Paper title

Spectra of Sovereignty: Nationalism and International Relations

Author information

Name:　　　　Jaakko Heiskanen

Affiliation:　University of Cambridge

Position:　　PhD Candidate, Department of Politics and International Studies (POLIS)

Address:　　St Catharine's College, Trumpington Street, CB2 1RL, United Kingdom

Email:　　　jwh48@cam.ac.uk

Abstract

This article furthers our understanding of the ontology of modern international relations by foregrounding the neglected structuring role of nationalism. Most accounts of nationalism in international relations reduce the phenomenon to a peripheral threat, whereby nationalism only seems to become relevant in moments when the international order is in crisis. In contrast, I argue that the ontology of modern international relations is inherently parasitic on nationalism. Leveraging on Jacques Derrida's writings on "hauntology," this article recasts nationalism as a spectral logic that silently structures the ontology of modern international relations even when it seems to remain absent and ineffective. In particular, I explain how the contradictions of nationalism become embedded in the concept of sovereignty, which serves as the ontological cornerstone of modern international relations. Transgressions of sovereignty are therefore not reducible to a tension between normative and factual levels, or logics of appropriateness and logics of consequences, but stem from the structural impossibility of the nationalist project itself. Viewed this way, the aporetic form of sovereignty is not merely a logical conundrum, but a vital and productive ontological opening that sets international relations in motion.

Keywords

Acknowledgements

Spectra of Sovereignty: Nationalism and International Relations

A spectre is haunting sovereignty—the spectre of nationalism…

Sovereignty is the ontological cornerstone of modern international relations in both theory and practice.[1] It is unsurprising, therefore, that IR scholars have produced a substantial corpus of theoretical literature on the topic (e.g. Bartelson 1995, 2014; Biersteker and Weber 1996a; Kalmo and Skinner 2010; Krasner 1999; Walker 1993; Weber 1994). At the same time, however, there is also a marked tendency among these scholars to resign themselves to the inscrutability of sovereignty. Many have reached the conclusion that sovereignty is an essentially contested concept that can never be properly defined (e.g. Bartelson 1995, 13-6; Walker 1993, 166; Weber 1994, 9; see also Kalmo and Skinner 2010). Others have pointed to an irreconcilable tension between sovereignty as a legal or normative principle and sovereignty as an empirical fact (e.g. Koskenniemi 2006; Krasner 1999). All in all, the prognosis is rather bleak: "the question of sovereignty, viewed as a practical political problem, is an intrinsically paradoxical problem that can never be named, rationally deliberated, and solved" (Ashley and Walker 1990b, 375).

The objective of this paper is not to "solve" the problem of sovereignty. To the contrary, the analysis largely corroborates the consensus among critical IR scholars that sovereignty marks the site of an insoluble aporia. Instead, the contribution of this paper lies in elucidating the historical and structural reasons for the existence of this aporia. This is done by foregrounding the neglected link between sovereignty and nationalism, and by tracing the inscrutability of sovereignty to the structural impossibility of the nationalist project itself: the impossibility of the nationalist project perpetually "haunts" the ontology of modern international relations, inscribing its own aporetic structure upon the concept of sovereignty. By closely scrutinising this logic of haunting, it becomes possible to comprehend how the concept of sovereignty *works* without having to "solve" its insoluble contradictions. In fact, I argue that it is precisely the aporetic quality of sovereignty that *makes international relations work*, by requiring an endless negotiation and renegotiation of the border line between the domestic and the international. Viewed this way, sovereignty is not merely the site of an

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[1] Throughout this article, "international relations" (lower case) is used as a general term that encompasses both the academic discipline and the arena of practice that is its object of analysis, while "International Relations" or "IR" (upper case) is used specifically with reference to the academic discipline.

insoluble problem, but a vital and productive ontological opening that sets international relations in motion.

The marginalisation of nationalism in international relations has been accomplished through a double move. On the one hand, the nation is depicted as equivalent to the state: there is a widespread tendency to "collapse the nation into the state by conveniently assuming that the former is supervened by the latter" (Berenskoetter 2014, 263; see also Agnew 1994; Mandelbaum 2013). This is manifest in routine references to "national interests" and "national security" by scholars and practitioners alike. At the extreme, it has been suggested that "international relations" is an unfortunate misnomer for a field that would be better called "interstate relations" (Connor 1978, 383). Even those IR scholars who take culture and identity seriously tend to posit a congruence of "national identity" and "state identity" and use these terms more or less interchangeably (see e.g. Doty 1996; Kowert 1998; Lebow 2016; Subotić and Zarakol 2012).

On the other hand, in the relatively few cases where nationalism is discussed explicitly, the nation is depicted as antagonistic to the state. For example, J. Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin (1994, 108) contend that modern nationalism entails a "historical tension" between "state sovereignty" and "national sovereignty." In a similar vein, the international law scholar Martti Koskenniemi (1994, 249-51) contrasts "classical" and "romantic" conceptions of self-determination, defining the former in state-centric and the latter in nation-centric terms. The most thorough exploration of the role of nationalism in international relations by an IR scholar, James Mayall's *Nationalism and International Society*, makes the same dichotomising move: in Mayall's (1990, 35-6) account, the modern international order was forged through an "ideological confrontation" between the conflicting principles of state sovereignty and national self-determination. In this framing, nationalism is reduced to an external threat which occasionally disrupts the habitual practice of international relations, and which disappears once a new compromise between state sovereignty and national self-determination is found.

