Sovereignty through Practice

Multiscalarity, Reflexivity, and Interdisciplinarity

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Introduction

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Introduction

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If we accept that sovereignty is a quintessential characteristic and an indispensable quality attributed to the state by political science and international relations (IR), *where* would it begin? Proceeding from a standpoint of spatial awareness, we posit that this question does not immediately imply a universally applicable answer. Regardless of what level, in which place, or at what time one begins their search, inevitably the inquiry must fixate on actors, the people who bring sovereignty to life, those who imbue it with meaning, and those who are foundationally responsible for practising sovereignty into existence. Sovereignty reveals itself to be a dynamic and functional force, not by assuming an inherent and timeless condition, but by investigating instances of practice. In this way, this volume endeavours to advance the scholarly dialogue on sovereignty by elucidating the adjudication of state power at varying degrees of scale.

Traditionally conceived as ontologically related to the state, sovereignty is often regarded as indivisible.[1] Yet the salience of envisioning the state in purely impenetrable terms is less sustainable when one first engages with our initial query. The head of state, the governing body, the military apparatus, the courts – sovereignty's exercise depends upon disparate components that successfully conspire to act under the auspices of a cohesive state. Internal mastery of a given territory, external recognition by other states, these aspects of sovereignty need not be unsettled in this book. But by narrowing the focus to actors, more diverse constellations emerge of practitioners of sovereignty. In this volume, criminal actors, nationalist movements, digital platform companies, multinational military commanders, and still more represent actors located below, above, within, adjacent to, and at times even *in lieu* of the state. Metaphorically, these actors are akin to isolated parts of a machine. Thus identified, their relationships with the greater whole can be ascertained. As a machine is more than the sum of its parts, the question automatically follows: does one recognise a machine by virtue of viewing its parts, even when ignorant of its ultimate form? In other words, when we look at actors at any level of the state or beyond, do we still recognise sovereignty when we see it?[2]

This book addresses this challenge by dissecting sovereignty's scales of practice and surrounding it from different disciplinary angles. Methodologically, we emphasise the multiscalar nature of sovereignty: social phenomena and processes,

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including the exercise of sovereignty, can be examined, and understood at multiple scales or levels of analysis. This multiscalar approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of sovereignty, recognising that it is not limited to a single scale but is composed of complex interactions that occur at various spatial, temporal, and organisational levels. To fully understand sovereignty, we must take its *overall* spatiality seriously, recognising that sovereignty is also not solely confined to the territorial boundaries of the state.

To apply such a multiscalar approach, the book is structured around the interdisciplinary dialogue of its authors, bringing together scholars from diverse disciplines, including contemporary history, political economy, and memory studies. This choice allows for a richer and more nuanced exploration of sovereignty, shedding light on its various forms and the different types of actors and practitioners involved. If we imagine a group of scholars assembling from diverse disciplines, each holding a piece of the sovereignty puzzle, combining their pieces will reveal a more complete picture. This is the interdisciplinary approach of this book.

Furthermore, organically arising from the intermingling of diverse perspectives, we, as a collective of scholars, insist on the importance of reflexivity in the study of sovereignty. Such an approach acknowledges that researchers are not detached observers, but are themselves practitioners of sovereignty, contributing to its creation and shaping its meaning through their research. In this book, we envision scholars as parties to their own narratives, as part of the performance. Towards further bolstering the efficacy of approaching sovereignty through practice, we submit ourselves as researchers to the same intellectual inquiry utilised in our various case studies. What results from this pursuit are three reflexive "Common Chapters," as we call them, which broadly contend that the study of sovereignty inherently leads to its reproduction and reification. Moreover, we raise the awareness to how sovereignty governs, regulates, and structures our research designs and output by virtue of our unavoidable entanglement with it as object of our studies.

Sovereignty through Practitioners, Sovereignty in Practice

Since the transition from feudalism and suzerain relations to the establishment of centralised states in Europe, sovereignty remained a central concept of international studies. Despite the belief that the growing complexity of the international system set sovereignty aside, bound – and thus binding states – in competition with newly emerging structures of authority and governance,[3] to the extent that new approaches ought to be developed in face of such an "outdated concept,"[4] sovereignty has shown its recursive resiliency even in postmodern societies of states–especially in the wake of entities like the European Union, where the concept seemed consigned to the past.[5] On the contrary, in the face of unprecedented contemporary challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when necessity beckoned, states' leaderships regained mastery of their prerogatives as decision-makers and political entrepreneurs.[6] Thus, sovereignty is here to stay. Nevertheless, the extent of the state's reach in maintaining its monopoly is subject to debate.

