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**The Power of Words in International Relations. Birth of an Anti-whaling Discourse**

BY CHARLOTTE EPSTEIN

xii + 333 pp., 23 × 15 × 2 cm, ISBN 978 0 262 55069 7 paperback, GB£ 16.95, Cambridge, USA/London, UK: The MIT Press, 2008

As the title suggests, this book focuses on presenting a particular theory of international politics that rests on the concepts of discourse and social field, as developed by scholars following the lead of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. In doing so, it illuminates a familiar story in an idea-centred way by focusing on how contentions in the International Whaling Commission (IWC) have been shaped by successive discourses that determine the meaning of whales (as resources in a 'whaling discourse'; as magnificent creatures to be left alone in an 'anti-whaling discourse') and create 'subject-positions' that political actors assume and enact through behaviour when they accept a particular discourse. Epstein traces the effects of discourses about whaling for individuals, private organizations and states (more accurately, governments of states) through a chronological account focusing first on the discourse of industrial whaling that prevailed when the IWC was established in 1949, then on the formulation and spread of anti-whaling discourse in 1965–1980, and then on the formation and spread of new whaling discourses using themes of cultural difference, food security and sovereignty to challenge anti-whalers after 1990.

Epstein places herself firmly within the camp of political analysts who accord to shared meanings and beliefs primary weight in their explanations of actions and outcomes. Material factors receive attention and materialist theories of politics are mentioned, but critique of other ideas-based theories of politics receives the most attention. This necessarily requires extended theoretical discussions. Here Epstein does readers a great service because she generally succeeds in explaining her approach in language much clearer than that used by most advocates of postmodernist discourse theory.

The book displays both the strengths and the weaknesses of that approach. It highlights the contentiousness involved in defining shared meanings, the ways that accepting a particular set of meanings channels an actor's own thinking and acting, and how success at getting other actors to accept the same set of meanings creates 'a form of power that does not need to coerce, because it commands consent' (p. 10). Many readers will find the methodology rather loose, and some of the connections drawn between whaling and other issues or concerns unpersuasive. Epstein avoids the near-complete denial of human choice characterizing some versions of discourse theory, but her actors remain heavily beholden to discourse. Thus the use of 'strategic rhetoric', namely statements made because they are expected to persuade others rather than because the speaker accepts a particular discourse, is largely ignored. Yet tracing strategic as well as sincere rhetoric would better illuminate the dynamics by which meanings and associated practices are weakened or modified, such as why some states found among the 'anti-whaling states' of the 1980s reappear among the 'whaling states' in the 1990s. The restrictive Foucauldian assumption that human reasoning operates through binary pairings of favoured versus out of favour alternatives suggests how individuals can be mobilized for political action, and seems confirmed when conflict hardens. However, notions of binary divide are not particularly useful for understanding decision-making. The political fact that in the IWC neither whalers nor anti-whalers

comprise the 3/4s majority needed to adopt new whaling rules means that anyone wanting to secure a policy change must develop proposals that will be accepted by some adherents to the competing discourse. As long as governments remain committed to using the IWC for decision-making (Epstein offers a social field-based explanation suggesting that they will) and fail to converge on a single set of meanings, the three-quarters rule will have a separate effect on decision-making. The notion that discourses create subject-positions for actors to assume is an intriguing way to analyse the impact of actor 'identity'. While handling whichever identity is foregrounded at the moment in a fruitful way, Epstein's approach does no better than competing approaches at solving the analytical challenges posed by the fact that political actors have and can move among multiple identities as they engage in political interactions.

Epstein offers theoretically-inclined readers a good introduction to and sophisticated application of postmodernist discourse analysis. Readers interested in whaling, even those not fully persuaded by the details of the explanation, will learn from her account of the assembly and dissemination of new arguments favouring smaller-scale whaling in the 1990s.

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**Beach and Dune Restoration**

BY KARL F. NORDSTROM

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As demand for space near the coast continues to rise, one solution has been to develop new beach and dune landforms to support recreational requirements and offer protection to communities within these areas. In *Beach and Dune Restoration* issues pertaining to the need for restoration and the tools involved in designing and conducting restoration projects are addressed over eight chapters. The book is aimed at those working within environmental conservation such as coastal scientists, engineers and managers, though the information contained may not go into as much depth as required by environmental professionals. Some of the information has been repeatedly covered in other texts, though this book is novel in that it addresses the need for compromise between different user groups and how past management techniques have focused on the negative aspects of environmental loss, rather than the opportunities that the development of new landforms generates. This additional angle makes this book a useful resource for undergraduate students interested in the future of coastal management.