Taken together, this double move transforms international relations into interstate relations and banishes nationalism to the peripheries of the international order. To explain this counterintuitive marginalisation of nationalism by a field which, after all, derives its name from the nation, I draw inspiration from Jacques Derrida's writings on "hauntology." In contrast to ontology, which is concerned with being and becoming, hauntology also encompasses the paradoxical "effectivity" of that which "seems to remain ineffective, virtual, insubstantial" (Derrida 1994, 10). The defining motif of hauntology is thus the figure of the

ghost or spectre, "which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive" (Davis 2005, 373). The essence of spectrality is precisely the aporetic mediation between presence and absence. And yet, even as it resists the binary choice between presence and absence, hauntology does not replace ontological theorising with vague approximations or a simplistic empiricism of difference in degree. Instead, it entails the elaboration of a different kind of "logic" that supersedes classical binary logic (Derrida 1988, 116-9). This deviant logic, which Derrida (1994, 10-1) describes as a "logic of haunting," is able to comprehend not only the structural reasons for which ontologisation always runs into certain limits, but also the spectres animating the conceptual paradoxes that inevitably result from these limits—in this case, the paradox of sovereignty.

The constitution of any ontology requires a "conjuration" of spectrality (Derrida 1994, 161). This conjuration is twofold: on the one hand, it entails the exorcism of spirits or the disavowal of something that is present; on the other, it entails the calling forth of spirits or the summoning of something that is absent (Derrida 1994, 40-8). In this contradictory spirit, I argue that *the ontology of international relations is constituted through a conjuration of nationalism.* On the one hand, due to the fact that it poses a terrifying ontological threat to international order through irredentism and secession, the spectre of nationalism must be exorcised for the ontology of international relations to cohere—hence why nationalism only seems to make an appearance at times when the international order is in crisis. On the other hand, nationalism must also be continually summoned for international relations to be intelligible: without the figure of the nation, references to national interests, national security, national identity, or even the "international" would be nonsensical. Any eruption of nationalism on the international stage is merely the materialisation of a spectre that is always-already at work.

The motif of spectrality must be sharply distinguished from the standard depiction of the nation as an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006). Typically, the nation as an "imagined community" acquires effectivity only when the nation is imagined to exist, to be present, in the present: the act of imagination is about bringing into presence the national community. In contrast, the nation as a spectre acquires effectivity precisely when it seems to be absent: the spectre makes itself felt even as it fails to materialise. Accordingly, as regards existing literature on nationalism, it is Michael Billig's notion of "banal nationalism" that comes closest to approximating the motif of spectrality, given that this refers to the "invisible" nationalism of established nation-states. In particular, Billig's (1995, 38) depiction of the "forgotten reminding" of nationhood resonates with the paradoxical present/absent status of

the spectre: the banal "flaggings" of the nation are so ubiquitous that they "operate mindlessly, rather than mindfully. The remembering, not being experienced as remembering, is, in effect, forgotten."

Leveraging on Billig's seminal work, a number studies have explored the variegated ways in which nationalism becomes sedimented in the "everyday" of national life (e.g. Edensor 2002; Skey and Antonsich 2017). However, these works generally remain confined to the domestic sphere and ignore the more universal structuring role of nationalism internationally. As one commentator notes, scholarship on nationalism has been characterised by "an almost exclusive focus on its subjective and discursive contours, especially the internal heterogeneity and difference that nationalisms seek to subsume and contain" (Goswami 2002, 773). To some extent, then, this paper can be read as an effort to transpose the framework provided by "banal nationalism" to the international realm. In so doing, the paper extends and deepens existing critiques of "methodological nationalism" in the social and political sciences (Chernilo 2006; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). As Angharad Close Stephens (2013, 29) has emphasised, "the argument about 'methodological nationalism' rarely goes far enough." Even cosmopolitan and globalist attempts to transcend the framework of nation-states frequently contain a "residual" nationalism insofar as they posit an either/or choice between nationalism on the one hand and cosmopolitanism or globalism on the other (Close Stephens 2013, 111-4). However, whereas Close Stephens is primarily concerned with developing the lens of "urban encounters" as an alternative way of imagining community, this paper has a rather different objective: to explain, in a systematic fashion, the structural relationship between sovereignty, nationalism, and international relations.

To undertake this task, it is essential to recognise a shift in the register of nationalism as it enters the international stage: a shift from a particular to a universal register. This follows logically from the dual structure of nationalist discourse, which is characterised by the linkage of particular ethno-cultural contents to the universal form of the modern state: "The circulation of particular nationalist models cannot be understood apart from the structural constitution of the nation form as transposable within the modern inter-state system." (Goswami 2002, 783). In short, nationalism becomes *formalised* and *objectified* as it enters the international stage. This differs from the banalisation or sedimentation of nationalism in the domestic sphere insofar as it is not merely the contents of a particular nationalism, but *the universal form of nationalism itself*, that is embedded in the ontology of modern international relations. As a result, the focus of analysis must shift from the everyday practices that

(re)produce particular national identities to the quasi-transcendental conceptual structures that enter into the constitution of *all* national identities—most notably, the concept of sovereignty.

The remainder of this paper is organised into four sections and a conclusion. The first section reviews existing understandings of sovereignty in IR and demonstrates the systematic neglect of nationalism in these literatures. The second section outlines the historical emergence of the modern territorial state and argues that the modern state suffers from an inherent condition of ontological insecurity which requires the concept of the nation as a supplement. The third section is concerned with the contradictory logic of nationalism that emerges from the interplay of nation and state: nationalism not only underpins the ontological security of the state, but also threatens this security by legitimating irredentist and secessionist claims. The fourth section explains how the aporetic logic of nationalism forms the ontology of modern international relations, depositing its own internal contradictions onto the concept of sovereignty in the process. Transgressions of sovereignty in international relations are therefore not reducible to a tension between normative and factual levels, or logics of appropriateness and logics of consequences, but stem from the structural contradictions of the nationalist project itself. The concluding section sketches out some of the implications of the analysis with regard to the fate of state sovereignty in a globalising world.

