

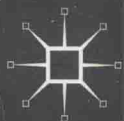
# BEYOND TRIBALISM

Managing Identities in a Diverse World



  
Business  
Publishing

Celia de Anca

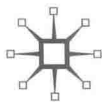


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Celia de Anca

palgrave  
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**Beyond tribalism**  
**Managing identities in a diverse world**

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*Para Nachito y Almudenita  
Y sus hermanos Álvaro y Alicia  
Y para Tobias y Violeta*

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Neotribalism, and ways that new forms of communities are influencing the business world, have been of great interest to me for many years. In my experience working with organizations to manage diversity, it has become clear that communities are beginning to take on different shapes, superseding the traditional diversity groups. New community-based business networks seem to be leading the way to the future, and thus it seems worthwhile to explore them in some depth. With the encouragement of my editor, I decided to write about my experiences with neotribalism and its effects on business behavior. However, for some time it was difficult to get beyond the working title of “Beyond Tribalism.” I was not clear about which approach would be best. I felt that things were changing very rapidly around the world, and a new model for “being together” was the key to understand some of these new dynamics. But I never had enough time away from my daily activities to provide the peace and quiet that reflection requires.

Arpad, my mentor, kept on telling me that I needed to take some time-off to explore, think and write, otherwise I would exhaust myself with the everyday routine. As I have always done in the last 25 years, I obeyed him.

So I took some time off, and used it to travel around the world to organize my ideas and see whether reality proved them right. Time was the key; not just to write, but also time to think and to explore the work of those who came before, those who had the clarity of mind to explain some of the fundamental characteristics of human behavior, since, as Aristotle said, to truly understand things it is necessary to see them develop, to take them at their beginning.<sup>1</sup> It is often said that there is nothing new, all ideas come from some old tradition, and this book is by no means an exception to this maxim. Everything has already been said, or is about to be said, or should have been said before; but we keep on thinking and writing, since we all see the same thing with different perspectives. Our only contribution is to add our different perceptions to the world and together create our human legacy.

On January 10, 2011, I managed to get things in order at the office so that I could leave. I only knew one thing: I needed to spend time in Cairo.

Everything seemed to be in the right place over there: friends, interesting companies to explore, good local universities whose representatives I knew well, as well as a colleague from our own office. My plan was to go to Cairo on January 10 and stay there for three months, then making visits to other Arab countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. After all, I am also a philologist of Arabic, and this trip could also help me to refresh my language skills. Eventually, from the Middle East I had plans to spend three months in other countries, including Brazil, the USA, and Turkey.

But things never work out as planned. Shortly after my arrival in Cairo, the revolution started, and then the whole of the Middle East rose up in turmoil. My colleagues felt sorry for me, since it was the first time in my life that I had taken time off just to travel and think, and my plans had collapsed in the turmoil. But in fact, I really thought that I was lucky. I was never in danger during the revolution because I took refuge with some great people who were kind and well-informed. Everyone who helped me was enormously pleasant and considerate. And above all, I had an incredibly well-placed platform from which to witness what I believe to be the biggest change in the Arab world in the last 50 years.

After Cairo, I went to the Emirates, and spent quite a lot of time talking with Arabs from many different nationalities, all united in their Arab identity, very concerned, and experiencing first-hand everything that was going on...

When I began to analyze what was going on in the Middle East, I saw clearly how the book had to be organized...

The Egyptian revolution gave me the key to understand what I was trying to visualize with the book: the interplay of the different identities in movement.

## Identities

*Diversity* is still a valid word to describe the society we live in with all of our differences in identity. However, when we talk of managing diversity, what we really manage is the myriad of conflicting identities we all carry inside. These can be roughly organized in the following categories:

- 1. Personal identity and the right of self-development.** The Egyptian revolution was full of middle-class individuals who wanted a better future for themselves. Food and security were no longer enough to keep them quiet, because they wanted more: the right to self-development, to have options in life.

2. **Communal identities.** If there was one thing that impressed me more than anything else, it was how the organization of the Egyptian revolution interconnected communities. It was the kids on Facebook who orchestrated a change in their destinies: Facebook groups such as the “We Are All Khaled Said” or the “6th of April,” that, despite not having a clear leader, managed to get all their members actively distributing information, recording what was happening, and even organizing the logistics for the people in Tahrir Square. But the Facebook kids were just one example of communal life during the revolution. In the neighborhoods far away from the square we can find a lesson in planning. After the police left the streets, the neighborhood committees wasted no time in organizing themselves to protect their neighborhoods from looters, controlling traffic, setting up a night-watch and other crucial aspects of neighborhood life.
3. **Civilizational identity.** Egyptians knew that the Arab world would be looking at them, that Tunisia could be just an anecdote or the small beginning of a dramatic change in the region. Everything depended on how the Egyptian situation would resolve itself. Following Cairo I went to other Arab countries, where I found that all Arabs were united through watching Aljazeera. They all felt connected with the soul of the Egyptians. In short, I felt that the Arab identity was back. For the last decades Arab identity faded away in the tension between each country’s nationalism and Pan-Islamism – but now it was back! People all over the Arab world felt identified and stepped out into the streets to demand changes ... Arab identity was on the move.

