

Shantytowns in the City of Barcelona: Can Valero, La Perona and El Carmel

Ethnohistory Research Group on Shantytowns¹
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Presentation of the Study

The social history of the phenomenon of shantytowns in Barcelona throughout the 20th century represents an essential legacy for understanding the process of building the city. However, the fragmentary and scattered information that exists about the phenomenon and the recent disappearance of major shantytowns in the city, of their

names and memories, is evidence that their footprint has been undervalued in explaining the city's history.

For this reason, in late 2004 a research team of historians, anthropologists and geographers from the Universitat de Barcelona was formed, and we began the study entitled "Shantytowns in the City of Barcelona. Ethnohistorical Study of Three Cases: Can Valero, La Perona and El Carmel"² within the framework of the Ethnological Heritage Inventory of Catalonia (IPEC)

and in collaboration with the Institut Català d'Antropologia (ICA).

The object of study of this research is shantytowns understood as a process of informal appropriation of land to build substandard housing (without prior planning for the land, lacking infrastructure, built with wood, mud, brick and/or recycled materials) as a spontaneous response to a lack of accessible housing in urban areas. Starting from this premise, the research team proposed:



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- Creating a database inventory of the documentation found in the archives on the shantytown phenomenon in Barcelona in the 20th century.
- Analyzing the shantytown phenomenon in the city throughout the 20th century.
- Reconstructing the social history of three shantytowns: La Perona, Can Valero and El Carmel.
- Creating an oral collection of interviews with shantytown inhabitants.

Three historically and geographically well-differentiated shantytowns were chosen for the ethnographic study of the shantytown phenomenon. La Perona was chosen because it was one of the last shantytowns to disappear from the city in 1989 and because of the characteristics of the process of relocating its inhabitants. Can Valero was chosen because of its size; its slum dwelling population was the largest and most extensive of the city during the period of the Franco dictatorship up to its eradication in the 1970s. Finally, El Carmel was interesting because a large number of its inhabitants succeeded in being relocated within the same neighborhood through local struggle and neighborhood associations. We are aware that while searching the archives enabled us to contextualize

the different processes by which the three shantytowns were configured and disappeared, the three case studies could not serve, for the moment, to explain the global phenomenon of shantytowns in Barcelona in the 20th century. In this regard, we hope that our findings serve to motivate new studies reconstructing the uniqueness of other shantytowns that allow for a cross-disciplinary study to address the phenomenon globally.

The ethnographic study of a disappeared phenomenon, as is the case here, precludes the use of one of anthropology's fundamental methods: participant observation. To address this shortcoming, documentary and bibliographic research that helped us to contextualize and complete the use of oral history in reconstructing the three disappeared shantytowns was indispensable.

The first phase of the search for literature and compilation of primary and secondary documentation that was undertaken in 26 public and private archives³ enabled us to contextualize the phenomenon, learn about the existence and location of different shantytowns and understand how they were eradicated and how those affected were relocated in addition

to how public opinion about shantytowns was constructed and what were the municipal policies on intervention and the role of the church.⁴

During this first phase, conversations with archivists, historians, social workers, clergy and so on put us in contact with shanty dwellers and other specialists from which a network of interviewees was built. At the same time, surveying the different housing estates the shanty dwellers had been relocated to, visiting different neighborhood organizations and disseminating information leaflets about the research brought new interviewees into the network.

Although the archival search was ongoing throughout the study, the second phase was based mainly on obtaining oral information based on the lived experience of those who were there. For this reason, our main tool was in-depth interviews (92) and, to a lesser extent, focus groups (6). Two guides were produced, the one for shanty dwellers differing from the one for persons linked to the phenomenon, but these were flexible and adapted to the unique experience of each interviewee. This flexibility in the use of in-depth interviews allowed for a better channel of communication, characterized by the use of more eloquent statements and greater trust between researcher and interviewee. On more than one occasion a single interviewee was interviewed a number of times to delve more deeply into a specific topic relevant to the research. Usually a single person was interviewed, but in some cases two people participated. A total of 63 interviews were conducted with shanty dwellers and 29 with persons

Barcelona's Shantytowns, existing from the beginning of the 20th century until their virtual eradication in time for the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, were an urban phenomenon that played an important role in the city's social and urban development. By means of Ethnohistorical research methodology using archives, field research, oral history and databases, researchers have been able to reconstruct the social life in three shanty towns and analyse the importance of these districts in the history of Barcelona. This is a summary of the dissertation titled *Barraquisme. La ciutat (im)possible*. Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona, 2011.

El barraquisme a Barcelona, existent des de principis del segle xx fins a llur virtual eradicació a l'època dels Jocs Olímpics de Barcelona de 1992, fou un fenomen urbà que va jugar un important paper en el desenvolupament social i urbà de la ciutat. Mitjançant la metodologia de la recerca etnohistòrica utilitzant arxius, treball de camp, història oral i bases de dades, els investigadors van poder reconstruir la vida social en tres nuclis de barraques i analitzar-ne la importància en la història de Barcelona. Aquest article és un resum de la monografia *Barraquisme. La ciutat (im)possible*. (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2011).

