

An antidote against the extreme right (Toni Cruanyes)

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To the good journalists who have lost their jobs.

To the good journalism students who will not have the opportunity to work in an editorial office.

And to my friend Gemma Casamajó, a journalists teacher.

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Author's note

This book is about massive immigration, globalization, xenophobia, religions, Islam, nationalism, civilizations... All these are basic concepts for understanding the world we live in, ideas that respond both to abstract feelings and very specific everyday situations. But at the same time these ideas are prisoners of some words with many ideological connotations. In Europe, the discussion about immigration and right wing extremism has always been carried out shyly, with a mixture of fear and good intentions, as to making sure no one would feel offended or uncomfortable. Being politically correct is a way of dressing up fear with forced tolerance. This is the reason why we often don't even have a suitable vocabulary to face an issue that is becoming the most important political phenomenon of the twenty-first century's beginning. And still, we don't have the tools to distinguish a native from a foreigner, we mix his ethnic-cultural features with his nationality; we confound immigrants with people that have different culture to ours; we see as a part of Islam some habits that have little to do with religion; we think European civilization is ahead of others concerning individual rights, but we don't dare to assert it aloud, afraid to be labelled as racists; we qualify as tolerance respect for foreigners' habits, but we feel provincial defending the cultural values of our own land.

And then we have the reaction vocabulary. The rise of the xenophobic political parties, extreme right, populists, Neo-Nazis, anti-globalization, ultra nationalists or simply anti-immigration before our eyes makes us feel lost. We don't even know how to label them. The European analysts don't seem to agree on a term, so facing such a diversity of shapes, they opt by calling them in a general term such as populism. The French sociologist Dominique Reynié has coined the term *patrimonial populism* to define those political movements that defend tooth and nail a material patrimony —Europeans' standard of living— and an immaterial one —Europe's lifestyle—. According to the French sociologist Emmanuel Todd, "populism is not about a well defined political theory or an economic and social project which add the numbers. Populism can both combine the answer and the identity dimension [...], which suits cynicism and conspirator theories." The problem when we talk of populism is that it's used to define too many things. In fact, it's a way of proceeding, a method, but neither a base nor an ideology. It has no content. It's a synonym for demagoguery because *populism* is Marine Le Pen as it is Hugo Chavez, although one defines its party as "the national right" and the other as "twenty-first century socialism". According to Julio María Sanguinetti, Uruguay's ex-president, "populism is a lack of economic rationality, and it is only possible with money". It is then clientelism, and this is a quite lax concept too, as it doesn't really work as a definition for a deep analysis.

This is why I have preferred to keep the *extreme right* concept. Being aware that it doesn't completely define the political Pan-European movement we're talking about, I have detected that the attitudes and part of the ideology that shaped the fascist parties in the Europe of the '30s and '40s of the last century are actually present in these new movements. Some leaders of these parties try to gather an aura of respectability with an apparently less extreme speech, but there are still skinheads, supremacists and xenophobes among their supporters. The terminology used by scholars with who I coincide in the analysis is very similar: the Italian political scientist Piero Ignazi speaks of *post-industrial ultra-right*, the French sociologist André Taguieff calls it *national-populism* and the compared politics professor of the United States Hans-Georg Betz calls it *populist radical right*. In some cases, the leaders themselves (Pym Fortuyn or Geert Wilders) or part of the evolution of the ideological arguments (secularity and anti-globalization) come really from the Dutch or French extreme left. Nevertheless, this hasn't prevented the extreme right's characteristic speech to be the dominant one since a century ago. So if this book is intended to make us understand some issues, we'd better start speaking clearly from the beginning. We'll analyse the great concepts that defines our identity (liberty, civilisation, Europe...) and the dangers we face (racism, violence, Neo-Nazism...) I'll try my best to do it honestly. To this, I commit myself from this very first page.

