

BOOK REVIEW

**Eddy M. Souffrant, ed. *A Future Without Borders?
Theories and Practices of Cosmopolitan
Peacebuilding***

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What is the future of the idea of “nation-state”? The question ushers us into a forest of debates concerning the political status, i.e. the necessity and tenability, of the modern form of ligature called nation-state in the current globalizing spirit of politics. Modernity has it that the emergence of this social formation is a response to unencumbered use of freedom in the state of nature that gives way to the atomistic and war-like situatedness of individuals. Sovereignty is thus installed to give an order in a form of a sociopolitical arrangement and therefrom hope for a more viable way being together. By divesting themselves with the unlimited use of freedom, individuals are supposed to voluntarily submit to a power that shall discipline them through the institution of social forms of rewards and punishment that are deemed to be operating in the principles of justice.

Following social contractualism, the idea of sovereignty rests on this invented or rather constructed position of power. Nevertheless, it can be said that it is a monster that modernity has bequeathed upon history. It has proven to be an insecure and hungry entity that preys on the less powerful forms of social organizations and creating them unto their own image. As it stands, the condition of war that has supposedly been abated by the election of a Sovereign power has just been displaced by creating strong borders that protect that is within its walls but shuns away those that are outside. Borders feed on the We-They dichotomy. However, Power has its way of admitting the outsiders, of which, colonialism is the glaring example. The hungry Sovereign looked upon itself and saw that it has the task of giving order to the “rest of the world” like what it did to its own. Colonizers stripped its new-found subjects not only of the freedoms they used to enjoy but their very identity as expressed in their language, culture, and yes, colors. The idea of a peaceful transition from the state of nature to political state is belied by these instances. At the core of any well-ordered, disciplined, and civilized society is the reality of violence.

A Future Without Borders pursues this thesis and proposes ways of imagining tenable ideas of going beyond the idea of borders, and consequently, of toppling down this modernist notion of sovereignty. At the wake of the Peace of Westphalia—which remains to be a European affair of ordering the world—the notions of non-interference and tolerance among states were decreed in order that the more than three decades of war could come to an end. Centuries hence, this Westphalian idea has guided the modern international relations by

strengthening local sovereignties in the face of the then nascent idea of globalization. Fast forward to current politics, these local borders are in constant tension with the influential supranational powers that have a say to almost anything with regard to a supposedly domestic affairs: from economic policy to national security, from facts to identity.

In a nutshell, this anthology edited by Eddy M. Souffrant proposes that cosmopolitanism is the new big political idea that aims to unmask the ideologies of nationalist-statist mentality and is the irreversible way to take if we are serious about the idea of world peace. Cosmopolitanism is a pluralist and inclusivist political idea that enshrines equal dignity regardless of one's geopolitical situatedness. If the bordered nation-state is founded on the idea of violence, "FWB [Future without borders] is motivated by the belief that... contemporary governance is to maintain that tradition" (xii). To map out an alternative to this foundational violence is to imagine and propose a global ethics that, in the words of the editor, "would lead to a justice that would help us assert that peace is cosmopolitanism" (14).

The book prides in its collection of fourteen closely argued, historically informed, and theoretically updated essays (including the Introduction). Divided into four parts, each chapter (which serve as the sections for this review) promises to reveal the ongoing history of violence because until now, we have not gone beyond our borders; this, despite the fact that contemporary crises—economic, political, human, and environmental—call for global and borderless attention and solution.

Theorizing the Need for Cosmopolitanism

The first set of essays evaluates global concerns that are tied on the opposition between humanitarian need and capitalistic gains. One of the pressing issues, albeit an old one, that shocked the world is the predicament of the refugees. Facing closed borders, life for refugees is literally a game of chance as to who would be more unforgiving: the nation-state borders or the sea that carries them for months. Tracy Nicholls' essay questions the imbalance of the almost uncontrolled fluidity of capital to enter these sovereign territories and yet, when human lives matter, negotiations among countries that had to go through the long legal protocols decide their fate. Although Nicholls focuses on environmental refugees, her argument undoubtedly reverberates to all forms of migration. Poignantly put, Nicholls surmises, if only they *were* money, their movements could have been more fluid. The more convenient argument is to let global systems take care of both humanitarianism and capitalism so that there would be no need to choose one over the other. However, Nicholls is correct that this reasoning is essentially flawed because it already assumed equivalence of the two, a measure that would only work within the distorted and ideological lens of capitalism. The categorical need, she argues, "is a conception of migration that is grounded in an equivalence of the rights people have, not to goods and capital, but to each other" (79).

