Sovereign myths in International Relations: Sovereignty as equality and the reproduction of Eurocentric blindness

Introduction

The discipline of International Relations (henceforth IR) is characterised by a constant dissatisfaction with one of its central concepts: sovereignty. In his history of the discipline, Schmidt has shown that the discourse of anarchy that was central to the development of IR is intertwined with a discourse of sovereignty, and therefore with debates around the precise meaning and implications of the concept of sovereignty. As he observes, "The recent attention that scholars have begun to direct toward the elusive concept of sovereignty is an indication of the fundamental importance that this principle continues to have for the study of international relations. The disciplinary history of international relations clearly reveals that the discourse about sovereignty was really what animated the political discourse of anarchy" (Schmidt, 1998: 240-241). Interrogations about sovereignty and its meaning have thus been a central topic for IR since its inception. The supposedly recent 'return' to debates about sovereignty in IR scholarship is therefore only the last occurrence of a long-term concern in the discipline.[1]

[1] This recent 'return' to sovereignty in IR has been widely noticed. See, among others, Onuf (1991: 425), Weber (1992: 199), Biersteker and Weber (1996: 1), Sørensen (1999: 590), Blaney and Inayatullah (2000: 29), Bartelson (2006: 462), Prokhovnik (2007: 41).

For a majority of scholars, such dissatisfaction with sovereignty – reflected in the extensive literature being written on the concept – emerges from the fact that sovereignty is intrinsically complex. In 1948 Morgenthau (1948/1973: 315) was already noticing that "despite the brilliant efforts of a few outstanding scholars, there is much confusion about the meaning of the term, and about what is and what is not compatible with the sovereignty of a particular nation". Providing a definition of the concept is widely acknowledged to be an elusive task: the evolution of sovereignty since "its first recorded usage in the thirteenth century renders quixotic the attempt to find a single, specific, historically valid formulation" (Philpott, 2001a: 16). History is thus seen as an obstacle for a concept "arrived at over centuries of experience, and reflecting the complex situation in which nations currently function in the world order" (Heller and Sofaer, 2001: 24). Definitions also escape scholars because of the number of subjects sovereignty relates to (James, 1986: 2-3, Fowler and Bunck, 1996: 400). The result is "a substantial intellectual quagmire" (James, 1986: 3): sovereignty is seen as an "ill-defined and amorphous notion" (Helman and Ratner, 1992-1993: 9) and "extremely, and perhaps purposefully, misleading" (Jackson, 2003: 788).[2] This assessment is still widely shared by IR scholars: for Kalmo and Skinner (2010: 1) "Pointing out, or deploring, the ambiguity of the idea has itself become a recurring motif in the literature on sovereignty". Recently, debates about the Responsibility to Protect and its relation to sovereignty have provided another example: scholars have extensively discussed what is or is not compatible with sovereignty (see, for example: Luck, 2009, Glanville, 2014, Moses, 2014, Lafont, 2015), a conversation that seems to re-enact the 'human rights versus sovereignty' debates (Chopra and Weiss, 1992, Barkin, 1998, Krasner, 1999, Reus-Smit, 2001, Thompson, 2006). In all these discussions, sovereignty is regularly identified as the main issue to be clarified.

[2] In a similar vein, Thompson (2006: 253) observes that "sovereignty is a problematic concept that generates genuine intellectual difficulties". See a similar argument in the collective volume by Bickerton, Cunliffe et al. (2007: xi).

As an answer to some of the intellectual puzzles generated by sovereignty, this article argues that, contrary to a common perception, the concept itself is not to blame. Instead, it is the myths constructed around and about sovereignty that lead to the difficulties faced by a large number of IR scholars. The concept of sovereignty is indeed understood as providing an equal, unbiased and culturally-neutral access to the same status to all the states which fulfil some supposedly universal standards. This means that sovereignty is seen as playing an equalising role in international relations because it does not discriminate between states based on culturally specific values. Sovereignty is therefore not entrenching inequalities between states; in fact, or so the myth argues, inequalities (and differences) between states exist independently of the formal/legal rule of sovereignty and have no bearing on the awarding of a sovereign status. This is what I call the 'myth of sovereignty as equality', i.e. the separation of the inequalities instituted and legitimised through sovereignty from the concept itself. Drawing on the concept of myth as used in politics and international relations (Yanow, 1992, Weber, 2001, Bliesemann de Guevara, 2016b) I explain in this article how most of the literature on sovereignty reproduces the myth of sovereignty as equality. This myth in turn hides a central tension between (i) the entrenched belief that international relations are a level-playing field where every actor can achieve equality thanks to sovereignty and (ii) the recognition that the West embodies the ever-changing standard of sovereignty and thus benefits from a superior status thanks to sovereignty. Combining these two contradictory realities necessitates the powerful mediation of the sovereignty myth. According to the myth, if some fail to be(come) sovereign, the origins of these status inequalities are to be found *outside* of the concept of sovereignty (and therefore outside of what the discipline of IR itself should focus on).

As such, the myth of sovereignty as equality generates a vision of IR as a noble, enlightened and universal enterprise interested in 'honourable' causes (such as equality, order and tolerance between equal actors). The silencing of the inequalities sanctioned by sovereignty, however, contributes to legitimise certain forms of domination and international intervention. Moreover, it enables a

justification and naturalisation of Western superiority through the vocabulary of a supposedly neutral and universal concept. Focusing on the myth of sovereignty as equality thus contributes to the critical and post-colonial literature on the concept but it also adds a crucial element: indeed, it reveals why their empirical 'disproval' or 'debunking' of the myth has not been effective. In fact, the very literature that these scholars criticise has acknowledged the empirical inadequacy of sovereignty as equality yet has continued to use it. Approaching sovereignty as a myth provides an explanation to this surprising situation.

This article is organised into three sections. I first discuss the idea of myth and what the myth of sovereignty as equality does. I also explain how this article adds a new dimension to the literature on sovereignty (and in particular to the critical studies of the concept). The second section argues that the myth of sovereignty as equality is established thanks to three interrelated arguments: (1) sovereignty means independence from abroad (or non-intervention); (2) external and internal sovereignty can be separated; and (3) sovereignty is a result of the practices of the 'international community'. In a third section, I explain that reconceptualising sovereignty is resisted because of the normative appeal that sovereignty as equality exercises. As such, empirical elements disproving the myth are relegated to epiphenomena – exceptions or deviations from the norm(al). The conclusion reflects on the consequences of approaching sovereignty as a myth (and in particular on the need to combine factual disproval with desirable alternatives in order to erode the myth of sovereignty as equality).

The myth of sovereignty as equality and its critics

This article argues that part of the confusion surrounding the notion of sovereignty can be attributed to the existence of a myth of 'sovereignty as equality'. In this section, I will first outline my

understanding of myth before turning to the specific myth of sovereignty as equality and the relation between this argument and the existing literature on sovereignty.

In this article, I adopt Yanow's definition of myth as "a narrative created and believed by a group of people that diverts attention away from a puzzling part of their reality" (Yanow, 1992: 402). First, myths are "public, always rooted in particular cultures, times and spaces, and reality for those who believe in and reiterate them" (Bliesemann de Guevara, 2016c: 30). Yet if myths are social constructions, their creation is neither explicit nor openly intentional. In fact, myths are not identified as such or they risk losing their power. The apparent truthfulness of myths is achieved through a specific selectivity: myths indeed make certain things visible and important while turning others into epiphenomena or silencing them. In practical terms, these silenced realities become more difficult to theorise as their 'triviality' means that a specific analytical vocabulary is often lacking. Thus, using myth as a heuristic tool does not mean uncovering 'truth' behind the mythical; it means focusing on the productive dimension of myths (Bliesemann de Guevara, 2016a: 3) and asking: what does the myth authorise or legitimise? What is being hidden away through the use and reproduction of the myth?