INTRODUCTION. INSECURITY AND FEAR

For the first time in two thousand years, Europe finds itself in a world it didn't make to measure. It is no longer master of neither its destiny or that of its colonies, but just another pupil in the world's international negotiations desk. Wealth is distributed in new ways on a worldwide scale, and the hegemony's shift between the Old World and the United States as revealed by the Second World War has resulted in a multipolar world where Asia and Latin America have already the same influence —and often higher decision power— as Europe. This has some causes that can be easily quantified, and consequences often unexpected. Our low birth rate, communications fluency —real and virtual— between every corner in the world, women's incorporation to the job market, increasing of the social inequality, the large-scale immigration which has transformed our human outlook... are fast moving changes we have experienced in the short lapse of only one or two generations. And all these changes —despite assuming that we live in democratic systems— haven't been chosen by us at the ballot box. It is all about what the philosopher David Singh Grewall calls the *power net*: an accumulation of individual decisions leads to collective decisions with consequences nobody had asked for, or that nobody wishes. This is the globalization story. Nobody foresaw it: for some it has been advantageous, but many others sustain the economic consequences. And then there are the cultural repercussions: the massive import of foreign hands and cheap products has made us apparently wealthier, but more vulnerable too. The entry of foreign means of mass production has also brought massive importation of social change factors with it (“we needed hands and we got people”). We wanted Scandinavian looking furniture, German reliability appliances and Italian design clothes, but at the same time, cheap hands: South American maids, Maghrebi bricklayers and day and night open shops run by Pakistanis... Who could believe none of these individual decisions wouldn't have any social consequences? To start with, the diversity of the newcomers' traditions and the imported products has driven our traditional lifestyle to a cul-de-sac. But it has also led us to accept the rules of the market's liberalism, a somehow alien view to a Europe with a statist tradition since the seventeenth century.

These are the facts of the story: from 1945 to 1970, our societies were capable of combining economic expansion with the establishment of a democratic system based on individual rights equality. Besides, in Western Europe's case, capitalism acquired a smooth and comfortable tone due to a social protection system which favoured an exceptional prosperity cycle —the one called *the golden age*. The fall of the Berlin Wall seemed to give more arguments to our social and economic model: the victory over communism set the bases for a future that seemed to be made-to-measure the Western patterns. This was the official version

about what was happening in the world, told by the Cold War victors. The oil crises of the '70s, the Near East instability or the first recessions of the '80s were not seen as signs of concern because the growth kept up and the population responded positively to the economic and political model. The government parties in Europe —mainly the social-democracy and the Christian-Democrats— were managed by the most competent groups of the political class who, instead of keeping or alternating themselves in the throne, they accepted the electors' demands. The elites managed the resources orderly, as they achieved the social progress of those countries that had come out of the Second World War devastated and impoverished, and they reached the twenty-first century with the upmost security standards and as the biggest consumers in the planet. We jumped from ration books to credit cards in less than forty years, we must not forget. We can find the weaknesses of our present and the uncertainties of our future in the deceiving foundations of this *miracle*.

Abruptly, on September 11th, 2001, the World Trade Centre attacks in New York made us aware of our physical vulnerability. The attacks in Madrid on March 11th, 2004, and London on July 7th, 2005 showed that our social and cultural models' victory over communism had concealed another dangerous enemy of the Western principles' system: Islamic fundamentalism. The most archaic Muslim doctrines —financed by the oil of the '70s— neither accept our view of the world nor admit the goodness of our system. The new technologies and the available means for travelling around the world offered by globalization are the new allies of Salafism, a medieval and anti-western ideology which incubates and expands itself through Ummah, the global Muslim believer community. Because —haven't we realized this neither? — with the migration waves of these late years, there are Mahoma followers in all European countries. Still now, every year 1.7 million new citizens arrive in Europe to stay permanently. And the results are that, according to 2011 figures, in Spain 13% of the population come from an immigrant background, in the UK this amounts to a 10%, in France a 9% and in Germany it is also a 13%. This indicates a real revolution in historic terms for a Europe used to expelling population, rather than incorporating new one. Adding to which is the fact that the great majority of this new population is from a Muslim background. In mid twentieth century, there were almost no Muslims in Western Europe, whereas it is calculated that there are about fifteen to seventeen million in the beginning of the twenty-first. Necessarily, the demographic importance of this population can't go unnoticed, and furthermore in a society as the European, which has become older and finds it hard to keep up the fertility rate. The populations of Germany, Italy or Spain would have descended if they hadn't received immigration and, in fact, with the *baby boomers* of the post-war period reaching retirement age, the youth and vigour of the newcomers is more evident... In Catalonia, for example,

