

**THE CHESS GAME
OF THE EUROPEAN *DEMOS*:
BUILDING EUROPE WITH AN
INDIRECT STRATEGY OF
SIMULTANEOUS GAMES**

Víctor Pérez-Díaz

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Research Papers



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1. The indirect strategy of building Europe as a triumph of peace over war, and its simultaneous games

1.1. A scenario of peace and indirect strategy

In the frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena,¹ he presents *il buon governo* [good government] in the form of a graceful dance by people weaving around one another against a landscape of cultivated fields transmitting prosperity and tranquillity, as the triumph of peace (Skinner, 2002), in stark contrast to the destruction and violence that accompany *il cattivo governo* [bad government]. This is the mediaeval dream of the “cities of God” (Thompson, 2005). The earthly city that welcomes the community of pilgrims on their way to heaven and becomes one with it. A kind of miracle.

A dream? Perhaps. But it is curious that we find an echo *à rebours*, an echo and a response to those images in the way in which Europe has been, and still is, perceived today from faraway, and which is reflected, for example, in the words of an Indian writer, Karan Singh: “In our youth, we learnt all about European wars: the Wars of the Roses, the Hundred Years War, the First and the Second World War and the Napoleonic Wars. The whole world held its breath over European wars. When the Europeans became colonisers, their wars extended throughout the world. It was the turmoil within Europe that kept the world in a state of upheaval which lasted for centuries. That is why it is such a surprise to us to see the emergence of the European Union. It seems almost like a miracle.” (2008: 91). The dream become miracle?

There are historical situations in which, when conflicts arise, the opposing parties are led to adopt a strategy seeking the total defeat of their adversaries. In contrast, other situations lend themselves to an indirect grand strategy in the long term as a more reasonable option, with the aim of not simply taking a position, winning a battle or successfully concluding a campaign but, more importantly, of winning the peace (Liddell Hart, 2015 [1954]). A stable and enduring peace which, by definition, involves the incorporation of the defeated. This is exactly what the victorious allies of the First World War, for example, failed to do, in the same way that the winners of the Spanish civil wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also failed to do.

An indirect grand strategy with the ultimate aim of winning the peace may have a principal agent but what it has, above all, is a plurality of agents engaging in many activities in diverse fields of operations: politics, the economy, society and culture. And, with that peace in mind, they must adhere to certain rules of civility, respect and care in the way in which they treat one another. Partly for reasons of benevolence. Partly out of common sense, because we know that, in the long run, we all have to continue to live together or close to one another, and living in conditions of resentment, violence and chaos is not living. And partly out of nostalgia for those cities of *il buon governo* of long ago whose memory, one way or another, lingers on.

It is true that the threat of an unexpected return of violence and chaos is always hanging over us. Those who lived the *belle époque* did not expect to wake up one morning to the First World War and subsequent totalitarianisms. We should even consider whether we ourselves are forgetting the risk. Whether, even today, in spite of the terrible experiences of the many European civil wars of both the

¹ Which I have commented on in another essay in the series to which this work belongs (Pérez-Díaz, 2019a, 2019b), within the framework of the project Studies on Europe, sponsored by Funcas.

twentieth century and earlier, Europe has finally learned the lesson. Not only to avoid war, as the greatest evil, but also to put out the embers of so much past hostility which still smoulder in the form of reciprocal indifference between her nations; that may be expressed in the form of banal and dismissive stereotypes applied to one other at every turn. An indifference that does not encourage a common space for friendship but a space of more or less calculated relationships between correct but distant strangers.

But how to avoid the chaos or that state of reticence or indifference? By means of a “decisive” grand strategy? Decisive for what? Perhaps for taking a hill by assault, for coming first in elections, or for winning a war... but without winning the peace. Decisive because a General Staff designs Plan A, with the corresponding Plan B already in place? Decisive because of party-political manoeuvring, social movements, the media, manifestos, tribunals, and propaganda campaigns? For concluding with the solemn act, the final ceremony, the signing of the corresponding treaty? Which, for all that, may be back in dispute by the very next day.

