THE SLEEP OF REASON PRODUCES MONSTERS: ON THE SUBJECT OF CIVIC DEMANDS AND CAPACITIES TODAY

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Research Papers

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1. Introduction

In this article I explore a number of cultural factors related to the difficulties Western societies are having in responding to the current crisis, which is understood to be a deep (economic, social, political and cultural) global crisis. Its very existence gives lie to theories of the end of history and instead reveals a drama open to various possibilities, including an approach to a "good society", variations of a *modus vivendi* among different segments of society, as well as significant destructive and self-destructive experiences.

I suggest that one of the keys to the present difficulty has been the spread of an interpretive framework focused on the leading sectors of society, which are the center of debate in public space. This framework is articulated around a contrast between elites and counter-elites, an *establishment* and an *anti-establishment*, with their corresponding economic, social and cultural milieus (including the media and others).[1] Both share an antagonistic political culture, which has had a profound effect in obfuscating and distorting public debate, and substantially reduced the strategic capacity of society as a whole to solve the problems of the crisis, including, first of all, the problem of the continuous re-creation of the political community itself.

I point out the possibility of developing a different interpretive framework, centered on a conceptualization of public space as a place for a conversation (deliberation, experimentation), based on the commitment of a sufficiently reasonable and basically reconciled society –whose main agent could be a critical mass of the public, of ordinary citizens, or if you will, of civil society– and one that operates in a relational and reflexive context. Ultimately, I suggest that this depends in turn on the development of the core of a tradition of common sense and moral sense (although I postpone the development of this subject for another time),[2] which, in different modalities and with different cultural languages, may exist to one degree or another in the society in question.

2. The sleep of reason, and reason awakened

A quarter of a century after the collapse of Soviet totalitarianism and what some announced as the 'end of history' and a new world order, a deep crisis has taken place in the *sancta sanctorum* of this order, the West, in two of its key institutions, democracy and capitalism.[3]

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[1] To simplify the argument, I deliberately set aside a complementary discussion concerning the mutation, and degeneration, of the establishment (and anti-establishment) in the direction of an oligarchic regime (or dominated by what I have called "oligarchic triarchies": Pérez-Díaz 2008: 85-104). This paper is the English version of "El sueño de la razón produce monstruos. A propósito del tema de las demandas y capacidades cívicas de hoy", *Información Comercial Española*, 2016, 891: 21-32 (translation into English by Jed Rosenstein). A shorter Italian version appeared as "Il sonno della ragione genera mostri" in *Il Mulino*, 2017, 1.

[2] I am referring to a tradition of common sense in the sense used by Voegelin (1989: 28-29) and of a *moral sense* as referred to by MacIntyre (2006: 193). At the same time (and in part in relation to the former), I will leave the analysis of the contrast between the situation in the West and the rest of the world for another time.

[3] Not just the idea of democracy, but also the experience of democracy (Marsh, 2014). Also not just

Instead of witnessing the end of history, it appears as if we have entered a new phase, one more in an unending process of both light and darkness.

The political and economic crisis represents a social fracture. In Spain the crisis has also been combined with a serious risk of territorial fracture; in Europe, with an institutional framework that no longer seems to work; and in the United States, with a sense of loss of direction. All has been accompanied by a high level of confusion because of a lack of understanding of how to to handle or even discuss a crisis of such characteristics.

Along with the objective difficulties the crisis presents are the additional inconveniences of a pressure to act in a hurry and through an interpretive framework that favors unfocused options. When it comes to resolving the crisis the public is urged to lend support to immediate solutions, major decisions and acts of supreme will, handing over its trust to one savior or another –actually saviors or exorcists, depending on one's perspective.

