
Catalunya 3D. Demografia, diversitat i democràcia

(3D Catalonia. Demography, Diversity and Democracy)

Andreu Domingo

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Catalunya 3D is an important book worth being read and debated by the country's social and political actors. Written by a demographer, it reaches far beyond his affiliation with this field and draws from the social sciences in general, especially sociology and political science, in addition to demographics. It is a bold book that never pulls its punches, a book with solid arguments that puts forth the author's theses about the complex situation today facing Catalonia today.

The book by Andreu Domingo can be read in several ways. One way would be to take an analytical perspective: what do demographics, sociology and politics say about the problems facing Catalan society today? A second reading would focus more on the topics it addresses: the *Procés*, international migration, the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils, the rise of the far right, the pandemic, the economic crisis, national identity... and the list goes on. The third could follow the structure proposed by the author: the dilemmas in the Catalan reproduction system, the purpose of stories in post-truth times and the crisis in democracies provoked by neoliberalism.

Increasing longevity has upset both the social definition of the different ages and relations among generations. Until what age is one young? When does one become old? Is it sustainable for some pensioners to earn more than young workers? What lies behind the pushback in retirement age? Questions like this are fuelling a supposed intergenerational war whose flames some are fanning to divert attention from the real problems facing the old and the young alike. On the other hand, the acceleration in international migration since the start of the century has fed the Great Replacement theory, which posits that these migrants will bring about the end of Western civilisation, rendering native peoples irrelevant minorities. Faced with this threat, which was invented by some analysts and propagated by the far right, it is essential to flatly assert certain truths: that for many years the Catalan reproduction system has welcomed successive waves of immigrants to offset the low local fertility rates, serve the country's economy and strengthen its demographic dimension; that the foreign-born population now makes up 20 % of those who live in Catalonia, and this is an inescapable fact that should be at the core of the policies of the different public administrations

and any future plans; that Western civilisation has done plenty of good, but also some horrible things (colonialism and the patriarchy, to name just two), in addition to being internally plural and having shown a proven capacity for assimilation and evolution; and that wanting us to believe that Europeans will go the way of the Natives of North America, marginalised and mistreated in their own country, requires a sound dose of dystopian imagination or malevolent intentionality.

What we have agreed to call the *Procés* can be perceived from two complementary vantage points: as an encouraging, mobilising outcome, like an available utopia, against the consequences of neoliberal globalisation, but also as a collective, articulated reaction to abandonment and mistreatment by the State (an unfair financing system and an antiquated, insufficient railway system, to cite just two examples), which regards Catalans as foreigners: it is no coincidence that anti-Catalanism is so useful in elections in the rest of Spain... Increasing inequalities, unstable working conditions and the gradual dismantling of the welfare state have led to a significant increase in right-wing national populism in many European countries as a strategy for the middle classes and workers to resist globalisation. In Catalonia, these population sectors may have found the *Procés* to be a different way to come together, and this is also why its failure may have led to empty nihilistic mistrust or hopeless fatigue. The *Procés* also revealed that the Spanish State is not culturally and nationally neutral: it has an official language and religion, a nationality that is identified with only part of the territory and a capital that has the right to suck up everything, while anything that meddles in this project has to be marginalised or destroyed. After all, it is not true that with the dawn of globalisation states have lost power compared to supranational organisations or regional or local administrations; instead, the priorities have simply shifted. Now they serve the financial economy and large multinationals, have abdicated their redistributive function, have increased their forms of control and repression and are increasingly acting as apparently technical executives who unflappably accept the dehumanising consequences of their actions, including the assumption that there will be an increasing percentage of surplus people.

Avoiding the country's social fracture to guarantee social cohesion by keeping economic inequalities from becoming unbearable and preventing cultural differences from threatening peaceful coexistence has long been a concern. It dates back to the 1960s, with the migrants arriving from different regions of Spain, especially Andalusia. 'Catalunya, un sol poble' (Catalonia, a single people) was an objective coined by Josep Benet from the Christian right, which Paco Candel adopted and Jordi Pujol also incorporated from the Catalanist right. Those were the years when the national discourse deliberately made the Catalan language the prime anthropological framework of the Catalan people, which still remains today. After all, it is not genetic or hereditary, like skin colour or surnames may be, but can be learned by anyone and is not exclusionary. This is likely the reason explaining the fierce opposition to Spanish nationalism as opposed to Catalan nationalism, which has heightened lately but began back in the early years of the Statute of Autonomy and pivots around three vectors: the fractioning of the unity of the language, the victimisation of Spanish-speakers given the supposed persecution and marginalisation of

Spanish and the futility of Catalan in the open, cosmopolitan market compared to the power of the Spanish language. But it also bears saying that the unity of the Catalan people in the waning years of the Franco regime and during the transition to democracy came not only from the Catalan language as a unifying element but also from the shared struggle in favour of democracy and against the dictatorship, from the improvement of neighbourhoods left to fend for themselves and from the actual possibility of rising social mobility which made it possible for the children of immigrants to reach higher levels of education, employment and life in general than their parents. This should lead us to think that the integration of foreign immigrants into the body politic and the Catalan nation cannot solely entail the use of Catalan, but their human rights must be recognised and they must be able to actually exercise them, as well as having the possibility of climbing the social ladder and no longer being forced to occupy the lowest rung on the job and urban ladders. National integration without attending to the economic dimension is simply a fallacy.

Regarding democracy, Andreu Domingo's book critically points to a left hijacked by the neoliberal story—which is primarily concerned with efficiency, innovation and accountability yet unconcerned with socioeconomic inequalities, the housing market emergency, urban and school segregation and the deterioration of the healthcare system—along with a far right that is asking the questions that the left is avoiding, blaming the left for all evils and claiming that the crisis in values caused by feminism, environmentalism, the heirs of May '68 and claiming that the cosmopolitan elites who monopolise the European Union are at the root of it all, not the economy. Their arguments are well-trodden territory: *our* culture is threatened by multiculturalism, *our* safety by Islamist terrorism and *our* welfare by uncontrolled waves of foreign immigrants.

It is a time of dystopias, the author tells us, of stories that paint an imaginary future that is much worse than the present, as seen in literature and films. It is the time of narratives and discourses fed by lies or truths called 'alternative', which identify specific enemies, appeal to the emotions, divert attention from the essential issues yet help to comfort and bring cohesion to societies that are disoriented and frightened by uncertainty.

As I stressed above, *Catalunya 3D* is worth reading because it places us in front of the mirror and forces us to ask ourselves who we are and what is happening to us, and to try to give some type of response that avoids superficiality and propaganda.