

TRANSVERSAL LINES

An introduction

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Speaking about the international, identifying its specificity, has commonly depended on multiple fragmentations: levels of analysis to distinguish the internal from the international, and particular individuals from both; disciplinary boundaries that differentiate international relations from anthropology (confined to localized peoples of marginal interest), and from both sociology and politics (confined to the domestic life of nations and states); distinctions between theoretical and empirical research, between politics and economics, and between scholars willing to face up to political realities and those who prefer to imagine something better. Scholars in other fields encounter related distinctions, but studies of the international always seem to rely on the sharpest of cuts both to identify what the international is and what counts as a legitimate way of studying it.

International political sociology is one (but only one) attempt to avoid these fragmentations. In the most general terms, it seeks to avoid them through an emphasis on transversal lines that cut across conventional planes of scholarship, both theoretically and empirically. Grounded in a critical analysis of the international as a specific object, reassessing the ways in which the international may be identified as a 'problem', and taking advantage of specific methodological strategies, international political sociology has been consciously envisaged as a trans-disciplinary project, one that necessarily resists more familiar appeals to an interdisciplinary discourse aiming to assemble novel forms of disciplinary knowledge so as to reconstitute a different kind of unified social science. On the contrary, international political sociology has sought to build on the possibilities of de-disciplinizing.

The notion of transversal lines is intended to articulate the distinctive contributions of various forms of knowledge, depending on the specific phenomena, trajectories and problems that are in question. It seeks to identify procedures for thinking about continuities and change in ways that do not ultimately rely upon claims about essentialist or transcendental causalities, or simplify everything into a

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form of 'order'. It demands instead that we think about process, change and flows through a continuous reflection on the assumptions enabling claims to knowledge, and provoke discussion with established disciplinary traditions of political sociology, political theory, anthropology, geography, criminology and various strands of the humanities in order to enhance our understanding of the multiple facets and circulations of power and authority.

The development of international political sociology, and the journal *IPS: International Political Sociology*, has been given strong institutional support by the International Studies Association (ISA). This should not be taken to imply that international political sociology is a monolithic movement located within a single discipline; again on the contrary. The scholars who have shaped its contributions so far are more properly understood as members of partially overlapping intellectual and disciplinary communities with a common passion for transversal research projects. A burgeoning number of articles, workshops, and conference papers underline how these scholars engage in debates within and across a variety of disciplines. It is perhaps significant that they sometimes choose to write very long collective articles despite the prevailing conventions of academic publishing. As such, international political sociology is better understood as a *comitium*, an open space that welcomes scholars who are critical of the fragmentations and foundational assumptions of their respective disciplines or sub-disciplines.

International political sociology began by considering the most influential forms of international relations scholarship as both object and subject of critique. How could it be possible to find transversal lines that might resist the entrenched categorisations that seemed to affirm an idealized and even nostalgic view of social and political orders that were clearly under immense stress, not to say falling apart? Specific publications and discussions around the uncertain course of contemporary world politics in the late 1980s and the early 1990s opened up many possibilities. Richard K. Ashley's article elegantly entitled 'Untying the Sovereign State', R. B. J. Walker's book, *One World, Many Worlds*, the collection edited by James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro, and the article 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline' by Ashley and Walker certainly mark significant sites through which the institutionalized discipline of international relations came under forceful questioning from within.¹

Yet, it is also from the outside, and partly in opposition to Anglo-American linguistic hegemony, that a large constituency for international political sociology has developed. For example, the intellectual collaboration between the two romance-language journals *Conflitti Globali* in Italy and *Cultures & Conflits* in France has contributed significantly to the creation of critical space that nurtured the international political sociology project, especially in Europe. These journals have long endeavoured to provide innovative and critical evaluations of the securitization of migration, border control and enhanced technological tools of surveillance, on the one hand, and of the reformulation of war, logic of suspicion and practices of exception, on the other.² With resources from two successive international research projects funded through the European Union's Fifth and Sixth framework

programmes (FP5 ELISE and FP6 CHALLENGE), the partnership between these journals has led to fruitful discussions and publications on the constitutive role played by war and security in national and international politics.

Whether internally or externally, these and other publications were the product of scholars who shared a strong sense of dissatisfaction with not only the achievement of conventional international relations but also, and perhaps more importantly, with the assumptions that shaped the specific forms in which international relations came to be institutionalized. Cracks appeared in this well-oiled institutional machinery, and international political sociology was able to take advantage of a specific moment of uncertainty, indeterminacy and the palpably changing character of contemporary social and political practices, both empirically and analytically.