We all have different basic identities inside our societies. In the case of the Egyptian revolution these aligned to reach a common goal. In other words, the individual person and the community were working in tune within the framework of a civilization that aspired to a better future.

Identities are multiple and in constant movement. They change because of the need for self-development, the desire to act in the multiple communities we all belong to, or aspire to be a part of. It is through this movement, from the self to the community and back, that we grow as humans. As we grow we can contribute to our community, and in turn we are influenced by this community, and back and forth in a permanent movement – from the solitude of the self to the company of the community and back. This movement has always been there but now, more than ever, we are becoming conscious of it.

What I observed, not only in Egypt but everywhere else I went during my research trip, is that there really is a major change happening: people

are becoming increasingly conscious of who they are and the control they can have over their multiple identities and destinies. People are beginning to understand that they can control these processes; they are aware of their capabilities, but also of the necessity of working together in various groups.

Understanding identities and their movements is, then, crucial to understanding today's world, with its myriad of internet-based microgroups living in a global world with multiple cultures. But it also becomes essential in the business world, since individuals are much more aware of their choices, choices that they identify with: choosing a job, creating a new project or in buying a product or service.

Whatever happens afterwards, and with all the hardships they are likely to face in reorganizing their country, the Egyptians have taught us a lesson: that this world in transition must understand that identity matters, that to be conscious of one's own self is far better than unconscious identification. And on top of all this, they taught us how to keep a smile and the joy to live even in the hardest moments.

Difficult times are ahead, all over the world: the financial crisis, the spike in oil prices, the energy crisis, the economic system, the unemployment rate, the dismantling of the social welfare state, the increasing poverty gap, environmental deterioration, the scarcity of resources, and the other difficulties we all have to survive. This is a world in transition, but examples such as the ones described in this book illustrate the myriads of people working with enthusiasm in different economic initiatives, contributing their best efforts to the improvement of their societies, and helping us think that there is hope ahead.

"Consciousness is a very recent acquisition of nature and it is still in an 'experimental' state. It is fragile, menaced by specific dangers and easily injured," said one of the greatest psychologists, Carl Jung (1978, p. 7).

I believe the sign of our times is consciousness, in the individual's self-development as well as in the need to act to achieve the aspirations of our communities. We need the consciousness to identify with the community we want to work in and with the products and services we want to consume. Unlike the social engineering of earlier times, nowadays our communities tend to emerge naturally, and only by accepting them can organizations use them to their advantage.

At the beginning of this quest, Edgard Gouveia from Brazil told me that he, too, was on sabbatical leave, travelling around the world, and his main realization was that there is much more positive in the world than negative. And I have to admit a few months later, that yes, there are quite a lot of

problems ahead and negativity is everywhere; but, honestly, I believe there are many, many young professionals working to find solutions.

A new generation of young people, is working enthusiastically on their internet-based business initiatives, and I believe they have the intelligence to improve their societies. This is a generation that has two key differences from mine:

- They are not ideological, they come together not to argue options but to take the best of each one. They are aware of their individuality and at the same time they are aware of the need to work as a community. Therefore, they share ideas, processes and even adjust their consumption so there is more for all.
- And they are practical; they can connect and integrate all options, resources and people in order to find ways to get ahead.

These young professionals do not represent the majority of new generations in the world, I am aware of that, not in the west nor in developing countries, but it does exist and in large numbers. I do think that they have a fair chance to create new organizations that will fit within the conditions of new markets and a world that is in a process of constant movement. Any new situation in human evolution needs new organizations, and the organizations and institutions we have right now are becoming too old to support these changes. "You should not put new wine in old bottles," Arnold Toynbee said. I am not sure what the new organizations that will support our world will look like, but I do believe there are good new ideas that, with time, will consolidate into new organizations. For the moment this generation is building new patterns that are leading to new way of organizing businesses; but this is only the beginning. I hope the world will give them a chance because this new generation deserves it, and it is working hard for a better world that has place for everyone.

Thus, the only intention of this book is to give a framework for some of the processes that are developing right in front of our eyes. They have many positive aspects, and with some synergies and some good luck, they can result in new and profitable ways of working and consuming together, and can open doors to many new great things in the future.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Co-creation is one of the words that describes the new tendencies I depict in this work, and the book itself illustrates what co-creation is all about; the generous participation of many to build something greater than the sum of the individual contributions. This section thus attempts to acknowledge the real authors of the book. I apologize to the ones I have forgotten, whose absence here is not due to the relevance of their contributions in the book but rather to my bad memory.

