

GLOBAL DENMARK

Mikkel Thorup:

Sårbarheder: Globalisering, militarisering og terrorisering fra Murens fald til i dag,
Aarhus Universitetsforlag 2013

While I was growing up in West Berlin, all my dad had to do was to poke energetically into the air with his index finger. He did it every time one of my questions or outbursts of political statements about the good things I imagined to happen in East Berlin (and the bad things of the past I suspected to still linger in the West) as a boy provoked him, well, irritated him, both politically and personally. In such moments he would often enough not even say anything. Extending his arm and irately pointing his finger was sufficient, not to mention the look on his face. I knew what he meant. The world was easy to decipher back then. Sometimes he would add with scorn: 'There is the Wall. Why don't you climb over if you don't like it here?' It was clear to me that in such moments, 'here' referred to both himself and the whole West simultaneously – and that my dad lacked all sense of humour on the subject.

Embodying global complexities with a gesture today would look less authoritative than three or four decades ago behind the Berlin Wall. Maybe more like a beginner's class's *Tarantella* or *Capoeira* performance. To provide a compass for our current experience of being overwhelmed by today's complexity marks the impulse for Mikkel Thorup's new book about the vulnerabilities of our contemporaneity since the fall of the Wall. The goal of the book, which is well-written, sometimes witty and always very well-argued, is to give interested academic readers as well as the wider public a tool to help them finding their way in today. Indeed, the rather naïve narrative of optimism from the 1990s related to evermore peace, democracy, trade and integration among all countries forming a united globe ended abruptly in the early 2000s, making the beginning of the new millennium a decade of uncertainties, new struggles and new conflicts over ways in which societies and economies should be organized.

Mikkel Thorup effortlessly illustrates the two decades that have elapsed since the fall of the Wall as one of global optimism and one of global anxiety in which new threats and insecurities have shaken the foundations of Western global domination that rested on both ideas (about the superiority of markets and democracy) and control (over the globe's space). He then unfolds his analysis of new global uncertainties and vulnerabilities that are so much different from the threats and scenarios of the Cold War. Today, climate change threatens to destroy mankind, not anymore 'the bomb'. China has reached the status of a great power, and so-

called wars on terror and new religious struggles make up what Mark Juergensmeyer called a 'new Cold War'.¹

The book is divided into three parts, namely the ones that make up the subtitle: globalization, militarization, and terrorization. Yet his book is much more than an account of recent wars and terror attacks. It combines successfully recent events and experiences with a critical investigation into the ways in which such events and experiences are conceptualized, legitimized and interpreted in political and social discourse. Most importantly, Thorup shows how much the local Danish discourse on immigration, marked by an increase in exclusionary language about ethnicity and an essentialisation of culture, is connected to a global trend. By further enumerating some events and conceptual shifts that have taken place very recently, yet have become an unquestioned normality, Thorup illustrates just how much the global compass has changed and how fast experiences of great significance have followed each other (11 September, Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the financial crisis, genocides in Africa, etc.) – when the world was supposed to calm down after the end of the Cold War. Indeed, the 2000s have proven one of the fundamental imaginations of the globalization narrative wrong: the expectation of convergence through market integration that would bring democratization and social stratification similar to Western countries in its wake. The recent Syrian and Crimean crises are testimony to the false expectations of (peaceful) convergence through market economy and the supposed erosion of nation-state sovereignty. In the case of Syria, the international community watches a bloody, long civil war and an endless stream of refugees following a traditional logic of non-interference into national territory; and the case of the Crimean annexation through Russia drives home the message that even in global times territorial claims are made not only in discourse.

In the first part of the book, on globalization, Thorup mainly uses the theory of cosmopolitanism developed in the 1990s and early 2000s to illustrate the phenomenon. His account of globalization is fluid and a convincing introduction into the topic from a particular perspective, namely the cosmopolitan one. Thorup adds interesting, sometime ironic, and insightful details to the otherwise well-known strands of globalization theory he summarizes. Yet, the overall categories presented in the book (which really are more descriptive than explanatory) remain those of mostly David Held, namely 'hyperglobalisationalist', 'transformationalist', and 'skeptical'. A little less of an introduction to the works of David Held and a little more critical reflection on the usefulness of his categories would have been helpful.

In fact, most of the literature used for this part is over a decade old and one wonders why the otherwise huge (almost overblown) bibliographic apparatus

¹ Mark Juergensmeyer: *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 1993.

has not been kept up to date in relation to globalization's history and theory. In many ways, the cosmopolitan thinkers foregrounded by Thorup, and judged benevolently, for example by his use of adjectives such as "exciting" or "thrilling" ("spændende") in case of Mary Kaldor's definition of global civil society (p. 71), have been protagonists of the decade of global optimism, i.e. the 1990s, envisioning a world in which a global order runs according to post-national, cosmopolitan ideas, and the world is populated by knowledge-based societies which are democratic and provide world peace. More critical and creative voices in the field of cosmopolitan thought, such as Martti Koskenniemi, Sheila Benhabib or Gerard Delanty are missing.² Instead, David Held and Ulrich Beck are Thorup's main witnesses for cosmopolitan theory. Even Held's old colleague in the field, Daniele Archibugi, is missing in the discussion (while mentioned as a main theoretical protagonist, p. 56).

