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## **WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER**

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# WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER ... TO NEW SECURITY THREATS

*Ionela Dobos*

This article shows that war represents an inappropriate solution to so-called new security threats such as terrorism, organised crime, regional conflicts and failed states which emerged with the end of the Cold War. Compared to previous times when threats were typically posed by defined adversaries, new security threats are markedly more global, inter-linked, less visible and less predictable. Paying insufficient attention to the prevailing nature of security threats and not trying to develop appropriate means for addressing them can be crucial especially when human lives, that need to be protected, are at stake. The experience of the war in Bosnia as well as the War on Terror are illustrative in this regard. As far as war proves to be inappropriate in the new security environment why is it that states make appeals to war in order to address contemporary security problems? The article offers an answer to this question starting from Mary Kaldor's explanation which attributes the recurrence of war as a result of a deficiency in understanding on the part of political decision-makers. Due to this deficiency, political leaders tend to interpret "new wars in terms of old wars" and thus develop inappropriate answers. What are the causes of this deficiency? Although Kaldor does not further develop her explanation, this article supports the idea that this is due to the predominance of political realism as the main approach to the traditional forms of warfare.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In *New and Old Wars* Kaldor observes that every society has its own characteristic form of warfare.<sup>1</sup> By the early 20th century war 'was recognizably the same phenomenon: a construction of the centralized, rationalized hierarchically ordered, territorialized modern state.'<sup>2</sup> In other words, the emergence of war was a function of the state, strictly related to its political consolidation in time. One aspect has changed and produced new wars; a shift over who maintains the monopoly of organised violence.<sup>3</sup> This monopoly no longer belongs exclusively to states; it has been disseminated to a growing number of paramilitary groups, warlords, terrorists, mercenaries and organised criminal groups.

Wars of the previous centuries were, according to Kaldor, related to the existence of high ideals represented as the interests of the 'nation' or

'state,' often self-legitimated and providing sufficient reasons for the state to wage wars and, consequently, sacrifice their citizens for the so-called 'greater good.' Also, previously, wars 'were fought between professional armies, with prudent strategies and tactics in order to conserve expensive professional forces.'<sup>4</sup> What defines the new context of wars is, according to Luttwak, the fact 'that the entire culture of disciplined restraint in the use of force is in dissolution.'<sup>5</sup> In order to support his idea, Luttwak refers to the wars in eastern Moldavia, parts of Central Asia and Bosnia which commenced following the Cold War.<sup>6</sup>

This work argues that war is an inappropriate solution to security problems when considering the context of new, unfolding international relations realities and new security challenges such as those posed by terrorist organisations; transnational organised criminal (TOC) groups, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and regional conflicts (etc) require altogether different approaches.

The idea of the inappropriateness of war as a response to such new security challenges suggests that a broader understanding of both security challenges and the means needed to be deployed as solutions may reveal that war is simply out-of-sync. In pursuing such an argument, this work seeks to unravel perceptions of security shaped by a paradigm inherited from long traditions of statecraft (i.e. Clausewitz) and sharpened in the Cold War years, during which military-technological innovations and the logic of deterrence rendered war a zero-sum game. Prior to analysing the inappropriateness of war, it is important to first explain why war has persisted as a policy of choice for those confronting such new challenges.

## 2. WAR IN THE NEW SECURITY ENVIRONMENT: A DEFICIENCY OF PERCEPTION?

There is a long list justifying the underlying rationale behind the instrumental deployment of organised armed force (war) in previous centuries. Indeed, in much of the literature on modern state-building the common theme that 'wars made states and vice-versa' is present.<sup>7</sup> The formation of political communities required the existence of 'the other' in opposition to which the community could define itself and this implied 'the real physical possibility of killing.'<sup>8</sup> Russell noted that if it had not been for the wars of colonisation – wars he believes can be morally justified – the civilised parts of the world would not have extended from the neighbourhood of the Mediterranean to the greater part of the earth's surface.<sup>9</sup> But it is not the objectives of war which is addressed in this section.

