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WINTER AND SPRING TOGETHER, GEOCULTURAL SIGNS OF RENEWAL THROUGHOUT EUROPE

Thomas Flichy de La Neuville

About the author:

Thomas Flichy de La Neuville

Professor of International Relations, University of Paris IV – Sorbonne, France

Despite its deep crisis of identity, spawned by nihilistic elites who are both unable to give a sense to existence and to act in favour of the common good, France is marked by a discreet renewal. Inside its peripheries but also within the State, living minorities, who have the capacity to transmit life, have suddenly emerged. In fact, they have benefited from the current disorder to propose alternatives and thus gain a growing recognition amongst the population. The accelerating decline has thus enabled a geocultural spring.¹

The views and opinions expressed in this Paper are those of the author and do not represent the views of the Valdai Discussion Club, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

¹ *The concept of geoculture invented by Olivier Hanne and Thomas Flichy de La Neuville in Geoculture, for sustainable civilisations, can be defined as the study of the capacity of civilisations to transmit life in all its dimensions. The geocultural index measures the ability of civilizations to transmit life in the long term. It takes into account five criteria: the fertility rate combined to the suicide rate (transmission of biological life); the age of settlement and statebuilding (policy framework and roots); the richness of the verbal and artistic production (poetical and linguistic creativity); the impregnation of religious reflexes; the debt ratio (safety of the economic situation).*

In Europe, signs of renewal have emerged. The most obvious ones concern the spirit. In fact, the widespread disconnection between theoretical speculations and realities could not last for ever. Even though a person who suddenly says the truth on television, is immediately described as being provocative – under the realm of lie, the truth is *indeed* a provocation – yet *iconoclasts* have become popular. Under the pressure of alternative information sources, traditional media networks have lost legitimacy and support. They appeal precisely to *iconoclasts* so as to regain some sort of visibility. One after another, the liberal assumptions have thus been questioned and have quickly lost the status of undisputed truths. For example, the heavy investments which have been made to promote the *gender ideology* have eventually federated various parts of the population on the necessity for a child to benefit from the framework given by a family, composed of a father and a mother and structured by marriage. Other sign of hope, the best-ranked books in France in 2016 are those that insist on the long-term historical roots of the country and propose common sense solutions to the current problems. Shortly speaking, the dead elites have lost the intellectual fight, and can thus be compared to the defenders of the French Monarchy who had lost the battle of ideas in 1750, forty years before the revolution¹. A focus could also be made on the emergence of primary schools, colleges and even Universities² which have developed parallel to the state system and propose an alternative training, with results going far beyond expectations. But the geocultural spring is not only intellectual, it also concerns tiny enterprises which have decided to remain small so as to retain their flexibility, their spirit of innovation and to escape the heavy legal framework imposed on bigger structures. Politically speaking, the exclusion of any kind of *real alternative* by those who have monopolised power causes growing concern. Not only because democracy thus appears as a sort of illusion, but moreover because of the dangerous gap between the professionals of politics and the ordinary citizens. Expelled from the television screens, the political debate has re-appeared with fierceness in the streets and on the web. In these new arenas, ideas promoting the transmission of cultural, economic, political and spiritual life are making their way. At the lowest level, innovative leaders have emerged from the chaos and quench the thirst of populations despaired by the regulations set up by techno-nihilists. They have not come to fill a vacuum, but rather to fulfill their mission: while the dead bury the dead, they are conscious of one thing: only the living will transmit.

The Living Elites are Back (and Officers Amongst Them)

Everything had been carefully planned: in a world marked by the simultaneous progress of democracy and globalisation, the military were a specie bound to short-term extinction. Conflicts would progressively dissolve into the market, and high civil servants would soon enjoy the monopoly of thinking without being bothered by the remarks of a few officers who hardly had

¹ This idea has been developed by Stephane Baudens, Professor of legal History in Saint-Cyr's military academy, in his Ph. D. on the Defenders of absolute Monarchy.