More specifically, myth help make "what is particular, cultural, and ideological" into "what *appears* to be universal, natural, and purely empirical" (Weber, 2001: 6), and thus true. As such, myths should not be reduced to 'false stories'.[3] If "sovereignty is often more myth than reality" (Benton, 2009: 279), then, it does not follow that the concept has no effect. Studying myths in the context of IR Weber (2001: 2) argued that myths act as the building blocks upon which IR theories are constructed. Myths indeed serve some crucial collective functions by hiding tensions between values and principles that are not compatible (Yanow, 1992: 401-402). Drawing attention to a specific 'reality' and silencing others, myths enable actors to maintain a particular understanding of the – or, in fact, 'their' – world.

[3] If some scholars have used the term 'myth' in their critique of sovereignty (Teschke, 2003, Carvalho et al., 2011) their understanding has been limited to considering a myth as a 'false belief'. On the specific 'myth of Westphalia', for instance, see Osiander (2001) and Carvalho, Leira et al. (2011).

According to Yanow (1992: 402), myths can thus be developed in order to "mask tensions between or among incommensurable values". Although developed for the study of organisations, this understanding of myth is analytically important as it highlights one of the central characteristics of myths: that they provide both a necessary fiction and an ideological delusion (Bliesemann de Guevara, 2016c: 22). Myths perform this function by remaining tacit understandings and "If the myth is publicly identified and labeled as myth, the suspension [of the tension between incompatible principles] may dissolve, the conflict reappear, and the myth's power to mask the irreconcilable differences may be lost" (Yanow, 1992: 402).

In this article, I build upon this understanding of myth to develop the idea that sovereignty has been essentially attached to equality, i.e. that sovereignty has been seen as a good (because universal and culturally-neutral) vehicle in order to achieve equality between states. This is what I call the myth of sovereignty as equality.[4] There is no denying, of course, that fully sovereign states do enjoy a certain equality in their diplomatic relations or when they participate in international organisations. The myth, however, means that the concept of sovereignty itself has not been contributing to the inequalities existing between states. If anything, sovereignty serves to equalise relations between unequal states. In other words, sovereignty plays an equalising role and the undeniable inequalities present in international relations exist *despite* the norm of sovereignty (and not as a result of it). This myth draws attention away from one of the central realities of IR: the superior status of Western states institutionalised and legitimised by the concept of sovereignty itself, and the award of a nominal and insubstantial ('quasi') sovereignty to others due to their lack of a Western-defined civilisation. This section will first expand upon the myth of sovereignty as equality before showing that this argument,

[4] It is undeniable that focusing on the idea of equality only reveals one dimension of sovereignty. I am therefore not arguing that sovereignty can be reduced to the myth of sovereignty as equality (nor even, in fact, that this myth captures the most important aspects of the concept). It is, however, one of the discourses on sovereignty most often found in the IR literature. For an exploration of another discourse of sovereignty ('civilised sovereignty'), see Mathieu (forthcoming).

although confirming some of the existing critical accounts of sovereignty in IR, also carries with it a more convincing explanation for the continued currency of the myth in the discipline.

First, the idea that sovereignty is essentially attached to equality is well-established in IR. Sovereignty is indeed seen as the central rule of international relations permitting states to "co-exist and interact on a foundation of formal equality" (Jackson, 1999: 434). 'Equality' and 'sovereignty' are as intimately linked as 'sovereignty' and 'state' (for a recent example see Lafont, 2015). Sovereignty thus seems to transcend differences: for Heller (2001: 26) "the exercise by states of their sovereign powers continues to represent the most important vehicle available to state and nonstate actors for collective action while maintaining the diversity of values and individuality that a sovereign-state system implies". Sovereignty is thus 'juridical equivalence' – an aspect of sovereignty that is essential insofar as it serves to differentiate the 'modern' form of sovereignty from earlier, pre-modern, sovereignties (Spruyt, 1994: 103). In fact, some imply that sovereignty could help 'offset' some of the inequalities of international relations: because equality implies non-intervention sovereignty is logically "far more constraining for powerful states and far more liberating for weak states" (Jackson, 1990: 6). Importantly, however, the expression 'sovereignty as equality' should not be interpreted as meaning an equivalence between the two terms. Rather, this expression is a shortcut to describe how sovereignty is considered to lead to equality between states – whatever form this equality takes for the scholar concerned.

Such equality is painstakingly maintained even against the resurgence of sovereign hierarchies such as the return to a standard of civilisation based on human rights (Donnelly, 1998). If states are nowadays differentiated according to their level of respect for 'human rights', this "does not imply the creation of fixed categories of states, as in 19th century doctrine. All states have the presumptive right to formally equal treatment, which can, in concrete legal contexts, be relativized on account of their committing or tolerating massive human rights violations and mass atrocities" (Peters, 2009: 530).

This 'presumptive right to formally equal treatment' derives from the fair, neutral and non-discriminatory rule of sovereignty. Topics contributing to entrenching inequalities (such as 'civilisational assessments' or racism) are evacuated as having no influence on sovereignty and thus as peripheral subjects for IR. This is reminiscent of what Schmidt (1998: 125) noticed for early twentieth-century IR for which "the colonized regions – the "dark" places, the "uncivilized", the "backward" or "barbaric" areas of the world – did not belong to the society of states" and thus were excluded from the discussions about relations between states. Equality and sovereignty continue to be associated in the (re)creation of the image of an international system that does not favour the values of some over those of others. Sovereignty is thus the best road towards equality.

This myth is crucial insofar as it reconciles two opposing principles or 'realities': that sovereignty is the central feature and mechanism of an essentially equalising international system, and that Western states have enjoyed a superior status because they have been in control of the norm of sovereignty itself. First, it emphasises the antithesis to domination: equality. With all actors being equal, the possibility for one or a group of actors to dominate is difficult to conceptualise and thus effectively silenced. The conceptual tools that could help understand international inequalities have thus been actively devalued.[5] But the myth of sovereignty as equality has another effect: it naturalises and legitimises the award of sovereignty to some and its denial to others. Indeed, this selectivity is portrayed as the result of a 'fair' process in which all states can fulfil the conditions for sovereignty insofar as these conditions are universal, commonsensical, and culturally-neutral. In other words, when states fail to become sovereign (or when they are perceived as violating the standard of sovereignty) their resulting unequal status is interpreted as an unfortunate failure to achieve equality *despite* the existence of a fair and equalising rule. In this way, the acknowledgements of Western domination that keep crawling back despite the insistence on equality do not destabilise the myth of

[5] The 'resurgence' or renewed interest in the notion of hierarchy is one example of what the myth of sovereignty as equality has made difficult to theorise in IR. See, for instance, Lake (1996), Hobson and Sharman (2005), Mattern and Zarakol (2016).

sovereignty as equality insofar as Western superiority is justified as 'earned' and 'deserved' through the myth of sovereignty as equality.

