



From Right Wing to Far Right

New Discourses, New Stages

THIRD NETWORKING MEETING ON PRESENT HISTORY

Barcelona, Autonomous University, March 3 de marzo, 2017



Last March, the Research Group in Present History (UAB) organized its third networking meeting – the second dedicated to the extreme right –entitled *From Right Wing to Far Right: New Discourses, New Stages*. The focus was on the importance of language and discourse in the recent upsurge of the far right in Europe and America. Interest in the topic was reinforced by Facebook's prominence with respect to the recent victory of Donald Trump, and the leading role of Robert Mercer in this. It was also a factor in Brexit's triumph following the June 2016 referendum in the UK. The controversies raised by the concept of "post-truth," the works and analysis of specialist authors such as Evgeny Morozov, Andrew Keen or the sociologist Dan Ariely and, in general, the rise of the ultra-right in the United States, Great Britain, France, Holland and Austria were all considered.

To discuss these current topics, we invited professors Barbara De Cock (Université Catholique de Louvain) and Maarten van Leeuwen (Universiteit Leiden), who specialize in the analysis of political discourses, and Heidi T. Skjeseth and Alexander Fanta, research fellows at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Oxford University), who are experts in mass and social media. We also counted on the participation of professors from Catalan universities, including Enric Ucelay Da Cal (Universitat Pompeu Fabra), Francisco Veiga (Uni-

versitat Autònoma de Barcelona) and Steven Forti (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), and researchers Carlos González Villa (Center for Advanced Studies – South Eastern Europe, Sveučilište u Rijeci), Mariona Lloret (Universitat Pompeu Fabra) and Jelena Prokopliević (PhD Architecture, Institut Ramon Llull).

The event started at 10 a.m. on March 3 and lasted until 6 pm, with a lively flow of ideas, information and opinions. The meeting started with a discussion of preliminary ideas, followed by debate focused on the central question and the discussion of new concepts. The conclusions of the networking meeting can be summarized as follows:

a.- The "microdiscourse", the "attitude" and gestuality, frequently channeled through social networks, are becoming relevant in the global context of the deconstruction of traditional political messages, which are hitherto articulated and structured. This tendency occasionally leads to primary feelings. According to Andrew Keen's approach (*The Internet is Not the Answer*, Atlantic Books, 2015), the emotion that is most spread in social media is anger, distantly followed by joy. We are more willing to share our indignation with strangers than joy (p. 210). Anger does not have a specific political significance, but it is clear that radical options are the ones that benefit from this feeling. [Concept: "Online Haters"].

The lie – frequently associated with concepts such as "post truth" – is another factor that has gained relevance in social and mass media, following Brexit and the election campaign of Donald Trump and his inaugural address. However, Dan Ariely, professor of psychology and behavioral economics at Duke University, points out that it is evident that blatant lies had much to do with recent financial scandals such as the Enron disaster and the recession of 2008. Indeed, President Trump's style seems to have a lot to do with an aggressive businessman mentality: exaggerating or lying does not matter if the goal is selling the product.

b.- The left has lost a lot of ground against the right-wing in this process, as the later benefits more from destructive and primary discourses in social media, reinforced by the use of robots (bots) that amplify and diffuse the impact of this language. The left, immersed in tactics of "a ritualistic nature, laden with a heavy dose of fatalism" (Nick Srnicek & Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*, Verso Books, 2016) has tended towards emphasizing victimhood and disorientation, lacking the reflexes to face the "destructive offensive" of the far right (Concept: "Weeping Left"). In this vein, the extreme right seems to have an "antifragile" structure, in the terms of Nassim Nicholas Taleb (*Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder*, Random House, 2012).

c.- In fact, it is possible to speak of a phenomenon we call "Inverse May 1968". In May 1968, demonstrators organized what seemed to be an imminent, spontaneous and disorganized revolution, which did not end as such. They resorted to an arsenal of slogans that sought to *épater les bourgeois*. Television, the dominant medium, was the vehicle of these gestures. Today, social media are the dominant vehicle, and the expressions and gestures that scandalize the self-righteous and politically correct are conceived and disseminated by the far right. In fact, they form an actual "troll culture" (concept), based on Andrew Keen's assumption about *online haters*. The 'quenelle' (devised by the French comedian Dieudonné) is another example, representing a gesture that is supposed to be anti-Semitic, but is also a joker. It is the new iconoclastic right against the "Weeping Left," which has fallen into the neoliberal trap of the politically correct. This is the space in which the far right is getting votes, and not in conventional political campaigns. This spirit unites Marine Le Pen with Donald Trump and Nigel Farage. The short expression format of social media becomes the perfect field of action.

d.- At the popular level, this effect reinforces the idea that neoliberal globalization has suffered a major setback with the political changes in the United States and Brexit. If, precisely, the powers that led this world-scale process have turned dramatically towards nationalist protectionism, it becomes clear that the countries of the European Union have been placed in an uncomfortable position. This situation is kindling the far right, who point to the United States and the United Kingdom as role models in order to dismantle the European Union and apply protectionist policies, both economically and socially (in relation to the refugee crisis). This partially coincides with the program of the radical left, which the far right has absorbed in countries like Austria or France. Therefore, the European far right has occupied the position of being an effective manager of the change from neoliberal globalization to an allegedly set of populist, more social policies from protectionist and anti-globalization positions.

e. Finally, the rise of the extreme right may not necessarily lead to a repetition of history, with the reappearance of a Hitler figure and a new European war - a new 1939. In the same way that the Marxist left failed to re-activate a revolution like the Soviets triggered in 1917 in the Western world, the ultra-right and even neo-fascism are not forcibly the same as they were between 1919 and 1945. It would be reasonable to consider that the twenty-first century might bring the fatal weariness of the far right, which is currently fighting a rearguard battle.