Towards a new cosmopolitan social contract: social trends and political challenges

Daniel Innerarity: *Política para Perplexos*. Lisboa: Porto Editora, 2019, 214pp, € 14,94, ISBN 978-972-0-03253-4 PB

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Daniel Innerarity's *Politics for the Perplexed* is a decisive contribution to the understanding of some of the dilemmas of contemporary societies, with particular relevance in the fields of politics, communication and technology, always anchored to their socio-cultural roots. Anchoring these axes of transformation to their respective socio-cultural roots, it seeks to deepen them in the melee of the Great Recession (cf. Innerarity 2016). Following an essayist style, it postulates uncertainty in contemporary societies, as a structuring element, seeking to understand the growing obsolescence of institutions and, above all, the inadequacy in the ways of doing politics. Innerarity's central argument is to emphasize that societies have never before faced such uncertainty. This premise is premonitory in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, which revealed the imperative need for greater and better intra-state coordination and even in planning between different continents. Uncertainty is a *sine qua non* of the state of perplexity, since the perplexed citizen finds himself with an endless set of options, still without any guidance, which would guide him, at the institutional level. At the same time, Innerarity making use of its refined social and political sensibility, captures the contemporary "zeitgeist" with a unique capacity for synthesis and argumentative clarity in contemporary philosophy. The author stresses the need to improve the methods and techniques that the different scientific areas currently have at their disposal, in order to pursue a better and more shrewd capacity to carry out quality diagnoses and to overcome the current impasses, especially in the necessary reorganization, political and institutional, that economic globalization exposes. The work is organized into six major axes of argument, of which, the last two are clearly written in a proposal tone, revealing the cosmopolitan humanist in Daniel Innerarity.

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The end of certainties is the result of opening up without limits what is possible in the social and political domain, expanding horizons beyond what was understood as impossible. In perplexed societies, politics has become an obsolete signalling field. In view of the conceptual rupture and the increase in unpredictability, there are two types of reactions: conservatives and innovators in political regulation and the state sphere. In this context, political options go through radical criticism, without an effective understanding of complexity by populists. On the other hand, there are the conformists who uncritically accept the “indisputable realities”. In this context, the debate in the public sphere is expressed in two ways. The right tends to resort to facts and thus to claim objectivity, limiting aspirational horizons and deliberation procedures. On the left, appeals to imagination and criticism of the current state of “things” multiply. For the author, the public sphere is guided by the spectacularization of politics, in which the status of citizen succeeds that of consumer. Journalists are becoming insecure and increasingly replaced by specialists from different fields.

The Great Recession highlighted the dysfunctionalities of financial globalization. In the current financialization process, there is an exacerbation of greed, intensifying expectations of unlimited profits. In this way, contemporary emotional capitalism makes it imperative that regulations put limits on the ambition of the insatiable financial markets. In this context, the traditional social media play a pivotal role as scheduling promoters that emanate emotional states such as anger, distrust or indignation. Downstream, there are social media promoting the existence of emotional bubbles. All of this is wrapped in an entertainment culture, where actors stand out for their virulent stance or are cloaked with sincerity. Are the *media* not feeding democratic impotence, igniting our expectations and emphasizing collective disabilities and increasing collective fear? It is here that indignation emerges as a striking political attitude, which has a greater potential for challenge and rejection than for construction and deliberation so relevant in the political process. Distrust proliferates. In a globalized world in emotional turmoil, trust is a scarce political asset, referring, for example, to the use of communication specialists.

The North American presidential elections in 2016 saw the emergence of a new political axis, confronting civic republicanism and liberal-conservative elitism. The first had Trump and Sanders as its main representatives, while the second was made up of the Democratic and Republican Parties. Trump, by focusing on the struggle of proprietary capitalism in the face of neoliberal globalization and reaffirming the exhaustion of the multicultural model, reflects the discontent of the “people”. The formula for its success is communicational and telegenic simplism, benefiting from the decline of civic culture. This cleavage is also reflected in the opposition between industrial capitalism and financial or creative capitalism. Indeed, the multiplication of populist movements and actors has the relevance of emphasizing the weaknesses of multicultural policies in order to pay attention to the “invisible” of the last decades. Justice must pass not through redistribution, but also through recognition.

The obsolescence of “left” and “right” is not only a political problem, but also a social one, resulting from the reflexive modernization of the last decades. For the author, it is a question of de-socializing social transformation and conceiving it as an open process that needs public discussion. Thus, the right would tend to see the social process as inevitable, while the left would be in a better position,

since it would emphasize the characteristic complexity of reflexive modernization. Refuting the evolutionary determinisms surrounding the socio-political process, the author looks forward to the metamorphosis of these two fields, leading the right to tend to be utopian and the left to be realistic.

Innerarity rebalances the way we relate to technological devices, in order to mitigate new ignorance. It is about looking for functional equivalents at the State level, which are articulated in the international political scenario of interdependence and polycentrality. Three types of dysfunctions emerged: ineffective political action; inoperability in the face of unprecedented problems and in new formats; and inability to identify new problems. The author warns that politics and its institutions are about to fall off the pedestal of the immunity they have enjoyed so far. What are we to do so that politics does not become socially irrelevant? The proposal falls on the concept of Governance, which responds to national and international challenges. In order to effect this transformation, it will be necessary to move from a majority democracy to a negotiating democracy.

The responsibility of the public intellectual in particular and of the social sciences in general depends on the fruitful diagnosis of future challenges, allowing the identification and design of strategies that allow us to overcome them. The author identifies three clues to anticipate future trends: a greater degree of uncertainty in globalized societies; greater social and political volatility; and improvement of instruments and concepts that allow anticipating and defining the strategies. The author leaves two final tips for those who challenge themselves to envision the future: the human narrative may not go for the worse; and certainties are bad councillors, making political and scientific reflection and questioning difficult. Therefore, we must look forward to the future with optimism.

Innerarity is not a revolutionary, nor does he claim to be one. He is someone who is genuinely concerned with the increasing dysfunctionalities of democracies all over the world and in particular in the West, in a context in which they acquire increasing visibility, especially in the sphere of the media. That is why he draws attention to the central role that the media has in today's societies, socializing agents and political actors in a field in constant turmoil. In this way, the author rehearses a proposal for a new social contract on a global scale, which allows politics to strengthen its response to the challenges posed by the complexification of the various systems that interact daily and that compete with it in the coordination of global society. At the cultural and ethical level, the re-foundation of the social contract must include a new way of doing politics, what the author calls negotiation policy. This process should be inclusive, democratic and consider the relevance of minorities, contributing to the establishment of a new global governance. This new global social contract must articulate not only greater redistribution, but also the recognition of social groups and categories called "losers" of globalization, but also the necessary increase in multicultural policies in order to respond to the multiplication of populisms, understood as the greatest contemporary political challenge.

Reference

Innerarity, Daniel. 2016. *A Política em Tempo de Indignação*. Lisboa: Dom Quixote.

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