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► **To cite this version:**

Johanna Siméant-Germanos, Florent Pouponneau. Scales, Reefs and Bureaucracies – International Political Fieldworks. *Political Anthropological Research on International Social Sciences (PARISS)*, 2022, 3 (2), pp.115-143. <10.1163/25903276-bja10036>. <hal-04276602>

**HAL Id: hal-04276602**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04276602v1>**

Submitted on 10 Nov 2023

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## "SCALES, REEFS AND BUREAUCRACIES - INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL FIELDWORKS<sup>1</sup>

Johanna Siméant-Germanos, Florent Pouponneau

The study of international relations is increasingly becoming, despite strong resistance, a field of practice for the sociologist's profession and for inventing methods for sociological investigation in its own right. It is becoming accepted that, just because one studies the international and operates at different scales and moves, this need not mean that one must stop doing social science. Although the achievements of the sociology of international relations are now important for the understanding of extra-national phenomena and processes, there is sometimes a large gap between its stated ambitions, which are empirically very demanding, and the results obtained. The reason for this discrepancy lies in the fact that the identification of international spaces, i.e. the theoretically reconstructed social universes in which the agents under research evolve, and the access to the fields of empirical investigation are often more difficult compared to when the study's object is coiled within the dotted lines of national borders. This calls for the development of specific analytical approaches and research strategies. Inter- and transnational forms of action refer to practices and configurations in which the routine superposition of one society/one state is even more problematic. In addition, there is a tendency in international relations to look for 'great determining factors' ('national interest', 'calculations or values') in 'great' causes or 'great' events, particularly when considering political issues, or even in what international relations has called '*high politics*' (war, nuclear energy, major international contracts, etc.) - at the risk of missing what may be the banality or triviality of the international.

Since no research method can be separated from the theoretical questions that have driven or generated it, we wish to return to these junctions between the construction of the object and the practice of enquiry in internationalised contexts. If there is no difference in essence between the social sciences of politics that are deployed at the international level and those that are 'local', there are, however, differences in degree and magnitude linked to the nature of the configurations<sup>2</sup> that we are trying to grasp. Based on cross-field experiences with forms of transnational activism (NGOs and alterglobalists) as well as foreign policy, this paper outlines some specific empirical and theoretical strategies. First, it returns to the question of identifying the ground field and processes of internationalisation, as internationalised configurations; configurations which are not more stable than any other ones, even if some think so. It then reflects on ways of capturing the division of labour between organisations and within international organisations, whether governmental or not. Therefore, tracing individual internationalised pathways is one way of reconstructing the relevant spaces of action by understanding the meaning of biographical properties in context. The paper then examines the possibilities opened up by investigations, particularly collective ones, conducted at international events (conferences, activist gatherings, major negotiations, etc.). The last part of the text addresses the issue of closed spaces and places of international power.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised and expanded version of a book chapter: Johanna Siméant, Victoria Lickert, Florent Pouponneau, "Échelles, récifs, bureaux. Terrains du politique à l'international" in Johanna Siméant (ed.), *Guide de l'enquête globale en sciences sociales*, Paris, éditions du CNRS, 2015, p. 13-32.

<sup>2</sup> Configurations understood here in the sense of Norbert Elias, as allowing to study any relation of interdependence, be it a group of card players or workers laid off in one country because of the demands of a pension fund in another. ELIAS Norbert, *What is Sociology?*, London, Hutchinson, 1978.

## 1. Finding the field: locating the actors and processes of internationalisation, varying the scales of observation

Doing fieldwork means first of all 'finding the field'<sup>3</sup> ... We know the classic saying: 'all politics is local politics'. It rightly reminds us that even in international politics, local practices and strategies matter... as long as we handle the term local with some caution: "all political activity (even international) takes place somewhere" would probably be the most accurate sociological implication of this formula - hence the importance of identifying this "somewhere", of *locating* it. The terrain of the international does not necessarily lie beyond national borders.

For example, we can understand the effects of the European integration process on the politicisation of the working classes by analysing the mobilisation of French hunters, at the departmental level, against a European directive<sup>4</sup>. And we can learn a lot about relations between states by studying the organisations and bureaucratic routines, the trajectories and 'mental habits' of actors or even the localised political competitions within states, because the national configurations in which foreign policies are developed constitute sensitive areas of international dynamics.

Rather than counting the number of 'poles or centres' in the international system like the 'realists' trend do<sup>5</sup>, it is possible to empirically grasp the effects of the end of the 'Cold War' on the conduct of states by examining, for example, the way in which agents of the Atomic Energy Commission in France behave and calculate. This can be done by examining the way in which previously indifferent or even hostile agents of the French Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) found themselves caught up in the process of discovering 'good reasons' for accepting the conversion to an international norm, in terms of career and financial resources, in a context marked by political decisions reducing military spending and American policies tempted by unilateralism<sup>6</sup>. The changes in the French policy of 'nuclear non-proliferation' can therefore be related to a change in France's position in the international political field.

In the same way, we can analyze what the embodiment of a "middle power" produces as constraints for the producers of French foreign policy by looking at the "rusticity" of the French army when it entered the war in Mali in 2013, i.e. its ability to do a lot with little, and its propensity to take risks<sup>7</sup>. It has been shown that members of the middle class within the contemporary national social space can, through their pretentiousness and asceticism, achieve more than they should have in terms of their objective resources alone<sup>8</sup>. By analogy, France's military interventionism, based on a claim to be a 'power that counts' despite limited material resources<sup>9</sup>, seems to be able to succeed only at the price of renunciations, deprivations and sacrifices that make up for the absence of resources and allow one to wage war in a small way and act beyond one's means.

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<sup>3</sup> Markowitz (L.), "Finding the Field: Notes on the Ethnography of NGOs", *Human Organization*, 2001, 60.

<sup>4</sup> Julian Mischi, "L'impact communautaire sur la politisation des classes populaires en milieu rural. Le cas des chasseurs de gibier d'eau", in Olivier Baisnée, Romain Pasquier (dir.), *L'Europe telle qu'elle se fait. Européanisation et sociétés politiques nationales*, Paris, CNRS éditions, 2007, p. 145-165.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth N. WALTZ, *Theory of International Politics*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1979.

<sup>6</sup> Florent Pouponneau, Frédéric Mérand, "Diplomatic Practices, Domestic Fields, and the International System: Explaining France's Shift on Nuclear Nonproliferation", *International Studies Quarterly*, 61(1), 2017, p. 128-130; Florent Pouponneau, *La politique française de non-prolifération nucléaire. De la division du travail diplomatique*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2015 (chapter 4).

<sup>7</sup> Florent POUPONNEAU, "Faire la guerre au-dessus de ses moyens. Les enseignements structurels de l'intervention", in G. DAHO, F. POUPONNEAU and J. SIMEANT-GERMANOS (eds.), *Entrer en guerre au Mali*, Paris, Éditions rue d'Ulm, 2022, pp. 207-230.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre BOURDIEU, *Distinction*, London, Routledge, 1984.

<sup>9</sup> Bertrand BADIE, 'French Power-Seeking and Overachievement' in Thomas J. VOLGY *et alii* (eds.), *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 97-113.

This does not imply reducing all international processes, in this case forces arising from the structure of the international political field<sup>10</sup>, to a local space (most often understood as referring to a national organisational field), at the risk of neglecting the importance of certain transnational fields and configurations. No scale of observation is superior to another: but at least the relevant scale of observation must be grasped without determining it *a priori*.

In terms of NGOs, the world of lobbies in Brussels, the large advocacy organisation based in Washington, the international humanitarian community in Monrovia, or the coordination of international solidarity associations based in a large capital in the North, all are *small worlds with local effects whose role must be specified*. These examples all refer to precise and delimited geographical locations. But this does not mean that everything that takes place there is determined by microlocal logics alone.