Keywords: Shantytowns, Public housing, Neighbourhood associations, Social exclusion, Urban segregation

Paraules clau: barraquisme, habitatge públic, associacions veïnals, exclusió social, segregació urbana

linked to the phenomenon (27 on La Perona, 31 on Can Valero and 34 on El Carmel).

Below are three summaries corresponding to the reconstruction of the three shantytowns studied based on the oral, documentary and bibliographic sources compiled. Although in the future we plan to continue analyzing the phenomenon to derive new findings, we will finish this paper by providing some of the most important conclusions drawn from this first study.

Brief History of the Can Valero Neighborhood of Montjuïc

Montjuïc, a hill in Barcelona, became a prominent place in the origin of the city's shantytowns. Its proximity to the city center and isolation due to its orography facilitated the setting up of a quarantine camp made up of 4,000 shanties in 1821 during a yellow fever epidemic (Carreras i Candi, 1916). The exploitation of Montjuïc's quarries reached its peak from 1870 on, and many of the stonemasons who worked there built shacks in the vicinity to be near their work, as can be seen in a

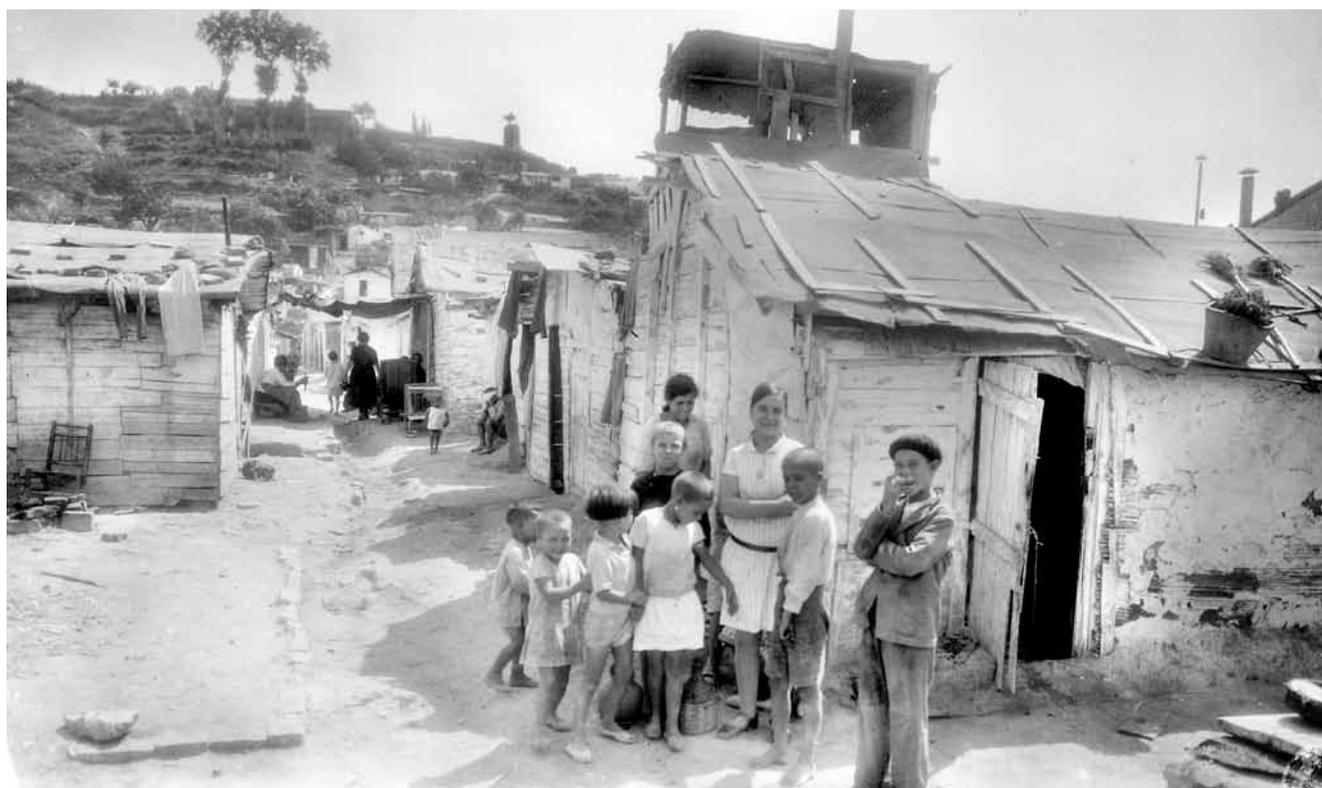
number of topographic maps from the period (Roca, 2002: 327).

In the 1900s, a host of small rustic holdings used to grow fruits and vegetables had cropped up on the north side of the hill. Their tenants were residents of the city and surrounding area who spent Sundays there and built small shacks to take shelter in and store tools (Fabre; Huertas Clavería, 1976).