This is to aspire to very little and to hope for too much. To aspire to a brief and ephemeral triumph, renouncing a true and lasting peace. And to hope too much of leaders and their staff officers, with their networks of political, media and financial élites. Too much, because experience tells us that a final victory forged around a peace project will only be successful if it manages to curb the tendency of the élites to create and recreate a public space full of belligerence and mistrust. In general, it is scarcely to be hoped that these élites will display either much friendship or much civic conversation, nor that they will make enough effort at reconciliation, inclusion or mutual confidence. Unless they were to repent and change; which is unlikely to happen merely by moral exhortation.

1.2. The playing of simultaneous games

In any event, while waiting for this miracle of change to take place, what can be done? Lots of things, and some of them, while apparently minor, can prove to be the foundation for other, greater, things. Pascal said that one can acquire faith through the practice of even such a simple ritual as crossing oneself with holy water and attending mass (1950 [1658-1661]: fragment 233). A gesture of devotion: of bearing witness and offering a gift that becomes a habit, an attitude and a belief. Another ritual is to speak truthfully, to listen intently and to act accordingly. In this way, by combining gestures, words and acts, by going from the micro to the macro, it is possible to try to deconstruct and reconstruct the public space in such a way that it is not dominated by the struggle between élites, supported by their followers, but becomes a scenario for the playing of multiple games simultaneously, in which society - the many - can participate, each in their own way.

Chess-playing: a ritual that makes one think, and that is based as much on the obsession with winning as on the desire to play and the experience of playing. In simultaneous games of chess, one player, a master, faces up to thirty opponents and spends his time passing from one table to the next. He challenges them and teaches them. Now let us imagine double that number or many more players and observers, who discuss and take their own risks by moving a piece here or there, and who communicate among themselves all the time. And that, in the end, they come together and reassemble as a few collective agents who share the experience of playing and respecting the rules, and who continue playing.

By applying this metaphor to the European public space (and something analogous to that of Spain), we can imagine it as a scenario of multiple games: the game of choosing governments, at one level or

another, of deciding policies of all kinds, of comparing or sharing different symbolisms, etc. In order to keep it simple, I propose that we group them together and look closely at the following: firstly, *games of representation*, in which we face the democratic dilemma whereby democracy means either the power (*cratos*) of the *demos*, or power over the *demos* on the part of their representatives, namely, the political class. The latter is as likely to make an effort to promote democracy, compensating for the limitations of society's deliberations and its civic participation (Achen and Bartels, 2016) as it is to weaken it, marginalising the voice of common sense and the sense of the common good of ordinary people.² Secondly, *games of substantive policies*, especially those of an *economic and social nature*, which, if they achieve a sufficient level of success, provide the customary bases for the substantive legitimacy attributed to democracies. Thirdly, *games relative to the forms of politics*, whose role is key to resolving that dilemma of democracy as well as to ensuring its substantive legitimacy.³

2. Games of representation and the dilemma of democracy

As I have indicated, the dilemma of democracy can be considered as a dilemma of the political class, hesitating between strengthening, or weakening and degrading the role of the *demos*. My understanding of degradation of the *demos* is what happens when the *demos* becomes fragmented: either it disintegrates into countless atoms that are barely connected to one another or its capacity for agency and participation in public affairs is substantially reduced. Degradation of the *demos* means its division, which can be achieved in any one of three ways.

The first is by means of the division of the community into an "us", which is the political class itself (with its own language, its own agenda and its distancing from the rest), and a "them", which is the "sovereign people", who are converted, de facto, into "truly sovereign for ten minutes": the time required to go to the polling station and cast a vote. This is not very long. Although we should recognise that it is much longer than in a totalitarian country, where the time may be reduced to "ten minutes in a public demonstration in an entire lifetime". This is how a humble railway electrician, Vladimir Dremlyuga, described it when he took part in a demonstration in the Red Square in Moscow, protesting against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968: "All my conscious life I have wanted to be a citizen (...) For ten minutes I was a citizen, during the demonstration" (and he was arrested as a result: compiled in Berman, 1982: 284).