From this point of view, it is also necessary to provide ourselves with the means to empirically grasp the changes in scale carried out by the actors themselves<sup>11</sup>, without the latter always being aware of it. *The international nature of the process says nothing about the consistency of the internationalisation process*.

Take, for example, the way in which humanitarian and development NGOs 'internationalise', in the sense that an NGO founded in one state tends to develop in others. These processes are too often seen through the prism of the 'transnationalisation of civil societies', for example through the 'diffusion of norms'<sup>12</sup>, which tends to provide a very idealistic interpretation of the latter. However, the issue of localisation is partly linked to these processes of competition and division of labour. Several factors contribute to these processes: the search for financial resources from public and private donors, the search for qualified personnel, the effects of competition between organisations, the encouragement of states anxious to be able to finance organisations from various countries or from their own country, and so on<sup>13</sup>.

Clearly, addressing these processes presupposes a socialisation, here within NGOs, that only immersion of the researcher into the ground field can guarantee - and this is this immersion that allows us to move back and forth along the lines of the organisation and across borders. For one of us, the use of ethnography within NGOs was therefore a first means of avoiding the classic problems of the reification of collectives. This *semi-participatory situation*, in addition to providing a privileged position for observation, had a profound role in socialising oneself to the humanitarian environment. It allowed for grasping things that were so obvious to our respondents that they would never have thought of formulating them in an interview at all<sup>14</sup>, nor would we have thought about asking the question. So far, nothing but the usual, about the difference between practical and discursive consciousness<sup>15</sup> and about the effects of censorship in interviews. The *time of daily life* (and of a domestic as well as a professional daily life due to the fact that we lived among our respondents) was therefore a time of permanent learning, strewn with revelations when an expression kept coming up until we realised its importance (such as the question of the *per*

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<sup>10</sup> Florent Pouponneau, "Ce que le champ international fait aux politiques étrangères", in Vincent Dubois (ed.), *Les Structures sociales de l'action publique. Analyser les politiques publiques avec la sociologie des champs*, Paris, Éditions du Croquant, 2022. To be published in English in Dubois Vincent (ed.), *Bringing Bourdieu to Critical Policy Analysis. The Social Structures of Policy Making Unveiled by the Theory of Fields*, Edward Elgar, forthcoming, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Tarrow (S.), McAdam (D.), "Scale Shift in Transnational Contention", in della Porta (D.), Tarrow (S.) (eds.), *Transnational protest and global activism*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield (Series: "People, passions, and power"), 2005, pp. 121-150.

<sup>12</sup> Finnemore (M.), Sikkink (K.), "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", *International Organization*, (1998), 52:887-918.

<sup>13</sup> Siméant (J.), "What is going global? The internationalization of French NGOs "without borders"", *Review of International Political Economy*, 12 (5), 2005, p. 851-883.

<sup>14</sup> Siméant (J.), Dauvin (P.), "Travailler sur l'humanitaire par entretiens - Retour sur une " méthode ". *Mots - Les langages du politique*, n° 65, March 2001, p. 117-133.

<sup>15</sup> Giddens (A.), *The Constitution of Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

*diem*, which summed up with a certain cruelty the consistency of relations between internationals and locals). Similarly, living the daily life of a humanitarian mission soon made us discover the extent of the administrative tasks (reports sent to headquarters and donors, coordination meetings with 'partners', etc.). This was an important part of humanitarian work that the actors did not consider to be necessary to explain to us, and which could have been left apart if the immersion was not there. It allows less naïve representations of the real discomfort of everyday humanitarian work which has as much to do with bureaucratic routine, air conditioning breakdowns and the noise of the generator powering the laptop as with bullets flying, children being rescued and adventures in a 4 x 4. We also discovered the strong similarities between organisations, and even the circulation among them: for example, this booklet of MSF "guidelines" used by MDM in a mission in Guinea Conakry in 1998, and which summarised quite well the pre-eminence of MSF in the medical humanitarian field<sup>16</sup>. This immersion also made us discover the strong similarity between organisations in the field - sometimes striking for those who are familiar with the insistence of these organisations to distinguish themselves from each other in their home countries. It was also clear that we were sometimes more aware of the differences in doctrine between organisations than their own members, because acculturation to the values of the organisation is more a matter of time than of slogans to be learnt by heart before going into the field. Finally, the fact that we ourselves were constantly mistaken for members of NGOs or "internationals" was a good lesson in the way local populations perceived NGOs, members of the different cooperation missions or the United Nations, as the very same set of international personnel recognisable by their body hexis, their 4x4s, etc.

Moreover, the "field" is not only useful for what it teaches but also for what it allows the interviewees to accept. Finally, our arrival in these organisations proved to be a very useful tool for testing the very unequal consistency of relations between the field and headquarters, gaining easier access to local communities in the international milieu, observing relations within the field, conflicts over the definition of humanitarian action, etc. It is certainly not a question of mythologising "the field" (and here, in particular, the field of humanitarians, which is not the field of the sociologist), or of considering that this field is the only way of approaching the action of international NGOs. The "field" also means spending time at head office, but sometimes for slightly different reasons than expected, such as when stripping mission budgets allows us to see the overwork of head office staff in the next office, under pressure from the teams and the board of directors, or to hear the association's elders talking about their next marathon or mountain race, which invites us to look into the question of sporting or even heroic ethos in humanitarian work.

The ethnography of the international thus refers intensely to this question of 'finding the field'. It is not just about multi-sited ethnography<sup>17</sup>, a term which, after having usefully pointed to the demands and constraints of globalised fields, has become just another cliché in the international social science "bazaar". It also has to do with the question of the variation of scale in observation and analysis - this in order to grasp the many spaces in which actors' strategies are embedded. This implies considering the action of actors at several levels: where do NGOs act, what is the relevant level of their action, since this level is never stabilised and its location also depends on the strategies and perceptions of the organisation's members?

It is empirical investigation that allows us to consider all those levels, to move between them to understand what produces the consistency of an organisation, and the role of intermediaries in the production of the latter. This perspective also leads to an interest in the calculation activities of the producers of state foreign policy - agents endowed with habitus

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<sup>16</sup> MSF, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, Doctors without borders, MDM, *Médecins du Monde*, Doctors of the World.

<sup>17</sup> For George Marcus' paper has obviously been reduced to its title... Marcus (G.), "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 1995, 24.

who have internalised the constraints of the international field - and in the properties of the situation that shape them, by thinking of certain constituent elements of this situation in terms of the structure of the international field. It is then a question of determining how agents calculate, when they calculate, by examining what they concretely rely on to define their moves<sup>18</sup>.

This requires identifying benchmarks (the 'great powers' and their numbers, the recognition of a sphere of influence, the weight of a precedent or a red line set by a third party, international alliances), evaluations (of the military forces present or of economic dependencies, of the unequal chances of success between governments, of the costs or the rewards of collective action) indices (for example, declarations on the political intentions or military manoeuvres of a dominant state, or the evolution of the dynamics of exchanges of blows) or the rules (formal and informal rules of negotiation within the large multilateral arenas, among others) which help agents to orient themselves in the international situation in which they are caught and to estimate, at a given moment, that a given action is playable and judicious, or, on the contrary, too risky and costly.

## 2. Understanding the division of labour in and between international *organisations*

It is a truism: the study of IOs and NGOs, like that of the international action of states, would benefit greatly if we bear in mind what these actors are: *organisations*. As such, we can observe processes quite classic for the sociologist of politics: division of labour and its consequences, concentration of information, conflicts over the right to speak on behalf of the organisation, etc. Caution in studying organisations should be redoubled in international spaces<sup>19</sup> - all the more so as the division of labour here refers to the effects of the international division of labour between organisations, as well as to the forms of division of labour within international organisations. This can be observed in several aspects.

