we all have to give a hand”, “duty”), or even “kindness” and the “everyday gestures” (“offer my services as a pastry cook, cook and seamstress, plus all the warmth and affection of my family” or “they won't go short of food, affection, clothes, hygiene, but, above all, understanding”).

A second source of information on the reception civic values is the manifesto written by Casa Nostra Casa Vostra. This organization is officially an association, but it began as a citizen movement bringing together people from various backgrounds who were not necessarily specialized in migration issues. This initiative, in addition to having been at the origin of the largest European demonstration in favour of reception, also produced a manifesto in 2016, supported by nearly 200 organisations. Aimed at Catalan institutions, this document was signed by more than 121,703 citizens, demanding the development of local welcoming policies for the refugees' reception. This significant number of signatures —and therefore adherence to its contents— allows us to consider this manifesto to be a significant source of opinions and values expressed, or at least supported, by Catalan citizens. Among the values presented in the document, we find solidarity and equality among all (*"treballar per la igualtat de les persones"*), respect for human rights (*"Treballem per la protecció dels drets humans"; "Defensar el dret a la lliure circulació de les persones, tal com queda recollit a l'article 13 de la Declaració Universal dels Drets Humans"*) or references to the memory of exile (*"Catalunya ha estat sempre terra d'inclusió, però no podem oblidar que en molts moments també hem estat rebuts en altres terres."*) (Casa Nostra Casa Vostra, 2017). All of these elements are also found in publications by collectives of inhabitants on social networks —mainly Facebook— or on their blogs, such as those of Barri Obert Gràcia or Sarrià Sant Gervasi Refugi, two citizen groups founded in 2016 to foster welcoming practices in Barcelona : “[...] refugees' reception is a process in which human rights are respected” (*"l'acollida de refugiats sigui un procés en que es respectin els Drets Humans"*) (Sarrià Sant Gervasi Refugi, 2017a); “In our district we have vulnerable people who were chosen as refugees in other European territories” (*"Al nostre district tenim persones vulnerables que van ser escollides com a refugiats a d'altres territoris europeus"*) (Barri Obert Gràcia, 2017). These initial observations therefore allow us to note a real similarity and continuity between the institutional discourses values and those of Catalan citizens, the latter calling as much as the former for "Catalonia to be a land of welcome" and "Barcelona to be a city of refuge" (*"Volem que Catalunya sigui terra d'acollida"* and *"que Barcelona sigui una veritable ciutat-refugi"*) (Barri Obert Gràcia, 2016). In any case, the important Catalan mobilization seems to be in line with trends in Spanish public opinion: 83%

of the population is in favour of receiving refugees, making Spain the fifth most welcoming country in Europe (Kantar Public Brussels, 2018). This similarity between the values promoted by the institutions and those of the mobilised inhabitants can however be explained as the product of two non-negligible factors: the socially imposed nature of these values in Western democracies and the socio-professional proximity of the respondents. Concerning the first factor, we can indeed understand that public authorities and engaged inhabitants promote similar values in that these latter are socially expected to be used when it comes to deal with these subjects in Western public and democratic societies. A discourse displaying values of hatred, rejection, and which is openly xenophobic would even be criminally condemned in Spain. Then, concerning the second factor, a real socio-professional proximity exists between the inhabitants we met and the political staff currently in office, especially in *Ajuntament*: both are on the left of the political spectrum, and both participating or coming from the associative and militant world¹³.

2. 2. ... and are the safeguards

However, it would be simplistic to believe in a perfect transmission of the hospitality values between Catalan citizens and institutions. Of course, we were able to see at first how close the content of these speeches was. Added to the very strong and early mobilization of the Barcelonians, this allows us to question the direction of these values' circulation, by wondering if the institutions would not have rather appropriated the citizens' rhetorics, and not the other way round. Secondly, however, gaps are emerging between citizens' voices and institutional words. Indeed, although part of civil society wishes to be hospitable, Barcelonians are nevertheless capable of taking a critical stance on the reception models proposed by political organisations.

a) Institutional values criticism

Several collectives and citizens' movements openly denounce the failings of the City and the *Generalitat* in the newcomers reception in Barcelona. The Acogida Digna network — a national citizen network active in Barcelona— describes the situation in the Catalan capital in September 2018 as follows: "While we are preparing media receptions for boats such as Open Arms and Aquarius and we have awarded ourselves the title of Refuge City or Republic

