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Source: *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Jul., 1992), pp. 199-216

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20097298>

Accessed: 05-10-2016 15:47 UTC

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Reconsidering statehood: examining the sovereignty/intervention boundary*

CYNTHIA WEBER

R. B. J. Walker recently noted that far from its largely accepted status as an ‘essentially contested’ concept,¹ state sovereignty is instead an essentially *uncontested* concept. This is a seemingly paradoxical comment for an international relations theorist to make in light of the recent revival of academic scrutiny concerning sovereign statehood.² Rather than marking an inattention to recent trends in the sovereignty literature, Walker’s statement is a commentary on the way sovereign statehood has been studied. Walker writes of sovereign statehood:

Its meaning might be marginally contestable by constitutional lawyers and other connoisseurs of fine lines, but for the most part state sovereignty expresses a commanding silence. At least some problems of political life, it seems to suggest, are simple and settled, fit for legalists and footnotes, but not of pressing concern to those interested in the cut and thrust of everyday political struggle.³

A parallel observation can be made with respect to the intervention literature—that intervention is essentially *uncontested*. I want to suggest that the reason why intervention, like sovereignty, is an essentially *uncontested* concept has to do with the coupling of the concepts sovereignty and intervention. This coupling of sovereignty and its transgressor continues to define the gambit of imaginable research programmes for intervention scholars. It is not the mere linking of the concepts sovereignty and intervention that presents an obstacle to offering unique contributions about intervention. Rather, similar to Walker’s remarks on the sovereignty debates, I argue that the particular understandings of sovereignty/intervention circulating in international relations literatures effect a silence. This silence is on potentially dynamic understandings of statehood. As Richard Little concluded in his review of the intervention literature, ‘For specialists in international relations to contribute to this debate about intervention, they will require a much more sophis-

* A draft of this paper was presented at the 1991 annual meetings of the Mid-West chapter of the American Political Science Association in Chicago, 18–20 April, under the title ‘Intervention as State Alibi’. The author wants to acknowledge the support of the Center for International Studies at the University of Southern California as well as to thank Richard K. Ashley, James Der Derian, Richard Little, Patrick J. McGowan, Carol Pech, Diane Rubinstein, Eric Selbin, R. B. J. Walker, Stephen G. Walker, and the anonymous referees for their critical readings of drafts of this manuscript.

¹ For a discussion of essentially contested concepts, see William Connolly, *Politics and Ambiguity* (Madison, 1987).

² Recent investigations of the sovereign state include Martin Carnoy’s *The State and Political Theory* (Princeton, 1984), Peter Evans et al., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge, 1985), John Hall and G. John Ikenberry’s *The State* (Minneapolis, 1989), and R. B. J. Walker’s *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

³ R. B. J. Walker, ‘Gender and Critique in the Theory of International Relations’, in V. Spike Peterson (ed.), *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory* (Lynne Rienner, 1992).

ticated conception of the state than the one usually relied upon'.⁴ I suggest that understandings of sovereignty/intervention currently employed by international relations theorists inhibit creative reconceptualizations of statehood. Yet if we as theorists think about sovereign statehood in terms of authority relations which are worked out in practice and that the sovereignty/intervention boundary is an important locale where authority relations are contested, then examining the intersections of discourses of sovereignty and intervention takes us a long way toward giving an account for how sovereign states are constituted in practice.⁵ Accordingly, my analytical point of departure for a 'more sophisticated conception of the state' is a re-examination of the sovereignty/intervention boundary.⁶

Such a positioning implies a break from the well-rehearsed practice of defining intervention as a violation of state sovereignty and proceeding to categorize specific episodes of historical practices as interventionary or noninterventionary. It further implies a refusal to stabilize the meanings of sovereignty and intervention through some grand theoretical gesture which enables such classification exercises. Finally, it implies a recognition that the meanings of sovereignty and intervention are inscribed, contested, erased, and reinscribed through historical practices. Focusing on the interplay of the meanings of sovereignty and intervention, this article suggests that modalities of sovereign statehood are effects of the contestation of meanings of both sovereignty and intervention. Furthermore, the arenas where meanings of sovereignty/intervention are contested include both practices by diplomats and practices by international relations theorists.

As well as outlining the specific argument to be made, I will at this juncture elaborate what I do and do not mean when I employ the terms sovereignty and intervention. Sovereignty is regarded as a set of practices that differs across time and space.⁷ With respect to statehood, sovereignty refers to what a state must do (performative criteria) in order to be (receive intersubjective recognition as) a sovereign state. By sovereignty I am not referring to a definition which has the same content in every historical era and in every geographic locale.

Intervention is introduced in the following section, 'Diplomatic practices and intervention', through the discussion of historical episodes of intervention practices. These historical episodes illustrate two points. First, in different historical periods, different community standards are in circulation about how sovereignty as a practice is to be performed. What a state must do to be sovereign is to organize its domestic

⁴ 'Revisiting Intervention: A Survey of Recent Developments', *Review of International Studies*, 13 (1987), pp. 49–60. Little characterizes the traditional notion of statehood that intervention scholars rely upon as 'sovereign institutions which possess absolute authority over their territory' (p. 54). These points are discussed later.

⁵ Thinking about state sovereignty in this way does not lead to equating the terms statehood and sovereignty. For example, during instances of intervention, sovereignty may or may not be invested in the target state. What is in question during such times is sovereignty and not statehood. States continue to exist under these conditions even when their sovereignty is in question.

⁶ Little suggested the sovereignty/intervention boundary as a beginning point for analysis. See Little, 'Revisiting Intervention'.

⁷ For examples of works which regard sovereignty as a practices, see, for example, Richard K. Ashley, 'Untying the Sovereign State', *Millennium*, 17 (1988), pp. 227–62; Richard K. Ashley and R. B. J. Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline: Crisis and the Question of Sovereignty in International Studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34 (1990), pp. 367–416; David Campbell, 'Global Inscription: How Foreign Policy constitutes the United State', *Alternatives*, 15(1990), pp. 263–86; Michael Shapiro, 'Sovereignty and Exchange in the Orders of Modernity', *Alternatives* (forthcoming); and Janice E. Thomson, 'State Practices, International Norms, and the Decline of Mercenarism', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34 (1990), pp. 23–47.

affairs in such a way so that its ultimate source of sovereign authority is authorized to speak for its particular domestic community in international affairs. Yet the source of sovereign authority has changed historically. For the Concert of Europe, for example, this ultimate source was the absolute monarch. For the Allied Powers and the Wilson Administration, it was the people.

