

IT WAS ANOTHER TIME

He was the oldest, therefore, it was up to him to take charge of his parents and the farm. From a very young age, like his brothers, he had to work in the fields: sowing, watering, mowing, gleaning, fetching firewood, the garden, the cows, the sheep, the raising and slaughtering of the pig, the chickens... Then they worked from dawn to dusk, only very rudimentary machinery was available. The work was arduous and complex. Professional learning was acquired hard, following orders and without complaining. There was no room for fussiness or fussing. Later, he would get more out of his trade, taking the lands of some neighbors to whom he would charge depending on the type of tasks he had to perform. He was an excellent operator with extensive agricultural knowledge, so he never lacked clients. Subsequently, he embarked first on the operation of one pig farm and then three: one for breeding and two for fattening. In that house there was no time to rest, his wife ran a business that was at the same time: a bar, a restaurant and a hostel.

When his children were finishing high school, he acquired an apartment in the capital of his province, so that, when they went to study at the University, they could stay there, avoiding bad company. The times held surprises. There were more and more boys who, overnight, joined the long list of puppets devoured by drugs. Of course, he came to think of those moments, like a tree, like a tree: the father having glasses of wine with friends after leaving work, his children following in his wake. The most expensive thing about higher education was not the tuition, but the residence, which saved him money. So he got a ten: that, without a doubt, had been a good investment. He demanded the offsprings responsibility for him. They had to take advantage of his privileged situation. It would not allow repetitions, nor absences from class and, of course, no attendance at demonstrations and assemblies. Politics did not bring good consequences, besides why, things were already fine the way they were.

Other events that occurred at different times in his life never came to mind, but they were no less worthy of being mentioned in his biography. Probably, he did not remember them because he had nothing to blame himself for. Out loud he stated that life was a battlefield, that the rest was nonsense, typical of daunted, weak, and courageless people. He could only succeed by fighting and putting a lot of courage into it. To himself, he told himself that he had nothing to be ashamed of and no one had to ask for forgiveness.

One day, just at the dawn of the 21st century, a tall, thin young man walked up to his farm. His name was Mamadou, a native of Mali. He had arrived on the Andalusian

coast in a boat, along with forty others: most of them men, also some children and some women. He did not intend to stay in the country of arrival. He had planned, after a few months, to cross the border and try to make a living in a neighboring nation. Someone had told him that there were more possibilities of finding work there and he was also better paid. Not in vain, he was part of the club of the seven most powerful economies in the world. But things went very wrong.

Although he was held for a few months in a CIE (Emigrant Detention Center), the authorities did not find sufficient reasons to repatriate him, so they released him. He turned to the Red Cross for help. There they told him that the main problem was his irregular situation. The young man immediately related it to the thorny issue of papers, the desired and happy papers.

After some time wandering around different towns, doing, from time to time, some low-skilled and poorly paid work, although this varied depending on the type of activity and its “productivity” (a word that he interpreted as “working hard and boss is always right”), he joined three other African boys. They lived in an unoccupied warehouse, in which, attached to the front wall, there was a tap with which they could wash themselves. They pooled their payments because this way the money earned them a little more. One night they had a strong argument about something that he didn't quite understand. The others spoke in a language he did not know. They yelled at him, threatened him and he had no choice but to leave.

That's when Mamadou knocked on our protagonist's door looking for work. The answer was: “No”, followed by a slam of the door, but, instantly, the door opened again. This time the words sounded glorious to the plaintiff and improved his mood: “Yes, I have a job for you.” He not only had one occupation, but three: taking care of his grandfather, who had reduced mobility, a waiter and kitchen assistant in the restaurant, and cultivating the garden at the back of the family home. He ate leftovers from the restaurant. His salary, of course in black, reached five hundred euros a month, from which two hundred were deducted for maintenance and accommodation (a bunk bed in the room attached to the machinery and tools shed).

Nor did he remember the continuous increases in rent for the tenants who lived in the two homes he owned: the one where his children lived when they were studying in the capital, and the other, in possession of a bank after the execution of an eviction that left a single mother and two young children on the street. The latter was acquired for a fairly affordable amount in relation to the sharp rise that market prices experienced at that time.

Her first and only objective was to obtain the highest possible return on her investments. She interviewed several real estate agents, in the end she chose the agency that was most intransigent regarding late payments and damage to the property. He never witnessed the events directly, but he always had detailed information about them. A couple with two children, after three years of renting, had to face a thirty percent increase in the monthly payment in the fourth year and another similar increase in the fifth. The receipt went from seven hundred euros to one thousand two hundred. The parents, despite both working, could not fulfill their obligations and after the third month of insolvency the four of them had to leave their accommodation. Once this family had been separated, the property became an apartment for tourists. With the other floor he started a similar process. In this way, the profit he derived from his properties increased significantly, almost exponentially. He never cared about the neighbors' protests and comments about the noise, shouting, drunkenness, exhibitionism and bad behavior of the majority of the new and fleeting tenants, who enjoyed the nights as if the end of the world were coming. .

In the long run, his obsession with multiplying the return on capital would be his downfall. He became interested in the enigmatic world of cryptocurrencies because, according to a well-known newspaper specialized in economics, the profitability that would be obtained by acquiring them would be very high. "The economic world is moving in that direction, there are countries that carry out their commercial transactions through this new value" - several executives assured him in as many personal interviews. His children explained to him that there was a lot of risk in this type of operations, that he should wait a while, that they were committed to thoroughly analyzing the international evolution of these currencies..., but he ignored their warnings. Before allocating his economic power to the purchase of the new currency, he decided to distribute a part of his properties and his funds among his grandchildren, still minors. This way, no one could blame him if the operation went wrong. His wife had died a few years ago and he alone didn't need anything else. He never liked proverbs, but in his own flesh he suffered the saying that "greed breaks the bag." His bet on technological currencies had failed.

His pride could not bear being seen in the municipality as a loser, as a nobody. He didn't want to depend on his children either. So, once his battered economic situation had been verified and contrasted, he decided to take the train at a very early hour, it had not yet dawned, and leave for an unknown destination.

He was terrified at the bottom of the street. Without moving from the spot, without even blinking, in an almost catatonic state. He didn't dare say anything, the words were

hidden, his motor system was paralyzed, as if he had been transformed into a pillar of salt. Things had changed so much and so suddenly that he was completely overwhelmed. Until just a few days ago, in the mornings he would go for a walk around the outskirts of his town and in the afternoons he would spend them at the casino with some acquaintances playing mus. Once, he played petanque with the retirees on the sandy beaches of the park. But now...now he had nothing. He felt empty, broken like a rag doll.

When he took the bowl in his hands and headed crestfallen to the line, in an instant, the following passed through his mind: the young Malian (what could have become of him?), the faces of the two little ones, although he never met them, the family that was left on the street (poor children!), the disproportionate punishment that he imposed on his son, two months without going out to play with his friends, when the teacher told him that in the last three days he had not done his homework. duties (I have no forgiveness), the kindness of his wife who never abandoned him and did not even raise her voice at him despite having many reasons to do so (I did not know how to love her as she deserved), the cynical smile that he gave back to the neighbors of the stairs of his tourist apartments when they complained to him about the bad manners and the events generated by these tenants (he only thought about the money)...

“Stories without Mufflers”