

CHARAUDEAU, P. *A conquista da opinião pública: como o discurso manipula as escolhas políticas*. Translation: Angela M. S. Corrêa. São Paulo: Editora Contexto, 2016, 192 p.

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The work *A conquista da opinião pública: como o discurso manipula as escolhas políticas* [The conquest of public opinion]³ has 192 pages with three chapters titled: *O que é a opinião pública?*[What's public opinion]⁴, *A manipulação da opinião pública* [Manipulating public opinion]⁵ and, finally, *Crise da opinião, crise da democracia: os sintomas de uma crise política da pós-modernidade* [Opinion crisis, democracy crisis: the symptoms of a postmodern political crisis]⁶ plus the Introduction.

(1) *O que é a opinião pública?* is subdivided in (a) *Um pré-requisito: como se constrói a identidade coletiva*; [A pre-requisite: how is collective identity built]⁷ (b) *Da opinião coletiva à opinião pública*; [From collective opinion to public opinion]⁸ (c) *A fabricação da opinião pública*; [The public opinion fabrication]⁹ (d) *Uma confusão a evitar: a opinião não é o eleitorado*; [A confusion to avoid: opinion is not the electorate] and (e) *A consciência cidadã: O difícil paradoxo* [Citizen consciousness: The difficult paradox]¹⁰.

(2) *A manipulação da opinião pública* [Manipulation of public opinion] includes: (a) *A manipulação no mundo político* [manipulation in the political world]¹¹; (b) *A manipulação no mundo midiático* [manipulation in the media world]¹²; (c) Conclusion.

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(3) A Crise da opinião, crise da democracia: os sintomas de uma crise política da pós-modernidade [The crisis of opinion, crisis of democracy: the symptoms of a postmodern political crisis]¹³, deals with the following issues: (a) The question of sovereignty in a democratic regime; (b) The issue of counter-power; (c) The reasons for a political crisis of postmodernity; and (d) Between democracy of opinion and participatory democracy.

The way the author explains complex concepts that surround the construction of public opinion, through accessible language, even to beginners to the subject, plus examples (mostly French) of the current world is what provides fluent reading and easy understanding of the work.

On the other hand, for the researchers - both in discourse analysis and in other areas such as sociology, politics and communication - the book comes to show and clarify the implicit contents that lie in the text, fact that contributes to the persuasive process of discourse.

The first chapter – O que é opinion pública? - relates the construction of collective identity, which is what Rimbaud (2009) summarized in *I is Another*, i.e., I only exist because there is another one that is different from me. A group is constructed according to social factors (e.g., position we occupy and roles we play) and cultural factors (e.g., group life practices of group members; representations that make the world).

Collective identity is fragile and must be constantly defended (differentiation process). In this process of construction, there is a group that isolates itself; a group that dominates another (attempt of assimilation). Assimilation (or integration) can be verified, for example, in the case of immigration seen by the host country, which will require it in return for the entry permit.

An opinion is a personal or collective judgment, an assessment, that an individual makes about the beings or events of the world, and is therefore subjective and relative. The same does not happen with the knowledge of belief, which encompasses objective explanations.

At the time of enunciation, there is no collective word (a chorus, for example, to utter the same word), but an individual who pronounces it and who wants his opinion shared. Once shared, the opinion could be considered *true*. Collective opinion is not, therefore, the sum of individual opinions, just as the identity of a group is not the sum of individual identities.

