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The social spaces of the international government of violence

By Sylvain Antichan and Cyril Magnon-pujo

With the apparent return of the state to the world stage coming into conflict with the dynamics of globalization and the dispersal of the use of force, the issue of the government of violence, and therefore the question of the monopoly of legitimate physical force, is of increasing relevance. Is it still possible to think, as Max Weber asserted in 1919, that “the state is the form of human community that [. . .] lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a particular territory”?¹ And is it still possible to believe, in accordance with the Westphalian model, that the international stage belongs to sovereign states with a monopoly of this nature?

The authors contributing to this special issue of *Critique internationale* adopt an empirical approach that is not restricted to national contexts, focusing on the government of violence in the modern world in order to highlight the limitations of traditional conceptions of the state. They remind us of the importance of shifting our gaze away from the monopoly of legitimate force, highlighting not simply the actors involved but also the social spaces that help produce this violence and shape the distinctive nature of the state’s stance on this matter.

1. Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, ed., and intr. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Hackett, 2004), 33.

From modern forms of organized violence to actor configurations: Approaches from International Relations

Over the past twenty years or so, various theories in the field of International Relations have examined the new forms of organized violence, and have ascribed them to recent changes in the actors and instruments responsible for using or preventing this violence. According to the “decline of violence perspective,” there are fewer wars in the twenty-first century, and they are more localized, shorter, and less deadly than in previous centuries.² The representatives of this perspective contend that this dynamic is the result of the greater role played by international organizations (the United Nations [UN], the European Union [EU], the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], and humanitarian nongovernmental organizations [NGOs]), which have helped institutionalize norms that delegitimize territorial conquests. They argue that the emergence of these new actors means that states no longer have a monopoly on the definition of legitimate physical force, prompting them to alter the way they conduct wars. The authors that Siniša Malešević has grouped together under the heading “new wars theories”³ provide a very different analysis: in their view, far from being in decline, modern violence has taken on new decentralized, chaotic, and deterritorialized forms, targeting civilians rather than soldiers.⁴ They believe that this change has been caused less by the restructuring of the international system under the auspices of international organizations than by the dynamics of state weakening, a situation that accentuates the role of private actors and intrastate warfare in modern armed conflicts.

Finally, the proponents of the “technological displacement approach” assign a pivotal role to the instruments used to perpetrate violence. They believe that war is likely to be continually redefined as technology (such as military drones) increases the physical and emotional distance from the battlefields.⁵

Whether these different theories focus on the intervention of international organizations, the weakening of states, or technological developments, they have in common the fact that they link modern forms of organized violence with reconfigurations of the groups of actors who use it or seek to prevent it. They can,

2. John Mueller, “War Has Almost Ceased to Exist: An Assessment,” *Political Science Quarterly* 124, no. 2 (2009): 297–321, doi.org/10.1002/j.1538-165X.2009.tb00650.x; Joshua S. Goldstein, *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (Dutton, 2011); Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (Allan Lane, 2011).

3. Siniša Malešević, “The Organisation of Military Violence in the 21st Century,” *Organization* 24, no. 4 (2017): 456–74, doi.org/10.1177/1350508417693854.

4. Paul Collier, *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy* (World Bank Group, 2000); Robert D. Kaplan, “The Coming Anarchy,” *Atlantic Monthly* (February 1994): 44–76, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1994/02/the-coming-anarchy/304670/?utm_source=copy-link&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=share; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Polity Press, 1999).

5. Peter W. Singer, *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (Penguin, 2009).

however, appear somewhat limited, since they disregard the political sociology of the state, public policy, and international relations, despite the fact that these provide a solid store of knowledge for investigating the processes observed.⁶

From reconfigurations of public policy to modern forms of organized violence: Approaches from political sociology

Since the 1970s, numerous studies have examined the role of the state in the design and implementation of public policy. By examining the state “in practice”⁷ and “in action,”⁸ their authors have demonstrated that “the traditional model of policies carried out primarily by a centralized state in well-defined sectors” is now “outdated,” since public policy is caught up in supranational and subnational dynamics, as well as in the intermixing of public and private actors.⁹ Some of these studies have concluded that the state is in retreat,¹⁰ while others have suggested that it has repositioned itself in new governance models or as a “coproducer” of public policy,¹¹ and others still talk of its “*redéploiement*” (redeployment or restructuration).¹² The notion of “assemblages” proposed by Saskia Sassen¹³ reflects one of these ways of rethinking the scope and role of the state, through the reorganization of territory, authority, and rights. This would enable a new geography of power to develop, in which sovereign power, shorn of the ability to define itself through its institutions and/or territoriality, would reposition and transform itself in specialized arrangements oriented according to objectives and practices.

