**Zeitschrift:** Tsantsa : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Ethnologischen Gesellschaft = revue de la Société suisse d'ethnologie = rivista della Società svizzera d'etnologia

**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Ethnologische Gesellschaft

**Band:** 14 (2009)

**Artikel:** New political arenas : international and non-governmental organizations, foundations, think tanks

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**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1007310

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# NEW POLITICAL ARENAS

## INTERNATIONAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, FOUNDATIONS, THINK TANKS

ALESSANDRO MONSUTTI AND BORIS-MATHIEU PÉTRIC

### THE GLOBALIZATION OF POLITICS

Rarely used twenty years ago, the term «globalization» is now so widespread that it has entered into everyday language. Given the proliferation of the word and the different ways in which it is used, an attempt at clarification is indispensable. In the French-speaking world, the term *mondialisation* (from *monde*, «world») was initially preferred to describe the unprecedented expansion of the capitalist economy and communication systems on a worldwide level. It covered the movement of merchandise, but also the intensification of the movement of people and ideas. But the English term «globalization» is increasingly used in the relevant body of literature.

We must obviously not forget that global flows, whether migratory or commercial, have always existed around the globe and that no society has ever been completely isolated. Since time began, transversal networks and different forms of sovereignty – complementary to, alternative to or in conflict with dominant structures – have always existed. Examples include the dissemination of certain universal religions (in particular Christianity and Islam) and the expansion of different imperial or colonial polities to various territorialities (marches, *limes*, protectorates, mandates and condominiums). Formerly, diasporas existed whereby peoples continued to maintain multiple ties with their society of origin as, for example, the Jews, the Greeks and the Armenians did. From an economic viewpoint, other periods of history have seen global systems of exchange. This trend has been underlined by several authors including Fernand Braudel (1979), Eric Wolf (1982), Lila Abu-Lughod (1989), Arjun Appadurai (1996), Marshall Sahlins (2000) and Immanuel Wallerstein (2004), to mention just a few. They have described globalizing phenomena affecting distant lands and previous historical periods, recognizing how the globalization of market exchanges and capitalism in recent times has not lead to a standardization of the world.

The uniqueness of today's globalization stems from recent technical innovations that have led to an intensification in worldwide communication and also, importantly, to a greater awareness of global interrelations and interdependencies (Eriksen 2007). During the second half of the nineteenth century, the invention of the telegraph allowed people to send information over long distances without the message having to be physically carried for the first time. This movement was crowned by the development of the Internet and the information society, so powerfully described by Manuel Castells (1996). In addition, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War at the beginning of the 1990s led to an opening of international relations and exchanges, which now no longer follow a bipolar logic. The emergence and proliferation of institutions that intend to participate in the

regulation of flows of people, merchandise and ideas has created a novel situation. This process not only gives rise to new global political arenas but also to unique ways of organizing power inside each society. It has an impact on both a global level and a local level.

This collection builds on the previous issue of *Tsantsa*, which discussed power relations[1]. Here, the focus will be on the displacement of sovereignty and legitimacy linked to the increasing role and visibility of transnational[2] networks, composed of international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), political party or philanthropic foundations, and independent research institutes or consulting agencies (more commonly known by the American expression «think tanks»).

## PEACE-BUILDING AND THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

Underlying this project are shared observations from our common research backgrounds: the recent political upheavals in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan that were the object of a remarkable degree of management from the outside.

In Afghanistan, the intervention of the American military coalition led to the fall of the Taliban Regime and the establishment of a new political power in Kabul at the end of 2001. The holding of two *loya jirga*, or constitutional grand assemblies (June 2002, December 2003–January 2004), followed by presidential (October 2004) and legislative elections (September 2005), were largely conducted under the influence of the driving force of the United States, their allies and the United Nations. However, while the government has almost no independent sources of revenue and the national budget largely depends upon international aid, Afghan society – at least some parts of it – appears hostile to the democratization process and to the establishment of a state subject to the rule of law respecting the values of the United Nations. Despite their differences, however, all Afghan actors look to increase their influence by gaining control of available resources, largely from the outside. Ministers, members of parliament, smugglers and commanders of the anti-Soviet resistance, human rights activists and Islamic militants, farmers and shopkeepers, mothers and fathers of large families, nearly all Afghans – men and women alike – are connected in one way or another to the outside world. Although they adopt different strategies and have varying means at their disposal, they all use transnational ties to promote their visions and interests (Monsutti 2009).

