

Take the Square!

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To my wife, Esther, my inspiration and the air that I breathe. To my parents, Adolfo and Socorro, my refuge and antidote to any poison. To my daughters, Hiral and Rayani, the delights and pure adrenaline of my life.

The murderous generation

It has been said, for more than a decade, that it is time to let the best trained generation of our history take over from their elders. As far as my age (52) and socio-professional condition (newspaper journalist and director during 20 years) are concerned, I belong to the younger sector of the generation that took power in Spain in the early 1980s owing to the advent of democracy. Therefore, I am a member of the politically murderous generation that expelled their elders from power for the following reasons: they were retrograde and prevented the then future generation from taking power as they neither trusted them nor believed them capable of securing a hundred-year golden retirement for the old generation, which we regard as a non-negotiable right.

It is puzzling to see how this generation of highly skilled young people bear the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s without expressing their anger nor mobilizing despite the high unemployment rate, their limited expectations to become "milleuristas" (persons with a thousand euro salary per month), their bad working conditions and their disenchantment with life in general. This generation seems unaware that they are being muzzled in spite of the apparent freedom they enjoy on the internet through social networks (Twitter, Tuenti, Facebook) and the thousand links shared everyday connecting millions of people, a perfect illustration of the modern expression "global citizens". Only sedated individuals can passively witness the popular uprisings of thousands of young people in Northern Africa claiming for work, food, democracy and finally freedom. Thousands of them die there fighting for their rights while we have been suffering a three-year crisis in our comfortable, free, entertaining and wealthy Spain. However, we have not even been able so far to find a way to definitely make it possible for the citizens to actively take part in public affairs and reduce the influence of the monstrous market to its strict utility. We live at the time of corporatism, a philosophical movement originated in the French Revolution that used Reason to pervert its true sense until it flourished in Mussolini's fascism. This ideology is responsible for the retrieval and imposition of Neoliberalism in the entire world with its pernicious entertaining version

found in Berlusconi's televised government and already threatening Spain if we take into account the negative opinions Spaniards have about their political leaders according to the results of some surveys. It is astonishing how this corporatism has been able to negate and undermine the legitimacy of the human being as a citizen in a democracy increasing their own profit and negating public welfare. We have been able for the last three years of financial crisis, resorting to our historical memory and common sense, to understand what has happened: who is to blame and why. I am really concerned, nevertheless, that despite our awareness of the truth, we remain entangled in the fatalism of Market and, what is even worse, the general ongoing belief that the way out of the crisis is possible without its authors assuming their responsibilities for spoiling the future of the best ever trained generation of our history.

This pamphlet is addressed to these young people who claim the heritage of Voltaire, the great thinker of Reason, trying to convert their fury into indignation and, as Hessel preaches in France, the necessary mobilization to conquer that stolen future.

Citizens, not clients

For the last two decades, our political and economic leaders convinced us that Spain was a great enterprise that would rise up to the world top positions and that it consequently had to be run as a growing company disposing of social and political inconveniences like the social security, the provision of services, the promise of equality and future expectations; in one word, putting aside the notion of citizen to replace it with that of client. The first thing that was done, like in the rest of the western world, was to entirely free the economic system from all the chains formerly imposed by politicians after the great depression of the 1930s that had engulfed half the world population in misery, engendered starvation and wars causing the death of millions of people. The neoliberal doctrine

swept away any remnant of social values as well as any trace of political and public control over the financial system. This process took several years in the United States and England and also required the tremendous and costly work of lobbies until it was finally accomplished in the last decade of the last century.

Once disposed of constraints and regulations, the financial system was now free to speculate on the future and use money to produce money. In one word, the system found a newly cleared path towards the philosopher's stone, the chimera that has been pursued by banks since its invention: money is generated by its movement, not by its investment in the productive system. In other words, investing money generates general wealth, but gambling with money produces wealth for the gamblers as the money is not shared out among people. It rather remains within the same hands moving from one person to another.

Several crises at the end of the 20th century and early 21st century like those experienced by Saving Banks in the USA or the "dot-com" bubble did not serve as a warning. The umpteenth rediscovery of concrete, homes and land as solid, irreplaceable and indestructible sectors in continuous overestimation (invented and sunk several times in history like in Florida and Louisiana) encouraged to put the greatest real estate bubble and bank fraud since the crack of 1929 under way. It is now referred to as financial engineering.

The most dangerous thing about this great recession is that it did not confine to one country as it had occurred on previous occasions. This time instead, it rapidly spread around the western world as a result of globalization, though at different scales.

