JPM717: Presentation Handout

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Reading’s Title: Performative state By Cynthia Weber

**1. Summary of the Reading**

*What is the reading about? What is the author’s main thesis and conclusions?*

The reading is about how Judith Butler’s performativity is linked to the sovereign nation-state and tries to show that the sovereign nation-state is not a pre-given subjects as many others suggest but it is a subject in proccess and all subjects in process are the ontological effect of practices which are performativly enacted. And in order to do so she starts with explaining the performativity then she discuss the main three types of arguments that defy the simple typical classification of sovereignty and tried to reconceptualise it, and how they position themselves in relation to normativity. Afterwards, she critique them through the notion of performativity.

In conclusion the author says a performative understanding of state sovereignty suggests that sovereignty is undecidable because its meaning cannot be fixed, for whenever the meaning of sovereignty is stabilised one finds that the meaning of sovereignty has already moved on to something else. States and sovereignty, like sex and gender for Butler, are forever in the realm of discourse and cultural, not in the realm of the natural.

If we accept that -like sex and gender- states and sovereignty are both discursive effects of performative practices, then it follows (transcribing Butler's transcription of Nietzsche) that there is no sovereign or state identity behind expressions of state sovereignty. The identity of the state is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its result. One of these expressions is sovereignty, and state sovereignty gets performatively enacted through various sex, sexuality, and gender codings.

A performative reading of sex, gender, and sexuality would not accept these universal internal/external, female/male, feminine/masculine codings of the sex and gender of nation-states that Gendered readings of IR suggests. Instead, it would investigate how various, particular, historically-bounded sex and gender codings participate in affecting the state and sovereignty.

**2. Critical Analysis**

*What are the strong and weak points of the argument?*

The strong point is by analysing state sovereignty performatively, analysis moves beyond traditional definitions of sovereignty to analysis of two important issues. First, how do definitions like these participate in the constitution of not just the state and sovereignty but their relationship? This is an issue that cannot be addressed until the meaning of the state and its relationship to sovereignty are 'denaturalised'. Second, what must a state 'do' in order to 'be' sovereign? If, for example, one considers sovereignty to be status, a performative understanding of state sovereignty allows one to investigate how sovereign practices confer sovereign status onto states without reifying the state or sovereignty.

**3. Relation to the Main Reading**

*How does the argument relate to, and/or expand the argument of the main reading to which it is linked in the syllabus?*

The relation between this reading and the main reading is clear and direct since Weber tries to connect Performativity mentioned in Judith Butler’s Gender trouble to the nation-state sovereignty, Gender in IR, foreign policy and queer theory and how they can be understood through performativity.