

*Full Length Research Paper*

## The Role of Intellectuals and Political Oratory in Modern Democracies

**Arnaldo M. A. Gonçalves**

Institute of Political Studies. Catholic University of Portugal, Portugal.

Email: ArnaldoG@iacm.gov.mo

Received 21 March, 2016; Accepted 28 March, 2016

### **Abstract**

The role of intellectuals in an era where information and knowledge circulates, vertiginously, with negligible restrictions is under scrutiny. Multimedia, the internet, and social media have reached a very impressive status, which has led some to argue that the 'race' of intellectuals is going extinct and that their role is in decline. Classic intellectuals of the last century made some effort to elevate and honour the intellectual's contribution to modern democracy. One of them, Noberto Bobbio, defended the notion that the intellectual has a role to play, by pursuing a methodological and discursive monitoring of the political discourse and coherence of the politicians. He was always aware of the illnesses of our time: the superficiality of the politicians, the vacuity of their discourse, and the incoherence between political programs, campaign promises, and the reality of governance in modern societies. Although not in decline, the role of the intellectual should be redefined like the objectives of his intervention in the public space.

**Keywords:** Politics, communication, democracy, government.

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

Rhetoric is the study of effective speaking and writing and is also an efficient tool of persuasion. Throughout history, rhetoric has enjoyed many definitions and has changed according to context and geography. Rhetoric examines what is being said and how it is said, so it is concerned with language, the methods and means of communication. Rhetoric is seen by some as something superficial or deceptive, a method of communication concerned mostly with the appearances and style and less with the quality, discipline or content of communication. Plato defined it as "the art of winning the souls by discourse". Aristotle called it "the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion". Cicero situated it as speech designed to persuade. John Locke portrayed it as "that powerful instrument of error and deceit" (American

Rhetoric).

If we consider philosophy more as a question of argumentation than doctrine, rhetoric is the field of fine or skilful argumentation. Rhetoric, taken as an art, was an important area of study at universities in the Middle Ages and conveyed to the public the suggestion that every speech and argumentation has political and persuasive contents (Blackburn, 1994, p. 186). In recent political discourse, rhetoric has become instrumental. It has become a central topic of debate among political scientists, linguistics, sociologists, marketers, and specialists in communication. This is the reason why political communication has been directly associated with the pursuit of power. By "political communication" we mean "the intended explicit communication of messages with a political content between members of the political

system” (Huggins, 2002, p. 409 and 566). Political communication is, therein, attached to the question of what political representation is and to the way ideas, identities, and relationships forged among political actors are expressed in words, images, sounds, and symbols. Representations are also of critical importance in terms of influencing how we treat and are treated by others; it is also a critical element of politics and power (Huggins, 2002).

Huggins (2002, p. 141) recalls that political communication and the role of the media in it can be characterised by some important features. First, it looks at the global proliferation of media and telecommunication technologies that include newspapers, television, radio, film, the Internet, broadcasters, and web pages. Second, it attends to the growing infiltration of political communication in the orbit of governments, political parties, non-governmental organizations, lobby groups, and other political actors. Third, it deals with media production, the ownership of media groups, and the interaction between national broadcasters and the global media industry. The impact of these complex trends has had a profound effect on the nature, goals, and amplitude of political communication in present societies. Big TV corporations dispute the image and message of politicians they feel have a special impact on audiences. This is true in political campaigns, but is extended now to events that may have an effect on the preferences of the public. For this reason, a mixing of messages, communication techniques, and marketing strategies have become common, if not platitudinous (Dalton-Hoffman, 2013). Obsessed with their “image” among common people, politicians now feel obliged to act as if they are actors. They adopt communication skills used in the world of sports (horse-racing) or the music industry (Pew Research Centre, 2012).

This is the reason why it is said that mass media and TV broadcasters have assumed the role that used to be the exclusive purview of the political parties in organizing, motivating, and gathering political participation by opening direct routes of communication between political leaders and the public. Simultaneously, they encourage populism and artificiality (Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Wollebæk, 2012). Governments use mass media to advertise and “sell” their policies, rather than explain them rationally and carefully to audiences and pressure groups. Political parties use communication techniques to conquer and diffuse power, or influence decision-making through political adverts.

Media communication has generated a new type of politician that is welcome by being “entertaining”, “inventive”, “funny”, “winner-type” and “TV-pro” (Hofmeister & Grabow, 2011, p. 43). But this phenomenon is hardly exclusive to political parties: social groups, pressure groups, and NGOs use the same strategy to focus on special issues and specific audiences.