Second, discourses of intervention always imply discourses of sovereignty. The cases briefly mentioned herein underscore this point because they are instances of when a domestic mode of representation (where sovereignty resides and how it is expressed within a state) becomes an international issue which may provoke intervention. Intervention practices direct analysis to the question of when, from a reputedly global perspective, sovereignty is or is not invested in a particular state. When state practices do not fit supposed intersubjective norms of what a sovereign state must be, then intervention by a sovereign state into the affairs of an 'aberrant' state is deemed to be legitimate by a supposed international community.⁸ On the other hand, when state practices do accord with intersubjective norms of being, intervention is prohibited and, when carried out, condemned by the supposed community of sovereign states.

It is only by investigating the justifications for undertaking interventions and their linkages to modalities of sovereign ontology that one arrives at a temporary, historically bounded and geographically specific definition of intervention. This is so because when intervention practices take place, intervention justifications are posed in terms of restoring or preserving the community-recognized sovereign authority in a particular state (the monarch or the people). Overall, intervention justifications are paradoxical, then, because they both recognize where sovereign authority in a target state might legitimately exist as well as subvert that authority because the target state's sovereign authority is represented or spoken for by a foreign state.

If one accepts that the meanings of sovereignty and intervention are worked out through historical practices, then the section entitled 'Conventional approaches to the study of intervention' investigates how practices of political scientists ahistorically fix the meanings of sovereignty and intervention. As it is conceptualized by conventional theorists, the sovereignty/intervention pairing abides by a logic of representation.⁹ Such a logic holds that within any symbolic order (a language, for example) there exists a foundational term which ultimately grounds the meaning of all terms in that symbolic order. One assumption of a logic of representation is that the foundational concept's meaning needs no guarantee because it is unchanging and meaningful in and of itself. Common examples of foundational concepts are 'God' and 'man'.¹⁰

In the sovereignty/intervention pairing, it is sovereignty which serves as the foundational concept and intervention which is meaningful only in relation to sovereignty. The construction of sovereignty as both a guarantee of the meaning of intervention and as a term that is meaningful in and of itself is done by theorists.

⁸ I use the term 'supposed international community' to convey the notion that no unambiguous international community exists. Indeed, the very practice of justifying intervention practices to a community participates in the constitution of that community.

⁹ Readers familiar with semiology will recognize that my use of terms like a logic of representation, foundations, and indicators are other ways of referring to a symbolic order, signifieds, and signifiers. For a discussion of semiology, see Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, translated by L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge, 1980) and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, 1983).

¹⁰ For a discussion of this, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1970).

Conventional analyses about intervention begin by positing sovereignty as an operationalized definition (as scientific-behaviouralists do) or as a constitutive or first principle (as traditionalists do). Either way, such a premise disallows any questions about changes in the meaning and/or practice of sovereignty across time and in different regions.

If we as theorists go about studying sovereignty and intervention as if their meanings were already fixed, then we cannot take seriously the challenge Richard Little set forth for intervention scholars—that richer understandings of the state depend upon a renewed analysis of the boundary demarcated by sovereignty and intervention. Little's challenge cannot be taken up by scientific-behavioural or traditional scholars because their practices as theorists ahistorically draw the sovereignty/intervention boundary.

The inability of conventional approaches to meet Little's challenge (and particularly their reliance upon a logic or representation) is discussed in the section entitled 'Reconsidering statehood'. This section points out that in conventional accounts of intervention the meaning of sovereignty appears to be stable because it is stabilized by theorists in their definitions of intervention. In other words, conventional theorists begin by assuming that state sovereignty can be violated. Such a position further requires that sovereignty exists. Therefore, it is the focus on sovereignty's transgressor—intervention—which testifies to the existence of sovereignty. To use Jean Baudrillard's terms, intervention performs as an alibi for fixing and giving meaning to sovereignty. Baudrillard's notion of simulation is elaborated in this section to discuss the alibi function of intervention.

It is difficult to miss the circularity of the above argument. It is at once suggested that sovereignty guarantees the meaning of intervention while it is also suggested that intervention performs as an alibi for sovereignty. The circularity, slippage, or co-dependency of the coupling sovereignty/intervention should not be made light of. As I suggest in the conclusions, how sovereignty/intervention is theorized in the conventional literature has serious effects for the study of sovereignty, intervention and statehood. It is only by refusing to restrict theorizations of sovereignty/intervention to a logic or representation that these limitations can be overcome.

Diplomatic practices and intervention

Consider the following historical episodes. Austrian Chancellor Metternich speaking on behalf of the Concert of Europe about revolutions in Spain and Naples in the 1820s stated:

States belonging to the European alliance, which have undergone in their internal structure an alternation brought about by revolt, whose consequences may be dangerous to other states, cease automatically to be members of the alliance. [If such states] cause neighbouring states to feel an immediate danger, and if action by the Great Powers can be effective and beneficial, the Great Powers will take steps to bring the disturbed area back into the European system, first of all by friendly representations, and secondly by force if force becomes necessary to this end.¹¹

¹¹ Brackets in original; quoted in R. R. Palmer and J. Colton, *A History of the Modern World* (New York, 1971), p. 490.

The Concert used force to replace the toppled Spanish and Neapolitan kings to their respective positions as sovereign authorities.

Speaking nearly 100 years later about revolutionary events in Mexico, President Woodrow Wilson said:

There are in my judgement no conceivable circumstances which would make it right for us to direct by force or threat of force the internal processes of what is a profound revolution, a revolution as profound as that which occurred in France. All the world has been shocked ever since the time of the revolution in France that Europe should have undertaken to nullify what has been done there, no matter what the excesses.¹²

Yet President Wilson sent United States Marines to Vera Cruz, Mexico to topple the President of the provisional government, Victoriano Huerta, and Wilson did so in the name of the sovereign people of Mexico.

Taken together, these two historical incidents point to a number of issues. They indicate that the limits of the modern international system have not been historically constant. For example, in the 1820s, the reincorporation into the international community of Spain and Naples was at issue. By the 1910s, the reincorporation of Mexico was at issue. Furthermore, the types of actions that provoked armed force by one sovereign state on behalf of a government or a people of another state changed. Put in the form of a question, one might ask was a revolution an ‘international’ problem or was it solely a ‘domestic’ issue? In the 1820s, the Concert of Europe viewed revolutions as an international problem. By the 1910s, however, the United States officially viewed revolutions as a ‘domestic’ issue—only so long as they were liberal revolutions with the goal of putting in place a liberal, democratic government.