The Concept of Sovereignty in International Relations

Sovereignty and statehood are so closely intertwined in modern international relations as to be almost inseparable (cf. Hoffman 1997). Thus, it is "sovereignty" that distinguishes a single federal state from a confederation of multiple states (Onuf 1991, 423). More specifically, sovereignty has both an internal and an external component: internally it means that "there is a final and absolute authority in the political community," and externally it means that "no final and absolute authority exists elsewhere" (Hinsley 1986, 1; see also Brown 2014, 52-4; Bull 1977, 8-9; Jackson 1990, 26-31; James 1986, 50-7). By extension, the concept of sovereignty also implies a relationship of formal equality among states: "None is entitled to command; none is required to obey." (Waltz 1979, 88).

As poststructuralist scholars such as Richard K. Ashley and R. B. J. Walker have demonstrated, this Janus-faced concept of sovereignty—facing both inward and outward—is the ontological cornerstone of modern international relations (e.g. Ashley 1988, 1989; Ashley and Walker 1990a, 1990b; Walker 1993). It is the presence of sovereignty that defines the

domestic space as orderly and peaceful, and correspondingly, it is the absence of sovereignty that defines the international realm as anarchic and war-prone. This basic distinction between the inside and the outside of the sovereign state is upheld through a series of mutually reinforcing binary oppositions: peace/war, order/disorder, progress/stasis, and so on. In each pair, the first term is privileged while the second is depicted as a dangerous degeneration thereof.

Perhaps the most eloquent discussion of sovereignty along these lines can be found in Jens Bartelson's *Genealogy of Sovereignty*. Leveraging on Derrida's work, Bartelson (1995, 49-52) suggests that sovereignty functions akin to a "parergon" that frames a work of art—for instance, the frame of a painting. The parergon is not an intrinsic feature of the object, but "a frame, a line of demarcation, an ontological divide" that makes it possible to distinguish the object from its background in the first place. Accordingly, sovereignty qua parergon resides neither inside nor outside the state, but is the condition of possibility of both: "there is a ceaseless activity of *framing*, but the frame itself is never present, since it is itself unframed" (Bartelson 1995, 51). Sovereignty, then, is nothing but the difference between the inside and the outside; it has no "essence."

This conceptualisation of sovereignty as a parergonal frame is evocative but incomplete. Without a doubt, the ideal parergon would be devoid of any content of its own so that it does not detract attention away from the work of art that it frames: "in its purity, it ought to remain colorless, deprived of all empirical sensory materiality" (Derrida 1987, 64). However, a minimal degradation of the parergon is inevitable: even as it melts into the background in relation to the foreground and into the foreground in relation to the background, the parergon must also be distinguishable from both. In the end, all parerga "have a thickness, a surface which separates them not only […] from the integral inside, from the body proper of the *ergon*, but also from the outside, from the wall on which the painting is hung" (Derrida 1987, 60-1). This "thickness" of the parergon is easily overlooked because it does not stand out, does not draw attention to itself, but instead "disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy" (Derrida 1987, 61). In short, the "thickness" of the parergon is a "spectral" object: it is most effective precisely when it seems to be absent.

By idealising sovereignty as a perfect parergon, as a pure divide between the inside and the outside of the state, poststructuralist IR scholars have limited themselves to questions of ontology at the expense of hauntology—how the concept of sovereignty shapes the world, rather than how the concept of sovereignty itself is shaped. To quote Cynthia Weber (1994,

3), the central question of the poststructuralist research agenda on sovereignty has been, "how do practices of theorists and diplomats stabilize the meaning of sovereignty and, by default, write the state?" The focus is thus placed squarely on the social construction of the inside/outside dichotomy, which requires "a great deal of hard work on the part of statespersons, diplomats, and intellectuals" (Biersteker and Weber 1996b, 3). In the same vein, Bartelson's recent work on sovereignty as "symbolic form," while extending the discussion to encompass the impact of global governance mechanisms, remains concerned with how sovereignty "not only structures our perception of political reality, but also allows us to shape objects in rough conformity with this form" (Bartelson 2014, 15). What this exclusive focus on the "external" ontological structuring effects of sovereignty has left out is the "internal" hauntological structuring of the concept of sovereignty itself. To be clear, the hauntological "inside" of the parergon is not the same as its ontological inside: the latter is simply the domestic society, whereas the former refers to *a spectre that breaches the inside/outside distinction from "within" the slash*.

For poststructuralist theorists, the neglect of the hauntological dimension is largely self-inflicted, stemming from the second of two theoretical moves that they make. The first move is to decentre the field by migrating to its "margins" or "border lines" (e.g. Ashley 1989; Ashley and Walker 1990a, 1990b). The starting point of poststructuralist IR is thus "a boundary that it puts in question: the boundary between domestic and international politics" (Ashley 1989, 260). Another name for this boundary is, of course, sovereignty. It is at this stage that these scholars make their second and more problematic theoretical move: in order to destabilise the inside/outside opposition, they deliberately place sovereignty "under erasure" (Ashley and Walker 1990b, 377; Weber 1994, 9). When it comes to understanding the role of nationalism in international relations, this second move proves fatal because in erasing sovereignty it also erases the spectral logic that structures sovereignty from "within."