## **New Forms of Communication and the role of the Intellectuals**

Today, televisions, newspapers, radio, the internet, social media, and Twitter have become the preferred outfits for spreading political messages. Therefore, the credibility of professional communication specialists, such as marketing professionals, advertising boffins and public relations experts, has increased substantially over the last decades (Scammel, 1995). Political communication is valued by producing a top “sound-bite”, but this has come with a high price.

Although many social scientists and commentators agree that media has assumed a role of crucial importance in modern democracies, and that it helps to form what is normally identified as the “public sphere”, some claim that the media is undermining the quality and functioning of modern democracies (Mandle, 2015). The media is supposed to perform an intermediary role in informing the public, giving alternative insights on what is reported and seek the truth. This is not happening. The idea of a scrupulous, honest, and combative media has been adulterated by continuous reports of scandals, political and corporative manipulation and cronyism. It is possible to deduce from this ambivalent relationship between the media, politics and democratic institutions that some deterioration of the quality of citizen participation in the democratic process is taking place and may be acceptable. But there are dangers.

Disproportionate media coverage (tabloidism) dilutes and corrupts the functioning of democracy by trivializing or ignoring the real issues and presenting irrelevant criteria for the public to be informed (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). By trivializing and mocking the political message and the political targets the mass media has created an extensive suspicion regarding the veracity of news, the soundness of the reports, and the objectivity of media coverage. The public in general is inclined to see the media and journalists as manipulators harassing those political actors or groups they choose (or are ordered) to vilify by mandate of some hidden interests and groupings.

A more authoritative and respectful analysis of political events is therefore required. A return of the traditional scholarly intellectual would be a welcome development and is already noticeable, in opinion columns in European and American newspapers and on national, regional, and international broadcasters. By intellectuals we mean the person that is usually occupied with theory and principles and less with practical issues. It is also a fact that in the last century totalitarian ideologies and systems were introduced by a small group of intellectuals backed by the masses (Kuryluk, 1995, p. 133). This applies to fascism, Nazism, and communism. The denunciation of the Nazi and communist intellectuals led to the vilification of the term “intellectual”, which was associated with the term “leftist” throughout the West. So intellectuals needed to disappear and revise their positions

In the member countries of the ex-soviet bloc, many intellectuals assisted the newly elected governments and helped integrate them. At the same time, intellectuals became involved in philanthropic activities and campaigns to help starving children in Somalia, benefit drugs addicts, AIDS patients, the homeless or minorities persecuted in Central Europe (1995, p. 134). This effort gave them publicity, and they become TV stars, moral authorities, and potential candidates for governmental posts.

After a time in which intellectuals were obsessed with historical determinism, systematic thinking, and closed systems, their shift from collective abstractions to the complexities of individual actions is rewarding and promising. But their role cannot be limited to charity events, political campaigns, and government positions. It would be useful if they could apply their perception and skills to the problems of their communities. Their success may come from balancing reasoning, intelligence, and the will to speak up.

### **What about the “broken promises” of the democracy?**

Norberto Bobbio, the esteemed Italian law professor and political scientist who died in 2004, has been quoted by sociologists, social scientists, and jurists for his lucid and reflexive account of the phenomenon of democracy. Bobbio's large bibliography contains pertinent discussions about the operation of democracy and the criteria for distinguishing it from dictatorships and other authoritarian regimes. It includes, as well, a detailed assessment of the deceptions carried out by contemporary democracies concerning the promised proximity between the rulers and ruled, the theoretical aspect that has made it the preferable system of governance in the West. In a text included in his 1984 book, *Il Futuro della Democrazia* (1988), Bobbio looks at the transformations that have been happening in democratic regimes, and specifically cases 'of promises not fulfilled'. The author integrates into this analogy the gap between an ideal form of democracy, as it was imagined by the founding fathers, and real democracy "the one that we are invited to live upon, with open or limited participation, in the context of the day-to-day life" (Bobbio, 1988, p. 10). Bobbio lists in the 'promises not fulfilled', the survival of the invisible powers, the continuity of oligarchies, the persistence of the intermediate bodies, the revenge of the organized interests over political representation, the feeble political participation of citizens, and non-educated citizens. Parts of these (promises) were illusions; some others were hopes rather than promises; while yet others are faced with obstacles that were not anticipated (1988, p. 11). It would be ill advised to speak about the 'degeneration' of democracy, Bobbio admits; rather, what has occurred is a natural

adaptation of abstract principles to reality, and a contamination of theory by the claims of praxis is needed.

