

Blom, Hansen and Finn Stepputat (Eds). 2005. *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants and States in the Postcolonial World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 360 Pages, ISBN: 0691121184 Cloth, ISBN: 0691121192 Paper. 2,191

In the wake of events of 9/11 scholar across the social sciences have been forced to rethink a host of basic assumptions and theoretical commitments. One of the most important of these concerns the idea of state sovereignty in the contemporary world system. The traditional conception of sovereignty, wedded to the Weberian distinction between the arbitrary use of force of the traditional despot and the legitimate monopoly of violence of the representatives of the modern centralized state, is central to our conception of the distinctiveness of the contemporary inter-state system. This is evident in the fact that, along with an international economy centered around competitive markets, the Westphalian system of states subject to the logic of mutual recognition of each other's internal territorial sovereignty and the repudiation of a centralized imperial control system is –according to Wallerstein's influential formulation- the *sine qua non* of the modern Euro-American-centered world-system.

In the volume under consideration here, Blom Hansen (Professor of anthropology at Yale University) and Finn Stepputat (Senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies) bring together a collection of readings designed to make us reassess the ease with which we assume sovereignty as an inherent and unproblematic property of modern states. The book can be read as in a state of critical dialogue with Hard and Negri's *Empire*, the first major salvo against traditional notions of imperial authority as centralized as localizable. The book's authors take to heart Hard and Negri's call to begin to think of Sovereignty as decentered and mobile, but bring with it a concern to move beyond general theoretical pronouncements. They productively focus on local empirical materials that attest to how state sovereignty is undergirded by local and translocal links and flows and is sustained by a discontinuous process of iteration and performance.

In the excellent introductory chapter, the editors lay out their larger programmatic perspective. In their view, it is time to question "...the obviousness of the state-territory-sovereignty link." Instead of assuming sovereignty as a natural "capability" of state entities (as in most neo-realist treatments in IR), the volume attempts to "...conceptualize the territorial state and sovereignty as social constructions" (2). Thankfully, at this point the reader is spared yet another rehashing of the now tired debate between "realism" and "constructivism" in IR theory. Instead, the authors move beyond the usual constructivist positions associated with a "macro-phenomenological" view of the discursive and narrative construction of the identities and commitments of international actors (and the associated concern with a normative "logic of appropriateness" over a calculative "logic of consequences"), and move toward a post-constructivist concern with how state sovereignty manifests itself at the microlevel.

For Hansen and Steputtat, the multifarious process of externalization of power at the level of practices takes the form of iterative performances of violence, state power, and the colonization of the bodies and minds of those subject to the "civilizing" imperatives of state action. These take the form of micropractices of domination and the "subjection" and normalization of bodies through mechanisms of control, physical conscription, bodily regulation and unconscious habituation. In this respect, the authors move beyond the sometimes problematic idealism of constructivist theory, which is sometimes perceived to flounder when faced with the empirical realities that form the core of this volume: those associated with state violence, abuse of power and the internalization of rituals of life and death for the purpose of the staging of the ultimate and unquestioned authority of the legal framework of the state (6-19). This concern with the very physical basis of state sovereignty and the unabashed treatment and consideration of the violent foundations of the legal order of the modern state, leads the editors to draw on relatively neglected sources in contemporary theorizing of the politics of sovereignty.

In particular, Hansen and Steputtat are able to frame their project as a creative blend of the Neo-Spinozist Marxism of Hardt

and Negri, tempered with a clear sense of the need to supplement this overarching macro-theoretical stance with a post-Foucauldian sense of the importance of iteration and “performance” (by interested state agents and other competing centers of power) for the establishment of both routinized and unstable (or emergent) regimes of state sovereignty (a theme that while broached by Hardt and Negri is never developed beyond the general sense that the “micro-politics of bodies” should be an important concern of contemporary theorists).

However, those who think that this “dramaturgical” framework is still too closely tied to post-structuralist concerns with language and discourse to properly deal with the “hard” realities of violence and the imposition of state power through force in the contemporary scene of the “new world disorder”, should breathe a sigh of relief. The contributors’ concern with the *empirical realities* of the *bodily* and *physical* procedures and consequences of the imposition of force by centralized state agents prevent them from falling into the post-structuralist vice of hypostatizing signs. Instead, the authors draw on contemporary re-interpretations of the work of the middle and late Foucault (especially his concern with governmentality and political practices), Bataille’s radical sociology of the violent excess hidden behind the façade of the “routinized” rational-legal authority of the modern state and even the Schmittian formulation of the radically “illegal” basis of legality and the differentiation between friend and enemy, citizen and non-citizen, outsider and insider as the fundamental performative act of establishment of political authority and sovereignty.

This theoretical scaffolding is supplemented by an overall attentiveness to the historical development of the ideological systems and the institutional practices associated with the concept of state sovereignty. A particular strength of the book is that instead of offering a purely “Europe-Centered” account of the process through which European states achieved their idiosyncratic sense of the importance of sovereignty in the realm of political conduct (as in the work of Tilly and Mann for instance), we are given a broader account of the process of the development of the European performative sense of sovereignty, one that is situated in the larger colonial project

of the 19th century, and which takes into consideration the sometimes complex process of importation and exportation of procedures, institutional practices and ideas regarding sovereignty from metropolitan centers to colonial outposts and back again (here the pioneering work of Benedict Anderson is of central importance). The authors show how Europe's own sense of the distinctiveness of its political project was only possible through the contrast and exclusionary practices made possible by the existence of the "parallel world" of the colonies, which like the subjugated body of the criminal in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, forms the proper inversion of the sublime body of the King represented by the colonial centers.