Indeed, the central question asks why the solution to a variety of current international security-related problems, such as terrorism, be cen-

tred on the wide deployment of armed force (war)? While some reduce the popularity of war to a lack of coordination between governments and international agencies or the ambition of certain political personalities, Kaldor suggests that it largely rests on deficient understandings of the nature of the new security environment.<sup>10</sup> Such a deficiency stems from both publics' and policy-makers' mode of thinking about the problematic of war which Kaldor suggests is dominated by 'a stylized notion of war' or, in other words, by the tendency of interpreting new threats in terms of old threats.

A 'stylized notion of war' is meant to correspond to the characteristics of armed combat prevalent at the end of the eighteenth century. Kaldor argues that what defines such an image of war is a set of specific distinctions in what constitutes civil and military activities. Specifically, war occurred between well-defined military units, which followed a warrior ethic of conduct, the war was waged on defined territories, and victory – of one side over another – could be recognised.

When confronted with new security threats such as organised crime, terrorism, the proliferation of WMD, or regional conflicts, it is odd that states continue to develop responses characteristic of previous centuries, since such threats are not always reducible to a contest between recognised military units, they are not necessarily geographically delineated, and victory is not always clearly recognisable.

Kaldor goes on to note that

when 9/11 happened, my first thought was this is real, they would have to develop a different approach. But I was wrong ... The War on Terror, like the Cold War, is viewed as a powerful crusade – freedom against totalitarianism ... the invasion of Iraq, was showy and dramatic ... the Americans behaved as if they had won War World II. They tried to recreate the occupation of Germany or Japan in dissolving the army ... humiliating and infuriating those very people who had allowed them their piece of war theatre.”<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, Kaldor assumes that, at the policy-making level, solutions to security problems should be dictated by the nature of such problems, not the tools available to solve them. Thus, adequately grasping the essence of the problem may also assist in directing more appropriate solutions to it. The difficulty with this approach is that it understates the important role the policy-maker must play in drafting the final, most appropriate solution and that such a solution is not only dictated by the situational context, it is also a product of will of the agent who undertakes the deci-

sion.

Kaldor deploys two cases (Bosnia and Iraq) to demonstrate how new wars have wrongly been interpreted according to the conditions and lessons of old wars. Analysing the situation surrounding the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, particularly the causes that led to the failure of UN peacekeepers to defend civilian populations from the deadly aggression, Kaldor blames the misperception of the situation on the UN officials tasked with ensuring respect for civilians. Accordingly, UN officials, argues Kaldor, perceived the situation as a war in Clausewitzian terms in which the belligerents were the involved states and not as a deliberate war against the civilian populations. This misperception determined that the UN peacekeepers – which were meant to protect civilians – cower away from the conflict, afraid that UN involvement in hostilities might be interpreted as an action which favoured state over the others.

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From the perspective proposed by Kaldor, as Walter suggests,<sup>12</sup> it could be inferred that had the international community understood the real nature of the situation in Bosnia – that a new type of war was being waged – it would have acted in a proper way. This would have increased the chances to adequately protect civilians, the refusal to partake in peace-negotiations with known war criminals, and further, ‘the international community would have never agreed to the partition of society along ethnic lines.’<sup>13</sup>

Walter assumes decision-makers, at the international level, to be willing and able to intervene into the domestic affairs of individual states, but this has never been the case. Although the international community addressed the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, from a more traditional, Westphalian perspective, by not intervening in the hostilities, by negotiating with those who were later accused of war crimes, by using traditional methods to end hostilities (re: air bombardments of Republika Serbska), and by agreeing to partition the society along ethnic lines, should not imply that once the international community had better understood the true nature of the situation, they would have immediately engaged in political, military and civilian efforts to stop the conflict.

It should be noted that the moral intentions of the actors undertaking peacekeeping missions are not central to the analysis proposed by Kaldor. Instead, Kaldor stresses that changes have occurred to the international security environment in general, and in the methods of warfare in particular; changes illustrated by real conflicts, such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina. When decision-makers do not properly consider such changes the results may produce devastating failures, which when concerning the protection of civilian lives, may undermine the fabric of the international community which itself has largely transformed into a more aware and respon-

sible community.