In the case of NGOs, the first is the relationship between these organisations and a large number of volunteers, despite their "professionalisation". While relying on this body of volunteers gives these organisations a great deal of legitimacy, it also means that we need to look at the internal tensions within these organisations regarding the legitimate forms of their action. The very notion of professionalisation thus takes on very different meanings (salarisation, competence, dependence on the criteria of institutional funders, etc.), a meaning that we must be able to observe. These avenues of research, not always considered "noble" by those who would like to believe that the noble causes with which international relations are populated should only refer to noble factors, presuppose that we take seriously the processes of division of labour internal to these international organisations, in order to grasp their effects on the unequal promotion of international causes<sup>20</sup>. How can we not see, for example, the development of *advocacy* strategies in these organisations as a partial effect of the rise in power of international law courses?<sup>21</sup>

This division of labour is multiplied by the international dimension of these organisations. It refers in particular to the permanent tensions between "headquarters" and

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<sup>18</sup> On the hypothesis of socially situated and structured calculations: Michel DOBRY, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 3rd edition, 2009 (1986) and 'Ce dont sont faites les logiques de situation', in P. Favre et alii (dir.), *L'atelier du politiste*, Paris, La Découverte, 2007, pp. 119-148.

<sup>19</sup> We are not using "division of labour" here in the economic sense, as for example dependency theorists do, but in a sense closer to the tradition of political sociology inspired by R. Michels for example.

<sup>20</sup> Dezalay (S.) "Des droits de l'homme au marché du développement. Note de recherche sur le champ faible de la gestion des conflits armés", *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 174, 2008, p. 70-79; Lefranc (S.), "Du Droit à la paix. La circulation des techniques internationales de pacification par le bas", *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 174, 2008, p. 48-67.

<sup>21</sup> On this point, see Siméant (J.), "Interpreting the Rise of International "Advocacy"", 5 (3), *Humanity*, 2014.

"the field", understood here as the operational "missions" of many of these organisations. A "top-down" vision of NGO governance would miss the often inevitable effects of the autonomy of the field with regard to headquarters, and the way in which field actors take advantage of these disconnections to promote their specific interests (not passing on all the information required by headquarters, playing the game of *fait accompli* in the local arena, etc.). This does not imply substituting a bottom-up approach for a top-down one, but it should remind us that the relationship between headquarters and the field is never entirely stable, and that neither legitimacy nor authority within the organisation is summed up by the organisation's slogan and official values. This division of labour must also be observed between the different national sections of the 'same' NGO, as defined by its name, even though it may refer to very different organisational cultures and legal statuses. In doing so, national particularities may strongly distinguish these entities. If there is an external tendency to use the organisation's acronym indiscriminately, competition between its national sections for the right to embody the institutional identity can be strong.

Finally, the self-designation as a "non-governmental organisation" should not lead us to neglect the relationship between NGOs and their donors (cooperation, UN or European agencies, States, etc.). Without giving in to the most caricatural conceptions of the dependence of NGOs on donors, the unequal conformation of the former with regard to the latter must often be considered from the point of view of institutional isomorphism<sup>22</sup> - and presupposes appropriate observation mechanisms. What does the adoption by these organisations of the logical framework of analysis (LFA) promoted by donors in their financial reports mean? What does it mean in a professional career to work in an NGO before considering recruitment in an international organisation?

At a distance from the tenacious idea of an objective 'national interest', a division of diplomatic work within states can also be seen in the specialisation of actors and the ordinary struggles between bureaucratic services. Diplomats can thus act together on a file for opposing reasons, objectives and visions of the situation. Thus, the emergence of the Iranian nuclear problem from 2003 onwards gave rise to conflicts within the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, mainly between the diplomats responsible for atomic issues and those in charge of the Middle East. These two camps clashed over the direction of the government line, while each of them was convinced that the pursuit of the 'national interest' depended on its own success. This cleavage is classic within the ministry, as the actors involved are not only caught in distinct positions of power, but also in separate career paths (opposing a strategic path, generally occupied by diplomats from the external ENA<sup>23</sup> competition, and a regional path, mostly taken by those from the Orient competition)<sup>24</sup>.

This division of diplomatic labour is also found among states, international organisations that are more or less active in the management of international crises and conflicts, and a small number of which are fighting for rights, privileges and 'spheres of influence'<sup>25</sup>. Focusing on the concrete modalities of this international division of political labour helps to understand that US domination has persisted since the end of the Cold War, despite actions of resistance, or rather, that it has imposed itself in the very efforts to overcome it<sup>26</sup>. From this perspective, the exceptional position of the United States in the

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<sup>22</sup> DiMaggio (P.), Powell (W.), "The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields", *American Sociological Review*, 1983, (48).

<sup>23</sup> Ecole Nationale d'Administration – National School of Administration.

<sup>24</sup> Florent Pouponneau, "Luttes nationales et politique étrangère. Analyse d'un changement de la 'position de la France' dans la crise du nucléaire iranien", *Gouvernement et action publique*, 2 (3), 2013.

<sup>25</sup> David AMBROSETTI, *Diplomatic Norms and Rivalries at the UN*, Brussels, PIE Peter Lang, 2009; Mlada BUKOVANSKI *et alii*, *Special Responsibilities*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Pape, 'Soft Balancing against the United States', *International Security*, 30 (1), 2005, pp. 7-45; Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power. The Global Response to U.S. Primacy*, London and New York, Norton & Company, 2005.

contemporary international political space is manifested in particular by the fact that this country, because of its unparalleled capacity for action, tends to appear as the only one with a reasonable chance of intervening effectively in the regulation of the most important political affairs (the United States as the 'world's policeman', it being understood that a reasonable chance does not necessarily mean a great chance)<sup>27</sup>. Agents of a dominated state can thus make skillful use of their resources, taking advantage of events and seizing opportunities to exist in the international division of political labour, but their range of possibilities is structurally limited, which tends to shape the calculations, strategies and ends pursued during the exchange of moves. For example, in early 2003, the French government, together with Germany and Great Britain, embarked on a diplomatic initiative to obtain from Iran a suspension of its nuclear activities deemed sensitive from the point of view of nuclear proliferation. This initiative is not only aimed at finding a solution to the "Iranian problem". As a series of speeches attest, it is also a distinctive policy that aims to show and make believe that France is a power that counts in the management of global political affairs. This ranking operation is part of a state of transatlantic relations that leads French diplomatic agents to consider that it is both useful and possible to act without the US. The war in Iraq is an episode experienced and staged as a break with the American administration that imposes the containment of the 'excesses' of the dominant power. The American-Iranian diplomatic history, for its part, offers opportunities, by conferring means of economic pressure on the Iranian government and by giving the impression of a playground left free by the American administration. However, it soon became clear that the offers to cooperate with the Iranian authorities were limited without the involvement of the United States and the lifting of some of its sanctions against Iran (for example, the sale of Airbus planes was not possible because they contained American parts under embargo). Support from the US government was then discreetly negotiated. This support proved to be limited and costly in terms of political choices. European governments must now be careful to keep their commitments to Iran within certain limits, in order to avoid being openly disowned by the US. In addition, they had to commit themselves to referring to the Security Council in the event of Iran resuming nuclear activities. In sum, through this insertion of the United States in the bargaining with Iran, international dynamics beyond their control, because they are linked to structural mechanisms, have put back the French representatives in their place and a strategy of subversion, conceived as such by the actors, has the effects of reproducing the established hierarchy. French leaders tend to bow to the convenience of the dominant state not because they agree with and recognise the validity of its actions<sup>28</sup>, but because they calculate that it is too difficult and costly to do otherwise.

In the wake of these observations, a division of labour between the major intergovernmental organisations of collective security reflecting and generating inequalities between states can be seen by following, during international bargaining, how the main states and their representatives move from one arena to another according to the balance of power and their preferences at the time. The regulation of the Iranian nuclear issue since 2003 has long been confined to the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as this allowed European diplomats, in particular, to contain the American sanctions policy in the name of 'multilateralism'. This body became minor with the referral to the UN

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<sup>27</sup> Kenneth N. WALTZ, *Theory of International Politics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 206-207.