While sovereignty has long since been considered absolute and indivisible, exclusive and unbound, vested in the state or the commonwealth, emanating from above by divine right, or anchored in the constitution or the people, in practice this myth has rarely conformed to reality. Rather, the impenetrability of the state, that is, the non-interference into domestic affairs, is a conceptualisation of sovereignty that was established only in the 19th century.[7] Much of the origin of the idea of sovereignty runs deeper, with roots in the process of secularisation of the state in Europe,[8] which progressively advanced from the *Res Publica Christiana* through the civil wars of religion of the 16th–17th centuries, to the key feature of a system of actors, the sovereigns, and then the states, recognising each other on an equal basis.[9] Asymmetrically, on the other hand, European powers "balanced" their mutual recognition concomitant to the predatory landgrabs widely practised in their colonial possessions in the Western Hemisphere.[10] At the same time, sovereignty constituted absolute control, administration, and management of affairs by one chain of actors responding to the sovereign, located atop, at the centre, and surrounded by the political life of those enclosed territorial entities that we categorise as states. Yet, this myth has rarely comported with empirical review, nor has the meaning and attributes of sovereignty remained completely immune from the flow of time.[11] Rather, sovereignty proved to be an Orwellian attribute for those "more equal than others,"[12] more akin to an "organised hypocrisy"[13] than to any equal recognition. Even still, mutual recognition sustains its relevance according to critical scholars of IR, among others.[14]

For instance, drawing on post-structuralist and feminist perspectives, Cynthia Weber challenges conventional notions of sovereignty as stable and absolute under the authority of the state. In *Simulating Sovereignty*, Weber's central argument revolves around the concept of its transformation in the modern world through the practice of international intervention in domestic affairs.[15] While affirming that a violation of sovereignty through intervention itself instigates a reifying effect, the author contends that sovereignty is not a fixed, objective reality, but rather a symbolic construct deeply intertwined with power relations and representations. With the case of external (military or foreign) intervention impugning upon a state's sovereignty, rather than diminishing its existence, such transgressions actually serve to reinforce its edifice, as only that which exists can be violated.[16] Furthermore, for Biersteker and Weber (1996), sovereignty's nature is contingent, as "there is no objective sovereignty, isolated from time and space. Depending on historical, social, and cultural contexts, a distinct set of conditions, practices and discourses was understood as an expression of sovereignty" (see also Ivanova, Chapter 7).

On a similar note, Jens Bartelson scrutinised sovereignty through a genealogical and interdisciplinary approach, exploring the origins and evolution of the concept over centuries. At the heart of Bartelson's work lies the notion that sovereignty is not merely a legal or political concept, but a symbolic form that transcends its traditional definitions and is deeply rooted in collective imagination, serving as a powerful symbol that shapes the way states and individuals perceive authority and autonomy. While rooted in history and theory, Bartelson discusses the relevance of sovereignty in the contemporary world, looking how its symbolic nature plays a pivotal role in shaping contemporary global politics, including issues related to statehood, international law, and territorial disputes.[17] Building upon his work and integrating it with insights from social theory, Epstein, Lindemann and Sending treated sovereignty as a symbolic structure to explain how struggles for recognition, and persistent failure to obtain it, are at the basis of states' search for sovereign agency.[18] Yet another biographer of sovereignty, Peter H. Russel, more recently argued that sovereignty is, in its essence, "a claim made by humans" and it is through the acceptance and enforcement of this claim that it comes into being (see Melcher, Chapter 9).[19]

Swati Srivastava has recently undertaken an insightful investigation on the practical exercise of sovereignty and its contested nature.[20] Offerings a compelling analysis of the concept of hybrid sovereignty, Srivastava refers to the intertwinement of public and private actors in global power dynamics that form the foundation of the contemporary global order. By examining such case studies as the English East India Company, the American private military contractor formerly known as Blackwater (now Academi), the International Chamber of Commerce, and Amnesty International, Srivastava argues against the perception that private organisations erode state sovereignty, concluding instead that they edify the exercise of sovereign power. Namely, she differentiates between *idealised* and *lived* sovereignty. Whereas idealised sovereignty is akin to the classical understanding of the concept, that is, all sovereign power belongs only to the state, lived sovereignty unfolds with both state and non-state actors sharing different roles in various social relationships.