Approaching sovereignty through the conceptual lens of the myth could seem reminiscent of some existing analyses of sovereignty yet it differs from them in significant ways. First, the idea of 'organized hypocrisy' put forward by Krasner (1999) could be seen as another way to approach sovereignty as a myth. Krasner indeed argues that rulers only respect the sovereignty of others when it is in their interest to do so. As such, departures from the norm of sovereignty – and from the equality that it could guarantee – are numerous as sovereignty is variously respected or violated according to the interests of (powerful) statesmen. If Krasner casts doubts on the association between sovereignty and equality, the inequalities he describes are not a consequence of the use of the concept of sovereignty itself. In addition, Krasner reconstructs the myth by dividing sovereignty into four components that reinforce some of the associations between sovereignty and equality (as explained in the next section). In other words, Krasner reconstructs through his critique the mythical/idealistic image of sovereignty as equality. In a similar way, Jackson (1990) could be seen as having revealed the mythical nature of sovereignty as equality insofar as he argues that some states only possess a limited form of sovereignty – quasi-sovereignty – and thus clearly identifies some of the problems of associating sovereignty with equality. His explanation, however, reinforces rather than undermines the myth of sovereignty as equality: indeed, he attributes these inequalities to the lack of capacity of these quasi-states, and not to the way the norm of sovereignty itself is understood or defined. Once again, sovereignty as a concept is not to blame for the inequalities of our international system.

The literature that questioned the concept of sovereignty has thus been unable to reveal the myth explored in this article. Such a limitation is akin to a 'dilemma of sovereignty': on the one hand the concept is criticised for its inadequacy while on the other it is reinstalled in its mythical form (despite the general dissatisfaction accumulated about it). Using the idea of myth helps explain why some IR

scholars seems 'captive of sovereignty' (Havercroft, 2011): as will be developed in the third section, it is the normative appeal of sovereignty as equality that maintains this dominant conceptualisation (rather than its dubious empirical adequacy). Approaching sovereignty as a myth can therefore explain why the vast amount of critical literature on sovereignty has not been able to challenge the association between sovereignty and equality. Since myths function as beliefs and rely on faith, their normative appeal makes them resistant to the factual disproving that has been conducted by critical scholars in recent years. Indeed, critical studies on sovereignty are now well-established: post-structuralist scholars have shown that sovereignty needs to be understood as a (performative) discourse that contributes to defining what a normal state should be (Ashley, 1988, Walker, 1993, Bartelson, 1995, Weber, 1995, 1998). Additionally, scholars inspired by post-colonial theory or interested in the domination of the West in international relations have emphasised the Eurocentric nature of sovereignty and have refused to accept the universality of a concept defined by the West (Grovogui, 1996, Dunn, 2003, Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004, Anghie, 2005, Aalberts, 2014). Finally, critical scholars have emphasised the fiction of the independent, benevolent and sovereign state and have reconnected its creation and functioning to the wider social and economic forces – and in particular to the historical structures shaped by the (capitalist) global political economy (Cox, 1981, Gill, 1993, Jessop, 2016).

But beyond the empirical and theoretical critiques provided by these scholars, a specific attention to the mythical aspect of the concept of sovereignty is still lacking.[6] In this article I build upon the vast amount of critical literature about sovereignty and expand on some of their conclusions through the

[6] In his later writings, Bartelson (2014) comes close to such an understanding when he defines sovereignty as a 'symbolic form,' i.e. a structure that stays constant and that organises our world into an intelligible whole. In this abstraction from the specificities of sovereignty, however, Bartelson runs the risk of reproducing some of the problems that sovereignty has a myth generates. Despite recognising the contributions of post-colonial scholars, for instance, Bartelson argues that sovereignty can accommodate a wide range of authority structures and constitutional arrangements, and that the concept does not need to be descriptive of the world in which we live. As such, Bartelson reproduces some of the views also defended by those who believe in the myth of sovereignty as equality (and that enable the myth to survive).

heuristic tools offered by the concept of myth. Approaching sovereignty as a myth indeed reveals why the attachment to sovereignty as equality remains so strong despite its empirical inadequacy. It is undeniable that most mainstream scholars maintaining the myth have also acknowledged its limited analytical value. Approaching sovereignty as a myth offers a way to engage *from within* with a literature that has recognised the limitations of this mythical understanding of sovereignty yet does not seem able to overcome them. It also explains why the repeated acknowledgements that the concept does not correspond to reality do not destabilise an understanding of sovereignty that has a mythical quality. Finally, it corrects one of the adverse and unwanted effects of 'decentring sovereignty'. Indeed, critical scholars discussing whether sovereignty originates from outside the West continue to reproduce the myth: in their quest for traces of sovereignty elsewhere, they indeed start from a very classical – and mythical – understanding of sovereignty (Branch, 2012, Hobson, 2009, Zarakol, 2018). This is unavoidable as decentring sovereignty means starting from the most widely accepted conceptualisation of the concept. Of course, these scholars cannot be considered to endorse the myth of sovereignty as equality, yet if their intention is to criticise the Eurocentric narratives that inform most of IR (Hobson, 2012) the unwilling result of their analyses is a further confirmation of the myth.

The three mythical foundations of 'sovereignty as equality'

While the meaning of the myth has been explained in the previous section, it is important to explore the different building blocks of this overarching myth. Each one constitutes a myth in its own right but they all relate to the dominant idea of sovereignty as equality. When discussing these building blocks, the tension between Western 'facilitated' access to sovereign status and the promise of equality attached to sovereignty resurfaces repeatedly. In fact, it animates the construction of all these myths insofar as this tension needs to be silenced through the insistence on sovereignty as equality. Hence, when in conflict with 'reality', the myth of equality remains, in effect, sovereign in the sense that it

imposes itself to reality. As such, it represents a core belief for some IR scholars and makes their theories appear to be true, empirical and universal.

Myth 1: Sovereignty means independence and non-intervention

This first myth is so central and widely accepted that only a cursory glance at some IR literature will be enough to convince the reader that sovereignty is, *essentially*, considered an equivalent for independence and non-intervention in international relations. Hence for Thomson (1995: 219, emphases added) "Sovereignty is the recognition by internal and external actors that the state has the *exclusive* authority to intervene coercively *within* its territory". In the same way Peters (2009: 518) argues that non-intervention is usually seen as "a corollary of sovereignty". Seminal authors have expressed this view repeatedly; Waltz (1979: 95-96) for instance estimates that "To say that a state is sovereign means that it decides for itself how it will cope with its internal and external problems". James also adopts such a view when he defines sovereignty as 'constitutional independence' (James, 1986). 'Modern sovereignty' is what makes states autonomous, observes Philpott (2001a: 19), while Etzioni (2006: 71) refers to "the key principle of international relations since the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648: that sovereign states are not to interfere in one another's internal affairs." For English-school inspired scholars, our international society is also characterised by non-intervention, a rule that sovereignty guarantees and ensures (Jackson, 1998: 12). Finally, Ayoob (2002: 83 and 92) explains that sovereignty "acts as a 'no trespassing' sign protecting the exclusive territorial domain of states"; sovereignty thus enshrines "the doctrine of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states as an essential ingredient of international society".

What is striking, however, is not that a large number of IR scholars adhere to this myth: rather, it is that this myth imposes itself upon sceptical scholars. Hence, even those who present themselves as critical towards this particular myth contribute to re-create it (however unwillingly). Glanville (2013,

2014), for instance, has been particularly vocal *against* this myth of sovereignty as independence or non-intervention. According to his history of the concept, the idea that sovereignty entails non-intervention gradually appeared in the 19th century and was not historically present until the 20th century. Glanville thus criticises the myth of Westphalia for rendering a false image of sovereignty as essentially attached to non-intervention and independence. But through his critique Glanville also confirms the idea that sovereignty *can* and indeed *was* understood in its 'traditional' sense at some historical juncture. As such, the possibility for sovereignty to 'recover' its meaning – which is possible since it was actually achieved during some historical periods – becomes the implicit benchmark against which 'deviations' are judged.

