

Darian-Smith, Eve; McCarty, Philip C.: *The Global Turn Theories, Research Designs, and Methods for Global Studies*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press 2017. ISBN: 9780520293038; 267 S.

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The notion and the wider field of „globalization“ has been on everybody’s lips for nearly three decades now. In the late 1990s the first degree programs under the name of „global studies“ saw the day. In a sense it was long overdue when *The Global Studies Journal* was founded in 2008. During the last decade the first textbooks to sustain degree programs in global studies started to appear. There is an evident need for such books, as global studies continues to spread and grow as a cross-disciplinary field of studies. A recent noteworthy attempt at such a textbook has been authored by Eve Darian-Smith and Philip C. McCarthy from the Global Studies Department at Santa Barbara. They have put together their twenty years of conversations and reflections on the foundations of „the global“ and how to study „it“, crafting a well-written textbook.

Before anything else is said, it must be recognized how daunting a task it is to write a short and comprehensive textbook for global studies. Introductory textbooks to disciplines (say, sociology or anthropology) have an established canon and a disciplinary history to lean on to. Of course, controversies and disputes surrounding the formation and development of disciplines are in integral part of those disciplinary histories. Who exactly should count as a classic will remain open to interpretation. However, when it comes to global studies, there simply is no established genealogy to lean on to, no easily defined or self-proclaimed founding fathers to argue for or against, no well-established list of „key concepts“, and certainly no clearly defined delimitation of the social reality global studies should engage with. Boundaries between disciplines can be blurry and contested. When it comes to global studies it is hard and perhaps even futile to talk about meaningful boundaries in the first place. Those of us who teach in

global studies are educated in economy, sociology, politics, history, anthropology, geography, international relations, archeology, communication, cultural studies - and the list can go on - but we evidently are not educated in all of those fields at the same time. We are not educated in global studies. We craft the field while teaching and writing about it. The complexity is also spatial. Global studies cannot simply be an extension of area studies, as the focus is on relations and connections across spaces, deterritorialized or not. It is singularly difficult to provide a shorthand definition of global studies. „Everything that happens in the world today involving human beings not to forget what happened in the past as well“ would be a contender. So where to start? Which theories? Which methods? Which key concepts? Which histories? Where on Earth do we start on day 1 when our students sit in front of us, eager to start their introductory course to global studies?

I think all of us who teach in global studies keep asking ourselves that question, and so we should. Eve Darian-Smith and Philip C. McCarthy have not only asked the question, but also tried to come up with a cohesive answer. The book starts by positioning global studies as a new field of inquiry. The authors unsurprisingly emphasize the holistic nature of global studies as a field that encompasses nation-states and their interactions but likewise a huge array of non-state actors with a stress on open-ended processes and the existence of what they call a „global imaginary“ that sits in „uneasy tension with a national imaginary“ (p. 4). They rightly move beyond „the vertical nesting hierarchy of spatial scale“ that has dominated how we think about political and economic relations between individuals, nation-states and the international order (p. 5). They instead invite for what they call, following Sasken, „overlapping assemblages“, where „the local may occupy the foreground and in fact eclipse the global in terms of analytical and methodological priority and material significance“ (p. 5). Instead of fixity or rigid models (the macro „above“ and the micro „below“) they present an essentially context-sensitive approach, „depending on the research questions one asks“. Right from the outset they op-

pose western-centrism, „recognizing alternative, non-Western epistemologies and pluralist political, legal, and economic systems“ (p. 6). In so doing they set an openly moral tone, positively referring to the democratic and pluralist ambitions of the World Social Forum and the wider analytical-cum-democratic quest to engage the Other in „global intersectional solidarity“ (p. 32). In the opening pages the authors also claim to move beyond both „multi-“ or „inter-disciplinarity“, advocating instead what they call a „global transdisciplinary approach“ (p. 11). In essence, the remainder of the book is an attempt to unfold what such an approach could be taken to mean, analytically, epistemologically and – not least – methodologically. Thus, Chapter 2 reads as a conceptual grounding of global transdisciplinarity; Chapter 3 brings the concepts presented together within a theoretical framework; while the following three chapters outline questions pertaining to research design (chapter 4), methods and methodologies (chapter 5) and the global case study method (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 provides a series of examples of global studies research, as a kind of final guidance into the field.

