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**Autor:** Michal Onderčo

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Resenha de *The Geopolitics of Emotion:*  
*How cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World,*  
de Dominique Moïsi

French international relations scholars have been studying the more unusual aspects of the world politics for a long time now. Bertrand Badie, one of the leading experts on power in its broadest sense, is teaching his students at Sciences Po that actions do not have to be based solely on reason but can also have emotional foundations. At first glance, this proposition might seem odd to those in the field of international relations. However, a deeper look into the reasoning of academics like Bertrand Badie reveals a solid and pertinent line of argumentation. A strong proponent of this approach, Dominique Moïsi, has, for the first time, managed to successfully reunite the study of emotions and politics into one book.

Before delving into the core aspects of Moïsi's work, it should be mentioned that he has not written a scholarly book but rather an extended essay based on his January 2007 article in *Foreign Affairs*. Although geopolitics and emotions appear to be an unlikely mix, Moïsi asserts that we need emotions to understand the world around us – including politics. According to him, globalization is based on a paradox – on one hand, we are witnessing the pervasiveness of US American culture, while, on the other hand, the countries of Asia are taking the economic lead. This leads to what Moïsi calls asymmetric multipolarity, in which unequal actors, with different views of the world, interact. The study of emotions as one of the main factors on the global political stage is, in Moïsi's opinion, justified by the changes in the post-Cold War order which brought about an increased importance of the role of emotions in politics. Such

a surge in the weight of emotions can be partially explained by the actions of mass media, which have made the world more transparent, blurring the borders of “separate worlds”. Nowadays, irrespective of their location, people have access to a large amount of information on even the most remote corners of the globe - leaving aside, of course, extreme cases such as North Korea. Moïsi proclaims that, after “the century of ideology”, “the century of identity” has come. He then proceeds to define three emotions as particularly significant in shaping the world and outlines three world regions to be respectively shaped by these emotions: hope for Asia, humiliation for the Islamic world and fear for the West.

The first emotion studied by Moïsi is hope. Hope means confidence and, in the author’s understanding, hope in 21st century also designates “better here and now”, a definition closely related to what Max Weber called the Protestant ethic. During past two centuries, the roles of Asia and Europe have switched; while in the nineteenth century Asia was fading away and Europe was a symbol of modernity, the twenty-first century sees a reversal of positions. In Moïsi’s view, this hope is translated into cultural openness and confidence. China, as a prime example of the culture of hope, manifests nationalism of two types: the defensive one, which fears the fall of the empire (e.g. Tibet) and the positive one, which expresses the abovementioned hope. Thus, contemporary China can be characterized by Guizot’s “Get rich and be quiet” motto[1]. At the moment, the Chinese regime is damaging its external image through its tense relationship with the Dalai Lama or its support of the Burmese junta. Nevertheless, buds of civil society are very slowly blooming in China in the form of organized protests. All in all, Moïsi predicts that the rise of China will lead to the eclipse of the US, a proposition that is hardly debatable.

Another Asian example of hope comes from India, a dazzling country – from an outsider’s perspective - which faces deep internal contradictions. The world’s largest democracy is plagued by incompetent and corrupt politicians, an alarming decrease in redistribution and in the destruction of caste differences. Indians, no matter how proud they might be of their achievements, are conflicted about their identity. Even though China and India share many commonalities, the origins of their pride and confidence are different: the imperial past for China and a bright vision of the future for India.

Japan is perceived as an Asian country only by the West, according to the author. In Asia, it is the same Nippon, with its historical scars intact as Japan has not yet apologized for World War II. To a certain extent, Japan shares the Western culture of fear by being similarly terrified of losing its strong international role to India and China.

This sense of insecurity has resulted into high suicide rates at home and into being “passionately moderate” internationally.

The two Asian giants of hope are facing crucial challenges: India has to decide what type of power it wishes to be, while China must ensure that its current inwardness does not transform into irrational behavior (all-out war with Taiwan, for instance).

However, it would be fallacious to assume that all Asian countries belong to the culture of hope: the author excludes Japan as being “beyond” the culture of hope and uses Pakistan as an example of a country which has not reached that point yet. These exceptions underline the diversity of the Asian continent and also, to some extent, undermine Moïsi’s argument. When he often talks of “Asia”, he actually means just China and India. His analysis does not examine Central Asian countries, the Koreas or successor states of the Raj other than India. It is understandable that, in order to offer a comprehensive picture, the author needs to simplify his ideas. However, Moïsi never truly explains what he means by Asia, preferring ad hoc definitions to a clear-cut delineation.