These points pose some serious challenges for international relations theory today. They indicate that the ultimate source of sovereign authority changes historically, that the justifications for intervention practices and the meaning of intervention change historically, and that incorporation into the modern state system—being a state—rests upon different historical criteria.

As these cases demonstrate, international relations was and is an arena for a contestation of meanings—meanings not just of foundational concepts like kings and people but of sovereignty, intervention and the state. How meanings take shape and are put to work—by whom and on whose behalf—has implications for just what forms international practice legitimately can take. The examples of interventionary activity in the 1820s and 1910s are cases in point. They bring to the fore the importance of casting meanings in particular ways which enable specific forms of practice to take place legitimately in the eyes of a supposed interpretive community.

For example, the Concert of Europe found it impossible to crush rebellions in Spain and Naples until they arrived at understandings of what the rights and duties of Concert members to other Concert members were and what the relationship was between sovereignty and intervention.¹³ This required fixing the meaning of sovereignty through intervention practices. This was so because even though intervention practices raised questions about the ultimate source of sovereign authority and the boundaries of supposed ‘domestic’ and ‘international communities’, intervention discourse—the justifications for intervention practices—settled these ques-

¹² Quoted in Lloyd C. Gardner, *Wilson and Revolutions: 1913–1921* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982), p. 27.

¹³ See Cynthia Weber, “‘Writing’ the State: Political Intervention and the Historical Constitution of State Sovereignty”, PhD dissertation, Arizona State University, 1991.

tions, however temporarily. When ‘intervening’ or ‘correcting’ sovereign states offered justifications for their practices, they presupposed an ‘international community’ to whom their discourse was directed and a ‘domestic community’ for whom they spoke. Furthermore, intervention justifications elaborated the officialized rationale for what constituted a legitimate cause for interventionary behaviour and under what conditions this rationale could and/or must be translated into intervention practices.

Acting in a very different political climate founded on different notions of sovereign authority (now invested in the people) and intervention and encompassing a much larger scope and variety of states, in the 1910s Woodrow Wilson sought ways to fight for liberal democracy in Mexico and Russia without claiming a right to intervention. Quite the contrary, Wilson insisted that no such right existed. He did so in order to respect the sovereign authority of the people of Mexico and Russia. This was why, for example, he went to great lengths to assure the supposed international community as well as his legitimating ‘domestic community’—the American public—that he had not and would not intervene into the affairs of the Mexican people. And, in the restricted terms he inscribed the terms ‘intervention’ and ‘the Mexican people’, it is possible to argue that he was true to his word.¹⁴ But how can the sending of armed troops without invitation to a state with which the United States was not at war be anything but intervention? The answer seems to lie in what is meant by the people, sovereignty and intervention and in what the practical relationship of these concepts is at any particular historical period in any specific geographic locale.

In Wilson’s case, believing that the ultimate source of sovereign authority was the people was not enough. What was critical was to ‘invent the people’¹⁵ in some form which could serve as the basis for United States’ intervention in a seemingly legitimate form—a form not questioned or condemned by the supposed international community. This explains Wilson’s unlikely ‘discovery’ of liberal democrats in counter-revolutionary Siberia during the Bolshevik Revolution. A liberal democratic people could be protected from an exclusionary, class-minded government (the Bolsheviks) by a country like the United States, a champion of universalized notions of liberal democracy.

These preliminary interpretations of intervention practices illustrate the transitory character of the sovereign subject of international politics, demonstrating that the ultimate source of sovereign authority historically has been a monarch or a people or both. Furthermore, to locate sovereign authority in different political bodies is to change what sovereignty means and how sovereign authority is exercised. For example, there are some claims which could be furthered and acted upon by monarchs in one particular historical era which could not be furthered and acted upon by a people. These observations suggest that the meanings attached to sovereignty and the practices which follow from them are historically and geographically variable. And, if this is the case, then the state—that seemingly foundational entity in global politics ‘essentially’ described by the term sovereignty—is historically and geographically variable as well.

Investigations of intervention practices have not traditionally led theorists to speculate about the variability of sovereignty. Consequently, conventional analyses of

¹⁴ Weber, ‘“Writing” the State’.

¹⁵ See Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York, 1988).

intervention practices have not reached the same conclusion. But how, in the face of abundant historical data, could analyses of intervention fail to note this slippage in the notion of sovereignty? I suggest that these studies cannot offer any unique observations about sovereignty because they begin by making sovereignty a given. A brief review of conventional approaches to the study of intervention illustrates this point.

Conventional approaches to the study of intervention

As Stanley Hoffmann noted, discussions of intervention often 'consist only of an endless series of classifications'.¹⁶ This is so whether the topic is pursued by international lawyers—who weigh issues of legality¹⁷—or by international relations theorists—who modify questions of legality to those of adherence to or violation of the norm of non-intervention.¹⁸ So pervasive are these tendencies in the literature on intervention that it is difficult to gain a critical distance from these familiar projects much less to imagine an alternative approach to the investigation of intervention.

Since James Rosenau's¹⁹ early call for a scientific study of intervention, practitioners of behavioural social science have been preoccupied with generating a precise definition of intervention and operationalizing it to account for observed international patterns of behaviour. Rosenau began by discriminating between the vague notions of intervention circulating in diplomatic practice (which elude scientific classification and measurement) and a clear conception of intervention necessary for scientific study. Generally, he defined intervention as a deviation in the relations between an intervener and a target state which is aimed at altering the authority structure in the target state.²⁰

Rosenau's definition functioned as an invitation to further specify the nature of intervention rather than to settle debate on this issue. After narrowing their consideration to measurable acts of overt military intervention, behavioural social scientists embarked upon a series of distinctions in the general area of intervention.

First, the target is differentiated: a distinction is drawn between integrated and fragmented states. Second, the intervener's objective is differentiated: a distinction is drawn between the desire to change the policy and the authority structure of the target state. Third, the instruments of the intervener are differentiated.²¹

¹⁶ Stanley Hoffmann, 'The Problem of Intervention', in H. Bull (ed.), *Intervention in World Politics* (Oxford, 1984).