² For example, the University Catholique de l'Ouest has launched this year a new Law Faculty which will blend technical legal subject-matters with humanities like literature, geopolitics or political debating.

a brain and sometimes pretended to think differently – as if they could be something else than mere technicians of war. After all the bureaucratic management of officers had its advantages in so far as it prevented the promotion of the very annoying minority, which pretends to have an alternative vision of the world.

Unfortunately for the technocrats, things did not quite turn this way. The inevitable progress of democracy proved indeed an optical illusion. Globalisation had come to a standstill and identities suddenly re-emerged. In fact, the massive opening of borders had spawned the clash of identities and the inevitable return of war. Now, would the civilian elites be able to cope with the wars they had unleashed? Were those who had claimed the monopoly of intelligence, able to exert their intelligence so as to ensure peace? The answer is only too obvious. They failed dramatically because their technocratic training, based on legal procedures and financial management had made them unable to grasp the world as it was, in its political and cultural dimensions.

They failed dramatically because realities ran against their ideology. Despite the protests of high-ranking officers, wars without purpose were waged. They ended up with military victories and political disasters. The soldiers had thus given their lives because of the unforgivable mistakes committed by ideologues or even worse, the cynical action of lobbyists pushing forward limited wars in order to sell their weapons at a smooth pace. In any case the creative imagination, necessary to overwhelm obstacles in times of troubles, was by no means encouraged. This was, at least, very clear for the French Military who had in mind the famous book of Marc Bloch, *The strange defeat*, 1940. This book describes how an army of bureaucrats was suddenly defeated by a younger one, which had retained the initiative at the lowest level, and strangely enough had *not* decided to wage war according to the rules defined by the French war college.

As we know, an army of technicians is unable to understand political realities, especially, when it is blinded by ideologues. During the last years, foreign policies have dissolved in their own contradictions. In France, it appeared very quickly to the military that a *supreme technician* now occupied the top of the State. In the same time, countries, which underwent other evolution than ours, placed a *prince of war* at the summit. Vladimir Putin is such a Prince. It appeared also very clearly for the military that in times of unrest, the supreme technician was quickly overwhelmed by the *prince of war*, especially when his competitor had a clear political vision of the world. Lacking public support, the supreme technician had to dress sometimes as a *prince of war* so as to regain the confidence of his citizens. In this respect, the Libyan campaign – despite its disastrous geopolitical consequences for North Africa and Europe – was very helpful for the private interest of President Sarkozy whose popularity suddenly raised after the first strikes. President Hollande understood the lesson and benefited very much from the Serval Operation in Mali. The problem is that the stupid military robots – even though confined to their pretended heart of expertise – had realized that wars were now launched for public relations reasons. Military action had become a substitute to a foreign policy. And diplomats had no plan. What should be done with Mali? Elections would be organised and would naturally solve all problems thanks to their magic. What should be done in Syria? No elections this time, otherwise Bachar al-Assad would immediately be re-elected.

The military disasters spawned by the inability of civilians to determine a policy obviously raised questions among the military. Given that the civilians had failed, the military might be allowed to participate in the political debate. Some officers realised that their understanding of the world

was by no means inferior to that of their civilian colleagues. In effect, the multiplication of military operations since the Afghan war had stimulated the intelligence of the officers corps. After all what is intelligence, if not adequacy with realities? On foreign operation theatres, the officers had grasped political and cultural realities which remained mysteries for the civilians locked in their island. During the previous decade, the relations between civilians and officers could have been compared to those which existed in France between 1715 and 1789. The armies of Louis 14th had been dramatically reduced between 1715 and 1723. The French army had lost 2/3 of its soldiers. It operated discreetly on foreign operation theatres and within coalitions so as to reduce the cost of war. Enlightened spirits bought mechanised nightingales, which were said to sing divinely, and expected officers to behave as machines, robots. But the comparison with the 18th century has now lost its meaning. War has come back and the officers know that they might play a growing political role in a near future. A window has been opened, just wide enough to hear the song of the *real* nightingale. Some officers had suddenly the idea that if they allied with the living and creative elites which have been rejected by the state bureaucracy, they could form an *elite of substitution*, and that this replacement would be accelerated by the growing internal troubles. The lessons of the first weeks of 1914 have not been forgotten, after a few days: a certain number of officers promoted by the peace bureaucracy, have proved unable to command, on the contrary, leaders have emerged from nowhere. Let us carry our thoughts for a moment back to the end of the roman third century. A time of financial collapse, social troubles, political disorder – with the apparition of splinter kingdoms in Syria and in Gaul, a time of migrations and wars. What was the solution found by the Emperor to cope with increasing violence? A militarisation of the administration.