One of the nastiest failures of democracy, which Bobbio alerts us to, was the survival of the invisible powers that go up against the 'visible' nature of democracy, as a system of government where decisions are taken according to institutional rules and the fundamentals explained to the governed. Although the survival of oligarchies and elites in power may be considered in opposition to democratic ideals, he says, this does not prevent a substantial difference between a political system in which various elites compete openly and a system where only one group controls the power and renovates itself by co-optation. The presence of invisible powers corrupts the democracy, Bobbio warns.

A correlated problem is the use of the "useful lie" by the rulers, now adapted to a modern context by taking hold of the ideological apparatus and other intermediate means of persuasion in mass society. The political power cannot dispense the ideological power and so forth the 'persuaders' (even if they act in a non-transparent manner). The chief difference between a democracy and an autocracy is that only the former can, through the use of freedom of speech, "generate anti-bodies and accept different forms of uncovering" (1988, p. 135). Bobbio alludes, in this paragraph, to the revelation of scandals by the media. This leads to a question: what can be the role of the intellectuals in the "unfitted promises of democracy (in-text citation)

### **The role of the intellectual in Bobbio's writings**

Bobbio details his vision of the role of the intellectual in parts of his extensive bibliography. On the one hand, he cherishes the role of classic liberal intellectuals such as Benedetto Croce, who successfully combated the frivolousness of historical materialism, being guided by ideas and appreciating the reality of the passions and vital forces that move history, in opposition to the scientific minded abstractions of the positivists (Bobbio, 1997, p. 70). Appearing to agree with Croce, Bobbio remarks that Croce believed that ideas and therefore persons of culture have a role to play in guiding history (the condottieri) (1997, p.79). In the 1970's, when the Italian Communist Party shifted to "eurocommunism" and the Italian left looked for new paths closer to a 'social-democratic' orientation, the country suffered great political unrest as a result of extensive corruption in the government, terrorism promoted by extra-parliamentary groups (of the extreme Right and the extreme Left) and a surge of criminal activity in Southern Italy. In the line of thinkers of Gaetano Salvemini, Luigi Sturzo, Benedetto Croce, and Antonio Gramsci, Bobbio emerged as the philosopher of democracy – of modern democracy (Foreword to Norberto Bobbio, 1997, *Ideological Profile of Twentieth-Century Italy by Massimo Salvadori*).

As was wisely observed by Massimo Salvadori, Bobbio is part of an Italian tradition, common to all political parties, in “which the intellectual aims at being a direct inspiration for those who exercise political power, both within the government and within the opposition” (Salvadori, 1997, p. XXXI). The problem is that the relationship between intellectuals and politics has become a failure because intellectuals have never had great influence on politics, and politicians have turned a deaf ear to the intellectuals’ recommendations. This was the cause of the intellectuals’ frustration and the reason why they move away from politics. In his book *Autobiography* (1999, which collects a set of interviews with the Italian journalist Alberto Papuzzi, Bobbio makes a reference to a 1942 article (*Chiarimento*) in which he argued that intellectuals should avoid two sorts of negative attitudes: ultra-politicization and apoliticality. The former represents a full commitment to politics for personal advantage; the latter the absolute indifference to politics. The intellectuals, as persons of culture, have a role to perform in times of turbulence and political antagonism, Bobbio emphasizes.

Referring to the creation of the European Society of Culture (*Società Europea di Cultura*), in Venice in 1950, Bobbio reminds us that the purpose of the Society was to assure a forum for dialogue between the “men of culture”(in-text citation), radicalized by the political struggle that was taking place during the Cold War – a situation that led to the political division of Europe “into two camps mortally opposed” (Bobbio, 1999, pp. 92–3). The ‘*Società*’ facilitated the contacts between intellectuals from both sides of the Berlin Wall. The representatives of the West were mostly leftists (the French *intelligentsia* represented by Sartre, Benda and Merleau-Ponty) and authors such as Benedetto Croce, Thomas Mann, Henri Matisse, or François Mauriac. The East was represented by intellectuals appointed by the communist parties in power within Eastern Europe. The Western intellectuals defended a posture of ‘engagement’ in the intellectual dialogue’. “We opposed the politics of the politicians that we labelled ‘vulgar politics’ and proposed a ‘politics of culture’” – in other words, “the specific politics of the intellectuals above all political divisions”. Bobbio made the point clear in this passage:

The Europe of Culture doesn’t recognize the Iron Wall which was a political division and only political. Our Europe was not the East against the West. To the Europe of Culture belonged by right Voltaire and Pushkin, Flaubert and Dostoyevsky, Gide and Kafka. This Europe was rescued and survived a bloody war that lasted six years, by virtue of Europe’s fine intellectuals such as Julian Benda, Benedetto Croce and Thomas Mann.

