Turned Inside-Out: The Concept of the Political and Reflexive International Relations

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While international politics, as IR's subject, is fettered and formed by the imperious political culture of the West, IR is developing calls for a reflexive turn (see Nuefeld: 1995; Eagleton-Pierce: 2011). In this movement, Shaw claims IR must make the turn to investigating the 'political' if it would be a suitable site for articulation of marginalized politics (Shaw: 2002, p.52). How has it come to be that IR as a political and discursive activity is so intellectually hermetic and discursively oppressive? What then are the potential implications of reflexive politics? The thesis of this essay argues that a reflexive turn in IR presupposes a critical turn in the culture of sovereign practice, which has the potential for radical unrest and democratic revision in international society and world politics. A skeleton history of ideas will detail how it came to be that IR is constituted by a particular conception of the political. Following this, the political implications of its reexamination will be assessed.

Shaw insists on examining the 'political,' which are those, "practices through which authority is constituted and legitimated" (2002, p.52). Shaw isolates sovereignty as IR's constitutive political conception, which, by its own practice, inherently problematizes and marginalizes other ways of political life (2002, p.57-58). According to this thesis, the centrality of the state to Western political theory, oppresses the stateless other (Shaw: 2002, p.57-59). It is the political conception and practice of sovereignty, which excludes and condemns non-sovereign politics to struggle.

While sovereignty, and its corollary concept anarchy are globalized concepts they are derived from a peculiar social world, which IR scholarship traditionally and predominantly today treats systematically. In general terms, sovereignty is best characterized by Suganami's conception of sovereign practice. He defines it as a, "routine practice whereby an ultimately unauthorised authority continuously authorises itself as the authority and the rest by and large acquiesce in this" (Suganami: 2007, p.529). This Western-born way of politics is a social political activity, reproducing itself generationally in acts of authorization and deference. Rousseau understood the social nature of the state quite well. In his *The State of War,* he explains,

Remove the public convention, straightway the state is destroyed without the least change for the worse in anything which makes it up … What, then, is it to wage war on a sovereign? It is to attack the public convention and all that results from it; for that is all the essence of the State consists in … Aristotle says that in order to authorize the cruel treatment to which the Helots were subjected in Sparta, the Ephors, upon assuming office, solemnly declared war on them. This declaration was as superfluous as it was barbarous. They were necessarily in a state of war with one another, simply because they were the masters and the others slaves (2007, p.176).

Where there is no deference to a self-authorizing sovereign there is potential for violence, civil or otherwise. It is this Western political sovereign practice which colonized, racialized, gendered, and exploited people struggle against, by rejecting, resisting, and reformulating such self-authorizations.

Within the discourse of IR scholarship the treaty of Westphalia has been traditionally referred to as the event, which created and institutionalized sovereign practice. However, Ossiander has clarified that the treaty and events surrounding it had little to do with sovereignty or a diminution of the Emperor's power (Ossiander: 2001, p.272-273). Unconventionally, but correctly, Blaney and Inayatullah interpret this event as an unsuccessful attempt to spatially

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segregate difference, seen at the time as the source of discord (2000, p.31-32). The ideas of the period, they argue, cohere around a problematic of difference. Descartes, Hobbes, Grotius, and Locke, "base social order and political peace on relative religious and cultural homogeneity and a strict political uniformity" (Blaney and Inayatullah: 2000, p.32). Westphalia was symptomatic of this logic, considering difference a political illness, the source of conflict and feud. Importantly, it froze princely power over religion (Ossiander: 2001, p.272-273).[1] In this reading, while Westphalia was not a sovereign watershed, its legislation of religious segregation was symptomatic of a mentality of difference. This political mentality would come to manifest in justification of the nation state, and international society.

Sovereignty, in this distinctly modernist practice, is largely attributed to Hobbes's conceptualization. In the medieval world, princes and various authorities existed within societies (Ossiander: 2001b, p.144). However, Hobbes conceived sovereign practice through the *pactum subjectionis* whereby society was founded upon general submission to the sovereign, which implied society ended at the sovereign's border (Ossiander: 2001, p.144). In Hobbes's reasoning, state and society were mutually constitutive entities enabled by general acquiescence. This dissolution of prior orders and creation of borders suggests the creation of an identity vacuum, which intuitively speaking, nationalism came to fill (Agamben: 2003, p.87).