Geoculture, a Method to Renew Decaying Civilisations

Not only have the living elites emerged, they have also invented a method in order to break away from nihilism. For them economic is not everything. Supported by images and infinitely diffused amongst the cascades of information, the primacy of economy, amplified by its own echo, claims to embody a reality. In effect, it is not necessary to demonstrate to convince. At first sight, supranational institutions, groupings of States, international summits, government appointments, everything that embodies the heart of political action has become a mere accessory to the economic decision. Although the word “decision” itself seems too strong: ignoring the reasons of economic crises, we believe that a good decision today (a devaluation or lower interest rates) could be catastrophic tomorrow. In these circumstances, what should we choose? The belief in the primacy of economics eventually joined the statement of Stalin, according to which “cadres decide everything.” What was true for socialism is even more so for globalized liberalism. Certainly, the human being is not neglected, but it has become the adjustment variable pending the stabilization of the economic system that will occur sooner or later ... or never.

In reality, the primacy of economy proves to be an optical illusion. It is indeed disputed by the antiglobalists and environmental movements, the figures of electoral abstention or the return to a patriotic rhetoric. Everywhere, calls to another type of governance are heard. A new future

is announced, to the benefit of social solidarity instead of trade. Paradoxically, the anti-globalization protest does not fundamentally challenge the primacy of economy: in fact, the decrease of profits and the taxation of financial benefits only serve to promote a new global material revolution. In short, even for those who wish to abolish merchant capitalism, everything remains economic. However, the figures give us only an imperfect idea of future risks. In addition, these complex indicators can be easily manipulated. Moreover, the reduction of the world to the simple interplay of economic forces eventually represents an obstacle to intelligence in so far as it ignores two essential dimensions: the affirmation of cultures and the will to exert power.

In fact, the artificial world built by the media has relegated culture to a museum object: men are presented as interchangeable. Our economic system, feeling that cultures represent an obstacle to the exchange of goods ends up denying otherness. It condones for example the idea according to which the development of Islamism is exclusively based upon an economic frustration, forgetting the religious causes of this revival. Now the rooting in a culture is far from being an illusion. Every culture fixes the integration standards of the individual within the group. Without a culture, the human being becomes an individual, with it he wins the status of person. Culture thus provides to the human being his landmarks, action modes and sustainability. Culture allows the orientation into the world. The orientation is not a simple marker: if tracking lets us know where we are, orientation helps us decide where we must go. Culture covers everything for which there is a right way to proceed. With culture, we thus introduce the concept of value.

Culture involves morality. It gives the notion of good, beautiful, just and true, even though these concepts do not cover the same direction in all latitudes. Simplified to the extreme: the culture defines what is human. Nowadays, the denial of the cultural factor has already led to spectacular failures for the West. This is true for the officers exerted to make war on virtual scenarios, as if an army could wage a war regardless of the civilizations in which it operates. This mania of role play within standardized headquarters mechanically leads to disasters on the different theaters of operations: from Afghanistan to Libya, passing through Syria and Iraq. We tend to forget that for most non-Western countries, culture remains of paramount importance. We only have to look at the rate of losses among American interpreters in Iraq to understand that the insurgents have targeted the interpreters of cultures as much as the platoon commanders. It was the best way for them to destroy their opponents. The same considerations apply to international companies where the triumph of standardized procedures of negotiation, leads to commercial setbacks. If one adds to that the mobility of executives who remain only two or three years in office and their geographical confinement into business centers where they are not in contact with the real country, a real loss of influence follows. Like it or not, culture is a reality. It is nothing less than the sap of civilizations. Now every civilization intends to perpetuate life. It is for this reason that the denial of the cultural factor represents the first step towards barbarity.