The culture of humiliation is exemplified by the Islamic world, later redefined as the Arab-Islamic world. For Moïsi, humiliation means impotence, being confined to a future that is in stark contrast to the glorified past. The Arab-Islamic world is not the only global region facing such a dichotomy. As the author points out, this dichotomy can induce two types of behavior. One possibility is the “I’ll show you I can do it” behavior, found in South-East Asia, which gives birth to powerful competition. The other side is the despair of the “if I can’t reach you, I will drag you down” kind. According to Moïsi, it is here that the Arab-Islamic World finds itself. The French scholar ascribes this despair to the fact that the region is both demographically on the rise and politically humiliated. The region has been plagued with incapable leaders who, instead of taking responsibility, are

constantly looking for scapegoats. The main cause of this grave situation is the historical decline of the Arab-Islamic world, a process which started with the failure to capture Vienna, continued with colonization in the region and was ultimately reinforced by the establishment of the State of Israel and by Israel's treatment of Palestinians. The climax was reached during the Six-Day War, when the Arab states lost all hope.

It should be kept in mind that, as Moïsi reminds us, the sense of humiliation is not only negative; as seen, it can be successfully used as a diplomatic weapon by Arab countries against their former colonizers and by Israel against Europe. Moïsi however rejects claims that the problem lies in Islam given that Islam has produced many intellectuals who argued against the feeling of humiliation. He also states that the Arab-Islamic world is culturally declining because of "despots and fundamentalists" sharing interest in curbing the free expression. As for terrorists, Moïsi claims that they address the legitimate grievances of Arab and Muslim people. Muslims in the West feel segregated, according to Moïsi, a sentiment which is augmented by their difficult search for identity and by the lack of significant European leaders of Muslim origin. The way out of the misery is, in Moïsi's opinion, hidden in improving the situation of women, taking off the mask of the victim and saying "no" to cultural relativism.

Nevertheless, Moïsi's oversimplified analysis cannot always be justified by an effort to present a comprehensive overview on emotion and politics. To support the argument that the feeling of humiliation in the Arab-Muslim world was caused by a historical decline, he uses the claims of a renowned Middle East scholar, close to the neo-conservative Bernard Lewis. Although he does not cite Lewis directly, Moïsi subscribes to his line of thought when it comes to the reasons for the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic world. While the academic credentials of Professor Lewis cannot be disputed, the analyses in his latest works often reach similarly oversimplified conclusions. Moreover, in his comparison of Christianity and Islam, Moïsi ignores that Christianity also consists of a set of rules and restrictions, if lived as a religion. Moïsi ignores significant debates about the morality of terrorist attacks among Muslim scholars and leaders since the early 1990s. When he states that there are no significant leaders of Muslim origin in Europe, he ignores Rachida Dati in

France, Sadiq Khan in the UK or public thinker Navid Kermani in Germany. In addition to this, Moïsi exemplifies the Muslims' difficulty of integration into Western society through the French suburban riots of fall 2005. However, he fails to mention that Gilles Kepel in his newest *Terreur et martyre* actually demonstrated that most of the perpetrators came from sub-Saharan Africa, where Islam is mixed with animistic religions and, thus, different from Middle Eastern Islam. Furthermore, Kepel, as a scholar who has extensively covered the issue of the integration of Muslims into Western societies, maintains that France is the prime example of Muslim integration.

Finally, the culture of fear pertains to the Western world. The main reason is that, for the first time in the past three centuries, the West is not the trendsetter – globalization no longer belongs to the Western World. It is this fear that unites Europe and the West. Moïsi acknowledges that, while fear is indispensable for survival, it can become excessive and incapacitating. The author never explains whether he means “fear” in the most salient sense of the word, that of an emotional response to the endangerment of one’s personal security, financial condition or political situation; the term is vaguely defined and constantly manipulated to fit with Moïsi’s claims. The fear did not start with the attacks of September 11, but was rather exacerbated by these events. Moïsi asserts that one of Europe’s main problems is with its own identity – is it defined by geography, cultural inheritance or is it just a “gentlemen’s club of democracies”? The high point of hope in Europe was marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall; the feeling of hope has been deteriorating ever since. The key moment for Europeans to completely change their positions was, according to the author, the breakup of Yugoslavia which brought a war to the backyard of Europe (war that Europeans were not able to cope with). Moïsi claims that the youth has changed since 1968 – they do not want to change the world, but rather to be protected from it; he compares Europe to Venice – a nice place to retire but not a source of dynamism. Fear in Europe stems from “the other” and, paradoxically enough, the more we need “the others” – as part of the workforce, for example – the more we reject them emotionally. This fear of “the other” is epitomized by the debate about the accession of Turkey to the European Union. Moïsi is pro-accession, stating that the journey to the ranks of the European Union is more

important for Turkey than the final destination. If Turkey is denied EU membership, the nation can be irresistibly tempted by the Middle East and all its failings.