This testimony also lets us expand on the argument in terms of complexity and indetermination, because the choices made by the élites are not predetermined in either orientation or degree. They may continue a tendency (or, let's say, not resist going with the flow) but they usually have some leeway in what they do. They may insist on promoting democracy by encouraging participation of the *demos*, or in weakening democracy by marginalising or undervaluing its voice. In this respect, over the last few decades, for example, the situation has clearly been open to a number of possibilities. The enlargement of the European Union has led many people to feel a growing sensation that, by expanding the territorial reach of its activities, European policy has put them at a distance; although

² The "wisdom of crowds" (Surowiecki, 2005), or "the voice of civil society" (Pérez-Díaz, 2017), or what the ancients, Aristotle in particular, might consider as "the virtue of the multitude" (Cammack, 2013).

³ Obviously there are other games of great importance, although I do not analyse them here. These include games of foreign and defence policy and, in general, games of (shared) memory and culture. On this, see Pérez-Díaz (2019b).

this does not apply to the countries which have joined the EU; nor to the people who are more attuned to the worldwide projection of Europe. The debates that have taken place in recent years on managing the economic crisis have been able to reduce that distance by demonstrating the interconnection between the economies and the economic policies of different countries; but they have also shown the difficulties of a clear debate on the subject between some countries and others.

The second way of degrading the *demos* is to divide both the political class and citizens against themselves or, in current terminology, to polarise politics and society. In simple terms, what are (supposedly) the left-wing half and the right-wing half become each other's enemy. Excluded from power, Party X is disqualified and frequently demonised. As a result, its voters are also denigrated and demonised because the argument applied to them is that either Party X voters (potentially half of the country) know what they are voting for, in which case they are malign and should be opposed; or else they do not know, in which case they are stupid, emotional or ignorant and should be despised. There is no space here for friendship. There can only be mistrust, hostility, suspicion, disdain, fear or antipathy towards them: only negative feelings.

Of course, in reality, this argument is more nuanced. As we shall see, experience tells us that such a clear-cut half-and-half division is usually an extreme situation, and the internal diversity of each country remains such that the opportunity arises, over and over again (and the history of Europe is witness to this) for establishing criteria for coalitions, consociations and cohabitations, for peaceful alternations of power or the rapprochement of the policies of one side and the other (and also by means of a Third Way or triangulation: Morris, 1997).

The third way is dividing society by fomenting the dispersion of interest groups (such as lobbies or unions, for example) and identity groups (by ethnicities, for example) to the greatest possible extent at the same time as encouraging a culture of "everyman for himself" amongst all of them. In other words, reinforcing the tendency of each social group or segment to seek to assert itself in an uncertain world where each one centres on their own best interest, which is more or less "understood". This is possibly in the belief that everyone else is alien and strange, or even potentially hostile, and is predisposed to exploit, dominate, despise or ignore them. As a result, they believe that each of them should always be aware of, and be prepared for, the worst-case scenario of a "fight to the death for pure prestige" (Kojève, 1969 [1947]).

Once again, this argument needs to be more nuanced. Because if the fight for recognition is prolonged for too long, it can go through several avatars, and identities can change or become more complex, or evolve into hybrid, mutable identities. It should be remembered that the more complex identities become, because we live with several identities at the same time and/or over time, the more diluted the sense of feeling threatened can also become.

Historical, primarily European, experience tells us that these processes of the weakening or degrading of the *demos* can be cured, relieved or eased by various means, among which are the use of rituals and words to which a magic, religious or crypto-religious power is attributed: anthems, flags, sporting victories, parades, speeches from pulpits or platforms, fireworks or simply fires or bonfires in the streets, as expressions of a craving for empowerment. But I wish to look at the simplest and, frequently, the most effective means, which consists of dealing with these processes by a commitment to substantive public policies: with practical measures that recompose, or seek to recompose, a fragmented *demos*.

3. Basic socio-economic games: a path of relative moderation, and connecting the issues

Included among basic substantive policies are economic and social policies (and others such as foreign and defence policy, as well as cultural policies, none of which I examine here). Their importance continues to be fundamental when it comes to resolving, or managing, the dilemma of democracy; and a large part of the substantive legitimacy attributed to the democratic system has been based on them at a national and European level in recent decades. This is thanks to politicians and the vast majority of citizens following a path of moderation or prudence in these areas in the long term, although with some flagrant deviations, U-turns and critical moments. This has been so in spite of the sound and fury of conflicts and social mobilisations, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century; and it has been so most especially throughout the three-quarters of a century since the end of the Second World War.