On the other hand, the fascination for economy makes us forget the geopolitical factor. For example the massive appropriation of land or Landgrabbing is analyzed solely in terms of economic investments. But most states, unless they are too weak to exercise power, have political strategies. These can be examined through the prism of history. China's current strategy is strangely similar to that adopted by the Tang Dynasty in the early centuries of our era when Central China launched a tremendous push towards the Caspian sea and the Persian Gulf. The exercise of power is based on objective criteria that are by no means obsolete. One

can identify three. First, collective self-esteem, or the strength of the cultural and religious values that propel emotional minorities to martyrdom or jihad. Secondly, the strength of innovation combined with work: the creativity of active minorities represent in effect the spearhead of economic development. Third, prolonged demographic dynamism. The current French population genetically descends from 25% of French of 1789. Again, only a minority has had ability to project itself into the future thanks to a responsible demography, that is to say rich in children. The addition of self-esteem, capacity of innovation and self-projection into the future has long been the privilege of Europe. But times have changed.

In their own ways, cultural anthropology and geopolitics have tried to challenge the vision of a world reduced to the clash of financial interests. However, these alternative views have not combined with one another while incorporating the economic factor to restore a true understanding of the world for disoriented elites. The thesis that we will develop can be summarized as follows: sustainable civilizations are necessarily based upon an assumed culture. It is thus necessary to oppose the geo-cultural nations that draw their power and influence from their profound identity, to the techno-abstract constructions that strive to compensate the artificiality of their origins by the use of violence and oblivion. The first maintain their influence in the long term and even beyond their political death as it was the case with the Roman empire. Even overwhelmed by invasions, geo-cultural nations are capable of sustainable influence. Persia thus irrigated the Muslim world for centuries despite its obvious weakness. With its demographic growth combined with the preservation of its elites, contemporary India also belongs to geocultural nations. It opposes abstract constructions of clerics and thinkers, such as the empires of Charles V, or that of Napoleon I, in which the absence of cultural unity proves the first factor of weakness, despite artificial homogenization attempts. This is also true for Britain, which has understood that the unlimited opening of borders combined with the unchecked importation of regulations which were entirely alien to its nature, threatened its very existence. To this respect, its exit from the European Union, could prove its most important contribution to a European geocultural revival. Especially at a time where the legitimacy of its common military interventions with the United States is being questioned. Now, what is true for empires is also true for enterprises, whose life and financial health are threatened by their belief in the technocratic myth. It is also true for families that are able to perpetuate in the long term when they adhere to spiritual values. If they reject these values, they will atomize in a multitude of rival individuals, drawn, like fireflies, to the profit that will transform them into ashes. Sustainable nations are therefore rooted into cultures that can be of an incredible variety, but must be able to renew themselves without denying their past in order to perpetuate themselves.

In this context, the geo-cultural strategy consists of drawing one's own forces, including economic, from one's millenary culture. Geoculture therefore turns out to represent more than a new geopolitical or historical approach, it claims to be the intellectual reconquest of the old concept of civilization. In effect only cultures survive when financial crises sweep economic powers. This approach reveals paradigms that economists can not see through quantitative assessments. With this prism, hierarchies are recomposed, in so far as to scrutinize empires in terms of geocultural footprint enable us to contemplate the soul of the world. In short, geoculture bypasses the frozen materialism of Marx, but also global capitalism which has run its course, in order to discern more discreet by also more sustainable hierarchies. Foundation to sustainable civilizations, the geocultural approach fixes to nations a goal that is placed far beyond economic domination, cultural influence or political power: its objective is merely the transmission of life.

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