As an overall assessment of the book it should be said that the stress is on methodology. Two thirds of the book (chapters 4-7, pp. 76-224) are about research methodology. As stated in the introduction, the book is about „teaching scholars and students what it means to do global research“. The conclusion repeats that the primary goal of the book is „to make the process of doing research on complex global issues accessible“ to both scholars and students. On that account the book does a solid job. Most available introductory books to global studies focus on theories and concepts and much less on research methodology. The book does not read as a revolution in research methodology, but rather as a sort of manual, particularly helpful for new students engaging with project or thesis work in the field. The level is introductory. Students learn why they must relate to previous literature relevant to their research question; how to put together a theoretical framework; why it is so crucial to have a research question, and how choices of theoretical and methodological framework always should refer back to the

question asked. They learn why a sound research design is vital; how to identify types of sampling and how to work with them; what it means to triangulate; how to assess validity; how to arrange a case study; how to identify the most relevant types of data and how to gather it; how to work with mixed methods. To an extent the book quite simply reads like a research methodology textbook for the social sciences with a global twist. As an anecdote I can mention that at our global studies degree program at Roskilde University we offer a series of introductory, theoretical and thematic courses, whereas our methodology courses are shared with the other study programs. I agree very much with the authors that there is a need to think about what a truly global research methodology might look like. In this sense I think many students may find it a useful introduction to global studies research design, and teachers in global studies likewise.

Let me add four more critical comments concerning the book's wider ambition. That ambition is not only to present a global studies methodology, but also to provide both novice and advanced scholars with „a coherent conceptual, theoretical and methodological lens“ (p. 11).

First, methodology textbooks normally put aside any ambition to also present a cohesive conceptual and theoretical framework, simply because it would require a different kind of book. Methodology textbooks of course discuss why and how questions of method relate to theory, but it is quite a different thing to actually propose one such theory. On this account I actually don't think the book really offers a cohesive theoretical framework. What it does offer in the first three chapters is a series of concepts and generic perspectives that are good to know and possibly helpful to think with. But the perspectives presented do not answer the many questions posed: Which are the drivers behind global processes? How far back can we trace globalization processes? Can we say anything about the causal relationship between economic structures of capitalism and politics and culture? The authors reject the idea that economic processes are the only drivers of the global, but what are the drivers then? I have a keen feeling the authors would answer, that „it depends on the kind

of research questions being asked". Fair enough, one could say, but it does perhaps suggest that the book overstates its ambition. It also begs the question if it is meaningful at all to present a „cohesive theory“, not of a specific phenomenon (say, rising divorce rates) but for an entire study area, called global studies?

Second, in terms of what the book *does* put on offer at the conceptual level, the authors rely on a mixture of post-structural theory, social constructionism, interpretative methods linked to the cultural turn, Frankfurt-school inspired critical theory, postcolonialism, critical race theory and feminism. In that sense the book is a good example of dominant trends in social theory and in the social sciences writ large, which one may sympathize with or not. The theory sections are full of references to authors invoked as „critical thinkers“ (Chomsky, Wallerstein, Foucault, Bourdieu etc.) that too easily end up reading as ritualistic name-dropping. There is no space to engage their theories in any detail, no discussion why their approaches should be considered particularly useful for *global studies*. As an example, Weber's name is dropped 5 times (pp. 49, 61, 62, 153, 190) always with a generic reference to „thinkers such as Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Freud“. There is no discussion of what it is in Weber's work that inspires global theorizing today (even if Weber evidently looms large behind the multiple modernities paradigm, as in Eisenstadt).