We are often asked to choose between two very different heroes or anti-heroes, although curiously, they share certain common features. On one side we have an *establishment* with significant responsibility for the current crisis (counting on both the acquiescence and neglect of the many). At times it asks us to be patient, as it boasts of its political maneuvering, appealing to the natural order of things. Other times, it distracts us, with the inestimable help of the entertainment and culture industry, and in part, education, with its cult of the future and a horizon they say, open to the conquest of Mars and distant galaxies. On the other side, we have varieties of an *anti-establishment* offering us a surrealistic future, a return to the past of some variant of Bonapartism, totalitarianism, or other nightmares of the last two centuries. Each, in their own way, is very politically correct, and, as such, somewhat autistic and very anxious, they daze us and predispose us to confusion. They numb us in various ways. One fosters a state of sleep-walking; the other encourages us to dream we can fly and assault the heavens as we fall into a precipice.

For the average citizen, the result of combining such accumulated stress (in such a short time) with such a dilemma is a high risk of mental confusion, even in discerning what might be reasonable at both the extremes. Reason requires some form of amiable conversation, far from the excessive noise of mutual disqualifications, and a certain amount of time and calm; calm because, to give some relevant local examples, if we have still not solved the problems of the labor market, of education, or the status of Catalonia after thirty or forty years in Spain, led by so many well-thought-of elites and with so many outbursts of indignation along the way, it makes no sense to think that we will now all a sudden be able to do so through a supreme act of will.

The truth is that in choosing between one or the other, or better still, neither, it would be wise to be reasonable and to avoid precisely the situation evoked in Goya's *capricho*, "The sleep of reason produces monsters", in which we see a man snoozing, his head down, his legs crossed and motionless, surrounded by sinister figures rising from his mind, to whom his lost reason has given flight.

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any type of capitalism, as suggested by the literature on this subject (for example, Hall, 2016), qualifying positions such as that of Streeck (2014).

That *capricho* was drawn by Goya in 1797, and the following year he gave us a portrait of Gaspar Melchor of Jovellanos that seems to be its antithesis. The figures represented in the *capricho* and in the painting of Jovellanos are of very similar workmanship and corporal disposition. But Jovellanos is painted against a luminous background somewhere between silver and gold, and his wide-open eyes seem to be cautiously considering a complex situation, a task to be done. The absence of reason in the *capricho* has given way in the latter work to an *alert* reason.

An alert reason… however long it lasted. It is doubtful that Jovellanos found a way to avoid the unreason of others for very long. His last words, "headless country, wretched me!", suggest a profound disappointment, although they can also be interpreted as a warning to those who want to listen, because the interesting thing about history, as with life, is that it does not usually follow laws that inscribe a destiny. Instead, it is an open drama. That the sleep of reason produces monsters that annihilate us is only one possibility. We can also awaken from our sleep, interpret it and learn something. How long what we learn might last remains to be seen, as it can always be forgotten (and learned again).

In this hopeful, non-illusory spirit, let us re-examine the present situation for a moment. It is necessary to use reason and to reason with others. It is even possible that we have no other way of reasoning about the common good then to do so together.

It is necessary to listen, to deliberate, to make decisions, but to do so as is done in an experiment, taking into account the consequences and their weight, rectifying, learning and continuing to learn, in order to realize what has been forgotten along the way (probably because others draw our attention to it), to remember it again, and all this in a climate of sufficiently reasonable conversation and civic friendship.[4]

Of course, being realistic, given the already accumulated hatred and mental confusion in today's Western societies, we should not expect too high a level of reasonable conversation and civic friendship. But, and without discounting miracles (because who are we to exclude them?), while the progress we dream of seems unattainable, we must try, and hope that it is not completely out of reach.[5]

3. In praise of heavenly music

Thus, with this both realistic yet optimistic frame of mind, we can try our best, opposing the dominant culture of both the *establishment* and the *anti-establishment*, the culture of the will to power, with an alternative culture, based on reasonable coexistence.

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[4] Let's say even applying Donald Davidson's principle of charity (2001): trying to rationally and coherently interpret what others tell us, if possible, or if you will, trying to understand what they say by paying attention to what they want to tell us.

[5] Thus said a friend of mine, of the tribe of Aronians (Raymond Aron's disciples), Stanley Hoffman, remembered in Hall (forthcoming). Hoffmann ended up teaching in New England, both because of the vagaries of destiny and in order to escape the furor of some contemporary totalitarians.