according to 2008 data, 25% of young people come from a foreign background. But despite this very high proportion, immigration hasn't been able to stop the young people's 4 % decrease in our age pyramid during the decade of 2000. With no government intending to — neither asking nobody's opinion— Europe's features have changed in less than half century. The Old World is older than ever, and fuller of foreigners than in any other moment in history. It's not surprising that many Europeans aren't able to identify around them the human outlook of their youth. A part of Europe doesn't like or recognize what it sees in the mirror.

EUROPEAN CIVILISATION

Islam clashes head-on against the values which we associate to Europe in our shared idea of the Old World. The French poet and essay-writer Paul Valéry used to describe European culture as “the sum of Greek philosophy, Roman law and Christian theology”. That was how he highlighted the anthropocentric nature of the European culture. According to Greek philosophy, mankind is capable of understanding reality through reasoning; Roman law states that the common citizen should defend his interests and manage his resources and Christian theology says that each individual can redeem or condemn himself depending on the personal decisions he makes through life. It also admits that there must be a space for religion and another for the human laws: “Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God what which is God's”. This anthropocentrism, since the low High Middle Ages, made Europe's economic growth possible because it set more attention on the particular businesses of people, families and groups rather than on sumptuous constructions or big religious or political projects like in the case of the Ottoman or Chinese Empire. This allowed Europe to overtake its contemporary rival political models until the Age of Enlightenment developed this idea and placed the individual's autonomy in the centre of everything else, and humanity welfare —in this life, not in another one— as people's main objective. The European man has long ago stopped feeling at any God's service. And it has also been a long time since rights' equality between men —and more recently in relation to women too— is a sine qua non condition in the old European democracies. We have already been through a bloody parenthesis in these illustrated values: the totalitarian fights in the twentieth century, between the liberal democracies, fascism and communism. We have also seen, since the First World War, how hegemony has shifted to the United States, although due to its history and cultural link we believed it was only an extension of our own way of understanding life. The fall of the Berlin Wall gave us the fake illusion of the victory of these values over these others which we look at now with a certain delay and incomprehension as they compete with our own for hegemony. And now Islam knocks on our doors with a restricted view of the liberties owed to the less

developed branches of this religion practiced in the Saudi Arabia deserts, Yemen or Afghanistan. The world's economic leadership is quickly moving to Asia.

A main fact to understand the other great threat to our economic security, the loss of our purchasing power, is the following: January 1st, 2002, China joins the World Trade Organization. After hard negotiations, the most populated country in the world and second economy of the planet completely enters the world market. Fifteen years after the establishment of the organization that promotes free trading, the WTO reaches the last step of a globalization process with decisive consequences for the whole world. For the northern countries, this has meant the off shoring of many companies, salaries decreasing and jobs lost with a supreme reference: the Chinese worker, who is paid forty times less than a French, German or Catalan hand. In the Euro zone, since 1995, 8% of the loss of industrial occupancy becomes from the fact that companies look for lower salaries and economies without social protection. Renault already only produces 20% of its cars in France. Total has closed its refineries in Europe because in Saudi Arabia it can continue polluting, as this country hasn't ratified Kyoto Protocol about CO2 emissions. British MG Rover closed its production factory in the UK and since 2005, cars with the characteristic Union Jack engraved on their bodywork are produced entirely in China. Since 1997, Burberry manufactures its luxury products in Hong Kong. The working class in Europe has no longer the employers' organizations or the competence as a rival. After having achieved decent working conditions and rights that have taken many generations to obtain since the Industrial Revolution, now a new Asian production model is the real danger to the standard of living of the European middle and working classes. During the decades of coexistence with the Soviet Union and the communist model in Eastern Europe, western capitalism provided itself with mechanisms to slow down the expansion of the communist alternative: social security, free education, improvement of working conditions... Marshall Plan was about this too: 15.000 million dollars due to help the United States strategic allies in Europe in order to prevent the communist expansion. Communism or USSR are no longer the alternatives, but China's industrial capacity. And our authorities wield Asian competitiveness in order to make us change our productivity model.