In sum, if sovereignty is indeed a parergonal frame or a symbolic form, it is necessary to understand what this frame is *made of*, or what this form is *formed of*—it is necessary to understand *sovereignty itself as a product*. In referring to sovereignty as a "product," I do not simply mean the practices of statecraft that (re)produce sovereignty as a parergonal frame, but the semi-autonomous hauntological labour that takes place "within" the frame itself, "within" the slash that separates the inside and the outside: the parergon "creaks and cracks, breaks down and dislocates even as it cooperates in the production of the product, overflows it and is deduc(t)ed from it. It never lets itself be simply imposed." (Derrida 1987, 75). Sovereignty, then, is always-already structured by a silent spectral logic that belongs neither to the inside

nor to the outside, but breaches the parergon from "within." It is this logic of haunting, herein strategically nicknamed "nationalism," that gives sovereignty its Janus-faced modern form—nationalism refers to *the formation of sovereignty's form*. Accordingly, in contrast to mainstream IR which has generally ignored nationalism by taking sovereignty for granted, and poststructuralist IR which has (perhaps unwittingly) placed nationalism under erasure, this paper intends to take nationalism very seriously indeed.

The Modernity of the State

Nietzsche (1976, 453) famously remarked, "only that which has no history is definable." Accordingly, given the difficulties that scholars have had in defining sovereignty, a historical approach to the problem seems most appropriate. Specifically, it must be recognised that the concept of sovereignty is not a transcendental given, but a particular feature of modern political discourse: "it is modernity's career to which the concept of sovereignty has been ineluctably tied" (Onuf 1991, 425). The concept of sovereignty can therefore only be properly understood by considering its formation in the historical-structural transformations that marked the onset of modernity, particularly the emergence of the modern territorial state.

In stark contrast to the modern world of nation-states, the socio-political landscape of pre-modern Europe comprised a patchwork of lord-vassal relations with overlapping religious and political jurisdictions. There was no clear distinction between domestic and international or public and private (Osiander 2001; Ruggie 1993). Pre-modern "society," insofar as this term is even applicable, was one of ranks or orders, characterised by hierarchical relations and mediated access. A peasant, for example, owed allegiance to a lord, who in turn owed allegiance to the king: "one belonged to this society via belonging to some component of it" (Taylor 1999, 224). The copious divisions and sub-divisions of this socio-political mosaic were held together by the notion of a divine chain of being (Bauman 1992, 681). In other words, the medieval conception of human community was fundamentally universalistic: linguistic and regional differences were subsumed under a universal Christian norm which transcended its component parts. The earthly community was taken as an expression of a heavenly transcendental order, with the monarch as the half-human, half-divine link between the two (Bartelson 1995, 91-2; Osiander 2001, 127-36). The existence of a plurality of political communities was ascribed to the will of God (Seth 1995, 44).

The reigning consensus among scholars is that the modern world was forged over the course of the long nineteenth century (e.g. Bayly 2004; Buzan and Lawson 2015; Osterhammel 2014). This entailed a radical transformation of the hegemonic socio-political imaginary "from hierarchical, mediated-access societies to horizontal, direct-access societies" (Taylor 1999, 224). The centrepiece of the new order was an abstract conception of citizenship, which posited a direct and homogeneous relationship between the state and its citizens. Although detailed accounts vary, the key historical processes included the emergence of standardised public spheres courtesy of "print-capitalism" (Anderson 2006), the consolidation of territorially defined bureaucratic polities that sought to cultivate heterogeneous "low cultures" into homogeneous "high cultures" (Gellner 1983), and the development of market economies wherein participants were seen to enter into contractual relations on an equal footing (Taylor 1999, 224-5). These developments were not wholly endogenous to Europe, but took place in a global context wherein colonial encounters with a plurality of "others" catalysed a fundamental rethinking of socio-political order (Anghie 2005; Branch 2012). The pre-modern universal conception of human community gradually gave way to an emphasis on local particularity: the "vantage point from which human affairs could be contemplated" was "literally brought down to earth" (Bartelson 2009, 107). This secularisation of space and time in turn entailed a new understanding of history as something which was makeable by men and which "no longer required recourse to God or nature" (Koselleck 2004, 196; see also Fasolt 2004, 19-20). The pre-modern assumption of an always-already-existing God-given order was replaced by an assumption of natural contingency (Bauman 1991, 4-5).

Order in modernity is provided by the sovereign state. Whereas the so-called "feudal state" had been built around personal ties of obedience, the modern state is a territorially-defined impersonal entity with standardised legal codes (Spruyt 2002, 129-35; see also Skinner 1989). As the ultimate guarantor of order and justice in modernity, the state basically has the function of a secularised and historicised God—to paraphrase Hegel, the state is the "Divine Idea on Earth" (as cited in Wight 2004, 269). However, abstract concepts such as order and justice are seldom sufficient to unite citizens, as this would reduce the state to a mere mutual-benefit society without affective ties (Parekh 1990, 254-5; Seth 1995, 48-50). More fundamentally, such universal principles are incapable of legitimating the existence of any *particular* state: there exists an ineradicable tension between the universal values that the modern state claims to embody and the inescapable geographical and historical particularity

of any individual state. This, in a nutshell, is what Istvan Hont (1994) calls the "permanent crisis" of the territorial state. And this is why the state must turn (in)to the nation.