This observation is fully applicable to the modern government of violence, where it is often possible to witness the plurality of actors involved. For example,

6. Marielle Debos, *Living by the Gun in Chad: Combatants, Impunity and State Formation*, trans. Andrew Brown with Benn Williams (Zed Books, 2016); Jacobo Grajales, *Gouverner dans la violence* (Karthala, 2016).

7. Jean-Gustave Padioleau, *L'État au concret* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1982).

8. Bruno Jobert and Pierre Muller, *L'État en action. Politiques publiques et corporatismes* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1987).

9. See for example, Pierre Lascoumes and Patrick Le Galès, *Sociologie de l'action publique* (Armand Colin, 2012). **Translator's note:** Our translation from the French. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign language material in this article are our own.

10. Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan K. Sell (eds), *Who Governs the Globe?* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Laurent Bonelli and Willy Pelletier (eds), *L'État démantelé. Enquête sur une révolution silencieuse* (La Découverte, 2010).

11. Frédéric Ocqueteau, *Polices entre État et marché* (Presses de Sciences Po, 2004); Matthieu Ansaloni, “Le marché comme instrument politique. Le désengagement de l'État dans l'usage des pesticides en France,” *Sociétés contemporaines* 105, no. 1 (2017): 79–102, doi.org/10.3917/soco.105.0079.

12. Béatrice Hibou (ed.), *La privatisation des États* (Karthala, 1999); Cyril Magnon-pujo, “La souveraineté est-elle privatisable? La régulation des compagnies de sécurité privée comme renégociation des frontières de l'État,” *Politix* 95, no. 3 (2011): 129–53, doi.org/10.3917/pox.095.0129; Philipp Genschel and Bernhard Zangl, “L'État et l'exercice de l'autorité politique. Dénationalisation et administration,” *Revue française de sociologie* 52, no. 3 (2011): 509–35, doi.org/10.3917/rfs.523.0509.

13. Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization* (Columbia University Press, 1996); Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

governments' use of private security companies, the influence of manufacturers in determining defense policies, the intervention of groups of "armed" citizens, or the actions of NGOs in putting into place interventions for the "restoration of peace" demonstrate how public and private logics in the political management of violence are intertwined.¹⁴ In many countries, civil society actors, sometimes supported by international organizations, attempt to restrict the scope of legitimate violence by mobilizing against state practices they consider harmful to freedom.¹⁵ Among other factors, the attempts by European Union diplomacy to operate independently of American leadership with regard to the issue of Iran's nuclear capabilities were hampered by the transnational nature of Airbus, since some of its aircraft parts were manufactured in the United States.¹⁶ Hence, foreign policies, military operations, and conflict resolution activities are determined in accordance with interdependencies and interactions between a variety of social spaces,¹⁷ each with its own logic.¹⁸

However, there is still very little interrogation of the reconfigurations of public policy in the field of the government of violence, particularly at international level. While it is acknowledged that the emergence of "security governance" in the early 2000s was an indication of a reappraisal of the state level,¹⁹ very little research has explored the day-to-day activities involved in managing physical force. Against a backdrop of increasing interpenetration of the private and public sectors,²⁰ the rationalization of state action,²¹ and the internationalization,

14. Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams, *Security Beyond the State: Private Security in International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Gilles Favarel-Garrigues and Laurent Gayer, "Violier la loi pour maintenir l'ordre. Le vigilantisme en débat," *Politix* 115, no. 3 (2016): 7–33, doi.org/10.3917/pox.115.0007.

15. Human Rights Watch and Pax Mondial, for example, put pressure on governments to persuade them to ban the development of "killer robots." Ingvild Bode and Hendrik Huelss, "Autonomous Weapons Systems and Changing Norms in International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (2018): 393–413, doi.org/10.1017/S0260210517000614.