¹⁷ See, for example, R. Higgins, 'Intervention and International Law', in Bull (ed.), *Intervention in World Politics*.

¹⁸ See, for example, R. J. Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order* (Princeton, 1974) and Richard Little, *Intervention: External Involvement in Civil Wars* (Totowa, N.J., 1975).

¹⁹ James Rosenau, 'The Concept of Intervention', *Journal of International Affairs*, 22(1968), pp. 165–76; and James Rosenau, 'Intervention as a Scientific Concept', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 13(1969), pp. 149–71.

²⁰ Rosenau, 'Concept of Intervention'.

²¹ Little, 'Revisiting Intervention'. For illustrations of these discriminations in behavioural social science, see J. Van Winge and H. Tillema, 'Law and Power in Military Intervention: Major States after World War II', *International Studies Quarterly*, 26(1982), pp. 220–50; F. Pearson, 'Foreign Military Interventions and Domestic Disputes', *International Studies Quarterly*, 18(1974), pp. 259–89; J. David Singer and Melvin Small, *Resort to Arms: Intervention and Civil Wars 1816–1980* (Beverly Hills, 1982); and B. Duner, *Military Intervention in Civil Wars: The 1970s* (New York, 1985). Richard Little briefly reviews much of this literature.

This behaviouralist impulse to divide and classify aspects of interventionary behaviour into clearly operationalized components seems to hold that once sufficient numbers of accurate and rigorous discriminations are made to unpack the complexities inherent in interventionary behaviour, the concept will reveal itself in all its transparency. What the efforts by practitioners of behavioural social science have yielded are interesting analyses of what types of behaviour occur in various, highly specified situations and have raised important questions about what may or may not constitute interventionary behaviour.²² What these efforts have not done, however, is to uncover the 'nature' of intervention, either as a general theory or as a pattern of behaviour. Their failure in this respect is noteworthy not only because this is an implicit goal of behavioural analysis but more importantly because this effort is misdirected.

It is possible to ask meaningful questions about intervention by employing behavioural techniques; however, it is not possible to do so without simultaneously settling some questions about meaning. Put differently, behavioural projects which aim to 'uncover' or 'discover' the nature of interventionary behaviour succeed only in that they create or invent the nature of interventionary behaviour through the conduct of their analyses. If behavioural analysis 'uncovers' or 'discovers' anything, it is its own prespecified, theoretical meaning of intervention. To illustrate this point, consider the scientific behavioural method's debts to a logic of representation and to the practice of operationalization.

Scientific behavioural methods are firmly rooted in a logic of representation. According to the assumptions of these methods, it is possible to get indications of law-like regularities or patterns through the observation of direct or indirect empirical phenomena. Regularities or patterns can be said to exist (or, more closely following Karl Popper's notion of falsification, not be said to not exist) if one can find empirical indicators of these regularities or patterns. Thus, indicators represent patterns. As applied to scientific behavioural analyses of intervention, indicators are conceptualized, differentiated from one another, operationalized, and tested to see whether or not they pertain in the highly specified cases encompassed in a particular study. For example, intervention commonly has been operationalized as 'the movement of troops or military forces by one independent country, or a group of countries in concert, across the border of another independent country (or colony of an independent country), or actions by troops already stationed in the target country'.²³

But where do indicators and operationalizations come from? It is theorists who impose definitions of intervention and propose indicators to capture interventionary behaviour, and they do so from outside of history. That is, these definitions are not generated by historical conditions or by the cases analyzed themselves; rather, these definitions are decided prior to analysis by theorists. In the words of Richard Little: 'The definition of intervention is generally established by the analyst without

²² C. R. Mitchell, 'Civil Strife and the Involvement of External Parties', *International Studies Quarterly*, 14(1970), pp. 116–94; F. Pearson, 'Foreign Military Intervention and Domestic Disputes'; E. Weede, 'U.S. Support for Foreign Governments or Domestic Disorder and Imperial Intervention 1958–1965', *Comparative Political Studies*, 10(1978), pp. 497–527; R. M. Siverson and M. R. Tennefoss, 'Interstate Conflicts: 1815–1965', *International Interactions*, 9(1982), pp. 147–78.; G. A. Raymond and C. Kegley, 'Normative Constraints on the Use of Force Short of War', *Journal of Peace Research*, 23(1987), pp. 213–27; and Ted Gurr, 'War, Revolution and Growth of the Coercive State', *Comparative Political Studies*, 21(1988), pp. 45–65.

²³ F. Pearson, 'Foreign Military Intervention and Domestic Disputes', p. 261.

reference to the views of the practitioner'.²⁴ And while operationalizations of intervention inform hypotheses which are tested against data to determine whether or not a given hypothesis is falsified, what is tested is not the 'nature' of intervention but the meaning that theorists have given to intervention in a particular instance. In other words, meaning is generated by the theorists so that it may be tested.

Working within a logic of representation, scientific behavioural analyses seem to give indications of whether or not an operationalized meaning is valid when applied to particular data.²⁵ However, theorists must be cautious not to confuse this type of analysis—when a theoretically generated meaning applies to a data set—with analyses which ask what intervention means or how these meanings were historically constituted. Scientific behaviouralists cannot ask these questions because these very questions must be settled before analysis begins. Furthermore, what constitutes an indicator of a particular behaviour also is determined by theorists. For example, that foreign troop movements across international borders represents interventionary behaviour is established *a priori* by the theorists and is not evidence that a logic of representation works with reference to analyses of intervention; rather, it is only evidence that scientific behavioural theorists assume that it does.

Notice that in scientific behavioural approaches to the study of intervention, one begins by stabilizing the meaning of intervention, and stabilizing is done by theorists. Two assumptions are implicit in this practice of stabilization. The first is that one can refer to a stable meaning of intervention even if changes in state behaviour occur. That is, referring to the operationalization of intervention just mentioned, foreign troop movements across international boundaries under specific circumstances have always been, are, and always will be regarded as interventions. The scientific behavioural project takes as its goal the clarification of intervention through scientific exploration. For this goal to be attainable, it must be held that intervention has a fixed, 'essential' meaning. In this sense, the practice of operationalization can be seen as the positing of one probable meaning of intervention after another, with the ultimate hope of arriving at the 'true' meaning eventually.