¹³ For instance, before becoming mayor, Ada Colau was the spokesperson of the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH), et Ignasi Calbó, Barcelona Ciutat Refugi programme first director, previously worked at Oxfam and Action Against Hunger.

of welcome, hundreds of people are arriving in the city with the help of various entities [...]. We have detected that many people are left out of this first phase of reception and are left on the streets"¹⁴ (Red Acogida Digna, 2018). The authors highlight here a form of migrant non-reception, showing the limits of the self-proclaimed statutes of “city-refuge” for Barcelona, or of “Republic of welcome” for Catalonia. This form of criticism can also be pursued through a mocked reappropriation of the institutions’ values, as illustrated by the two tweets below:



Screenshot of Emergencia Frontera Sur Barcelona's Twitter feed published on August 8, 2019

After denouncing the migrants’ situation in Barcelona —expulsion from a squat called the Tancada Migrant, putting people back on the streets, “voluntary” returns of minors, 3 to 5 months of waiting to sleep in a public hostel—, the citizen collective Emergencia FS Bcn mobilizes the hashtags *#volemacolir*¹⁵ and *#BCNCiutatRefugi*, highlighting the gaps between the reality experienced by migrants and the political ambitions displayed.

In the second tweet above, the hashtag *#racismeinstitucional* is used. Institutional racism is indeed a recurrent argument in citizens' speeches to describe the (non-)welcome given to exiled people in Barcelona. It is not, however, specific to the contemporary situation of asylum seekers and refugees, but is part of a longer temporality of struggles for foreigners and undocumented migrants’ rights in Barcelona, which became particularly structured from the early 2000s (Varela Huerta, 2007). Indeed, the city has known and still knows many squats and

¹⁴ Personal translation from Castillan to English.

¹⁵ *#Volemacolir* is the emblematic hashtag of the great February 2017 demonstration in favour of the refugees’ reception in Barcelona, expression then widely used by politicians and institutions.

occupations of places by undocumented migrants and precarious foreign workers, often supported and helped by district neighbours or associative activists. In new squats, such as the Tancada Migrant started in April 2018, or Casa Àfrica opened in winter 2018, the claims of people in asylum procedure are part of the broader framework of those of foreigners in a so-called irregular situation. Solidary inhabitants, very present around these initiatives, therefore propose a different vision of the reception in Barcelona and oppose other values to it, as highlighted by the testimony of Esteban and Manuel, two neighbours of Tancada Migrant:

"We will stand up, make a neighbourhood call and fill in the Tancada with solidary neighbours," says Esteban. Manuel, another neighbour who works with immigrants, goes further: "It is an act of hypocrisy to come and take a picture in the beginning, and now the first government action is to evict refugees. These people are sorry that Colau took advantage of the refugees when they cast their votes and now, when no one speaks, cast them out. It is institutional racism" says Manuel."¹⁶ (Vila, 2019)

In addition to the notable support of "solidary neighbours", this interview allows us to observe the interpretation these citizens make of the *Ajuntament's* welcoming policy, seen as "hypocritical", intended to "take advantage of the refugees" for electoral purposes and then abandon them, thus achieving "institutional racism". This is a far cry from the policy of "good neighbourliness", the "kindness of small everyday gestures" and respect for human rights.

b) Proposals of new values and reappropriation for the City?

But the rhetorics of citizen mobilizations do not stop at criticizing the institutions' stated and "hypocritical" values. Indeed, they mobilize others, the first being the non-illegality of individuals. This argument is regularly found in the solidarity residents' associations publications, such as in the declaration of Barri Obert Gràcia creation ("*no existentix una persona il.legal*") (Barri Obert Gràcia, 2017) or on the Twitter threads, with the hashtag *#CapPersonaEsIllegal* — "no one is illegal" in Catalan. Like the denunciation of institutional racism, this claim for the legality of all human beings is a recurrent argument which falls within the more general framework of struggles for precarious foreigners' rights, and in particular those of undocumented migrants, appealing to a "common humanity" which would give everyone the same rights (Blin, 2008). To this is added the right to free movement and the right

¹⁶ Personal translation from Catalan to English.

to housing. The tweet below from a citizen collective, Suport Casa Àfrica, is particularly illustrative in this respect:



Screenshot of the Suport Casa Àfrica's tweet, published on January 11, 2019

A second major value is omnipresent in the supporting citizens' discourses: the question of dignity. This value is absolutely central in the welcoming rhetoric of the City of Paris, but is particularly absent from the Ajuntament speeches, and even from the Generalitat (Hombert, 2020). In the Catalan capital, the inhabitants have truly taken hold of this register. The calls to a “decent welcome” (*acollida digna*) or to a “dignified life” (*vida digna*) are thus permanent: “to demand the reception and decent treatment of refugees (Barris Refugi Barcelona, 2016), “guaranteeing a decent life [...] for them the right to a decent life” (Barri Obert Gràcia, 2016), “if the authorities do not have concrete solutions, we the neighbours, must be the ones who take complementary solidarity measures in order to achieve a dignified reception” (Sarrià Sant Gervasi Refugi, 2017b)¹⁷. The hashtags *#acollidadigna* or *#acogidadigna* are also particularly

¹⁷ All of these latter quotes are personal translations from Catalan to English.

used within these support networks, as in the tweet above. This value claim constitutes a major difference with respect to institutional discourses, as the term "dignified" (*digna*) never appeared in the studied documents published between 2015 and 2018 (Ada Colau's Facebook publications, Municipal Council's debates, awareness-raising campaigns for residents). However, in the page dedicated to the 2019 World Refugee Day in the Barcelona Ciutat Refugi platform, a change is to be noted: "The objective is to continue working together to guarantee a dignified reception and fight against the criminalization of solidarity"¹⁸ (Barcelona Ciutat Refugi, 2019). Here we see the beginning of a reappropriation of citizen values and demands, with the expression "dignified welcome" and the denunciation of the "criminalization of solidarity", the latter point referring to the rescue NGOs boats in the Mediterranean and their captains who were then at risk of condemnation in Italy. The subject was particularly topical in 2019 Spring and Summer, and many associations and citizens' collectives were pressuring Catalan institutions to propose "safe ports" (*puertos seguros*) to receive these boats in the region.

3. Conclusion

In 2019, 9,429 people applied for asylum in Barcelona, an increase of 27% compared to 2018, according to SAIER figures ("La atención a personas", 2020). For this new populations' reception to go as smoothly as possible, we have seen how the Catalan institutions, both the *Ajuntament de Barcelona* and the *Generalitat*, have developed awareness-raising and education programs for the inhabitants in order to convince them of their hospitality policies merits. These organizations therefore propose "welcoming citizen" models, with specific values: the "good neighbour", who makes the exile participate in his/her daily life, and who has the "kindness" to make "small gestures" for him/her; the activist, who joins associations and urges institutions to develop welcoming policies; or the "democratic" citizen, who respects the hospitality duty due to his/her national history and his/her political commitments, and protects human rights.

However, political organizations are not the only ones to offer definitions of what a welcoming city should be. Civil society itself was particularly mobilized, even before the *Ajuntament* and the *Generalitat* formally proposed their own policies. Values communication started from this citizen pressure, first and continuous between 2015 and 2017 at least, that inspire awareness and education programs. Indeed, the latter demanded information, training

¹⁸ Personal translation from Spanish to English.

and the means to act on their scale to be welcoming. But Barcelonians are also the safeguards of these hospitality values: many inhabitants groups refuse to allow this welcoming ambition to stop at a simple political display, with an electoral aim. In the face of the situation experienced by exiled people arriving in the city, citizen movements then oppose to institutional models their own system of hospitality values, based on the legality of all individuals and the right to dignity. Finally, it is particularly interesting to observe a recent circulation of these latter values, from the supportive citizens towards the institutions, through the reappearance - certainly timid but notable - of this citizen vocable in the *Ajuntament* words.

Yet it seems necessary to us to raise in a final moment the existence of value systems opposed to hospitality. Barcelona, as everywhere else, has racist and xenophobic movements and there are therefore local dynamics against the exiles' reception, as the petition "Casa Nostra no és Casa Vostra!" can attest¹⁹. Also, for the first time, the far-right political party Vox entered the Catalan Parliament in February 2021, by obtaining 11 deputies, and became the fourth political force in the region (González, 2021). A political breakthrough often explained — among other factors— by their anti-independence position but also by a growing adherence to anti-migrant sentiments.

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¹⁹ "Casa Nostra No És Casa Vostra! No Tots Els Catalans Volem Acollir Refugiats" was a petition addressed to the Generalitat in 2017 by a group of "Catalan patriots" urging the institution not to welcome migrants, specifically from "Muslim countries" (Un Grup de Patriotes Catalans, 2017).

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