In Kyrgyzstan, the Tulip Revolution of March 2005 abruptly placed the former Soviet republic in the worldwide media spotlight. Following the trend of previous events in Georgia and Ukraine, this government changeover was to mark the advent of a non-authoritarian political era, one that would witness the election of a new parliament (*Jorgorku Kenesh*) and a new president embodying the effectiveness of democracy promotion as led by international organizations, Western NGOs and various foundations. However, the new authorities in power actually differ little from the establishment that was in place before. President Bakiev's new government – supposedly representing democracy and opposing the authoritarianism of former President Akaev – took advantage of the industry of democracy promotion to take power before progressively moving away from these principles and adopting the same political practices (fraud, ballot-stuffing, carousel voting, candidate invalidation) as his predecessor. This development is visible in closer ties with Moscow and Beijing, as well as the recent order for the closure of the US Manas Air Base[3]. In geo-strategic terms, the complex political situation in Kyrgyzstan has created a type of «globalized political arena» where the different powers who wish to influence the destiny of the country confront one another (Pétric 2005). Among these powers are the American, Russian and Chinese governments, as well as international and regional organizations, NGOs, political foundations and religious groups. Given this situation, we have used the term «arena» to describe the unique nature of the power plays inside certain political spaces where multiple players confront one another, moving from the local to the global scale.

In addition to attracting unprecedented media attention, these two situations have created a new historical context in the globalization of politics. Politics in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan are intrinsically tied to global issues

[1] See in particular the introduction (Rey 2008) which presents changes in perspective regarding power relations in anthropology.

[2] The term «transnational» refers here to transversal ties that are established across national borders between people or institutions; it differs from the term «international» which refers to relations between governments, and «multinational» which designates companies whose business activities take place in various countries.

[3] This base has housed military coalition planes since 2001 and is an entry point into Afghan territory. It essentially serves as a logistical base for troops and material.

that cannot be reduced to relations between states. Events are no longer limited to the East–West confrontation or the developing–developed polarization. The situation in Central Asia cannot be defined as a new Great Game[4] between empires. Undoubtedly, states remain major political players but they must develop new strategies to adapt to forms of power that did not exist in the nineteenth century, be it through international institutions, regional organizations, NGOs or large foundations that want to influence the current social situation throughout the world.

The establishment of this form of governmentality (Foucault 1991) – one that tends to redefine the sovereignty of states – can follow different models. International experts use the label «peace-building» to justify outside intervention in places like Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor and (obviously) Afghanistan. Other examples of situations that justify emergency interventions by the global governmentality include humanitarian crises (for example in Haiti), natural disasters (for example the earthquake in Bam, Iran), economic catastrophes (for example in Argentina, and in the worldwide increase of wheat prices) and other hybrid situations (for example, in Sri Lanka and Aceh after the tsunami in December 2004).

Kyrgyzstan, like many of the other regions in the former communist bloc, is a country that international experts label using the expression «in transition»[5]. This small Central Asian republic evidences another type of intervention that involves a process of political transformations that is less violent but still just as profound. The nation's «transitional» status justifies the involvement of different types of institutions and organizations that participate in economic reforms and public life and whose activities include the promotion of democracy and human rights, as well the protection of minorities, women's empowerment, public health and even rural development and education. This model of intervention is also employed in postcolonial situations in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

## NEW POLITICAL ACTORS

The international order rests upon the idea that states share sovereignty of the world by having exclusive control of separate territories. International organizations have been conceived to enhance debates and cooperation between the states. At the same time, however, the successive secretary generals of the United Nations have attempted, with more or less success, to affirm their autonomy before the members of the Security Council. The creation of the United Nations' Human Rights Council in 2006 intended to establish a universal mechanism to examine violations of human rights in all countries and constitutes a new element in the constantly evolving global governmentality.