The construction of the grounds for the second Barcelona International Exposition in 1929 required hun-



■ Aerial view of Montjuïc showing the extent of shanty building in the stretch between the Olympic Stadium and the castle in the late 1960s.



■ A group of shanties in the district of Magòria (Montjuïc) in the 1920s. ARXIU NACIONAL DE CATALUNYA, BRANGULÍ COLLECTION (PHOTOGRAPHERS).

dreds of workers, many of whom, coming from neighboring provinces and within Catalonia, found a city where popular housing was scarce and rental prices were beyond their means. A great number of them, following widespread practice on the hill, built their homes near their workplace, and as such a large number of shanties appeared scattered along its north face, some of them concentrated in neighborhoods like La Cadena, La Font de la Mamella, L'Animeta, La Magòria and El Polvorí, among other, more sparsely concentrated areas. It was in this decade that Montjuïc's shantytown grew to become the largest slum area in the city, going from 1,055 shanties in 1922 (Pons; Martino, 1929) to approximately 3,500 in 1928,⁵ shortly before the shacks that harmed the image of the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition were eradicated and their inhabitants relocated to four groups of Cases Barates (literally, "cheap houses" –affordable housing estates) provided by the Patronato Municipal de la Habitación de Barcelona (Housing Board

of Barcelona). A huge wall was built to conceal and isolate the remaining shanties on top of the hill for the same reason.

Valero Lecha i Plana, an innkeeper from inland Catalonia, opened a snack bar behind the stadium in 1929, and over time it gave its name to the settlement of shanties that grew up on the hill after the second great wave of immigration that began after the Spanish Civil War. Montjuïc would once again be a destination for those workers who, confronted with the lack of popular housing in the city, opted for shanty dwelling in areas where living in these constructions was already a reality.

Can Valero would become the name of a slum area that together with Els Tres Pins comprised the two large districts on the north slope of the hill, which were bounded by Montjuïc Castle to the south, the Passeig de l'Exposició to the north (along which the large wall isolating the area ran), the cemetery to

the west and the Passeig de Miramar to the east.

From the 1940s, newcomers to the shanty settlements would privately purchase the parcels and small shacks from the old garden owners, who because of the overcrowding of the shanties began letting go of their holdings. Others, in the gardeners' absence, would occupy the land. Over the 1940s and 1950s there were frequent scams in the sale of land on the hill, and the sales and transfers never had any formal legality. Once the land was acquired, the shack had to be built without the authorities noticing, since a census of the shanties was taken beginning in the 1950s and new buildings or expansions were prohibited, making it necessary to build them at night.

On the land we bought there was a summer lean-to shed that had been used for the garden. We used this structure to build the brick shanty. First we made a roof from leather-board and we gradually built the

brick walls from the inside to keep “the fuzz” from finding out we were building a shack. We bought the materials from the Can Valero bar, which gave them to us on credit. [...] Later we removed the external shed structure and were left with a two-room shack of about 40 meters. After adding facing and whitewashing we had to dirty up the walls so it looked old. (Interview from 12 April 2007. Code: [EN(RR)(CV) B.A.])

The settlement of shacks was totally lacking in basic urban infrastructure since the City of Barcelona had never made any sort of urban planning investment. There was no sewage system or running water; there was power at the entrance to the enclosure, which was where the few owner families who had a meter lived. The most common system for obtaining electricity was hooking up to the mains and sharing the cost of consumption among neighbors, which weakened the power supply. There were only seven public taps for a population that by 1957 had reached 29,958 people inhabiting 6,090 shanties in the neighborhoods on the hill (Duocastella, 1957). Supplying water became one of the main daily occupations of some Can Valero families. Others who were more fortunate had wells on their land:

We had two wells, one for washing and the other providing water for sale, because on the way from the Font de la Mamella to Casa Valero there was nowhere else to get water. As such, a lot of people came to buy water from us. We sold it at 10 cents for a twenty-liter demijohn. The water was very good, and many people had to make many trips to carry all the water they needed. It was a very busy shack. (Interview from 25 September 2007. Code: [EN(RR)(CV) J.B and J.H])

There was no trash collection within the district, despite the paradox that

residents of Valero Petit and Les Banderes had to live next to the garbage dump that Foment d'Obres i Construccions S.A. (FOCSA) had set up to fill the quarries that had ceased to operate. The stench and risk of explosion from gases released by decomposition were part of life in Can Valero.⁶

Can Valero's population in 1960 was quite stable, with an average of 15 years residing in the neighborhood and a broad age structure of between 30 and 50 years, both men and women. This shows the limited integration of its population, which remained in the settlement over generations without gradually moving to apartments in the city. In spite of this, 75% of the men were fully integrated into the city's work force, with jobs in construction, industry and at the port. Among the women, 7.6% worked outside the home, in cleaning, trade and industry.

One of the biggest problems was overcrowding, because of both the concentration of shanties and the small size of the dwellings, on average 25 square meters. Family space inside the shack was 5.5 square meters per inhabitant and there were an average of 1.9 people per bed. In addition, each shanty housed 1.2 families, which conditioned the subsequent relocation process (Echenique, 1965).

