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Book review of *La ruse de la mondialisation. L'assaut contre la puissance américaine* by Paul Dobrescu, Paris : L'Harmattan, 2015, 362 pages

Several years after the initial publication (Institutul European, 2010), Paul Dobrescu's book, *Viclenia globalizării. Asaltul asupra puterii americane* [Globalization's cunningness. The assault on American power] was beautifully translated in French by Denisa Adriana Oprea and published by the prestigious L'Harmattan publishing house. In a field where analyses can rarely keep pace with the events, a book needs more than factual information to stand the test of time. In this particular case, what has made this book a standard reading in Romanian academic field and is now launched on an international market is neither relevant data (although the book abounds in spectacular facts), nor the impressive list of recent bibliography. It is the particular quality of what over the years has grown into a powerful, unapologetic and balanced perspective over contemporary developments in the field of global economy and politics. "A philosopher in the economists' arena", said Adrian Vasilescu in his review (2013) of the other major work of Paul Dobrescu, "A century-old decade. The century of the emerging world", now being translated for the Anglo-Saxon market. It is, indeed, the most visible characteristic of the book: a philosopher's debate on the complex causes that have tipped the balance of power in contemporary world, and, more importantly, a philosopher's ability to discern historical patterns in current developments. An equally poignant trait is the beautiful writing, in an age where efficiency is often placed before the aesthetic pleasures of reading. The author's long career as a journalist has given a nice flow to phrases; the book reads with the passion usually preserved for literature. More importantly, however, it offers a new perspective: a distinct voice coming from the periphery of Europe, who may ask those questions which are relevant to this part of the world. This is an advantage that the author has used throughout the book.

The main focus of the book is the dynamics of the contemporary balance of power. The author debates the various implications of the rise of China and the decline of US as the contemporary superpower. Both actors have a crucial say in shaping the future world. An important question is how they will manage to harmonize their interests in order to take major decisions about the world.

The author builds a strong argument which in the end gives the very title of the book: "Globalization did not serve the interests of its designers, but the interests of those who knew how to meet the demands of the new process and in this way put it to work for their own good.

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Is this the irony of the process or its cunningness?” (my translation, p. 22). The demonstration is developed patiently throughout the book, pointing to the dramatic change in the paradigm of globalization, from the heyday of American exceptionalism to the black age of global crisis. The utopian hype of the early days of globalization has been replaced by the stark realism of recent years. The impressive growth of the West and the rise of multinationals as important global actors widened the gap between developed and developing countries; the crisis revived concerns for the disenfranchised of the world. Yet, with their emphasis on the contentious issue of the social impact of globalization, both visions have lost track of what the author calls the most important trait of globalization: *the relationship between globalization and development*.

The various facets of the crisis (a classic macroeconomic crisis, overlapping a crisis of financial structures and a crisis of development management), together with the decline in the role of elites against the background of shrinking middle class, seem to have severed the very roots of capitalist society as we know it. With it, the trust in its vision on development. In this respect, the confrontation between the established and the rising power will be won by the one power with a valid development model.

For many years, globalization was seen as the process encouraging financial and technological flows from developed to developing countries. For some time now it has become equally important to debate the regional and national answers to these flows, which have changed the face of global economy. Another characteristic of the process is the rise of giants – the emerging economies, with the added advantage of natural data: vast territory, wealth, population, but, equally important, economic and technological breakthroughs, partly explained by investment in educational systems. “What globalization accomplished was the unification of the terrible force of the numbers with that of modern technology” (p. 36). If China and India succeed, says the author, it will be because of economic performance (and the growing confidence it feeds), but also because of their sheer size. In this respect, it is correct to say that with the rise of giants, encouraged by globalization, we are witnessing the return of geopolitics (shedding some light over the current situation of Europe, which betted on “the primacy of geo-economy over geopolitics” – see Robert Kagan, 2008).

The book is divided into three major parts: the first, “America no longer seems to be America”, details the factors that have led to the decrease of America’s influence. Rather than blame the crisis for this downfall, the author points out that the crisis merely accelerated an evolution which was already on the way, mainly fed by the excesses of neoliberalism (the weakening position of the state, the privatization of power, the consequences of financialization and of giving up production, which, in the author’s vision, is the very source of wealth and the fundamental axis of development). In this way, “the US failed to give themselves – and the world – a cause” (p. 49).

The second part, “History returns to China”, proposes to dismiss some of the myths surrounding China’s rise, which was so gradual, that many powers failed to acknowledge it. China’s lesson to the world was the value of flexibility in rethinking development strategies in answer to the context created by globalization. History returns to China, the author reminds us, because for 18 out of the last 20 centuries, this is where (economic) history was made.

The third part, “Energy feeds development, and the population models it”, details the two challenges for the world of tomorrow: the problem of resources, and the problem of demography. The author points to the constraints of sustainable development, which hinder the ambitions of emerging economies. The added dilemma is the course of action to take against

global warming, in the absence of global instruments of intervention. The other challenge is demography, with its irreversible processes and long-term consequences on the very identity of countries and regions.

The book concludes with a meditation on the future face of the world. The role of a development model is to guide economic and social (re)construction. Strategies are needed to translate this model into answers to the challenges of modern world. "The crisis has not sanctioned the model, but the excess of the orientation in recent years, the process of deregulation, accompanied by the underevaluation of the role of the state" (p. 338). In this respect, says the author, we can speak about an "asymmetry of vision": while developed countries took evolution for granted, the emerging countries had a vision. The latter sought innovative solutions and alternatives, the former were caught unawares. "America's historical comfort is that it unlocked globalization and (un)willingly inaugurated a long cycle of historical evolution. What is not known is whether it will continue to be its beacon" (p. 345).

To conclude, we will revisit the first phrase of the book: "it is a privilege to be the contemporary of the rise of a new superpower" (p. 21). So much more of a privilege for someone from the periphery of Europe: it teaches one that powers rise and fall not as much because of an implacable pattern in history, but rather because of the wisdom of their leaders and the viability of their institutions.

References

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