

sovereignty as “states’ agency,” “a quality of ‘sovereignty,’” and sovereignty “understood as freedom to act” (pp. 1–6). Stephen Krasner famously introduced four types of sovereignty (international legal, Westphalian, domestic, and interdependence) that differ on internal/external control as well as legitimation. My book, also featured in this critical dialogue, catalogues over twenty definitions in IR theory that focus on different aspects related to “supreme authority.” The lack of conceptual clarity (or discussion of the impossibility of such clarity) are important because the empirics are structured around different contestations of sovereignty norms. However, in the numerous mentions of proposing or opposing norm circles defending sovereignty claims, Ng only includes two explicit mentions of sovereignty by a state leader (p. 86, p. 216). For example, when discussing how South Africa and Nigeria dealt with Gaddafi’s United States of Africa proposal, the book does not use the archival material to reveal particular sovereignty concerns, instead choosing only to emphasize that such opposition existed (pp. 89–90, 92–93, 95). Thus, while Ng remarks that “African states could be united in such negotiations without ceding sovereignty” (p. 97), we have little insight on *how* the leaders thought about the meaning of sovereignty and what *kind* of sovereignty contests were at play with Gaddafi’s proposal.

The story recurs in the successful Conference on Security, Stability, Development, and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), which introduced ideas of collective responsibility. CSSDCA is interesting because it features within-case variation: the proposal by Nigerian leader Olusegun Obasanjo in 1991 was initially rejected before a version was later adopted in 1999. Here, Ng calls attention to the OAU Charter’s principle of non-interference as the sovereignty norm at stake in 1991 (p. 112). However, while mentioning that states like Libya and Sudan were vocally opposed (p. 116), Ng does not present those objections in charter terms or otherwise. In the historical background, Ng refers to the “OAU’s first open debate about the nature of sovereignty” (p. 119), but the selected passage does not invoke sovereignty directly or indirectly. Crucially, the one aspect that changed between the 1991 and 1999 proposals was that CSSDCA’s challenge to sovereignty was “less directly stated” (p. 127). This is an important aspect of what I call “Idealized Sovereignty,” where state leaders maintain the convenient fiction of indivisible supreme authority even when they proceed to divide and delegate sovereign functions. Elsewhere, in the ASEAN chapters, Ng sometimes uses language of “national interests” to substitute for sovereignty (pp. 179, 188), but this is also not substantiated by diplomatic discourse. There is sometimes a sense that the meaning of sovereignty norms in regional organizations is ambiguous outside of practice (p. 183), but this point could be more clearly stated, especially given its affinity with international practice theory. The practices

themselves still rarely highlight the variety of contests over meanings of sovereignty.

Second, the book’s unique contribution to norm contestation derives from promoting a theoretical argument that foregrounds “utility” beyond a foundationalist approach that conceives of norms as moral (p. 23). For Ng, the foundationalist view misses that norm following also occurs for instrumental reasons (p. 26). Instead, Ng adopts the idea of utility, which means that “norms that are more beneficial or serve a greater utility than their counterparts are likely to spread and embed themselves” (p. 28). Even though this framing largely overlooks work on the instrumentalization of norms (e.g., see Ian Hurd, *How to Do Things with International Law*, 2017), the more acute concern is disregarding the feedback loop between power and utility and divorcing the creation of “greater utility” from normative force. While Ng touches upon this briefly in a footnote (p. 43), the issue is surely deserving of greater engagement, especially if the utility model claims to not treat preferences as exogenous (p. 44).

Ng also positions his contribution to norm contestation by opposing realist and constructivist foils (p. 36). International Relations scholars have (gradually) moved past arguments that exclusively present realism as material power and constructivism as ideas or norms. Indeed, the variety of social construction projects in IR over the past two decades would be totally compatible with Ng’s embrace of “power in practice” and the strategic use of norms. While Ng situates his work well within practice theory, there are missed opportunities to include IR theorists who have recently worked to reconceptualize norms (e.g., Michelle Jurkovich, “What Isn’t a Norm?”, *International Studies Review* 22[3], 2020), especially from a processual view (see Simon Frankel Pratt, “From Norms to Normative Configurations,” *International Theory* 12 [1], 2020), and study the practices of procedural rules (see Mark Raymond, *Social Practices of Rule-Making in World Politics*, 2019). These works are similarly advancing practice theory and norm contestation beyond singular logics, but without reifying the material/ideational divide.

These conceptual issues notwithstanding, *Contesting Sovereignty* is an important book that sheds light on multiple histories of wrestling with sovereignty in regional integration outside the Global North. It deserves to be read widely and have its argument engaged, through dialogues like this.