Although forcefully defended by a large number of IR scholars, this myth is also contradicted by the countless acknowledgements that non-intervention has *not* been a key feature of international relations. Waltz (1979: 96) explains that despite his definition of sovereignty the concept does not mean that sovereign states "are free of others' influence". For Krasner (1999: 51), there is an "empirical inaccuracy of the Westphalian model" because of the countless violations of the 'rule' of non-intervention.[7] In another article, Krasner (2001: 18) writes that "[e]very major peace treaty since 1648 – Westphalia, Utrecht, Vienna, Versailles, Helsinki, and Dayton – has violated the sovereign state model in one way or another".[8] Morgenthau (1948/1973: 318), like most IR scholars, recognises that non-intervention is necessarily limited "by treaty or what we have earlier called common or necessary international law". Similarly, after claiming that sovereignty is essentially attached to non-intervention, Ayoob (2002: 83) acknowledges that "Strong states have routinely intervened, even forcibly, in the affairs of weaker ones" with sovereignty acting as a mere "restraint on the former's interventionary instincts". Even Glanville cannot avoid recognising the limit of the myth of sovereignty

[7] See other mentions of these violations in the introduction and first chapter of Bickerton, Cunliffe et al. (2007).
[8] Interestingly, Krasner (2001: 22) also explains that "[a] great deal of what takes place is consistent with the sovereign state model" (i.e. sovereignty as non-intervention). Such a conceptualisation should thus still be treated as a starting point. This reveals the force – and thus persistence – of the mythical image of sovereignty as non-intervention.

as independence: for all the periods he studies, interventions in the sovereign sphere of states are a common practice. Even in the period identified as having established sovereignty as independence – the 'traditional' meaning of sovereignty – Glanville (2013: 85, emphasis added) explains that "it *also* continued to be widely accepted that the right of non-intervention was limited in important respects and that states were answerable to international society for their actions." Such a tension between 'sovereignty as non-intervention' and 'interventions conducted in the name of sovereignty' has recently reappeared in debates about the Responsibility to Protect doctrine. But thanks to the force of the myth, the inequalities instituted by and legitimised through sovereignty are relegated to the margins of international relations (as an addition – 'also' – to what remains central, i.e. equality).

Myth 2: External and internal sovereignty are independent

The second myth that sustains the idea of sovereignty as equality in IR is the insistence that sovereignty can be separated between its internal and external dimensions insofar as one is not dependent on the other. A large number of IR scholars indeed study sovereignty without looking at its internal 'content'. When sovereignty is defined as a "final and absolute authority in the political community" (Hinsley, 1986: 1) it acquires a generic meaning and as such can supposedly accommodate different forms of political authority. For Spruyt (1994: 56), for instance, "[s]overeignty per definition consists of internal hierarchy and territorial demarcation" but nothing more. In fact, external sovereignty represents the stable basis on which international equality is constructed: "Compared with internal sovereignty, external sovereignty has remained relatively constant – not unrevised, but steady" (Philpott, 2001a: 18). The fact that sovereignty in its external form is identical for every state contributes to international equality: every state possesses the same (external) sovereignty. In this way, the separation of internal from external sovereignty (and the supposedly

exclusive focus of IR scholars on the latter) participates in the (re)production of sovereignty as equality.

The concept of sovereignty thus becomes restricted to its 'international law' dimension. As Peters (2009: 516) writes: "juridical equality can be seen as a logical corollary of sovereignty". This insistence on law is also visible when Morgenthau (1948/1973: 321) estimates that "[t]he actual inequality of nations and their dependence upon each other have no relevance for the legal status called sovereignty". This refusal to consider internal sovereignty "makes IR theory as a separate body of knowledge possible" (Adler-Nissen, 2013: 180): internal sovereignty is the subject of Politics while IR can safely circumscribe itself to external sovereignty. This is what Krasner (1999) argues in his seminal study of sovereignty: his analysis is premised on the separation between internal and external sovereignty and his focus is on those forms of sovereignty that have to do with the 'external'. As such, this myth perpetuates the fiction of sovereignty as equality through the argument that sovereignty is not concerned with the domestic (and thus varied) realities of states, i.e. how communities organise their form of political authority. Hence, all states are (or can be) sovereign and thus equal in status regardless of their internal characteristics.

Such a distinction, however, is more mythical than actual as can be seen in some of the most influential works on sovereignty published in IR. In Krasner's analysis, for instance, external and internal (or Westphalian and domestic, in Krasner's terms) sovereignties are supposedly independent from each other.[9] But as acknowledged by Krasner himself, his distinction is analytically correct but empirically difficult to sustain as the erosion or reinforcement of one form of sovereignty usually leads to the erosion or reinforcement of the other (see especially Krasner, 1999: 24, 13 and 14, and for a critique of the separation between the four components Zaum, 2007: 32). The separation between external

[9] I do not mention the two other components of sovereignty – interdependence and international legal sovereignty – that Krasner identifies insofar as they can respectively be understood as dimensions of domestic and Westphalian sovereignty instead of separate elements. See Krasner (1999: 9).

and internal sovereignty ultimately relies on the separation between authority and power, a distinction that is recognised by Krasner (1999: 10) as slippery: “A loss of control over a period of time could lead to a loss of authority”. When external and internal sovereignty are reconnected, the inequality built in the concept of sovereignty becomes apparent: domestic/internal sovereignty is defined from a normative perspective by Krasner (2004: 118) who associates it with “governance structures that exercised competent and ideally constructive control over their countries’ populations and territory”. Krasner’s conceptualisation thus privileges a specific and provincial form of internal sovereignty as his basis for sovereignty *tout court*. In this context, the maintenance of a separation between internal and external sovereignty is more mythical than actual and serves to hide the status inequalities supported by the concept of sovereignty.

Similarly, Jackson’s framework of positive and negative sovereignty (designed as a response to the difficulty to conceptualise sovereignty in international relations) reveals that internal and external sovereignty cannot be fully separated. For Jackson (1990: 29 and 27), positive sovereignty corresponds to an independence based on “capabilities which enable governments to be their own masters” while negative sovereignty is simply “freedom from outside interference”. His conceptualisation thus reproduces the usual distinction between internal and external sovereignty. Once again, however, this distinction is an analytical construction that quickly dissolves when Jackson explains what sovereignty really is. Indeed, the negative sovereignty of ‘quasi-states’ is clearly seen as inferior to the positive sovereignty of (Western) ‘historical’ states. Hence, only positive sovereignty (which encompasses both internal and external sovereignty) *is* sovereignty. The thinly veiled associations of positive sovereignty with a ‘civilised’ stage reinforce this idea that negatively sovereign states are not ‘proper’ states. The myth of the separation between internal and external sovereignty serves to hide how achieving external sovereignty is intimately dependent on achieving a culturally-specific form of internal sovereignty. Sustaining the separation between internal and external sovereignty is thus problematic

if not impossible yet the widespread recurrence of this separation reveals the force of this mythical belief in orienting theories and analyses in IR.