Public opinion needs motives: events that present themselves to it and the group that supports it (politicians, opinion polls, media), and emerges by reaction of individuals in situations they deem unsustainable. Thus, for public opinion to manifest, it is necessary that an event that can sensitize many individuals. An event that causes problems and that is not resolved. Charaudeau warns of confusion to be avoided: opinion with electorate. It deals with several events that have shaken French public opinion and ends the chapter with the difficult paradox surrounding citizen consciousness. For him, it is necessary to distinguish belonging and feeling of identity: one belongs to a group because of one's social identity of age, sex, family environment, etc. The feeling of identity comes from an idealization; it constructs itself subjectively in reference to a group in which we wish to recognize ourselves, to which we attach ourselves through beliefs. Citizen consciousness is "a condensate of wanting to be together and of wanting to live together and is of symbolic order" (p.63)

In the second chapter – *A manipulação da opinião pública* – [Manipulation of public opinion] - the author deals with the manipulation of public opinion in the political world that can be done by manipulating discourse through seduction. To this end, Charaudeau asserts that a charismatic leader tends to manipulate public opinion more easily and specifies some types of charisma, such as the Messianic charisma that, according to Max Weber, is related to the gift of grace. For Weber (2003), unlike much of the current of experts in the subject, merit should not be given to the type of charisma itself, but to its domination and its effects. In a more sociological and historical line of reasoning, Weber sees the charismatic domination as the essence to understand these phenomena without necessarily dwelling on the substance, or element, that makes a figure a leader in counterpoint to his proselytes. Although Weber focused primarily on the charismatic individual, his relationship with the collective also drew his attention, since only through the recognition of the follower, and even of the community in which s/he lives, the existence of charisma is formed. The gift of grace is not necessarily of divine order; it can be an inner force. In the case of the political actor, Charaudeau cites Christ as an example of someone who had the Kantian duty of the type *do what you should*, as well as figures less related to religion, as is the case of General Charles De Gaulle, who, according to the author, was gifted of such grandeur that he had the mission to save France.

There are, in the author's opinion, other charismatic leaders such as those who have explored the founding roots of a people, calling for revolt as Hugo Chaves did in his speeches when referring to Simon Bolivar and to the *trees of the three roots*¹⁴.

14 Allusion to the historical figures Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez and general Ezequiel Zamora.

Another type of charisma, to which Charaudeau refers, is the Caesarist charisma, which is related to the ethos of power that can be expressed through different figures. They are apparently figures of exaggerated virility, and may even be expressed by sexual adventures as was the case of former US President John Fitzgerald Kennedy and former Italian President Silvio Berlusconi. There are also energy figures, which are manifested by hyperactivity as happened with Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. However, there is an ethos less related to power, but more related to courage, as can be seen in the speech of former Argentine President Juan Domingos Peron on Peronism. Charaudeau makes clear that the political charisma is of another nature in relation to the other types of charisma, for there seem to be two antagonistic forces that permeate this relation: on the one hand, there is power – an indeterminate place – but with a force of domination; on the other, a people – a somewhat amorphous global entity – without indefinable limits, but a supposed place of counter-power.

This same chapter, begun by the subchapter *A manipulação do mundo político* [Manipulation of the Political World], brings further subchapters on manipulation of public opinion entitled: *A manipulação do discurso de sedução dramatização*, *A Manipulação pela exaltação de valores*, *O discurso populista como reciclagem dos discursos extremistas*, *O discurso como fator de embaralhamento das oposições políticas*, *A manipulação no mundo midiático* [Respective free translations: The manipulation of the seduction speech dramatization, The manipulation by the exaltation of values, The populist discourse as a recycling of the extremist discourses, The discourse as the scrambling factor of political oppositions, manipulation in the media world].

In *A manipulação do mundo político*, Charaudeau, makes a collection on politics and on political actors. It deals with the idea that the political word circulates in a public space and is subject to its restrictions, viz., in this space, the exchanges occur not between individuals but between entities or collective offices, which are defined by means of statutes and social roles. It is in this political space that there are the two instances, mentioned by the author, which are the political and citizen instances.