<sup>28</sup> GJ Ikenberry, *After Victory. Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major War*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001; David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2009; GJ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan. The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011; Vincent Pouliot, « Against Authority: The Heavy Weight of International Hierarchy », in Zarakol, A ed., *Hierarchies in World Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 113-133.

Security Council in 2006 and the adoption of the first sanctions. A new shift occurred in the summer of 2007, when the French and British authorities sought to circumvent Russian and Chinese opposition in New York by promoting additional sanctions against Iran within the framework of the European Union.

As in multilateral arenas, being a representative of a "big state" rather than a "small state" changes the situation, the European Union proved to be an international arena much more favourable to the interests of French representatives than the Security Council<sup>29</sup>. The French were able to rely more easily on their personal resources but also on those of their state (financial and military means, expertise and bureaucratic capacities, networks, prestige) to obtain recognition from competitors and to exist in the exchange of moves. However, they had to carry out intense diplomatic work to influence the outcome of the bargaining because of the opposition of some European 'partners' who were kept away from the negotiations in the Security Council and were anxious to preserve their market share, but also because of the bureaucratic logic specific to European games<sup>30</sup>. Far from being epiphenomena of international politics, as realists like to say, multilateral organisations thus appear both as points of support where material and symbolic resources (funding, instruments, expertise, 'political legitimacy') are mobilised and as places of competition where calculations, ends and practices are reconfigured.

### 3. Tracking international trajectories

Another way of identifying the relevant spaces and configurations in which individuals are caught up and act is obviously to follow their temporal and geographical trajectories internationally. This refers not only to a sociology of their own socialisation, but also to the contextualisation of their social properties in international spaces (the international field of human rights, etc.) that we reconstitute as we follow these individuals (since we do not know *a priori* where these relevant spaces are).

Here too, ethnographic time is what allows access to life stories. By spending hours waiting in 4x4s before entering Kosovo or other checkpoints in African countries, Pascal Dauvin has not wasted his time: these dead times are also those during which humanitarians willingly talk, often about their lives if we bring it up. More generally, the boredom and repetitive aspect of life in humanitarian missions, as long as they are not in absolute emergency situations (that can be very demanding in terms of time and personal involvement for humanitarians, except when the risk is such that it means staying in the villa or the NGO compound), the fact that expatriation, combined with communal living, can quickly become oppressive, makes it attractive to have an intense discussion with a third party, to whom intimate torments, professional and personal conflicts can be exposed without great consequences, provided that trust has been established beforehand. These are all avenues that allow us to perceive the style of the different organisations, the professional perspectives in this environment, the risks taken by humanitarians, and the difficulties of reintegration of certain expatriates who sometimes accept one "mission too many".

In the same sense, following the careers of the administrative and political staff of the European Union suggests the emergence of European bureaucratic and political fields through the identification of specific careers and social skills. By reconstructing the trajectories and properties of the very senior officials of the European Commission (Directors-General and Deputy Directors-General), Didier Georgakakis and Marine de Lasalle identify a tendency for

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<sup>29</sup> Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders. The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Florent Pouponneau, « La diplomatie et la politique de voisinage », in Olivier Costa, Frédéric Mérand, dir., *Etudes européennes*, Bruxelles, Bruylant, 2018, p. 444-446

hierarchies to be reversed in favour of agents with specifically Community resources, thus attesting to a process of autonomisation of this centre of European power in relation to the states of origin<sup>31</sup>. The study of the biographies of 'MEPs' also shows a lengthening of careers and the formation of a 'hard core' of actors with capital of their own in the European Parliament who are able to direct and control this arena, and contribute to its institutionalisation<sup>32</sup>. Even in the intergovernmental framework of foreign policy, we observe the emergence of specialised civil servants who are likely to negotiate and modify the national positions they are committed to defend, in order to ensure a margin of maneuver in their permanent search for compromises with the other national delegations<sup>33</sup>.

Following individuals in order to identify international spaces implies here not so much believing in the systematic explanatory power of primary socialisation, but rather, given the indeterminacy of the international fields in which individuals evolve, proceeding in the same way as one would follow migratory birds in order to understand climatic changes - in short, by reconstructing these spaces thanks to the follow-up of the individuals who evolve in them. Thus, in a systematic effort to link trajectories to the construction of a professional field, Sandrine Lefranc was able to show that the development of the international field of post-conflict reconciliation<sup>34</sup> has much to do with the academic field of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) - marked by specific national origins. International NGOs, as cosmopolitan as they consider themselves to be, often try to universalise (or conversely devalue) very specific know-how, whether it be surgery, public health, or mastery of the legal corpus of human rights<sup>35</sup>.

#### 4. International events, collective surveys and multinational teams

Another empirical strategy, which one of us has practised more as a team, is to go through 'nodes', which can be institutions (cf. the metaphor of international organisations as a 'coral reef'<sup>36</sup>) or other moments of coalescence of international actors. In these fragmented spaces of international fields, we can try to take advantage of those moments that bring together actors from different national contexts: conferences of large organisations, international meetings of the G8, the IMF, the Summit of the Americas, which will often generate protests, or large militant gatherings such as world, continental or regional social forums. Although it does not meet the canons of ethnography, the idea of taking advantage of such opportunities should not be abandoned<sup>37</sup>. The dramaturgical dimension of such elements is crucial because of their unity of time and place, the stakes involved, the groups that mobilise themselves in front of what they perceive as an international audience and that stage

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<sup>31</sup> D. Georgakakis, M. de Lasalle, "Genesis and structure of a European institutional capital. Les très hauts fonctionnaires de la Commission européenne." *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, n° 166-167, 2007, p. 38-53.

<sup>32</sup> W. Beauvallet, S. Michon, "L'institutionnalisation inachevée du Parlement européen. Hétérogénéité nationale, spécialisation et autonomisation", *Politix*, 89, 2010, p. 147-172.

<sup>33</sup> Y. Buchet de Neuilly, "Mais où se trouve " l'intérêt national " ? Les diplomates français dans les arènes du Conseil de l'UE" in J.-M. Eymeri-Douzans, G. Bouckaert (dir.), *La France et ses administrations. Un état des savoirs*, Brussels, Bruylant, 2012, pp. 437-459; Chatzistavrou Filippa, "The Permanent Representatives to the EU: Going Native in the European Field?", in Didier Georgakakis, Jay Rowell, eds, *The Field of Eurocracy: Mapping EU Actors and Professionals*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2013, pp. 61-86.

<sup>34</sup> Lefranc (S.), "The Emergence of Transitional Justice as a Professional International Practice", with F. Vairel, in L. Israël and G. Mouralis (eds), *Dealing with Wars and Dictatorships*, T.M.C. Asser Press, The Hague, 2014, p. 235-252.

<sup>35</sup> The contribution of Dezalay and Garth's work on the internationalization of palace wars is well known - they base it empirically on the reconstruction of a number of individual trajectories. Dezalay (Y.), Garth (B.), *The Internationalization of Palace Wars*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Tarrow (S.), "Transnational Politics: Contention and Institutions in International Politics", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2001, 4.

<sup>37</sup> On this point, see Combes (H.), Hmed (C.), Mathieu (L.), Siméant (J.), Sommier (I.), "Observer les mobilisations. Retour sur les ficelles du métier de sociologue des mouvements sociaux", *Politix*, 93, 2011.

what is internationally at stake (effects of globalisation, future of the planet, global inequalities, international solidarity...). It is therefore particularly heuristic to observe these events systematically - which means, almost inevitably and given the limited time available and often the lesser familiarity with the local context for part of the team, doing so collectively and if possible in multinational teams, better able to counter certain effects of ethnocentrism and even to reproduce almost experimentally within the team the issues specific to the event.