Bodin, later rearticulated Hobbe's move with much influence on European politics, declaring, "Just as the sub-vassal owes an oath of fealty to his lord against all others, excepting his sovereign prince, so the subject owes obedience to his sovereign prince against all others" (Bodin: 2005, p.35). The revolutionary democracies were founded upon this practice, "and the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people … took possession of the State : every class was enlisted in its cause ; battles were fought, and victories obtained for it, until it became the law of laws" (Tocqueville: 1971, p.52). So modern democracy is troubled by the paradoxical problem that for the people to be sovereign it must be decided who the people are, which, by the principle of sovereignty of the people, only the people can decide. Globally, sovereign practice was diversely implemented and proclaimed in the colonial world, until it was universalized after 1945 in the UN Charter (Bull: 1985, p.126; Badie: 2000, p.10, 78). So was the conception and Westernizing expansion of sovereign practice.

IR has traditionally fixed its investigations upon the anarchical social relations between authorities, the inter-sovereign practice which sovereign practice is sustained by in the international system. The mutual authorization of sovereigns as free and equal or the declarations of sovereigns as free and autonomous is a living question and activity (Bull: 1966, p.37). The early IR pluralists or idealists sought to influence sovereign practice through law and internationalist education (Olson: 1972, pp.10; Lloyd: 1995, pp. 25-57). Later, Carr's realist idealist distinction made a call for mediating the two opposed but coextensive schools of sovereign thought, and his post-nationalism, was a vision of controlled escape from them (Booth: 1991, p.527-547).[2] Wight's historical sociology of states systems became a counterfactual way to understand systemic sovereign practice (Wight: 1977). Morgenthau's prudential realism and Bull's romanticism of the nineteenth century were attempts to defend and perfect the practice.[3] Waltz's analyticism is but a way to abstract its implications.[4] Beitz's seminal return to moral philosophy and justice opened the door for critical thinkers, but itself only criticizes realists from a liberal Rawlsian position, and did not critique sovereignty itself (Beitz: 1979, p.182-183). Liberalism, realism, and rationalism or Grotianism all debate the same mode of politics, which is why they conflict.[5]

So, the elephant in this discussion so far is of course power. While there has been resistance, power has made knowledge, and defined the political. The walled intellectual horizons of IR are largely an expression of Western power. The history of the indigenous in settler societies had no place in IR's realm of knowledge, conceived by the European political line between sovereignty and anarchy. Elsewhere, however, the attention IR gave to claims of sovereignhood in the history of decolonization in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, can also be historically seen in the post-colonial world, to have been dark inversions of new authority inward upon its own people. Despite its Euro-centrism, sovereign practice is widespread, and we can mostly agree, is prone to violence inside and out, which makes its study important. It is the study of violent conflict and oppression authorized from conceptions of hierarchy and difference, freedom and equality, that characterizes sovereign practice. However, it is the reexamination of the historical inception of Western sovereign practice, which understanding the meaning of Shaw's suggestion necessitates.

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The rise of the individual corresponded with the political justification of sovereign practice and the possibility of anarchy and international relations. The nominalist and humanist turns introduced approaches of particularity and new notions of the individual into the medieval world, which Petrarch can be cited as articulating (Gillespie: 2008, p.29-35, 44-47). Therein, the conception of the individual is closely related to the symptomology of private and public difference in individual and sovereign practice. Prozorov describes the general underlying system of thought as, "a conception of politics as a relation between particular identities" (2009, p.217). Scholars seem to be generally agreed that it was in Hobbes where this particular conception of the politics as relations of necessary hierarchy and individual difference, crystalizes most clearly (Walker: 2010, p.227).

Furthermore, Hobbes' approach was to apply a scientific causality to difference, and determine the natural/necessary law of conflict between free moving subjects (see Hobbes' introduction to *Leviathan*).[6] It was this scientific attitude that brought him into popularity. Vattel is explicit in his praise,

Hobbes, whose work, in spite of its paradoxes and its detestable principles, shows us the hand of the master –Hobbes, I repeat, was the first, to my knowledge, to give us a distinct though imperfect idea of the Law of Nations. He divides the natural law into the 'natural law of man' and the 'natural law of States.' The latter, in his view, is what is ordinarily called the 'Law of Nations.' 'The principles,' he adds, 'of both of these laws are exactly the same; but as States acquire what are in a way the characteristics of persons, the same law which we call natural in speaking of the duties of individuals we call the Law of Nations when we apply it to the entire people of a State or Nation.' His statement that the Law of Nations is the natural law as applied to States or Nations is sound (Vattel: 1964, p.5a).

It was Hobbes' secularized scientific conception of politics as the relations of particulars in the *Leviathan,* which Grotius and Puffendorf adopted and applied law to, that in turn wandered into Wolff's, *Law of Nations Treated According to a Scientific Method*, which Vattel translated from Latin and popularized (Covel: 2009, p.73-74). The canonical Kant and Hegel later underwrote their philosophies of international right and history with this fundamental conception of sovereign practice, as internal hierarchical freedom and external anarchical equality between different bodies.[7] IR inherits this legacy and is constituted by as a field of study around this Western body of ideas.