However, such aim is not without mountains to overcome. As long as borders are tied to the idea of sovereignty, justice towards the Other waiting at the gates will be an elusive prize. The opening essay of this chapter by Andrew Fiala pursues this critique. He disagrees with the more common notion that by strengthening national borders, the hope for world peace will be more tenable. Borders are not mere political inventions; they too are "spiritual" bonds that produce the idea of the "people" that is further rooted to another social imagination

called “home country.” The cosmopolitan imagination that loosens such bonds, if not totally renders them obsolete, is admittedly long way to go but Fiala argues that there is no other way to tread if we are serious indeed in attaining global justice. Respect for persons, anyway, is not a bordered idea. But to pursue this ideal necessarily involves a kind of anarchism, of throwing away the arches that define global order, namely, capitalism, nationalism, and identity. Fiala prescribes that “until we re-conceptualize our idea of borders and ligatures—that is, until we learn from the anarchists and cosmopolitans—there will be no lasting peace” (35). The appeal to anarchism, however, is loaded. While it is clear that Fiala wants to jettison the idea of nation-state borders that only centralizes power either to the notion of identity or to the workings of capitalism, what happens in “postborder” politics remains a question. What exactly does the call for decentralization in the global sense entail? The question can be read as an anxious inquiry, and perhaps rightly so, because as it stands, calls for global decentralization cannot go beyond the failures that Marxist ideal of global order was naïve about.

Anton Allahar’s essay can be an alternative view to what Fiala is envisioning. It is true that sovereignty is another name for violence and it takes many colonial forms, from the Modern European-led invasion of “unexplored lands” to the now American-led imposition of the idea of democracy. Nevertheless, the idea of democracy and sovereignty are antithetical to each other because the latter strengthens itself only by lessening accesses to the former and this is true both intra and extra state affairs. Neocolonialists that bask on their power by bombing “undemocratic states” are everything but democratic. Allahar details the already widely known atrocities that colonialism—both the modern and neo—has brought and continues to do so to its objects of power. His engaging point rests on situation that the Cuban nation takes vis-à-vis the long history of colonization that happened in its surrounding states. He notes that Cuba is a test case of a state affirming its rightful claim to sovereignty in spite of the external pressures that democratic and powerful states wanted to impose on it. Whether Cubans themselves agree to socialism or not is not Allahar’s point; what is interesting, he says, is what we can learn from Cuba is that the pursuit of cohesive and strong intrastate sovereignty is a tool to fight neocolonial powers and that does not mean that every other state must be a socialist one. Of course, Cubans had to pay a lot both for their resistance to the external forces and by succumbing to their highly imposing state in the name of sovereignty but the fact remains, Allahar argues, that “in comparison with the majority of its neighbours, it seems to have served the average Cuban quite well” (64).

Yet, the question for Allahar remains: given the situation of Cuba today, both in its domestic affairs and how it plays in the undeniable globalized politics, is the idea of border—regardless of its efficiency to dispel neocolonial powers—the way to go? It is on this point that Allahar and Fiala’s understanding and critique of sovereignty can be most productive. What to make of the being called sovereignty? Nicholl’s ruminations offer one solid point for the debate between the two: in case, human dignity cannot be equated to monetary concerns and that is the prime consideration for anyone who claims to be cosmopolitan.

Theorizing Paths to Cosmopolitanism

It is a truism that the centralized power of the state feeds on its ability to control capital. Where the latter fails, the former does not only lose it hold within its own subjects