Particularly insightful have been studies focusing on those actors who *claim* to be sovereign, but whose status is selectively or systematically denied by the exclusive club of the international society of states. For our purposes, "want-to-be-states" persist as entities suffering a substantial deficit in international recognition, with many entities among this category substantiating their claims by performing as (if they were) states (Nicola and Kucharzewski, Chapter 2).[21] Such performances encompass a wide range of practices oriented towards state-, nation-, and reputation-building. These practices range from evoking the symbolical aspects of being a state – such as, by adopting official state symbols, for example, their respective official flags, coats of arms, and hymns – to staging elections and developing (or often imitating) democratic politics, conducting foreign policy and, through it, supporting the construction of their image as states abroad. These aspects include interaction with states and international organisations, as well as trade, sometimes solicited, sometimes condoned, by the affirmed states of international society, more often than not without official recognition.[22]

All these approaches stress an aspect of the performativity of sovereignty, that is, exercising, shaping, and execution of sovereignty, culminating in *doing* *something*. Such a research agenda has been fruitful to the significant and influential contribution of practice theory in social sciences and the further adoption of works of authors such as Bourdieu, Giddens, or Schatzki, among others,[23] into IR (see Wang, Chapter 3). Practice theory – or theories, as it often encompasses different theoretical approaches having in common the unit of analysis, that is, practices[24] – seeks to understand human behaviour and societal phenomena through the lens of practices, routines, and actions, and emphasises that culture, society, and individual identity are not static, but emerge through the ongoing and dynamic activity.

Practice theory offers a nuanced understanding of sovereignty by scrutinising the concept as something constantly enacted and performed by individuals, institutions, and states in their daily activities and interactions. Some examples are the studies of everyday statecraft, highlighting the contribution of mundane activities to the exercise of sovereignty by means of administrative tasks, border controls, law enforcement, the issuance of passports, the role played by rituals and their symbolic significance, which is then treated as performative acts that reinforce the symbolic authority of states and their leaders.[25] In IR, practice theory has examined how states and international organisations practise sovereignty in their interactions. This includes negotiations, diplomatic exchanges, and the crafting of international agreements, all of which shape the exercise of sovereignty in the global arena.[26] Finally, such theorists also focus on discursive practices, which involve the language and narratives employed to construct and contest sovereignty. For instance, by looking at how states talk about their sovereignty, the stories they tell, and the discourses they engage in, this plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of their authority, as well as constructing, identifying, and othering potential enemies of sovereignty.[27] All told, the application of practice theory to political science and IR has informed the study of sovereignty by decoupling it from its abstraction and idealisation, connecting it to a relational dimension between actors, and seeking to demonstrate that, to be fully recognised, sovereignty can be practised, performed, showcased, and employed as part of a meaning-making process (see Gérard, Chapters 8 and 12).

Approaches to sovereignty range beyond political science and IR. For example, micro-level analyses, such as those of ethnographers and anthropologists, decentre sovereignty from the state by conceptualising it as something more akin to the power projection that one practitioner exerts over the physical body of a person, turning it into an expression of biopolitics, and claiming that sovereignty is "tentative and unstable project whose efficacy and legitimacy depend on repeated performances of violence and a 'will to rule'"[28] (see García Pinzón, Chapter 1). Other indigenous and psychological approaches distance themselves from a top-down exercise of sovereignty, and rather read it as individual and communal self-determination through "identity and the roots that ground [the author's] existence," offering a self-centred understanding of the concept "integrally tied to the revitalization of Indigenous cultures and languages through self-sufficiency and self-governance."[29] Indeed, owing to their interconnectedness with community histories and identities, indigenous approaches to sovereignty stress how sovereignty in these terms is embedded with traditional knowledge and practices, facilitated through their connection with land and language, culture, and political-legal traditions: its assertion and reclamation are by themselves struggles for recognition and self-determination. By the same token, sovereignty is treated as "multi-layered," showing instances of "temporal relativism in terms of its meaning and scope."[30] In this way, indigenous approaches to sovereignty push its margins beyond colonial notions of exclusivity, such as political borders, and normatively advocate for its reconfiguration according to local indigenous traditions.[31]