The housing bubble

The great financial fraud originated in Wall Street and the City of London as subprime mortgages almost damaged the world financial system except China and, surprisingly, certain countries like Spain. However, the other equally relevant component of the financial crisis, the real estate bubble, also originated in the United States then spread to numerous European nations like Ireland and, especially, Spain. In this country, the mirage fueled by tourism, one of the main resources characterized by almost 60 million visitors invading its coastlines and a request for housings as well as seasonal services, provoked a huge and unprecedented construction frenzy never seen in any country throughout history. Consequently, the country became the attractive Promised Land for immigrants willing to work in this sector as if the country was under reconstruction after being heavily destroyed by a war or earthquake.

Aznar, supporter of the neoliberal ideology, defeated the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE): the architect of the great democratic and economic change that took place in Spain in the 1980s, later entangled in the chaos of bureaucracy as it battled to stay in power having to choose between the support of European integration on the one hand and the defense of communities' autonomy on the other hand. That policy caused the paralysis of the nation as a result of the excess of bureaucracy especially the intricate web of corruption and political patronage. Aznar and the neoliberal ideologues of the Popular Party (PP) launched an assault on the Mediterranean coast by placing both the town planning and its wide range applications within Spanish democracy under the command of speculation and the housing bubble. In the region of Valence, the spearhead of the scheme, was announced the first rule that gave way to the regulation of the housing bubble: all the land can be urbanized except that specifically protected by law. It means that if we want to prevent a protected forest or woodland from being urbanized, we will have to face a long and costly legal process which will certainly arrive late because it is legal to put the machinery on the ground and start the construction.

The new rule rapidly spread around the country and, in a few years, millions of homes were built and countless portions of land urbanized in

places which we are ashamed of when we look at them today. Thus was the Spanish economic growth miracle achieved and praised in the world financial markets.

In very little time, construction companies became the new King Midas and spread their tentacles all across the production system including the industry and eventually took control of the media and politicians. All these plots are now brought to light after the burst of the housing bubble.

Such disaster would not have occurred without the participation of the financial and political system, the last of which is most responsible for being permissive with legal impunity of the financial and business speculation.

The Spanish financial system had previously survived the subprime mortgage crisis owing to a conservative policy of the Bank of Spain. However, it took a straight and deep plunge into the risky direct mortgages given to clients with no credit capacity and, with is worse, it plunged down into the speculative funding of the big construction, housing and promoting companies, most of which are in serious troubles today facing debts, restructuration, collapse and which, as ghost companies, have only postponed their death a few years later.

Bankers and politicians

The political power, now held by the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and led by Zapatero, was aware that any attempt to prick the housing bubble would provoke a steady slowdown of both employment and consumption causing the dread crisis, which was somehow necessary for the economic restructuring. So, thinking of the best option, he decided to cover up and deny the truth. He even supported and repeatedly praised the system claiming that the economy was in great expansion and home prices would never decrease but would endlessly continue to rise because

the housing business was one of the few remaining and safe assets. This policy would not have been practicable without the unconditional support of banks, especially Saving Banks, some conceptually unique financial institutions throughout the world that let these semipublic institutions (they cannot gain profits) operate as banks but without the risk these last ones represent for their shareholders. Savings Banks, under the control of local and especially regional politicians wove a net of local interests that funded the entire speculative boom which later induced public institutions like city councils, deputations and autonomous communities to run up huge debts in order to fund the great expansion of public construction projects while the administration staff was increasing stunningly. The oversized administration staff was due to a direct hiring policy and the creation of public inter-administrative institutions that led them to an unsustainable debt and terrible deficit.

As a result of the housing bubble burst, most construction projects including a million empty homes as well as other two million initiated, approved or under-construction homes were stopped. As a matter of fact, the world crisis originated in the United States with the collapse of Lehman Brothers that was the detonator of the housing bubble burst. The American financial firm introduced the lack of confidence in the solid and steady world financial system and froze interbank lending, real foundation of the system. This lack of financial confidence also froze credit loans to development and construction companies, all of which with debts up to ten times their real capacity. So home constructions and sales stopped and unemployment soared to very high levels, which later dragged all the sectors including the industry and destroyed the autonomous workers and small and medium enterprises sector, the core driving force of the Spanish growth.

