

Charles University  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Institute of International  
Studies

Opponent: Dr. Anna Vidén

Student: Oliver Cox

Title of BA- thesis: *Canada and the Northwest Passage: Intersection of National Sovereignty and Environmentalism?*

## 1. Fulfillment of stated objectives

### *1.1. Introduction of the topic*

In *Canada and the Northwest Passage: Intersection of National Sovereignty and Environmentalism?* Oliver Cox takes on a vital but thorny issue: the relationship between sovereignty and environmentalism. The context of the study is the receding ice cap and the new economic opportunities that are thus emerging in the Arctic. As a result of this development the Northwest Passage – a sea route through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago - presents a viable commercial shipping route for international traffic. This poses a problem for Canada who historically has claimed the NWP as its internal waters. The Canadian government has used environmental regulations to bolster its claims for sovereignty over the NWP. The underlying question posed by the author is precisely what constitutes the means and the ends in this context, which leads the author to formulate the following related specific research questions: 1. Does Canada claim sovereignty over the NWP in order to be able to protect Arctic environment? Or does Canada enforce the environmental regulations because it bolsters Canadian sovereignty over the NWP? Oliver Cox uses the specific case of the voyage of the U.S. tanker SS Manhattan through the NWP in 1969 and concurrent events to analyze these questions. More specifically the objective of this thesis is to determine how environmental regulations contribute to Canadian claim over the NWP in the face of legal vacuum and historical precedent. The author's main argument is that the environmental approach is crucial to the Canadian claim over the NWP. The author justifies the research focus by the necessity to study the shift in Canadian Arctic discourse from the focus on the protection of the Arctic environment to a hardline assertion of Canadian Arctic sovereignty.

### *1.2. Execution of stated objectives*

The author has successfully carried out the stated objectives, which were to analyze the relationship between environmentalism and sovereignty in the context of the Canadian Arctic. I find the discussion on the shift from Arctic protectionism to the hardline assertion of Canadian Arctic discourse specifically revealing.

## 2. Strength and weaknesses

This BA-thesis have many strengths such as a clearly stated and formulated research problem; evidence based arguments, a pertinent conceptualization of relevant terms and concepts; an analytic tone, concise and clear language, great use and treatment of sources; and a well-executed research methodology. Also the choice of topic, contextualization and its justification is impressive. By the way, what strikes the reader first hand is that the thesis is well-structured and neat.

What also strikes the reader however, is the fact that the first two pages completely lack referenced sources, which is odd for a foundational discussion. This is a BA-level thesis, however the handbooks and other literature used for this introductory discussion should have been referenced.

A more serious issue is the fact that the issue of Canadian claim to sovereignty in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago is not sufficiently problematized. Are there for example underlying reasons, possibly related to economic issues that drive Canada to use environmental regulations to stake a claim for sovereignty? Or is sovereignty an essential issue in itself? If so why? Can it for example be linked to the issue of national security? In any case environmental issues can be costly so one could make a claim that the Canadian government wants to protect the environment partly for economic reasons. If so, those or other related issues should have been discussed. It also would have been interesting to know if there are specific interest groups such as the Indigenous populations our Canadian corporations for example driving such concerns. Also, a discussion on why there are environmental concerns in the Arctic in the first place and specifically in regards to Canada would have been welcome.

Finally, a short definition of the used methodology would have been welcome. This is something that the author should think of in his future research and writing.

## 3. Format and linguistic aspects

Stylistically, structurally and linguistically Oliver Cox BA-thesis is well-executed. There are very minor writing errors such as omission of the word *the*, and a few grammatical mistakes related to the past tense.

## 4. Final assessment

My final assessment based on the previous discussion is therefore that Oliver Cox should be recommended for defense and that he should be awarded the grade 1 with the condition of course that he successfully carries out this task.

Dr. Anna Viden June 9, 2015 in Prague