The second assumption is related to the first. Namely, there is an often unarticulated notion that it is possible to arrive at the 'true' meaning of intervention because the meaning of sovereignty is already stabilized in international relations theory. If, as in conventional international relations theory about both sovereignty and intervention, intervention is understood to be the flip side of sovereignty, then to the extent that the meaning of sovereignty is already stabilized in international relations theory, theorists can begin to stabilize the meaning of intervention. The only questions one need ask to arrive at a stable meaning of intervention are when, how, and under what conditions sovereignty is violated. And what it means to violate sovereignty is decided by theorists when they operationalize the meaning of intervention.

Another approach to the study of intervention is variously termed traditional, normative or legal. This approach generally focuses on non-intervention as a pervasive norm in the modern international system. Nonintervention is taken as the normal state of affairs in international relations. What must be analyzed and explained, as with the behavioural approach, is intervention.

²⁴ Little, 'Revisiting Intervention', p. 51.

²⁵ Raymond and Kegley's analysis of the international system is a particularly good illustration of this. See Raymond and Kegley, 'Normative Constraints on the Use of Force Short of War'.

This preoccupation with norms enriches analyses of intervention because it returns practices to their historical context. For example, researchers do not abstract historical incidents into data sets and test them against operationalized definitions. Rather, the meaning of intervention is derived from historically specific cases. As Richard Little notes in his review of intervention literatures:

The idea of a static, ahistorical conception of intervention is antithetical to the traditionalist approach. Instead, traditionalists are preoccupied with conflicting conceptions of intervention and with the way the meaning of the concept can change over time.²⁶

However, like scientific behaviouralists, the meaning of intervention is derived in reference to the meaning of sovereignty. This is illustrated in the work of R.J. Vincent.

Vincent defines intervention as a violation of the norm of nonintervention. Intervention for Vincent is:

that activity undertaken by a state, a group within a state, a group of states or an international organ which interferes coercively in the domestic affairs of another state. It is a discrete event having a beginning and an end, and it is aimed at the authority structure of the target state. It is not necessarily lawful or unlawful, but it does break a conventional pattern of international relations.²⁷

The 'conventional pattern' to which Vincent refers is the practice of nonintervention. He notes further that the principle of nonintervention is derived from the principle of sovereignty.²⁸ For Vincent, sovereignty is a 'first principle'. Sovereignty is the stable foundation to which analysis refers. To embark upon an investigation of intervention or violations of the norm of nonintervention, sovereignty as a 'first principle' must already be in place. Treating sovereignty as a 'first principle' is not unique to Vincent's work; rather, it is common practice in the traditional literature.²⁹

Just as in the behavioural literature where sovereignty and intervention operate as conceptual opposites, so too do they operate as conceptual opposites in the normative literature. Indeed, sovereignty and intervention form the boundary of a sovereign state's authority. Vincent quotes Richard Falk on this point, who notes that nonintervention is the 'doctrinal mechanism to express the outer limits of permissible influence that one state may properly exert upon another'.³⁰ Thus, continues Vincent: 'To ask what areas the principle of nonintervention protects is equivalent to asking what matters are within the domestic jurisdiction of states'.³¹

The different ways in which scientific behaviouralists and traditionalists deal with meaning parallel a distinction between thin and thick description applied to anthropology by Clifford Geertz. In his book *The Interpretation of Cultures*,³² Geertz describes how approaches to ethnography or cultural anthropology are tied to understandings and descriptions of culture. Culture, he notes, has variously been the

²⁶ Little, 'Revisiting Intervention', p. 53.

²⁷ Vincent, *Nonintervention*, p. 13.

²⁸ Vincent, *Nonintervention*, p. 14.

²⁹ See, for example, Little, *Intervention*; Bull, *Intervention in World Politics*; and C. Thomas, *New States, Sovereignty, and Intervention* (New York, 1985).

³⁰ Richard Falk, *Law, Morality and War in the Contemporary World* (London, 1963).

³¹ Vincent, *Nonintervention*, p. 15.

³² (New York, 1973).

object of 'thin description' and 'thick description'.³³ Thin description takes as its focus of analysis observable phenomena. The aim of thin description is to derive theoretical generalizations from the testing of data or observable phenomena against hypotheses.

As applied to the study of cultures, Geertz notes that thin description has some shortcomings, and these shortcomings have to do with interpretive questions of meaning. If one focuses on observable phenomena that are abstracted from their cultural contexts, then one cannot interpret what these phenomena mean within their particular culture. This is because the same observable phenomena can have different meanings in different contexts. Take, for example, the different meanings conveyed by a wink and a twitch.³⁴ Both involve the same physical movements, and divorced from their specific performative contexts, they appear to be the same. Thin descriptions would note no differences between them. However, if one interprets a wink and a twitch in their social contexts—if one employs thick description—different meanings conveyed by identical physical movements are revealed. Unlike a twitch which is involuntary, a wink is a gesture, a signal sent to someone else. Depending on contextual criteria, this gesture may signal ridicule, conspiracy, satire, etc.

What thick description takes into account and thin description overlooks is culture. Geertz views culture as a semiotic concept. That is, culture refers to a particular symbolic order, to particular indicators representing ultimate foundations. And, explains Geertz, '[c]ulture is public because meaning is'.³⁵ A semiotic approach to culture takes this public into account. As Geertz puts it,

The whole point of a semiotic approach to culture is . . . to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them.³⁶

To do ethnography—to study culture—one must not only note observable phenomena but attempt to gain access to different symbolic orders or cultures. Says Geertz:

Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherences, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior.³⁷

Thus, ethnographic analysis—when it moves from thin description to thick description—retains its focus on behaviour but for different reasons. In providing a thick description, '[b]ehavior must be attended to, and with some exactness, because it is through the flow of behavior—or, more precisely, social action—that cultural forms find articulation'.³⁸

As applied to the two conventional approaches to the study of intervention discussed here, scientific behavioural analyses employ thin description; traditionalists, thick description. By way of illustration, recall the preliminary interpretations of historical intervention practices by the Concert of Europe and the United States noted earlier. A behavioural social scientist probably would classify these episodes as

³³ Geertz acknowledges that he is borrowing these terms from Gilbert Ryle's writings. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973); and Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (New York, 1949).

³⁴ Geertz, *Interpretation*, pp. 6–7.

³⁵ Geertz, *Interpretation*, p. 12.

³⁶ Geertz, *Interpretation*, p. 24.