The suspicion about fake accounts among banks all over the world equally froze consumer credit loans and brought to light Spanish subprime mortgages that contravened the established rule in European countries like France and Germany where it was forbidden to take out mortgages for a value of more than 60% of the tax rate. In Spain, mortgage loans were made for a value of up to 110%. As a consequence of this, millions of

immigrants and Spaniards (many of them with temporary contract jobs) were trapped in the mortgage debts, which in turn swelled the bank debt. Bank entities initially kept the unpaid private mortgages and uncollected housing loans secret from the public. The concealment of such facts spoiled the whole Spanish financial system reputation, formerly praised and approved from the other side of the Atlantic. This circumstance was a key factor that led to the mistrust of the world credit rating agencies (Moody's, Fitch and Standard and Poor's). These rating firms systematically lowered their outlook on the country, which raised its risk and provoked the debt crisis. It is well known that countries like Greece, Ireland and Portugal that already underwent the same process needed to be rescued afterwards.

The debt crisis we are all undergoing at the moment would not have occurred if the public sector in all these countries and Spain in particular had not collapsed. The historic growth fueled by the housing bubble lowered unemployment rates in Spain to unprecedented levels (the so-called zero male unemployment, estimated in 5%, was reached). A historic tax collection record was achieved and the country obtained, for the first time, the economic surplus that both Aznar and Zapatero held as their flagship achievements during their first legislative sessions. It was also the reason their pride in the last two decades: the so-called social security moneybox that amassed about a hundred thousand million Euros and that is on the verge of breaking into pieces in an attempt to rescue the system from collapse.

The budget surplus (excess of incomes over spending) spurred by the euphoria of the financial system, now free from any political binding ties, resulted in certain good things like the investment in the country's future infrastructures, the most internationally representative and envied symbol of which is the Spanish high-speed rail network (AVE). But, above all, the surplus funded the political megalomania (Spain became the world paradise for the architectural designers) and, what is worse, brought about the proliferation of the public sector at every level: state, autonomous, provincial and municipal governments that, by means of foundations, consortia and public enterprises involved with all the

administrations, diverted billions of public money out of the legal and ordinary budgetary control, the real hole of which remains unknown today.

The suspension of public construction works, now non-funded, and the inflated and unsustainable public sector characterized by thousands of unnecessary civil servants and services were the obvious results deriving from the outbreak of the economic crisis in the USA first and then the housing bubble collapse in Spain.

A ruined country

The Spanish intricate administrative and labour web, a Francoist heritage strengthened during the transition period, dragged all the country's administration into a no escape trap that not only brought along the historic public deficit of 11% in 2009, but also led, last year, to the greatest crisis in our recent history together with the private debt caused by the housing and bank bubble. Following the Greece's economic downfall, our country was about to face the same disaster and had to be rescued by the EU, whose leaders and members forced Zapatero to radically change his policy and undertake the well-known reforms we are undergoing now.

Everything stems from the same origin. The housing bubble generated growth and greater public incomes through taxes and institutional credit. Once it bursts, incomes drastically fall down, social security spending rises and credit loans are frozen. But the deficit is still there as the contracted debts need to be paid off and saving is impossible because it is impossible to sack civil servants and adjust public services without changing the laws and reaching a great national agreement.

Nowadays, the regular spending on the maintenance of workers and public services sucks up to 90% of the local, provincial and autonomous administrations' budgets. Combining that spending with the costly debt

used to fund the political megalomania of the great expansion, the result is quite obvious: all the administrations are struggling under the three-year-burden deficit and are unable to develop a credible rescue scheme.

This is what the so-called Market, represented by the world three rating agencies, frequently says. Such report raises the debt price increasing the distance with respect to Germany. It also raises the risk premium constantly threatening to drag Spain into the group of the already fallen PIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Greece, and Spain) sentenced by markets to the economic downfall three years ago.

Zapatero must leave and Rajoy must not come back

Up to this point, it is easy to understand why Zapatero must leave and why Rajoy must not come back. The first one must leave because he knew about the problem and could have pricked the housing bubble but refused to do it as he feared a crisis that would have been manageable. That option meant a serious threat to his political position and power so he preferred instead to deny it lying to the Spanish people and causing a far greater suffering characterized by almost five million unemployed people and the country's dangerous situation on the edge of collapse resulting from the rising debt and a huge deficit for which he is responsible. Rajoy must not come back because he was part of Aznar government that established the bases of the housing bubble approving all the neoliberal theses as well as the deregulation of bank activities responsible for consolidating the bubble. But, especially because he defends, supports and protects the real Valence-based propagandists and authors of the bubble. Valence is the place in Spain where it flourished the most thanks to the corruption involving all the institutions. And Rajoy is hindering and covering up the only legal process initiated in Spain, against the Gürtel case suspects who most profited from the current crisis, to reveal the intricate political, business, financial and media corruption web.