Nordstrom paints quite a bleak view at the start of the book by outlining the immense destructive impacts humans are having on beach and dune systems, but positively addresses the issues throughout chapters 2 to 4. The author realistically discusses the unlikelihood of ever returning to pristine ecosystems, and instead focuses on the compromise between human reliance on coastal systems and the need to conserve and manage what little is left of the natural environment. Chapter 4 critically reviews

a range of restoration techniques, but focuses on the important role natural processes have to play in the successful restoration of coastal landforms. These processes are often overlooked by management teams determined to deliver a successful project under time and financial constraints. The book's underlying premise that the development of new landforms presents beneficial opportunities for advancing natural environments and conserving beach and dune systems is brought to the forefront within this chapter. Chapter 5 focuses upon restoration options in spatially restricted areas and highlights the responsibility that local property owners have to work alongside planners and managers to reduce the impact of human activities on the natural environment. This is a theme that is carried into chapters 6 and 7, which further emphasize the importance of communication and cooperation between all stakeholders. The main issues affecting different stakeholders are outlined along with how these are perceived by other stakeholders within the area. This is a welcome inclusion, presenting an unbiased view of opinions.

Examples are drawn heavily from the USA, though some current practices in Europe are briefly alluded to in the final chapter on 'Research needs'. The text is supported by a wide range of relevant references, though arguments could have been strengthened by the inclusion of case studies to provide evidence of restoration in practice. While it is clear that the author has passionate views about the current and future management of beach and dune systems, he presents a very balanced argument and regularly outlines the positive and negative impacts of techniques; this allows the reader to make an informed decision as to their value as management tools. The statements concluding each chapter not only usefully summarize the main points, but also present ideas for the future management of coastal ecosystems. The use of tables embedded within the text allows Nordstrom to present often contrasting information clearly and concisely. While it is appreciated that the publication cost would have increased by the inclusion of coloured figures, the detail in many of the figures is lost due to their being printed in black and white.

The book meets its aim in that it informs and educates stakeholders about potential viable alternative methods of managing developing landforms with the view to maintaining their function in line with stakeholder interests, while allowing natural processes to progress, further improving stability and diversity in beach and dune systems.

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### **The Evolution of Sustainable Development in International Law: Inception, Meaning and Status**

BY NICO SCHRIJVER

265 pp., 18.0 × 11.0 × 1.3 cm, ISBN 978 90 04 17407 8 paperback, GB£ 15.00/US\$ 24.00, Leiden, Netherlands/Boston, USA: Martinus Nijhoff, 2008

Deep ecologists and other eco-purists might consider the notion of sustainable development an oxymoron, stodgy professors of law might think of it as being rooted in theoretical obscurity, and

reactionary diplomats might suggest it to be an affront to national sovereignty, but this monograph is certain to disabuse all those naysayers of their misplaced and counter-productive assumptions. It was the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) that through its ground-breaking 1980 *World Conservation Strategy* precisely articulated and developed in detail the concept of conservation for sustainable development, defining it at the time as 'the management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations'. That aspiration, so important for the long-term well-being of humankind, was subsequently adopted and widely publicized in 1987 by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development, with the somewhat more succinct definition of 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

Nico Schrijver, a world-renowned authority on international environmental law, here offers the reader a detailed analysis of the concept of sustainable development in all of its diplomatic and legal dimensions, with emphasis on its historical antecedents (those, quite interestingly, reaching back at least as far as 1882), its various interpretations and extensions, its relationship to the underlying principles of international law, its legal evolution (both via the 'soft law' of UN Resolutions and the 'hard law' of international treaties and international case law), its current broadened and deepened status in international law and policy (with some coverage of national law as well), and, in closing, even touching upon the formidable diplomatic challenges its pursuit is sure to face in the years to come.

Schrijver reminds us that international law on the one hand reflects the values and norms of society, and on the other provides a regulatory framework for the conduct of the global community of sovereign states. Thus it is most heartening to learn from him that the body of law herein so carefully reviewed and analysed demonstrates that sustainability is fast becoming one of the core values of the international community, thus on a par with such related emerging values as peaceful co-existence and human rights. Indeed, this recognition provides further confirmation that social security (with its human rights, economic and military components) and environmental security (with its preservation, conservation and use components) are inexorably intertwined, with neither attainable unless both are.

I have several minor quibbles with the presentation. First, numerous commendable quotations in support of sustainable development are presented from the preambles of multilateral treaties, however, without ever noting that these are not a binding component of those instruments. Second, the many treaties not yet in force being offered to support acceptance of notions of sustainable development ignore the possibility (even likelihood) that a significant number of them will never enter into force, indeed, perhaps owing in part to their position on sustainable development. Third, with the ever worsening global over-population being one of the root causes of humans' likely inability to ever actually achieve sustainable development, there might have been some mention of the relevant positions and efforts, albeit modest, of the UN Population Fund. And fourth, unlike the author, I consider the outcome of the UN 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development in the last analysis to have been a substantial reversal in the progressive acceptance of sustainable development.

The text is extremely well organized and the information admirably presented and meticulously annotated (the author here