³⁷ Geertz, *Interpretation*, p. 10.

³⁸ Geertz, *Interpretation*, p. 17.

indicators of interventionary behaviour by testing them against an operationalized meaning of intervention indicated by uninvited troop movements across state territorial boundaries. These historical episodes would be extracted from their historical contexts in the hopes of arriving at some general theoretical propositions.

Because of their neglect of historical contexts or 'international culture', scientific behavioural interpretations of these cases would be unequipped to handle a question such as: How could President Wilson maintain in 1917 that the particular practices operationalized by behavioural social scientists as intervention—the uninvited sending of United States troops to Mexico—were not an instance of intervention? Such a question begs another question—what does intervention mean in a particular historical period? Thin description as a mode of analysis employed by behavioural social scientists is unable to do anything but fall back on ahistorical operationalized meanings of intervention. Consideration of historically generated meanings—or cracking the symbolic order of a particular international culture operating in a specific historical period—is beyond its scope.

In contrast, traditional approaches to the study of intervention employ thick description. Analyzing the very same episodes of historical practice, traditional theorists might argue for the legality or illegality of practices, or, referring to the historically changing content of norms of nonintervention, note violations of these conventional forms of behaviour. Both of these kinds of traditional interpretations take historical context or 'international culture' into account because they assume the existence of an 'international community'. What intervention means, according to traditionalists, changes as norms of nonintervention change, and these norms are interpreted by a supposed international community. Thus, meanings of intervention are not imposed from beyond history by theorists but are generated through historical practices. And, without reference to some extrahistorical definition, intervention is meaningful in international practice so long as there is a supposed international community to interpret the norms of nonintervention.³⁹ Symbolic orders which convey meanings in particular historical periods can be examined by traditionalists. Thus, traditionalists can offer interpretations of why United States troop movements into Mexico in 1917 may not have violated international norms of nonintervention and therefore might not have been instances of intervention.

Adopting the gaze of a cultural anthropologist when assessing conventional approaches to the study of intervention, questions of meaning gain critical importance. From such a perspective, traditional approaches to the study of intervention promise richer analyses than do scientific behavioural approaches. Given this, it might be suggested that if one is interested in questions of meaning, one should conduct analyses of intervention cases by employing traditional methods. I want to suggest that while traditional approaches do enrich analyses of intervention, they do not go far enough. While traditional approaches treat questions of meaning differently than do scientific behavioural approaches, both approaches share similar debts and thus restrictions.

In particular, as Little mentions in his review of the intervention literature, when one speaks of boundaries between intervention practices and sovereignty, one is speaking of the state. He concludes that both scientific behavioural and traditional investigations of intervention have not offered more to international relations because

³⁹ I discuss the notion of a supposed international community as an interpretive sight of judgement in traditional studies of intervention below.

they are restricted by prevailing theorizations of the state in international relations. In Little's view:

According to this theory [of international relations], states are defined as sovereign institutions which possess absolute authority over their own territory. Any erosion of this authority is considered to challenge the sovereignty and, therefore, the existence of the state.⁴⁰

In making this argument, Little highlights the importance of theorizing about the state when one investigates sovereignty and intervention. He argues that international relations theories of the state must improve for intervention analyses to improve.⁴¹ However, what Little does not recognize is that refining a theory of the state is just what these approaches to the study of intervention *cannot* do because they begin by positing the state as sovereign and then use sovereignty as a point of reference.⁴²

Recall once again the preliminary interpretations of historical intervention practices by the Concert of Europe and the United States noted earlier. Conventional interpretations of these historical incidents would focus on intervention as a violation of state sovereignty. A behavioural social scientist would use an operationalized definition of intervention as his interpretive guide; a traditional theorist would use social codes of legality or nonintervention as her interpretive guide.

What both conventional approaches presuppose are sovereign states with boundaries that might be violated. It is the job of conventional theorists to determine under what conditions the boundaries of sovereign states are violated. It is beyond the scope of their analyses to question what the boundaries of sovereign states are, what constitutes a sovereign state, and whether or not it is possible to speak of sovereign states. For these conventional interpretations of intervention to be meaningful, there must already exist domestic communities whose authority can be violated and (for normative interpretations) international communities who can judge whether or not intervention norms have been violated.

For domestic communities to exist, two conditions must be met. First, one must solve problems of inclusion and exclusion. That is, who is and is not a member of any domestic community must be clear. Thus, a domestic community must be distinguishable both from members of other domestic communities and others who are not members of any community. As the illustrations of intervention practices at the beginning of this article indicate, distinguishing just who is and is not a member of a domestic community is never easy, particularly in times of domestic turmoil. Who was a member of the domestic community in Spain in 1820 or of Mexico in 1917? In the face of this difficulty, both approaches to the study of intervention meet the condition of distinguishing a domestic community theoretically.

Both approaches hold that sovereignty and intervention constitute the boundary of sovereign authority for a state. Yet in both cases, this boundary is stabilized by theorists and not by international diplomatic practice. For scientific behaviouralists,

⁴⁰ My brackets; Little, 'Intervention Revisited', p. 54. Little's complaint is that what constitutes a challenge to state sovereignty—intervention—is too narrowly defined in international relations theory. It must be broadened to include economic as well as military intervention, for example.

⁴¹ Little, 'Intervention Revisited', p. 59.

⁴² Little's blindness to this point is due to his own work on intervention from a traditional perspective. In his book, *Intervention: External Involvement in Civil Wars*, Little breaks with the traditionalists who view intervention as a form of deviance and instead regards intervention 'as a result of autistic thinking: a systematic distortion of reality' (p. xii). Even so, underlying this autism is the norm of nonintervention which is attributable to both an international society (p. 18) and a stable notion of sovereignty.

this boundary is drawn in the act of operationalizing intervention in relation to state sovereignty. For traditionalists, this boundary is drawn by stabilizing sovereignty as a 'first principle' and, while holding sovereignty constant, asking what intervention means in relation to prevailing norms of nonintervention.

A second condition which must be met for one to speak of 'domestic communities' is for the transitory character of sovereign authority to be overlooked. That is, theorists cast a blind eye toward practices which displace monarchical sovereignty with popular sovereignty. Theorists of both approaches cannot and indeed must not acknowledge that foundations of sovereign authority change historically. One cannot acknowledge that the meanings of both sovereignty and intervention change historically if the meaning of one depends upon the meaning of the other. For to acknowledge the variable content in that which one holds constant—sovereignty—is to prevent analysis of intervention.