16. Florent Pouponneau, "The International Distribution of Diplomatic Labour: An Analysis of French Foreign Policy towards the Iranian Nuclear Problem," trans. Alexandra Harwood, *Revue française de science politique* 63, no. 1 (2013): 51–73, https://shs.cairn.info/journal-revue-francaise-de-science-politique-2013-1-page-51?lang=en.

17. Gregory Daho, *La transformation des armées. Enquête sur les relations civilo-militaires en France* (Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2020); Delphine Lecombe, "Nous sommes tous en faveur des victimes." *La diffusion de la justice transitionnelle en Colombie* (LGDJ, 2014); Florent Pouponneau, *La politique française de non-prolifération nucléaire. De la division du travail diplomatique* (Peter Lang, 2015).

18. Yves Buchet de Neuilly, *L'Europe et la politique étrangère* (Economica, 2005); Antoine Vauchez, "Le prisme circulatoire. Retour sur un leitmotiv académique," *Critique internationale* 59, no. 2 (2013): 9–16, doi.org/10.3917/crii.059.0009.

19. Elke Krahmann, "Conceptualizing Security Governance," *Cooperation and Conflict* 38, no. 1 (2003): 5–26, doi.org/10.1177/0010836703038001001; Anna Leander, "The Power to Construct International Security: On the Significance of Private Military Companies," *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (2005): 803–825, doi.org/10.1177/03058298050330030601.

20. Benjamin Lemoine, "Dealing with the State: The Politics of French Sovereign Bond Transactions and Wholesaling," trans. JPD Systems, *Sociétés contemporaines* 92, no. 4 (2013): 59–88, https://shs.cairn.info/journal-societes-contemporaines-2013-4-page-59?lang=en; Olivier Nay, "Gouverner par le marché. Gouvernements et acteurs privés dans les politiques internationales de développement," *Gouvernement et action publique* 4, no. 4 (2017): 127–154, doi.org/10.3917/gap.174.0127.

21. Philippe Bezès and Christine Musselin, "Le *New Public Management*. Entre rationalisation et marchandisation?" in *Une "French touch" dans l'analyse des politiques publiques?*, ed. Laurie Boussaguet, Sophie Jacquot, and Pauline Ravinet (Presses de Sciences Po, 2015), 125–152.

or perhaps the transnationalization, of government activities,²² there is a lack of analysis of observable practices in the field. Studies devoted to new forms of organized violence follow hypotheses that have been largely developed by the sociology of the state, public policy, and international relations, without fully tackling and critically engaging with this literature. Conversely, the analysis of public policy, which seeks to renew the sociology of the state, has not yet developed a systematic interrogation of violence-related policies, even though the monopoly of legitimate physical force has been established as one of the features of the state. We intend to use the two observations above to provide concrete answers to a number of questions. First, who produces the policies for perpetrating and preventing legitimate violence? The “who” here refers not only to the actors, but also to the social spaces that nurture relationships based on collusion and conflict.²³ Second, what do the relationships and interactions that produce these policies teach us about the power relations between the various actors, institutions, and social spaces? Third, how do these policies tend to (re)define violence in multiple ways? We will examine the way in which actors who are to some extent external to the state, or who may even be opposed to it, help shape the specific nature of the state’s stance in a range of configurations.²⁴ We will go on to analyze the places where these policies are created and the rationales underlying this process, thereby shedding light on how (re)definitions of legitimate and illegitimate violence emerge and are consolidated.

We therefore propose to apply questions from the sociology of public policy and the state to the apparatuses, assemblages of actors, knowledge, and practices that come from multiple social spaces but shape the government of violence beyond national level. This perspective ties in with the thinking initiated by the French sociology of international relations focused on the division of labor and social differentiation in the international arena.²⁵ It takes this thinking further in seeking to describe not only the relationships of power or meaning between actors, but also the “process of interaction” between the social spaces where these actors develop, along with the impact of these interactions.