This work now turns to depicting the nature of new, emergent threats, to provide the groundwork for ultimately concluding on the inappropriateness of war in the framework of current international relations.

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### 3. WAGING WAR IN THE NEW SECURITY ENVIRONMENT: REALISTS' STUBBORNNESS

Rasmusen considers the explanation offered for the aforementioned question as deeply related to the evolution of the state; that one characteristic of the modern state is that war became a rationalised, state controlled activity.<sup>14</sup> Using war for political ends led to an increased interest in strategy as it 'provided a conceptual tool used to deal with a world in which things had ceased to stay the same.'<sup>15</sup> During the Cold War, the discipline of Strategic Studies, expressing this interest, focused on the state as a rational actor 'and thus defined a research program concerned primarily with the choices of alternative strategies for states.'<sup>16</sup> The focus on actors' rationality pigeonholed Strategic Studies in the realist school.<sup>17</sup> From such a perspective, the emergence of war had a structural cause related to the nature of the international system.<sup>18</sup> Contrasted to domestic politics, characterised by the existence of a monopoly on organised violence, defined by the existence of a central authority which settles disputes between individual subjects, international politics contains no such central power. Indeed, a key realist assumption determines that the nature of the international system is based on perpetual anarchy.

Due to this absence of a high-authority, capable of preventing the use of force in settling of disputes, states are forced to develop mechanisms of self-help, and deploy force as they see fit. In short, the capacity of individual states to help themselves in solving their disputes with other states depends on the level of military/security provisions it has developed. From a realist perspective security is analogous to military capabilities, participation in military alliances, and the development of efficient strategies for the use of force. Accordingly, the more militarily equipped a state is, the more its security increases.<sup>19</sup> The appeal of war by states is explained in this way, in structural terms, as a deficiency of the international system represented by the absence of an authority exercising the monopoly on organised violence for the purpose of dispute settlement.

Despite the clear departure of international relations from Cold War logic, strategy is still relevant. However, realism, according to Rasmusen, recalibrated Strategic Studies for the post-Cold War world by assuming that many of the characteristics of the Cold War are transitory.<sup>20</sup>

Realist thinking, in this regard, is characterised by the fact that new

threats such as terrorism, regional conflicts, failed states, or WMD proliferation, while retaining importance, are, from a historical perspective, essentially non-issues, since inter-state conflict remains likely in the future. Realism cannot conceive of strategy in different terms than based on power-conflict, shaped along the strategic paradigm inherited from Clausewitz and (much later) the Cold War. What realists must learn from the past, concludes Rasmussen, (Creveld), is that ‘how conflicts are fought, by whom and for what reasons, change over time.’<sup>21</sup>

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#### 4. GLOBALISATION AND NEW SECURITY THREATS

The previous section assumed that a gap exists between traditional views on war – Clausewitzian approaches – and the nature of new security threats. This part offers a snapshot of the configuration of the new security environment and explains why war is largely inappropriate despite realist claims to the contrary.

As noted above, the realist view of how international relations functions is problematic when comparing the Cold War to the still unfolding, post-Cold War order. Whereas the former was based on superpower competition – each superpower atop its own bloc of allied states – for ‘spheres of influence,’ while trying not to upset the established balance of power and hence required a degree of shared expectations and predictability, the later period bears witness to ill-defined, less predictable threats in which internal and external aspects of security are deeply interlinked. Echoing Paul, the end of the Cold War reduced the possibility of a major-power war.<sup>22</sup> Importantly, the inching away from such superpower conflict may be attributed to introduction of wholesale globalisation which would render interstate war between developed countries nearly impossible owing to socio-economic and political integration at unprecedented speeds. Globalisation also left its mark on the security realm.