BEYOND THE CRISIS

This European model's lack of security is the key to the extreme right's growth. As they feel the effects of globalization, the Europeans —older as they go— are more receptive to the populist messages that come from the extreme right. Their arguments not only reach the states with fragile economies, but the wealthiest too, like Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands or Denmark. The protests, xenophobia, and disaffection towards the political

elites are breeding ground where the extreme right movements can grow into several different shapes. Not always structured as compact political parties, but as an ideological current too. Europeans feel their cultural inheritance being dismantled and their economic welfare in danger. A part of them feel as deprived collectively as they do individually. This leads many not to feel represented by the ruling left political parties, that is to say, social-democracy. The historical popular bases of this parties feel let down by the leaders, who have put emphasis on multiculturalism, promotion of new rights and liberties but have neither known how, wanted to or been able to defend the interests of the most deprived. The medium classes feel electorally out in the open too, because as production systems change, they are more concerned about other issues such as delinquency or immigration, mainly because they relate one thing with the other. And the answer to this fear is not given by social democracy, but from the extreme right. Equally, the aging of society leads the older —thanks to the last decade's welfare— to be richer in comparison to the young ones. Taxation system and taxes on propriety electorally become important issues too. And the intra-generational link becomes stronger than the sense of class-belonging.

We are tempted to believe that the extreme right's boom is related to the crisis. It is like expecting it to be a temporary sickness which will disappear with no further effort on our part. In fact, it is a way of denying reality that is quite in line with the European's behaviour during the last decades: if we don't like something, let's hide it under the carpet or wait until it disappears by itself. But all the facts that have led to the rise of these parties are far from clearing because of the crisis. According to the International Organization for Migration, there are 214 million immigrants in the world, and the main flow of them continues to be from the southern countries to northern ones. The population aging data in Europe follows the same pattern too, if not worsened by the crisis (The average age in Germany is 44, the highest in the European Union, whilst in Spain it is 40). And the commercial imbalance between Europe and the emerging powers (180.000 million Euros in comparison with China, 70.000 with Russia, 10.000 with Brazil and 2.000 with India) doesn't seem to correct itself through the new consuming pattern which the crisis has led us to since 2008. This has a political translation: democratic, economic and demographic stagnation have led the ruling parties to a crisis in these last years. The programs are more austere; all countries speak now freely of cuttings in the welfare society. The measures taken are painful. Confidence in these leaders weakens and in some cases it becomes hostility. We suddenly accuse our political elites of incompetence, bad managing and dishonesty. Seeking not to let down the electors, many politicians have attempted to prolong the feeling that we are still living in full wealth by throwing themselves into systematic credit. In France, for example, there hasn't been a national budget without

deficit since 1974. This period of fake prosperity has been managed in different ways in each European country, but in general it has meant a challenge for the ruling parties and citizens have slowly become exasperated. Electors get impatient, they demand social improvements which are impossible and blame the political class for not doing their duty. For some, the leaders are incompetent, for others, it is the system itself which must be questioned, because it is not democratic: politics are not being ruled by the common citizens' will. So the old scenario of the majority parties competing for power in the electoral arena has given way now to a time of protests, recriminations and collective anger. Condemnation becomes more important than the construction of a realistic government program. It is precisely here where populist extreme right parties find their breeding ground to grow.