A parallel fundamental critical inquiry on the exercise and productive effects of sovereignty and borders comes from political geography. Mountz offers an overview of the conflictual sites of sovereignty,[32] ranging from prisons, islands, seas bodies and borders. Always in the attempt to escape the "territorial trap" against which Agnew duly warned scholars of international studies,[33] political geographers progressively turned to political theory, and their focus to sites of exceptionality,[34] where the rule of law – the norm – and the exercise of power rarely coincide, leading, in Butler's words, "petty sovereigns [to] abound."[35] Indeed, "although sovereignty is understood as defining the moment of state power – and, thus, has an aura of immutability – it is not immutable but is related to actual problems of governing."[36] Such an aspect makes the existence of a practical enactor of such a prerogative all the more relevant, and thereby "that sovereignty is always produced and reproduced through sovereignty practices."[37]

Sovereignty through Multiscalarity, Interdisciplinarity, and Reflexivity

While our contributors adopt different disciplinary perspectives in approaching sovereignty, our investigation is bound together by a metaphorical three-dimensional magnifier. The multiscalarity of actors, the interdisciplinarity of the dialogue between chapters, and the reflection on the role and positionality of the researcher undergird the essential framework of this volume. Perhaps in a controversial move concerning practice theory,[38] to understand the practices of sovereignty, we do not solely dedicate our observations to practices themselves; rather, we interrogate practitioners qua performers of sovereignty. We believe that to understand where the performance takes place, where the seat of sovereignty is articulated, and where its single instances are fleshed out, we cannot simply look at a practice abstractly, but it is necessary to engage with the actual performers as such. Towards fulfilling the ambition of this inquiry, this volume incorporates approaches ranging from memory studies, history, IR, political science, sociology, and political economy, among others. Ours is primarily a procedural and methodological choice, highlighting sovereignty's multifaceted elements and the ranging spatial gradations of its location. Furthermore, broadening the scope of disciplinary approaches included into this dialogue is expedient in answering the overarching questions of this volume. By broadening the methodological tool kits set to this task, namely, placing actors within the spectrum of practices of sovereignty, this disciplinary diversity provides insights that enrich the current state of the literature – not only that of IR but also that of all the disciplines intervening in this volume.

Multiscalarity refers to the idea that social phenomena and processes can be examined and understood at multiple scales or levels of analysis. By unlocking vertical and horizontal axes of analysis, the relationality of sovereignty's practice by actors at competing levels of power can be more easily accounted for. While, at a very minimum level,

> multiscalarity can be defined most simply as a property of trans-scalar action or acting across more than one geographical scale [...] it refers to a general feature of social relations whereby they have different spatial reaches of interaction, which are related to one another in different ways.[39]

In turn, in approaches informed by IR, it "focuses on the scale of social, political and economic structures and processes, and posits that in a globalising world an uneven variety of both old and new scales of interaction are crystallizing and consolidating."[40]

But how does this approach enable us to decipher the complexity of sovereignty? In approaching what he treats as multiscalar sovereignty, Agustín notes the following:

> Rather than disappeared from nation-state, sovereignty has moved to different scales from global to national and local scales. None of these scales are autonomous (there is no such thing as full sovereignty at one sole scale) but rather interconnected. However, the connection between scales is not automatic so the challenge [...] is how to interconnect them and put every scale into value.[41]

Here, Agustín makes a useful point (ironically, in brackets): *there is no such thing as full sovereignty at one scale*. And yet, despite a truncated viewpoint, we recognise sovereignty even at microscales. This is because a multiscalar framing unveils the fundamentally relational quality of sovereignty. Evident in the interaction of diverse levels, from the global to the local, from the macroscale to the microscale, from a focus on the present to historical depth, actors do not act in spatial isolation from one another.

On top of this, we do not privilege these scales in a hierarchical relation, thereby implying one to be more useful than another, precisely because practices themselves transcend and interconnect across scales. In our volume, we want to offer a complementary approach to investigate sovereignty through practices. Much of this endeavour has been part of the IR agenda for some time. With our interdisciplinary contribution, we do not pose ourselves against IR approaches. Quite the contrary, we run on a parallel line. Whereas IR, by definition, investigates international practices of sovereignty, we focus on the internal dimension of sovereignty and the multiscalarity of its practitioners.

So, where does the contribution of this volume stand? We suggest that there are at least three dimensions where our dialogue offers added value to research on sovereignty and practices.