In order to understand the relationship between globalisation and new, in some ways reflective, security threats, some authors explore globalisation as a root cause or a vehicle of such threats.<sup>23</sup> Freeman, for instance, locks terrorism into the larger context of deepening economic discrepancies between a powerful West and the rest of the world. He notes that ‘we have collectively created a global social structure of complex interdependence. The rich and the powerful benefit from this structure more than the poor and the weak, and the former have a considerably ability to determine the fate of the later.’<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, Osiatynski provides a linkage between economic globalisation and the rise of fundamentalism in the developing world arguing that fundamentalism is ‘a reaction to the failure of a promise for modernisa-

tion.<sup>25</sup> Throughout much of the developing world, hopes of rapid modernisation were dashed as political banditry, cronyism, and corruption were joined by insurgencies, civil conflicts and a new wave of ethnic identification leaving many governments looking to more traditional forms of political legitimacy, notably of a religious origin.

James and Friedman share such a view in their excavations of the layers encasing the causes of regional conflicts, considering such tensions and resulting conflicts 'a reflex of the decline in state authority over large regions of the Global South,'<sup>26</sup> which is especially visible 'in zones where there was previously a colonial order of authority as part of an earlier period of imperial globalization.'<sup>27</sup>

Economic globalisation is not the only process contributing to heightened sensations of frustration among the so-called Global South, which is partially responsible for the increase in fundamentalist movements. The ideas of cultural penetration through some framework of large-scale socio-cultural globalisation offer another interpretation of the types of resistance to certain, perceived impositions. Forms of resistance range from socio-economic, political and cultural localisation movements to civil disobedience, to wholesale violence manifest in acts of vandalism (arson, looting) to terrorism.

When making the case for the emergence of a new security environment following the Cold War explicitly linked to processes of economic, political and cultural globalisation, it is interesting to note the changes in acceptable language to refer to security related issues. While the Cold War tended to capture threats to 'international peace and security' the post-Cold War period has even 'globalised' the language of international relations which now boasts explorations of 'global threats,' 'global epidemics,' 'a global war on terrorism,' and 'global warming (to name a few).'

Going 'global' in understanding international politics is not only related to the trans-territoriality of threats (among other issues), but rather it indicates that while all events do occur within determined spaces, the consequences and, as a result observable patterns are increasingly global. For example, events which are extremely 'local' in the sense that they take place in a particular territory, involving only local peoples, who directly bear the consequences of their actions, are increasingly determining the international relations agenda. Take the ensuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an example; the local combatants are increasingly under international scrutiny, the result of which is the globalisation of the conflict, mobilising perhaps millions of people around the world to support one or the other. It is now clear that such a trend in globalisation, of taking local conflicts out of their local context and placing them instead into a global context has changed the way foreign policies are being shaped and



how political communities view each other and themselves.

Indeed, the globalisation of local conflicts has also produced security overlapping in the sense that internal and external security providers have been forced to coordinate their activities while internal and external security challengers are increasingly finding themselves in marriages of conveniences. This is best seen in EU latest security guidance document: The European Security Strategy, A Secure Europe in a Better World which emphasises, that in the post-Cold War, distinguishing between internal and external sources of danger is, itself problematic as the two concepts are indissolubly linked. Conflicts in Africa, Central Asia, the Middle East or Caucasus region are not isolated to the effect of concerning only those directly involved in a conflict. The new security environment and the new conflicts waged within it, have facilitated the means for all actors (recognised political entities, regular and irregular armed forces, transnational criminal groups and/or terrorist organisations), to seek – and often find – the support of sympathetic publics beyond the frontiers, particularly among diaspora communities, or close ethno-cultural kin-groups.

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Further, although a conflict does not take place within the borders of a state, it can impact on it through the flow of displaced people seeking protection within its borders. Besides the indissolubly linkage between the internal and the external aspects of security, there is also an indissolubly linkage between the new threats. Thus, conflicts, terrorism and organized crime support each other as income generating activities.

If looking into the Pandora's Box of international relations from a non-traditional vantage, in other words as a non-realist, the strange-brew of security relations presented in this section should indicate when addressed, 'a debelicization of security and an obsolescence of war.'<sup>28</sup> However, no such debelicization has occurred and war continues to be advanced as an appropriate means of conflict/crisis resolution throughout the international community.