In the essay “Invito al colloquio” published in the revue *Comprendre*, in 1951, Bobbio (1999) was even more precise in his labelling of intellectuals as persons of culture and not of party: The task of the men of culture

today is more to spread doubts than to admit certainties. Of certainties - covered by the luxurious skin of myth or built according to the rough stone of dogma – are the chronicles of pseudo-culture of the improvisers, the dilettantes and the propagandists, full of. Culture means moderation, weighing, and circumspection. Culture means measuring every argument before advancing it, to confirm every testimony before deciding, and never makes up one’s mind on the way on a definitive and peremptory way, like an oracle would do. (p. 94)

Bobbio returns to this theoretical debate in his book *Il dubbio e la scelta. Intelletuali e potere nella società contemporanea* published in 1996 (Bobbio, 1996a). He argues that seeing the intellectuals as a coherent group is misleading and that the peremptory statement that they betray is a question that should be contradicted: all of them? If not all, then who? Intellectuals are, in the philosopher’s words, the individuals that in other times were called wise men, scholars, ‘*philosophes*’, erudite, *gents de la letter*, or simply writers, who in religious societies responded to priests and clerics. With different names, intellectuals have always existed, because in every society, alongside the economic and the political powers, the ideological power was orientated “to the minds of the people through the production and transmission of ideas, symbols, world visions, practical teachings and through the use of the word”. The ideological power depends, forcefully, on the nature of man as “the animal who speaks”, explains the Italian author (1996a, p. 9). If in every society there are those who control the ideological power, their roles change from society to society, from epoch to epoch. They are related, if we want to use a Marxian idea, to the superstructure of the society and reflect the nature of the relations of production.

As the role of intellectuals changes, their attitude towards the other societal powers is modified accordingly. Sometimes they support, at other times they are opposed to the other societal powers (Bobbio 1996a, p.12). Something that changes is not dead. That is why Bobbio, as other prestigious intellectuals before and after him had done, argued that the disappearance of intellectuals is unlikely as the means and instruments at their disposal change. The main instrument of the ideological power is the word, which is the expression of thoughts through words and even more, nowadays, through the use of images (1996a, p.12). There are societies where a group or faction has a monopoly on the ideological power; and there are others where the power is spread throughout different distribution centres, even competing among them. Bobbio introduces, here, an elegant distinction between ‘ideological intellectuals’ and the intellectuals that are “experts” or “technicians of human knowledge”. The latter is even larger in number and that is the reason why “those who detain the political or the economic power cannot ignore them” (1996a, p.13).

Bobbio introduces a second distinction in the discourse of intellectuals, between the plane of “being” and the plane of “ought to be”, that is, between the descriptive and the normative analysis of facts. The Italian author observes that the passage from a descriptive to a normative dimension of discourse often occurs involuntarily and the suggestion often recurs that intellectuals are not fulfilling their duty in the way that they should, according to the ideal paradigm every individual has in his head. Bobbio names the dissimilarity introduced by Jean-Paul Sartre between the “true” and the “false” intellectual; the first being the “revolutionary” and the second being the “false” – the intellectual that “would not engage in the political struggle and remains closed in his ivory tower”. Criticizing Sartre, the Italian philosopher clarifies that the utopian intellectual that looked to change the world to his image, fell in disgrace and that the intellectual with his feet firmly on the ground became more reliable as someone that advises the politician to take one step at a time (1996a, p. 14).

Bobbio affirms that between intellectuals and politicians a gap exists that is difficult to fill and is only possible to bridge in exceptional times (1996a, p. 16). This gap is appropriate for challenging the illusion that the intellectuals have a political role to play by their denunciations of or proposals for a just society. The politics of culture and the politics of the politicians are different spheres that need to be kept apart even if one acknowledgeable that the man of culture does politics, he does it in the long run. The history of ideas and the history of praxis pursue parallel tracks that seldom meet together Bobbio concludes.