Myth 3: Sovereignty is defined by the practices of the 'international community'

Finally, the third myth supporting the idea of sovereignty as equality is the belief that sovereignty being a customary rule of international relations, it reflects universal values and is defined by all equally. Sovereignty is thus universalised and 'consensualised': it does not represent the values and ideas of some (to the detriment of others) but reflects an international consensus. Fowler and Bunck (1996: 403-404) argue that it is the "international community that determines whether a particular political entity qualifies as a sovereign state." Others resort to the ideas of 'humanity' and 'international law': for Peters (2009: 514), sovereignty "has been humanized" and it now finds its normative foundation in international law. Other scholars perpetuate the myth of sovereignty as a consensual rule of international relations by obscuring its sources or origins. Fabry (2010: 8) describes how sovereignty seems to be rest 'above' states and to impose itself on them:

> Although their actual decisions have been commonly affected by political factors such as national interests, pressures from domestic constituencies, or shared interstate interests, members of international society have nevertheless generally understood recognition of a new state to be an activity regulated by binding norms that are independent from, and logically precede, those factors. This has been the case even in situations where differences arose over which particular norms applied.

Hence, sovereignty can be taken as a transcendental norm existing prior to or above the actors to which it 'only' later applies. This can be seen in Taylor's observation that sovereignty and states

function in a 'grand dialectic': "the sovereignty of states obliged them to meet the norms of the international community but the norms of the international community were a product of the sovereignty of states" (Taylor, 1999: 565). What such an assertion does, in effect, is to remove from view the way sovereignty is instituted, defined or transformed. Sovereignty becomes transcendental, which confirms the overarching myth of sovereignty as equality insofar as sovereignty is not 'created' or 'influenced' by some but rather imposes itself upon all in a similar fashion.

The problem is not, of course, that norms exist and have a binding effect; rather, the problem lies in the fact that this approach furthers the myth of sovereignty as a unanimous rule of international relations by obscuring the way sovereignty comes to be defined by some states only. If sovereignty is indeed a common rule or norm in international relations, it does not follow that this norm exists without being (re)created, and in this act of (re)production some exercise a stronger influence than others. This is how sovereignty can be universalised to become a reflection of an international 'consensus'. Jackson (1999: 454) rhetorically asks why sovereignty is such an important norm in international relations and answers in the following way:

> [sovereignty] is an arrangement that is particularly conducive to upholding certain values that are considered to be of fundamental importance (...) The core values of sovereignty are the following: international order among states, membership and participation in the society of states, co-existence of political systems, legal equality of states, political freedom of states, and pluralism or respect for diversity of ways of life of different groups of people around the world.

Sovereignty thus expresses the core value of all and the core values of all are expressed in sovereignty. International diversity and pluralism becomes 'non-issues' since sovereignty transcends them (and supposedly ensures their respect).

In order to build this third myth, however, these scholars are forced to disregard part of a reality that they nevertheless perceive. The absence of power in the definition of sovereignty, for instance, is not easy to sustain: Fabry (2010: 8) refuses to recognise the role of particular states in forging sovereignty yet he almost simultaneously acknowledges that "state recognition has been a practice led and shaped by major powers, especially the great powers." Similarly, and despite all the appearances of neutrality, the intersubjective construction of sovereignty is necessarily connected to power: "our understanding of sovereign authority is intersubjective, largely based on the principles and beliefs that *a dominant coalition* comes to adopt in the process of constructing an international order" (Barkin and Cronin, 1994: 128, emphasis added).[10]

Other elements contributing to this third myth also necessitate maintaining faith in certain beliefs and thus not interrogating them. International law, for instance, enables a 'humanisation' and thus a universalisation of sovereignty for Peters who thus disregards the long-established critiques of International Law as Eurocentric (Grovogui, 1996, Koskenniemi, 2001, Anghie, 2005). The place that 'human rights' occupy in the IR literature on sovereignty[11] also leads to problematic assumptions: human rights are taken as a universal and culturally-neutral concept largely associated with sovereignty, thus reinforcing the myth of sovereignty as a consensual rule of international relations. Even when 'universal human rights' are rightly identified as a norm defined by the West, the myth continues to function: Reus-Smit (2001: 534 and 536) argues that at the time of the decolonisations "The right to self-determination only triumphed because developing states skilfully grafted it to pre-existing international human rights norms" which leads him to conclude that "developing states successfully undermined the paternalism of the European colonial powers". Western norms are here

[10] On the reluctance of constructivist scholars to explore power behind sovereignty see Zarakol (2011: 14-15 and 17) and Pourmokhtari (2013: 1783).
[11] See, among others, Chopra and Weiss (1992), Barkin (1998), Krasner (1999), Reus-Smit (2001), Thompson (2006).

tactically embraced by others, their cultural (and thus constraining) character being silenced in the portrayal of the equalising powers of sovereignty.[12]

Preserving the myth of sovereignty as equality

In the previous sections, the myth of sovereignty as equality was presented and its three pillars discussed in turn. Given the existence of an extensive critical literature that contradicts this intellectual construct, one could wonder how the myth is still alive and well. In this final section, I offer one way to explain why this understanding of sovereignty continues to survive despite the criticisms it has received: the myth of sovereignty as equality has a strong normative appeal that makes it resistant to factual disproval. Importantly, this is only one possible explanation and other reasons also certainly contribute to the maintenance of the myth (such as the socialisation in a discipline that largely accepts the myth).

Using the idea of myth, it becomes possible to reveal the key role played by the desirability of the idea of sovereignty as equality in the maintenance of this conceptualisation. Sovereignty as equality possesses a mythical appeal: it depicts international relations as organised around the principle of equality and as such it is considered as a desirable reality by most scholars reproducing the myth. As a result, de-mystifying sovereignty is perceived as a step in the wrong direction as it would amount to questioning the normatively superior 'reality' that these scholars see themselves as studying. In contrast, the adherence to the mythical definition of sovereignty is perceived as more desirable *even*

[12] Very few constructivist scholars explicitly recognise this problem. One exception is Glanville (2014: 6) who justifies his choice by claiming that he does "not seek to pass normative judgement on the historical development of the relationship between sovereignty and responsibility. I claim neither that the various historical constructions of sovereign responsibilities that I trace ought to be celebrated nor that they should be lamented. I simply seek to explore how the relationship between sovereignty and responsibility has developed over time." By retreating behind the idea(l) of objectivity, Glanville authorises himself to disregard what could complicate the maintenance of the third myth of sovereignty.

when recognised as empirically inadequate. This desirability can be seen in the restriction of the extent to which the concept can be legitimately questioned. Some assumptions about sovereignty, it seems, cannot – and should not – be interrogated. Jackson (2005: 76), for instance, suggests that "[t]here are of course limits to the renovations that can be made to any institution, including sovereignty, beyond which it is changed out of all recognition and it can no longer be said to exist as such". Philpott (2001b: 316) also expresses doubts about the extent to which sovereignty could be redefined:

> Were sovereignty to mean something other than the traditional definition, were it to lose its defining features of internal supremacy and external independence, were it to mean a whole assortment of privileges, it would lose all distinctiveness. It would refer to virtually any type of authority and thus to no type of authority in particular. Indeed, why not simply jettison sovereignty in favor of the broader concept of authority and say that different polities practice different forms of authority?

The resilience of the myth is here clearly illustrated by the refusal of these scholars to question what makes sovereignty what it is and should be: a concept that contributes to international. While sovereignty as equality is recognised by these scholars as lacking descriptive capabilities, questioning the association of sovereignty with equality accounts to rejecting sovereignty altogether. It is worth quoting Jackson (1999: 456) at length on this issue:

> [as an alternative to the current situation] States might be judged by the quality of their domestic political institutions and practices which might be defined by those of liberal democratic states. Sovereignty might be conceived as an international license granted by the international community (…) If that were the case at the present time presumably not all states would be recognized. Presumably not all states would enjoy an equal right of non-intervention. Conceivably some states would be subject to international supervision or

> trusteeship until their rulers and peoples mended their domestic ways. World politics would once again contain two sorts of states: those which are sovereign and those which at least for the time being are not (…) That could be seen as a step backward rather than forward.