To begin with, there is no reason why the belligerent, if not vengeful (some would even say satanic), shouting should not and cannot be substantially reduced. Rules of civility should apply in public conversation and facilitate communication among the heterogeneous groups involved in collective debate to avoid the tendency toward reaching extremes.[6] Above all, we must be careful with our use of language and rhetoric. It seems obvious that in the present circumstances, political dramas are often a result of overacting. The current crisis tends to be managed (not always, not everywhere) based on the assumption that society is divided into enemy camps, or, as is often said, intensely and increasingly polarized. But this is not really accurate.

Strictly speaking, what such a marked polarization reflects is, first of all, the experience of a certain sector of society, perhaps the one formed by the *establishment* and the *anti-establishment*, and in particular by the social milieu of many (not all) professional politicians and media agents, as well as other intellectuals, cultural agents and experts. This certainly *interesting* part of society is bent on assaulting Olympus and building its own tower of Babel, experiencing life as the expression of a will to power.

However, this does not apply to all of society, as the majority of people are probably slightly more interested in just living, and in living together in reasonable coexistence. Perhaps this part of society, that of the common people, or civil society if you will, lives a different type of life, following a different wavelength. It is like the friendly crowd in the Meadow of San Isidro painted by Goya ten years before his *capricho* of the sleep of reason, gathered on the banks of the modest Manzanares River, the basilica San Francisco el Grande in the background. The crowd is relaxed amidst laughter and play, entertained in sharing conversation and food, and includes both those of noble birth and commoners, who almost seem to be enjoying this shared experience, although their enjoyment may end up being mistaken (Hagen and Hagen 2016). In any case, although ordinary society is, in general, also affected by so-called political polarization, it is less so. Although, we cannot rule out that it might become "contaminated" by the belligerence and infighting of the elites and counter-elites of the moment, as perhaps occurred with some of those same figures in the Goya painting.

For example, while political parties in the US have been ideologically polarized since the 1970s, the society itself has not been so to the same extent. The presidential debates and campaigns of 2016, as well as the immediately following events, may have been disturbing and left many with deep concerns, but over the last two decades, ideological consistency has been characteristic of only somewhere between 10% and 21% of the population; logically, we could assume that the remaining vast majority of Americans without consistently conservative or liberal (or progressive) views might prefer that their parties meet halfway and accept compromises with each another (Nye, 2015: 87). To draw on an example closer to home, we can look at recent opinions among the Spanish (from all over Spain) regarding the excessive polarization and ideological confrontation introduced by the political parties in

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[6] See, for example, Schudson (1997) on the habitual limitations of civic conversations; Sunstein (2008) on the importance of the heterogeneity of the public to these effects; Olsen (2013) on the influence of institutions of *accountability*; as well as Thompson (2016) on the character of political language. And take into account, on another level of analysis, Girard (2007).

debate on questions regarding territory and issues of identity (Pérez-Díaz, Mezo and Rodríguez, 2012: 192 and ff.; and Pérez-Díaz, 2017).

There is a kind of hiatus between two cultures, that of the ordinary people, at least when they apply their good sense, and that of the elites, riding in their carriages so to speak, when they get carried away with their possible mixture of enlightenment and pride.

Finding a way to deal with the contrast between these two ways of experiencing life and these two very different discourses is no easy task. For a long time, the reigning cultural universe has defined political conflict as a conflict of interests that are almost irreconcilable, and of fixed ideas reconverted into ideologies or re-baptized as such, which meet in a battle reminiscent of that of the armies in the night in Arnold's poem (1995: 92-93). What that battle determines is who will impose their will on the other. In the face of such a willful illusion, introducing its antithesis, a cultural universe in which reasonable conversation and civic friendship has primacy, seems almost impossible, suggesting it is the empty promise of a "heavenly music".[7]

What can be done? We can add to the confusion or become despondent. But if we choose to do something different, the first thing would be to revive our interest in and the importance of this heavenly music. Yes, I know that we are immersed in a political culture that emphasizes the tradition of "political animals", of Machiavelli, of Nietzsche and *tutti quanti*. But in the end, along with Dionysus there was Apollo, and even Pythagoras and Plato and the city of God, and the idea of harmony and the order of heaven applied to the earth, an ancient politics, as well as the misnamed *utopian* movements of the last two, five, twelve centuries?[8] Is this all so outdated? Is it our fault that our leaders, politicians, the media and the experts, including many social scientists, have (we have) such a weak historical memory?