When it comes to the United States, Moïsi is clear: for him, McCain was a candidate of fear and Obama a candidate of hope in the past elections. Americans are traditionally more concerned with the future, a future which, at the moment, looks gloomy. As previously stated, the sentiment of fear did not begin in America with 9/11; the terrorist attacks actually served as a reminder and reinforcement of the United States' feeling of its own vulnerability. America has become, according to Moïsi, the symbol of oppression in the past twenty years. The traditionally positive image of the United States and the American way of life has been shattered. Americans fear that collectivism may take over individualism, the very idea on which the US was founded. Also,

Americans are scared of "the other", focus too much on controlling the borders and neglect internal issues.

The relationship between the two fearful banks of the Atlantic is currently a cold, distant one. In the US, disillusionment with Europeans has prevailed, whereas the Europeans feel that they do not need Americans anymore. The reasons for this estrangement are the contradictory policies of the past two White House administrations. Moïsi adds another, very emotional reason – America has lost its appeal because of its noticeable shift from a culture of hope to a culture of fear.

Moïsi devotes an entire chapter to hard cases, where all three emotions are entwined. The first examined case is Russia, a country obsessed with its tragic flaws. Humiliated since the fall of the USSR, Russia exhibits the xenophobic fear of "the other" (such as Chechnya) and displays hope in its most material form. For the Russian leadership, democracy, according to Moïsi, is a sign of weakness. A parallel between Russia and Iran can be easily drawn. Nevertheless, Iran is on the rise while Russia is facing a rapid decline.

The other analyzed hard case is Israel, a state which shares the vulnerability feature with Russia due to its demographic and regional political realities. In the

subchapter on Israel, Moïsi makes the most surprising comparison of the whole volume: he states that the source of Israel's humiliation is Israel's mistreatment of Palestinians. Apparently, this wrongdoing can be traced back to the mistreatment of Jews in the past in the same way to abused children abusing their own children. This comparison is hard to digest, especially when the scale of the injustice against Palestinians can, under no circumstances, be compared to the mistreatment of Jews during the Holocaust.

Africa is the third hard case, a world region slowly emerging from the abyss. Contemporary deals are, however, signs of politicians' efforts to remain in office. Moïsi points to South Africa as a success story and again alludes to the maltreatment of Palestinians by the Israel by expressing his desire for the rise of a Palestinian version of Nelson Mandela.

The fourth case is embodied by Latin America, which shows less despair, but also less hope. Brazil, the only shining example, especially from a financial standpoint, is unfortunately plagued with violence.

In the final chapter, Moïsi offers two possible scenarios for the world in 2025. He states that if fear takes over the globe, catastrophic events would ensue: more unrest in the Middle East, use of biological terror, a shutdown of borders, the weakening of neo-protectionist United States, the almost complete dissolution of the European Union, a partial resurgence of Russia's former empire, wars in Asia, nuclear armament of Japan, the fall of Africa, and chaos in Latin America. In a nutshell, life would be like in the Early Middle Ages. On the other hand, if hope prevails, there would be peace in the Middle East, the UN would undergo a significant reform, the United States would become "a senior partner" around the world instead of a policeman, Russia would envision its future in the West, China would be on the path of the rule of law, Africa would develop and MERCOSUR would become a full-fledged entity. Strangely enough, Lebanon would unite with Syria.

Although Moïsi acknowledges that most of his future scenarios are fictional, some of them are completely unrealistic. It is hard to imagine having borders shut if one takes into account the huge amount of international trade or the fact that some countries' survival depends solely on imports/ exports. It is also quite

difficult to conceive of the dissolution of the European Union, given all the strong economic and political ties holding it together. To see MERCOSUR following the path of the European Union in the next fifteen years is merely wishful thinking; the construction of Europe took much longer and had a significant power actor – the United States – with stakes in the integration of Europe and the remediation of its most serious problems. Another puzzling aspect is why the unification of Lebanon and Syria is regarded as a positive scenario, especially in light of the recent attempts to isolate Syria from politically interfering with Lebanon's affairs.

Moïsi has produced a relatively persuasive and well put together book on a little- researched area of international relations. However, at times his arguments are flawed, too general or oversimplifying. Moreover, the book is filled with factual errors which could be have easily been avoided, such as dating the 2005 London Tube attacks in 2006 or classifying famous political economist Francis Fukuyama as a historian.

For an experienced reader with solid background knowledge, Moïsi offers great substance for debates. He excels in putting together different pieces of the global political puzzle and creating convincing scenarios. For those without background in international relations or modern history, the book can be misleading, especially because of some crude generalizations. That is why it should be treated as medication: to be taken with care and in small doses. Only then can it bring much needed help to understanding the world of politics – or the politics of the world.

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[1] François Guizot (1787–1874) was a Minister of Education and, later, Prime Minister under French king Louis Philippe.

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