The increasing importance of regional organizations such as the European Union, the African Union or the Shanghai Group must also be mentioned. Western governments have aid agencies that support development and that play a decisive role in the spread of this new relationship to politics. Through development programmes, these institutions contribute to increasing states' visibility and influence on the international level. They often act in conjunction with international organizations to call upon NGOs as subcontractors for their projects. Political foundations (for example, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and International Republican Institute in the United States, or the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Germany) and think tanks also contribute to politics in certain countries. It was partly by using them as intermediaries that neoconservatives exerted their influence under the Bush administration (2001–2009). Examples include the Hudson Institute or the Project for the New American Century (founded in 1997 by the neoconservative thinkers William Kristol and Paul Kagan). Further examples include the RAND Corporation (specializing in analyses for and advice to the American Armed Forces), the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (closely linked to the State Department) and the influential Brookings Institution (one of the oldest think tanks, founded in 1916). Philanthropic foundations must also be mentioned. Some examples include the Open Society Institute (OSI) headed by the American billionaire George Soros, which is very involved in the ex-Communist bloc countries, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which finances ambitious public health programmes in Africa and elsewhere. The term American «soft power» is used to describe this technique of influence which depends upon the work of this kind of organizations in the world.

[4] This expression designates the struggle for diplomatic and military influence that the British and Russian empires engaged in during the nineteenth century in Central Asia.

[5] For a study focusing on the Balkans, see Brown (ed., 2006).

The numerous international NGOs are evidence of a power structure that transcends national borders. Their core competencies now extend well beyond the protection of victims of conflicts, emergency action and humanitarian aid (a sector initially favoured by the International Committee of the Red Cross, Oxfam, Médecins sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde and Save the Children) and include political analysis (International Crisis Group), the defence of human rights and civil society (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House), the organization and monitoring of elections (International Foundation for Electoral Systems), the fight against corruption (Transparency International), the conservation of the environment (World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace). The scope of their activities has few limits. At the local level, too, coalitions of small NGOs and forums of associations or social movements have begun sprouting up around the world (Keck and Sikkink 1998). They are active in many fields, including the promotion of democracy (Pétric, dir. 2008), the protection of minorities (Gossiaux 2002), women's empowerment, public health (Atlani-Duault 2005), rural development, education, civil society, protest against deforestation and land management (Fischer 1997, 2001; Li 2007).

Certain NGOs openly define themselves as counter-powers, whether in relation to the growing influence of multinational corporations and international organizations (this is, in any case, the ambition of the alter-globalization movement) or authoritarian regimes. Other NGOs present themselves as non-partisan and apolitical, while international rhetoric underlines the supposedly beneficial role of civil society in the fight against poverty and corruption or post-conflict reconstruction. These situations provoke forms of depoliticization (Ferguson 1990) that consider interventions as merely «technical» and therefore not political. However, a different picture emerges when looking at the way in which these structures are organized and networked with financial and logistical support from bilateral and multilateral agencies, foundations or large NGOs. In fact, each organization is an active participant in political games at the local, national and international levels.

Clearly, global politics cannot be understood through the actions of state players and groups of state players alone. The label «non-governmental» does not necessarily mean that these organizations do not participate in power relations. Whether they are aligned with or against the authority in power, each is an integral aspect of an evolving political landscape. In all domains, a form of global governmentality supplements state power and contributes to the management of material resources – genetic engineering, environment, agriculture and fishing, human beings – as well as immaterial resources – cultural heritage, education, freedom of expression and religion[6]. Different political spaces are therefore undergoing profound modifications, without these changes giving rise to the territorial expansion of a state or empire. It is no longer a matter of the great powers of the moment going out to conquer the New World or to colonize additional territories. Their international influence now manifests itself through other vectors and power structures. As Georges Balandier (2003) says, «At the beginning, colonization was about taking control of territories by the establishment of an administrative, economic, and religious power. Today, the geographic, territorial reference is less and less decisive. New areas are created under the influence of techno-sciences corporations, notably where the virtual meets the real, stemming from the network of the economy, technologies, and media. In these newly created territories, men can act without the inconveniences of time, distance, or material restrictions. Positions are taken, relationships of domination appear.»

