

**Roberts-Miller, P. (2017). Demagoguery and Democracy (Demagógia a demokracia).** New York: The Experiment. 2017. 135 pages. ISBN 978-1-61519-408-7.

The reviewed publication has been written by Patricia Roberts-Miller and published by the Experiment in New York in 2017. Roberts-Miller is a professor of rhetoric and writing and director of the University Writing Center at the University of Texas at Austin. In addition to the reviewed publication, she is the author of many other books, such as *Voices in the Wilderness*, *Deliberate Conflict* or *Fanatical Schemes*, concentrating on the field of public deliberation, demagoguery, public discourse and rhetoric.

The author's main aim in the publication is twofold: firstly, to offer a new and complex understanding of the concept of demagoguery because the author argues that demagoguery is not only about politicians, their actions and rhetoric, through which they aim to attract the audience, but, and on the contrary, the publication highlights the fact that ordinary citizens play also an important role in arguing, reasoning and deliberating about demagoguery and democracy. Consequently, Roberts-Miller thinks that "we need to persuade people to engage in more deliberation and less demagoguery. That isn't easy because demagoguery isn't just a way of arguing about politics; it's a way of thinking about decision-making" (Roberts-Miller, 2017, pp. 121-122). Secondly, according to Roberts-Miller, the conventional view of demagoguery is insufficient because it is focused only on "passion, emotionalism, populism, and pandering to crowds" (2017, p. 7). Therefore, the author is of the opinion that "thinking about demagoguery that way makes it likely that we won't notice when we are persuaded by and promoting demagoguery because it gives us criteria that enables us to see only *their* demagoguery" (2017, p. 7; emphasis in the original). Following this rationale, Roberts-Miller suggests analysing the term demagoguery in binary categories "of us (good) versus them (bad)" (2017, p. 8) because this is the way how this phenomenon works empirically. In order to fulfil the objectives of the study, the publication is divided into seven short chapters discussing not only how to – and not to- define demagoguery but also how demagoguery works in practice.

The first chapter is devoted to "Democratic Deliberation". It goes without saying that deliberation and public discourse are indispensable parts of modern democratic societies. Or, as Roberts-Miller puts it: "Democracy

depends on rhetoric – on people arguing with one another and trying to persuade one another” (2017, p. 13). The author of the publication presents her views on good deliberation that “should favor inclusion, fairness, responsibility, self-scepticism, and the “stases<sup>1</sup>”” (2017, p. 14). The inclusion rule is, on the one side, very simple to be explained, however, on the other side, its accomplishment is much more complicated because it refers to the inclusion of all people who are involved in or affected by a discussed policy or issue. The second rule, the fairness one, is characterized by enforcing rules and their application to all participants in the same manner. Responsibility means to be responsible for our own words and arguments expressed in deliberation. Also, it means to “ground our arguments in relevant evidence and credible sources” (2017, pp. 16-17). While taking part in public discussion, we should be aware that our arguments might be proven to be wrong and ideally, we should admit our limitations. This is the rule of self-scepticism. Lastly, good deliberation should favor stases, which indicates that we have to argue not only about the need to change a problem but it is also of utmost importance to discuss the cause of a particular problem – without its identification, a proper solution to the problem cannot be found. Demagoguery raises a concern because it violates all previously mentioned rules, which good deliberation is based on. Basically, demagoguery brings these rules to the point of identity, which is reduced only to us versus them.