As the authors make clear the colonies far from being a static point of comparison (or simply a "symbolic" presence that allowed European identity to acquire its own sense of significance through a Saussurian logic of difference) was in fact a real-life laboratory, where the liberalizing project of citizenship in the European metropolis was supplemented by a virtual real-life "laboratory" in which alternative practices –often of a deeply violent and illiberal cast- were developed in the colonial context that deemed local indigenous populations as "quasi-citizens" not endowed with the full-complements of rights and freedoms that were slowly doled out to the residents of the European core. In this sense, not only is the Euro-American experience of political "exceptionalism" (a core theme in the current "war on terror" being waged by the American establishment) unintelligible without understanding the exclusionary practices of domination of the European powers, but neither is the contemporary experience of fractured and multiple forms of sovereignty that populate the "chaotic" post-colonial zones of Latin America, Africa and South-East Asia. These constitute reflexive "late-modern" attempts to impose practices of sovereignty and domination that were developed throughout the colonial period as a result of the mixing of European conceptions of the right of the colonizers, and their related realization that complete subjugation of indigenous populations (without mediation by local elites) was not possible. The result is mixed (and sometimes even productive and creative as well as violent) regimes of sovereignty that are spread throughout the postcolonial world, in which state, civil, and economic centers of

sovereignty compete in sometimes complicated and overlapping ways even as they are embedded in ever widening circles of neo-imperial domination from the U.S. center and global capital flows of currency, laborers and technologies. This creates a patchwork state of fluctuating and overlapping zones and cycles of order and disorder that is both a product of and a reaction to the colonial experience.

Issues related to the fragility of citizen identities, and the performed nature of state authority cut across most of the contributions. The book opens with historical and cultural considerations of racial and ethnic identity (as these intermeshes with issues related to status and class) in a postcolonial context in Mexico and Peru. Partha Chatterjee goes on to explore the concept of *political society* as a counterweight to the neat division between politics and civil society in Western scholarship, a model that it is argued may not be applicable to postcolonial state entities. Political society is a mixed space where issues of governmentality and the conduct of everyday life are not clearly separate. He uses a study of conflict between government agents and local religious groups in India to illustrate the point. Navaro-Yashin uses the concept of “borders of the imagination” to understand how state boundaries and state power are performed in state rituals in the “Turkish Republic of North Cyprus.” Two contributions (by Lars Buur and Stefen Jensen) concentrate on the bottom-up reorganization of coercive authority (local police forces and “neighborhood watch” groups) in states (such as South Africa) that are too weak or racked with corruption to effectively provide these public goods. They note the constitutive role that violence plays in recreating a semblance of order and morality at the local level and how issues of ethnic and religious identity, local self-control and morality intertwine in complex ways. The Comaroffs undertake a study of discourse surrounding “invasive plant species” in South Africa, which they deftly show parallels very closely xenophobic declarations regarding the impurity and invasive nature of immigrant populations. For the Comaroffs, this “naturalization” of the nation by way of botanical and natural analogies represents an alternative way of reestablishing the racist overtones of national sovereignty and citizenship.

Another basic concern running through many of the contributions in the book revolves around a problematization of the issue of individual citizenship (as a relation of “belonging” to a particular state formation) and the related notion of a separate “civil society” under contemporary conditions of decentered imperial dominance. Barry Hindess, in an excellent introductory chapter to the last section of the book productively takes on Hard and Negri’s contribution to this issue by focusing on how even as they promote radically new ideas regarding sovereignty and control, they continue to implicitly hold on to a traditional conception of citizenship as involving only intra-statal links between rulers and citizens. For Hindess (242), this account is “seriously incomplete” because citizenship “should also be seen as part of a supranational governmental regime” composed of INGOs, TNCs and other international agencies and regulatory entities. The chapters that follow explore these issues in detail. Aihwa Ong uses the notion of “cosmopolitan citizenship” to study the variegated patterns of residence and residential exchange between Vancouver and Hong Kong. Peter van der Veer explores how India’s entry into the global economy by way of exporting flexible labor in the IT industry -- “body shopping”-- creates complex connections between national identity, religion and capitalism between American corporations and Hindu modernity. Oivind Fluggerud notes how Norwegian national identity has undergone radical changes sustaining a renewed emphasis on Norwegian uniqueness and the “quality” of locally made products while attempting to become integrated into a global system in its terms (i.e. by emphasizing the “Norwegian model” in foreign policy) and carefully protecting its boundaries from outside migration. Fluggerud notes how state sovereignty is transferred away from regulating economic flows to regulating population flows under these conditions. Finally, Simon Turner’s contribution enriches the concept of “suspended spaces” (i.e. internment camps) where state sovereignty is suspended and “special populations” --reduced to what Agamben refers to as “dead life”-- become the purview of overlapping regimes of management and authority. He notes how Burundian refugees in Tanzania are subject to the regulation and control of both the local government and foreign INGOs, and how

their attempts to begin to manage their own lives are carefully structured by these centers of authority.

Overall, the book provides an excellent overview of contemporary theory and research at the interstices of globalization and citizenship studies, International Relations theory, anthropology and political sociology. Like many works crafted when fields are undergoing paradigm shifts, this work is full of new concepts, exciting turn of older ideas and radical reformulations, some of which seem more *prima facie* useful than others.

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