For the time being, opting for this celestial music might unravel the world of entertainment culture somewhat, fomenting a certain confusion within it, suggesting that perhaps it might be convenient to take up the latest fad by returning to ancient history, adopting the language, perhaps the dress and gestures, of ancient Egypt or the times of some remote Chinese dynasty. Perhaps social networks would welcome the experiment; the new sensibilities of the fleeting moment would respond to the stimulus, and all this would end up being (at least for a while) very, very *in*.

In this way we could gain precious time and reduce the emotional tension in public space and develop an *ad hominem* argument to attack the weak flank of an adversary who wishes to direct the course of history while lacking the capacity to do so.

But at this point a nuance must be introduced. We should not imitate the elites and counter-elites by being as bellicose as they are. We must take into account that what is needed is a grand, peaceful strategy, which recognizes society as diverse and somewhat contentious, but

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[7] And as such, it may arouse the irony, or the censure, of many, including so many *esprits forts* who use their energy to make everything change, perhaps to only change what changes by itself.

[8] Without excluding experiences from different cultural areas of the West, and within the latter, addressing not only modern and classical experiences, but also so-called "medieval democracy" (Dalarun, 2012).

deeply reconciled with or accepting of its character as such. There is no need to get carried away in attacking the sensibilities of the elites (and, of course, the counter-elites, who are only their mimetic rivals). An extreme attack on the elites is not advisable because it must be remembered that, like the poor of the Gospel, the elites will always be with us, and we will always need them to some extent, within the limits of reason; that is, with the understanding that they are not in charge, and that justice is for everyone.

As has been said: "We cannot live with politicians, and we cannot live without them" (Fawcett, 2014). We must understand them, criticize them, help them to rectify when they make mistakes, and get rid of them when necessary, promptly but without acrimony. We must even be grateful to them, as they have to deal with complex problems that concern the common good, but that are disregarded by many ordinary citizens.

4. The problem of the strategic capacity of agents in a relational and reflexive context

The *ad hominem* argument directed at today's elites and counter-elites is based on considering their own actions to question their discourse; that is, to systematically question in a graduated manner their strategic capacity to solve the problems of the society. It is a strategic capacity which, to a great extent, they lack, as is precisely demonstrated over and over again by their inability to solve the problems we face.

This does not mean, however, that elites and counter-elites do not know some of the things they're doing or that what they know does not have a reasonable core; nor does it mean that they completely lack sensitivity to address the common good. Obviously they do have such sensitivity. It is simply a matter of remembering the normal limits of their capacity, which would also suggest they be humble and treat citizens on an equal footing. It is logical that they have these limits, despite all the grandiloquence that usually accompanies modern political symbolism; grandiloquence regarding the very ideas of the sovereignty of the state and the sovereignty of the popular will, both sovereignties being *de jure* and *de facto* limited, not to mention the rhetoric of controlling destiny, supremacy over the seas, empires where the sun never sets, empires that are the center of heaven and earth, the eternity of nations, and so on. And now, for example, there is what is often called control of the exponential disruptive change of the global world (which is, of course, much more than just "the world"), a grandiloquence which, moreover, has, like almost everything, its core of reasonableness, but which so far has induced, as soon as the spirits become (slightly) heated, diverse forms of delirium.