The Undecidability of the Nation

Due to the contradiction between its claim to universality and its inherently particularistic existence, the modern state requires "supplementary work" (see Derrida 1987, 56). This supplementary work consists of the reification of "society" and its projection as "an alternate place" that can serve as "the ultimate source of legitimacy for the state" (Wæver 1993, 19). Whereas medieval rulers were seen to reside within a universal society that existed independent of them, modern society is seen to exist only within the state (Osiander 2001, 141). The state/society distinction is therefore not symmetrical, but society exists only insofar as it is doubled or re-presented in the structure of the state: the state conceals the inherent inconsistency of society by re-presenting it in its own image and thereby retroactively positing society as a unified totality (Badiou 2005, 97-115; Weber 1994, 7-8). Put differently, society is a symptom of the state: without a state to "domesticate" it, the sphere of the social would be nothing more than an "infinite play of differences" (Laclau 1990, 91). The distinction between state and society is therefore not an external difference between two separate objects, but "a line drawn internally within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained" (Mitchell 1991, 78).

Nationalism arises precisely from this uniquely modern distinction between state and society: the core principle of nationalism is that each society is a unique nation and that each nation should be as independent as possible (Breuilly 1993, 2; Gellner 1983, 1). In this way, nationalism seeks to "ground" the abstract concept of the state in a particular ethno-cultural community or nation (Parekh 1995, 34). Critics of this "modernist" thesis have argued, with some justification, that national identities and nationalist language predate the emergence of the modern state (e.g. Hastings 1997; Hirschi 2012). However, the crucial point is that "there was a remarkable time lag between the creation of nationalist language and the implementation of nationalist politics. By the end of the fifteenth century, the concept of the nation was almost fully developed in scholarly literature, whereas in political practice, imperialist, dynastic and religious principles would prevail for another three centuries." (Hirschi 2012, 3; see also Hastings 1997, 3-4). It is only after nationalist language makes the

passage from scholarly literature to political practice that it becomes possible to talk about nationalism in the modern sense of this term.

The watershed moment was the French Revolution, which "redefined the nation from a diffuse sentiment to a specific program for political and constitutional action" (Sewell 2004, 96; see also Bukovansky 1999).[2] This reconfiguration of the nation was epitomised by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789, which proclaimed that "the source of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation" (as cited in Connor 1978, 382). The modern nation form that was thus forged in the furnace of the French Revolution turned out to be highly modular and was rapidly mimicked around the world (Anderson 2006; Goswami 2002). As a result, nationalism has managed to establish itself as the hegemonic discourse of state legitimacy: "today no state possesses legitimacy which does not also claim to represent the will of the 'nation', even where there is as yet patently no nation for it to represent" (Smith 1992, 62; see also Connor 1981).

However, due to its linkage of the state to a particular nation, nationalism not only legitimates the state, but always-already-also threatens this legitimacy by undermining the state's claim to embody "universal goals of rationality, objectivity, progress, and development" (Subotić and Zarakol 2012, 918). By breaching the universality of the state, nationalism ensures that the identity and borders of the state are always open to contestation, opening the door to irredentist and secessionist claims (Brubaker 1998, 278-80; Mayall 1990, 57-63). This ontological threat is inescapable because the ethno-cultural community that the state claims to represent is not pre-given, but a symptom of the state itself. Every self-styled nation-state is haunted by national minorities.[3] The state must therefore engage in a never-ending process of "writing" the nation, of inscribing the nation into society even as it posits this nation as its pre-given foundation: "the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space" (Bhabha 1990, 300; see also Weber 1994, 27-8). There is thus a kind of "mutual haunting" of nation and state, where each calls upon the other to supplement itself without the two ever being fully reconciled (Cheah 2003, 307-47). Due to this mutual entanglement, nationalism is not only a terrifying menace to the integrity of the state, but also the surest protection against this menace.

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[2] It is noteworthy that two key terms were first recorded in the context of the French Revolution: "international" was coined in 1789 by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (Der Derian 1989, 3) and "nationalism" was coined in 1798 by the exiled French priest Jacques Barruel (De Bertier De Sauvigny 1970, 155).

[3] In a fascinating article on the conceptualisation of "spectral" legal personality in interwar international law, Natasha Wheatley (2017, 758) notes that national minorities were "likened to slaves and ghosts."

Reflecting this tension, the word "nation" has acquired a dual meaning, signifying a state as well as a particular ethno-cultural community. This is not simply a terminological muddle (cf. Barrington 1997; Connor 1978), but a structural effect of what Slavoj Žižek has called the "parallax gap." The parallax gap refers to a situation where there are "two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible" (Žižek 2009, 4). To be clear, this does not entail a relativist claim where an object merely appears different when viewed from two different perspectives. Instead, the critical feature of the parallax gap is that there is in fact no object apart from the difference in its framing: "in contrast to a mere difference between objects, *the pure difference is itself an object*" (Žižek 2009, 18). Viewed this way, the nation can be conceptualised as the pure difference between state and society: the nation does not indicate a presence, but a constitutive gap at the heart of the modern socio-political edifice. By simultaneously connecting and separating state and society, the concept of the nation achieves "an *impossible short circuit* of levels which, for structural reasons, can never meet" (Žižek 2009, 3). As John Breuilly (1993, 62) observes, "Nationalist ideology never makes a rational connection between the cultural and the political concept of the nation because no such connection is possible."

The nation as the pure difference between state and society belongs to the category of "undecidables" (Bauman 1991, 58-9). The notion of undecidability must be clearly distinguished from the notion of contestability that has been widely deployed in constructivist approaches to nations and nationalism (e.g. Brubaker 1998, 279-80; Calhoun 1997, 98-9). Simply put, constructivist approaches take communities such as nations to be socio-political "projects" that must be continually (re)produced through discursive practices: nations "are not things *in* the world, but perspectives *on* the world" (Brubaker 2004, 17). An understanding of the nation as undecidable does not contradict this argument, but instead adds a further twist: although the nation is indeed not a "thing *in* the world," it is not wholly reducible to a set of discursive practices either. Without the existence of a quasi-transcendental concept of the nation, it would not be possible to distinguish a nation from any other type of community: the spectral figure of the nation—together with its connotations of sovereignty, territoriality, and so on—necessarily enters into the constitution of *all* particular national identities.