Two examples of collective research projects carried out in the context of world social forums will be given here, in Nairobi in 2007<sup>38</sup>, and in Dakar in 2011. This was based in addition on the legacy of other collective surveys carried out in international activist events. The Nairobi World Social Forum in 2007 was the first to be held in Africa, hence the need to understand how participants, whether African or not, dealt with the question of Africa's place in the world and in this event<sup>39</sup>. Within the framework of this survey, which brought together about 25 researchers and young researchers, most of them French and Kenyan, we deployed a systematic observation system of about a hundred workshops, all of which we had prepared a four-page observation guide. We were inspired by the survey co-directed by Isabelle Sommier and Éric Agrikoliansky<sup>40</sup> during the European Social Forum, whose qualitative results of the same type had been little used. The observation guide encouraged attention to the way people spoke, the composition of the assembly, the way Africa was referred to or named, the degree of expertise mobilised, the place of NGOs in the workshops, among other variables. Each workshop was observed by a bi-national duo, which ensured that relevant points were not overlooked, the identification of which depended either on familiarity with the alterglobalization movement or with Kenya, or on a specific language skill (Spanish, Swahili, etc.). This multinational teamwork was not only useful in terms of language or social familiarity, but it also allowed us to see that the research team functioned in some respects as a microcosm of this international event: thus, certain themes that seemed negligible to part of the team, to the point of neglecting their observation, appear on the contrary as quite central for others. Of course, the side issues of the Forum were also scrutinised (such as the looting of a restaurant in the Forum that belonged to a person close to the Minister of the Interior). In addition, biographical interviews were conducted throughout the Forum. Finally, we wanted to examine how participants - especially Africans - managed to get to the Forum (an aspect too often neglected in work on 'global civil society' is the question of the cost of attending these events that are supposed to embody it). No African participant in the Forum had gone without financial support from a Northern organisation, which cast a very bright light on NGO sponsorship of African 'activism'.

Our survey approach in Dakar in 2011<sup>41</sup> was comparable in its questioning but focused on a questionnaire (n=1069) administered in the workshops and other venues of the forum, so as not to over-select the studious participation in this event. In order not to privilege English and French speakers (a choice that would have mechanically produced the conclusion that these events are very selective given the language skills that internationalisation presupposes), the questionnaire was distributed in five languages: English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Wolof. This meant that both self-administration and the administration of questionnaires had

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<sup>38</sup> Pommerolle Marie-Emmanuelle, Siméant Johanna, "African Voices and Activists at the WSF in Nairobi: The Uncertain Ways of Transnational African Activism", *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 2010, 16 (1), pp. 82 - 93.

<sup>39</sup> Fillieule, Olivier, and Philippe Blanchard. "Individual Surveys in Rallies (INSURA). A new tool for exploring transnational activism?" University of Lausanne, Political Science Working Paper Series, n° 35, 2008 ; Della Porta, Donatella (ed.). *Another Europe: conceptions and practices of democracy in the European social forums*. ECPR studies in European political science. London: Routledge, 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Agrikoliansky (E.), Sommier (I.) (dir.), *Radiographie du mouvement altermondialiste*, Paris, La dispute, 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Siméant Johanna, Pommerolle Marie-Emmanuelle, Sommier Isabelle, *Observing protest from a place. The World Social Forum in Dakar (2011)*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2015.

to be considered (a speaker of Wolof alone would have had little chance of being able to read it). The questionnaire included an important biographical section on international experience, funding of the trip, position in the organisation, whether or not the person was employed by an NGO, etc. The multinational composition of the team was such that it was difficult for the interviewer to know whether or not he or she was a member of the team. This, as well as the attention to linguistic diversity, proved not only to guarantee the extensiveness of the research, but also its acceptance by the activist public. The multinational team was also the occasion for numerous and heuristic debates on the coding of socio-professional categories, covering diverse realities according to the nationalities of the respondents.

In both cases, the practice of the smallest possible division of labour within the research team, coupled with the fact that they resided in the same place, which allowed for evening debriefings, was a strong tool for the 'rigour of the qualitative' as well as the quantitative - and here quantitative analysis and thick ethnographic description can enrich each other.

Regarding the quantitative aspect, we would like to emphasise a descriptive data analysis method, of the geometric type, the Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), which is particularly adapted to surveys on international populations<sup>42</sup>. MCA, considered one of the most powerful tools in survey processing, is inspired from the French school of data analysis and was the method preferred by Pierre Bourdieu<sup>43</sup> because it makes it possible not only the representation of complex data sets but also the representation of polarities within a social space, and in doing so, to map the social space. According to the principle of descriptive statistics, one of its advantages is to condense information by making factors emerge that summarize the greatest amount of information and provide a graphic representation, for instance on two dimensions (the number of factors is not always limited to two), of the whole set of variables under consideration. One therefore gets new variables, combinations of variables informing the research theme and summarizing the initial set.

MCA was used to circumvent the increased difficulties of *ceteris paribus* statistical analysis in an international configuration, in which the variables and the practices they measure mean different things to different individuals, depending on their nationality. MCA, combined with agglomerative hierarchical clustering, enables the meaning of sociographic variables to be checked more accurately according to reconstructed national groups. With its ability to condense information, MCA enables a full, visual, and summarized view of a population and its diversity, and allows polarities within it to emerge rather than to be posited; it is then possible to draw up a hierarchical classification, which, projected onto a factorial map, makes it easier to identify affinities between, for instance, modes of action and sub-groups within the population participating in this militant event. Here, MCA and Ascending Hierarchical Clustering seem particularly adapted to surveying internationally diverse populations.

This is by no way an attempt to suggest there would be any silver bullet in methodology, but it appeared to us as a very good way to suspend unequivocal reasoning on the direction of causality. MCA makes it possible to represent complex data sets, which is an issue when one deals with international populations, and doing so, to map polarities in a given situation. This statistical mode of reasoning specific to MCA is perfectly consistent with a sociological type of reasoning that is closer to the science of investigation than to modeling<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> For more developments see chapters 3 and 8 in Siméant Johanna, Pommerolle Marie-Emmanuelle, Sommier Isabelle, *Observing protest from a place. The World Social Forum in Dakar (2011)*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Benzécri, Jean-Pierre, *Correspondence analysis handbook*, New-York, Marcel Dekker, 1992.

<sup>43</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1984.

<sup>44</sup> Passeron, J.-C. (2013). *Sociological reasoning: a non-Popperian space of argumentation*. Oxford: The Bardwell Press.

Since then, other researchers have also carried out collective ethnographies of international events: we are thinking in particular of the work on the COPs<sup>45</sup>. For our part, we also had the opportunity to pursue the principle of collective investigations in the context of our work devoted to France's entry into the war in Mali, which was based on a research workshop bringing together some thirty people over three consecutive years (2017-2020).

Finally, the use of MCAs was a way of getting around the increased impossibility of a statistical treatment '*all things being equal*' in an international configuration: the MCA, combined with a hierarchical ascending classification, made it possible to better control the meaning of sociographic variables according to the national groups reconstituted. In both cases, the practice of the smallest possible division of labour within the research team, combined with the fact that they lived in the same place, which allowed evening debriefings, was a strong tool for the "rigour of the qualitative"<sup>46</sup> as well as the quantitative.

## 5. Closed areas, borders and secrecy

In tackling the study of the transformations of French nuclear non-proliferation policy<sup>47</sup> and France's entry into the war in Mali<sup>48</sup>, areas of the state's external action considered by their leaders to be particularly 'sensitive', we have been confronted throughout our research with the problem of access to closed spaces, closed areas and places of secrecy. Against any methodological defeatism, a few avenues can be explored in order to trivialise the social science approach to these places of international power<sup>49</sup>.