In his article on European management of the war in former Yugoslavia, Yves Buchet de Neuilly shows that it was possible for a given state or, even, a given diplomat, to advocate different actions depending on the arena in which he or she was operating. For example, a diplomat may have helped introduce tough

22. Franck Petiteville and Andy Smith, “Analyser les politiques publiques internationales,” *Revue française de science politique* 56, no. 3 (2016): 357–366, doi.org/10.3917/rfsp.563.0357.

23. Nathalie Duclos, *Ex-Combatants and International Statebuilding: Veterans as Peace Brokers in Kosovo*, trans. Susan Traponier (Routledge, 2024).

24. Hence, the articles gathered in this special issue (or Thema) ignore violence that takes place wholly on the periphery of the state and national and international organizations, and which is often too readily labeled “illegitimate” or “private.”

25. For an initial overview of this perspective, see Sandrine Lefranc, “Ce qui se joue à l’international. Les relations internationales à l’épreuve de la sociologie des crises politiques,” in *La logique du désordre. Relire la sociologie de Michel Dobry*, ed. Myriam Ait-Aoudia and Antoine Roger (Presses de Sciences Po, 2015), 199–220.

sanctions against Albanian and Serbian leaders during international negotiations on collective security, while ensuring that the same sanctions became “hollow shells” when involved in negotiations on international trade regulation. From one social space to another, “states’ interests and power relationships are not the same.” Consequently, “in order to understand international crisis management, this practice needs to be understood in a range of sectors.”²⁶ In this special issue, we extend this approach, taking into account both the “structural effects” specific to each of these spaces²⁷ and the impact of encounters between them. The relationships, interdependencies, and socially structured interactions between these social spaces give rise to specific configurations that define the government of violence.²⁸ We do not, however, intend to put forward a single, transposable model of configurations of the international government of violence, irrespective of the situation. Our aim is to identify invariants in the exchanges between these different national (open or closed) and transnational spaces, while at the same time analyzing the new practices and new power structures in which the state takes shape, is redefined, and is ultimately consolidated.

Considering the monopoly of legitimate violence via its periphery

The outcome of this investigation is a questioning of the notion of the monopoly accorded to the state. This challenging of the state’s monopolistic position is not new. The notion is polysemic and contested, but nevertheless seems still to be essential.²⁹ It might function in the same way as “public opinion.” The fact that “public opinion does not exist”³⁰ does not prevent it from existing, but means that it exists as a sort of artifact that produces social and political effects, acting as a resource and a constraint in political games.³¹ A whole series of studies in the fields of both political sociology and International Relations suggest that the same is true of the monopoly of legitimate violence.

26. Yves Buchet de Neuilly, “La gestion internationale routinière des crises. Sectorisation des relations internationales et mondialisation de l’institution étatique,” in *La logique du désordre*, ed. Aït-Aoudia and Roger, 221–224.

27. Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1989–1992*, ed. Patrick Champagne, Remi Lenoir, Franck Poupeau, and Marie-Christine Rivière, trans. David Fernbach (Polity Press, 2014). We define “social spaces” as relatively autonomous social spheres that tend to operate according to specific logics. We use the term “social space” rather than “field” because these spheres do not necessarily possess all the properties that define a field (autonomy and structural homology, in particular).

28. For Afghanistan, for example, Gilles Dorronsoro provides an analysis of what he calls a “transnational government” in a manner similar to our own. Gilles Dorronsoro, *Le gouvernement transnational de l’Afghanistan: Une si prévisible défaite* (Karthala, 2021).

29. Marian Eabrasu, “Les états de la définition wébérienne de l’État,” *Raisons politiques* 45, no. 1 (2012): 187–209, doi.org/10.3917/rai.045.0187.

30. Pierre Bourdieu, “Public Opinion Does Not Exist,” in *Communication and Class Struggle* (2 vols), vol. 1, *Capitalism, Imperialism*, ed. Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelau (International General/IMMRC, 1979), 124–30.

31. Michel Dobry, “Le président de la République en cohabitation. Modes de pensée préconstitués et logiques sectorielles,” in *Le Président de la République. Usages et genèses d’une institution*, ed. Bernard Lacroix and Jacques Lagroye (Presses de Sciences Po, 1992), 276–77.