In contrast to the basically empirical argument implied by the notion of contestability, the notion of undecidability implies a logical or structural argument: the nation as undecidable is not mere "indeterminacy," but "a *determinate* oscillation" between state and society (Derrida 1988, 148). If the fundamental objective of the nationalist project is the congruence of state and society, then the nation as the difference between state and society is the object

that opens up the space for this project in the first place. By implication, however, the nation is also the object that stands in the way of this project: for the nationalist project to be completed, for state and society to be congruent, the nation as the difference between state and society must be effaced. In other words, the nationalist project is "*an effect which exists only in order to efface the causes of its existence*" (Žižek 2008, 100). The problem, however, is that if the difference between state and society were to be effaced, then the primordial lack at the core of the modern state would be revealed—or not revealed, which is the same thing for a lack (Derrida 1987, 59-60). To avoid this terrible crisis, the nation must never be completely effaced and the completion of the nationalist project must always be deferred. The nation is thus not only the condition of possibility, but also the condition of impossibility, of the nationalist project.[4]

The Hypocrisy of Sovereignty

To comprehend the significance of nationalism's aporetic logic for international relations, it is necessary to recognise that, akin to sovereignty, the concept of the nation has an internal and an external dimension (Kowert 1998; Todorov 1993, 171-6). On the one hand, in its internal dimension, the concept of the nation invokes the aforementioned relationship between state and society: "The nation is a space of legitimation, and as a source of power it is opposed to kingly or divine right." (Todorov 1993, 175). On the other hand, in its external dimension, the concept of the nation invokes a boundary with other nations: "No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind." (Anderson 2006, 7; see also Triandafyllidou 1998). In other words, the state/society opposition is accompanied by an inside/outside opposition. And given that another name for the inside/outside opposition in international relations is "sovereignty," it is the relationship between these two oppositions that is the key to understanding the structural link between nationalism and sovereignty in international relations.

The state/society and inside/outside pairings relate to one another through the spectral play of nationalism. This paranormal activity cannot be properly grasped through any metaphysical concepts, but it is helpful to think about it metaphorically as a ceaseless activity

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[4] In Lacanian terms, the idealised congruency of the nation-state "can be read as a *fantasy*, or a *fantasmatic project*, an endless endeavour of overcoming the lack and contingency of social life by offering a 'fullness-to-come'" (Mandelbaum 2016, 248). In this framing, the concept of the nation corresponds to the object-cause of desire or what Lacan calls *objet petit a* (see Žižek 2009, 17-20).

of folding and unfolding (Figure 1).[5] This folding and unfolding takes place along a crease, along the slash that separates the two terms in each paring. As we already know, the crease between the inside and the outside is called sovereignty and the crease between state and society is called the nation. The crucial point here is that these are in fact two sides of the same fold: *sovereignty is the nation turned inside-out*. As nationalism folds state and society into one another, it effaces the difference between them and constructs an internally congruent nation-state. A clear distinction between the inside and the outside is thereby established: the internal boundary between state and society is turned into an external boundary between nation-states. Given that the inside/outside dichotomy is the ontological cornerstone of modern international relations, it is precisely through this activity of folding, which quite literally turns the state/society distinction inside-out, that nationalism enters the international stage. However, the folding of state and society into one another is always-already interrupted by the spectral figure of the nation, which must never be completely effaced: state and society may be folded toward one another, but they can never fully merge. The fantasy of the congruent nation-state must therefore remain just that—a fantasy (Mandelbaum 2016). And, by implication, sovereignty too must remain a fantasy.

International relations are, both literally and figuratively, the *unfolding* of the nationalist project. Accordingly, in testimony to the fantasmatic quality of sovereignty, effectively all IR theories recognise some kind of transgression of the inside/outside dichotomy. Classic examples include complex interdependence and institutional cooperation in neoliberal approaches (e.g. Keohane and Nye 1977) and the uneven distribution of capabilities in structural realism (e.g. Waltz 1979). More recently, there is a growing body of scholarship on sovereign inequalities and hierarchies in international relations (e.g. Donnelly 2009; Hobson and Sharman 2005; Lake 2009; Zarakol 2017a). The one insight that all of these divergent approaches share, more or less explicitly, is that states are never fully their own masters. A state's sovereignty depends on its ability to maintain internal order and external independence, but "activities pursued by sovereigns to maintain the well-being and safety of the community necessarily include actions that overlap and potentially infringe upon the sovereignty of other communities" (Piirimäe 2010, 66). The formal principle of state sovereignty is therefore inevitably tainted with more "substantive" factors such as military strength, diplomatic tact, and popular loyalty (Hoffman 1997, 14-5). And as a corollary, both

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[5] Perhaps the most accurate way to conceptualise nationalism is as a process of eversion that turns a structure inside-out, but this is quite difficult to visualise. The visualisation of sphere eversion has been discussed at some length in the field of Mathematics (e.g. Francis and Sullivan 2004).

statehood (Clapham 1998) and sovereignty (Berg and Kuusk 2010) would seem to be relative rather than absolute concepts.

