

**de Carvalho, Benjamin and Neumann, Iver B. (Eds.) (2015). *Small state status seeking: Norway's quest for international standing*. London: Routledge. 162pp. ISBN: 978-1-1382-8959-8. €32.60.**

In recent decades, the idea that world politics is hierarchical rather than anarchic in nature has gained traction, with the quest for social status as one defining feature of interstate relations. Until recently, however, this field of research has primarily focused on the social status of great powers and overlooked the pursuit of international prestige and esteem among states of lesser standing.

Benjamin de Carvalho and Iver B. Neumann's edited volume *Small state status seeking* sets out to address this lacuna. The editors suggest that competing for power supremacy is not really an option for small states. Thus, for the Lilliputians of the world, social status often becomes 'the only game in town'. As the introductory chapter suggests, small powers like Norway exemplify this attitude by seeking to project moral authority by being acknowledged as a good, reliable partner and honest broker to the major powers. It has pursued the *good power*. The book foregoes broad generalisations to inductively explore the numerous forms of non-great power strategies for status-seeking, which it then suggests could offer a fruitful basis for other comparative projects.

In Chapter One, Halvard Leira explores how Norway's pursuit of absolute status (statehood), and later on relative status, was a key feature of the formative years of Norwegian foreign policy. Chapter Two by Kristin M. Haugevik investigates the special historical relationship between Norway and the United Kingdom by showing how the pursuit of status influenced security relationships between a small and large power. Benjamin de Carvalho and Jon Harald Sande Lie show in Chapter Three how *engasjementpolitikk* (policy of involvement) became a key status-seeking practice in Norwegian foreign policy since the early 1990s. Moving to the more contemporary part of the book, Niels Nagelhus Schia and Ole Jacob Sending explore Norway's status-seeking in the UN in Chapter Four, suggesting that Norway's embodied role as a reliable actor produces status. In Chapter Five, Nina Græger shows that Norway has sought status by contributing to international peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions. In Chapter Six, Ingvild Johnsen explores Norway's most prized possession, the Nobel Peace Prize, and its role in generating moral authority and thus also international status. Chapter Seven outlines how status impacts Norway's policy on the international environmental policy field where the authors Bård Lahn and Elana Wilson Rowe claim that Norway has sought the role as a front runner, which in turn enables access to certain privileged fora to which it would normally be excluded. In the final chapter, William Wohlforth sums up the overarching findings of the book and notes that Norway is best conceived of as a small middle power which in turn should be the starting point for any future comparisons made with reference to this Scandinavian country.

The study of small states often falls into the exceptionalism trap because small states exhibit characteristics that mainstream IR theory cannot explain. While empirically accurate, this can result in the marginalisation of small state studies. *Small state status seeking* elegantly avoids this trap. The volume's primary contribution to the broader field is to show that status-seeking is diverse. Status may be sought domestically or in world politics, through wars or development aid, by means of nuclear weapons capability or the Nobel peace prize. As such, the book represents a model for any status research applying a case study approach. With some modifications, the overall framework could easily be applied to Sweden or Denmark, as it could also be to Serbia, South Korea or the United States. This is a testament to the analytical

eclecticism of the book, which is supplied by the theoretically well-informed conceptual framework as laid out in the introductory chapter. This conceptual framework and its potential expansion to other contexts is a key strength of this book.

This analytic flexibility does have its drawbacks, however. It is unclear whether the analytical framework set out by de Carvalho and Neumann is particularly suitable for grappling with the category of small powers. The volume links small state behaviour to moral authority; at the same time, the editors, explicitly or tacitly, argue that Norway is not a typical small power. While the editors state that their intention is exploratory, this ambiguity results in an overall uncertainty about what the volume can tell us that is relevant beyond Norway.

The ambiguous treatment of labels allows the book to avoid the categorisation question that has long stymied the small state literature. In brief, this deadlock revolves around the question of what a small power is and what it is not. Though understandable, avoidance of this question is also disheartening since a focus on status has the potential to nudge this debate further in the direction of perception. Whether a country is a small, middle or great power depends not on its military capabilities, wealth or moral authority, but whether it is recognized as such. *Small state status seeking* focuses on how countries seek status. It would have been an even stronger volume if the authors included a focus on how countries are also *recognised* for their status.

Not focusing on the perception of status leads to a final critique of the book, namely the lack of discussion about what status *does*. In short, the book does not show how status can potentially be turned into influence, power and deference. Indeed, the editors explicitly limit themselves to the intrinsic aspect of status seeking. As they put it: status ‘does not sell more cod’ (p. 16). But: is this really true? A range of countries, including Norway, invest in nation-branding to increase the visibility and attractiveness of the country, which in the long run would, quite literally, ‘sell more cod’. Indeed, all the chapters in the book, ranging from alliance politics and great power relationship, to climate politics and multilateralism, seem to be ideal arenas for exploring the instrumental aspect of status. There is an enormous potential here which the book has perhaps not taken full advantage of. To be sure, this is a problem that is not only applicable to this book, but in general to the emergent field of status research in International Relations (IR). Yet, given the excellent conceptual framework, it is a bit disappointing that it barely recognizes the *doing* side of status.

Having addressed these caveats, this book deserves much praise. Overall, *Small state status seeking* is an excellent contribution that has already moved the field of status research in IR forward. The criticism put forward in this review has largely revolved around the issues and questions which it does *not* address. This should not overshadow the novel aspects of status-seeking that the chapters so compellingly do grapple with. The fact that the book is short – it has only nine articles – is deceptive; this is an empirically rich book and a theoretical gem that will serve as a future reference point for any authors wanting to join the status turn in IR. Indeed, *Small state status seeking* needs to be on any future IR curriculum that seeks to teach students about status or hierarchies.

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