The church was the only institution acting on the social level in the slums. In Can Valero, a Carmelite priest, Father José Miguel, took charge of providing the neighborhood with minimal welfare structures (previously nonexistent) in the 1950s. Funding from his congregation and the collaboration of individuals and charitable foundations like the Miró Trepas construction company made it possible to create a small school and set up a dispensary, which over time would become a clinic. In the early 1960s, the Teresian nuns of the Infant Jesus of Prague built a school

in Las Banderas, a smaller settlement within the broader Can Valero district, with financial support from the above construction company.

The presence of catechists from Marian congregations in the settlement in the early 1960s would introduce variety into the paternal nature of social welfare and gave way to the creation of a night school and later a youth center, which created the newsletter *La Voz de la Montaña* (1967-1969). The arrival of a Caritas social worker in late 1967 opened a new space for community development in the district and laid the foundation for organizing a local movement that emerged in response to the process of eradication started by the city council: the Asociación de Padres de Familia La Esperanza (La Esperanza Family Association, 1967-1972). Residents raised public interest in the relocation through a very vigorous press campaign,⁷ which led to the residents being able to humanize the process of being relocated from Montjuïc, and one apartment was offered per family instead of per shack, as was the practice of the City of Barcelona, since in many cases more than one family or the different generations of a family lived in a single shanty. Likewise, work was done to ensure that all families obtained the first payment to acquire the apartments and to prevent the transfer of shacks for apartments among the poorest residents. The new leaders of future neighborhood associations in the rehousing areas emerged from this first experience in neighborhood organization.

The factors that sparked the eradication process were Franco's statements on this on a visit to Montjuïc Castle in 1963, the construction of the Amusement Park of Montjuïc (opened in 1966) and the project to install the TVE studios on the hill, which were urban planning interests for which the shantytown was a nuisance. The relocation of families from 1965 to

1972 was to subsidized housing estates promoted by the Obra Sindical del Hogar through the Unidades Vecinales de Absorción (Neighborhood Absorption Units, UVAS)⁸ (Pomar, Cinco Rosas and Sant Cosme) and, for the last 375 families, to the La Mina housing estate (Domenech; Juncosa, 1973). The owner families, as the heirs to Casa Valero, came to agreements about the expropriations and gradually disappeared from the neighborhood.

Brief History of the La Perona Neighborhood

According to the archival documentation consulted,⁹ there is evidence of a new shantytown in District X, on Ronda de Sant Martí de Provençals, beginning around 1945. Despite variance in its territorial expansion on account of population changes, we can see that during the period of maximum expansion it occupied the stretch of Ronda de Sant Martí between the district of La Verneda and the train tracks and from the Pont d'Espronceda to the Riera d'Horta.

In 1947, the wife of the president of Argentina, María Eva Duarte de Perón, travelled to Barcelona and visited the shantytown area of Ronda de Sant Martí. As a result of this visit, the idea spread among the shanty dwellers that Eva Peron, *La Perona*, wanted to build homes for the poor on this land, and for this reason the district adopted the name La Perona.

La Perona was a very rich lady who really looked after the poor. This woman gave money to the neighborhood so that we poor people living there would have water and electricity and to fix the streets because they were made of mud. But what she gave and what it ended up used for, well, it was all lost and none of it happened. Later there were more trustworthy people who wanted to fix things up and that was when they fixed the

streets and put in water. We already had electricity before that. (Interview from 9 October 2007. Code: [EN(RR)(PE)A.F.L. and J.G.T.]

The shacks were built on public land and land affected by the rail service (RENFE) alongside the edges of the tracks. It seems that the land was kept open in anticipation of expansion. However, this did not prevent some RENFE workers from appropriating the land for their own use and turning it into gardens and some newly arrived families from using it to build their homes. Given this phenomenon, the idea spread that it was a good place to build a house and many RENFE workers, knowing this, took advantage of the demand for land to sell the gardens to whoever wanted to settle there. This was the case for J.'s father, who learned of the sale of plots of land in La Verneda after only one week in Barcelona and moved there.

My father came in 1947 because my mother told him life was difficult in the town and to go to Barcelona. My dad had some friends

who lived in the shacks in the Barceloneta, so he went there. He was there one week and decided he didn't want to spend winter on the beach, and then they learned that there was a place called La Verneda where they were selling gardens. Between the three friends they bought a large plot of land and divided it into three parts. Each of them paid three hundred pesetas because the RENFE workers had these gardens. (Interview from 15 October 2007. Code: [EN(RR)(PE) J.-B.S.-M.-R.]

From the late 1940s through the 1950s the number of shanties in La Perona increased as the district became a place of refuge for immigrants from different regions of Spain, especially Andalucía. One of the people interviewed explained that his family sold the bar they had in their town (Granada) to come to Barcelona because "it was the immigration era and we all came to Barcelona because we thought it was the land of milk and honey." (Interview from 15 October 2007. Code: [EN(RR)(PE) J.-B.S.-M.-R.]