First, as mentioned, the volume aims to collect a series of investigations on the multiscalar dimension of sovereignty through the lenses of its practitioners. In the research presented here, we stress the importance of practitioners, not in disagreement with practice theory, rather as a form of what Adler and Pouliot proposed (talking about diplomacy) as an "important subset agenda" for "studying micro-practices and everyday world politics."[42] Along these lines, ours is an attempt to better understand where practices of sovereignty are located. Practices of sovereignty are produced by actors who, in turn, being both ideal and material, cannot exist in a vacuum, but are fundamentally tied to the practical – though not necessarily conscious[43] – knowledge and instruments that practitioners can and are allowed to employ in such exercises. Rather than debating whether sovereignty is indivisible or not, can be shared or cannot, we suggest looking at it as scattered through the different levels of practice by pointing to its atomised application.

Second, the interdisciplinary approach of the volume contributes to the identification of practitioners of sovereignty and the extraction of its practice and exercise in its different forms. Arguably, what makes the project interdisciplinary is not so much the inclusion of different disciplines into one single contribution, but the overall dialogue between the authors taking place within the volume and, concretely, through the journey that accompanied its conceptualisation and realisation. Indeed, while the project itself is born as a dialogue on sovereignty between people stemming from different disciplines, and reads as a multidisciplinary endeavour, the commitment is to maintain the added value of this discussion by introducing various perspectives to our research. Finally, the reflexive contribution of the volume is of clear interdisciplinary extraction, approaching methodological approaches to the study of sovereignty from multiple disciplinary perspectives within each single contribution.

In this context of multiscalarity and interdisciplinarity, nine of the authors of this volume collaborated to reflect on how their practices as scholars can make them, and therefore us, in one way or another, practitioners, and subjects of sovereignty ourselves. Put differently, by honing in on individual actors of sovereignty, the researchers also expose and subject themselves to the very atomised forces of sovereignty that we seek to contend with. One important takeaway of this reflexivity is that we do not conflate our participation in sovereignty practice with its source; our research reifies but does authentically produce. This caveat notwithstanding, the selection of objects and states of investigation represents an exercise all its own, with the resulting inquiry edifying and reproducing a given (un)sovereign entity in research. In this way, we as scholars are not exempt from practice. Furthermore, we hold the "trap" of reifying sovereignty through research to be inescapable, therefore warranting reflection and awareness by scholars working on this topic.

Here is our embeddedness with practice theory: we do not understand sovereignty merely as a product of agency. Rather, the approaches of the book recognise both the importance of structure and agency in practising sovereignty. Put differently, the departure we take from practice theories does not reject their key promise of overcoming theoretical dichotomies between structure and agent, stability and change, rationality or practicality, ideas and matter, and so forth.[44] Rather, it assumes the existence of constant feedback and influence between the two sides. In line with the multiscalar approach of this book, all authors to some degree engage with actors and practices of sovereignty in a contested space. And it is indeed through practices of sovereignty, as we investigate in this book that we see moving beyond dichotomies as possible.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 investigates practices of sovereignty in criminal non-state armed actors as both tacit progenitors of localised authority and disturbers of the state's peace. Viviana García Pinzón problematises how millions of urban dwellers in periphery Latin American cities live under competing and overlapping sources of rule, with such actors, in turn, upending the state's exclusive monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. In this chapter, García Pinzón contends that in contested conditions of violence-affected local contexts, namely with examples from El Salvador and Colombia, fixed and static understandings of sovereignty are incapable of comprehending how sovereignty in these communities works. García Pinzón does not confine her framing and empirical review by merely categorising the deficiencies of state sovereignty in a Latin American context. Doing so simplistically applies a Western IR gaze to a postcolonial environment, lacking nuance and due diligence in research.[45] As demonstrated in this chapter, criminal actors at once threaten the physical bodies and livelihood of urban dwellers while also themselves serving as ad hoc guarantors of security. Effectively, criminal actors do not offensively assault the fundamental sovereign claim of the state government, as they seek no recognition from outside states, nor attempt to interact with international organisations.[46] Moreover, it is an underdeveloped observation to ascertain "weak" or "fragile" characteristics of states unable to immediately stifle and suffocate criminal or sectarian elements within their borders, as newer research has argued that such conditions can engender "fierce states" rapidly employing authoritarian methods of governance.[47]