We are of the opinion that the second, third and fourth chapter of the publication present a useful contribution to the understanding of the term demagoguery. In these chapters, Roberts-Miller challenges the conventional notion of this phenomenon because she argues that demagoguery does not necessarily have to be understood as a “false rhetoric on the part of corrupt and self-serving political elites who are manipulating their followers” (2017, p. 23). Thinking about demagoguery that way makes us focused only on bad people (they), while it puts restrictions to see when we (good people) are being dangerously misguided by demagogues. Consequently, Roberts-Miller puts forward an idea to think about demagoguery as discourse that reframes all arguments about public policy as issues of group identity. This means that we do not think about policy problems from the point of their feasibility, necessity or effectiveness but we consider rather who the source of the argument - we (good people) or they (bad people) was. Social psychologists have named this as “in-group favoritism” when we support and agree with all ideas coming from people who are like us, who are in our group. Contrariwise, we vehemently reject opinions as well as behavior made by them (out-group members). The author of the book devotes

considerable attention to highlight the fact that not only group identity but scapegoating and charismatic leadership as well are inherently connected to demagogic practices. Roberts-Miller explains that Hitler, for example, used the Jews as having responsibility for Germany's defeat in the First World War. Similarly, a charismatic leadership is very often a part of demagoguery when people are captivated by the leader's charisma and they identify with his/her beliefs and actions. Therefore, it is unthinkable to accept the fact that the leader might have done something bad. Analogously, the author refers once again to Hitler when his close friends found it very unlikely that he might have known about the Holocaust.

The fifth chapter is dedicated to an empirical case-study of demagoguery. It is worth mentioning that Roberts-Miller has not used any modern example of this phenomenon but she has rather opted for historical evidence. The author exemplifies that the mass imprisonment of Japanese Americans, taken place in the beginning of the 1940s in the USA, is a clear example of demagoguery. The main demagogic protagonist was Earl Warren, the then attorney general for California, who gave his testimony that Japanese Americans were dangerous and involved in sabotage, which placed in jeopardy the security of the American nation. As it has been explained by Roberts-Miller in her book, Warren reduced the complicated political question about enemy nationals to the question about identity. His rhetoric operated with binary categories of good Americans (us) versus bad Japanese (them).

The chapter, which follows, deliberates about what a culture of demagoguery looks like. Roberts-Miller claims that "demagoguery depoliticizes politics" (2017, p. 78) because we have stopped arguing about policies and instead of that we talk about the purity of our own community or nation, while avoiding the equal treatment of people belonging to out-group. Demagoguery is highly likely to come into being in an expressive public sphere where people just express their opinions without further consideration of someone else's arguments. It is necessary to mention that media and mass communication are capable to create so-called "informational enclaves" characterized by fractionalized media that present to their consumers "alternative facts", while offering false interpretations of opposite arguments. Thus, such a scenario is a breeding ground for demagoguery.

We personally consider the last chapter of the book of immense importance for the discussion about demagoguery as it provides several

practical recommendations of what we can do and how we can stop its occurrence. For example, Roberts-Miller suggests consuming less demagoguery by opening up our own horizons to multiple points of view and challenging ourselves with vehemently opposed opinions. Furthermore, we may stop getting into arguments with people spreading demagogic misinformation. Or, on the contrary, we may want to get into arguments with those, who reproduce demagogic ideas and try to persuade them why they are wrong. Despite these suggestions, Roberts-Miller is of the opinion that the most effective way how to tackle demagoguery is through democratic deliberation, which is a process through which people argue with one another. The most profound argument expressed in this book is that: "Democracy is hard; demagoguery is easy" (2017, p. 129). Democracy is hard because it requires the virtue of listening to other people and making compromise with them. Demagoguery is easy because it reduces all complex political questions to the issues of group identity – that is to say, us (good) versus them (bad).

It is needless to say that although the book is short in its length, its quality and contribution are of immediate relevance to the contemporary politics. The book offers not only insightful comments on how to uncover demagoguery by defining its main characteristics and empirical manifestations but it also encourages us to take various countermeasures that might eliminate demagogic tendencies. Roberts-Miller challenges readers' understanding of demagoguery by coming up with the complex nexus between this phenomenon and democracy. This small book teaches us not only how to stand up to demagogues but it shows us how we should reinforce democracy. The key to resisting and weakening demagoguery is to engage and bring people to public democratic deliberation that presents counterbalance to this negative, although still present, democratic illness.

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