It is nevertheless important to underline that international political sociology is not a new synthesis. It is not a new meta-narrative articulating a nicely homogeneous political sociology of the international. It rather raises a set of uncomfortable questions and proposes an array of alternative ways for thinking about the international. Whatever one assumes is being identified by concepts of an international, the relations it expresses are less likely to be linear or monocausal than transversal: criss-crossing and generating diverse, plural and transnational social and political practices. Consequently, international political sociology is better understood as a project, a collaborative endeavour primarily intended to further dialogue across areas of scholarship that usually proceed in comfortable isolation from one another. It is an invitation to assess the articulation of modern thought and the forms of silencing that some of the divisions between disciplines have created. It is thus also an invitation to re-envision ways of engaging with entrenched boundaries, borders and categories,³ as well as to analyse specific practices, especially their justifications and routines, their effects on the reproduction of particular narratives, and their contributions to the empowerment of particular groups or individuals over others.⁴ It seeks to engage with emerging forms of domination and social (im)mobility, stretch the possibilities of epistemological enquiry, identify transversal lines questioning unitary categories like the social, the political and the international, and learn from dissident scholars who, like ourselves, still work within established disciplines of sociology, anthropology, geography, political theory, international studies, and so on.

Reworking the modern categories expressed by these different disciplines concerned with the international is not simple. A lot is at stake both in these categories and especially in the distinctions between them. Nor is it a radical theoretical exercise for its own sake. It is, in part, a call for applying greater sociological imagination to understanding the various and entrenched divisions of and in many worlds. Perhaps more importantly, it is a plea for reflexive scholarship aiming at countering teleological and dogmatic visions of the world transmitted through the symbolic violence of entrenched categories and distinctions.⁵ It is also in part an attempt to appreciate the historical depth not only of the categories it seeks to rework but also the forces that have shaped the capacity of sociology to speak

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about a society, political science to speak about a polity, and international relations scholars to speak about an international.

International political sociology is not trying to localize either politics or the international; rather, it seeks to provoke discussions about relations of power and practices of authorization in ways that do not simply condone or justify established categories and classifications. As such, it does not automatically separate out a global/international level from myriad other levels, such as the national and sub-national, the territorial or extra-territorial, self or other, inside or outside. It is thus an invitation to explore the fissures in the walls that orthodox scholarship erects around the analysis of the international, to analyse the logics of diffraction and disjunction, and to re-engage with longstanding questions about power relations and mechanisms of social change as well as novel forms of heterogeneity, transformation and struggles for power.

In short, international political sociology questions the rationales through which international relations has defined the international, political science has understood politics and sociology has conceptualized society. It also tries to reconnect some branches of humanities by obliging them to confront the tendency of some disciplines to present themselves as sites of autonomous knowledge providing specific technologies of action and power. It thus resists influential ideas of modernisation and expertise predicated on clear demarcations between domains of thought that make it easy to distinguish an inside of society from its outside, or a modernity in the making from its non-modern residues, or a domain of politics that is different from science and *techné*, or a domain of facts that is different from values.

Thus as an exercise in relations, tensions and transversals which destabilise the different versions of the opposition between structure and agency, international political sociology endeavours to avoid some of the tendencies commonly found in political science generally and theorisations of international relations in particular: essentialization and ahistoricism; a false dualism between constructivism and empirical research; and an absolute opposition between the collective and the individual. A sociology of practices, and especially of practices of power and politics, must refuse the core tenets of methodological individualism and methodological nationalism, insisting that individuals and communities exist only in relations and are embedded in processes.⁶ From this stance, thinking processually and relationally is the most appropriate way to understand how fields of forces are organised and evolved. Processes rather than reified things best represent the phenomena that we encounter in the world around us. This impels us to think in terms of movement, trajectories and becoming rather than the fixed and static, the separate and self-contained.⁷ A relational perspective is also processual, insisting that social and political life is not reducible to the intersubjectivity of already pre-constituted entities. It is the relations between agents that permit us to understand their practices and what constitutes and transform their identities.

The present book is prompted by the feeling that it is now time to pause and to take stock of the intellectual dynamics between dissident researchers who are unsatisfied with disciplinary boundaries, the enclosure of knowledge and so on. We

have not tried to compile a catechism or establish a new orthodoxy, but to highlight the diversity of contemporary research and bring together leading scholars from various intellectual and geographical backgrounds so as to encourage much needed transversal conversations.

Outline of the book

The book is divided into three sections: *Lines*, *Intersections* and *Directions*. The first section examines some of the influences that led to the formation of the project of international political sociology, the second explores some key concepts, and the third explores some transversal topics of research within the project.