■ Aerial view of the district of La Perona in the 1980s, of the stretch between the Pont d'Espronceda and the Pont del Treball. In the lower right you can see the group of shacks that made up the school for adults. Patronat Municipal de l'Habitatge, Barcelona.

AUTHOR: MARIANO VELASCO.

Most shantytown residents were thus newcomers for whom renting an apartment was out of reach and who worked in factories, in the construction industry, in domestic service or by setting up a small shop or workshop there in the shantytown. This is why we often understand the building of shantytowns as a transitional situation in anticipation of obtaining a better home. In most cases, however, this situation was prolonged, and when people began having children the social background of the neighborhood changed so that by the mid-1960s we can see that most inhabitants had been born in the neighborhood (San Roman, 1986).

Over time these hopes would become reality for many shanty dwellers who moved to other districts by their own means, to new blocks built by the *Obra Sindical del Hogar* and a number of cooperatives and companies such as *Construcciones Españolas* (Carrasco; Garriga, 2000: 84). By 1966 it is estimated that there were approximately 200 shanties and 3,000 shanty dwellers in La Perona (Rispa, 1993). For its part, the parish church of Sant Martí took care of the most underprivileged, providing them with food and clothing as it had for decades.

The period from 1966 to 1967 was a turning point in the history of La Perona. The shacks abandoned by families who moved to apartments were reoccupied by other families with fewer resources, most of whom were gypsies. Motivation for greater transformation began with a demonstration of naval exercises attended by Franco, which led to the urgent and forced eviction of some shantytowns like El Somorrostro, Can Tunis and Montjuïc. Some of the evicted shanty dwellers were moved to unoccupied shacks in the districts of La Perona, El Camp de la Bota and Sant Roc in Badalona.

The drama for most of these people began when a municipal pickaxe was taken to the El Somorrostro neighborhood in the Barceloneta. Within twenty-four hours the area had been demolished, and a few days later a contingent of sailors from our squadron disembarked there to participate in the Navy Week shows. (Pons, 1967).

The 1970s was a period of economic crisis that struck the poorest among Barcelona's population forcefully. The effects of this were seen in the most underprivileged districts, and in the case of La Perona, it coincided with the move of a large number of gypsy families from other areas of the city, whom for social and urban planning reasons the administration had decided to relocate to the neighborhood (San Roman, 1986). Overcrowding and growth in the number of shanties rose to 653 in 1971 according to A. Rispa (1993). In view of this situation, the city's intervention consisted in extending water services to the neighborhood and paving some areas while simultaneously relocating some shanty dwelling families to apartments in La Mina and Pomar from 1968 to 1974. Following these interventions there was a significant drop in the production of subsidized housing until this activity was taken up again in 1981 (Patronat Municipal de l'Habitatge, 2003).

At the same time, in the early 1970s, with the new social intervention model adopted by Caritas based on community development, social worker Sister Pilar López settled in the district. Community works were begun with her involvement, like the creation of a kindergarten, school and dispensary. Later, in the late 1970s, other educational projects promoted by the city council were added, such as the establishment of a school for adults and children's and youth centers.

However, the situation of economic crisis led to greater social competition that wound up translating into greater inequality and criminality, which, added to the growing number of gypsies arriving in the neighborhood generated several episodes of social conflict.¹⁰

According to data collected in social worker P. López' study (1990) of La Perona district, in the early 1970s 69% of inhabitants were gypsies of various origins,¹¹ and in the late 1970s this increased to 95% of inhabitants. One gypsy who was already living in La Perona in the early period recalled that when most of the non-gypsy families left the neighborhood began to deteriorate and to be discriminated against. Defending himself against accusations made against the gypsies, he said:

The gypsies paid for the stolen cars in the neighborhood. If there was a car stolen and you were a gypsy and walked in front of it, you paid for the theft of the car. (Interview from 12 November 2007. *Code: [EN(RR)(PE)C.H.]*)

In 1981 the First Catalan Conference on Barcelona's Gypsy Population was held, and T. San Román, together with the research team he coordinated, presented the *Report on the Population of the La Perona District*.¹² From this moment on, the Patronat Municipal de l'Habitatge, which had been in charge of care services and control of shanty building since 1979, began to develop a relocation plan within the framework of the Plan to Eradicate Slums with three strategies: first, apartments from the secondary market would be allocated; second, two new single-family housing areas would be built; and third, the needs of those shanty dwellers who wished to return to their place of origin by their own means would be met. At the same time, professional integration projects would be developed to adapt shanty dwellers

to the new social conditions. The second proposal planned was impossible because of protest from the residents of the La Pedrosa housing estate and the district of La Verneda. Because of these protests the administration chose to abandon the second proposal and opted to relocate shanty dwellers to apartments on the secondary market and to offer compensation to families that chose to return to their cities of origin. In February 1985 104 apartments had been allocated, 35 gypsy families had received assistance for finding an apartment, and 90 families had accepted money in exchange for leaving their shanties (Carrasco; Garriga, 200: 83-102). The abuse of this last option meant that many of these families found themselves on the street again without resources, seeking new empty spaces to move into. The La Perona neighborhood disappeared once and for all in 1989, when the last shanty, occupied by the Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, was demolished.