Additionally, both approaches reserve a site of judgement.⁴³ At this location, answers to whether or not a specific practice is an instance of intervention are given. For scientific behaviouralists, answers are pronounced by theorists. Theorists occupy this site of judgement. For traditionalists, however, the site of judgement is occupied by a supposed international community. In his book on intervention, Little notes the interdependence of the concepts of international society and nonintervention norms.

The purpose of international norms . . . is to assist in the development and maintenance of an ordered international society . . . [States] abide by the norms to promote this order. One of the cardinal rules which underlies the conception of an international society is the nonintervention norm. It is on the basis of this norm that the sovereignty and independence of states are maintained . . . Without a conception of international society, a basic principle of this kind cannot function.⁴⁴

Little's point is that it is an interpretive community—in this case a supposed international community—which gives meaning to international norms. Without an interpretive community, norms cannot function because no one can authoritatively say what norms mean. And, like domestic communities, for international communities to exist requires both stable domestic/international boundaries and clear constituencies (this time of sovereign states rather than of citizens). As already noted, these boundaries and constituencies are posited *a priori* by theorists.

Reconsidering statehood

Taking these points together, it seems that if one intends to take seriously Little's call for a reconsideration of theories of sovereign statehood, one might begin by analyzing the relationship between sovereignty and intervention. If sovereignty and intervention in some sense constitute a boundary, then the interesting question is what does this boundary mean in international practice? How is it constituted in practice, and what are its implications for the state? Asking such questions requires breaking with both scientific behavioural and traditional approaches to the study of intervention because

⁴³ For a discussion of 'sites of judgement', see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, 1977).

⁴⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 18.

both approaches treat boundaries as accomplished facts rather than as open questions which find temporary solutions in international practice.

Furthermore, both approaches are rooted in a logic of representation which allows one to treat sovereignty and intervention as foundation and indicator. However a symbolic order is generated—by theorists positioned outside of history or by practitioners positioned inside history—within a representational symbolic order, indicators represent foundations. For scientific behaviouralists, that intervention signifies a violation of sovereignty is worked out through theoretical practices of operationalization.

For traditionalists, intervention also signifies a violation of sovereignty. Yet in contrast to scientific behaviouralists, traditionalists do allow for variable meanings of intervention at different historical periods. What intervention means, according to traditionalists, changes as norms of nonintervention change. For traditionalists, meanings of intervention are not generated by theorists but by a supposed international community. Thus, as noted above, that meanings are public, worked out in practice, and historically interpreted so that the same observable phenomena can carry different meanings in different cultures, is accounted for in traditional approaches. However, regardless of its specific meaning, intervention is meaningful only in relation to norms of nonintervention, and these norms are only meaningful in relation to sovereignty.⁴⁵

To work within a logic of representation is to maintain that a foundation exists to guarantee meaning. With respect to intervention, this presumed ground is sovereignty. Intervention is a meaningful concept so long as it expresses a violation of state sovereignty. But what happens when one cannot meaningfully speak of state sovereignty? What happens—as in the cases of revolutionary Spain, Naples, Mexico, and Russia—when state boundaries cannot be stabilized, domestic communities cannot be identified, and a transference of authority from a citizenry to a state government cannot take place? With respect to these ambiguously specified locales, is it possible to speak of sovereignty, much less a violation of state sovereignty? Put simply, can one meaningfully speak of sovereignty and of intervention practices in the absence of clear foundations?

The answer seems to be both yes and no. That theorists regularly do speak about sovereignty and intervention as if these concepts refer back to some foundation or ground has two important effects. First, to speak about intervention practices is to imply the existence of sovereign states. This might be called the alibi function of discourses of intervention. Jean Baudrillard argues that one way to assert the ‘realness’ of something like sovereignty is by contrasting it with its ‘hyperreal’ counterpart, intervention. Baudrillard argues that a logic of representation has been replaced by simulation. ‘[T]he age of simulation . . . begins with a liquidation of all referentials . . .’⁴⁶ Indicators (signs of the real) no longer represent foundations (the real). Simulation ‘is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real

⁴⁵ That traditional analyses of intervention do not escape a logic of representation is not surprising when one reconsiders Geertz explanation of culture as a semiotic concept. For Geertz, a logic of representation still applies. What Geertz adds is an awareness that different symbolic orders function simultaneously in different historical and geographical locales. For behaviour to be meaningful, one must access those symbolic orders which convey meaning. For Geertz, indicators do represent foundations within a symbolic order. To this extent, Geertz arguments adhere to a logic of representation.

⁴⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulation*, translated by P. Foss, P. Patton, and P. Beichman (New York, 1983), p. 4.

itself . . .'.⁴⁷ Thus, rather than indicators referring to foundations, indicators or models of the real refer to other indicators. Indicators, in other words, are self-referential. In such a system of symbolic exchange, questions of what is 'real' and what is 'imaginary' have no meaning because there exists only the imaginary. Indeed, 'simulation threatens the difference between "true" and "false", between "real" and "imaginary"'.⁴⁸ This system of symbolic exchange Baudrillard calls the 'hyperreal'.

Baudrillard notes that simulation is particularly troubling for Western culture.

All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could *exchange* for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God,⁴⁹ of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say, reduced to the signs which attest his existence? Then the whole system becomes weightless; it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum: not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.⁵⁰

Thus, an attempt is made to save the 'reality principle'—the belief that a logic of representation ultimately has some ground that guarantees symbolic exchange. This leads Baudrillard to expound his alibi theory. His argument is that within this system of symbolic exchange in which 'reality' operates according to principles of 'hyper-reality'—where indicators refer to other indicators and where questions of 'real' and 'imitation' lose their meaning—recognizable 'imitations' are circulated in order to give the appearance that some 'real' exists. His example is Disneyland. Says Baudrillard:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.⁵¹

In this illustration, Disneyland provides the alibi to suggest that America is 'real'. And just as 'fantasy' supports the claim that there exists a 'reality', so too does 'scandal . . . pay homage to the law'.⁵² Here, Baudrillard's example is Watergate. Of these illustrations and of simulation in general, Baudrillard suggests, 'It is always a question of proving the real by the imaginary; proving truth by scandal; proving the law by transgression . . .'.⁵³ For Baudrillard, then, one effect of practices which attempt to rescue the 'reality principle' and ground a logic of representation is that these practices put into circulation signs which endlessly refer back to themselves or other signs and—if recognizably 'unreal'—suggest that a 'real' exists.