In this respect, public debate has tended to take place within a meaningful context, which is what validates it in the eyes of the people. It has involved establishing a *substantive connection* between economic and social policies, which is a widely perceived connection anyway. Because, however much the leaders and intellectuals of the right have persisted in emphasising economic issues, and those of the left, social issues, the majority of people have usually taken *both issues* into account *at the same time* in the understanding that there is no way of making economic policy without linking the economy to questions of survival, legal protection, equality and social cohesion. The market economy and the welfare state (or rather, the mixed system of the state, families and associations that we know in Europe) come together. They are closely linked in everyone's view, and all the more so when the development of those links are guided by common sense. It is understood that, in order to share something, there has to be something to be shared which has previously been produced; or that, to get a job, there have to be job opportunities. And it is obviously better that there are more opportunities than fewer in both the short and the long term; and, preferably, that they are offered in conditions of greater rather than less freedom.

Even when embarked upon an emotionally charged electoral campaign, society tends not to become so single-minded, or, let's say, so blinkered and obsessive, as to overlook the close connection of these two issues. It is as if, even when most prone to be swayed by political hype, the majority of citizens prefer a benign form of bi-polarity while suspecting that the climate of political and media bi-polarity around them abounds with posturing and cajolery.

In the end, the majority usually votes for the left or the right but, in doing so, only commits to their programmes "up to a certain point" (without completely losing sight of a centre alternative, now renamed centre-right, centre-left or even centre-centre). The fact is that, although politicians of the left and the right (and their hangers-on) tend to insist on polarising society, society fights back, though not always successfully. In its own way, a little lacking in confidence in itself, society persists in sending relatively balanced messages, faintly or otherwise, through its voting choices and the way it lives its everyday life, as it tries to adapt to what is going on.

In this way, rather in the discreet, baroque manner of Gracián than in the style of the more distinct, clear-cut ideas of Descartes (not to mention the Enlightenment), and with a certain amount of deliberation and rather more improvisation and reaction to events, the majority of Europeans have given repeated indications of their preference for capitalism or the market economy as a good in itself or as a lesser evil compared to the alternatives; of which many Europeans had a long and intense experience (although one that is perhaps becoming blurred in the imagination of subsequent

generations). A “good in itself” in its better moments, and a “lesser evil” in its less glorious ones. However, whether “second best” or a “lesser evil”, this preference sits within that meaningful context that encompasses both economic and social policies, including issues of justice, inequality and protection of the weak and vulnerable.

The Europe (or at least the Western Europe) of the last seventy years has been the scene of that process of compromises, adjustments and correctives; in short, of tentative attempts at solutions to the economic and social necessities of voters which the latter perceive as interconnected. This has been happening throughout several phases. One was a phase of relative stability over several decades (from the 1940s to the 1970s), led by Christian democrats, social democrats, and their variants. Then there was a more unsettled phase, also lasting several decades, with liberal-conservatives alternating with social democrats. Each European country has followed this path or gone in this direction with varying success but, overall, in a way that has been relatively well-accepted by the majority of citizens; and many have believed that such a path has been fully justified in view of what they have seen happening in other parts of the world: in view of the implosion of the authoritarian, collectivist system of the Soviet Union and the mutation of China towards what it calls market socialism.

This is what has been happening in the West as a whole over the long term, where the type of politics put into practice has usually consisted of a mixture of purpose, improvisation and accommodation to the circumstances, of ordinary people as well as of politicians (Dunn, 1989: 190). Commendable politics, certainly, but limited: neither the high politics of the élites nor a fully participative politics for society. However, this critical distance should not obscure reasons for praise. Although possibly lacking in great visions of state, politics has encouraged or allowed improvements in many basic areas (including hunger, illness, infant mortality, longevity, education, transport, communications, free time, public health) that have led to rising standards of living for everyone. Major wars have been avoided, in recent decades at least, and the triumphs of totalitarian systems seem to have withered away. For many, it remains the ideal reference as regards a culture of reason and freedom, of tolerance and diverse voices, and a culture of caring for others.

In other words, with all their limitations, European societies seem to have functioned fairly successfully in many aspects, at least until now. For the moment, (to use a simile from an earlier essay “Europe like Icarus or Daedalus, with wings of wax”: Pérez-Díaz, 2019a), Daedalus has continued flying, although perhaps in a more hazardous or eventful way that he would care to admit.