Response to Swati Srivastava’s Review of *Contesting Sovereignty: Power and Practice in Africa and Southeast Asia*

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— Joel Ng 

I take on board many of Swati Srivastava’s suggestions of what the book neglected to do. However she has two main

critiques, one methodological and the other theoretical, that I may address.

The first charge is of conceptual looseness regarding the term “sovereignty” in which discrepancies exist between narrower conceptual definitions and broader notions in the empirical cases. This is frequently on account of, as Srivastava has argued in her own book, the idealized and lived versions of sovereignty that are often used interchangeably yet at odds with each other. In my research, leaders and diplomats tended to discuss policies rather than principles (except in broad, non-specific ways), though the implications for sovereignty were usually clear. Their understandings were inferred by combing archival sources or from secondary interviews of others who interacted with them (the costs and barriers of direct interviewing being prohibitive, although the post-Covid Zoom era may alleviate one part of this perennial problem for comparative regionalists). The challenge for me was how to maintain fidelity with such usage or inferred implications against a concise theoretical definition.

The simplest way to map permutations of sovereignty was along an axis between two extremes of a regional organization’s potential influence on the state; i.e., from total non-interference (where the OAU was in the 1990s) to full authority over the state (a hypothetical situation potentially realisable had the “United States of Africa” proposal succeeded). Even so, linearly modelling a locus of agency between state and regional organization has difficulties with some conceptions, such as the case study of the “ASEAN minus X” principle, which was simply a sovereignty bypass rather than power over any state. These reflect the non-linearity of these debates even as they test different conceptions of sovereignty. Ultimately, case variation (methodologically, the need for significant cases with variant outcomes of acceptance, rejection, or qualification) for me was a higher priority than conceptual stringency, which would have greatly limited the empirical set of cases investigable.

A more fundamental question Srivastava raises is the interrelationship between power and utility, as she describes, “divorcing the creation of ‘greater utility’ from normative force.” She is correct that I only tackle it in a single footnote, albeit one that encapsulates a very large debate in sociology (see Dave Elder-Vass, “Developing Social Theory Using Critical Realism,” *Journal of Critical Realism* 14[1], 2015). The path out of this feedback loop is to use time as a methodological separator. This means that at the outset of each case, I take the initial preferences as fixed, and any changes of preferences thereafter are mapped by the movement of actors across norm circles. Therefore if an actor initially believed a norm held low utility, but became convinced otherwise, it should be observable within the period of the case study by their movement to a different norm circle. This model thus only seeks to explain *movement* rather than their original

positions, and as I show in the book, the practices of agenda control, use of shared norms, and *metis* are adequate for such explanations.

Hybrid Sovereignty in World Politics. By Swati Srivastava. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 280p. \$99.99 cloth. doi:10.1017/S1537592723001068

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The idealized conception of sovereignty in popular imagination is visible everywhere: From Disney movies to dictators, the inalienable rights of a sovereign are frequently invoked, yet the extent of the “sovereign” reach of a state is far more ambiguous in practice, as numerous previous works have discussed (for example, Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, 1999.; Dominik Zaum, *The Sovereignty Paradox: The Norms and Politics of International Statebuilding*, 2007; John Agnew, *Globalization and Sovereignty: Beyond the Territorial Trap*, 2018). This disjuncture between idealized, and as Swati Srivastava terms it, “lived”, sovereignty, is present and well-attested to, particularly in law where principles and practices frequently diverge (*de jure vs de facto* distinctions).

For Srivastava, the problem of these two forms is that the idealized version of sovereignty is indivisible, whereas lived sovereignty is intrinsically fragmented or incomplete due to its fundamental *divisibility*. That divisibility opens the space for not just contestation, but also overlap and competing claims over sovereign functions. As she states, “divisible practices of sovereign power are perpetually in productive friction with representations of indivisible sovereign authority” (p. 34). Because states do not have the competence nor capacity to manage all possible domains, these are often delegated or else the gaps are filled by non-state actors.

Srivastava suggests three types of public-private hybridity that vary by formalization and recognition: contractual, institutional, and shadow hybridity. Contractual hybridity results from formal outsourcing of sovereign functions. Institutional hybridity may not be so overt but develops where private entities interact and influence state entities through networks that may or may not be formalized or public. Finally, shadow hybridity is the least formalized or public type, often relating to functions that explicitly require confidentiality of information, but whose results are therefore by nature opaque and not open to public scrutiny.

These hybridities are then explored in a fascinating range of case studies from the Early Modern period (the English East India Company or EIC) to contemporary examples: Blackwater, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), and Amnesty International. In tackling