Overall, the part on globalization is not the strongest one of the book. It is more about one particular agenda or reading of globalization than about the phenomenon itself. The assumptions of the globalization narrative (ever-tighter and interdependent markets, the withering away of the nation-state and the beginning of an age of post-sovereignty, the ever-increased global integration, the rise of global civil society and a new world society) have not been met by recent historical developments. Nations have not disappeared, quite the contrary. With the Republic of South Sudan the 193rd member joined the United Nations in 2011. Post-national, in the Habermasian sense, refers not only to the withering away of the nation-state, it also refers to the norms and values that inform (or, rather, should inform) the politics and laws within nation-states (Habermas' *constitutional patriotism*), that are not based on ethnicity anymore, but instead on universalistic law and values, such as human dignity. Thorup's account of globalization remains mostly uncritical. Yet his final reflection on cosmopolitan theory (p. 78) convincingly summarizes the problematic relationship between a claim to an unstoppable historical phenomenon and the ideological assumptions written into this imagined historical unfolding. Here, Thorup describes cosmopolitanism as an ideology that pretends to account for facts yet follows an agenda. Thorup then ponders why a shift from a language of state sovereignty to a language of values, democracy and human rights took place. Was it because the old West had lost control over the nation-state principle? Until the middle of the twentieth century, Thorup explains, Western countries could control non-Western polities by

² Most recently, see Martti Koskenniemi: "Cosmopolitanism", in Mónica García-Salmones and Pamela Slotte: *Cosmopolitanisms in Enlightenment Europe and Beyond*, Brussels et al.: P.I.E.-Peter Lang 2013, pp. 21-37. Koskenniemi has written on the topic in a string of articles already before the above-mentioned critical introduction to the concept. Sheila Benhabib: *Another Cosmopolitanism*, New York: Oxford University Press 2007; Gerard Delanty: "The cosmopolitan imagination: critical cosmopolitanism and social theory", *The British Journal of Sociology* 57(1), 2006, pp. 25-47.

ousting them or not accepting them as sovereign states. With the increase in nation-states accepted as full members at the United Nations, this control mechanism was lost. By shifting to a post-sovereignty discourse on values, the West regained what Thorup calls “humanitarian dominance” over non-Western polities, cultures and societies. One must ask why he has not begun his discussion on globalization with these relevant observations and reflections, but instead presents the works and thoughts of Held and others at length?

Held also holds the high score in the bibliography with eleven articles and books mentioned. Only Osama bin Laden has more entries (thirty-three). The fact that bin Laden appears among the ranks of scholars as if he were a normal author alongside the likes of Ulrich Beck and Jürgen Habermas is indeed surprising to see. A division of the bibliography into two parts, illustrating the difference between empirical or exemplary material and scholarly work would have been beneficial. This lack of a division of analytical levels is even more cynical when, some pages further down the bibliography, the Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik is listed as a seemingly normal author between two scholarly works on current militarization and strategy issues. While the bibliography may not be too helpful simply because of its length and bulkiness, yet can still be managed, an index is dearly missed. For a book that can proudly claim almost one third of its length for endnotes and references (one hundred pages!), the omission of an index is a real problem for the reader and makes navigating the reference-heavy and name-laden text problematic. This cannot be laid on Mikkel Thorup’s doorstep, of course, but it infringes on the pleasure of engaging with his writing.

The second part of the book deals with militarization. It is divided into four sections, in which cyberwar, urban warfare, space war and weather war (yes, weather war) are discussed as new forms of warfare as well as new ideas about how to gain control over the globe’s space. Throughout the section Thorup mainly comments on the topics above in short essays. After all, the whole part is nearly half as long as the reference section (53 pages). None of the essays go into depth and wrestle with the task at hand and one wonders why the weather features so prominently as the first chapter. To reveal mankind’s hubris? Or the American hubris, rather? For what this part of the book is really about is not necessarily militarization from global perspectives, but merely the U.S. one. Similar to weather war, the chapter on space war is all about the American drive to dominance of embattled heavens. This drive lessened in the 2000s when money was transferred to new budgets for homeland security, for example. In fact the chapter reveals a red thread throughout the book. Like in all the other parts the topic of new vulnerabilities is mainly treated by looking at the (supposed) loss of American dominance over the world. The militarization of China, aiming at widening its sphere of influence in the near future, is not mentioned. A geopolitical angle to militarization is thus unfortunately omitted.

One still learns a lot from each of Thorup's vignettes in this part. Mostly about Denmark, though. And this is no small achievement. Throughout, the book is at its strongest when examples from contemporary Denmark are introduced to illustrate a global discursive shift. In the chapter on cyberwar, the Danish examples reveal how intricately linked global discourses are, or, rather, how influential the American experience is in regard to the Danish. Certainly, there is a Danish particularity about these global issues. Yet the global perspective reveals that these particularities are really variations of a larger theme. The current new militarization, Thorup concludes, reveals that older concepts, through which vulnerabilities could be contained in a language of security, are absent today, yet a new language to get a grip on contemporary insecurities is still missing – and with the missing terminology the capacity to cope without anxiety-ridden uncertainties and imaginations of increasingly, incredulously dangerous threats is not possible.