Here, the myth is preserved not because of its superior explanatory power – contrary to what Jackson writes it is widely acknowledged that not all states currently enjoy an equal right of non-intervention – but because the alternative is judged as normatively inferior. The myth depicts a desirable reality and as a consequence, even the lack of empirical translation of sovereignty as equality should not trigger a transformation of our conceptualisation:

> We would preserve the power of our conceptions far better by maintaining the concept of sovereignty in its traditional form and simply acknowledging that we live in a world of violations, compromises, and aberrations, of many political entities that do not enjoy full sovereign privileges (…) The concept is as valid as ever; the world does not always conform to it (Philpott, 2001b: 316).

This attachment to sovereignty as equality means that some scholars are bound to reproduce the fiction of a 'descriptive gap' – a supposed 'gap' that sparked their interest in sovereignty in the first place. Indeed, numerous scholars try to 'solve' what they identify as a 'lack of fit' or a "growing non-correspondence" (Lipping, 2010: 188) between the myth of sovereignty as equality and the reality of imperialism, colonialism and interventions in international relations.[13] In this context, the concept of sovereignty is considered by some to be "counter-factual" (Peters, 2009: 517). Others explain that it should not be expected to have 'descriptive' capabilities (Werner and Wilde, 2001: 285). Despite these

[13] Krasner (1999: 9) labels the gap a "a decoupling between the norm of autonomy and actual practice". This gap is also described by Walker (2003: vii) as "the disparity between purely legal conceptions and sources of authority and actually existing articulations and locations of political authority in the globalizing era".

striking recognitions, the conceptualisation of sovereignty is not transformed and the myth is thus preserved. In fact, this reaction illustrates that myths cannot be disproved by factual arguments (Yanow, 1992: 401). No matter that such a position contributes to the 'conundrum' of sovereignty by replacing equality at the core of the concept.

More generally, myths work by providing justifications and reasons for a part of reality that is perceived yet cannot be openly acknowledged. In this sense, myths act as 'light torches' and have a double-edged power (Bliesemann de Guevara, 2016c: 22): they highlight a specific reality – a necessary fiction – while enabling other realities to safely fade into the background. How is this silencing action of the myth working in practice? In other words, how do theorists interested in sovereignty manage to place the origins of inequalities outside of the concept of sovereignty (and thus outside of the remit of IR theorising) while still recognising that their conceptualisation fails to adequately describe international relations?

A first strategy is to shift the blame for this descriptive gap from the myth to external 'realities' not fulfilling the promises of the myth. For Lipping (2010: 188), for instance, 'new phenomena' and 'novel circumstances' make the concept of sovereignty (as equality) unable to make sense of reality. Another strategy is to emphasise the way international inequalities represent 'anomalies' when compared to the equal international order enabled by sovereignty. In particular, the use of 'history' is widespread in order to conceal these 'anomalies' or 'violations' to discrete periods of history. 'Deviations' are thus assimilated to 'historical mistakes' which in turn reinforces the 'reality' and desirability of an international order organised around the myth of sovereignty as equality. The celebrated turn to history in order to better understand sovereignty (Kalmo and Skinner, 2010: 7) is therefore having the unexpected result of furthering the myth.

This emphasis on temporal – and thus reversible – 'anomalies' takes several forms. For some, it is the past that represents the exception to sovereignty as equality. The present or contemporary period, by contrast, represents the triumph of sovereignty as equality. For Jackson (1998: 12), for instance, "trusteeship is normatively at odds with the ethos of equality of cultures, civilizations, races, etc. that entered into international society, in my view quite rightly, during the course of decolonization after centuries of inequality and discrimination." International relations are here on a path to progress towards the 'right' conception of sovereignty, namely sovereignty as equality. In this progressive evolution, the 'correct' understanding of sovereignty comes to be realised in international relations. In a similar vein Philpott (2001a: 32) explains that sovereignty started as a normative and biased concept: it required states to have a Christian culture. But this "requirement was gradually dropped over the following couple of centuries", thus allowing sovereignty to take its "modern form" (or, in other words, its 'true' meaning). Finally, Peters (2009: 519) also restricts the existence of a 'normative' or civilised sovereignty to a specific period and estimates that "[w]ith the extension of the *Ius publicum Europaeum* around the globe, the requirement that states, to become full members of the international legal system, must conform to the 'civilized nation' standard, had been abandoned."

Conversely, and as another way to maintain the myth despite its lack of descriptive capacities, sovereignty as equality can be considered as historically realised yet violated in contemporary international relations. After arguing that sovereignty as equality came to be realised in the twentieth century, Philpott (2001a: 41) also estimates that contemporary interventions authorised by the United Nations make states "accountable to a higher authority for upholding certain standards of civilized behaviour", which amounts to a revision of the 'constitution' of international relations. These contemporary 'violations', of course, can only be identified against the ideal of sovereignty as equality. Critical scholars also sometimes generate (more implicit) arguments that serve to re-establish sovereignty as equality as the norm. Zaum (2007: 4, emphases added), for instance, argues that

> Sovereignty, as understood by the international community, is *now* more than the formal-legal entitlement which formed the core of what Robert Jackson has called 'negative sovereignty', prevalent during the cold war. It *now* also entails a dual responsibility of the state towards other members of international society on the one hand, and its own citizens on the other.

Crucially, the author still refers to a period during which sovereignty as equality provided the groundrule for international relations. Sovereignty as responsibility becomes understood a contemporary historical deviation that can (and must) be corrected.

The response of these scholars to the counter-examples to the myth of sovereignty as equality is thus to dismiss such examples as 'anomalies' or 'deviations' from the well-known standard. This strategy, however, only functions thanks to a belief in the myth. By establishing 'deviations' from the idealised notion of sovereignty as historical 'exceptions' or 'mistakes', inequalities are discarded as epiphenomena that safely reside outside of the concept of sovereignty. Such a temporal restriction of 'sovereign anomalies' depends on convincingly arguing that these 'deviations' are indeed limited to a minority of cases and do not represent the way international relations generally functions. Yet such an argument is difficult to maintain. A number of IR scholars emphasise how 'anomalies' seem to overtake the norm.[14] This is particularly prevalent among those authors who identify a gap or non-correspondence between the concept and the reality of sovereignty since these scholars start their analyses from the 'violations' of the rule of sovereignty as equality. That 'anomalies' could become the normal state of affairs also reappears in historical analyses: Glanville (2014: 131) for instance explains that the normativity of sovereignty – and in particular its link to Western civilisation – needs to be understood as restricted to a historical moment, a "problematic but crucial chapter of the history

[14] In fact, it seems that a large portion of the literature on sovereignty is motivated by the supposed inability of the concept to describe international reality.

of sovereignty". Glanville situates this 'chapter' in the nineteenth century and argues that Europeans realised and claimed their civilisational superiority at this moment (101). This 'bracketing' of the Western normativity of sovereignty is contradicted, however, by his mention of (European) authors writing about the links between sovereignty and civilisation before the nineteenth century and by his silencing of the inequality built into the other regimes of sovereignty that he mentions (monarchical, national self-determination, minority and individual rights). Hence, the scholars mentioned above must repeatedly re-establish as 'deviations' the countless historical examples that reveal how sovereignty is attached to inequality.