but also to its standing in the global arena. This being the case, powerful states, otherwise known as the “First World” have deep relationship with equally, if not more, powerful transnational companies. Hilbourne A. Watson’s essay pursues this line of argument in exposing what he calls as the growing human insecurity. This is the condition wherein, in the midst of heightened capitalism as expressed in new technologies that does not only limit actual human participation by robotizing work but also increases the state’s surveillance capacity, citizens are further subjected into power thus, unleashing more state violence. His exposition of the drone war that US has employed post-September 11 attack merits further engagements and debates. Waxing Foucauldian language, Watson believes that drones, with its higher capacity for surveillance, operate in equally amplified claim of state’s disciplinary authority. More importantly, it is the new face of the race to global supremacy in terms of military muscles. Of course, capitalism is not to be missed in the picture; “they create opportunities for business thereby helping expand the circuits of capital” (95). In short, Watson surmises that where the new technology is, there the money is; where the money is, there the power is. The negative effect, as expected, is passed on to those who are pushed aside either as collateral damage to robotization of jobs (drones and companies need computer experts more than a sharp-shooter soldier or a skilled worker, for example) or as powerless denizens whose lands transnational companies seize in the name of progress. To this growing concern of human insecurity, Watson believes that “the real options before humanity are socialism or barbarism” (112). As it goes, socialism has the mechanism to distribute the accumulated wealth thanks to the technological advancement and thereby addressing poverty, in both existential and economic terms.

Nevertheless, proposals such that of Watson always beg the question whether socialism can stand on its own or does it need a “supplemental” idea for it to be true to its aims? The reality is that when one speaks of socialism, she can no longer deny the burden of the history of its very idea and confront its own monsters. While it is true that socialism, or parts of it, is being employed in the way states are being run at present, it remains tied to the powers that it wants to dispel. An easy excuse would be that socialism per se is yet to be realized in its full political power but then again, its own history continues to be its own antithesis. So perhaps, it needs another “auxiliary” idea through which its ideals may finally be tenable.

Could it be the return to ethical ideals? Jorge M. Rodríguez-Martínez’s speaks of ethical communitarianism as the way to go to address social structural violence. Essaying the history of violence in Latin America, his thesis is that ethical inter-subjectivity ought to be the backbone of any strong and violence-free society. Moreover, this claim to ethics must be translated into the idea of justice, that is, laws, policies, and the political system in general. While the author’s concern in this opus is the juxtaposition of the emergence of liberalism and its effects and failures on the cultural traditions of this region, plus the inherent structural violence therein, the appeal to responsibility that rides on the notion of ethical inter-subjectivity is undoubtedly potent idea to address the limits of socialism. This is so because, as stated a while ago, such a political system has proven (at least historically speaking) not to be devoid of its own forms of structural violence; in fact, it has spewed its own unique monsters, too. Rodríguez-Martínez envisions that such form of ethical being-with-others leads to a form of communitarianism that addresses the needs to respect indigenous cultures, property rights, and finally the hope for an emergence of new political

power. His contention that “social structures cannot be explained thoroughly in terms of economic structures since economy presupposes in its turn social structures” (142) gives a strong jab against political projects that only considers economic distribution as the saving power.

Kurtis Hagen further argues for the return to ethics in his much-welcomed exposition of Confucian ethical principles vis-à-vis globalization. What is wrong with the global order is that morally corrupt leaders govern it; that is the epistemic and ethical status of the current politics. Employing the notions of *ren* (virtue), *yi* (appropriateness), *fen* (distinctions), Hagen unpacks the moral bankruptcy of the globalization and thus, he claims, we are far from realizing the goal of achieving world peace. He then proposes the idea of Xunzi who believed that “what is most important is not good laws or policies but *good people*. It takes propriety, not laws, to cultivate goodness in people” (173). Without morals, no amount of economic nor technological progress will emancipate the global community, instead, the same hungry manipulative power brokers will divert all the gains towards their own good.

At this juncture, the book teaches us that imagining cosmopolitan world cannot but question old forms of sovereignty such that of the idea of the state and further, to look for means where people can better live together with each other post-sovereignty. The return to ethical principles is perhaps the strongest argument that cosmopolitans offer, for truly, political systems without being rooted on ethics are bound to repeat the history of their downfalls. Linden Lewis’ essay presents a strong case where Internally Displaced People are trapped within the idea of sovereignty and its biopolitics. It remains a hope that in a time of cosmopolitan peace, where politics that shun away sovereignty is finally tied to ethical posts, then indeed we can live in world peace.

