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BOOK REVIEW: IN SEARCH OF LOST REPRESENTATION. NEW ROUTES TO THE WEST, EAST AND SOUTH

Gilles Rouet*

GUEORGUIEVA, P. – TODOROV, A. (eds.): *A la recherche de la représentation perdue. Nouvelles voies à l'ouest, à l'est et au sud.* [In Search of Lost Representation. New Routes to the West, East and South]. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2017, 248 p. ISBN 978-2-343-13564-9.

Petia Gueorguieva and **Antony Todorov**, both specialists in political science at the New Bulgarian University, Sofia, brought together fourteen texts written by sixteen authors involved in universities in seven European countries. About the composition, we can regret the choice of the insertion of notes at the end of the volume, chapter by chapter, especially since the quotes are then not indicated in full and it is necessary to search in the book references.

Is the representation lost, has it got lost? It is above all the problems of the representative democracy, in a crisis for some, now unsuitable for other authors, while proposals for the implementation of new tools of participatory democracy are defended in different countries, especially in Europe.

The introduction, quoting **Marie-Anne Cohendet** in 2004, evokes an “adolescent crisis” of representative democracy, induced not only by the evolution of the “modalities and frameworks of this representation”, but also by a weakening capacity to act of the State, which is no longer the “single frame of citizen representation” (p. 9). Reactions against the current system of representation, especially populist ones, are now numerous and sustained, and “illiberal democracies” seem to be settling down (Zakaria, 1998, Mink, 2016, Rupnik, 2017).

Citizens now often contest the “institutionalized policies” and the “political

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parties organized around professional political elite that diminishes the role and meaning of civic engagement” (p. 11). The evolution of the political parties is therefore a very important aspect of this book, but the question of the professionalization of elected officials and of their rejection remains nonetheless.

A series of questions (p. 12) introduces the five parts of the book: after two chapters gathered under the title “crisis of representation or representative democracy”, a second part describes and analyses mobilizations and revolts, then a third part, with four texts, focuses on “political parties in crisis”. The fourth part is devoted to the “populist response” and the fifth part provides elements on “the effects of the economic crisis”.

The first chapter written by **Pascal Perrineau** proposes a synthesis of the crisis of political representation in Europe. Abstentionism evolves; that of “indifference” remains stable, but that of “protest” increases. The “vote is only one way among others to participate in politics” (p. 16), even as political and trade union commitment is “falling” and the image of the political class is deteriorating. The causes of the crisis of democracy are very precisely described in a few pages (pp. 19-24), which allows Pascal Perrineau to propose “some axes to revitalize democratic participation” (pp. 26-28), articulating the representative democracy that “must keep the last word” with a participatory democracy that can “make it possible to better base the necessary choices on the preferences” of the “nations” (p. 28). State reform is at the centre of this evolution.

Antony Todorov proposes a complementary approach and develops an analysis of the “limits of elections” in our democracies. The evolution of abstentionism and political commitment and, more generally, of the interest of citizens in elections and parties justifies particular experiments, such as that of a “random democracy” with random draws (p.40). Above all, it is about abandoning “electoral fundamentalism”.

The second part of the book begins with a text by **Jean Marcou** that puts into perspective crises, protests and mobilizations from the 1970s to the present day, all around the world, or almost: Latin America, Central Europe, and Arab Springs. Arab revolts have often overthrown regimes, but they have not always been able to “drive lasting political change” and “institutionalize the new forms of representation they initiated”. This theme is extended by **Jérôme Heurtaux** whose contribution brings very interesting critical elements on the comparison between the post-communist “transitions” and the Arab Springs. The different

“uses” of the comparison must be analysed (p. 55), especially the political uses, but as “no historical experience is identical to another” (p. 58), we must accept the “incommensurability” of the approach and take the risk of a “historical reductionism” (p. 61). This text, one of the most successful of the book, brings a necessary epistemological dimension since the putting into perspective of the protests, in different contexts and historicity, is often the basis of interpretative analyses.