This is the reason why Bobbio (1996a) elects a special mode of behaviour for the intellectual:

If I have to elect an ideal model of conduct I would say that the attitude of the intellectual should be defined by a strong determination to participate in the political and social struggles of his time but not to a point that he becomes alienated, incapable of feeling what Hegel called ‘the soaring clamour of the history of the world’. At the same time, because of that critical distance that prevents him from identifying himself with a party until he is completely glued to a slogan. *Indipendenza ma non indifferenza*. (Independence but not indifference). (p. 79)

From the abovementioned excerpts, it is apparent that Bobbio constructed most of his arguments with regards to the role of intellectuals in a modern democracy, departing from a classical and Ciceronian perspective that sees intellectuals as counsellors or advisers to paramount political leaders. As meaningful advisers, intellectuals hold an ethical superiority that prevents them from putting “their hands in the mud” – i.e. being forced to take a side with respect to the political bargaining. How this statement is adjustable to the environment public

intellectual’s face today is a question that requires further discussion. We will look at it taking into consideration additional contributions on the special nature of intellectual studies, the fact that there are different levels of quality among public intellectuals, the circumstance that after a long public engagement during the first and the second World Wars intellectuals decided to go back to the Academy to protect their own accountability. As intellectuals have, nowadays, greater access to the public space and enjoy a global immunity with regards to their views, there is a significant difference between the attitude of classical and modern intellectuals – something that may have escaped Norberto Bobbio’s very classical appreciation of the intellectual.

### What are intellectuals needed for?

The study of intellectuals, under a historical or sociological perspective, falls into an unusual subject, as intellectuals are among those objects of analysis less open to describing their activities or points of view (Lemert, 1990, p. 304). That is contradictory to the fact that the public expects intellectuals to interpret their own ideas according to circumstances and that they often fail to do so. “The reflexive nature of intellectual work, whether actual or potential, places serious obstacles in the way of any objectivist, or generalizing, account of that work”, notes Charles Lemert. It is necessary, then, to take into consideration the exceptional dimension of some intellectuals, like Max Weber, and an insufficient regard for the reflexive, idiosyncratic ideas of an intellectual makes it difficult to assess an idea or an intellectual movement.

It would, nevertheless, be imprudent to consider intellectuals as being part of a unique category or as having attained a particularly high level. There are estimable and dreadful intellectuals just as there are good shoemakers and bad shoemakers. “Like the hands, the mind can be used for anything” and one may come to terms with the unpleasant fact that in the 20th century totalitarian ideologies of the left and the right were introduced by a small group of intellectuals and supported by an enormous mass of people, recalls Ewa Kuryluk (Kuryluk, 1995, p. 133). Another additional aspect to consider is the engagement of intellectuals. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the denunciation of collaborators and fellow travellers of the communist regimes, in Eastern Europe. The term “intellectual” become synonymous for “leftist” and as the leftist tradition became discredited so were the intellectuals that took a part in it. These “fellow travellers” were forced to retire to the universities or change their attitude. In the countries of the ex-Soviet bloc, intellectuals, many of them members of the democratic opposition to the communist regimes, become government advisers, officials, and philanthropists. They filled the vacuum of

power after the implosion of communism, but instead of reclaiming a new national rebirth they opposed to the totalitarian rule in the name of civil rights and an autonomous public sphere, propagating the principles of liberal Western tradition. This is the case of Vaclav Havel, Tadeusz Masowiecki, Imre Kertecz, and Milan Kundera (Giesen, 2011, p. 297).

The participation of intellectuals in humanitarian campaigns gave them enormous publicity and they become media stars. But if the role of intellectuals cannot be limited to government posts and charity, we may be forced to assume that intellectuals have a special gift in speaking out to people and that they may teach them how to think in a positive and constructive way, rather than in a way that is destructive (Kuryluk, 1995, p. 135). But in some locations the intellectuals are seen as a threat to new powers that took the place of the colonial rulers, and they are branded as racists if they pursue a position that differs from the official political line (Jansen, 1996, p. 163).