Take the square!

The world is undergoing a change, a transformation beyond all expectations. In accordance with Alexandro Baricco's statement, we may be experiencing a mutation process towards a new civilization that we can perceive beforehand by just observing the universe of Internet, Google and Facebook because there is at least something that some of us are really certain about: our current world is a borderline moving on to some unknown land. We are the young people with a dark future and also the elders with adaptation problems as we cling onto the past. But we, the elders, can recognize, through the Chinese bazaar-like shine of the past, a rubbish dump from which we are interested in retrieving all that can be used as a walking bridge with which to build our new home. It was done at different times by numerous civilizations before us. That dream is still alive today as it stands for the horizontal citizen's legitimacy against the vertical one's. That is to say, for instance, the artistic contrast between what the Alhambra of Granada or the Church of Constantinople represents against the Pyramids of Egypt or the Roman Coliseum, which is about to be privatized and transformed into a two thousand-year-old Disneyworld theme park.

This pamphlet does not intend to tediously and uselessly investigate all the history of ideas but part of it. This paper, indeed, stems from several readings of books explored during several years trying to find user-friendly instructions not found in Guttenberg's language but in real life. It definitely attempts to connect with the new generations of readers accused, by the leading corporatists, of destroying their neurons with the compulsive use of the new technologies, but who I consider to be real mutants or, as said in our old humanist language, geniuses.

Like Ralston Saul, I claim the right to undertake an initiatory journey without the expectation of reaching a specific goal, without the hope of finding the truth like Socrates. I also claim practical humanism so I can live in a society that will still exist in the future as long as its citizens believe in and keep working for it; a society that does not pretend, as done until now with the promotion of eternal institutions, to make us believe we have defeated time and later asks us no to move and hold still.

I claim a society that does cherish its young people; not one that spoils their precious youth super-specializing them before their twenties and transforming them into money-making machines for the Market and Technology until they are finally abandoned to their fate of other thirty-year retirement playing golf or lying on a beach. I claim that young people take the most advantage possible of their youth and employ that precious time to fully train as persons, citizens and collaborators on public welfare. Let us not wait until they grow old to give them back the stolen and now useless time.

I reject the vertiginous race to professionalism and specialization resorting to the threatening justification that we may, otherwise, fall down into inefficiency, chaos and destruction. I reject the Bologna Plan because it does not prove necessary for the society of citizens (not clients) we need to build, but only aims at the Market. Such orientation keeps us far from a world ruled by reason and takes us back to a rather medieval type of society, lost in the obscurity and superstition of the dark ages.

I claim systematic criticism and thought at every professional level. I oppose State secrets and professional confidentiality agreements as they muzzle almost everybody at all social levels: lawyers, dentists, cooks and car mechanics. I defend Wikileaks and hate news conferences without questions.

I claim the reflective vote and public political debates. I hate referenda on irrelevant issues as entertainment for people in order to cover the real social problems affecting the citizens. The use of this democratic tool, in the ballot boxes as well as on the internet, usually and finally becomes a plebiscite, which was and is the most sophisticated fascist instrument.

I reject specialized and corporatist language turned into hermetic dialects used as exclusion tools by the power. I oppose business schools suggested as promising future models for our universities since they are leaded by Nobel Prize winners whose new financial engineering skills nurtured the speculation. Some of these well known gurus must be unmistakably held responsible for the crisis. I reject that these economists take over the

thinkers' position and lie to the citizens to enjoy golden retreats in their yachts and private jets.

We cannot change society but we can find a way, through the thick forest of corruption, which can safely drive us to a brighter future. We cannot selflessly collaborate on our common good if we do not stop the speed race into which we have been dragged and during which we have to ignore the five million unemployed people. If we accept that state of affairs, our high speed society will rapidly slow down and stop.

I claim, together with Ralston Saul, the equilibrium that guarantees the uncertainty of any ideology. I claim the right to doubt and the free use of it as an instrument to control an question power. I claim the citizen's right to be a creative, ethical, intuitive, reasonable individual; one with a historical memory and common sense in a truly democratic society.

And I, finally, claim for mobilization as a reaction to our most logical and current indignation, nonconformism and demonstration at the public square. It is our space and time. Join the protest and recover the public forum. Let us emulate Gabriel Celaya: "Take the square, the time has come to let our bodies be publicly noticed and show them we are alive and announce something new!"

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