First I would like to acknowledge all the companies that have illustrated the different sections of the book by their daily work. The Journey began a year ago with a visit to JAK Medlemsbank in Skövde, Sweden, where Miguel Ganzo and his colleagues shared their enthusiasm for their project. My next visit was to SEKEM in Cairo, where Bianca Fliss and Philip Maximilian Boes taught me a lesson on how to keep focus and concentrate even in the middle of a revolution. ADIB in Abu Dhabi was the next step, there, thanks to Fatima Iliasu, in addition to Islamic banking, I learned how enjoyable and fruitful it can be to jointly write a case, with different perspectives adding to a common purpose. Adriana Barbosa in São Paulo taught me a lesson on how resilience and purpose can help overcome any difficulty, as her work at Instituto Feira Preta shows, and nearby, in Rio de Janeiro, Leila Velez showed me how it is possible to fly with the force of the conviction. The final step was at HUB, where some of its wizards, Pablo Handl in São Paulo, Indi Johar in London, Tatiana Glad in Amsterdam, and Max Oliva in Madrid, opened new doors for me to explore how things are really moving. Finally, I would like to thank Edgard Barki, Cristina Trullols, and Newton Campos, for their work in the development of some of these cases.

Max also lead me to Edgard Gouvía, and his contagious optimism gave me the idea to ask more entrepreneurs like him for their testimonies. So Edgard introduced me to Jay Standish in Seattle and to Sheri Herndon who, through our Skype conversations, helped me to understand the new energy that penetrates the world. Sheri in turn introduced me to her entrepreneurial friend in Istanbul, Filiz Telez, then in turn led me to Ayşegül Güzel, whose testimony in Chapter 5, together with those of Nisrine Abasher and

Lotfi El-Ghandouri, give me hope and the conviction that the coming generation is ready to improve the world.

Salvador Aragon deserves special mention: he always had, at the right moment, the perfect book, writer, expert, or idea, as well as the understanding I needed in each and every angle of this book, and his encyclopedic knowledge of everything is explicitly manifest in the outstanding fiction-history letters he and Franco Llobera produced for the chapter on the Mediterranean, letters beautifully illustrated by the geographic expertise of D. Juan Antonio Martinez Romera. Franco has special relevance in this book: someone with whom I have experienced the deep joy of co-thinking, in this work since its earliest beginnings, and in many works before this one. My thanks need to go also to Rodrigo Reyes, who helped me with my English expression, and to Daniel Conde, whose beautiful picture on the back-cover managed to show the happiness I felt during the journey

I also would like to thank all those who accompanied me through the journey in different places: Margarita, Omeima, Conchita, Rima, Khawla and her beautiful family, Nadia and her courageous family, who sheltered us and help us to understand the new emerging Egypt; and Najwa, Rahma, Rayana and Sandy, with whom I shared the intense and unique moments of the Egyptian uprising. And of course I need to recognize the influence of Arpad Von Lazar in this book, the best of mentors who always knows better than I what I am able to do.

I also feel I must acknowledge all those whose words keep me the greatest of companies all these months, some long gone, others still with us, thanking them for their thinking that pushes the human legacy further and allows us to build whatever contribution we can on really solid ground. In particular, I would like to thank Hannah Arendt, Arnold Toynbee, Carl Jung, Ibn Sina, Henri Corbin, Pierre Hadot, and Fernand Braudel, whose works constitute the theoretical ground behind the book

Finally I would like to thank IE, which, without hesitation, gave me the flexibility, time, trust, and support that I needed to carry out this venture.



## FOREWORD

---

And now, a word from the mentor ...

This work of Celia's started out with a conversation between us about the nature of business organizations, how women fit in modern and complex structures and why some countries prosper and others don't. The whole thing happened in my office in Madrid between inane bureaucratic faculty meetings and flavored by the imminent prospect of my having to leave for the airport for a flight to Boston. Celia was explaining things by doodling circles, arrows and connecting lines for me on a soiled coffee napkin, not losing my attention but testing my patience, since I was not about to miss my flight. So I did what seemed to be the simple, fastest and cheapest way out of such a conundrum, and said to her: "Why don't you write a book about this?" So, here it is.

I don't want to talk about the content of this excellent volume. You must read it for yourself. But I want to make a brief comment what it means for we readers and how we should approach its message and meaning. So let me regress for a minute. Almost thirty years ago my late dear friend and colleague Sam Huntington, a political scientist at Harvard, started talking to, actually more like pestering, a few of us about his idea of the role of religious fanaticism in the coming clash of civilizations. We listened but I just did not get the point. Sadly, it was only years later that I did begin to get the point, the relevance and the conceptual meaning of his ideas and that of the subsequent product of his vision, Huntington's by now world-famous book.

I think it is a bit like that with Celia's current work. This is an important book about a circumstance, a condition and a behavioral and structural given with which we are already living, but the full implications of which we do not understand. Celia explains, as always at some length; but more than anything else she forces us to think and reconsider many of our pre-conceived notions of how and why society, individuals and business work and coexist.

Celia is a hard taskmaster. She is, as an author and a thinker, a relentless aggressor on our mind and attention. This work simply forces us to be