This flourishing of de-territorialized phenomena and transnational institutional actors not only has consequences for the play of influences on the global level but also contributes to the transformation of political relations at the heart of societies in developing and developed countries. Local players, in order to influence their ever changing realities, seek to capture resources brought in through transversal channels. The Afghan and Kyrgyz political spaces are therefore examples of a much more general phenomenon. In these political spaces «sovereignty» is continually redefined through increasingly complex ties and is reflected in changes to the organization of power exerted over peoples, territories and resources. International organizations, NGOs, political foundations, philanthropic foundations and think tanks are active participants in the constant elaboration of new political games.

## THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF POLITICS

This situation has many implications for anthropologists. In the field, researchers must now examine more and more situations involving interactions between multiple actors. The term «political arena» seems particularly appropriate to describe this new political game, operating on different levels. This observation is valid well beyond the borders

[6] For an open conception of resources, see Giddens (1984: 258).

of Central Asia and concerns a large number of societies in the world. For anthropology, there are whole series of consequences. In such a perspective, a development project, a rural village or the headquarters of an international organization can be understood as an arena.

This idea may best be understood when compared with Evans-Pritchard's classic texts on the Nuer. Today, it would seem difficult to propose such descriptions of political systems, religion or marital rules taken out of their larger contexts. First, researchers have become aware that few societies are structured around an exclusive relationship with a territory and its natural resources. In order to understand the social organization of any group, we should consider the relationships created with other groups and the multiplicity of the resources utilized. In other words, in order to clarify the local political reality, we must examine different scales. Secondly, it must be acknowledged that when Evans-Pritchard was describing the Nuer society this was embedded in a colonial power that the British anthropologist failed to even mention. By way of contrast, the Manchester school inspired by (amongst others) Max Gluckman[7] was an interesting attempt at describing a political arena which included the colonial power. Here, the concept of «situation» has been used to analyse the social relationships between colonizers and local political authorities. Today, this idea may be used to study transnational relationships that are established at the local level.

While methodology is an important question, it will not be addressed in this collection of articles. The issues of scale (local/global) and multi-sited anthropology have already been explored elsewhere[8]. Instead, we will focus on theoretical issues to do with how anthropologists construct their object of study, power and sovereignty. Contemporary politics is always part of wider historical and geographical contexts. This wider picture has significant implications for the ways in which anthropologists operate. Power structures in peripheral societies are always closely linked to globalization, despite their apparent distance from international exchanges. For anthropologists, these power structures merit closer examination as it is no longer possible to believe that societies exist independently of larger social contexts. Ignoring the wider context of political relations may lead to misrepresentations of political life. However, the aim of this collection is not to produce a typology of actors and their classifications (using the well-established local/global, citizen/foreigner, civil society/politician and broker/international expert categories). Instead, we have chosen to focus on the effect of transnational relations on local politics. As new global political arenas are created, the role of organizations traditionally considered external to local politics must be reconsidered in particular in the fields of public policy and social relations.