What does this strategic capability normally refer to today? Obviously, (and leaving aside geo-strategic challenges) it refers to solving important economic and social problems through the use of public policies. But we only need to remember what seems to be common knowledge today. There is a long and deep economic crisis, with all the problems which accompany it.[9] A significant part of society is, as a result, in a very vulnerable situation; the

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[9] Obviously I am referring to the situation in the West, but it is important not to lose sight of both the contrast and the analogy between what happens in the West and what happens in other parts of the world. And to give an example, it is a good idea to look at the complex relations and tensions that exist in modern China between the political and economic establishment and neo-Maoist currents (see

range of existing opportunities for improving their situation has been shrinking for a large part of the middle and working classes, while increasing inequality is threatening social cohesion in a diverse society.[10] In addition, political disaffection may combine with a climate of moral indignation, in part genuine, and in part an alibi for the expression of mutual contempt. In these circumstances, solving socioeconomic problems becomes even more difficult, as there is a lack of the sense of a community acting as a sort of collective agent to confront these problems.

In other words, by placing the analysis of the strategic capacity of the agent in question in a framework that is, let us say, relational and reflexive,[11] we encounter a vacuum, the emptiness of a community that, for the moment, is unable to deliberate and make decisions. One has the feeling that there is scarcely a story or a conversation that elicits the outline of a future project and the narrative of a sufficiently shared history. One has the impression that the feeling of "an autobiographical we"[12] has been lost, or is being lost. The "we" disappearing through our hands, we are left with the remains of a community with amnesia: it does not know who it is because it does not know who it has been. It is without direction. Of course, it is strange that such a community would intend to play a role in Europe's future. (How can it do so? Through sheer will?) Although perhaps the strangeness is disguised, and aggravated, by the fact that in this case something similar is happening to Europe itself. This is certainly a very skeptical way to face this world of growing geo-strategic tensions, which almost everyone is convinced is here.

There is no doubt that the elites and counter-elites have the tactical astuteness to survive in this situation in the very short term. They have clearly demonstrated that they are capable of doing so (or of perishing in their efforts), which gives the spectacle of their struggle for power an interesting touch of suspense. But what is not clear is whether they have the strategic capacity to handle the process, not in the short term, but in the medium and long-term. Can they provide direction and motivation to the people, help articulate a story or a conversation, help rebuild the community day by day?

Anderlini, 2016).

[10] This is an inequality that is not only social and economic but also political, so that some observers speak of a "lower third," which, it appears, is becoming increasingly marginalized (Merkel, 2014).

[11] All agents only exist in relationship with others, and with the fabric of their activities and their interactions and with the resulting products of these; and this relationship is penetrated, to an important extent, by diverse degrees and modalities of reflexivity. See Archer (2013).

[12] Pérez-Díaz (2003a: 418-24; as well as 2003b, and 2004), applying a conceptual schema developed in another academic sphere, that of the "autobiographical self" (Damasio, 2000).

5. The relational and reflexive context and the question of legitimacy

Even from the perspective of the present continuous (and not that of the future, perhaps fraught with disruptive and exponentially disconcerting changes to come), we find that elites and counter-elites often fail or are failing in this effort; sufficiently so that it is clear that we cannot rely on them even in the present (let alone in the future). Their efforts are not enough, nor even close to being so. As a result, their legitimacy seems to be in question. Thus, we may want to reexamine and redefine the interpretative framework of that legitimacy.

In the language of experts, the legitimacy that results from political leaders being able to resolve society's problems is sometimes referred to as *output legitimacy*; *input legitimacy* results from the political class taking into account the concerns and demands of the citizens in resolving these problems (Scharpf, 1999). But this schema falls short when interpreting the political process. There is something more necessary, referred to with the somewhat baroque expression of *throughput legitimacy* (Schmidt, 2013). This refers to the recognition that the role of citizens in the political process tends to, and should, exceed what is reduced to an expectation of solutions and a communication of desires. And when political elites do not see this "something more", they do nothing more than confess, in a kind of Freudian slip, that they have not realized that they cannot solve problems, nor even understand what citizens communicate to them, without a substantial contribution from the citizens themselves.

