

Johannes Stripple: *Climate Change After the International: Rethinking Security, Territory and Authority*. Lund Political Studies 140. Lund 2005: Department of Political Science

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This volume, which was defended as a doctoral dissertation in the Department of Political Science at Lund University in September 2005, brings together three elements: a critical analysis of mainstream “rationalist” International Relations (IR) theory; a “processual ontology” used to develop that critique by assessing how IR theory operates in, and on, the world; and an interpretation of the politics of climate change as a means of examining specific processes and mechanisms through which IR theory constructs a social world.

To conduct this inquiry, the author draws upon three core concepts of IR: security, territory, and authority. Here they are rendered not as neutral descriptors of an underlying reality, but rather as processes that historically have served to stabilize international relations in our imaginations, as the familiar realm of bordered states seeking security in a context of anarchy. Stripple suggests a two-way relationship between these core IR processes and the politics of climate change. On the one hand, he sees them as disciplining our view of both the climate problem and imaginable solutions. He also sees them, however, as dynamic processes that are

rearticulated and reworked in the climate debate.

Framed in this manner, the work sits within the constructivist theoretical tradition. It views the international system not simply as a system of fact but rather a system of meanings. The structure of the international system is not inherent but, rather, social. In Alexander Wendt’s (1992) famous dictum, “Anarchy is what states make of it.” The role of theory in this context is not to serve as a mirror on the world, but is better understood as a set of performative practices. Thus Stripple associates his argument with Steve Smith’s (2004) dictum about IR theory “singing the world into existence.” He also shares the broad premise of constructivist theorists that the ability of IR theory to offer a stable system of meaning is challenged, if not besieged. And he argues that climate change politics is a fruitful realm in which to see that process at work.

One of the work’s great strengths is an excellent literature review, which draws out not just the theories of authors working in the constructivist tradition but the implications of those theories for how we understand world politics. A related strength is the work’s impressive clarity; it provides an excellent entry point into a body of literature that has shaken the roots of IR theory—but not always done so in clear and accessible language.

Another strength, and an innovative feature of the work, is its emphasis on the multiplicity of processes that form the core of the mainstream IR narrative. Where mainstream IR theorists in the rationalist tradition see nouns—states, sovereignty, territory, authority—constructivists see verbs. The emphasis is on a world not of facts but of processes. Stripple selects three of those processes which he takes to be at the heart of IR as the or-

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ganizing themes of his inquiry: securitization, territorialization, and authorization.

If Stripple's perspective is innovative, his interpretation is cautious. He is as sensitive to the ways that climate politics reproduces and reinscribes the bordered, statist, sovereign world of our imaginations as he is to the transformative dimensions. Unlike many constructivists working at the interface of ecology and politics (see for example Kuehls 1996), however, Stripple does not interpret the effects of global environmental challenges as an inexorable push toward a post-Westphalian, post-sovereign realm. For example, in his discussion of the process of securitization, he stresses the multiplicity of practices of securitization and of the subjectivities that need to be secured. On the one hand, he sees a significant transformative trend in the climate arena, in which security is being rearticulated as a risk to be underwritten rather than a threat to be countered. As a result, compensation for loss is replacing freedom from danger. At the same time, however, diplomatic maneuvers in the climate arena by states as diverse as the United States and the alliance of small-island states reproduce traditional statist, territorialized understandings of security, threats, and counter-measures.

As with security, so with territory. The social construction of climate change as a "global" problem tied to a global carbon cycle raises the possibility of climate politics as a de-territorialized political space. At the same time, however, climate change politics is replete with reterritorializing maneuvers. An example developed at length in the text is that of the debate around climate equity and the highly uneven rates of emissions of different countries and social classes. As Stripple shows, climate politics has transformed the Earth's buffering capacity into territorial-

ized "carbon sinks" that become power resources in intergovernmental negotiations. As a result, the equity debate around climate emissions and climate-change consequences has been rendered as equity among territorial units, not people.

Of the three core processes examined in the work, it is the process of authorization that appears to hold the most dramatically transformative consequences. Again, there is an emphasis on multiple practices of authorization at work. But here the emphasis is on those that do not (re)authorize states as the legitimate agents of governance. Chapter Four contains an intriguing discussion of the activities of the global insurance industry, emphasizing the ways that the industry acts as a de facto agent of governance: framing problems and mobilizing responses, and doing so in ways that create new solidarities that cut across national lines of identity.

One question that is less than fully treated in the work is the selection of the three core processes of securitization, authorization, and territorialization. The work is richer for avoiding the trap of settling on a single master narrative (bordering, for example, or sovereignty) at the heart of IR theory. However, the very success of rationalist IR theory in colonizing imagination suggests that there must be, if not a monolithic master narrative, several core processes at work. Rather than offer a defense of his particular choices, Stripple simply acknowledges the likelihood that "Any reader of this book will have specific troubles with my choice and would have liked to see some other concept (think of your favorite)."

Certainly the choices of security, territory and authority are defensible, if not defended here. One wonders, however,

about the role of arguably equally fundamental processes, such as citizenship and the social construction of nationalism. Given the subtleties and ambiguities in Stripple's findings—with territoriality seen a largely reproducing the statist frame, authorization understood as largely transcending it, and securitization rendered as a mix of the two effects—the choice of the particular processual lenses used to focus our attention seems critical.

Stripple concludes the work by offering the metaphor of IR theory as a tourist's travel guide to understanding international environmental politics. He suggests that many who use the guide to study climate change and other eco-political phenomena prefer to stay close to the beaten path, deploying time-tested rationalist concepts to the study of environmental conflict and cooperation. He also suggests that those who do go trekking off the beaten path have too often failed to "write home" in the sense of re-engaging with the larger questions of IR theory and of world politics (he also cites recent work on migration in IR theory as a positive example of writing home). The metaphor is apt, but the scholar's responsibility less clear:

Should we seek to un-write the master guide? To write a new guide? To subvert the idea of guide books and destabilize the act of guide-writing in general?

Of course, different scholars will quite reasonably find different answers to that question. For Stripple, the answer is clear: we should recognize that much of our trusty guidebook is obsolete, but also that the terrain into which we are heading is not really solid ground at all—at least until we find the (temporarily) stable understandings that will make it so. *Climate Change after the International* does not purport to be a new guidebook, but is well worth taking along on the trip.

References

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