4. Forms of politics, or the civilising of politics by means of mutual listening, and the populist challenges

4.1. Overcoming polarisation

Reality resists us, and it resists the pretensions of “the omnipotence of ideas”: of children, of visionaries, of some post-modernists and of the primitive animists (Freud, 1981 [1913]). Although it is true that we can transform reality, we shall do it better if we understand its resistance; even then, we shall do it laboriously, and only after recognising its power, its structure and its own logic. Hence the European reality, the Europe that we know today, is that of a Europe of nations, and Europeanism is the Europeanism of people who, generally, feel themselves to be part of differentiated nations. It has been so throughout the seventy years of “European construction”. Or is it rather seven hundred years? Or one thousand four hundred years, with the corresponding mutations? Are these nations seen from a distance (by Singh, for example, from far-off India: see above) as continually involved in an

interminable war lasting centuries? Are they now possibly tired of destroying one another? Possibly nostalgic for lost empires? Or possibly seeking the recognition of other nations? It is a European construction that is still going forward by means of a continuous give-and-take between nations or nation-states, even when we focus attention on the experience of the social segments that usually consider themselves to be Europeanists and/or globalists.

This is what the experience of the immense majority of businesses has been, whose local market is crucial for them, and whose access to political power is based, above all, on access to the influence of local politicians. Crucial also for cultural élites, obsessed with control of their cultural and linguistic market which is, above all, local; and for the politicians, who visit Brussels but the majority of whom focus their political lives on the national capital. Crucial for ordinary people, who may feel themselves to be more or less European, but in whose imaginary and in whose emotional world a far greater role is usually played by their country or their nation than by any other, more cosmopolitan experiences. And, in general, for all those many people for whom the world would probably lose all meaning if they ever had to experience it having lost their own national identity (Manent, 2006: 10). Or if they were to see themselves, these “citizens of the world”, as Stefan Zweig (1984 [1944]: 478-481) was forced to see himself at that extreme moment in his life when, as a European and cosmopolitan, he had to confront a world that had suddenly become inaccessible and unrecognisable; with his home ground cut away from beneath his feet just when he needed it most. To deny their roots, their way of life, would be to deny what continues to be, for the large majority, probably the immense majority, all that is obvious, and because it is obvious, tacit. For the present. A present which may well last... a few more centuries.

In these circumstances, putting European affairs in order within the European democracy involves putting them in order in one's own country at the same time. To start with, by solving the problems of the here and now whilst engaging with the European whole, whose parts are increasingly linked together but which are no more than halfway to being aligned.

This is a difficult task made even more so in such turbulent times as the present. Nevertheless, disturbances can act as stimulants: stimulants to learn new and better ways of understanding and managing European diversity. On condition that such diversity does not become discord. And in order to avoid that, it is necessary to construct a public space based on the premise of *listening* to our adversaries and discerning the rationale, or its lack, behind their proposals. And behind our own.

4.2. Listening to the adversaries, what they say and what they mean

To follow are three illustrations of what listening to others in the midst of the sound and fury of present day political life could mean. Listening with the intention of understanding what they say, and what they mean, with an awareness of the substance and rhetoric of the discussion. I focus here on the Europeanists / globalists and the nationalists / populists listening to each other. It is generally supposed that the former reason more, which should imply that they listen more. Populists and nationalists are often characterised as emotional people who are prone to get angry, but they tend to see themselves as the ones with common sense and consider their opponents as dominated by their own passions, in this case, pride and arrogance.

I suggest that the best way for them to listen to each other - a long-term task - in a way that is beneficial for developing a strategy orientated towards winning a lasting peace, is for everyone to try to understand the viewpoint of the other side. I deal with the subject mainly by considering how the

Europeanists / globalists regard populists / nationalists, leaving the opposite view for another occasion. I would offer two words of caution: firstly, that the voice of populisms and nationalisms is not only the voice of their leaders but also that of their grassroots; and, secondly, that the content of that voice is not only what is said but also, I insist, what is meant (Davidson, 2006).