Conclusion

As shown in this article, a large number of IR scholars defend the myth that sovereignty can ensure international equality and that, *in fine*, international relations are essentially defined by the equal potential for all actors to become sovereign. When this myth collides with the inequalities legitimised by sovereignty it is nevertheless maintained – which creates much confusion around what sovereignty is and an abundant literature dedicated to the supposedly intrinsic ambiguities of the concept (a recent example being the renewed interest in sovereignty emerging from the 'Responsibility to Protect' debates). This article has shown that a series of interrelated myths serves to hide a tension between two realities: that sovereignty is an effective tool in order to ensure equality between states and that the West benefits from an unequal status thanks to the norm of sovereignty itself. Recognising such a tension would endanger the image of IR as a noble discipline trying to organise (and make sense of) relations between independent and equal units.

The myth of sovereignty as equality, therefore, hides the provincial nature of sovereignty and its forging out of particular cultures. The myth perpetuates the misleading idea that one of the central characteristics of international relations is the ability of all states to achieve equality of status thanks

to sovereignty. In this view, international relations are therefore culture-blind or operating above cultures since the concept of sovereignty does not favour some cultural traits over others. If some schools of thoughts (such as Realism) have never argued that the international system is characterised by equality (because of the influence and agency of powerful states) these inequalities are seen by realist scholars as limited (and not strengthened) by the norm of sovereignty itself. Hence, the mainstream literature has been reluctant to accept that some states play the international 'game' with a clear advantage: through sovereignty, Western states enjoy a legitimate superiority while many non-Western states perpetually 'lag behind' and are seen as undeserving.

In response to the analysis developed in this article, two strategies seem available to disrupt the myth of sovereignty as equality. One focuses on what the myth tries to silence – i.e. that the rules of international relations favour certain specific cultural values to the detriment of others – so that "the myth ceases to divert attention away from them" (Yanow, 1992: 418). This is a task that has been carried out by scholars interested in hierarchies (Mattern and Zarakol, 2016), marginalised regions of the world (Heredia and Wai, 2018), or race (Shilliam et al., 2014), for instance. These critical contributions are rich in empirical facts and disrupt the silencing produced by the myth. The other (and less obvious) strategy is to provide alternative myths to replace the dominant one. Indeed, myth-making does not need to be conservative or in favour of the status quo. One relevant (artistic and political) example is Afrofuturism; through a re-imagining of the present inequalities and violence faced by black people, Afrofuturism offers utopian futures in which race (but also politics and international relations) are re-organised. Afrofuturism enables *thinking about* people of colour as actors by creating new and more equal futures that can influence our political present (Mosley, 2000, Kelley, 2002, Womack, 2013).

This practice of 'future myth-making' complements and extends the existing critical literature looking at the past and present of our unequal international relations. Crucially, these two strategies need to

be combined. Indeed, critical scholars have been engaging with mainstream analyses on the level of facts and 'truth' with most critical analyses assuming that mainstream scholars are unaware of the empirical shortcomings of their conceptualisation of sovereignty. In reality, and as explained in this article, the attachment to the myth remains strong because of its normative appeal (and not because of its empirical accuracy). And this normative appeal is not questioned by critical approaches: indeed, this mythical appeal of sovereignty – i.e. the achievement of more equal relations between states – is surprisingly similar to the objectives of critical scholars. If the critical endeavours of scholars interested in sovereignty are to succeed, therefore, they must combine their factual disproval with the second strategy outlined above – proposing an alternative way towards equality that does not use sovereignty as currently understood – and outline how their alternative myth could help realise what most mainstream scholars are also attached to: the achievement of a more egalitarian international system.

References

AALBERTS, T. E. 2014. Rethinking the Principle of (Sovereign) Equality as a Standard of Civilisation. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies,* 42**,** 767-789.

ADLER-NISSEN, R. 2013. Sovereignty. The state's symbolic power and transnational fields. *In:* ADLER-NISSEN, R. (ed.) *Bourdieu in International Relations.* London and New York: Routledge.

ANGHIE, A. 2005. *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

ASHLEY, R. K. 1988. Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies,* 17**,** 227-262.

AYOOB, M. 2002. Humanitarian Intervention and State Sovereignty. *The International Journal of Human Rights,* 6**,** 81-102.

BARKIN, J. S. 1998. The Evolution of the Constitution of Sovereignty and the Emergence of Human Rights Norms. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies,* 27**,** 229-252.

BARKIN, J. S. & CRONIN, B. 1994. The State and the Nation: Changing Norms and the Rules of Sovereignty in International Relations. *International Organization,* 48**,** 107-130.

BARTELSON, J. 1995. *A Genealogy of Sovereignty,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

BARTELSON, J. 2006. The Concept of Sovereignty Revisited. *The European Journal of International Law,* 17**,** 463-474.

BARTELSON, J. 2014. *Sovereignty as Symbolic Form,* Oxon and New York, Routledge.
BENTON, L. 2009. *A search for sovereignty: law and geography in European Empires, 1400-1900,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
BICKERTON, C. J., CUNLIFFE, P. & GOUREVITCH, A. (eds.) 2007. *Politics Without Sovereignty. A Critique of Contemporary International Relations,* London: University College London Press.
BIERSTEKER, T. J. & WEBER, C. 1996. The Social Construction of State Sovereignty. *In:* BIERSTEKER, T. J. & WEBER, C. (eds.) *State Sovereignty as Social Construct.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
BLANEY, D. L. & INAYATULLAH, N. 2000. The Westphalian Deferral. *International Studies Review,* 2**,** 29-64.
BLIESEMANN DE GUEVARA, B. 2016a. Introduction: Myth and Narrative in International Politics. *In:* GUEVARA, B. B. D. (ed.) *Myth and Narrative in International Politics: Interpretative approaches to the study of IR.* London: Palgrave MacMillan.
BLIESEMANN DE GUEVARA, B. (ed.) 2016b. *Myth and Narrative in International Politics: Interpretative approaches to the study of IR,* London: Palgrave MacMillan.
BLIESEMANN DE GUEVARA, B. 2016c. Myth in International Politics: Ideological delusion and necessary fiction. *In:* GUEVARA, B. B. D. (ed.) *Myth and Narrative in International Politics: Interpretative approaches to the study of IR.* London: Palgrave MacMillan.
BRANCH, J. 2012. 'Colonial Reflection' and Territoriality: The Peripheral Origins of Sovereign Statehood. *European Journal of International Relations,* 18**,** 277-297.
CHOPRA, J. & WEISS, T. G. 1992. Sovereignty Is No Longer Sacrosanct: Codifying Humanitarian Intervention. *Ethics & International Affairs,* 6**,** 95-117.
COX, R. W. 1981. Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies,* 10**,** 126-155.
DONNELLY, J. 1998. Human Rights: a New Standard of Civilization? *International Affairs,* 74**,** 1-24.
DUNN, K. C. 2003. *Imagining the Congo: The International Relations of Identity,* New York, Palgrave MacMillan.
ETZIONI, A. 2006. Sovereignty as Responsibility. *Orbis,* 50**,** 71-85.
FABRY, M. 2010. *Recognizing States. International Society and the Establishment of New States since 1776,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.
FOWLER, M. R. & BUNCK, J. M. 1996. What Constitutes the Sovereign State? *Review of International Studies,* 22**,** 381-404.
GILL, S. 1993. Gramsci and global politics: towards a post-hegemonic research agenda. *In:* GILL, S. (ed.) *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
GLANVILLE, L. 2013. The Myth of ‘‘Traditional’’ Sovereignty. *International Studies Quarterly,* 57**,** 79-90.
GLANVILLE, L. 2014. *Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect: A New History,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
GROVOGUI, S. N. 1996. *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans. Race and Self-Determination in International Law,* Minneapolis - London, University of Minneapolis Press.
HAVERCROFT, J. 2011. *Captives of Sovereignty,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
HELLER, T. C. & SOFAER, A. D. 2001. Sovereignty: The Practitioners' Perspective. *In:* KRASNER, S. D. (ed.) *Problematic Sovereignty: Contested Rules and Political Possibilities.* New York: Columbia University Press.
HELMAN, G. B. & RATNER, S. R. 1992-1993. Saving Failed States. *Foreign Policy***,** 3-20.
HEREDIA, M. I. D. & WAI, Z. 2018. *Recentering Africa in International Relations. Beyond Lack, Peripherality, and Failure,* Cham, Palgrave Macmillan.
HINSLEY, F. H. 1986. *Sovereignty,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
HOBSON, J. M. 2009. Provincializing Westphalia: The Eastern Origins of Sovereignty. *International Politics,* 46**,** 671-690.