The vanishing of the intellectuals was something real. Most of the intellectuals of the past decades had a strong commitment to politics and ensured that there was a link between the intellectual and the outside world. People like George Orwell, Dwight Macdonald, George Grant, and Hannah Arendt might be said to fit this pattern (Ludwig, 1989, pp. 486–487). Some seven decades ago, most intellectuals were not at universities and could align with the proletarian cause, the victims of the Great Depression, while the professors in the academy were part of the middle class and were close to the “ruling class” (Ludwig, 1989, p. 487). In the 1960s, intellectuals moved to the University and became, to that extent, members of the middle class and, as a consequence, came to be influenced by their new conditions of life. This may explain why the gulf between the educated sectors of the public and the academics has been widening.

The rhetoric about ‘gulf’, ‘widening’, ‘decline’ of the intellectuals is, according to another author, misleading as liberal arts institutions have established themselves as strongholds of progressive thought (Lock, 1989, p. 483). There is a temptation for academics to despise the vitality of conservative thinking because of the general assumption that ‘intellectual’ is an attribute of the Left. That is the reason why they consider, reluctantly, Roger Scruton, Alain Finkielkraut, William Kristol, Charles Krauthammer, and Niall Ferguson to be members of the same “intellectual community”. An intellectual is someone who is perceived to be one. In the mid-1970s, the French newspaper *Le Monde* asked its readers to point out the top ten intellectuals of France. Sartre, Foucault, Aron, Girard, Foucault, Derrida and Ricoeur comprised the final top ten. The *Times* did a similar exercise and the result was astonishing, as many of the intellectuals were not even born in England: Popper, Gombrich, Koestler, Canetti, and Hayek (Ludwig, 1989, p. 485).

A similar account of the devaluation of the contribution

of academics and intellectuals is portrayed by Jennifer Wood and Clifford Shearing (Wood & Shearing, 1999). They argue that this is the consequence of important developments under the umbrella of post-modernism and neoliberalism, which discredited the value of universal knowledge just as it did the institutions that look to promote its uses (1999, pp. 311–312). The discourse of social/national was substituted by a focus on the communities’ specificities; the ‘social’ dimension was subrogated by the idea of the ‘global’, as a network of interacting communities. These changes were barely handled by the academy, which conceives the world through modern and social eyes and which looks to contribute to it, through the production of knowledge based on universal truths. In the words of both authors, if intellectuals have a role to perform in this changing world they need to question their uncontested assumptions, about what they do and how they may interact with those who seek to manage and regulate public life. For that purpose, they are challenged to reinvent themselves and their business.

Considering that a possible reshuffle may be “a normative engagement” in which intellectuals seek to use their map-making skills to open spaces for action, namely for those who have their liberty limited, and those whose capacity to be self-directed is very limited (1999, p. 318).

There is a continuous assumption that modern intellectuals are not what they used to be, but curiously there was never such a great interest for what they think, about almost everything, then there is today. The internet is perceived as an important vehicle of expression for public intellectuals, and the explosion of online publications, podcasts and weblogs has allowed public intellectuals to express their views beyond the limits of op-ed pages and network television (Drezner, 2009, p. 49). As with any sort of technology, the internet increases the production possibilities for those who use it, and by that enlarges the size of the audience increasing individual productivity. There is evidence that blogs fill the gap between the rhythms of intellectual production for authors and allows them to publicize their work. Blogging is not a substitute for publishing, and, done correctly, it may be a powerful complement. Academics view blogs as a form of public service and political activism (2009, pp. 52–53).

The lament that the role of public intellectuals has declined in recent years is not substantiated and misses the point that by returning to the academy many of them transformed the university into a political playground for their concerns and agendas (Patai, 2009, p.129). Their ready access to the op-end pages of important newspapers, to television talk shows and to the entire universe of high-speed communications have added visibility to their public profiles. Although some argue that this visibility has turned intellectuals into pop stars, it is unquestionable that “intellectuals feel under tremendous pressure to demonstrate their correct political views,

attempting to do so even as they try to voice they disagreements with ideas that have become orthodox in academy” notes Daphne Patai (2009):

Many of us who for years have been dismissed as conservatives and reactionaries merely because we have argued that the mission of the university is not to end racism, sexism, economic oppression and other social ills [...] all humanities professors become prominent experts on everything. Everyone becomes a public intellectual, contesting power, engaging into crucial issues, in blatant disregard of whether this is either desirable or appropriate in the classroom. (p. 136)

This note retains the idea of a return to the myth of the intellectual engage, the political militant that uses his position in the academy to disseminate his political views and mobilize his students and the public to support them. A deviation to the role of mediator and balancer that Norberto Bobbio and other classical intellectuals esteem to be the responsibility of the intellectuals in the public sphere and a caution that has been sidelined by opportunistic calculations.