What the leaders say may or may not relate to a grand strategy for breaking up the European Union; or to a mercantilism which, though populist, in reality reflects the mentality of those who spearheaded the combination of “trade and war” of three centuries ago, which was key to the formation of the modern political economy and the parliamentary political system: (Hont, 2005). Nevertheless, their grassroots both can and want to say other things; and to express, in their own way and on the basis of their own experience, their wish to live a quiet life free of crime, to go their own way without feeling manipulated by distant élites, and to have a degree of social recognition and economic opportunity, etc. That the globalist élites are obsessed with what the representatives of populist electorates say may be normal, in the sense that they perceive them as their competitors for power, but, by doing so, they ignore the voice of the followers of those populist leaders. This is an oversight that reduces their capacity to include them in the political community and highlights the limitations of their own strategy.

Firstly, for example, many Europeanists and globalists see Brexit as a collective madness on the part of half the British population, who claim that they want to “take back control of their destiny”. Perhaps by doing so they are going to miss “the train of the future”. But, perhaps for that half, “the heart has its reasons”, as Pascal would say (fragment 277). Perhaps their attitude has a reason; one that is anchored in the present and in the past of what they perceive as their daily lives, their memories and their identity. A reason that is rooted in the experience of an *Old England* which refuses to disappear and is more important than it seems to be in the collective imaginary (or at least that of the élites). It refuses to become the object of a “funeral elegy” (Scruton, 2006). Perhaps an exercise in mutual understanding is long overdue between the globalists and localists of today, and vice versa; and all the more so if one bears in mind that they are all the children and grandchildren of the Great Britain that ruled the seas not so long ago.

Secondly, a number of observers have considered the alliance between the left-wing and right-wing populists in Italy in recent times to be an aberration. However, it should give us pause for thought that, in this case, the extremes converge. The Five Star Movement and the Northern League, for example, have coexisted as allies and rivals (for, to some, a fleeting amount of time but long enough, I believe, to be significant), exhibiting an elaborate combination of *finezza* and *doppiezza*, of delicacy and deceit, for exercising power together and maintaining, in their own way, the same curious trajectory of muddling through, faithful to an ancestral tradition, that was perfected by the major parties. It is what the country has almost always done and which almost appears to it, in moments of wise but melancholy insight, to be its natural order. Adding an expressive touch that seems to have got out of control.

It is perhaps this third example that indicates most clearly how the right and the left may not be so antagonistic as is generally claimed, neither when one looks at the centre, the centre-right and the centre-left, so often working in tandem, nor when one looks at the extremes. This has been clear at least since the time in which a large segment of the French working class stopped voting for the left (communists and socialists) and started voting for Jean-Marie and Marine Le Pen; and possibly since the time that the Nazi and Soviet totalitarian states became allies and divided up Poland between them, leaving each other with a free hand to pursue their respective expansion policies. Thereby

turning on its head the traditional, politically correct reading of the spaces reserved for the left and the right.⁴

Everything suggests that there is a need to rethink, case by case, the spectrum of tangible realities, institutions and substantive policies, and of political symbolisms, that we have before us. In doing so, we find an assortment of countries that (as occurs in both France and Italy) have different and recurring identity reflexes as well as persistent reservations (and with different modalities: liberal, neo-corporatist, clientelist, statist...) in the face of Anglo-Saxon style capitalism, and an ambiguous relationship with the political class in power. The conclusion must be that, to understand the situation better, structure and culture should be re-examined on a country-by-country basis; and although the historical perspective should be broadened, it is essential to concentrate more on the details and the forms of the experience in question.

For their part, the countries of Eastern Europe are frequently seen as doubtful Europeans, dominated by unregenerate populists. However, perhaps a greater effort should be made to comprehend them as countries which have only just emerged from a situation of secular dependence and, in particular, from a quasi-colonial oppression of over half a century at the hands of the Soviet Union (Rupnik, 2019). Not to mention the fact that they had earlier been invaded by imperial troops of every stripe, and many times. Poland, for one, was invaded by two central-European countries, Austria and Prussia, and by Russia, who carved it up and shared it out. They were all Christian countries, of different denominations, and all enlightened and modernising in one way or another; and they fell into the orbit of the Soviet Union with the express acquiescence of the Western democracies. Perhaps those past traumas should be taken into account and the fact that, as a result, the countries of Eastern Europe believe it necessary to affirm their self-government, having interpreted their entry into the European Union as an endorsement of their recently regained independence rather than as a step towards its loss.

