

politics underpinning this lack of ‘political will’. For example, in the context of growing economies how can we understand the continued neglect of sanitation in urban slums and the severe resource constraints of rural health services? And why is the support for harm reduction approaches such a sensitive political issue – in the US, internationally, and in most African countries?

In other words, if historical investigations are to be used to formulate new social science insights that can inform the education of a new generation of global health practitioners there is a need to explicate more systematically how we can conceptualize these insights in social science terms. Thinking in terms of for example institutions, power, governance, humanitarian imaginaries, migration, sexuality etc. all hold potential. There is also a need to reflect on whether these insights are meant to merely ‘serve’ global public health or if they might also offer critical, even disruptive accounts that challenge how we think about global health. Indeed the history of global health in Africa offers many ‘uncomfortable’ lessons on historical continuities, in terms of the violence of medical experimentation and its racial underpinnings, the moralization of disease as linked to sexuality and ignorance,³ and how disease control in poor countries is locally and internationally invested with visions of modernity, progress and humanitarian solidarity.

Notes:

- 1 J. Biehl/A. Petryana (eds.), *When People Come First. Critical Studies in Global Health*, Princeton 2013; H. Dilger/A. Kane/S. A. Langwick (eds.), *Medicine, Mobility, and Power in Global Africa. Transnational Health and Healing*, Indianapolis 2012; P. Farmer/J. Y. Kim/A. Klein-

man/M. Basilio (eds.), *Reimagining Global Health. An Introduction*, Berkeley 2013; M. Lock/V-K. Nguyen, *An Anthropology of Biomedicine*, Chichester 2010.

- 2 Such insights are also prominent in ethnographic accounts such as Biehl/Petryana, *When People Come First*.
- 3 See for example M. Vaughan, *Curing their Ills. Colonial Power and African Illness*, Stanford 1991.

Jens Bartelson: Sovereignty as Symbolic Form (= Critical Issues in Global Politics, vol. 6), London: Routledge Publishing 2014, 134 S.

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For students in international relations, “sovereignty” has played a constitutive role in the formation and functioning of the “modern” international order. This order has been based on a political geography of a world neatly demarcated into sovereign territorial states, where national borders constitute clear boundaries between “internal” order and “external” anarchy. As a concept, sovereignty has, on the one hand, informed political practice and guided scholarly inquiry. On the other hand, it has simultaneously been constructed and renegotiated over time through the same processes of political practice and scholarly debate. More recently the meaning and function of sovereignty has once more come under critical inquiry. New actors and social spaces emerging around processes of “globalisation” and “transnationalisa-

tion” have come to challenge the ontological foundations of international relations as both a discipline and a practice.

Sovereignty as Symbolic Form is the most recent contribution of Jens Bartelson, a professor of Political Science at Lund University, to the current debates on sovereignty in a changing global order. While Bartelson’s previous books such as *Visions of World Community* (2009), *The Critique of the State* (2001) and *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (1995) have clearly informed the author’s current perspective, especially in view of his devotion to a Foucauldian approach to conceptual history, the current work may also be seen as a radical shift or self-reflexive exercise where the author challenges his own past in order to reposition his present stance and vision. Building on a growing dissatisfaction with his previous work on sovereignty and the state, this short book, consisting of only about 100 pages, is a concise critical inquiry into the meaning and function of sovereignty in the present day. Distancing himself from his previous focus on sovereignty’s constitutive function in political discourse, Bartelson’s central argument is that “the meaning and function performed by this concept have changed significantly over the past few decades, with profound implications for the ontological status of the state and the *modus operandi* of the international system as a whole” (p.1). According to Bartelson, the notion that sovereignty represents both the defining characteristic of the modern state and constitutive principle of the international system is challenged by current trends that point towards sovereignty as “something granted, contingent upon its responsible exercise in accordance with the norms and

values of an imagined international community” (p. 1). This is what Bartelson will ultimately call the “governmentalization of sovereignty” (ch. 3). Yet, as the author initially asks, “how did we get to such a predicament?” (p. 1).

The key problem that Bartelson identifies is that difficulties in understanding sovereignty today revolve around “tensions in the ways in which we understand political concepts and their meanings” (p. 8). The book builds on an overview of the academic debate on sovereignty that the author treats as a central field representing and influencing changes in social ontology. Three central chapters are structured around an investigation into the “ontological status” of sovereignty through a critique of the theoretical debates, which, according to Bartelson, have been central in informing the form and function of sovereignty over time.

His first chapter, “Sovereignty as Symbolic Form”, is devoted to highlighting the shortcomings of more recent approaches to the contingency of sovereignty. Bartelson holds that, although such approaches “have helped us to understand the causes and consequences of conceptual change,” (p. 8) they nevertheless fail to grasp the present changes in sovereignty that they have, in effect, informed. Influenced by the work of the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer, Bartelson suggests that “sovereignty should be understood as a symbolic form by means of which Westerners perceived and organized the political world since the early-modern period” (p. 2). This symbolic form has in turn then “conditioned the ways in which we habitually talk about, reflect upon and organize the political world” (p. 8). In building his

approach that may offer more grounded historical inquiry, the author also offers a fascinating historical account of the development of sovereignty as symbolic form that rests on a simultaneous “construction of the global sociopolitical space that both antedated and conditioned the emergence of the modern state and the international system” (p. 69).

