

## CRITICAL REVIEW

Innerarity, Daniel (2019). *Política para Perplexos*. Lisboa: Porto Editora, ISBN 978-972-0-45-03232-4, 214 pp.

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Daniel Innerarity in "Politics for the Perplexed" continues the reflection begun in the aftermath of the Great Recession (Innerarity, 2016) on the current challenges facing contemporary democracies, examining the ethical and cultural foundations for the possibility of a new social contract. This social contract is to be based on trust between citizens, but also between them and the various institutions that support liberal democracy. To this end, we are proposed to replace a majority democracy with a negotiation democracy, continuing an "old" theoretical opportunity of the author (Innerarity, 2012). As a desideratum of contemporary societies, negotiation democracy corresponds, in the first place, to an objective and correct diagnosis of the pathologies and dysfunctions of today's western democracies.

For those who read the 214 pages that make up the work, it is clear that the Basque author is endowed with a unique observational acumen of reality, which allows him to translate into simple and clear text, accessible to non-specialist readers, but eager to gain knowledge of community life, a whole reflection about the current political situation. The reading of the work under analysis is relevant not only for specialists in political communication or political science, but also for those who are interested, who question the representations that are constructed in everyday life in the context of co-presence (for example, interaction in a café or family context), but above all those with whom we contact on a daily basis, through the different traditional and/or digital media. The work is structured in six parts, each of which divided into several chapters.

*I The End of Certainties* - The perplexed condition results from the limitless opening of the horizons of the possible. Faced with structural changes, there are those who have



absolute certainties and end up being fanatical. On the other hand, the so-called “politically correct” gains public expression. Uncertainty spreads through the various domains of social activity. Politics in times of perplexity is expressed in: predictive incapacity of polls that monitor political behaviour; the primacy of subjectivity in the analysis of political phenomena; and outdated concepts in the face of current requirements. In this context, there are two forms of reaction on the part of political actors: on the one hand, the conservative appeal to authenticity and non-intervention in reality (conformists); on the other hand, the radical critique that results in a misunderstanding of reality, as exemplified by populist proposals all over the world. The author argues that the contemporary left should focus on redistributing and mitigating the inequities created by the process of economic and capitalist globalization. The right focuses on state action in combating crime, giving priority to security issues.

Both the left and the traditional right bequeath their incapacity and inertia, in the political domain, to the unregulated role of financial globalization. Thus, the right assumes globalization and the ineffectiveness of state action as an “indisputable reality”. The left, for its part, assuming a clear stance of resistance to the process of economic globalization, insists, according to Innerarity, on not understanding the emerging guiding frameworks of contemporary political action.

In the public sphere, the “old” left and right are discursively distinguished. The right resorts to facts and data with the guise of objectivity, tending to limit the aspirational horizons of the debate itself. On the other hand, inside the left, appeals to imagination and criticism succeed one another at a dizzying pace. In an increasingly spectacularized public space, in which the status of citizen has progressively been replaced by that of consumer, journalism finds itself facing competition from an increasing number of specialists participating in the public debate.

*II Emotional Deregulation* – Innerarity begins the second part of the essay by postulating that emotions have increasingly guided activity in spheres as diverse as the economy, war and, more markedly, politics. Social structures where states of anxiety, anger and trust are expressed constitute the axes of social transformation. In this circumstantial framework, the media play a pivotal role. In the foreground, the author places the traditional media as definers of the agenda that emanates emotional states. Downstream, there are social media that foster the existence of emotional bubbles around particular cases. In fact, the actors who differentiate themselves and succeed in the public space have multiplied due to their discursive aggressiveness and inconsistent sincerity: “those who are more offensive gain more attention in the public sphere” (2019: 66). Innerarity (2019: 66-67) asks “(...) what if the media were enhancing and feeding democratic impotence, that is, inflaming our expectations, emphasizing collective incapacities, amplifying our fears and paying greater attention to provocateurs?”

*III Politics in an Area of Poor Signalling* – The author starts with a reflection on populism based on the conceptual distinction made by Chantal Mouffe between populism of democratic radicalization and authoritarian populism, associating them with the political left and right, respectively. However, she claims that this distinction does not consider democratic plurality. Both populisms exclude more than they integrate. After all, all populisms adopt a rhetoric based on exclusion: people vs elite; them vs us; caste vs



people etc.. As populism is the most striking contemporary political expression, the traditional left and right reiterate their anti-populism. For the left, populism is still unattractive insofar as it is insensitive to the inequalities and inequities produced in social and political processes that evoke the reconstruction of social structures; on the other hand, the stability-obsessed right see the reform drive at the institutional level of the populists as a threat to the desired stability. Brexit, as a political phenomenon, is the typical political event. For the author, it results from a “flight forward” on the part of the British and, in particular, their political elites, dispensing with any method of representative democracy, assuming plebiscitary contours. Thus, this process must be seen as a double paradox: the first is that, contrary to what is claimed by Brexit supporters, the United Kingdom will not be completely outside the European Union, as is the case with European Union legislation; the second manifests itself in the growing tension between the plebiscitary impulses and the procedures of representative democracy. Direct democracy translated into the holding of a referendum has the power to pierce the citizen's sense of empowerment, although in the end they are always dependent on the enforcement and execution by the various institutions of democracy.