Global political arenas have been the object of anthropological studies for several years. Studies on the development industry (Ferguson 1990), the European Commission in Brussels (Abélès 1983, 2008a; Bellier and Wilson, eds 2000; Bellier 1995, 2002), the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank in Washington (Harper 1998; George and Sabelli 1994), United Nations agencies in New York and the WTO in Geneva (Chalfin 2006) have all contributed to new perceptions of power shifts. Other studies have chosen to focus on indigenous people (Schulte-Tenckhoff 1997; Bellier 2006), the «without borders» movement (Siméant 2005) or new global political arenas like those in Porto Alegre or Nairobi (Siméant and Mayer 2004; Pommerolle and Siméant 2008). And further studies have focused on development brokers (Bierschenk et al., dir. 2000; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, dir. 2007) and humanitarianism (Hours 1998; Agier 2002). Nevertheless, much more work is needed before this phenomenon can be fully understood. This collection aims to provide further insights into different forms of embedded politics and the complexity of political relations today.

## ANALYTICAL PRESENTATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Through fieldwork, reading and discussions with colleagues, we have developed a certain understanding of how the way anthropologists study social phenomena has evolved. The approach adopted by this collective work is comparative. The contributions deal with different regions and operate on different scales. They all provide empirical insights into the new global power game and political organization underlying all societies. Inevitably, the countries focused on are spread across the globe and include the Philippines, Pakistan, Madagascar, Cameroon, Senegal and Bulgaria. Some articles examine delocalized politics, concentrating on UN agencies (the UNHCR and FAO), foundations set up by political parties (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung) or a transnational development organization (Aga Khan Development Network). Others touch on

[7] See, for instance, his work on Zululand (Gluckman 2008).

[8] See, for instance, Gupta and Ferguson (eds, 1997) and Ghasarian (ed., 2006).

cooperative efforts (USAID), private organizations (the Open Society Institute) or environmental organizations (the Wildlife Conservation Society).

Marion Fresia examines the case of Mauritian refugees in Senegal and how they are affected by the activities of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Looking into the question of power in humanitarian spaces, she analyses its impact on displaced populations. Humanitarian aid is the result of conflicting dynamics which reinforce or call into question the sovereignty of nation states while giving rise to new forms of supranational power. Some interpretations of this situation underline the UNHCR's role as the defender of Western interests and the suppression of borders through transnational social and identity strategies. Fresia questions these views and paints a different picture of refugee camps. Instead of being «extraterritorial» spaces where undesirable populations can be controlled and confined, refugee camps are presented as new political arenas where various actors struggle to impose their supremacy using different justifications, either successively or simultaneously. Her observations show how new forms of sovereignty emerge in political spaces where local, national and transnational strategies converge.

Birgit Müller concentrates on another UN agency, the Food Agricultural Organization (FAO). As claimed by its Latin motto, *fiat panis* («let there be bread»), the FAO aims to create a world without hunger. The global nature of this objective inevitably has implications for international food and agricultural sovereignty. According to Müller, the FAO's role is ambiguous, divided between mediation – providing an international arena for debate and discussion – and acting within the development process. This ambiguity is particularly visible in the debate surrounding GMOs and new agricultural techniques. To avoid becoming involved in political debates, the FAO focuses on technical issues and uses the global consensus on the need to alleviate poverty to justify its position. As underlined by the article, the FAO's strategy bypasses national authorities in order to facilitate direct dialogue between FAO representatives and civil society. In this situation, civil society can be seen as another political arena where multiple power struggles are played out.

Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos examines German political foundations in the Philippines, a country traditionally under American influence. Today, the country is home to a multitude of national and international NGOs. Some of these organizations, acting as the «soft power» instruments of powerful countries, work openly for the country's democratization. The article focuses on the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, part of Germany's attempt to set up centres of influence in Asia. These two organizations, active in the Philippines for nearly forty years, have various objectives including the decentralization of government, electoral observation, the strengthening of municipal authorities and the promotion of freedom of the media. In particular, the organizations are active in building peace and in resolving conflicts between the central government in Manila and Mindanao Island. While the government of the Philippines is predominantly made up of Christian elites, Mindanao Island is home to several separatist Muslim movements. As a solution to the problem, these organizations advocate the German federal model. While their actions have had little success to date, they have allowed some minorities to express their opposition to centralized power structures.