The following is a subsection on manipulation by opinion polls, which is subdivided into: *A pesquisa da opinião pública que é um discurso*, *Diferentes tipos de pesquisa de opinião*, *Um espelho deformante da sociedade*, *Análise de uma pesquisa de opinião que*

causa complexidade, Um bom exemplo de manipulação e As pesquisas formatam a opinião pública [respective free translations: Public opinion research which is a speech, Different types of opinion polls, A deforming mirror of society, Analysis of an opinion poll that causes complexity, A good example of manipulation, and Surveys shape public opinion], followed by a conclusion about manipulation.

In *A manipulação do discurso de dramatização* [The manipulation of the dramatization discourse]¹⁵, the author argues that political discourse, far from being an absolute truth, tries to challenge others by means of appeals to feelings and by making scenarios, as in a theatrical stage in which dramas and tragedies are presented in order to manipulate public opinion. This discourse may arouse a protest movement, such as some injustice causing indignation, and a state of anguish in public opinion. There are episodes in history in which this discourse justified, for example, military interventions in foreign countries where absolute enemies such as Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milošević and Osama Bin Laden were stigmatized.

Concerning the chapter *A manipulação pela exaltação de valores* [The manipulation by the exaltation of values], there's a subjective question to be thought that would be the notion of the meaning of the term values. All the politicians declare to defend values of their nations, democracy, the republic, etc. However, the point is that certain values can be judged by the utility and good functioning of social life at a given time, and these values can be considered as values that are obstacles to the performance of the economy and even social well-being, as Luis Fernando Veríssimo puts it ironically in his text called *Silogismo* (2000) [Silogism]:

[...] Our stability and our prestige with the international financial community are due to the tenacity with which honest and capable men, resisting emotional appeals, maintain an economic policy firmly rooted in the misery of others and admirable coherence based on the hunger of others. The country is only viable if half its population is not.¹⁶

In this same block, in *O discurso populista como reciclagem dos discursos extremistas* [The populist discourse as a recycling of the extremist discourses]¹⁷, Charaudeau approaches the ideological French matrices of both right and left, in order to deal with populist discourse

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16 Original text by Veríssimo (2000): [...]A nossa estabilidade e o nosso prestígio com a comunidade financeira internacional se devem à tenacidade com que homens honrados e capazes, resistindo a apelos emocionais, mantêm uma política econômica solidamente fundeada na miséria alheia e uma admirável coerência baseada na fome dos outros. O país só é viável se metade da sua população não for.

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as a recycling of the extremist discourses. Populist discourse consistent with the dominant tradition in comparative political science defines populism as a form of politics based on the "moral debasement of elites and the concomitant veneration of ordinary people" (KRIESI, 2014). According to the author, populism is denounced as an antechamber of totalitarianism. He proclaims the victimization of a people, exaltation of certain values of this people and the demonization of the guilty ones made by the figure of the *scapegoat*. The populist discourse as a scrambling factor of political oppositions cites examples from history that have occurred in Europe as well as in Latin American, African, or Eastern countries. For the author, the populist discourse has historical origin in the extreme right wing, but can align, for strategic purposes, with the discourse of the extreme left wing as well.

In this line of thought, left populism seeks a strong state, with no market economy, but at the service of the people to whom it must redistribute wealth. Likewise, right-wing populism defends the less favored classes, but without state intervention. In the case of France, these classes are represented by a population of the agrarian interior, plus a small bourgeoisie of merchants and artisans. Left populism, on the other hand, fights for the group of members of the so-called popular class as workers, proletarians and illegals. As enemies, the right-wing populists have not only the establishment but a hypothetical Communist-Socialist alliance. The enemies, in the case of the left populists, would be the so-called reactionary forces, called fascists in other times.

