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Who Is a Spaniard?

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"Vox wanted to appropriate the rhetoric of the national priority without assuming the cost of defining it"

A few days ago I made the mistake—or the entertainment—of opening X and meeting with Manuel Gavira's pifia _boomer_ that was throwing down the millenial virguería of Vox's "national priority" by pointing out that a Peruvian would be as Spanish as you would be after ten years in Spain. **This triggered an exciting debate in networks, in the press and in more than one table: what the hell exactly does that mean about "the Spaniards first"?**

The phrase, emphatically launched by Vox under the formula of "national priority", has the rhetorical virtue of every great political slogan: it sounds forceful, intuitive and mobilizing. It also has, as with the big slogans, a small drawback: it means nothing until someone explains what it means.

Moved by a mixture of intellectual curiosity and digital masochism, I decided to ask publicly something that seemed quite reasonable to me: who exactly are the "Spanish" who are intended to prioritize?

The answers were most varied, especially those that were not of bots sent by the Mints above. Manolo, let us say, gave me and our readers a very symptomatic argumentation of the level of current politics in our country, of its supply and demand.

To the question of who is Spanish—or who should be Spanish—Manolo responded, with a lot of determination, what I consider to be a small jewel of bar political philosophy.

"Nationals," Manolo said.

"And who are the nationals?" I asked.

“Those who have nationality,” Manolo replied.

"And to whom do we give our nationality then?" I replied, already making the point.

“To the nationals,” Manolo replied again, not deriding himself.

"But... who are the nationals?" I asked in despair.

"Those who have the nationality," Manolo said.

At that moment I had the feeling of having been absorbed by a logical black hole from which I am not yet sure I had left. **Manolo won that debate out of sheer exhaustion.**

The scene inevitably reminded of Matt Walsh's already celebrated documentary, _What Is a Woman?_, in which the contemporary inability of some to define what a woman is derived from a hilarious concatenation of tautologies: a woman is the person who self-defines or declares herself as such. But then, who is a woman? Well that. Here we attended the same phenomenon applied to the nation: **Spanish are those who have Spanish nationality, and have Spanish nationality because they are Spanish.**

It would be of little importance if we were faced with a mere anecdote from social networks. But we are not. Because Vox has introduced into the public debate a question of enormous political, philosophical and civilizational significance: **what exactly is the Spanish nation and who is a substantive part of it.**

And once that door is opened, it is no longer enough to repeat slogans.

Any policy of national priority rests on a simple premise: there is a _demos_, a delimitable political community, whose members deserve preference in the allocation of resources, rights or protection by the State.

But that forces a previous question to be answered: **How is that community defined?** Because if the nation is simply an administrative group of people with a passport issued by the State, then the national priority means absolutely nothing new. It would be enough to maintain the current system: national it is who the State says is national. End point.

But if Vox means something deeper — and obviously means something deeper — then he must explain **what substantive criteria justify that belonging**.

«It is necessary to explain who the Spaniards are, why they are, what makes them such, and by virtue of what principles someone ceases to be or becomes»

Is it Spanish who is born in Spain?

Who speaks Spanish?Who has Spanish descent?Who shares Hispanic culture?Who fully assimilates himself?Who professes political loyalty to the nation?Who is part of a certain historical tradition?

Each response leads to different political consequences. And all are controversial, which does not mean that some are more successful than others, and even that there are some that are directly good. The proof that the issue is not trivial is that, in the face of Vox's conceptual vacuum, other actors are beginning to fill it.

Sectors of the right-wing identity that articulate their own responses begin to proliferate. Some claim a prohispanity definition, arguing that the Spanish national community cannot be fully understood without reference to its Hispanic civilizational matrix, and that a Peruvian or culturally assimilated Mexican shares more with Spain than many Europeans outside that tradition.

Others, on the contrary, argue for a sort of European preference, sometimes formulated in a civilizational key, others in openly racial terms: the idea that Spain belongs primarily to a European or white matrix, and that an Estonian would be, in some sense relevant, "nearer" to the Spanish nation than a Hispanic American.

They are uncomfortable, explosive and deeply sensitive debates, but they are inevitable once the concept of national priority is introduced at the heart of the political conversation.

And here the real political problem emerges. Vox has wanted to appropriate the rhetoric of national priority without assuming the cost of defining it.

At most, it offers specific examples. Spanish first in aid. Spanish first in housing — although eye, the pact of the PP and Vox in Extremadura gives access to VPO homes to a foreigner registered in Cáceres, but not to a Spaniard from Toledo. Spanish first in employment. **But carefully avoid explaining who exactly enters that category and why.**

It doesn't because defining means excluding, and excluding means losing votes.

Because the moment Vox spells out his definition, he'll have to alienate someone:

- If you adopt a purely legal view, you will disappoint your identity wing.
- If he adopts a hispanist view, he will lose European ethnonationalist sectors.
- If it adopts a European ethnocultural view, it will fracture its Hispanic Americanist base and part of its traditional conservative electorate.
- If it adopts demanding cultural assimilation criteria, it will open explosive debates on generations born in Spain.

In other words: **Defining national priority has an obvious electoral cost.** Especially in a Spain where nationality has been given away for too long, so a clear definition of who is Spanish would inevitably imply another one about _El buen español_. Or the "true". And so Vox, for now, seems to prefer calculated ambiguity.

At this point, there are only three possible explanations. The first is that Vox did not give serious thought to the question. If so, he would have acted with a mixture of recklessness and improper frivolity of those who aspire to govern: to open one of the most delicate debates of contemporary national politics without having developed a coherent response.

The second is that it does have a clear answer, but it does not dare to formulate it. In which case we would be faced with political cowardice; knowing what is thought, but lacking the courage to defend it.

The third is that it deliberately maintains ambiguity by electoral calculation. That is, to know that defining would divide, and therefore prefer to exploit the emotional power of the concept, allowing each voter to project his or her own interpretation on it.

If so, it wouldn't be stupidity or cowardice. Maybe malice?

The national priority can be a perfectly legitimate doctrine within a liberal democracy. Every State prioritizes, in one way or another, its political community.

But that is precisely why it demands maximum conceptual rigor. It is not enough to proclaim that “the Spaniards first”. It is necessary to explain who the Spaniards are, why they are, what makes them such and by virtue of what principles someone ceases to be or becomes.

Because when a nation ceases to know how to define itself, others will do it for it, both from outside our borders and from within. And because the worst way to address such a fundamental question is not to give a bad answer, but **to pretend to benefit politically from the question while carefully avoiding answering it.**

We have a problem, because Manolo is not a fictional character, not a bot, but a lord of flesh and blood, very convinced of the solidity of his answers, and because we have opened a melon that, impossible to close, only touches to eat it.