However, sovereignty is also, by definition, an absolute category: "There can be no 'sort of' sovereign, any more than there can be a 'sort of' God" (Brown 2014, 50). Most commonly, scholars have resolved this tension between the conceptual absoluteness and the empirical variability of sovereignty by distinguishing between "normative" and "factual" levels: "On the one hand, states assert the right to supremacy over authorities within their territory and population and independence of authorities outside it; but, on the other hand, they also actually exercise, *in varying degrees*, such supremacy and independence in practice." (Bull 1977, 8, emphasis added). In a similar vein, Stephen Krasner (1999) distinguishes between "logics of appropriateness" and "logics of consequences" as motivators of state behaviour and claims that it is the primacy of the latter over the former that explains the prevalence of "organized hypocrisy" in international relations: states pay lip service to the sovereignty principle while happily violating it in practice. This tension between norms and power politics is analogous to the distinction made by international lawyers between sovereignty as law and sovereignty as fact (see e.g. Koskenniemi 2006). A similar dichotomy between "the concept of sovereignty and the political realities to which it supposedly refers" also underpins Jens Bartelson's (2014, 30-1) theorisation of sovereignty as an "ideal form" that empirical reality can only approximate. All in all, the standard solution can be summarised as follows: all states are sovereign in principle, yet no state is fully sovereign in practice.

There are two interrelated problems with this solution. First, the distinction between normative and factual levels constructs an empirical "outside" as an alibi for sovereignty, allowing the concept to retain its purity even as it is continually violated in practice. In other words, the identification of empirical transgressions of sovereignty actually contributes to the (re)production and (re)stabilisation of the concept: the fact that a transgression has occurred is taken to prove the fact that there exists a sovereignty principle that can be transgressed (Weber 1994). The second problem is that the concept of anarchy, sovereignty's opposite number, is saddled with a double role. On the one hand, international anarchy is a necessary condition of state sovereignty insofar as the latter is predicated on the absence of a higher power. On the other hand, precisely because there exists no higher power to guarantee adherence to sovereignty norms, it is the condition of international anarchy that is seen to engender the violation of state sovereignty in practice: "the international system is an environment in which the logics of consequences dominate the logics of appropriateness"

(Krasner 1999, 6). In short, international anarchy is required to explain both the possibility and impossibility of state sovereignty.

The ascription these contradictory effects to anarchy belies the extent to which this concept "derives from and reproduces the political project of the nation-state" (Zarakol 2017b, 266). When scrutinised, the concept of anarchy does not actually explain anything unless it is combined with other variables, in which case it is these other variables that do the explanatory work (Donnelly 2015, 412-3). Even in the absence of an international government, the international realm can be ordered and governed in a myriad of ways (Milner 1991; Wendt 1992). In the end, the only thing that the concept of anarchy tells us is that there exists a lack—an "absence of government" (Donnelly 2015, 407-12).

The crucial point is that the lack symbolised by anarchy is the same lack that undercuts the ontological security of the modern state from within. Modern statecraft is precisely about externalising this internal lack, of externalising the problem of difference by locating the "other" beyond the boundaries of the state, so as to represent the domestic realm as a congruent social totality (Ashley 1989; Blaney and Inayatullah 2000). In other words, as the state/society distinction is turned inside-out by the play of nationalism, the subjective lack on the inside of the state is externalised into an objective lack on the outside. In this way, the play of nationalism not only underpins the legitimacy of the state, but also forms the international stage on which states can be recognised as independent actors. More specifically, it is the *impossibility* of the nationalist project that forms this international community of nation-states. As Jean-Luc Nancy (1991, xxxix) tells us, community is constructed through a "subtraction" of work that is *not* done: "it is the work that the community does *not* do and that it *is* not that forms community." Equally, it is the unfinished work of the nationalist project, the indefinite deferral of its own self-completion, that forms the international community: the international community is nothing but the exposition of the finitude and mortality of the modern state.[6]

It is with the formation of the international community that sovereignty acquires its external or international component: any claim to external sovereignty presupposes the existence of an international community of states that recognise the inside/outside distinction as valid (Werner and De Wilde 2001, 288). Accordingly, whereas the roots of internal sovereignty qua supreme authority can be traced back to Roman times, the external

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[6] In Lacanian terms, the formation of the international community can be read as the "mirror stage" of nationalism: it is on the international stage, face-to-face with other nation-states, that the subjectivity of the nation-state "is rendered both meaningful and incomplete" (Mandelbaum 2016, 249).

component of sovereignty only became thinkable with the gradual development of a particular form of international politics, centred on the idea of the territorial state, in early modern Europe (Thompson 2006, 253; see also Costa López et al. 2018; Hinsley 1986). The Janus-faced form of sovereignty is thus a historically contingent consequence of its "nationalisation" from the early modern period onward: the concept of sovereignty does not, in and of itself, presuppose the existence of other sovereigns, and the idea of a global sovereign is by no means conceptually incoherent. In contrast, the concept of the nation is inherently particular and necessarily implies the existence of other nations (Abizadeh 2005, 49-50).

The splitting of state sovereignty into an internal and an external component is necessitated by the same primordial contradiction that gives rise to nationalism: the contradiction between the state's claim to universality and its inherently particularistic existence. In the domestic realm, this unsolvable problem is "solved" by the concept of the nation, which functions as the undecidable link between the universality of the state and the particularity of the society that the state claims to represent. In the international realm, the splitting of sovereignty effects a similar "solution" by positing that sovereignty is universal internally but particular externally. This move does not abolish the underlying contradiction, but provides it with a form in which it has "room to move" (see Markell 2003, 109-11). In other words, the play of nationalism does not and cannot produce a seamless ontology, but leaves a structurally necessary crease in the fabric of the modern international order—a split within the concept of sovereignty itself. This split serves as a kind of metaphorical gravestone, designating the haunted site where the undead body of the nation has been buried: it is on the border lines of the international order that nationalism "lives on" (see Derrida 1979).