The third and strongest part of Thorup's journey through contemporary vulnerabilities and their ramifications in conflicts and political as well cultural discourse deals with the phenomenon of terrorism, or, rather, with what he calls 'terrorization'. The term implies a development over time as new frontlines emerged in the early 21st century, dividing the planet into new friends and foes, unforgivingly muzzle to muzzle with each other. The part is divided into five chapters: religious terrorism and discussions about the legitimacy of war, a part reflecting on the very meaning of terror, one on the wider ramifications of the global fear of terror on Danish political and public discourse, on the changing self-conception of society after 9/11 and on an important broader view on terror which includes extreme right wing terror and thus widens the perspective from the obsessive focus on terror inflicted in the name of Islam. Overall, the new religiously motivated terror is a broader global phenomenon putting religiously motivated violence against the secular state on the global agenda. The ideological frontlines are clear: terror groups put the morality of so-conceived pure religion against the supposed lack of morality found in secular societies and the secular notion of the state, of law, justice and the role and rights of the individual in society (challenging Western concepts of citizenship). In fact, Juergensmeyer had placed a question-mark behind the title of his 1993 book (*The New Cold War?*). In later publications he pondered that by now the question-mark should be removed as the new ideological frontlines became entrenched.

In the first chapter, Thorup takes his time and digs deep into the arguments and communications of Osama bin Laden. The twists and turns inside radical logics are a page turner. One remains baffled in despair and disbelief about some of the well-constructed and thoroughly thought-through logics of terror. A true believer dies (for the true cause) in order to live forever after death. Thorup brilliantly picks his examples and analyses the elements of the terrorists' narrative meticulously, which, in the end, represent a quite sophisticated counter-narrative to the way Western discourse deals with key concepts such as 'life' or 'freedom'.

After all, even terrorists need to develop a narrative of legitimacy for violence, especially religiously motivated ones.

Yet, the fear of terror attacks has also unleashed many fears and exclusionary discourses hidden in the closets of Western societies. Not only has an essentialisation of non-Western identities or cultures taken place, but in some cases, the conflict with religious terrorists has forced Western societies to define so-called non-negotiable values as well. Freedom of speech, for example. A return of Christianity as a cultural essence of European societies can also be noticed in recent debates. But more than anything, the new fears that have constructed new vulnerabilities (sometimes imagined, sometimes real) have provoked a populist, nationalist answer. National identities, supposedly eroding according to some theories of globalization, are back at the forefront and Thorup impressively reveals how Danish discourse on immigration and war has affected the conceptualization of Danish society. Especially scenarios of a dystopian Danish future are found in the Danish populist discourse. Mostly these dystopias depict a Denmark in which children and grandchildren suffer from the fact that the good old Denmark of today (or, even better: yesterday; whenever that was) has eroded, even disappeared and grandchildren supposedly need to live under a militant Muslim dictatorship in Denmark herself (p. 221).

Thorup's *Vulnerabilities* illustrate and analyse the recent emergence of new global frontlines competently, accessibly, and convincingly. He shows how especially American and Danish political and public discourse have reacted to new threats, mainly the threat of terrorism. He convincingly debates, with Juergensmeyer, not only Islamist fundamentalist terror, but also broadens the view and shows how other recent forms of terror, from neo-Nazi organisations to Christian fundamentalists, follow a similar logic than the Islamist terrorist organizations. The third part of the book is the most and the second part the least convincing one; and the first part still presents a very decent presentation of recent theories of globalization, while it is too focused on summarizing (meanwhile) outdated theories of cosmopolitanism, or at least fails to critically engage with them from the beginning to develop an independent account on the concept and phenomenon of globalization. While the level of argumentation is always high (even entertaining in the best sense at times), Thorup could have profited from the conceptual apparatus of Karl Polanyi, for example, in order to illustrate the tensions between the global and the national (and thus, the social) he is interested in carving out. Or, if not Polanyi, then he could have used his theoretical loadstar, Ulrich Beck, who, in Polanyian fashion, reflects on the effect of globalization on social imagination through the notion of "social closure".³ What Thorup has furthermore omitted is to widen his geographic perspective. He almost exclusively deals

³ Karl Polanyi: *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Boston MA: Beacon Press 2001 [1944]; Among other publications, Beck develops his notion of

with the United States and Denmark. Europe, China, India, Brazil, the UN, etc. all play no or only a minor role in his account of new global vulnerabilities. What remains is still an important book that uncovers current configurations of ideological confrontations. Even more importantly, he shows that Danish society (as other Western societies) still lacks a vocabulary and semantic stability to deal with the new threats constructively and to push back the encroaching political and discursive forces of right-wing populism and cultural as well as religious essentialisations.

HAGEN SCHULZ-FORBERG
LEKTOR, PH.D.
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, AARHUS UNIVERISITET