

Introduction to the Monograph *Political Psychology in Europe*

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Youth violence, terrorism, gender inequalities, anti-immigrantism and humiliation experiences are ever present features in the daily lives of European citizens. Despite repeated efforts to conceal or minimize them, they reappear once and again in intense episodes that attest to their undeniable reality. To grasp their dynamics, to understand how they evolve and persist over time, the actions in which political decision-makers engage should be looked at carefully, since governmental regulations shape those standardized practices affecting the welfare of citizens.

A good example is provided by Scandroglio & López Martínez work (this issue), when they point to how youth violence is dealt with differently by several European governments. And even more evident are the strategic rules of the Swiss government oriented to push immigrants away from the Swiss territory (Roca I Escoda & Sánchez Mazas, this issue). Not so evident, at least at first sight, is the political nature of sexism and gender inequality present in European countries, as shown by the data and review by Rollero (this issue). However, her work shows, at the same time, the relation between the political orientation of citizens and the endorsement of sexist attitudes. In this respect, the finding that hostility toward men “can be conceptualized as a reaction against male power” sheds light on the political nature of these attitudes,

In a similar vein, Falomir Pichastor and Mugny (this issue) analyze the political dynamics of the “cultural egalitarian norm”, which, while being universally accepted in its abstract formulation, has paradoxical effects depending on its interaction with the perceived threat of the current inter-group context that, it goes without saying, is contingent on the regulations

of political decision makers. As shown by these authors, under the pressure of changing contextual factors, the egalitarian norm may dissolve itself losing totally its legitimacy.

Contextual factors are emphasized by Gill (this issue) in his work on terror through his resorting to the concept of “suddenly imposed grievances”. The “resistance to the surrounding political consensus” is increased by the so-called “dramatic and largely unanticipated occurrences”, in all cases actions taken by political decision makers. As described by Hartling, Lindner, Spalthoff & Britton (this issue). “these strategies inflict and intensify irrevocable feelings of humiliation”.

But decision makers are not the only actors of the political scene. In fact, they interact with the targets of their decisions at different levels and in several ways. In some occasions, these interactions fulfill their expectations and are in line with their intentions, as intimated by Rollero observation that “right wingers hold a more traditional vision of gender roles”. In many other occasions the opposite happens, frustrating decision makers’ goals and generating unexpected outcomes. Such is the case of hostility toward men (see Rollero), the resistance of immigrants in Switzerland to follow governmental instructions (Roda i Escoda & Sánchez Mazas), the loyalty conflict analyzed by Falomir Pichastor & Mugny, the already mentioned “suddenly imposed grievance” in Gill’s paper, and young people identification with violent groups in Europe.

As stated by Rosema, Jost and Stapel (2008, p. 311), political psychology is a “challenging field of study”. It should be added that it does not challenge only its practitioners, but the extant state of affairs as well. It does so by making itself a resource, meaning that it heads to the fostering “of a productive relationship between psychological inquiry and social practice” and converting to a discipline that “pursues its dialogic relationship with the outside world (Garzón Pérez, 2001, p. 348-353).

Political psychology has been used as resource by many scholars, at least since 1984, when Zonis, in a seminal paper, put together the concept of self-devaluation and its accompanying feeling of humiliation, initiating a way of thinking that reached its peak in 2007 with his analysis of terrorism. Humiliation is also the core concern of Lindner’s (and her collaborators’) impressive contribution to political psychology (see, for example, Lindner, 2006; 2010; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999), as she deems it plays a crucial role in some of the most damaging conflicts among groups today (see also Fernández Arregui, 2008). Many other authors have worked along the same lines, like Kruglanski, Chen, Dechesne, Fishman & Orehek (2009) and Kruglanski & Orehek (2011).

A decision to take care of citizens, to look after them, should be rooted in the conscience of citizenship and in the perception of oneself and others as vulnerable beings. Accordingly, Leal Rubio calls a “tragic trap” a situation in which citizens are forced by need to depend on institutions that mistreat them, more specifically, “a situation in which citizens, in order to live, work, recover health, among others, depend on something or somebody that mistreats them or treats them in inadequate way, without taking into account their helplessness (2009, p. 167).

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