Historically, sovereign practice seems to have attained a working order in nineteenth century Europe. The earlier secularized conception of the sovereign as subject to natural or necessary law but autonomous and free in voluntary law, conceptually enabled the practice of the later laissez fair balance of power international society of Compteian and Benthamite nineteenth century positive law, which moved beyond natural law, into an only self-restrained imperial and nationalist sovereign practice. However, this system was considered a disastrous failure after WWI and its foreshadow in Crimea. Since then, IR has made the study and control of different units its prime function (hence the popularity of regime theory today).[8]

The suspicion of difference was given its starkest expression by Carl Schmitt in his famous concept of the political, as the sovereign friend enemy distinction (Prozorov: 2009, p.218-219). For Schmitt, politics is the state of exception, wherein the sovereign demarcates difference, friend and enemy, inside or out (Schmitt: 2005, p.5-35). For Schmitt, this decision was unavoidable because he considered the multifariousness of humanity to be characterized by inextinguishable conflict stemming from plurality of differences (Prozorov: 2009, p.220). Morgenthau, understood the function of sovereignty in the same way, yet he did often appeal to the desirability of a world government, which Prozorov argues Schmitt regarded as an impossible containment of difference (Morgenthau: 1978, p.560). However, the actuality of difference, natural or not, politically requires locating the sovereign so to segregate and restore order (Prozorov: 2009, p.219; Morgenthau: 1948, p.361-362). This succinct concept of the political was the apotheosis of a political culture with a history of sovereign practice. However, its hegemony in IR knowledge has begun to unravel.

Contemporary Continental philosophy has dissected the body of IR discourse. Scholars such Ashley, Walker, and Der Derian began critiquing how the subject itself is an expression of oppressive sovereign power, and how anarchy and sovereignty came to be what we study rather than other political practices and knowledges (Ashley: 1995, p.94-128; Walker: 1993; Der Derian: 1995, p.vii-viii). They exposed the inner parochialisms of Western politics and so moved on to intellectually turn the discipline inside-out with the notion and ambition of understanding world politics.

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However, it is not only the capacity to unearth this concept of the political which makes the reflexive turn significant. It implies a change in politics. We can complain that this turn is resisted or incomplete. We can conduct a sociological review of discursive practice or catalogue its oppressions. We can investigate the philosophy of science or time as battlegrounds of this debate. We can engage in controversy. All such moves engage in Shaw's suggestion of reexamining the political. Yet, it is more interesting to explore the meaning of this turn to the political. What are its implications for international relations? That is, if the cause of IR's parochialism is cultural and historical, the possibility of its reassessment is the same. The implications are in political culture, in sovereign practice, not only intellectual life.

It is symptomatic of a general change in Western culture and corresponding change in the intellectual life of the arts and humanities in academia. The work of thinkers such as Derrida, Beauvior, and Foucault and their successors have fundamentally changed intellectual attitudes towards power and authority, much like the bygone Marxist movements. Knowledge is contested and self-authorizations are questioned. Arguably, there has been a corresponding societal change the West, intuitively attributable to the rising levels of education, dissemination of Continental thought, increased communication networks, psychological effects of successive disasters, and atrocities attributed to modern ideologies, and the successes of non-violence. Deference is in some ways in decline, while at the same time authority is accumulating authorizations.

Whether or not this change is possibly global is unclear. The expansion of sovereign practice does not presuppose replication in cultural understandings of its meaning. An empirical investigation of change and constancy in the West and beyond is outside the present inquiry. Equally, the analytical question of the state's sovereignty or neo-medievalism in relation to the notion of globalization is not crucial. Even if globalizing forces were in full reverse change in the culture of sovereign practice would still be significant because that practice historically constitutes our modern way of politics. Moreover, this change is taken in the affirmative, and should come about because it has the potential to mitigate violent and arbitrary excesses of sovereign practice.

Initially, three potential changes are evident, a revision of democracy, an unsure diplomatic practice and foreign policy, and a new role for the theorist. What will be said about these now is that democratic practice should change not expire, the functioning of international society and production of law should be revised, and IR scholars should become public intellectuals. These notions will be clarified after a closer look at some visionary reflexive politics.