Baudrillard's notion of simulation can be applied to discourses of sovereignty and intervention. Just as in simulation no ultimate foundation exists to ground indicators, so too with discourses of sovereignty, no 'domestic community' can be distinguished

⁴⁷ Baudrillard, *Simulation*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulation*, p. 5.

⁴⁹ In this passage, Baudrillard notes both a Western reliance on a logic of representation and on God as that which grounds this logic—God who serves as the ultimate foundation. With the rise of Enlightenment thinking, God was replaced as the ultimate foundation by man.

⁵⁰ Italics in original, *ibid.*, pp. 10–11. Baudrillard, *Simulation*, pp. 10–11.

⁵¹ Baudrillard, *Simulation*, p. 25.

⁵² Baudrillard, *Simulation*, p. 27.

⁵³ Baudrillard, *Simulation*, p. 36.

and made to serve as the foundation of sovereign authority within a state. Yet sovereignty is relied upon by diplomats and theorists to ground understandings of international practice. Diplomats forever call upon sovereignty in reference to their particular international practices, but the sovereignty to which they refer refers only to itself. That sovereignty appears to refer back to a ‘domestic community’ suggests that a ‘domestic community’ exists. In this sense, sovereignty is an alibi for a ‘domestic community’.

Yet sovereignty also needs an alibi. Otherwise, sovereignty will be seen to refer only to itself. According to diplomats and international relations theorists, to be sovereign a state must be recognized as sovereign by other sovereign states. But mutual recognition—self-reference—is not enough to rescue the ‘reality principle’, the belief that sovereignty does refer back to some citizenry or ground. Sovereignty’s alibi is intervention. As noted earlier, for intervention to be a meaningful concept, sovereignty must exist because intervention implies a violation of sovereignty. To speak of intervention, then, is to suggest that sovereignty does exist. In Baudrillard’s terms, intervention or transgression proves the law or sovereignty.

The second effect of speaking about sovereignty and intervention as if they refer back to a foundation is to constitute foundations in the very act of speaking about ‘them’. Often, this presumed ultimate foundation is a domestic citizenry. And while no stable citizenry—no domestic community within clear, fixed boundaries—can be located in practice, speaking as if a stable citizenry exists is to fix (however temporarily) the content of that citizenry discursively. It is through discursive practices that foundational meanings are identified and, thanks to this act of stabilization, sovereign states are ‘written’ or constituted.

Conclusion

What is at stake in the contestation of meaning in discourses of sovereignty and intervention? I suggest that the sovereignty of the state is at stake. Indeed, sovereign statehood is at stake. I suggest that there is no ‘natural’ sovereign state because there is no ‘natural’ foundation of sovereignty. While the belief that sovereign authority resides in ‘the people’ has become a less and less questioned foundation of state authority in the modern state system, this fact does not settle debates about sovereignty because just who the people are and who legitimately can speak for them is contested and constructed daily in international practice. And very often, debates about who ‘the people’ are and where sovereign authority resides occur around episodes of intervention practices.⁵⁴

For the foundational myth of sovereign statehood to be believable, the state requires more than a creation myth justifying its authority. What must be done to effect a sovereign state is to control how the people are ‘written’ or constituted—how their meaning is fixed. This is no small task. A state does not always monopolize control of the meanings of its mystical source of authority. Indeed, this power often has been claimed effectively by one or more other ‘intervening’ or ‘correcting’ sovereign state—acting on behalf of the international community or on behalf of some universalized principle of man (man as liberal democratic citizen, for

⁵⁴ See Weber, ‘“Writing” the State’.

example)—which penetrates the sovereign sphere of the state in the very name of sovereignty. This practice is justified by reference to the source of sovereign authority in the penetrated state (the king or the people) and by the interfering state's claim to represent that source.

Amidst competing claims to speak on behalf of the source of sovereign authority, states are 'written' or constituted in two ways. First, states are 'written' effects of attempts to exert effective control over representation, both political and symbolic. 'Political' representation involves a presumed exchange between the state and its citizenry. A citizenry authorizes the state to serve as its agent so long as the state honors its obligation to stand for and further the interests of that citizenry both domestically and internationally. What makes this relationship between the state and its citizenry possible is a second type of representation—'symbolic' representation understood as the act of depiction, the act of portraying officialized myth.⁵⁵ In this case, what is portrayed is the mystical source of sovereign authority, 'the people'. Symbolic representation is a strategy whereby the sovereign authority of the state is 'written' or invented in a specific form which serves as the grounding principle of the state.

If a state loses its control to symbolize its people in believable ways, then it risks losing its source of sovereign authority. It therefore risks losing the legitimacy attached to its claim to represent its source of sovereign authority. Only by maintaining control over the depiction of its people can the state authoritatively claim to be the agent of its people. Without the ability to make credible its claims to both political and symbolic representation, the state risks forfeiting its presumed ability of representations and ultimately its sovereignty.

Second, competing claims to speak on behalf of the sovereign authority of a state not only 'write' or invent the foundational authorities of states but also 'write' or draw boundaries between that which is within the sovereign jurisdiction of the state and that which is beyond it. If, for example, a state experiencing domestic turmoil can no longer 'represent' or write its 'people', then another sovereign state may claim to speak for the sovereign authority within this divided state. This is what President Wilson did in both the Mexican and Bolshevik revolutions. Making distinctions between governments and peoples, Wilson claimed to speak for and act on behalf of the Mexican and Russian peoples and against their respective governments. Furthermore, Wilson maintained that in the case of Mexico these practices did not constitute intervention. In so doing, Wilson redrew the boundaries of sovereign authority of Mexico and the newly-forming Soviet Union.

How Wilson and others 'write' foundational meanings in relation to notions of sovereignty and intervention redraws boundaries between sovereignty and intervention and expresses what it means to be a state at a particular time and place. If one wants to break with scientific behavioural and traditional analyses of sovereignty and intervention in a way that enriches analyses of the state, one must analyze how foundations and boundaries are drawn—how states are written with particular capacities and legitimacies at particular times and places.

⁵⁵ While the terms 'political' and 'symbolic' are used to distinguish these two types of representation, it should be understood that both types of representation are intensely political practices.