This section offered a snap-shot of security in the post-Cold War period, which saw a proliferation of actors, in addition to new states and the political complications which tend to accompany such state building, and identified new actors operating within a new environment. It was stressed that whether or not globalisation is considered a cause, symptom or vehicle, new security threats cannot be analysed separately from its all-pervasive nature.

Thus, a consequence of the fact that the new security threats are less predictable and less visible is reflected in the reduction of the capacity of states to perform the same security functions that it had in the past.<sup>29</sup> Security cannot be aggregated in terms of military capabilities as realist logic assumes; the capacity of military forces to provide security is has

substantially decreased due the nature of these threats. This also affects the effectiveness of war understood as the ability of using military force for political ends.

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Understanding appropriateness as a synonym for effectiveness, the following section explains why war is an inappropriate solution to new security threats. To do so, the limited scope of military force and some key problems exposed by more traditional strategies and modes of warfare will be exposed.

## 5. APPROPRIATENESS AS EFFECTIVENESS AND WAR AS A RESPONSE TO THE NEW SECURITY THREATS

According to Paul, war as defined by Bull – ‘organized violence carried on by political units against each other’<sup>30</sup> – was, until the post-Cold War period, a phenomenon which could determine the main political events at the international level, such as survival, the disappearance or the appearance of new states. This control on organised violence entered in a new phase once with the Cold War, as the nuclear age made it imperative for states to remain the main possessors and managers of security.<sup>31</sup>

What was characteristic for the Cold War was the possibility to identify a danger and measure it on the basis of state capabilities. Since security dangers were mainly posed by states, measuring relative capabilities was a linear process. The amplification of danger could be determined by knowing the level of high technology possessed by states, which meant qualitatively better weapons and thus stronger military capabilities.<sup>32</sup> Threat could be measured on the basis of the ends and the means at the disposal of the state. Thus, threats were understood, as Rasmussen observes in a means-end rational framework.

Compared to the Cold War, the nature of the new threats has significantly been altered in the post-Cold War period prompting Rasmussen to operationalise an analytical distinction between threats and risks.<sup>33</sup> According to Rasmussen, threat is a ‘specific danger which can be precisely identified and measured on the basis of the capabilities an enemy has to realize a hostile intent.’<sup>34</sup> In contrast, risk is equivalent to danger and is less measurable than threat. Indeed, a risk is regarded as a negative scenario, followed by the deployment of political measures in order to prevent the unfolding of the scenario and accordingly the new security environment is defined by the presence of risks, not threats in the context of globalisation.<sup>35</sup> This analytical distinction operationalised by Rasmussen supports the conclusion that in order for new security strategies to be effective it is imperative to consider the origins and nature of such risks.

As far as security is a matter of perception,<sup>36</sup> the actors themselves de-

termine what constitutes a security threat and what does not and the non-event of not developing a proper framework for addressing new security threats expresses the position of decision-makers as they must not view such threats as such. For instance, Paul remarked that ‘in the past, terrorism rarely struck security planners as a core security threat and the defensive measures against it were confined to intelligence and political solutions aimed at eliminating the root causes of the problem.’<sup>37</sup> In other words, since decision-makers (pre-11 September) did not expend the majority of their political and security-related energies on combating terrorism it necessarily implies that they simply did not see it as a threat to theirs, or their citizens, security.

This security relativism has been significantly undermined in the current international environment and the diffusion of security tools, prodded by globalisation has had profound impacts. Cha notes that if ‘in the past there was a direct relation between power, capabilities and technology, this relation is altered in the context of globalisation which facilitates access to technology and information related to force projection and weapons of mass destruction; enabling terrorists to launch operations that are asymmetric and disproportional to their aggregated power.’<sup>38</sup>