Brief History of the El Carmel Neighborhood

El Carmel is part of Horta-Guinardó, the 7th municipal district of Barcelona, and it is characterized by steep slopes resulting from a rugged geographical location. The neighborhood was formed in the early 20th century when the first houses with gardens were built and the first roads began to connect the area with the city. The area's social composition and the use of its space would change over the century from the waves of immigration; in general terms, the neighborhood would cease to be a recreational area for the city's more or less well-off classes and would become characterized by the concentration of a population of humble origins in a confined space lacking basic services in certain areas.

The existence of shanties is recorded in the early 1940s, coinciding with the

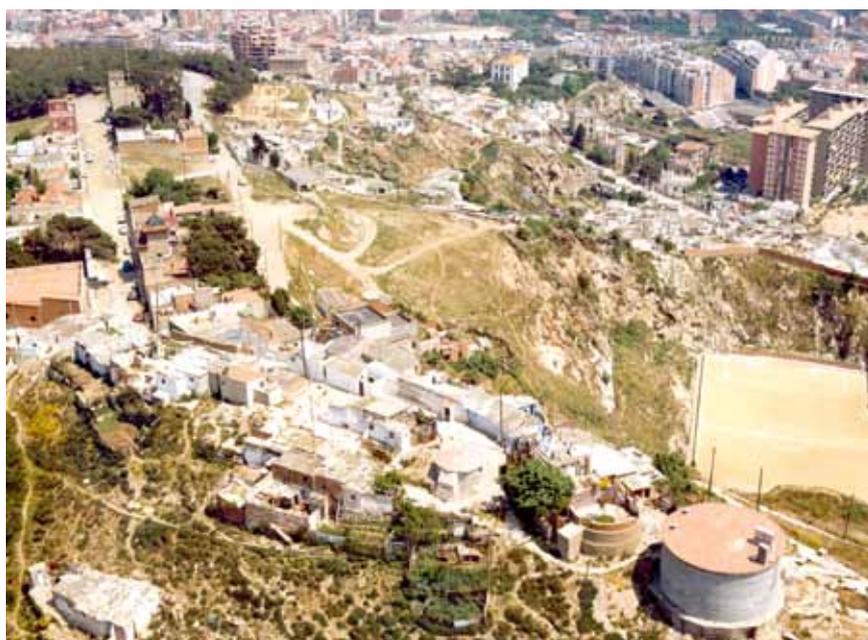
second great wave of immigration to Catalonia. At first glance, the shacks in El Carmel were not part of a unified group. There were five different groups and some small pockets of homes in certain streets of El Carmel where one sometimes found a fragile boundary between shanty and self-build home. The five groups were Francesc Alegre, Ramon Casellas (*El Santo*), Marià Labèrnia (Los Cañones), the shanties of Hospital de Sant Pau and the shanties of Carrer de Marsans i Rof and Carrer de Font-Rúbia. From an administrative point of view, the shanties were part of the district of Can Baró, but as those who were there explain, their immediate ties were to El Carmel.

We studied the first three groups –Francesc Alegre, Ramon Casellas and Marià Labèrnia– as a matter of unity in terms of the local struggle and because of geographical location (Turó de la Rovira). From interviews we know that the first shantytown began atop Turó de la Rovira in the air-raid shelters found at the end of Carrer de Marià Labèrnia. The first families arrived around 1944 and used the abandoned

military installations for shelter. The area around the bomb shelters gradually filled with shacks despite a number of expulsion attempts by the police. A resident of Los Cañones described the eviction that took place around 1955:

At midnight it was pouring rain. They knocked on doors, especially at the bomb shelters, because there were these two facing the sea and then more above them. The police came, Mr. “Scarface,” whose name I don’t know, but his face was scarred. A wonderful person: may he never have been born. They put us in their truck and took us to one of those pavilions on Montjuïc. (Interview from 9 May 2007. Code: [EN(RR)(CA)M.G.M.]

The Francesc Alegre and Raimon Casellas areas grew up around 1946-1947. All three shantytowns were fully established in the early 1950s, and their population came mainly from Andalucía and Extremadura. According to reports published by the Servicio de Erradicación del Baraquismo (Shantytown Eradication



■ Detail of the shacks of Los Cañones, so called because the anti-aircraft guns used during the Spanish Civil War were located in this space. In the background the shanties of Francesc Alegre can be seen under the highest apartment building.

PATRONAT MUNICIPAL DE L'HABITATGE, BARCELONA.

Service) of the City of Barcelona, in 1956 the existence of around 570 inhabited shacks was recognized, for just under 3,000 inhabitants (Fabre; Huertas Clavería, 1976).

A great number of the first settlers arrived in Barcelona with the idea of starting a new life; while most had fled poverty, their prospects in Barcelona would not be much more hopeful. Despite the uncertainty represented by living in a shack with the idea that their stay there was temporary, the district took on a life of its own as explained by one resident:

Well, it was a town. You come from one town and then you find another town, set up in a different way, [...] disorganized, with an uphill climb, that doesn't have water; well, OK, the town we were in didn't have water either. [...] But that's what you found, a load of shacks, the side of the hill full of little white houses, with leatherboard, a bunch of stones stuck on the roofs. Everyone was an immigrant. (Interview from 24 May 2007. Code: [EN(RR)(CA)F.G.S.]