Several surveys of diplomatic practices suggest that, first, one should try to arrange observation slots when possible. In the summer of 2002, David Ambrosetti followed files relating to armed conflicts in Africa during an internship with the French delegation to the United Nations. His participation in the debates and his preparation of diplomatic telegrams allowed him to reconstruct the formal and informal rules of daily negotiations in the Security Council<sup>50</sup>. Yves Buchet de Neuilly, also in the context of a thesis and an internship - the status of student undoubtedly facilitating this type of participant observation - worked at the end of the 1990s in the European Commission with the advisor for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and attended some forty meetings of the Council's working groups, which enabled him to identify the plurality of sectors interrelated in the production of the European Union's external action<sup>51</sup>. In France, several researchers, for example in African studies, combined expert status at the MAE's Centre d'Analyses et de Prévisions (CAP), which guaranteed them information and access to the field, with a scientific production that maintained its autonomy of questioning.

Interviews with 'large' actors - who usually know how to control their discourse, many of them being specialists in the elaboration of 'elements of language' used to distort, omitting and concealing for the sake of secrecy - can be extremely fruitful, especially in identifying bureaucratic rivalries and conflicts. The main techniques to be deployed are

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<sup>45</sup> Stefan C. Aykut, Jean Foyer, Edouard Morena (eds), *Globalising the Climate. COP21 and the climatisation of global debates*, Routledge, 2017

<sup>46</sup> Olivier De Sardan Jean-Pierre, *Epistemology, Fieldwork, and Anthropology*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Florent Pouponneau, *La politique française de non-prolifération nucléaire*, op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> Daho Grégory, Pouponneau Florent and Siméant-Germanos Johanna, *Entrer en guerre au Mali : luttes politiques et bureaucratiques autour de l'intervention française*, Paris, Rue d'Ulm, 2022.

<sup>49</sup> Florent Pouponneau, "Refuser le défaitisme face au secret : stratégies de recherche pour les sciences sociales de l'international", *Cultures & Conflits*, 118-119, 2020, pp. 19-36.

<sup>50</sup> D. Ambrosetti, "Décide de demeurer saisi de la question" : La mobilisation du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU face aux crises", *Cultures & Conflits*, 75, 2009, pp. 99-122.

<sup>51</sup> Y. Buchet de Neuilly, *L'Europe de la politique étrangère*, Paris, Economica, 2005.

already described in numerous methodological writings: guaranteeing respect for anonymity<sup>52</sup>, taking care with the order and formulation of questions, daring to ask again, negotiating the time and place of the interview, giving credibility to one's approach by displaying one's expertise<sup>53</sup> or even getting recommendations to obtain interviews by taking care to diversify the points of support in the networks<sup>54</sup>. We will limit ourselves here to highlighting how, since each informant seeks to 'sell' his or her interpretation of the social world, it is possible to avoid being dependent on the silences, lies, rationalisations or omissions of a particular actor by accumulating testimonies and diversifying, or even transforming, interests in relation to the survey.

If crucial matters are at stake in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, and if it is therefore appropriate, in the conduct of the interview itself, to play skillfully with one's resources, to seize the opportunities of the situation and to take advantage of events (while accepting the element of chance that affects the results obtained), it is also possible, even necessary, to 'act on the very structure of the relationship' by varying the positions of the interviewees<sup>55</sup>. The 'trick'<sup>56</sup> is well known: it proves fruitful to meet 'outsiders', marginalised or withdrawn actors, for example, those defeated in the competition for the definition of the policy under study, non-commissioned soldiers or retired civil servants, who tend to have nothing to lose, to make fun of the fact that the ability to keep quiet is an external sign of respectability, or even to have an interest, or pleasure, in the unveiling of the 'insiders' stratagems and secrets. For these actors, the interview is an opportunity to express themselves and to be heard by settling old conflicts, by recalling personal grudges, by denouncing the hierarchy, by expressing their regrets or by arguing that another policy is possible and desirable. Sometimes, by targeting the right person to interview, most of the work is done, as with the former member of an intelligence service who received us at his home and, before we could even sit down, told us: "you have something to record I hope"; or with the recently retired general who, even before sitting down at the coffee

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<sup>52</sup> This ordinary solution, which deprives the investigation of the full trappings of fine sociological analysis, is hardly satisfactory, but this is often the only one possible. It is imposed with perhaps more danger than for other fields of study because of the legal context surrounding the disclosure of classified information, which can be done by cross-checking unclassified information, and the likelihood of being read by the actors studied. On the multiplication in recent years of legal proceedings against researchers in France, Laurens S. and F. Neyrat (eds.), *Enquêter de quel droit? Menaces sur l'enquête en sciences sociales*, Bellecombe en Bauges, éditions du Croquant, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> While expertise has proven to be an effective entry strategy into these closed international circles, it is not without consequences: it can be counterproductive when respondents consider that enough or too much is already known. Faced with precise knowledge about their working environment and professional trajectory, some interviewees may also associate the researcher with a category that is familiar to them, but threatening, that of journalist.

<sup>54</sup> See among others: Chamboredon H. (ed.), "S'imposer aux imposants. À propos de quelques obstacles rencontrés par des sociologues débutants dans la pratique et l'usage de l'entretien", *Genèses*, n°16, 1994, pp. 129-130; Legavre J.-B., "La neutralité dans l'entretien de recherche. Retour personnel sur une évidence", *Politix*, vol. 9, n°35, 1996, pp. 207-225; Laurens S., "Pourquoi" et "comment" poser les questions qui fâchent? Réflexions sur les dilemmes récurrents que posent les entretiens avec des "imposants", *Genèses*, n°69, 2007, pp. 112-127; Beaud S., Weber F. *Guide de l'enquête de terrain*, Paris, La Découverte, 2010 (1997); Cohen S. (dir.), *L'art d'interviewer les dirigeants*, Paris, PUF, 1999; Allès D., Guilbaud A., Lagrange D., "L'entretien en relations internationales", in Devin G. (ed.), *Méthodes de recherche en relations internationales*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2016, pp. 159-176; Van Puyvelde D., 'Qualitative Research Interviews and the Study of National Security Intelligence', *International Studies Perspectives*, 19 (4), 2018, pp. 375-391. On questions of the relationship to secrecy in international security studies, see also and more broadly the recent special issues of *Cultures & Conflicts* 'Les mondes du renseignement entre légitimation et contestation' (*Cultures & Conflicts*, 114-115, 2019) and 'Les territoires du secret: confidentialité et enquête dans les mondes pluriels de la sécurité' (*Cultures & Conflicts*, 118, 2020) or the book by Marieke De Goede M., Esmé Bosma, Polly Pallister-Wilkins (eds.), *Secrecy and Methods in Security Research: A Guide to Qualitative Fieldwork*, London, Routledge, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Bourdieu Pierre, 'Understanding', in P. Bourdieu et al, *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Societies*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999.

<sup>56</sup> Becker Howard, *Tricks of the Trade. How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998.

table where we were waiting for him, launched into a lengthy critique of the current French military intervention in the "Sahel" (the interview then lasted almost four hours).

When research is collective, the positions of the investigators can also vary. As we already said, our book on the beginnings of French military engagement in 2013 in Mali is the result of work carried out over three years with thirty students in a research workshop at the *École normale supérieure* in Paris. This pedagogical model of training by and for research offers the luxury of being able to take its time to test certain hypotheses and increase the empirical surface of data collection. In order to get our interviewees to talk as much as possible and to avoid being trapped in their settling of scores and rewriting of history, the contrasting properties of the interviewers were useful: we were able to play on the connivance between former students of the *École normale supérieure* or to draw on the experience of interviews in international political circles. In addition, some people were interviewed several times by different interviewers (this method proved all the more fruitful as the second interviewer could, of course, rely on the transcripts of interviews already conducted by his predecessor).