Conclusion: The Autodeconstruction of Sovereignty

The central argument of this paper has been that the paradoxes of sovereignty in international relations can be traced to the impossibility of the nationalist project. By extension, given that the nationalist project itself emerges out of the need to supplement the ontological insecurity of the modern state, "The problem of sovereignty is the problem of the state itself." (Hoffman 1997, 19). More specifically, the supplementation of the state entails the formation of two impossible-yet-necessary concepts: the concept of the nation and the concept of sovereignty. Given that these two concepts are merely two different projections of the same internal lack

that plagues the modern state, the structure and function of sovereignty in the international realm mirror the structure and function of the nation in the domestic realm: both concepts are split between the universal and the particular, providing the contradictions of the modern state with a form in which they have "room to move." And it is precisely in the room of movement provided by sovereignty's aporetic form, in the ethereal non-place between the inside and the outside, that international relations "take place." The aporetic form of sovereignty is therefore not merely a logical conundrum, but a vital and productive ontological opening that sets international relations in motion: by inscribing its own impossibility upon the concept of sovereignty, the spectre of nationalism *makes international relations work*. In the end, the phrase "international relations" may not be a misnomer after all.

By way of conclusion, I will sketch out some of the implications of this analysis with regard to the claim that globalisation is bringing about the separation of sovereignty and statehood (e.g. Brown 2014; Sassen 1996). This claim is also implicit in the growing tendency to supplement sovereignty with adjectives such as "relational," "shared," "suspended," "divisible," and "post-statist" (Camilleri 2008, 33-4). The specific point that I want to emphasise here is that the uncoupling of sovereignty from the state is not reducible to those empirical developments that are often grouped together under the name "globalisation." This is because, as I have argued, the notion of a territorially-bounded sovereign state has always been fantasy. At most, "globalization has merely further complicated an already complex relationship between sovereignty and territory" (Agnew 2018, 2; see also Shah 2012). Consequently, drawing a sharp contrast between the age of globalisation and the age of the nation-state actually "reintroduces a *methodologically nationalistic conceptualization of the nation-state* in spite of itself" (Chernilo 2006, 13; see also Closs Stephens 2013). Instead of being depicted as a radical break, globalisation should be understood as a metaphor for the *autodeconstruction* of sovereignty.[7] This process of autodeconstruction is not instigated by any external force, but by a spectre that resides within sovereignty itself—the spectre of nationalism.

The spectral figure of the nation is "the ghost of the undecidable" that deconstructs sovereignty from within (see Derrida 1992, 24-5). It does so, quite simply, by bestowing the concept of sovereignty with an external component. At first glance, this would seem to be a

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[7] As a metaphor for deconstruction, "globalisation" must be understood as a concrete process rather than an abstract totalising gesture. For this reason, both Derrida (2002) and Nancy (2007) prefer the French word *mondialisation*. The etymological roots of "globe" in the Latin *globus* or "ball" imply a self-contained totality, whereas the origins of *monde* in the Latin *mundus* or "world" have a more concrete socio-cultural tonality (Li 2007, 142).

simple addition to its internal counterpart, even a logical corollary thereof. In the words of Alan James (1986, 50), sovereignty "has two aspects each of them reflecting, in different ways, central elements of a unitary sovereign statehood." Upon closer scrutiny, however, it becomes clear that the external component radically undercuts the absoluteness of sovereignty by making it conditional upon international recognition and thereby inaugurating the tension between sovereignty as an empirical fact and sovereignty as a legal or normative principle. As a result, sovereignty is always-already escaping the orbit of the state. Jens Bartelson (2014, 87) has described this as the "governmentalization" of sovereignty, whereby "responsibility for its maintenance has been wrested out of the hands of domestic governments and delegated to a thousand petty emperors acting on behalf of an imagined international community." In an insightful passage, he points out that this entails an inversion of the traditional inside/outside dichotomy: warfare and violence come to be associated with domestic politics, paralleled by a linkage of the international realm with peace and prosperity (Bartelson 2014, 97-104). Simply put, the locus of sovereignty shifts from the state to the international community: insofar as it is the international community that has the power to confer sovereign status to political entities and acts as the guarantor of order, it is the international community that is sovereign.

All in all, the external component of sovereignty is not simply an *addition to*, but can also *substitute for*, its internal counterpart. Hence, for example, the possibility of "quasi-states" that "lack many of the marks and merits of empirical statehood" (Jackson 1990, 1). In turn, the possibility of detaching the internal and external components from one another decisively undercuts the doctrine of the indivisibility of sovereignty, paving the way for a more thorough disaggregation of the concept (see e.g. Bartelson 2014, 74-90; Krasner 1999, 3-42; Lake 2009, 45-62). And if sovereignty can be disaggregated and divided up among different actors to different degrees, then it cannot be an absolute category—sovereignty must be a *spectrum*.[8] This spectrality of sovereignty is reducible neither to empirical differences between states, nor to the development of global governance mechanisms, but is inscribed into the very structure of the concept by the spectral logic of nationalism. By lodging itself between the internal and external components of sovereignty, the ghostly figure of the nation breaches the concept of sovereignty *before any empirical transgression can occur*.

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[8] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "spectrum" can refer to an apparition or phantom as well as a range or continuum. Both "spectre" and "spectrum" are derived from the Latin *spectrum* (plural, *spectra*), meaning appearance, image, or apparition.

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