Proceeding further, in Chapter 2, Silvia Nicola and Tim Kucharzewski present a comparative analysis of Kurdistan-Iraq and Abkhazia since the early 1990s. This chapter initiates its discussion by firing a salvo across the proverbial bow of mainstream IR scholarship with the contention that interaction, not recognition, serves as a more expedient metric to examine sovereignty. By employing Krasner's essential lenses, (1) domestic, (2) Westphalian/Vattelian, and (3) international sovereignty, the authors postulate that an actors-centric grounding calls for a more fluid, elastic understanding of sovereignty. The question therefore is not being reduced to absolute states, "to be, or not to be a state, but rather how and to which degree?" This chapter fits well into our overall call to examine practices, here understood as interactions, to encapsulate and provide a fuller picture of a want-to-be-state's sovereign ambitions. Other recent scholarship further implores a nuanced view of actors in Kurdistan-Iraq, taking the stance that the political actors in Kurdistani nation-building institutions are at times cohesive, and at times divergent in their behaviour towards each other.[48]

Thereafter, in Chapter 3, Yuhan Wang expands the scope of the inquiry by composing a wide-reaching socio-material analysis of Chinese digital platforms as state instruments to provide ontological security. Wang cautions against replicating previous scholarship that predominantly interprets Chinese digital sovereignty as top-down, but also advocates against exoticising digital platforms in the context of China. Increasingly, states have reversed their previously lacklustre oversight on the emerging frontier of digital landscapes and have resurgently asserted their considerable powers upon it. Wang interjects how a sovereign state can instrumentalise digital platforms to communicate, instigate, and imprint sovereign power upon its users through material interaction. While this text places digital platforms at the centre, Wang advances the notion that digital services are also reactively driven by user participation. Online actors therefore exercise their own agency in shaping the range of Chinese state authority by virtue of their daily interactions, and their acceptance of an increasingly territorialised digital space. Given that digital platforms, as infrastructure, extend beyond national territory, this chapter provides the opposite case of methodological nationalism, as it elucidates the potential extent of states to de-territorialise their power and exert it upon users across any state boundary around the world.[49]

Progressing into our collection of contributions, Jon-Wyatt Matlack's Chapter 4 draws attention to a previously critically understudied functionary of state power: The Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), the top military commander of the united military forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Examining the period of inception of the SACEUR's tenure (which continues today), this study is informed by research scholarship asserting how foreign, multinational deployments of military forces *beyond* the territory of their state, onto the area of another, engenders "conditions incompatible with sovereign independence."[50] The SACEUR's powers, however, were primarily theoretical, as his power over all NATO-assigned military forces was only realisable in wartime. Hence, SACEUR's sovereign power to control all, in a war of all against all, was latent in disposition as an unconsummated practice of sovereignty. The fact that the SACEUR was permanently held by an American, itself a practice, has led some prominent scholars to view the office as predicated by Americans constantly needing to serve as a filter on European rivalries.

Representing a refreshing pivot, in Chapter 5, Matthäus Wehowski collects four distinct nationalist movements from the immediate post-1918 collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This chapter examines the territory of Teschen Silesia, where three nationalist movements – one Polish, one German, and one Czech – and one regionalist provide impetus to understanding how state power forms in absolute abeyance of an existing authority. Ultimately, Wehowski refrains from edifying any one of these movements and contains his review of *how* national movements advocated, substantiated, and ultimately exercised their preferred state sovereignty in the context of Teschen Silesia. As eventually Polish and Czech nationalists resorted to armed conflict to seize coveted territory for a given movement, this chapter presents a unique view into how war and armed intervention were envisaged as legitimate extensions of sovereign power. With the selection of this region, we contend yet again with questions on whether nations are only successful if they come to possess a state and exercise sovereignty.

Returning to the well-travelled confines of the state, in Chapter 6, Cornelia Sahling produces a substantial empirical reckoning of the Central Bank of Russia's (CBR) most recent (2000–22) project to solidify monetary sovereignty. Sahling's selection of the CBR serves as an enticing actor to examine the overlap between the flow of global capital and the state's attempt to harness financial power into what amounts to monetary sovereignty. By exploring the practices of the CBR, we gain insight into the wider limits of state power. Regardless of internal mastery and external recognition, states can nevertheless fall well short of exercising sound and competent financial policy, the failure of which can render them susceptible to other foreign states' will. As Sahling illustrates, the CBR acted uniquely independently within the context of the Russian Federation, in an express effort to shore up perceived deficiencies in monetary sovereignty, thereby granting the Russian Executive a freer hand for military confrontation in Ukraine.