Third, and relatedly, the book is clearly animated by a Left-leaning perspective. While there is continuous reference to neo-Marxist authors there is precious little engagement with liberal, pro-market approaches to globalization. This is of course legitimate in a general sense, and this reviewer may even agree with much of what is said here. The problem is that the book at the same time presents itself as an introductory reader to a field of study, e.g. a useful guide for the novice student who wishes to navigate in global terrains. Is global studies really a generically constituted left-leaning field of study? I would sustain that any introductory book to global studies (as to any other field of study) should oblige itself to present conflicting theories and interpretations of globalization that any curious student can examine *as such* and think with

or against – critically, comparatively. And here it would indeed also be relevant to engage more seriously with „conservative“ positions against globalization, not only because they are increasingly politically dominant (are all nationalists stupid?), but also because such positions do relate to conflicting ways of theorizing the global. What the book does seem to write up against is a rather diffuse notion of „neoliberalism“. For example, on page 20 it is asserted that religious fundamentalism and extremism is a consequence of neoliberalism, which has weakened welfare states and therefore the protection of workers' rights. This might be argued, but so can the contrary. For this „contrary“ the book has little, if any, space.

There is little discussion of rivaling theories of globalization and the possible clashes between theoretical positions. The book refers (p. 20-21) to the well-known positions of „hyperglobalists“ versus „skeptics“ and „transformationalists“ (as in Held), but there is little engagement with the theoretical stakes behind such positions. Everything seems to come together nicely together in a wider framework that is holistic, integrative, inclusive, decolonial, critical, and a lot of other plus-words at the same time. Hybridity, fluidity and flexibility are repeatedly invoked as celebratory terms, almost amounting to something like an intellectual ideology. For this to be a convincing theory book something more and something else would be needed.

The major weakness of the book is thus that it fails to open up for the real and heated frictions that not only make up the global but also critical debates about the global. There is a sense of predictable circularity to the argument. In the opening chapter Saskia Sassen is quoted to say that „When we confront today's range of transformations – rising inequality, rising poverty, rising government debt – the usual tools to interpret them are out of date“ (p. 9). There are no statistics or data to back up that statement. The fact is of course that while inequality is on the rise, the opposite can be said about global poverty. That the world today is characterized by increasing poverty due to (neo)liberal market economies is an assertion that works well with the general perspective adopted here, but it is also one

that many scholars with a different orientation would contest or quite flatly reject. They would do so for some very legitimate reasons that this book does not even discuss in merit. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the conclusion ends on a Saskia Sassen quote (p. 229). The exact same quote as above, word by word. The question is, if we really have become any wiser in-between.

Fourth, and finally, the book's repeatedly stated ambition to move beyond western-centric understandings of global processes ultimately does not result very convincing. The stress on „critical thinking“ for the authors involves a duty to include voices from outside the „West“. The authors continuously signal „the danger to apply Western binary logics and abstractions to non-Western regions“. Such statements easily risk sounding like political correctness if not followed up at the substantial level. Chapter 3, A Global Theoretical Framework, starts by claiming that „the Euro-American academy is entering a new integrative paradigm“. And yet practically all authors discussed in the book are indeed working within that „Euro-American academy“, even as their work touch upon global developments in other parts of the world. Except a few references to Latin American authors, the bibliography indicates no rupture with a western-centric academic outlook. The book contains nearly 500 references. They are all in English. Practically all of them are published in the US and the UK, except for a few entries from Canada - and an OECD report published in Paris.

When the book provides a historical contextualization of global processes, it singles out the New York World's Fair in 1964 as a decisive event that „encapsulates people's newfound capacity to think in terms of global democracy and freedom“. One wonders how decisive this event was for people in China today or for Latin American peasants then. Because there is little space for any real discussion of the historicity of global processes, rarely referring to events prior to the 20th century, there is also no space to discuss in merit how global histories actually have been written outside a western-centric focus.

The final chapter that presents the reader with four „exemplary studies by leading glo-

bal scholars“ that new students in the field can learn from. Here, one would think, is really a chance to show how global studies has developed as a decentered and multi-centric affair. The first example is a study by one of the book's authors (Darian-Smith). All four studies chosen as trailblazers for global studies are not only carried out within the „Euro-American academy“. They are not only Californian. All four of them are led from the authors' own university campus: Santa Barbara.

There is still work to do as we search for meaningful entries into our global condition.

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