*IV Democracy in the Age of Trump* – The last US presidential elections were mainly guided by the civic republicanism vs liberal-conservative elitism axis. The first had in Trump and Sanders its main representatives, while the second had its most representative forces in the Republican and Democratic parties. In the case of Trump, by focusing on proprietary capitalism in the face of financial globalization, he reaffirms the exhaustion of the multicultural paradigm, albeit without coherence and objectivity, explaining the discontent of the people. He combines communication and telegenic simplism with this strategy, taking advantage of the decay of civic culture itself. On the one hand, this new cleavage is marked by classical capitalism and, on the other hand, by creative financial capitalism. In this axis, the ideas of an essentially national industrial development are confronted and their main interlocutor is the nation-state. At the antipodes stands the financialized economy of global markets whose epicentres are Silicon Valley and Wall Street. The target of the populist movement is above all the multiculturalism ingrained in economic globalization. The author proposes a new conception of justice that should include not only redistribution but also recognition.

*V Establishing Intelligent Systems* - In recent decades, politics has seen its function radically altered. This metamorphosis is comparable only to that which took place four centuries ago when the nation-state emerged. The transformations occurred at structural level, that is, at the level of global coordinates: globalization of economic activity, emergence of the knowledge society, individualization of lifestyles and the westernization of societies. The implications contribute to three major types of political dysfunctions: first, ineffectiveness of political action within the scope of what would be expected; second, inoperability in the face of unprecedented problems and new formats; third, inability to identify new problems. We are facing a deficit of political intelligence that is daily confronted with the versatility and dynamism of other spheres: technological euphoria vs civic illiteracy; technological innovation vs social redundancy; critical scientific and economic culture vs anachronistic political space. At the end of the line, the author argues that we must improve the systems that defend us against people



themselves, against errors produced deliberately or inadvertently, because in the end “fear itself is an instinct that defends us from ourselves” (2019: 191).

*VI What Awaits Us* – Diagnosis, as a public intellectual's job, is a responsibility of this agent in relation to his fellow citizens and other surrounding community. Even without being able to predict the future, a good diagnosis is essential to reasonably face the current uncertainty and unpredictability. Three leads with prospective potential: first, increasing uncertainty; second, intense volatility of social and political patterns; third, the need to improve the concepts that guide the reflection and definition of strategies. The work ends in a tone of optimism, although one should not whitewash the colossal challenges posed to societies in general and to institutions and political actors in particular. Indeed, optimism to the detriment of pessimism as a basic rule of social reflection is a cornerstone in the assembly of the complex sociopolitical puzzle. There are two good reasons to forego pessimism and give priority to optimism: the narrative of human history may not go downhill; the conclusion is always the enemy of reflection and prospective interpolation of the social and the political spheres.

### **Notes to keep and expand on**

In the work that supports this reflection, the author assumes, even implicitly, the role of public intellectual. As such, he proposes a new cosmopolitan social contract based on principles of tolerance, dialogue between different states and between different nations within the states themselves. Although throughout the work there are some signs of criticism of the steps taken by western democracies and in particular their hesitant responses to the different populist movements, Innerarity at the end denotes moderate optimism, specifically in response to the greatest political challenge of the first decades of the 21st century. – the resurgence of populisms and nationalisms that give it shelter with an ambitious cosmopolitan proposal that acts as an intercultural and political dialogue.

Both the left and the traditional right bequeath their incapacity in the political field, having globalization as an argumentative background. In the particular case of the right, resorting to “indisputable reality” has as its most paradigmatic case the “ordoliberal consensus” that has permeated some institutions of the European Union and Member States, in addition to the patent domain in the public and media spheres in the European continent.

The question Innerarity raises in the second part about the role of the media today impels us to consider the following aspects: first, it involves addressing all the transformations of traditional media in recent decades, such as commodification (Cardoso, 2016); the second point deals with the relationship between these media and social media, in particular Facebook and Twitter; the third point is based on the strong disintermediation of mass communication (Bruns & Humphreys, 2007); a fourth issue and as a consequence of communication disintermediation, political actors, especially populist ones, have taken advantage of the establishment of direct links, with a vast audience and followers, discarding journalistic mediation. This may, in fact, explain the fact that



traditional media are a frequent target of the discursive wrath of populist leaders and movements in a wide range of democracies.

It is in this line of reasoning that Innerarity tells us about “emotional dysregulation”. The state of emotional anger is expressed in the growing anxiety and distrust that permeate daily life, becoming vectors of social and political change. The fact that an author, such as Innerarity, points out these transformations associated with emotions in the public sphere and particularly in politics, is an important indication that this will be an emerging field of study and that will consolidate itself in the coming decades, particularly in the fields of electoral behaviour and political network communication.

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