Three nodal points, the "Great Past," the "External Threat," and the "Russian World," are interrogated in Anna Ivanova's Chapter 7, which deconstructs Vladimir Putin's discursive practices. As Ivanova poignantly notes, President Putin does not forthrightly adhere to a systematic and internally consistent critique of Western perceptions of state sovereignty. Examining speeches from 1999 to February 2022, the author carefully collates six of the most significant texts of the Russian executive. The manner of discourse, be it akin to the "everyday" approach or as legal proclamation, nevertheless contributes to constructing the underlying foundation of a state's identity. As the author quickly brings to the foreground, President Putin's executive policies do not permit any sort of autonomous public discourse to occur. So constrained is the permissible speech in public spaces in Russia, that Putin's discourse artificially soars, propelled by his extraordinary grasp on institutions of all estates. This chapter, therefore, is an invaluable tool in experiencing a wide bisection of Putin's rule in Russia through his discourse practices, as we arrive at broader insights into how sovereignty is constructed and instrumentalised to gravitationally align the population around the will of the state.

With a similar methodological toolset, in Chapter 8, Nelly Gérard engages with no fewer than five political parties vying for dominance and democratic success in Holyrood in Scotland. This chapter enriches our established discussion on discourse by placing competitive political parties as the primary actors of analysis. Among her examples, Gérard reviews the duality of the Scottish National Party's (SNP) desire for political independence from the United Kingdom, even as they articulate a vision of a nation limited by the constraints of a globalised world. Concretely, Scotland (re)joining the European Union would naturally necessitate a (voluntary) forfeiture of certain core competencies. On the contrary, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party finds itself in a rhetorically rigid constraint: through analysis of speeches and published manifestos, the Scottish Conservatives are revealed to be considerably more trigger-shy in referring to Scotland as a nation in as glowingly nationalistic terms as the SNP. In this way, narratives discursively expressed carefully select and re-categorise actions, events, and past interpretations to influence perceptions in the eyes of the public.[51]

Should one be so inclined to re-enact the battle of Warsaw between the Red Army and Polish forces from 1920, or in case another vintage seems more suitable, to relive the trauma of the two-pronged Nazi/Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, then Matthias Melcher in Chapter 9 provides a fruitful forum to problematise these impulses. Melcher postulates the potency of sovereignty to substantiate *historical* claims of state power and vitality. The actor at the core of this study is the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), an entity specialising not only in the creation process of video games but also in the public dissemination of these digital products for a wider audience to consume. If the nation and its sovereignty are claims produced in a domestic dialectic, then this choice of actors illustrates the potential virality of such discursive claims to the public far beyond Poland's borders. Through visually stunning and artistically vibrant videos such as *Niezwyciężeni* ("The Unconquered"), the IPN has been quite effective in enlivening wider appeal for historical narratives and games that reify the Polish state as the quintessential defender of the Polish nation. Unlike other narrative media, video games involve a "non-trivial effort" on behalf of the player in adding value and interacting with the discourse produced by games.[52] This effectively elevates gamers participating in these games as co-conspirators in validating the Polish state's claim to sovereignty.

Reflexivity and Common Chapters

Peering beyond the veneer of intellectual neutrality, each of us as scholars has personal connections to their respective topics. Not only as a matter of study, but also in the physical task of carrying out research, state sovereignty revealed its influence.[53] Once revealed, the question remained: What role do we scholars play in our own object of study? How are we as researchers of sovereignty subject to the very same force we have dedicated so many years to study?

In an inspirational body of literature, Hannes Černy advances that the discipline of IR must critically examine the "we."[54] IR theorists are "categorizers and analysts, are co-protagonists of the social phenomena and processes we set out to describe; we do not 'make' the world," but we do "take part in influencing and shaping it."[55] In a more recent assertion, Černy more sharply implicates scholars as "co-protagonists" of their research, as the narrative production of their labour permeates into Western media, and public discourse, and even can penetrate executive decision-making.[56] An alternative formulation to this approach comes from Bueger and Gadinger, who propose that practice amounts to what "normal people are doing," and by theory, they refer to "abstract generalisations – or what academics are doing."[57] While we do concede validity to the latter, we tend to gravitate towards the former approach that blends both theory and "normal" people in practice.