Dostena Anguelova-Lavergne examines the role that civil society associations had during Bulgaria's transition to democracy. These associations are neither political parties nor popular movements and developed independently of electoral activities. Nevertheless, their role in creating a new political space after the collapse of the communist system is undeniable. Set up with assistance from George Soros' Open Society Institute and USAID, they are examples of the American «soft power» strategy. Anguelova-Lavergne focuses on one think tank in particular, the Center for Liberal Strategies. She looks into how the organization's main leader became a prominent figure in Bulgaria before going on to make his influence felt in the European Union. The many organizations involved in promoting democracy form networks stretching across the borders of Eastern European countries. Using their global support, the representatives of these organizations have constituted a new elite despite lacking local constituency. As noted in this article, civil society can no longer be considered external to existing power structures.

Concentrating on Africa, Michaela Pelican examines «indigenous people» labels and how they are used by the Mbororo people of northwest Cameroon. The Mbororo people, a group of pastoralists who are relatively marginal in Cameroon's politics, obtained a few years ago the status of indigenous people as recognized by the United Nations. This has given them more visibility and access to diverse resources. It has also given rise to social, cultural, legal and political claims at the local and national levels. The case of the Mbororo people is not unique in Africa. Other groups have also adopted the UN rhetoric to further their own rights and interests. In the struggle for control of natural resources, the UN label adds another dimension to

relationships between rival leaders, local groups and governments. However, the UN is an organization of states and has not always lived up to the Mbororo's expectations. Pelican shows how globalization and development practices have given rise to new political arenas where conflicting interests and strategies are played out.

Shafqat Hussain examines projects run by the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in the Hunza. Before being incorporated into Pakistan, this region was part of the colonial state of Kashmir. Its status in international law is still not totally clear. In this uncertain context, the article identifies different forms of sovereignty operating in the region that affect inhabitants' daily lives. It also looks into the perceptions and reactions of these Ismaili populations to activities financed by their spiritual guide, the Aga Khan. His authority is recognized in spite of the fact that he lives in Aiglemont, north of Paris. His religious aura has created what the author calls a «transnation» made up of his millions of followers spread throughout the world. Given this unique context, «sovereignty» does not flow directly from political power, administrative control of a defined region or the monopoly of legitimized violence. Instead, it is derived from an organization's power to influence local events. Here, the AKDN is active in providing some protection and basic services to inhabitants (such as health and education). It has therefore built a kind of sovereignty, based on its own development and modernization project, which is not in conflict with the sovereignty of Pakistan itself. Rather, Ismaili networks should be considered as complementary to state activities.

Eva Keller has focused on another form of global governmentality, namely environmental conservation in Madagascar. The island's biodiversity is unique and the country is home to several indigenous species. Protection of the environment and the establishment of protected areas are therefore important issues. The country has attracted the attention of numerous environmental organizations whose aim is to participate in the management of its natural resources, one example of these being the Wildlife Conservation Society, based in New York. The author carries out a meticulous ethnographical analysis of Masoala National Park and, in doing so, depicts the range of national, international and transnational actors in the region and their complex relationships with one another. In particular, she describes how local populations interact with these new constraints and how they develop surprising strategies to retain control over their means of subsistence. The postcolonial context adds another interesting dimension to power relations: as France's presence in the country is gradually reduced, this is supplanted by the influx of international and non-governmental organizations. Consequently, external actors play an important role in Madagascar's national politics. Acting as guarantors of the environment and environmental protection measures as defined at the international level, these organizations – paradoxically – allow Madagascar's government to increase its local presence.

As these articles show, the «international community» is a deceptive concept. While it implies a large consensus, it in fact hides various power struggles. On the local level, politics can be seen as an arena where different strategies are played out. Local actors struggle for, obtain and manipulate global resources. However, power struggles are not always asymmetric, nor do they systematically reflect the activities of international organizations representing Western interests. One of the most promising tasks of anthropology is to highlight the complex, contradictory and unexpected nature of these forms of power. Speaking on a global level, it is not possible to reduce this process to Westernization or the developed countries' dominance over developing countries. Within international organizations themselves, relationships are constantly evolving bringing to the fore new strengths and new debates. The collection could also have focused on transnational networks built around Muslim organizations (Rabita in Saudi Arabia, Fetulla Gülan in Turkey, the Khoei Foundation and Shiite *ulema* networks) or around protestant Korean NGOs active in Central Asia. In the field of development, we could also have mentioned non-Western donors like the Asian Development Bank.