While the trajectory and substance of Continental philosophy is diverse and resistant to definition, the forward-looking philosophy of Agamben and Badiou can serve as helpful and compelling examples to reflect on potential changes. Following their works, Prozorov argues it is necessary to, "dispense with the very principle of identity as a politically relevant category" and so move beyond policy of multiculturalism (2009, p.228). "What is required, rather, is the constitution of the Same out of this infinite chain of differentiation" (Prozorov: 2009, p.229). What does this mean? What does it imply? It is a new political praxis of a genericism without the possibility of a friend enemy distinction. Prozorov describes this, "generic politics as practice" and sets out four aspects of it (2009, p.243). Some potential implications of the reflexive turn for international political practice will be inducted from these features.

First, generic practice, "seeks to subvert the existing order in its entirety by the production of *new* elements that subtract themselves from the overall regime of representation" (Prozorov: 2009, p.233). This is Diogenes' cynic attitude, not that of his utopian misinterpreters. These new elements are not a vanguard, but nevertheless contain a resistance deeper than Berlin's conception of negative liberty, mere absence of oppression (Berlin: 1969, p.298-305). Rather, it is a potentially quite active politics which, "seeks to deactivate or render inoperative the existing particularities" (Prozorov: 2009, p.233). These new elements are intuitively or potentially apart of the mass assaults on trade and environment summits, which function on principles of sovereign practice and concord between differences. This practice is radically in opposition to nationalism, self-determination, and sovereign practice generally.

Second, Prozorov explains that generic practice, "has nothing to do with the political unification of humanity" and that a world state "is strictly unthinkable" in its system of thought (2009, p.233). So, no powers will arm in its cause and it could not resemble Trotskyist foreign policy. Generic practice, is better understood, I think, in the critique of

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authorizations. It does not destroy the political structures of state and international society. Rather, it is a world-view which Prozorov describes as identitarian and temporal, "*bankruptcy* … assumed in the present as the irreparable condition of our contemporary existence" (emphasis added, 2011, p.1290). Generic practice does not necessarily imply a revisionist stance to world order, only the negation of identitarian based authorizations. Sovereign structures will remain though sovereignhood may not. In this way, Agamben's thought implies, "everything will be as is now, just a little different" (Prozorov: 2009, p.239). However, the implications of this anti-utopianism for development and democracy promotion immediately stands-out.

Which brings us to the third aspect. Prozorov explains that generic practice, "contains a radical egalitarianism, an axiom that founds politics rather than as a contingent effect of political praxis" (2009, p.233-234). The problem of equality is seemingly solved, since this practice takes it as a given not a desire. The general implication of this is that if equality is no longer a value to be attained but one to protect, who is to protect it and what exactly is it? Agamben leaves that role to, "whatever singularities," the fragmented new elements of resistance and critique and, "principal enemy of the State" (Prozorov: 2009, p.238). Global distributive justice according to generic practice would be along the lines of redistribution, based on misallocation causally attributed to authorizations of false identities. Corporate culture is hardly an identitarianism that many people believe, though many buy into it. For generic practice, welfare is redistributive justice, but it is distinct from welfare internationalism and the ideas of T.H. Green and Keynes, which assume sovereign practice (Suganami: p.141; Richter: 1996, p.267-291; Winslow, p.142-158). Generic distributive justice is derived from critique of production and exchange based on differentiation. This implies a radical denaturalization or politicization of private property. It is a logic leading to potentially rampant Robin Hood activism against night-watchman and socialist policy.

Fourth, for Agamben, generic political practice, "is thinkable in terms of the emergence of the egalitarian *world community,*" devoid of identity (Prozorov: 2009, p.234). In this vision there is no species being or potential to define humanity only infinite generity. Prozorov explains in this end of history, "Agamben's 'coming community' is thus[ly] a community … that has liberated itself from historical tasks and is finally able to dwell in its 'being-thus' or 'whatever-being'" (2009, p.237). Yet, according to generic practice, mere false accusation of identitarianism is enough to foment clamor. Moreover, where is the communion in indifference? A term like generic civil society fits better. However, this fourth aspect of generic practice should be taken as purely intellectual. The force of generic practice is the renunciation and continual critique of differentiating and violence authorizing ends.

At this point I would like to return to the three general implications of the reflexive turn in Western political culture. Prozorov explains the sovereign and generic,

dualism disturbs the familiar oppositions between international politics and world politics, anarchy and hierarchy, realism and idealism by fracturing the figure of world politics itself into two opposed positions: the identitarian universalism of the world state vs. the generic universalism of the world community (2009, p.242).