Entitled *A manipulação no mundo midiático* [Manipulation in the media world]¹⁸, this part presents a subdivision that deals with a discourse feature that goes from the superdramatization of the information to the peopolisation of the politician. The strategy that politicians use to reach undecided voters through non-political argumentation contributes not only to personification but also to the dominance of television advertising. In addition, "negative publicity in attacking the opponent directs the attention of the voter to the personal characteristics of the candidates with the most votes" (ANSOLABEHERE; IYENGAR, 1995). As a consequence, personalities with greater intention of votes become the main motive of votes, to the detriment of political programs or campaign themes, having as a doubtful side effect the celebration of politics, viz., peopolisation. According to the author, the peopolisation is distinguished from populism by having a characteristic in the discourse that speaks of the private lives of celebrities as celebrities, idols of cinema, sport, art, etc. This is the hallmark of gossip magazines. This phenomenon is a double-edged sword, as it de-

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sacralizes the politician by approaching the voter, taking her/him out of her/his pedestal, but resacralizes him "by introducing humanity in a function that, by definition, is dehumanized" (CHARAUDEAU, p.124).

Under the title *A manipulação pelas pesquisas de opinião* [Manipulation by opinion surveys]¹⁹, Charaudeau analyzes the opinion poll stating that this is actually a discourse because, for him, a research is an act of language that brings in its core a set of questions and answers. In this way, opinion research can induce a response, since, in general, every question imposes a scheme of speech in which the one who is asked is inserted. Also, one can think of the questioner as someone who wants to know something for a certain purpose.

The author makes a general survey of the various types of research and argues that they can be a deforming mirror of society (author's words), as they feed the electoral dramaturgy, viz., allows political commentators, with their own ideologies, comment the results research within their own bias. Thus, the polls can manipulate public opinion, since they are, in turn, acts of formatting a thought that does not know what it represents.

In sum, the author sees in opinion polls the lack of boundary between legitimate persuasion strategies or the sampling of a scenario through research and the intent to manipulate minds.

Finally, in the third chapter – *Crise de opinião, crise da democracia: os sintomas de uma crise política da pós-modernidade* – [Opinion crisis democracy crisis: the symptoms of a postmodern political crisis]²⁰ – the author addresses the phenomena much discussed today that are crises of opinion and democracy. In the monarchic regimes, due to fact that power supposedly has a divine origin, the voice that represents a people acquires its sovereignty by an absolute regime of beliefs, nevertheless, in a democratic regime, "the voice comes from below, that is, from the public opinion" (CHARAUDEAU, 2016, p. 152) and this is not always translated by an alignment between public opinion and the representative (s) of that opinion. If we take as an example, among several instances that occurred in Brazilian politics, we can cite the case of the trial by the House of Representatives in Brasilia, which exempted the current President of the Brazilian Republic, Michel Temer, from being investigated by the Federal Supreme Court (FSC) despite the fact that the vast majority of Brazilians, as revealed by some opinion polls, favor the authorization for the FSC to decide whether or not to open a criminal case against the president.

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Then one can read about the possible notions related to these crises of democracy and power as the counter-power, which comes from public opinion in the form of claims, be ignored.

According to Charaudeau, a full democracy without a counter-power does not exist. The great democratic principle is that of the provisional delegation of the power of a people to a representative, who in theory will represent it in vital decisions that will strongly affect the life of this same people. In this case, counter-power has an important role in regulating the sovereignty of a representative so that the policy of a country is not made only in the name of a majority or an active minority without any justification.

In *A conquista da opinião pública: como o discurso manipula as escolhas políticas* [The conquest of public opinion: how discourse manipulates political choices]²¹, Charaudeau amplifies these ideas discussed here and makes his analysis about the construction of public opinion. It builds a discursive activity on how one can manipulate opinion polls. The book attempts to detail how the manipulative discourses occur, taking into account the processes of individual and collective identity construction brought to the surface by feelings, values, political theater and charisma.

It is worth emphasizing the social importance of reading the book both for those who want to think about stratagems used for the conquest of public opinion and for the understanding of discursive strategies existing in the current historical moment. In democratic regimes, it is politicians who represent the voice of the people, but for them to come to power, they must use discourse to win over citizens. And it is through words that one seduces, persuades, manipulates and regulates social and political life.

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²¹ Free translation.