The critical issue is this: if one wishes to combat populism, one has to begin by combating the angry, aggressive element of populism which threatens to cause a break up of the political community; however, in this case, it is necessary to combat this angry element in both “them” and in “us”. That is why the path of moderation is so important in not only the content of politics but, above all, in its form. Hence it is an internal contradiction of globalism and Europeanism to adopt an angry and belligerent attitude towards populism and to exclude it; because that is to imitate and to strengthen it, and to encourage in society a polarisation that is at variance with the survival, and even the improvement, of the political community and democracy.

To avoid any possible misunderstanding, I insist that I am not saying that present-day nationalisms and populisms are “in the right” in comparison to their globalist and Europeanist adversaries; nor that they offer “the” satisfactory answers to the ongoing problems of Europe or its member countries. And I would not do so for the basic reasons that I outlined at the start of the essay, concerned with dealing with the dilemma of democracy and its substantive legitimacy. This is because a very important component of populisms today is their urge for either a greater division of communities or for a drastic and illiberal reduction of their internal diversity; also their injudicious handling of socio-economic public policies, and their bellicose and simplistic attitudes that make it impossible to have reasoned conversation or a reconciled society.

⁴ And taking into account that, in reality, the history of this confusion of categories dates back much further; see Pérez-Díaz (2008).

This said, I would add that, in a comprehensive strategy to construct Europe as a space for peace in the long term, and at the same time to “make a country”, we have to distance ourselves from the sound and fury of the current debate: to be able to distinguish the rational core that *everyone’s* proposals may have. In what is going to be a long-lasting debate, it is about understanding the reasons put forward by the other side; something that I have only touched on here, in looking at the positions held by populists. The debate must not be allowed to become a trading of insults leading to an escalation of extreme views (Girard, 2007). On the contrary, it must promote a conversation between different narratives with a view to integrating the different Europes of which the one Europe is made up. Of which, it should be said, the European Union is a substantial part but not the whole: Great Britain is, and will continue to be, a crucial part of Europe, as are Norway and Switzerland.

And what about Spain? Spain has the usual populisms and others, if you count the peripheral nationalisms. They may destabilise us more, or they may not. Perhaps they will upset the institutional balance and the balance in public policy-making at this time, with their many merits and demerits, or perhaps not. Perhaps not, because by attempting to understand them and deal with them, we have the opportunity to understand the fragility of that institutional balance, and the shortsightedness of public policies. In which case, on becoming more aware of both the vulnerability of the system and the limits of political experience of Spanish citizens and their political class, in view of what they have both been doing over several decades, it is time to take the next step.

4.3. The populist challenges and the ambiguity of the historical process

In general terms, this next step is to understand that the solution is not to exclude these many and varied populisms, thrust them into the outer darkness and throw a cordon sanitaire around them. At least, not without first exploring a combined strategy of resisting and redirecting them or, as was said during the years of compromise and *modus vivendi* in the 1990s, by starting to try and triangulate them. By setting out to imagine possible scenarios, we may discover that they would be delighted to triangulate themselves and draw closer to the mainstream political classes: to become respectable parties, entering into coalitions and participating in the government of the day, at the first opportunity, and, in this way, moving on from poetic cultural revolution to prosaic administration. Along the way, they will hope not to lose what they imagine to be their better impulses, leaving their realisation for a more propitious moment on an indefinite horizon; and, in the meantime, alternating praise and blame.

In other words, yes, populists can opt for rebellion, for living intensely and getting carried away by inspiration, and for subverting institutions by taking them over in the manner of the Leninists and Fascists of days gone by. However, they may prefer to act in a manner more similar to that of the young *gauchistes* of May, 1968, who “did not lose their way” and who, in fact, did not even miss their summer holidays that year, and certainly not their opportunity of the long march through the institutions (a simulacrum of Mao’s long march) that were to change them into the respectable middle classes and political, economic, social and cultural leaders that they became. In fact, they engaged on an ambiguous path. This could be called co-optation or domestication or the betrayal of ideals; it could also be called a process of maturation and enculturation, depending on the development of events and on the final destination, to be continually redefined (Waelhens, 1951).