HOBSON, J. M. 2012. *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics. Western International Theory, 1760-2010,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
HOBSON, J. M. & SHARMAN, J. C. 2005. The Enduring Place of Hierarchy in World Politics: Tracing the Social Logics of Hierarchy and Political Change. *European Journal of International Relations,* 11**,** 63-98.
INAYATULLAH, N. & BLANEY, D. L. 2004. *International Relations and the Problem of Difference,* New York, Routledge.
JACKSON, J. H. 2003. Sovereignty-Modern: A New Approach to an Outdated Concept. *The American Journal of International Law,* 97**,** 782-802.
JACKSON, R. H. 1990. *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
JACKSON, R. H. 1998. Surrogate Sovereignty? Great Power Responsibility and "Failed States".
JACKSON, R. H. 1999. Sovereignty in World Politics: a Glance at the Conceptual and Historical Landscape. *Political Studies,* 47**,** 431-456.
JACKSON, R. H. 2005. *Classical and Modern Thought on International Relations. From Anarchy to Cosmopolis,* New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
JAMES, A. 1986. *Sovereign Statehood: the Basis of International Society,* London, Allen & Unwin.
JESSOP, B. 2016. *The state: past, present, future,* Cambridge, Polity Press.
KALMO, H. & SKINNER, Q. 2010. Introduction: A Concept in Fragments. *In:* KALMO, H. & SKINNER, Q. (eds.) *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
KELLEY, R. D. G. 2002. *Freedom dreams: the Black radical imagination,* Boston, Beacon Press.
KOSKENNIEMI, M. 2001. *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
KRASNER, S. D. 1999. *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy,* Princeton, Princeton University Press.
KRASNER, S. D. 2001. Rethinking the Sovereign State Model. *Review of International Studies,* 27**,** 17-42.
KRASNER, S. D. 2004. Sharing Sovereignty: New Institutions for Collapsed and Failing States. *International Security,* 29**,** 85-120.
LAFONT, C. 2015. Human Rights, Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect. *Constellations,* 22**,** 68-78.
LAKE, D. A. 1996. Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations. *International Organization,* 50**,** 1-33.
LIPPING, J. 2010. Sovereignty Beyond the State. *In:* KALMO, H. & SKINNER, Q. (eds.) *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
LUCK, E. C. 2009. Sovereignty, Choice, and the Responsibility to Protect. *Global Responsibility to Protect,* 1**,** 10-21.
MATHIEU, X. forthcoming. The dynamics of 'civilised' sovereignty: Colonial frontiers and performative discourses of civilisation and savagery. *International Relations*.
MATTERN, J. B. & ZARAKOL, A. 2016. Hierarchies in World Politics. *International Organization,* 70**,** 623-654.
MORGENTHAU, H. J. 1948/1973. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace,* New York, Alfred A. Knopf.
MOSES, J. 2014. *Sovereignty and Responsibility Power, Norms and Intervention in International Relations,* New York, NY, Palgrave Macmillan.
MOSLEY, W. 2000. Black to the future. *In:* THOMAS, S. R. (ed.) *Dark matter. A century of speculative fiction from the African diaspora.* New York: Warner Books.
ONUF, N. 1991. Sovereignty: Outline of a Conceptual History. *Alternatives,* 16**,** 425-446.
PETERS, A. 2009. Humanity as the A and Ω of Sovereignty. *The European Journal of International Law,* 20**,** 513-544.

PHILPOTT, D. 2001a. *Revolutions in Sovereignty. How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations,* Princeton, Princeton University Press.
PHILPOTT, D. 2001b. Usurping the Sovereignty of Sovereignty? *World Politics,* 53**,** 297-324.
POURMOKHTARI, N. 2013. A Postcolonial Critique of State Sovereignty in IR: the contradictory legacy of a 'West-centric' discipline. *Third World Quarterly,* 34**,** 1767-1793.
PROKHOVNIK, R. 2007. *Sovereignties. Contemporary Theory and Practice,* New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
REUS-SMIT, C. 2001. Human Rights and the Social Construction of Sovereignty. *Review of International Studies,* 27**,** 519-538.
SCHMIDT, B. C. 1998. *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations,* Albany, State University of New York Press.
SHILLIAM, R., ANIEVAS, A. & MANCHANDA, N. (eds.) 2014. *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line,* London: Routledge.
SØRENSEN, G. 1999. Sovereignty: Change and Continuity in a fundamental institution. *Political Studies,* 47**,** 590-604.
SPRUYT, H. 1994. *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors. An Analysis of Systems Change,* Princeton, Princeton University Press.
TAYLOR, P. 1999. The United Nations in the 1990s: Proactive Cosmopolitanism and the Issue of Sovereignty. *Political Studies,* 47**,** 538-565.
THOMPSON, H. 2006. The Case for External Sovereignty. *European Journal of International Relations,* 12**,** 251-274.
THOMSON, J. E. 1995. State Sovereignty in International Relations: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Empirical Research. *International Studies Quarterly,* 39**,** 213-233.
WALKER, N. 2003. Preface. *In:* WALKER, N. (ed.) *Sovereignty in Transition.* Oxford and Portland: Hart Publishing.
WALKER, R. B. J. 1993. *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
WALTZ, K. N. 1979. *Theory of International Politics,* New York, McGraw-Hill.
WEBER, C. 1992. Reconsidering Statehood: Examining the Sovereignty/Intervention Boundary. *Review of International Studies,* 18**,** 199-216.
WEBER, C. 1995. *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, The State and Symbolic Exchange,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
WEBER, C. 1998. Performative States. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies,* 27**,** 77-95.
WEBER, C. 2001. *International Relations Theory: A critical introduction,* London, New York, Routledge.
WERNER, W. G. & WILDE, J. H. D. 2001. The Endurance of Sovereignty. *European Journal of International Relations,* 7**,** 283-313.
WOMACK, Y. L. 2013. *Afrofuturism: the world of black sci-fi and fantasy culture,* Chicago, Lawrence Hill Books.
YANOW, D. 1992. Silences in public policy discourse: Organizational and policy myths. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory,* 2**,** 399-423.
ZARAKOL, A. 2011. *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live With the West,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
ZARAKOL, A. 2018. A non-Eurocentric approach to sovereignty. *International Studies Review,* 20**,** 506-509.
ZAUM, D. 2007. *The Sovereignty Paradox. Norms and Politics of International Statebuilding,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.