#### Last remarks

The role of the intellectuals in the public sphere is a subject that is still controversial. The general public likes the intellectuals to express their views and bestow the public with guidelines regarding what to think and decide on. This turned the intellectuals into media ‘parrots’ of sorts; capable of commenting any subject they are been asked about. This is a pressure that public intellectuals are experiencing and it is fostered by the modern means of mass communication.

This led us to the problem of populism and demagoguery as an innermost feature of modern-day democracies. Political actors do not use so much the direct mode of communication to enlighten the public about their policies. They use intermediate means, basically broadcasters, journalists, communications “experts”, advisers and marketers to do the job for them. These experts are paid to take the messages to the receptors, bring the reaction to the source and measure the impact in terms of the rate of applause or criticism.

If rhetoric is a means to informing the public, the written message is less and less important these days than it ever was before. The public wants short messages, sound-bites, and images. The power of the television and the internet is appalling and makes the traditional procedures of communication seem archaic.

All this presents a trap for public intellectuals, as they are required to give the audiences balanced views on

controversial issues even though many times they prefer to follow the mainstream ideas, rather than give substantiated opinions on what they observe.

#### References

- American Rhetoric, Definitions of Rhetoric. Retrieved from <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/rhetoricdefinitions.htm>
- Blackburn S (1994). *The Oxford dictionary of philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blumler J, Gurevitch M (1995). *The Crisis of Public Communication*. London: Routledge.
- Bobbio N (1988). *O Futuro da democracia [The Future of Democracy]*. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote.
- Bobbio N (1996). *Ideological profile of twentieth-century Italy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Bobbio N (1996). *Os intelectuais e o poder*. [Intellectuals and Power], Fundação Editora da UNESP (FEU).
- Bobbio N (1999). *Autobiografia [Autobiography]*. Lisboa: Editora Bizâncio.
- Dalton-Hoffman M (2013). *The effect of social media in the 2012 Presidential Election. The First-Year Papers*. Trinity College Digital Repository, Hartford, CT. Retrieved from <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/fypapers/36>
- Drezner DW (2009). *Public Intellectuals*. *Sociology*, 46, 49–54.
- Enjolras B, Steen-Johnsen K, Wollebæk D (2012). *How do social media change the conditions for civic and political mobilization?* University of Oslo. Retrieved from [http://www.uio.no/english/research/interfaculty-research-areas/democracy/news-and-events/events/conferences/2012/papers-2012/steen-johnsen-elrojas-wollebaek-wshop1\].pdf](http://www.uio.no/english/research/interfaculty-research-areas/democracy/news-and-events/events/conferences/2012/papers-2012/steen-johnsen-elrojas-wollebaek-wshop1].pdf)
- Giesen B (2011). *Intellectuals and politics. Nations and Nationalism*, 17(2): 291–301.
- Hofmeister W, Grabow K (2011). *Political parties: Functions and organisation in democratic societies*. Singapore: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.
- Huggins R (2002). *Political communication and the media*. In B. Axford, G. K. Browning, R. Huggins, & B. Rosamond (Eds.), *An introduction to politics* (2nd Edition). London and New York: Routledge.
- Jansen J (1996). *Intellectuals under fire*. *Critical Arts J.*, 18(1): 163–169.
- Kuryluk (1995). *Intellectuals, be intelligent*. *Triquarterly*, 94, 131–135.
- Lemert C (1990). *The habits of intellectuals: Response to Ringer*. *Theory and Society*, 19(3): 295–310.
- Lock C (1989). *Scapegoating intellectuals*. *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 58(4): 482–485.
- Ludwig J (1989). *The vanishing intellectuals*. *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 58(4): 486–491.
- Mandle J (2015). *The erosion of democracy*. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-mandle/the-erosion-of-democracy\\_b\\_6614142.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-mandle/the-erosion-of-democracy_b_6614142.html)
- Pew Research Center (2012). *Winning the media campaign 2012*. Retrieved from <http://www.journalism.org/2012/11/02/winning-media-campaign-2012/>
- Scammel M (1995). *Designer politics: How elections are Won*. London: Macmillan.
- Wood J, Shearing C (1999). *Reinventing intellectuals*. *Canadian J. Criminol.*, 41(2): 311–320.