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## What Globalization for the Many?

Development “*is a way of getting acquainted with ourselves*” (Dobrescu, 2020, p. 9). Starting with *The Century of the Emerging World* (2013) and continuing with *No Project Country* (2019), Paul Dobrescu explores Romania’s recent history of development, in an attempt to understand what future is envisaged by current economic policies. As usual, the conclusions of the analysis are an elegy. Development was not a real priority during transition in Romania, but a rhetoric. “We had lived a time of *development without freedom* and we inaugurated a time of *freedom without development*” (p. 167). That is not to say that Paul Dobrescu’s newest book is a disheartening read. On the contrary, it invites meditation on the fate of countries and puts their development into a global perspective which, in rationalising historical trends, provides a well-grounded explanation for contemporary developments, while giving hope for a more equitable future. If anything, Paul Dobrescu’s books are deeply humanistic (in a way globalization itself, his arch-theme spanning more than 20 years, is supposed to be) and serve as a reminder of the fate of the many.

In fact, this is exactly the theme that has inspired this essay and the questions launched for debate in this book symposium. “The discourse of globalization is [...] growing dangerously dispersed, with the language of epistemic communities, the discourse of states and inter-state fora, and the everyday understanding of global forces by the poor growing steadily apart” (Appadurai, 2001, p. 2). *Is there a “grassroots globalization” for the many?* In its most idealistic projections (the likes of which are to be found in principles, conventions, proclamations, declarations of the many supranational and international organisations taking care of the fate of the world), globalization includes a promise for a better future for everyone. The current state of the world is a constant reminder that this is just a projection. The many are often left behind (or, put differently, the powerful are so many lightyears ahead, that the plight of the rest is practically inconceivable for them, which invites, if not indifference, certainly incomprehensibility).

What is now so radically different in the world? Certainly, not just the current medical crisis, although in an opinion article published quite early on for the European Institute of Romania, *Geopolitics in the time of coronavirus*, Paul Dobrescu and I saw Europe’s loosely-knit

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strategy as an example of a bleak truth: its inability to learn from the rise of the US and, more recently, China. A more momentous and certainly disquieting development is *ideological deconstruction*. Globalization failed as a world project because of ideology forced on markets that were not ready for free trade or global competition. “A major impact of the crisis has been to discredit Western views of development [...] and to fortify what has sometimes been referred to [...] as the ‘Beijing consensus’ instead”, said John Williamson of the Peterson Institute for International Economics – the very John Williamson who had coined the term the Washington consensus (and later came to regret doing so) (Williamson, 2010). This is not to say that the Washington consensus is dead for many of its initial proponents; rather, it has been replaced by “Washington confusion”, in the words of Dani Rodrik (2006), the same author who criticized its somewhat idyllic vision on the relationship between globalization and development. This narrative about development worked as a strategy for the rich and as mere rhetoric for the poor, or, as Anne O. Krueger, Acting Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, said, “meant well, tried little, failed much” (Krueger, 2004).

In this context, it is no surprise that alternative visions on the fate of the world arose. When such projections preserve a humanistic core, in the greater scheme of things it does not really matter who is temporarily in charge. The real problem is when world economy cannot solve “the trilemma”, the impossibility of reaching simultaneously three main objectives: hyper-globalization, national sovereignty, and democratic policies. Will the world sacrifice the ideal of democracy in favour of economic prosperity? We know from history that “[d]emocracy is not complete – or lasting – without development” (Dobrescu, p. 214). Will it encourage globalization to the point where the nation state (and its citizens) become irrelevant? Or will it return to the historical ideal of national protectionism? After all, Donald Trump’s remarks to the 74<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly are a stark reminder that we are witnessing a return to hard geopolitics: “The free world must embrace its national foundations. It must not attempt to erase them or replace them. [...] If you want freedom, take pride in your country. If you want democracy, hold on to your sovereignty. And if you want peace, love your nation. [...] The future does not belong to globalists. The future belongs to patriots. The future belongs to sovereign and independent nations.” (Trump, 2019).

Of these three objectives, which is better for the individual? This is the question at the core of the theoretically dense second chapter of the book. If the Great Recession of 2008-2009 was indeed the 1989 of Capitalism (Luce, 2017), what is following? “Fault lines everywhere!”, in the inspired formulation of the author (one of the many; if anything, Paul Dobrescu’s books have a literary feel that makes them a highly enjoyable read: suspense stories, laments, and sometimes poetic, decidedly non-formulaic text).

Following the idea of a Chinese Consensus, the author explores, in Chapter IV, “The Geopolitical Heavy-lifting of Eurasia”, the trilemma between Washington and Beijing: how will their diverging cultural-ideological, economic and military interests develop in the future decades? (p. 167). Or, following Ariel Cohen’s formulation (“Russia plays chess, China plays Go, and the United States plays football” – Cohen, 2020), which player will take full advantage of its own playground? The Belt and Road Initiative, called by Paul Dobrescu “*a new start of globalization by Chinese definition*” (p. 185), stands proof that “the world may be conquered on horseback, but cannot be ruled on horseback” (ancient Chinese proverb). Will the return of geopolitics and re-territorialization of political and economic interests herald the birth of the “civilization state”? The one that Gideon Rachman defined as “a country that claims to represent not just a historic territory or a particular language or ethnic-group, but a distinctive civ-

ilization” and warned has “distinctly illiberal implications” in that “[i]t implies that attempts to define universal human rights or common democratic standards are wrong-headed, since each civilization needs political institutions that reflect its own unique culture”, and is also exclusive, since “[m]inority groups and migrants may never fit in because they are not part of the core civilization.” (Rachman, 2019) And what will this rise mean for globalization?

The chapter shows Paul Dobrescu as the geopolitics professor he has been for almost 30 years and the keen analyst of globalization, a trait he has added for 20. It is from this chapter that I am deriving a second question for the author: if “*the state instrument becomes crucial in a world where the strategic dimension of modernization is so pronounced*” (p. 204), how can a state like Romania keep in balance geopolitical interests, while striving to be part of a regional strategy?

With every book dedicated to the state of the contemporary world, Paul Dobrescu explores, among the traditional themes of the rise and fall of powers or the role of elites and the importance of state-led vision, the newest developments that can shed a light onto our understanding. In *Globalization’s Cunningness* (2010), it was the asymmetry of the visions of the West and the emerging world; in *The Century of the Emerging World*, it was the periphery, “the illness that can kill the Union”. In this latest book, it is the technological competition and AI as the engine of contemporary development. Chapter I, “AI First”, is a discussion on deep learning (Kai-Fu Lee, 2018), technology containment, the race among smart cities, and, most importantly, the rise of the seventh continent – important because here will take place the battle between “the political power (the power to regulate) and the commercial power of technological giants, briefly, between democracy and the market” (Bârgăoanu, 2020). “*The order modelled by the digital revolution*” will make the weak all the more irrelevant, with the added difficulty of closing the technology gap, and will be dominated by “whoever looked more closely at today’s world, rather than at the narratives about this world” (Dobrescu, p. 74). Do not, however, be deceived by this bleak conclusion. With books like this, the narrative (or, at least, the academic narrative) about the contemporary world is in safe hands.

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