This means that the contribution of citizens is not limited to the minor, secondary aspects of so-called participatory democracy. It covers a very wide range of activities whose "natural" agents, within the framework of the western societies of the last few centuries, are each and every member, organized to one degree or another and in one form or another, of civil society.[13] But even with regard to activities that are, in general, considered to pertain to public affairs or the public domain, citizens may feel called to act or moved to act on their own initiative. And they have done so and are increasingly doing so. This is largely what has led to an ambiguous extension of political language and a kind of transition from the word "government," to that of "governance." This is ultimately a recognition that citizens can solve many collective problems by themselves. How to do so is a matter of debate and experimentation. It can be done through a combination that results from a continuous experiment with markets, networks, regions, administrative decentralization and *tutti quanti*.[14]

At the heart of these experiments are conversations and multiple, diverse, continuous negotiations between citizens and elites and counter-elites, which in turn involve an appeal to certain cultural forms, reference to certain experiences, and the search for a certain form of community.

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[13] On the various uses of the concept of civil society see Pérez-Díaz (2011, 2014).

[14] Experimentation with various forms of governance extends to all levels and all sectors. It is growing worldwide (Salamon, ed., 2002: Keane, 2003; Nye, 2015), and of course, in Europe (Lendvai, 2005; Sabel and Zeitlin, eds., 2012; Torfing and Sorensen, 2014). And it affects the management of welfare systems, the public sphere and the contribution of experts, to give a few examples (see the contributions of Johansson and Hvinden, Newman, and Bang, in Newman, ed., 2005).

It is understandable that the appeal to culture be complex and in certain ways ambiguous. But leaving aside the complexity and ambiguity inherent in what is usually a long historical trajectory, and focusing on the present for the time being, it does not seem to be in the interests of citizens to, imprudently, appeal too much to *saviors* and *exorcists*. Although perhaps they can and should handle things in the manner of "ancient politics," with some, let us say, benevolent rituals of exorcism, both to reduce the excesses of accumulated hatred and to compensate for the shortcomings of the meager joy that many derive from being together. In any case, in handling these rites of mourning and celebration, it is not necessary to resort to a new incarnation of the holy alliances between Church and King, this time under the aegis of portentous secular officials. It may suffice – at least to begin with – to return to the basics, to a respect for the very clay of the earth that provides us with humility, and to the traditions of common sense and moral sense that have survived, as they have in many cases impregnated with religious experiences and purified, if possible, by (many) harsh dramas.[15] The hope is that in one way or another, these traditions will have formed, for example, around cults of *lares* and *penates* deities, or modern day prophets, and provide the foundations of society's resistance to the proliferation of not only partial, but also excessive judgment (Dunn, 1996) in societal debate. And if they have not yet done so, they will continue to try.

All this helps us to analyze our own and more distant historical experience, which, being so full of errors is, for this purpose, a great source of wealth. Thus, before the possibility of accessing the sources of collective memory is destroyed, when we still have the opportunity to return to them, we can read history books, go back to the past, discover who we are in light of what we have been and what we remain, before we are absorbed by the black hole of an empty future; hence, the importance of what I would call the recalcitrant experiences of the near past (to which I will refer in the following section).

But for the moment, I want to insist on the issue of the community of reference, which is the culmination of the argument about the relational and reflexive dimension outlined above.

Because of precisely all of the above, it is possible to deduce the main demand citizens may make at this time of a crisis in the political system: that of substantially increasing their own strategic capacity. If the capacity of elites and counter-elites is limited, and it is radically so, it will be necessary to know how to judge it, complement it and replace it with the capacity and actions – although also limited – of citizens.

This is a demand that is, paradoxically, also an offer: the offer of a service to the common good that is, in a certain manner, a service to oneself. It also offers an opportunity to regain the meaning of ancient words, according to which to *bring order* and to *give an order* mean to serve (Dalarun, 2012).

That said, it is obvious that this demand must be directed, for the moment, by society to itself and must start with the recognition that from the outset, it may also lack this capacity. Acquiring it implies education, including self-education, in other words, a civic education: Do not ignore common problems. Be aware of the issues, using the materials made available

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[15] I refer to the complex relationship between different cultural, including religious, traditions, which I cannot address here (see Pérez-Díaz, 2014).