In the first part, R. B. J. Walker, Didier Bigo, John Agnew, Mathias Albert and Yosef Lapid reflect on international political sociology's moment of emergence and how certain transversal intellectual dynamics within and outside the international relations discipline provide a fertile soil for the international political sociology project today. They analyse the differentiation between the way the international relations discipline inspired largely by political science and international political sociology approach the problem of the international, as well as some of the main discussions emerging from trans-disciplinary debates.

Rob Walker considers what is at stake in the concepts of a social, a political and an international in order to insist that what may appear to be debates about contemporary academic disciplines speak to a much longer history. Critiques of international relations theory were always about much more than the limited horizons of specific forms of institutionalized knowledge. Reading the move towards process, practice, relationality and politicization as the appropriate response to the reification of structural forms in states, nations and disciplines, he simultaneously reminds us about the continuing appeal of principles guiding progressive accounts of what it means to speak about humanity in general and politically qualified citizenships in particular. Paradoxically, the stress on careful analyses of social practice quickly exposes the need for careful analysis of principles and concepts that seem to work precisely because of their apparent abstraction from social or political practices. In his contribution, Didier Bigo shows that the lines of politicization are not ontologically bounded by either the spatiality of the interstate system or the temporality of a global order in the near future. He emphasizes how thinking in terms of immanence and change leads to a different framing of the problem of the international today. Insisting on the logic of practices, he proposes to explore the lengthening of the chains of interdependence linking the practices of the different actors, and the types of dynamics that result from the proliferation of boundaries. Once relations and process are highlighted, it becomes easier to understand how centrifugal and centripetal dynamics organize practices of politicization internationally. John Agnew then comes back to his own earlier critique of the conceptualization of territory and sovereignty within the discipline of international relations⁸ and shows how rethinking spaces and places far from the ordering of contiguity allows us to understand contingencies, discontinuities and the

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continuities they produce. Finally, Mathias Albert and Yosef Lapid reconsider the significance of thinking in terms of relations and process instead of substance and essentialist categories. Their contribution is informed by the Identity, Border and Order initiative, another attempt to disturb the dominant ontology of stability and continuity in international relations. They consider that two different paths have been opened for conceiving a political sociology that avoids methodological nationalism and essentialist accounts of a national society. If the international political sociology project insisting on tensions and disruptions is one possibility, rethinking in more global terms through a sociology of international politics is an alternative that cannot be marginalized.

All these authors insist on the need to examine specific practices, relations between actors, temporal processes, the diversity of places, the multiplicity of ways in which people congregate, and so on, rather than simply presume continuity, territory and the centralization of power and authority. They encourage attention to places where lines become boundaries, how they crisscross, cut, intersect and destroy the continuity of other lines, and organize a pattern of traces left by multiple dynamics of human activity. The painting by Kandinsky reproduced on the cover of this volume may be suggestive in this respect.

The second theme is the exploration of the key intersections or nodes permitting explorations of these lines, at the core of which lies a series of heated discussions about power and authority, practices and governmentality, performativity and reflexivity. Quite clearly, Foucault's theory of disciplinary power and Bourdieu's sociology of power, with a particular emphasis on forms of domination, have played a productive role in the development of the international political sociology project. In his contribution, Mitchell Dean discusses Foucault's notion of *dispositif* and his understanding of power. Dean suggests that to engage with and to use the notion of power goes with the need to recognize its signature, that is, to understand how power operates and to analyse the forms it takes. In his view, a revised analytics of power involves a fourfold programme of research in which the study of *dispositifs* is connected to a genealogy of order, an archeology of glory and an analytics of sovereignty. In his contribution Mikael Rask Madsen looks at the importance of Pierre Bourdieu's work when it comes to the study of the international and highlights the post-Bourdieuian trend within international political sociology. Perceptively, he reminds his reader that such apparatuses do not provide any empirical or theoretical shortcuts for understanding transnational fields and their effects on reconfigurations of power. Methodologically decisive here is the way reflexivity operates through the 'double historicization' of both the object and the academic construction of the object by the researcher. In their chapter, Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans frame the messiness of many worlds and their multiple coexisting rationales in a different way. For them, any method is performative and helps to produce plural realities; these multiple realities can be partially connected, but resist reduction. Therefore, against methods that aspire to be universal they insist that methods depend on places and the politics of places, and show how this understanding of performative practice modifies our common understanding of

what methods should be about. Christine Helliwell and Barry Hindess then invite their readers to engage with the widespread and insensitive eurocentricity of the temporalizing of difference. In charting the practices of relegating certainty to the past in Western political thought, they usher their reader into a discussion about the colonizing of time, a discussion that speaks to the constitution of modern concepts of polity, society and an international as it does to the practices of colonialism.