It is also possible to provoke the unveiling of more central or dominant agents by making them see the threat of a publication that is not favourable to their interests or points of view. The strategy consists of playing, in a controlled manner, on the struggles between the producers of the public action studied by going back and forth, during the interview and the survey, between the different groups of competing actors who sometimes hate each other and find themselves mutually incompetent. It is a question of referring to public controversies or, better still, to supposedly secret criticisms and denunciations of the interviewee or his or her positions in order to provoke defences and counter-attacks (playing, like journalists, A against B by saying who we met without giving names, as soon as we made contact, and what we were told)<sup>57</sup>. If one can try to preach the false in order to get the true, it is preferable to have a good prior knowledge of the issues and the state of the political-bureaucratic struggles, and for this it can be judicious to start the investigation from the margins of the universe studied. It is also possible to generate indirect moves by asking, more or less candidly, for suggestions of questions for the next people we meet, questions, sometimes very precise, which will reveal the convergences, the points of tension and the perceived strengths or weaknesses of the allies and adversaries.

It is therefore sometimes useful to abandon the posture of neutrality during the survey. On some occasions, respondents may reverse the interview relationship by asking for an opinion on an element of their response or an event. Sticking to a posture of distancing can provoke, at best, incomprehension and, at worst, strong irritation in an environment that is inclined to judge the discipline of international relations - this is often the case in *high politics* - as being useful for action, in a conception close to those conveyed by centers of expertise close to the State or *think tanks*. Faced with this constraint of judgement, close to the test of orthodoxy, we tended to agree with our interlocutors, while claiming to be cautious 'due to the weakness of the information at our disposal'. This is less a question of confirming the legitimacy of ideas of which the respondents are convinced than of reassuring them of our intentions. However, full acceptance is not a *sine qua non* condition for the success of the survey in these environments. One of the most fruitful interviews with a member of a political cabinet ended with the 'friendly' advice, close to a threat, to have the Quai d'Orsay (the Ministry of foreign affairs) read back an advanced version of our work to avoid any trouble, including lawsuit.

As a follow-up, it is useful to use documents in the course of the interview to suggest to actors that their secrets are 'open secrets' and to make it easier to ask uncomfortable

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<sup>57</sup> Barbot J., "Mener un entretien de face à face", in Paugam S., (ed.), *L'enquête sociologique*, Paris, PUF, 2012, pp. 136-137.

questions<sup>58</sup> about objectives, interests in acting or practices hidden by public statements. For example, as part of our research on the 'war in Mali', we asked officers whether the French army had any interest in staying in the Sahel. Often faced with scathing denials or embarrassed answers, we systematically pulled out a 'confidential' memo from Emmanuel Macron's campaign team in 2017, released by Wikileaks, with among other things this underlined excerpt: 'Despite very difficult conditions, the French army has no interest in withdrawing from the Sahel. It finds there a terrain that allows it to develop and maintain its operational capabilities as well as a source of prestige compared to its Western counterparts. The French presence in the Sahel also provides material benefits to the French military: higher pay, exceptional leave, lower retirement age'<sup>59</sup>. This led to other responses.

Another way to usefully vary the interview situation is to take time. Often, one of the conditions for successful interviews is to meet people several times (up to five times for some), in order to build a minimum of trust, to show oneself to be serious and credible, and to go a little further each time in exploring practices and competition. This time devoted to fieldwork also allows access to the actors. There are few agents that cannot be met if we take the time to wait until they leave office, retire, have the necessary recommendations or until the political pressure subsides. This argues, we believe, in a context of strong injunctions to publish, for a slow science that publishes less but better.

The voice recorder is not an obstacle to obtaining discourses that are not purely facade (these facades deserve to be described in any case). Although common in sociology, the practice of recording is not self-evident in the closed field of international affairs: recording would add artificiality and control to an already tense interview context, and the method of taking notes sparingly during the exchange should be preferred<sup>60</sup>. What can be achieved with a recorder - whose discreet presence has been reassuringly justified and which tends to be forgotten - is however not negligible<sup>61</sup>. In addition to the fact that the recording makes it possible to capture words and hesitations precisely, even when they appear invisible or insignificant during the interview; to conceal the satisfaction of hearing "revelations" and real surprises in the flow of agreed-upon things; or to identify what is considered "sensitive" (several people asked for the recording to be suspended during the interview for certain answers); this method, and this is perhaps the most important thing, makes it possible to evaluate one's own questioning and ways of doing things<sup>62</sup>.

Access to data on diplomatic or economic conduct is also complicated by the fact that existing public records are 'protected' by a range of institutionalised technologies of 'secrecy'<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Laurens S., "'Pourquoi' et 'Comment'...", *op. cit.*

<sup>59</sup> "Opération Barkhane - Comment éviter l'enlèvement des forces françaises au Sahel [Operation Barkhane - How to avoid the stalemate of French forces in the Sahel]", Paris, 19 October 2016, p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Cohen S., "Enquêtes au sein d'un 'milieu difficile' : les responsables de la politique étrangère et de défense", in Cohen S. (ed.), *L'art d'interviewer..., L'art d'interviewer les dirigeants*, Paris, PUF, 1999, pp. 17-49. In presenting his research process, the researcher always runs the risk of being tempted to rationalise his choices by finding good reasons *a posteriori* for the validity of his work. Here, the risk is perhaps less great, because both methods have been tested. Indeed, the recording was sometimes refused by the interviewee or dissuaded by the conditions of the interview (too noisy environment or too (un)tense a context). It should be noted that the status of student, and the inoffensive image it conveys, is beneficial here, as this anecdote suggests: a senior civil servant interviewed on the 'war in Mali' refused to allow us to use the voice recorder, stating that he never allowed it, whereas he had agreed a few weeks earlier to a student who was taking part in the same collective research as us.

<sup>61</sup> A third solution, combining the advantages of both methods while avoiding their disadvantages, is that of surreptitious recording. This has not been tried, as there is a high risk of being permanently barred from the field if the deception is discovered.

<sup>62</sup> On the recording of interviews against the logic of error: P. Joutard, *Ces voix qui nous viennent du passé*, Paris, Hachette, 1983, p. 209-210.

<sup>63</sup> On the practices of concealing public archives and its consequences for the writing of history: S. Combe, *Archives interdites. L'histoire confisquée*, Paris, La Découverte/Poche, 2001 (1994); S. Laurent, ed. in *Archives "secrètes", secrets d'archives ? Le travail de l'historien et de l'archiviste sur les archives sensibles*, Paris, éditions du CNRS, 2003.

. Access to the vaults where these sources are stored has been difficult, as most of our requests for waivers of the legal deadline for disclosure have been refused. However, it was possible to circumvent, at least in part, the opposition of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Atomic Energy Commission by playing with the logic of document classification. For example, it was possible to access certain notes on nuclear affairs by consulting the declassified archives of the regional directorates of the Quai d'Orsay (on India, for example, in the 1960s and 1970s) and by requesting access to the archives of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's presidency concerning bilateral relations with the United States. When public archive sources are not accessible, a range of other sources of information exist, some of which are often neglected: foreign archives, press files, personal archives of actors who witnessed the events, etc. For example, we were able to benefit from the publication of a considerable mass of classified State Department documents by the non-governmental organisation Wikileaks. Despite their unusual mode of communication, the choice was made to treat these digital files as current public archives in their own right (the American authorities have never questioned the veracity of these documents). However, these diplomatic "cables" cannot be analysed as "anti-official speeches" that give a neutral account of diplomatic practices, since their content is determined by important power issues.

As another example, to find recent public records on the Iranian nuclear crisis, we went looking in unusual places, such as the subjects and corrections of papers at the Ecole Nationale d'Administration. In this place of elite reproduction, serving diplomats can ask students to write a topical diplomatic telegram on the latest developments in the Iranian dossier by putting themselves in the shoes of a writer from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' strategic affairs directorate using documents provided (texts and public statements, notes, diplomatic telegrams, etc.).