(with sufficient discernment) by the education system, the culture/entertainment/information industries, etc., as well as by the politicians and elites and counter-elites of the moment, and especially, within the social (and family) environment in which everyone develops. Society must develop its capacity to listen and converse and for reasonable coexistence if it is to participate in public space. In this way it can, and should, make a decisive contribution to the continuous recreation of the political community.

6. The continuous recreation of the political community

In posing the problem of this recreation, I do not refer to an *ex nihilo* creation, nor to a text or a foundational moment, but to a continuous reconstruction and reproduction of the political community. I am speaking of a community that endures over time, at least long enough to fill, or calm, the normal existential anxiety of human beings to remain; in this case, to do so as part of a chain of generations that extends to a supposedly immemorial time in the past, and promises to remain indefinitely in the future. This is a narrative that tries to reflect, to articulate, to do justice to the trajectory of a relatively unitary subject, with a sufficient degree of coherence, at least enough to avoid a state of acute bipolarity and to be recognizable despite its ambiguities, dramas and mutations.

In the situation today, generally speaking, neither the *establishment* nor the *anti-establishment* –neither the established political class, nor those anxious to establish themselves– appear to be in a situation to offer a story, a strategy and the experience that will make it possible to create and recreate this community. This is because, by definition, they divide the community into two in two ways: first, into two sides, a left and right, and secondly, into an "us and them", between those who lead, the elites themselves, and the citizenry or civil society. The latter, in turn, although they supposedly choose their leaders (masters of their destiny during the thirty seconds it takes to drop the ballot in the voting box), later find themselves in the position of supporting them for the next four years (or however many years correspond).

One of the ways that politicians have to establish this doubly divided community is to offer, with the help of experts in these matters, an interpretive framework of politics understood as a political market, as a supply and demand of policies. According to this framework, citizens formulate their demands, usually very influenced by the very terms the elites use to define political problems and their solutions, imagining that the latter will apply them in a way that will satisfy their interests and desires. And, when the time comes, citizens will accept "purchasing" what is on offer, which is like buying the expectation that their desires will be satisfied.

But given this interpretive framework constructed and proposed by the elites, the supply and demand are skewed, because at their base there is a community immersed in permanent civil conflict, with the consequent implication of the denial of itself as a community. This introduces a somewhat lethal dimension in political life, a kind of process of entropy, a propensity to spread an emotional state of bitterness, the taste of a civic sadness, which, without a notable opposing force, tends to repeatedly take us back to the scene of Goya's *capricho*.

7. Recalcitrant experiences and common sense

Thus, given the limited strategic capacity of the elites to solve the crisis, in this case, and to recreate/reproduce the political community itself, one alternative is to dream in one of the two habitual forms: Either in a state of sleepwalking caused by the maneuvers of the *establishment,*[16] or in a hallucinatory and delusional state based on the proposals of the *anti-establishment*. However, another alternative is to wake up and develop the strategic capacity of the citizenry. How to do this depends in large part on the intellectual, moral and emotional resources, as well as the political, legal, economic resources of a public or a civil society that does not allow itself to be carried away by a "spirit of servitude" (La Boétie 1976 [1576]). Its focus of attention must be placed on the central demand of increasing its strategic capacity and asserting the value of its proposals, bringing about a "power conversión" (Nye, 2015: 87) through which its capacity is transformed into effective influence.

And to avoid ultimately submitting to the elites and counter-elites of the moment, I would insist it is important to understand that it is not a matter of civil society affirming a mere will to power, but rather, of embodying a practical reason that is part of a reasonable and reconciled lived culture, anchored in a (very long) tradition of common sense and moral sense. This should not be so difficult to achieve if we turn to experience, and, first of all, to the very recent memory of the "recalcitrant experience"[17] of totalitarianism and its variations in recent times. I refer to an experience that should be rejected and that has in fact been rejected, not as a mere conceptual proposal, but as something unbearable, and not only for certain minorities but, above all, for the common people. This rejection was driven by an impulse that may not have always expressed itself with the right words, although it recognized and solicited them; it is the impulse of the woman who in the interminable queue of relatives trying to send food to loved ones lost in the Gulag, approaches Anna Akhmatova and whispers in her ear, "Could you ever give an account of this?" And she answers, "I can".[18]
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The living memory of this and other recalcitrant experiences exists everywhere. Thus, in contrast to what those who study public opinion sometimes expect to find through their surveys, the results of these experiences continue to reveal a practically uninterrupted and stable support for democracy over the past several decades, with or without an economic