Historians Lluís Bou and Eva Gimeno, referring to the shanties in El Carmel in the late 1960s, believed that: "Beyond the grim reality of the numbers (even if they did not balance) and for many years, shantytowns formed part of the landscape of El Carmel, which helped promote the urban legend that identified it as an inhospitable and dangerous neighborhood —where it was hard enough for taxis to make the drive up— adjectives accepted outright by a large part of Barcelona's citizenry that lived on the fringes and bowed their head before the existing social reality in El Carmel. Gone were the descriptions of the past of the neighborhood as '*picturesque and pleasant*.' Inhospitable, probably it was, given the limited accessibility; but with regard to dangerous, that should be called into question since it was more dangerous for those who were forced to live under very harsh conditions (without water, electricity, a sewage system, garbage collection and so on) in shacks located in steep places where children could get hurt easily" (Bou; Gimeno, 2007).

The social reality of the shantytowns was heterogeneous and peculiar. On

one hand, many inhabitants tried to reproduce part of their life in their place of origin —the physiognomy of the neighborhood was an example— and on the other hand they were new, unrecognized citizens who worked in factories, in the construction industry, cleaning private homes or by setting up a small shop or workshop there in the shantytown. Their children, in the best of cases, went to nearby schools if the family income permitted; if not, they entered the labor market prematurely.

Above we described the isolation suffered by the El Carmel neighborhood, both from a geographic perspective and from the lack of investment in infrastructure on the part of the City of Barcelona. In 1969 a group of residents that included some shanty dwellers decided to create the Centro Social del Carmelo (Social Center of El Carmel). In 1972 it would disappear to make way for the creation of the Asociación de Vecinos del Carmelo (El Carmel Residents' Association). A protest movement for improvements to the neighborhood originated from this association: potable running water, the creation of schools and day care centers, a health care center, urban planning improvements, public transportation and more. In the case in question, the shantytown committee of the association would work to provide the shanty areas with basic infrastructure and to promote the construction of subsidized housing in the same neighborhood. One prominent member described it thus:

I would say that the El Carmel Residents' Association was an example to follow for many associations. It carried a specific weight because there were a lot of people who gave their all in exchange for nothing, who spent many hours alongside us, and then we proposed doing things and achieved them. Why?



■ Scene of daily life in the district of La Perona. Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, Solidaridad Nacional collection.

Well, because when we went to talk to the administration, we didn't go alone. We were people who had informed ourselves about what it was that had to be done, and what it was that had to be said, so we weren't lost—we had architects, we had master builders, we had doctors, we had nurses, we had everything. When we went to talk to the health care system, we had people who knew what the health care system was. When we went to talk to the urban planning department, we had people who knew what the urban planning department was. (Interview from 8 November 2006. *Transcription code: [TR(CA) P.G.D.01]*)

Shortly before the death of dictator Francisco Franco, most of the shantytowns had running water and electricity, and a garbage collection service had also been created. The next step was to find an optimal space for building subsidized housing, but once again negotiations were tedious. This led the association to exert strong pressure on the city council, and a meeting was arranged with mayor Josep Maria de Porcioles i Colomer, who promised to explore the possibility of relocating residents within the neighborhood and to start the paperwork for those residents who wished to obtain an apartment in the Canyelles housing estate (Camallonga; Custòdia; Fonollà, 1985).

With plans in place to eradicate the shacks and resettle residents, the choice was to either obtain economic compensation and personally undertake finding an apartment or to take advantage of the plans for relocation to public housing. Most shanty dwellers went for the second option. Briefly and following the chronological order of rehousing, in 1977 123 families were relocated to the Canyelles housing estate, most of them from the Francesc

Alegre shantytown. In 1984 the keys were given out to 161 apartments in the Raimon Casellas housing estate, a historical milestone since they had succeeded in being relocated within the same neighborhood. Finally, in 1990 the last 87 families from the Francesc Alegre shantytown moved into the Can Carreras housing estate.¹³ This entire process was successful thanks to pressure from the neighborhood movement and the subsequent collaboration between the residents' association, the Patronat Municipal de l'Habitatge and the City of Barcelona.

Conclusions

The reconstruction of the three shantytowns from bibliographic and documentary research and oral sources allowed us to confirm that the configuration of shantytowns always responds to a vital necessity for the more disadvantaged social classes facing the problems of work and housing in urban contexts. Indeed, the increase in slums in Barcelona was brought about by waves of immigration, but the main cause of the shantytowns was determined by a lack of rational housing policy.

Shantytowns were and are established above all in the empty spaces within the urban fabric, on small plots of land awaiting their turn to be transformed, in the vacant lots and abandoned spaces of interurban areas and very often at the limits and boundaries between two cities. All of them, in one way or another, are like boundaries to the structured city.

