

Book Reviews

The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World By Dominique Moisi (Routledge, Doubleday, New York, 2010), Pbk; 192 pages; ISBN 13: 978-0307387370

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Dominique Moisi is considered as one of the resplendent personalities in academic circles. One of his famous works is *'The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World'*. This is one of the important books on the contemporary discourse and response to Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilization. Dominique Moisi shows how the geopolitics of today is characterized by a "clash of emotions." The West, he argues, is dominated and divided by fear. For Muslims and Arabs, a culture of humiliation is quickly devolving into a culture of hatred. Asia, on the other hand, has been able to concentrate on building a better future, so it is creating a new culture of hope. Moisi, a leading authority on international affairs, explains that in order to understand our changing world, we need to confront emotion. And as he makes his case, he deciphers the driving emotions behind our cultural differences, delineating a challenging and important new perspective on globalization.

The contemporary academic circle is filled with diverse issues wherein scholars of different fields put forth their ideas in different narratives which boggle the whole structural foundation of academia. One among such contributions is the book under review. It adds a different dimension to the way the world has been divided, and examines political trends through the prism of emotion. Professor Moisi argues that it is the feelings of fear, humiliation, and hope that are reshaping world politics, and it is these sentiments which are just as influential as the cultural, social, and economic factors that breed political conflict.

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Moisi suggests that the world is divided into three groups of nations: those that are motivated by hope, those that are driven by resentments born of humiliation, and those whose primary attitude is that of fear.

The first emotion studied by Moisi is hope. Hope means confidence. In Moisi's view, this hope is translated into cultural openness and confidence. China, as a prime example of the culture of hope will lead to the eclipse of the US. Another Asian example of hope comes from India, a dazzling country – from an outsider's perspective – which faces deep internal contradictions. 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.

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. When he often talks of “Asia”, he actually means just China and India and not other like Central Asian countries, the Koreans or successor states of the Raj other than India.

The culture of humiliation is exemplified by the Islamic world, later redefined as the Arab-Islamic world. For Moisi, 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 Moisi, 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.

Moisi reminds us, the sense of humiliation is not only negative; as seen, and it can be successfully used as a diplomatic weapon by Arab countries against their former colonizers and by Israel against Europe. Moisi 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. In the Arab and Muslim world, he writes how these societies feel trapped in a culture of humiliation, which feeds into Islamic extremism, leading to hatred of the West. Meanwhile, much of Asia has been able to concentrate on building a better future, creating a culture of hope.

The Fear: 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. Moisi acknowledges that, while fear is indispensable for survival, it can become excessive and incapacitating. The fear did not start with the attacks of September 11, but was rather exacerbated by these events. 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). 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. Russia, Israel, Africa and Latin America: Moisi 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 Moisi, 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, Moisi 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.

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. Moisi 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, Moisi 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.

At the conclusion of his argument Moisi offers two imaginary scenarios of how the world might look in 2025: one where the culture of fear has been dominant and one where the culture of hope has held sway. There are no prizes for guessing which is preferable.

This book is very important for understanding the whole scenario of looking at the world for all those who are interested in studying the possible scenarios and future of the world. An insightful and concise thesis of our (the world's) emotions of fear, humiliation, and hope collectively through a remapping of geographic and political realities in an age of globalization and the how these emotions in concert with cultural, social and economic factors are reshaping international relations, political trends and conflicts, and ultimately the world.