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[16] So exciting for the *establishment* and its milieu and so distant from the citizens. Who may discover, without wanting to, the emotional irrelevance of these maneveurs to themselves when governments and their oppositions find themselves in a sort of limbo, a "caretaker government", and the masses discover that "nothing is different", and that stirring up agitation (reinforced by the media) over what the elite think or do not think in this state of suspended animation lacks interest, among other things because they repeat slogans but hardly think. We only lack the voice of the child that told us the king was naked; except that this voice would not be so innocent if it ignores the small detail that the economy and the system of justice continue to function.

[17] The function of the "recalcitrant experience" can be seen in the development of a moral political reasoning in Pérez-Díaz (1984: 21 and ff.), starting from Morton White's (1981) corporative pragmatist theory.

[18] See Anna Akhmatova's prologue (written in 1957) to her book of poetry, *Requiem*, in Ajmátova and Tsvetáieva (2010).

crisis (Merkel 2014). If totalitarianism is taboo, terms of reference such as oligarchy and populism do not find themselves in a much better predicament, which, although indispensable in academic debate, function like grenades lobbed into the public sphere.

It should be emphasized that this attachment to the idea of democracy comes from the remarkable practice of democracy itself, and in particular, it is expressed through rather more measured and coherent responses than are usually found to questions of an institutional nature or regarding individuals' preferences toward one public policy or another. In this regard, the voice of civil society, as based on ordinary citizens interviewed in surveys (one of their many voices to take into account), can be quite enlightening, as this voice may reveal, as in a recent Spanish survey (ASP, 2016; Pérez-Díaz, 2017), a way of understanding contemporary politics which includes a desire for stable references for political coexistence, a judicious management of different political identities, and a kind of reasonable prudence in the economic and social policies to be carried out, going quite far, even in the details, in regard to support for a series of reforms as well as continuities: [19] Support based on the results of previous policies, which they attempt to gauge moment by moment, seeking to improve policies that have already been experienced over time. All of this entails complex reasoning and a willingness to compromise, as well as an opening of the space for reflexivity of the whole, and is far removed from the over-simplification and polarization usually attributed to public opinion by the elites and counter-elites, the *establishment* and the *anti-establishment*.

Returning to the images of Goya at the beginning of this brief essay, it is even possible to imagine that these ordinary citizens might want something similar to a remake of the scene of a more or less joyful coexistence depicted in the painting, *the Meadow of San Isidro*. As for the problems posed by the biases introduced by the media, political parties, the elites of whatever type, it is imaginable they could lead us to a path of chaos or, for an irony of history or the cunning of reason as Hegel said, to a path that we may travel with a better and more positive spirit. The elites can be useful, or they can be a hindrance but in a manner that can be used as a warning. In any case, it is always possible that some or many of them will learn or even undergo a process of conversion.

But it is clear that hope, even this *Aronian* kind of hope, does not exclude an apocalypse. In fact, the European experiments of these last centuries contain experiences of two types: Experiences of reasonable coexistence, of habitable worlds, and experiences like those of the holocaust, the gulag, two world wars and now a disturbing "new normality" and an apparent loss of direction.

It is a matter of being alert to the contrast between the two types of experience, knowing that the future is not inscribed, but rather, an open drama. And it will always be left open.

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[19] The details can be found in ASP (2016) and Pérez-Díaz (2017), but similar results can be found in many other studies on a wide range of public policy fields, for example, in the area of education in Pérez-Díaz, Rodríguez and Fernández (2009).

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