Jean Crombois then turns his attention to the politicization of the “European construction crises”, with a well-documented synthesis based on national elements within the EU (Eurobarometers in particular), with the flaws inherent in these approaches that do not take into account internal disparities (divergences) inside each Member State.

The third part, devoted to “political parties in crisis”, begins with a text by **Petia Gueorguieva**, which focuses on the relationship between party crises and the formation of governments during the last decade. This chapter, which provides an overview of government developments, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, proposes an analysis that incorporates both the evolution of the attitude of citizens, in search of a “new political representation”, the “electoral erosion and disappointment [...] about so-called established parties” and the “appearances and disappearances of political parties” (p. 96). These new political parties are “often unstable, without identities and clear programs”, but are justified by the logic of coalition induced by the modes of polls and of representativeness themselves. It would be necessary to return to the constitutional aspects, to the institutional choices, starting from solid analyses like that proposed by the author, to envisage a possible evolution of the representative devices.

Alexandra Iancu, in the following chapter, describes the “backward modernization of the elites in Romania and Bulgaria” (p. 99), and returns to the question of the “professionalization” of politics, especially of ministers (p. 106) using a very interesting database that allows to put into perspective the duration of mandates with the seniority in the political party or public responsibilities. The author highlights the “political pathways” to become a minister, but his analysis describes an “unfinished professionalization”, because “hidden resources” (p. 114) become an “alternative road” to power.

In Italy, according to **Maria Elisabetta Lanzone**, traditional political parties have “favoured the emergence and development of new party forms” (p. 117). However, the Italian case remains very particular, because of “personal and

media leadership (fusion of television and the web) [...] capable of uniting all Italian parties” (p. 125), and of a “new version of populism” (p. 126). A case very different from that of Bulgaria, described by **Valentina Gueorguieva**, who relies on the concept of “bad-representation” of Rosanvallon to analyse the protest movements of recent years. A series of interviews allows the author to “reconstruct three nuclei of meaning: the frameworks of identification [...], of injustice [...] and of politics” (p. 131). The link between the protest movements and the “negative assessment of political parties” is very clearly established: “social movements suffer from the crisis of political parties” (p. 141), but do not have “generated alternatives or solution(s) to the problem of political bad-representation”.

The fourth part, devoted to the “populist response”, extends this analysis and brings both illustrative and analytical elements of great interest. For **Thierry Kochuyt**, the “Calvary of Populism” is “the mobilization of the discontented in the name of the people” (p. 145), for **Ildiko Otova** and **Evelina Staykova**, anti-elitism is a “populist response to crises” (p. 161). **Magali Boumaza** relies on a longer temporality and analyses the “militate with the National Front from 1972 to the present day” (p. 171), mobilizing in a very appropriate way the notion of “configuration” and proposing a chronology of the three FN configurations. This chapter proposes a synthesis of a research integrating a new approach 15 years after a first research (p. 189) which further reinforces the relevance of development.

The last part of the book brings together two chapters devoted to the “effects of the economic crisis”. In Spain, **Alicia Fernandez Garcoa** and **Mathieu Petithomme** describe the “conjunction of factors related to the crisis of the left”, “the effects of austerity policies and recurring scandals of corruption”, “the declassification of the working classes” and “the spread of the indignation” that explain the “current crisis of political representation” (p. 197). This crisis is also linked with the economic situation and the political system, for **Nikos Marantzidis**, in the case of Greece. After a loss of confidence, “a sharp rise in apathy and political cynicism” characterizes this country and participates in “the rise of the extreme right” (p. 212).

Petia Gueorguieva and **Antony Todorov** summarize, in the conclusion of this book, the essential elements brought by the various authors and attempt a successful problematic synthesis (p. 222). Ultimately, this book, published in France and in French, although it develops well-known issues, is original in its design and especially in its contributions that does not only allow better

understanding of the situation of certain countries (Central and Eastern Europe) but also to considers comparisons in a renewed and dynamic framework. Indeed, the concerned academics have contributed to citizens' engagement.

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