

INTERROGATION, VISION, AND FORESIGHT ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Stephanie Lawson, *Relații internaționale. O scurtă introducere [International Relations]* (Cluj-Napoca: CA Publishing, 2010), ISBN 978-606-92680-3-2, 201 pp.

Speranța Sofia MILANCOVICI*

By translating into Romanian and publishing Stephanie Lawson's book, CA Publishing House completes the Romanian landscape of international relations with a brief, transparent, clearly written introduction, which is precisely why it is so necessary to those taking the first steps in this area of study, as well as to the public interested in the current configuration of world politics.

The paper is divided into eight chapters, each with its own subchapters. It starts from a prudent historical perspective, offering however a contemporary view on international relations as well. The first chapter systematically deals with the defining ages regarding the way in which specialists and the general public divided into periods the world of politics. It is interesting to notice that, at this point, humanity tends to define the fundamental periods of its evolution by relating to major conflagrations (pre-war, inter-war, post-war). At this point in her analytical approach, the author also refers to the globalization phenomenon (especially with the decline of socialism and the "apparent" success of capitalism), as well as to modernity as a *sin qua non* condition and as a foundation for contemporary globalization.

The field of international relations is located at the crossroads of various subjects and fields of study; a quaint and limited view of said subjects would involve the overlapping of the international relations over the study of the relations between countries or their interactions, beyond their own borders. In conclusion, the author notes that "the whole classical international relations edifice is based on the modern, sovereign state" (p. 14)

By going through the text, one can easily notice that the issue of war, in general, and of a possible World War III in particular, has managed to channel the energy and attention of specialists. From this perspective, Stephanie Lawson considers that "the study of international relations is therefore far from just an academic exercise – it is an investigation on our chances of survival ..." (p. 16)

Apart from the external conflicts, the book also brings to our attention the complex issue of domestic conflicts and, implicitly, that of identity policy (where religion, ethnicity and culture intertwine). Various conflicts are debated upon, under different aspects, conflicts such as the one in Northern Ireland, the Basque country, Chechnya, Israel/Palestine, Rwanda, Indonesia, Fiji, Sri Lanka and the Balkans; each of these conflict epicenters proposes a particular type of identity policy.

* "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Department of Psycho-Social and Humanistic Sciences, 15 Eminescu str., Arad, Romania, e-mail: m_speranta@yahoo.com

A separate subchapter is dedicated to the types of approaches in international relations, from the realist to the liberal internationalist one, then the alternative ones (feminist, constructivist, critical or postmodern). The idea that poignantly results from the text, as well as many other references in this field, is that between international relations and other subjects of the social sciences and humanities (history, law, philosophy, sociology, political economy, geography and cultural studies) there is an inextricable link and even an interconditionality.

A welcome discussion is that centered on the term “international”, with the disjunction – essential in some circumstances – between “state” and “nation”, which overlap only on an ideal level.

The second chapter proposes a diachronic perspective of the state, starting with its definition and continuing with a brief yet accurate incursion into the history of the pre-modern states and empires and systematically advancing towards modernity, the sovereign state, the modern colonial empires and the nation-state.

In a logical order, the third chapter puts the spotlight back on the twentieth century; to be more precise, it brings into question the two mars that have decisively marked the physical and spiritual map of the contemporary world. It is here where the author also discusses the beginnings of international relations as an academic subject, identified with the first department for this subject at Wales University College, in 1919, named after the US president Woodrow Wilson and supported by the Welsh MP David Davies. (p. 60)

This is also the chapter where the UN status is brought up for discussion, an organization “designed to build and preserve a new, peaceful world order” (p. 77), without which, the author speculates, the Cold War (tackled transversally throughout tens of pages) could have become a very hot one.

The next chapter synthetically presents the ideas of Francis Fukuyama on “the end of history” and Samuel Huntington’s theories, a Harvard professor, which proposed the famous theory of “clash of the civilizations”. The six main causes of these phenomena, tackled and pertinently explained by the author, are: the real and fundamental differences between civilizations in terms of history, language, culture, traditions and especially religion; the increase in the number of interactions between members of different civilizations; the economic modernization and the social exchanges that took place internationally, weakening the role of the nation-state; the clash between the West, as a pole of civilization, and the non-West, as an area with abundant resources to shape the world; the lack of mobility of the cultural differences, as opposed to the political or economic ones – “in the former Soviet Union, communists may become democrats, but Russians cannot become Estonians” (p. 94); the increasing economic regionalism. Metaphorically, Huntington therefore argues that the central axis of international politics will be represented in the future by the clash between “the West and the rest”. Naturally, the reactions regarding these theories were quick to appear; they were both pros as well as cons. At this point in her scientific endeavor, the author insists on the issue of the relationship between ethnicity and culture, the priority of the ethnic identity in an uncertain social and political context, as well as on the issue of culture in international relations, calling into question UNESCO’s position in this regard. (p. 100)

The fifth chapter is dedicated to the concept of security and the lack thereof in the contemporary world. International relations theorists have mainly targeted the possibility, or even the imminence, in some cases, of a nuclear confrontation between the superpowers, without neglecting the domestic security threats. In this context, the activity of the League of Nations is briefly presented, as well as its successor, the United Nations, whose main activity has been to maintain the peace in situations of internal conflict (with the exception of the Gulf War, for example). The UN intervention has generally been a sort of humanitarian intervention, officially allowed and well tolerated by the authorities of the target state.

An aspect on which the author insists, in a special subchapter, is the Report on Human Development elaborated by the UN (1994) which proposes a list of seven specific security concerns: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security (p. 119). Summarizing, even if military security is a priority, especially since terrorism is not just a figure of speech and the principles of sovereignty are quite diluted in the contemporary period, other approaches of the security issue concern the specialists and main actors of international relations as well.

The next subdivision of the book deals with the idea of governance and the way in which the UN meets the expectations which the world has regarding its activity. Since the San Francisco conference (1945) with 51 signatories, the organization was dominated by European states; after the Second World War, the number of members tripled, after which it maintained an upward trend, especially after the end of the Cold War. Its interventions, oftentimes viewed critically by the observers or the parties involved, do not aim – as the author points out – to undermine state sovereignty, but the idea of “making it a better state in terms of its moral responsibilities to its own citizens”. (p. 135) However, the regionalization and the end of the bipolar world order, but relatively stable, has given way to a much more unbalanced world, where danger lies precisely in its unpredictability.

The penultimate chapter proposes globalization as a discussion topic. It is a concept that has been written and talked about quite a lot, and not just by specialists. The author briefly tackles the history of this idea, trying to summarize the concept and present its phases. The text marks the relations between globalization and national economy, globalization and culture or globalization, state and normative theory. The interrogation, in lieu of a conclusion of the chapter, leaves the discussion open on the current role of the state and the solidarity of its position, under the aspect of globalization.

The author’s analysis, synthesis and projection endeavor is completed by updated critical references, necessary to further the presented issues, as well as by a very useful index of names and concepts, which facilitate reading.

In the conclusions of his research, Stephanie Lawrence refers to the new agenda of international relations, in the context of expanding the debate about the nature of world politics, in a world torn apart by internal wars and latent threats which we will have to face, not only in theory, but especially in reality.