## LOCAL AND GLOBAL: THE RELEVANCE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropologists could play a wider role in the debate on the power structures that we have chosen to identify by the expression «global governmentality» in order to describe how societies are organized, underlining the fact that power is multi-dimensional. For their part, most international organizations use the concept of «governance». The UN, the World Bank and the IMF promote «good governance» which involves setting up political strategies and public space based on smooth interactions between the government, political parties, private companies and civil society. These initiatives have given rise to a stereotypical and institutional vocabulary (Rist 2002) which is used abundantly by the transnational elite working in these organizations. This vocabulary has the effect of reducing the wider «good governance» phenomenon to mere technical reforms. In this collection, we have chosen to use the term «governmentality» initially put forward by Michel Foucault and then rede-

fined in the contemporary context by Ferguson and Gupta (2002) and Abélès (2008b). Using a wide and pragmatic vision of power, it is particularly useful to the empirical – not speculative – approach at the heart of anthropology.

By thinking in this way about power, we do not mean to break with prior anthropological research. Instead, we hope our questions, based on pioneer studies in anthropology, will help renew the debate on the state and power. We are inspired by early texts – for example, the studies carried out by British anthropologists in the 1950s and 1960s examining politics in Africa (segregated societies, chieftainships and monarchies) and the studies carried out by authors such as Pierre Clastres showing the diversity of political systems in human societies.

Today, the notion of the state is pivotal to international relations. In the 185 states recognized by the UN, however, there are an equal number of different political realities and just as many different power structures. Instead of using the term «state», the term «political space» might be more appropriate to propose a descriptive and comparative approach. The next step is to examine «politics» within this space. In doing so, the study should focus on its concrete aspects: the multiple activities of national bureaucracies, international organizations, NGOs and foundations. Our understanding of the notion of «state» is not limited to traditional definitions, which usually refer to the nation-state or the state characterized by its monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force as proposed by Max Weber. Instead, the focus is on new forms of legitimacy, sovereignty and the use of power.

Creating a normative and static typology of the state, however, would be redundant. What is needed is subtle terminology that can describe the many varying political spaces throughout the world (Sharma and Gupta 2006). To take a few contrasting examples, power is not exercised in the same way in Kosovo, Afghanistan, China or the United States. Our considerations naturally raise questions as to how power is exercised in a given society, how the state legitimizes its power and who the actors involved in public policy are.

In the field of the political sciences, there are several important studies examining transnational elites and the globalization of politics. These works generally give rise to an analysis of the changing forms of sovereignty. Two alternative interpretations seem to dominate. The first approach underlines how globalized politics become de-territorialized, leading to a dialectic between «weak» and «strong» states (Badie 1992; Badie and Déloye 2007). The second approach demonstrates how the internationalization of politics reinforces state policies that operate differently from one place to the next (Bayart 2004). Both of these approaches seek to focus on sovereignty and how it is measured.

However, the globalization of politics can be seen in another way, one which is to a certain extent consistent with classical studies in political anthropology. This approach focuses on «displacements» (Abélès 2008a). Geographical and political displacements are not only observed in exotic societies but in every society. As such, they provide insight into current reflections on postcolonial spaces. The anthropological discipline is based on a sound theoretical and methodological corpus which has been developed over a considerable period of time. Anthropological tools are particularly well adapted to describe global governmentality in contemporary societies, both in general and specific terms, without succumbing to speculation. Using an empirical and qualitative approach, anthropology describes «how things are» and not «how they ought to be».

*Translated from French by Rhonda Campbell*

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