In the first two decades of the 20th century, settlements grew and became established along the waterfront and on Montjuïc, where shanty building had been a practice tied to work as in the case of stonecutters and fishermen. The postwar immigration gave the phenomenon new dimensions, placing it at its peak in the 1950s

when the shantytowns became true neighborhoods within the urban area and not cracks or lawless cities as they had been called in some cases. They were, in short, spaces with social life, closely bound and related to the rest of the city. People who worked in the city lived there, and they organized to improved living conditions in their neighborhoods. They were, however, neighborhoods that grew up spontaneously outside of urban planning and which, in principle, except for some cases, were never recognized as part of this city—and perhaps this is why they disappeared. This negation was made patent with the lack of municipal action regarding infrastructure and services, a total neglect until the 1970s when the new political mood sought to provide the remaining districts with minimal living conditions. Only the social action of the church, from the initial charity to the community development of the 1960s, mitigated the marginalization to which these areas had been condemned by the city.

Eradicating the shantytowns was nearly always more an impulse responding to urban planning needs and projects that appeared than a policy focused on resolving a social problem. Most slum inhabitants were relocated to planned estates, often outside city limits, and their names (La Perona, El Somorrostro, Can Valero, El Camp de la Bota) were replaced with other names proposed by institutions (Parc de Sant Martí, Platja de la Barceloneta, Avinguda de l'Estadi, Fòrum de les Cultures).

On the other hand, the life stories collected show us a wide diversity in ways of experiencing and understanding life in the shantytowns. For many people, shanty dwelling was a choice forced on them by a lack of resources; for others, it was a temporary way of saving to be able to obtain an apartment; still others

sought to build a neighborhood from the shanties and fought for its recognition. All of this diversity also helps us to see that within the shantytowns, as in the rest of the city, there is a structure wherein different social and cultural categories can be distinguished. And

these differences are made more evident when periods of greater poverty generate greater social competition and inequality is exacerbated, as occurred in the 1970s and 1980s and led to the shantytowns' exclusion from the rest of the city.

By way of conclusion we would add that shantytowns are not the only response in the face of a social problem like the lack of affordable housing. The disappearance of shantytowns does not always represent a solution to the problem. ■

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NOTES

1 Coordinators: Mercè Tatjer and Cristina Larrea. Researchers: Xavi Camino, Flora Muñoz, Oscar Casasayas, Max Díaz, Pili Díaz, Eva Cerveto.

2 This final report was presented to the Ethnological Heritage Inventory of Catalonia in December 2007. Its annexes contain a listing of interviews conducted (document), digital interviews (DVD), summaries of digital interviews (document), the interview guide for shanty dwellers (DVD/document), the interview guide for people involved (DVD/document), the list of interviewees (DVD/document), the ACCESS documentary database (DVD), the IPEC register of voice recordings (DVD), the IPEC register of photographic recordings (DVD), collections of photographs (DVD) and the transcriptions (DVD/document).

3 Among the archives consulted, mention should be made of a few for how important the documentation we were able to obtain from them was: Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona, Arxiu Municipal Administratiu de Barcelona and Secció Prearxivatge, Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, Patronat Municipal de l'Habitatge, Arxiu Municipal del Districte de Sant Martí, Arxiu Municipal de Sants-Montjuïc, Arxiu Municipal del Districte d'Horta-Guinardó and Arxiu de Càritas.

4 The documentary research enabled us to create a database inventory with more than 300 entries.

5 For the 1928 estimate: "Comunicación sobre el acta de construcción de las Casas Baratas de Eduardo Aunós." Patronato Municipal de la Habitación. Barcelona, June 1928, p. 17.

6 "La única luz que ilumina las barracas son las llamas del vertedero." *Telexprés* (27 February 1967).

7 To follow the neighborhood association's press campaign and the negotiations with the City of Barcelona and the Ministry of Housing, consult the *Diario de Barcelona*, the *Noticiero Universal* and the *Correo Catalan* from 1967 to 1968, as well as the 22 issues of *La Voz de la Montaña* at the Arxiu de Càritas.

8 Unidades Vecinales de Absorción Social, a project by the Obra Sindical del Hogar (OSH) to relocate shantytowns.

9 Much of the information relevant to the La Perona shantytown can be found at the Arxiu Municipal del Districte de Sant Martí, the Arxiu Històric del Poble Nou, the Arxiu Municipal Administratiu de Barcelona and the Arxiu del Patronat Municipal de l'Habitatge.

10 A tracking of the neighborhood conflicts can be found at the Arxiu Municipal del Districte de Sant Martí in the folder of press clippings *La Perona: eradicació de les barraques i lluites veïnals (1979-1991)*.

11 Spanish (both newcomers and several-generation-established) and Hungarian origin. (López, 1990)

12 May be consulted at the Arxiu Municipal del Districte de Sant Martí.

13 "Memòria del Patronat Municipal de l'Habitatge." No signature. Arxiu del PMH. For the subject at hand, you can consult the reports for 1979-1990, in particular the sections "L'eradicació del barraquisme" and "L'adjudicació de vivendes."

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