In order to stimulate discussion, outside the usual context, it is interesting to explore the analogy between that potential grand strategy of changing the world by adapting it to that of these post-

modern secularist populists, and the strategy of conversion of the heathen on the part of eminent witnesses from our early modernity such as the Jesuit missionaries, like Matteo Ricci, who were at the Chinese court of the Ming Emperors (Fontana, 2017), determined to become like the Chinese in order to convert them, and accepting the need to change themselves along the way. They adopted this same, or a similar, call to friendship; including the rites of ancestor worship, as an example of upholding a sense of community over time; and making their own vision of divinity coincide as closely as they could with the one held, in a more or less confused way, by the Chinese. Of course, he and his fellow Jesuits were accused of the equivalent of co-optation and opportunism for doing this, and they still are today. For others, and for us, however, it may be better thought of as a fascinating process of maturation and inculturation.

Mutatis mutandis we might wonder if and when today's populists (on the left) would clarify their own ambiguity by imitating their ancestors, in this case, the rebels of the late sixties, under present conditions, and return either to some new version of social-democracy or to some variant of Maoism (including that of today's China).

In short, we should be realistic but, set to be optimistic (and is there a contradiction?), and in the light of those and other similar experiences, and always aware of several simultaneous games, we should consider the possibility of progressing to a common knowledge and a knowledge of how-to-be-together. Right now, élites and citizens could move on from their obsession with here-and-now snapshots of elections, (or a news item, a bankruptcy, a scandal, a terrorist attack, a win-or-lose situation) to an understanding more similar to that of a film: as a *process* that develops over time. It would be a process of learning which may be incomplete and frequently forgotten, but which can always be recalled; especially in view of so many accumulated experiences of successes and failures.

Specifically, what globalists and Europeanists can learn from populists and nationalists is very simple (at least until they decide to impose a mutual cordon sanitaire: when they are still in their right minds). The former can listen to what the latter "want to say" to them, with their slightly exaggerated rhetoric, and ponder up to what point they want to say something similar (and almost as comprehensible) in return, such as: "we feel lost in an economic system that is difficult to understand and with a very pronounced oligarchic bent; in a political system prejudiced by party politicking and the ongoing *agitprop* of an overly biased media; in a social system that beckons us to succeed individually, defying the world, but then ultimately crushes us completely or offers minimal shelter; and in a *me first/us first* culture that partially satisfies my/our narcissism but partially signifies a continuous learning that, by definition, involves the un-learning of a large part (the better part?) of what we have just learnt, and all in order to culminate in a kind of Tower of Babel".

Conclusion

And although the populists do not perhaps have the right answers, they do at least have the right questions. And if their particular version of the "wisdom of crowds" does not take us very far, it still offers food for thought, and a useful pause.

And there is more. Globalists and Europeanists can benefit from the presence of the populists to ask themselves about their own way of working, and particularly about the possibility that the problem of polarisation that they impute to those on the extremes owes less to the fact that the latter exist and

more to the fact that the centrists, amongst themselves, hate each other so much. A hatred which, in turn, gives rise to the populisms.⁵

Consequently, given that we are considering worst-case scenarios, we have to contemplate the possibility that the inertia of the usual institutions and imaginaries, combined with the thirst for domination of some, the complicity of others and the indifference of third parties, could result in the habitual mix of hostile polarisations that, in the longer term leave commitments empty of any meaning. And thus they relegate dreams of discovery and learning together (and recognising, in passing, how much we do not know and have not learnt) to remain as nothing more than dreams.

And yet, this is still a good moment for everyone to learn. Even, in some way, to learn from the Chinese... and especially “to learn from those who wanted to learn”, as the testimony of Matteo Ricci about his Chinese contemporaries suggests. In order to be able, among other reasons, to teach them something. What a curious experience that encounter of so much knowledge between Confucian mandarins and Jesuits, benevolent men of the Enlightenment (as Leibniz would say) must have been, *sui generis* from their respective civilisations. An encounter that was possible perhaps because they all began to suspect that *none* of them knew as much as they thought. Which can act as a counterpoint, a wake-up call and, perhaps, an inspiration, to the élites of the Europe of today, so keen to formulate their project in the world.

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⁵ As has occurred recently in Spain, for example, in which the mutual hostility between the socialist party and the Popular Party has handed a very important strategic advantage to peripheral nationalisms.

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