An underlying theme of the book is a broader interest in social ontology described as: “what kind of political world do we inhabit and of what kind of entities is this world composed” (p. 88). Through sovereignty as symbolic form, Bartelson attempts to overcome the impasse where the modern concept of sovereignty is caught between “the tendency to attribute constitutive powers to sovereignty while trying to control its meaning through practices of definition and contextualization”. In his second chapter he calls this the “Fetishism of Sovereignty” (ch. 2), which he illustrates through an intriguing reconstruction of the various forms of contestation that the concept has undergone over the last century in international legal and political theory. He orders his discussion on an axis that discerns between essentialist and nominalist approaches. Essentialist approaches aside, Bartelson’s main agenda is to highlight both the ground made by and limits of nominalist approaches that, in their reaction to essentialists, hold that “the meaning of political concepts is wholly contingent upon the context of their usage and on the discourses in which they figure” (p. 57). Bartelson also then situates himself in this legacy by challenging his earlier conclusion that, rather than being constitutive of the international system, sovereignty should be understood as pro-

viding the modern international system with its ultimate justification (p. 68).

In order to push beyond his earlier work the third chapter, entitled “Restoring Sovereignty?”, attempts to understand the function of the symbolic form of sovereignty in the present by situating sovereignty into a global context. Bartelson thus sets out to investigate “how the function of sovereignty has changed as a consequence of its meaning being stretched to fit these circumstances” (p. 69). In this very interesting chapter the author situates his discussion in a global context that is not epiphenomenal to the international system, but rests on a re-emergence of the prior construction of the global sociopolitical space starting in the early modern period (ch. 1). He then makes use of his own approach to governmentality in order to grasp how “sovereignty has been increasingly governmentalized after the end of the Cold War” (p. 78).

On the author’s own account, this section is rather brief and incomplete; on the other hand, the various examples, including the “Right to Protect” as well as “failed state” discourses, seem adequate to substantiate the thought-provoking assertion that varying governmental practices playing out on the global stage have changed the ontological status and *modus operandi* of the international system. Such governmental strategies, which may seem neo-statist rather than liberal, serve to “restore sovereignty and keep the international system in good order” (p. 98). The international system is then increasingly governed according to legal and moral standards that justify new forms of othering and exclusion. Those who do not conform to the symbolic form of sovereignty are thus perceived to

threaten peace and order. Ultimately, the extraordinary measures needed to protect that system do not build on the same notion of “internal” order and “external” anarchy that form the foundation of the essentialist and nominalist notions of the international system. Rather, this relationship is turned inside out, as “sovereignty no longer finds its ultimate justification in the provision of domestic peace and order, but rather in the promise of international peace and order” (p. 99).

Although this book may seem short, it is a culmination of many years of work on the topic and constitutes an important contribution that challenges the foundations on which international relations is built. It is an interesting yet challenging read for post-graduate students and scholars in the fields of international relations, international law as well as global studies. The author succeeds in making complex ideas fathomable to a wider readership as well as covering concisely many key critical social scientific topics emerging out of the changing global order of the so-called post-Cold War world.

Dominik Nagl: No Part of the Mother Country, but Distinct Dominions. Rechtstransfer, Staatsbildung und Governance in England, Massachusetts und South Carolina, 1630–1769 (Studien zu Geschichte, Politik und Gesellschaft Nordamerikas, Bd. 33), Berlin: LIT Verlag 2013, 792 S.

Rezensiert von
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Dominik Nagls veröffentlichte Dissertationsschrift ist das Resultat seiner Forschungen im Rahmen des DFG-Sonderforschungsbereichs 700 im Teilprojekt „Colonial Governance und Mikrotechniken der Macht. Englische und französische Kolonialbesitzungen in Nordamerika, 1680–1760“, aus dessen konzeptioneller Ausrichtung sich der Fokus für die Untersuchung ergibt. Ausgangspunkt für Nagls vergleichende Betrachtung des transatlantischen Rechts- und Institutionentransfers in die nordamerikanischen Kolonien South Carolina und Massachusetts ist die Verfassungs- und Verwaltungsstruktur des englischen Königreiches und des britischen Empires. Nagls Studie schließt in Grundzügen an die New Imperial History an, ohne dabei die Strukturgeschichte zu vernachlässigen. Mit dem Anspruch, die „wichtigsten staatlichen und nicht staatlichen Regierungsmechanismen, Gerichts- und Verwaltungsinstitutionen sowie sozialen Straf- und Disziplinierungspraktiken im Kontext des frühneuzeitlichen Nordamerika“ (S. 15) zu untersuchen, weist er