Unclenching Fists and Reaching Out to the World

The final chapter evaluates American politics specifically the just ended Obama regime. Specific issues such as climate change, racism, and political bureaucracy in general are tackled vis-à-vis the built-in (im)possibility of critique in American society. Hinged on the high hopes that Obama brought with himself when he was elected, not to mention the much celebrated ascension into power of a black American, authors in this chapter critically check whether such euphoria has actually been translated into social policies or not. Arnold Farr’s essay dons a critical theory perspective in exposing the failures of Obama presidency. His contention is that whatever Obama did not succeed in accomplishing is rooted in American messianic complex coupled with high sense of individualism; the former places premium on allegiance the electorate gives their leaders while the latter hampers the possibility of critique that could hold the elected responsible. Taken together, Farr argues that American society best embodies what the philosopher Herbert Marcuse calls as “one-dimensional thinking” that “results from the whittling down of critical consciousness. It is the reduction of thought to the facts (what is) as opposed to what can and should be” (196). The absence of critique perpetuates the “wrong life” as the critical theorist Adorno has put it. Obama, Farr argues, is not spared from this one-dimensionality because he himself is careful not to offend the status quo. Political correctness, more than political truth, becomes the name of the game. Against this kind of thinking and the society that it produces, Farr calls for politics that has the character of a prophet, that is, that which can call for change that passes through real

critique. “The prophet or the Socratic gadfly is in the community but stands outside the community as one who refuses to conform to the narrative of denial that the community chooses to construct” (204). This prophetic critique is a duty of the electorate if they wish to live a good life.

The next essays further put into the limelight what the failure of critique or the persistence of one-dimensionality costs the American society. For one, government programs are derailed because of the constant conflict between bureaucracies. Pierre-André Gagnon argues in his article that although Obama may have a program on environmental issues, he is nonetheless caught in the gridlock in the Senate that has a powerful say on the program. Each senator has an interest laid down at the negotiation table and it shapes US’ domestic policies. What happens consequently is that “environmental, ethical, intergenerational and international justice issues are thus subtly evacuated” (221). Second, failure of internal critique also leads to xenophobia and this, in William C. Gay’s essay, is evident in America despite its façade to be a welcoming land to strangers. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attack, US has launched war on terrorism that expands not only to the enemies of US but also to identified countries as possible breeding grounds of terrorists. Gray points out that this campaign has sadly given way to “browning of terror”, that is, people of color, like the immigrants, seen with suspicious eyes; “Bodies that are ‘browened’ are bodies that have been transformed into threats by a particular discourse” (228). Thus for Gay, the browning of terror qualifies as hate speech. Pegging these two essays on Farr’s arguments, we can say that the success of one dimensional thinking lies on the condition that a society must fail in its being open to others and to itself.

The final essay by Richard Peterson uses the term catastrophe to signify the seeming incapacity of the state to act on certain issues and the lack of coherent political action in the midst of pressing political matters. Under the state of catastrophic politics, citizens seem to be reduced to mere spectators thus failing to engage in what Peterson outlines as the modes of agency supposedly expected from them, namely, first, “*sensitivity* to the experiences, including the needs and sufferings, of others” (243) and second, “*constructive engagement*, that is, the capacity and interest to explore new options in the context of problematic practices and institutional functioning” (243). In the face of violence, citizens are paralyzed to do action, reducing it to mere spectacle that the media feed them.

Conclusion

Quo vadis, cosmopolitanism? This anthology certainly provides for well-argued critique of the politics involved in the idea of sovereignty that every state holds on to. The constant appeal to the idea of justice that can go beyond borders and thus can attend to the different need of Others that are caught between the statist politics is much needed discourse in this trying time. The issues of distribution of wealth, shared responsibility, migration, and environment can truly be subsumed into the discourse on how just is our current globalized world and what else is there to do to make it more humane and responsive to the needs of everyone. While cosmopolitanism dreams of a world of equality and ultimately a worldpeace, such goal is hinged on the downplaying of the role of sovereignty. But as it stands, sovereign states are here to stay and current political events seem to suggest that there is actually a global movement where each state is flexing its muscles to strengthen its borders.

Consequently, justice is understood as a domestic idea and affair. So where does cosmopolitan idea stand amidst these events? This is not to undermine the idea of justice that this book has used as its general anchor, however. But perhaps, cosmopolitans need to think of other models that can work amicably between the domestic and the transborder politics and perhaps, through such, world peace can be attainable indeed.

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