Sovereignty of the people is potentially wearing thin and elected cabinets are walking a careful course between imposing policy on the public and deferring to it. For democracy, the new movement of public engagement in policy craft is a necessary implication of generic practice, but should broaden to include those policy affects beyond sovereign borders (see Lenihan: 2012). Furthermore, international positive law looses its force of legitimacy. It still operates, but through embattled summit diplomacy. The process should be inverted and the new outspoken should be engaged. Walker critiques this prescription, though admittedly it is imperfect, but provides no alternative (1993, p.153). Public engagement is necessary to revise democracy in a less deferential political culture.

Therein, the IR theorist, in a public role for the intellectual, should engage in critique of sovereign authorizations as well as articulating the political expression of the marginalized, instead of seeking to understand and control sovereigns through abstract authoritative knowledge production (Prozorov: 2009b, p.539; Lawson: 2008).

The present reflexive turn in intellectual presuppositions and potentially if not actually in the culture of sovereign practice, gives a new compelling impetus to the popular and radical traditions of resistance and critique. Generic practice emerges from the wasteland of ideologies and implies potentially great unrest in Western sovereign practice,

within an ever changing and troublesome world politics. However, while potentially violent and oppressive mechanisms of authorization are still in social operation, by divesting culture of the concept of the political at the inner center of sovereign practice, politics may be disenthralled from tragic notions of necessary and recurrent violence.

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[1] For example, article LXXVII stipulates, "The most Christian King shall, nevertheless, be oblig'd to preserve in all and every one of these Countrys the Catholick Religion, as maintain'd under the Princes of Austria, and to abolish all Innovations crept in during the War" (Treaty of Westphalia: 2008).

[2] See for example, where Carr argues, "The best hope of achieving them [demands for social justice] in the next period lies in a balanced structure of international or multi-national groupings both for the maintenance of security and for the planned development of economies of geographical areas and groups of nations" (1945, p.70).

[3] Morgenthau for example claims, "Diplomacy can make peace more secure than it is today, and the world state can make peace more secure than it would be if nations were to abide by the rules of diplomacy" (1978, p.560). See Bull, 'The State's Positive Role in World Affairs' (1979).

[4] See where Waltz explains, "The third image describes the framework of world politics, but without the first and second images there can be no knowledge of the forces that determine policy; the first and second images describe the forces in world politics, but without the third image it is impossible to assess their importance or predict their result" (1959, pp.238).

[5] This point was made by Hidemi Suganami in his inaugural lecture at Aberystwyth University, 2004. http://streaming.aber.ac.uk/Unrestricted/Departments/interpol/hidemi/hidemi.wmv

[6] The similarity between Hobbes' mechanistic causality and Legnano's much earlier thought is surprising to look at.

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Legnano was of great renown and influence, yet if Hobbes makes mention of him the citation eludes me to the point where I think the ideas may be independent, a coincidence which suggest further the common cultural source of sovereign practice. Suffice it I will leave here a passage of Legnano,

For according to the teaching of natural philosophers it is impossible for the heaven to stand still, Physics, vii and viii; on the contrary its motion is perpetual, and the celestial bodies by their own nature work opposing effects upon these lower bodies, and this opposition of effects arises here below by reason of the variety of the aspects of the celestial bodies and their motions, as our sensations show us. For, to deduce the proposition strictly, by reason of the varied correspondence of the celestial bodies at the time of the construction of states, some states are found hating one another naturally, others are friendly or akin; and so too there are men who hate one another naturally, not because of preceding deserts on one side or the other, and others who love one another naturally. Since, therefore, wars arise by reason of hatreds and discordances of desires, and these are necessarily produced by the motions of the celestial bodies, which are always and necessarily active, we infer that there will necessarily be wars, having regard to the necessity of material and corporeal nature … I think that wars had their origin not only in the equity of natural human created intelligence, but primordially in the disposition of creative Nature, which influences not only human actions, but all other things animate and inanimate also; so that it is true to say that wars have their origin in natural law, even as distinguished from the law of nations (Legnano: 1964, p.220, 229).

[7] See, for example where Kant argues, "it is nonetheless the inevitable outcome of the distress that men cause one another, distress that must force nations to do just the same decision (however hard it may be for them) to which savage men were so unhappily forced, namely, to give up their brutal freedom and to seek calm and security in a law-governed constitution" (1983, p.35). And Hegel, "In the course of this work of the world mind, states, nations, and individuals arise animated by their particular determinate principle which has its interpretation and actuality in their constitutions and in the whole range of their life and condition" (1942, p.217).

[8] However, also notice that Nietzsche and Kierkegaard became popular following the war (Lilla: 2003, p.2). Lenin's alternative imperial theory combined state analysis with class analysis and somewhat transmuted the unit but not abandon the problem of difference, but even that was rejected. See, Lenin's essay *Imperialism,* (1979).

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