The third theme indicates the directions taken on new and challenging themes that have been engaged recently within international political sociology. Joao P. Nogueira highlights the necessity of rethinking patterns of inequality in international politics, in ways that show how our understanding of governance is necessarily coming into question. As globalization deepens, mobility and migration have not only impacted upon the economy and institutions but also infused desires, imaginaries and subjectivities. Engin Isin reflects on emerging forms of citizenship and how certain practices enable or hinder claims for justice, rights and equality. At the core of his argument lies the idea that the international citizen comes into being through performative acts. The issue of practice is also at the core of the chapter by Stefan Davidshofer, Julien Jeandesboz and Francesco Ragazzi on the effect of technologies on practices of security, which argues that it is necessary to retrieve Bourdieu's analysis of practice from the procedures elaborated in his name within the so-called practical turn in international relations. They argue that while technology matters in security practice, it does so differently and distinctly depending on the context of action under consideration as well as on the specific set of dispositions activated by a particular device that in turn modulates the expectations formulated about technology, its use and effects. Philippe Bonditti and Christian Olsson examine how war and security practices are intellectualized and rationalized by its experts and practitioners. In doing so, they reflect on the distinction between the concreteness of practices and the abstractness of theories that sometimes seems to loom behind the recent 'practice turn'. They show how strategic theory is itself imbued and pervaded with a 'practical logic' that is silenced in the process of theorization. In his contribution, David Lyon highlights how technologies of observation and detection play a vital role in how governance works today. He examines how and why, in a post-Snowden era, the techniques and technologies involved in the process of data-driven surveillance are so important. Lyon argues that the reliance upon big data practices signals crucial changes in the practices and politics of surveillance that challenge the way we understand politics and ethics. Finally, Tugba Basaran and Elspeth Guild explore what it might mean to pursue further analysis of the character and significance of mobility approaches to the study of security, borders and migration. They especially stress the need to re-engage with the multiplicity of possible configurations of mobility, power and inequality.

Through these three sections this book tries to take the reader on an intellectual journey that engages with questions about boundaries and limits among the many interrelated worlds in which we live, the ways in which we conceptualize them,

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and how we continually reshape boundaries of identities, spaces, authorities and disciplinary knowledge. We hope that we have been able to offer our readers a helpful guide to the kinds of research initiatives that have been promoted so far, and to provoke inspiration for initiatives yet to come.

Notes

- 1 See Richard K. Ashley, 'Untying the sovereign state: Double reading of the anarchy problematique,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 10, no. 2 (1988): 227–262; R. B. J. Walker, *One World, Many Worlds* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989); James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro eds, *International/Intertextual Relations: Post-modern Readings of World Politics* (Lexington, KY: Lexington Books, 1989); 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, no. 3 (1990): 367–416.
- 2 Among other publications, see Didier Bigo and Elspeth Guild eds, *Controlling Frontiers. Free Movement into and within Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Salvatore Palidda, 'Politiche della paura e declino dell'agire pubblico,' *Conflitti Globali* 5 (2005): 13–23; Alessandro Dal Lago, 'La guerra mondo,' *Conflitti Globali* 1 (2005): 11–31; Didier Bigo and Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet, eds, *Militaires et Sécurité Intérieure* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004) and *Antiterrorisme et Société* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006).
- 3 Didier Bigo and R. B. J. Walker, 'International, Political, Sociology,' *International Political Sociology* 1, no. 1 (2007): 1–5.
- 4 Jef Huysmans and Joao Pontes Nogueira, 'Editorial – International Political Sociology: Opening spaces, stretching lines,' *International Political Sociology* 6, no. 1 (2012): 1–3.
- 5 Yves Dezalay and Bryant G. Garth, eds, *Global Prescriptions. The Production, Exportation and Importation of a New Legal Orthodoxy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); R. B. J. Walker, *After the Globe, Before the World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); R. B. J. Walker, *Out of Line: Essays on the Politics of Boundaries and the Limits of Modern Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Didier Bigo and Mikael R. Madsen, 'Special issue – Bourdieu and the International,' *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 219–347.
- 6 Didier Bigo, 'Internal security as a transnational power field,' in Raphael Bossong and Mark Rhinard *Theorising Internal Security in the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- 7 Mathias Albert, David Jacobson and Yosef Lapid, eds, *Identities, Borders, Orders: Rethinking International Relations Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
- 8 John Agnew, *Place and Politics. The Geographical Mediation of State and Society* (Winchester, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1987) and John Agnew 'The territorial trap: the geographical assumptions of international relations theory,' *Review of International Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (1994): 53–80.

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