The possession of advanced military technologies has limited effectiveness when compared with the expenditure it involves. The Barcelona Report provides an explanation for this situation by noting that ‘the use of military technology can be effective against governments, as shown in Iraq and Afghanistan. But technology does not help troops with imposing and maintaining order, with coping, for instance with suicide bombers who have relatively unsophisticated technology.’<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, heightened access to information and communication technologies alters power relations between actors and has consequently produced an important cog in the post-Cold War order, the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), which as argued by Kaldor, shows how information and communication technologies change the technological aspects of strategy, in this sense an essential characteristic of new wars is represented by the possibility of waging wars via remote command, control and communications networks facilitated by easily-acquired technology.<sup>40</sup>

In a similar vein, Rasmusen considers the idea of new wars through military precision where control is simply a discursive form aimed at showing the virtues of military force without paying attention to the real elements of novelty in the security environment. The reference to the new wars and RMA underlines the logic of the major-powers conflict expressing the way in which decision-makers redefine their political goals in light of the new possibilities created by military technology.

It is interesting to note the explanation provided by Rasmussen regarding the persistence of the use of military force in the realm of security which is a consequence of continuous progress in the military technology sector which studies on strategy catalysed.<sup>41</sup> The most obvious example that can be given in this sense is, as he argues, the invention of the nuclear bomb which was followed by deterrence doctrines.<sup>42</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This work argued for the inappropriateness of war as a solution to new security threats and was constructed along a multifaceted approach to the problematic. It began by presenting a conundrum, that although war is inappropriate it continues to be seen as an acceptable solution for decision-makers a fact which begged the question of ‘why?’ Solving this problem was accomplished by deploying the analytical tools proscribed by Kaldor. Thus, trying to explain the failure of the UN peace-keeping mission in Bosnia Herzegovina, this work refers to a deficiency in perceiving the nature of new wars on the part of decision-makers tasked with taking action on the ground.

The idea of a problem of perception at the policy-making level acted as guidance for finally providing an answer to the above noted question; it was argued that the instrumental use of war at the international level is due to political realism remaining a dominant approach to understanding traditional forms of warfare. As Rasmussen remarks, although realist thinking recognises that new threats such as terrorism, failed states, and regional conflicts retain their own, independent importance, from a historical, more realist perspective they are considered non-issues, since the possibility of inter-state war is ever-present.

Once the task of explaining the incidence of war as a solution to the new security threats was accomplished, the analysis proceeded further in explaining why, when confronted with the new security threats war is an inappropriate response. At this point, attention focused on the nature of the new security threats defined as global, interlinked, less predictable and less visible, stressing the limited capacity of military force in an international environment defined as globalised.

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## NOTES

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- 23 Paul James and Jonathan Friedman (2005), 'Globalization and the Changing Faces of War Paradigms,' in Damian Grenfell and Paul James (eds) *Rethinking Insecurity, War and Violence*, New York: Routledge. This work uses the definition of globalisation as understood by Victor Cha (2000) who notes it is 'a gradual and ongoing expansion of interaction processes, forms of organizations, and forms of cooperation outside the traditional spaces defined by sovereignty.' See: 'Globalization and the Study of International Security,' *Journal of Peace Research*, 37:3, pp. 391-403.
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- 27 *Ibid.* p. 22.
- 28 Cha (2000), p. 393.
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- 34 *Ibid.* p. 2.
- 35 *Ibid.* p. 2.
- 36 Barry Buzan (1997), “Rethinking Security After the Cold War,” *Cooperation and Conflict*, 32:1, pp. 5-28.
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- 40 Kaldor (2005), remarked that ‘President Bush (...) claimed that the US has discovered a new form of warfare that, through exploiting information technology, war is more rapid, precise and low in casualties than ever before. Coalition forces, said Bush, toppled the Iraqi regime ‘with a combination of precision, speed and boldness the enemy had not expect and the world had not seen before (...) I would argue that both the Cold War and the War on Terror resemble what I call “Old Wars” using new technologies. (...) And what about the enemy? Long before 9/11, the war gamers were talking about what they called asymmetric threats, the risk of terrorism and of rogue states that harbour terrorists. It was never clear why RMA or Defence Transformation was the answer to these asymmetric threats.’ See pp. 7-8.
- 41 Rasmussen (2006), p. 21.
- 42 *Ibid.* p. 21.