In closed fields, there is much to be learned from the analysis of open sources. Indeed, there are many practices that are presented as 'secret' and which are constantly on display. From this perspective, press articles allow for the chronicling of public positions, but also for capturing what actors 'leak' about ongoing competitions and negotiations, as press outlets can be understood as agencies of indirect hits against one's opponents. Moreover, researchers working on French foreign policy have at their disposal an online database that gathers all public statements since 1990, and most of them since 1966, which allows one to easily reconstruct discursive practices on a given subject. It is also possible to track the details of governmental conduct, and the state of bureaucratic and political struggles on international issues, by scanning domestic and foreign parliamentary debates and briefings (e.g. US congressional hearings). It is similarly useful to collect 'grey literature', the numerous publications that proliferate in administrations and in semi-public centers of expertise that work on behalf of the state (white papers, reports, notes, reports of colloquiums and seminars, etc.), and articles in specialised journals (*Politique étrangère*, *Défense nationale*, etc. in the French case) often written by actors. A lot of information can also be found in books by specialised journalists, who are extremely well documented and well inserted in security circles (Bob Woodward, to name but one), provided that one is cautious about 'revelations' and 'confidences' that respond to the logic of media and political coups, and critical about accounts of micro-decisions and singular anecdotes that tend to focus on the individual or collective intentions of a small number of people. Another research strategy consists of taking a diversion through history, considering that over time very few secrets remain secrets, and therefore that types of practice, mechanism and social logic that are still current are easier to examine in past moments, particularly thanks to the memories of the actors. Thus, in a dozen or so collections of recollections by former heads and members of the French intelligence services, we find a series of accounts and anecdotes describing in detail investigations; the missions, means and know-how of field agents; the interpretation schemes and calculations of

agents and agencies; the content and organisation of bureaucratic work; the competition, divisions and conflicts within and between the services; relations with politicians; and international alliances and cooperation. These writings thus reveal decisive aspects of the social constraints that guide the actual activity of the 'secret services', including in the most sensitive areas, when, for example, the authors justify assassinations or negotiations with 'terrorist' groups.

Finally, it is worth relativising the theoretical significance of the difficulties of accessing closed areas by emphasising that the discomfort of the field sometimes proves to be heuristic, since it helps to construct new questions that might otherwise have been ignored. The staging of state secrecy with which we are confronted is fully part of the object of study itself. If it is a question of protecting ongoing negotiations or military intervention by limiting the circulation of reserved knowledge, another of the virtues of secrecy is to delimit and protect groups of trustworthy actors. These institutionalised practices of classification and concealment thus construct distinctions and boundaries between groups authorised to know and others. More broadly, a somewhat iconoclastic view of the relationship to empirical work in international relations, and more broadly in the social sciences, can be put forward. A classic work like Graham Allison's on the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis relies exclusively on open sources (secondary literature, published memoirs of the actors, congressional hearings, press articles). For the second edition, thirty years later, the author was able to benefit from empirical material of a quality that is difficult to match in such a field: declassified US and Soviet public archives and transcripts of secret recordings of the deliberations of the US National Security Council Executive Committee<sup>64</sup>. While this addition of data has obviously corrected some factual errors and enriched the narrative, the analytical model developed for the study of foreign policy, and state policies more broadly, is not really made any clearer or more fertile. One is tempted to think with Paul Veyne, who has confronted particularly fragmented sources in studying ancient Greece and Rome, that the poverty of available data, far from being an obstacle to thought, gives rise to ingenious questioning.<sup>65</sup>

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Despite the development of international political sociology as a discipline, and institutionally as a section and journal at the ISA, it is clear that the exchange between sociology and international relations remains one-sided. While there are exceptions, the closure of a whole area of international relations to the methodological and empirical contributions of the social sciences remains strong.

Nevertheless, since the 1990s, in a context of ultra-specialisation in the social sciences, the analysis of international relations, like European studies, has been renewed thanks to the contributions of the social sciences, particularly the sociology of fields<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> See G. T. Allison, *Essence of Decision. Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1971; G. T. Allison, P. Zelikow, *Essence of Decision. Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York, Longman, 2<sup>ème</sup> edition, 1999. On the recordings of President Kennedy: E. May, P. Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York, Norton, 2002.

<sup>65</sup> P. Veyne, *L'inventaire des différences, Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France*, Paris, Seuil, 1976, p. 14-15. Moreover, as we know, many theoretical advances in the sciences have been made by decisively distancing themselves from observed facts, cf. Bourdieu Pierre, Chamboredon Jean-Claude, Passeron Jean-Claude, *The Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries*. New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1991.

<sup>66</sup> See in particular: Didier Bigo, *Polices en réseaux*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1996; Yves Dezalay, Bryan Garth, *The Internationalization of Palace Wars, op. cit.*; "La circulation internationale des idées", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 145, 2002; "Sociologie de la mondialisation. Héritiers, cosmopolites, mercenaires of imperialism and missionaries of the universal", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 151-152, 2004; Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007; Julian Go, « Global fields and imperial forms: Field theory and the British and American Empires », *Sociological Theory*, 26-3, 2008, p. 201-229; Frédéric Lebaron, « Central bankers in the contemporary global field of power: a 'social space' approach », *The Sociological Review*, 56 (1), 2008, p. 121-144; Antoine Vauchez, 'The Force of a Weak Field: Law and Lawyers in the Government of the European Union (For a Renewed Research

Sociologists of the international field thus populate international institutions with individuals, analysing their social properties, systems of relations and constraints, practices and professional routines on the basis of empirical surveys. And they consider that the questions and problems they face are the same as those of the rest of the social sciences, and that there is everything to gain by drawing on the ordinary approaches and achievements of the social sciences to propose solutions. In short, there is no difference in essence between the social sciences that deal with the 'international' and those that deal with the 'local'. This standardisation of international studies is, in some respects, a return to the roots, since, as we know, the first sociologists - Durkheim, Weber, Mauss, Elias - worked indifferently on the national and the international, without changing their perspective.

Since one believes in the uniqueness of the social sciences, the question of what the political sociology of international relations does to the social sciences in general arises in return. The ambition of this article is also to show the contribution of the analysis of international relations to the renewal of the social sciences, by considering the international as a field of exercise for the profession of the sociologist, anthropologist, historian, political scientist, and of invention of methods of investigation in full share. In short, it is a question of pushing the logic of decompartmentalizing the analysis of extra-national relations to its end by showing that international relations are a fruitful field for thinking about phenomena or processes that exist elsewhere. Moreover, it is possible to think that the diversions via the international arouses the sociological imagination by reinforcing the difficulties of research problems encountered at the national level (for example, by adding levels of analysis or borders to the processes of producing public action or to the circulation of ideas) or by making things appear more clearly. In this sense, the international scale is privileged to highlight the phenomena of domination, because one of the characteristics of inequalities between countries is that they are perhaps more assumed than many others.

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Agenda)', *International Political Sociology*, 2 (2), 2008, p. 128-144; Frédéric Mérand, *European Defence Policy: Beyond the Nation State*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008; "Bourdieu and the International" *International Political Sociology*, 5: 3 (2011), p. 225-58; Rebecca Adler-Nissen (ed.), *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR*, London: Routledge, 2013; Didier Georgakakis, Jay Rowell, eds., *The Field of Eurocracy*, op. cit.; Johanna Siméant, (ed.), *Guide de l'enquête globale en sciences sociales*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2015; Julian Go, Monika Krause (eds.), *Fielding Transnationalism*, Chichester, John Wiley & Sons, 2016; Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders*, op cit.; Christian Schmidt-Wellenburg et Stefan Bernhard (dir.), *Charting Transnational Fields*, Londres, Routledge, 2020.