

## **Subverting Westphalia:**

### **A decolonial reading of the Modern State in International Relations**

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#### **Extended abstract:**

The object of the present project is the concept of the Modern State, whose “birth” is commonly associated with the Peace of Westphalia (1648), and how it is perceived by the mainstream field of International Relations (IR), specifically the English School and Constructivism. In academic debates within the field of IR, States or nation-states are worked on without major problems about their entities. This is largely due to a hegemonic perception that they are endowed with territory and population with a legitimate monopoly on physical violence within their borders (WEBER, 1992).

The Peace of Westphalia was a series of treaties signed between May and October 1648 in the cities of Osnabrück and Münster, effectively ending intra-European wars of a religious character, such as the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). It set the precedent for a new political order system in Europe, later called Westphalia sovereignty, based on the concept of coexisting sovereign states. Interstate aggression should be controlled by a balance of power. This framework is considered a constitutive object of the International System (IS) and International Relations as a discipline (JONES, 2006). From this perspective, the debates about anarchy in the IS arise (WALTZ, 1979), assuming that it does not have supranational actors as important as the State, saying: there is no power above the States. Sovereignty, from Westphalia, was represented as mutual recognition between the parties, with rationality being central to the possibility of creating a political society, both domestically and internationally. Through Westphalia, European States “solved” the problem of anarchy through cultural or contractual evolution. Non-European states, which did not have these attributes, remained in anarchy, only integrating the IS after reaching the so-called “standards of civilization” (MELO, 2019). However, when problematizing the Westphalian narrative, starting to work it as a “foundational myth” of the IR discipline, hierarchical power patterns that underpin the consolidation of IR as a field of study become noticeable, patterns that are present until today.

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Therefore, this research focus on making a decolonial reading of the modern State. The aim is to understand how the mobilization of the concept of sovereignty starts from a Eurocentric perception about the creation of the State that delegates to Europe a central role in the creation of modernity. In this sense, the modern state from Westphalia is read as a creation of an aseptic Europe, closed in on itself. This narrative, in turn, hierarchizes normatives about States as main units of the formation of the international, as well as mobilizes the concept of the State as a relatively homogeneous unity in its formation.

Thus, when working on an “other” epistemological and ontological dimension about the existence of these concepts, the decolonial reading of this narrative offers a way to think from difference to decolonization, and the construction and constitution of a radically distinct locus. This different epistemic and ontological perspective also means tensioning the boundaries of the formation of the international, understanding global history through other perspectives.

**Key words:** Modern State; Westphalia; Decoloniality; English School; Constructivism.