As a conclusion to the volume, we have collectively dedicated ourselves to three "common" chapters that serve as miniaturised, free forums to present a given cluster of scholars with the space to reflect and ruminate on (1) how sovereignty impacts their research both in terms of sources and methodology and (2) how sovereignty affects us as individuals traversing the borders of the world to conduct our studies. Careful readers will note that it is itself a privilege to openly implicate the states we study, without fear of the coercive forces of the state. Each chapter corresponds to a common approach to research, through field research, state information, and discourse analysis. This allows for three harmonised discussions between scholars, sporting different disciplines that nevertheless share in certain core experiences. In Chapter 10, García Pinzón, Kucharzewski, and Nicola face the daunting gauntlet of challenges and physical peril that comes with field research. Circumstances, where the state fails to provide security (inner mastery), juxtapose with states that eagerly and enthusiastically enforce their own preferred regime of law and order, leaving the researcher on the receiving end. In Chapter 11, Matlack, Wehowski, and Sahling contend with sovereignty in the archives of their historical studies and from the publishing of state statistics that inform economic study. Content in the bluster that the pen (scholars) may indeed be mightier than the sword (the state), we found ourselves disquieted when confronted with the unavoidable fact that to criticise the state, we must engage with the resources and repositories of the state. Finally, in Chapter 12, Ivanova, Melcher, and Gérard complexify a discussion on the validity of discourse analysis as an approach to studying state sovereignty in the first place, quickly punctuated by a broader reflection on how each scholar's positionality served as a factor in their own respective research.

Notes

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2 We owe this contemplation to: Bruno Latour, "*Onus Orbis Terrarum*: About a Possible Shift in the Definition of Sovereignty," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (June 2016): 7–9, https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829816640608.

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16 See also Helle Malmvig, “The Reproduction of Sovereignties: Between Man and State during Practices of Intervention,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 36, no. 3 (September 2001): 251–272, https://doi.org/10.1177/00108360121962416.

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21 While we remand to Nicola and Kucharzewski’s chapter for a deeper discussion on terminology, for the importance of the aspect of contestation, see Bruno Coppieters, “Abkhazia, Transnistria and North Cyprus: Recognition and Non-Recognition in Ceasefire and Trade Agreements,” *Ideology and Politics*, 2019, 16–18.

22 The literature on these aspects has solidly developed in recent years. Among many others, for literature on these aspects, see Laurence Broers et al., eds., *The Unrecognized Politics of de Facto States in the Post-Soviet Space* (Yerevan: Caucasus Institute and International Association for the Study of the Caucasus (IASC), 2015); Dimitris Bouris and Irene Fernández-Molina, "Contested States and Their Everyday Quest for Recognition," in *Routledge Handbook of State Recognition*, 1st ed., eds. Gëzim Visoka, John Doyle, and Edward Newman (Abingdon; New York : Routledge, 2020), 333–42, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351131759; Sophie Gueudet, "Displays of Statehood," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 56, no. 4 (December 2023): 121–142, https://doi.org/10.1525/cpcs.2023.1998962; Daria Isachenko, *The Making of Informal States Statebuilding in Northern Cyprus and Transdniestria* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Gëzim Visoka, *Acting Like a State: Kosovo and the Everyday Making of Statehood*, Interventions (Abingdon; New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018).

23 Some of these works include Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, repr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, 1. paperback ed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Karin Knorr Cetina et al., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2005); See Leonie Holthaus, "Who Practises Practice Theory (and How)? (Meta-)Theorists, Scholar-Practitioners, (Bourdieusian) Researchers, and Social Prestige in Academia," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 48, no. 3 (June 2020): 323–33, https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829820935177 for a more detailed account.

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38 Nicolini, *Practice Theory, Work, and Organization*, 6–8.

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43 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, repr (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 35–36.

44 Adler and Pouliot, "International Practices.".

45 Pourmokhtari, "A Postcolonial Critique of State Sovereignty," 1767–1768.

46 Weak states beset by violence have been noted as still internationally sovereign. See Enrique Desmond Arias, *Drugs and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro Trafficking, Social Networks, & Public Security* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 43.

47 Heydemann and Chace-Donahue, "Sovereignty versus Sectarianism," 10.

48 Kamaran Palani, *Kurdistan's De Facto Statehood: A New Explanatory Framework* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 21.

49 Cf. Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology," *The International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (2003): 578.

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53 Special thanks go to a coffee-imbued discussion with Silvia Nicola, whose justified frustration with entering Iraq served as the launching point for this effort.

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55 Hannes Černy, *Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations: Theory and Ethnic Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2018), 2.

56 Hannes Černy, “How Kurdistan Independence Debate Came to Die: Western IR Scholars as Co-Protagonists of the National Conflicts They Set Out to Describe,” in Černy and Grzybowski, *Variations on Sovereignty*, 108–130.

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