From the dynamics of power concentration to relationships between social spaces

Historical sociology began by examining what constitutes the distinctive nature of the political form known as “the state”: the dynamics of the homogenization, concentration, and centralization of power.³² In modern times in the international arena, these processes took the form of the delegitimation of nonstate violence—the violence of mercenaries, pirates, and corsairs—delegitimation that resulted in the de facto monopolization of legitimate violence by the state beyond its borders, and to the progressive and contingent assertion of its sovereignty.³³ If we think of the formation of states in terms of these dynamics, our modern period emerges as the “shift from homogeneous to heterogeneous, from the singular to the plural, from order to disorder.” According to Serge Gruzinski, this perspective is mostly an “illusion.”³⁴ In fact, various political sociologists who have questioned our perception of what form the state previously took have pointed out that the role of centralization has probably been exaggerated.³⁵

Even Max Weber’s works seem less unambiguous when reread today. The traditional definition of the state he proposes in *The Vocation Lectures* is in fact supplemented, in a second, less frequently quoted passage, by: “what is specific to the present is that all other organizations or individuals can assert the right to use physical violence only insofar as the *state* permits them to do so. The state is regarded as the sole source of the ‘right’ to use violence.”³⁶ Without doubt, the principle of claiming the monopoly of legitimate physical force is clearly stated. However, Weber’s emphasis here is less on the centralizing dynamic per se, than on the relationships between the various actors who create this monopoly. He emphasizes the fact that the state “permits” other groups the option to use violence. He also highlights the fact that these groups agree to “regard” the state “as the sole source of the ‘right’ to use violence.”³⁷ This prompts a double shift in perspective: first, by dereifying the state, which means not just being restricted to describing a process of centralization, but also considering the relationships between the different parts of the state that, on a day-to-day basis, ensure that the monopoly exists; and second, by examining not just states, but the other

32. Yves Déloye, *Sociologie historique du politique* (La Découverte, 2017).

33. Janice Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns: State-Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1994).

34. Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization*, trans Deke Dusinberre (Routledge, 2002).

35. Patrick Carroll, “Articulating Theories of States and State Formation,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 22, no. 4 (2009): 553–603, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6443.2009.01369.x; Desmond King and Patrick Le Galès, “Conceptualiser l’État contemporain,” *Revue française de sociologie* 52, no. 3 (2011): 453–559, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/440063188>.

36. Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, 33.

37. On this point, see also Catherine Colliot-Thélène, “La fin du monopole de la violence légitime?,” *Revue d’études comparatives Est–Ouest* 34, no. 1 (2003): 5–31, doi.org/10.3406/receo.2003.1594.

actors or, better still, the other social spaces that contribute to the prevention and perpetration of legitimate violence.

The sociology of the state outlined by Pierre Bourdieu confirms this hypothesis by emphasizing the historical dynamic of the state's concentration of symbolic capital, the distinctive feature of which is the recognition by others of its control of the means of action, rather than the actual control of these means.³⁸ In his post-structuralist rereading of the concept of the state, Michel Foucault goes further, highlighting in particular the impact of discourse and belief in the monopolization of violence to explain not only the power associated with the state, but also the institutions that reproduce it. According to this interpretation, the authority of the state resides more in relationships than in institutions, as suggested by his concept of "governmentality."³⁹ These various proposals call for a "less overtly state-centred" approach to the state,⁴⁰ an approach that does not necessarily aim to abandon the notion of a monopoly of legitimate physical force,⁴¹ but to consider the "assemblages" of social spaces that produce policies for the prevention and perpetration of violence.

A fiction with very real impacts?

A whole body of literature traditionally associated with the field of International Relations can be linked to these discussions on conceptualizing the role and position of the state in the government of violence. In addition to the now well-known research on the potential retreat of the state in the face of external powers,⁴² or on how the various authorities beyond the level of the state are organized,⁴³ some authors seek not simply to "reappraise" the state's position in a new architecture of power, but to directly question categories of thought partly based on fictions that are highly problematic given their tendency to become self-fulfilling. Hence, "the international," "sovereignty," and even the "state," are sometimes contested as concepts that have become foundational for the discipline, even though their relevance to critical thinking about how power and violence are currently

38. Pierre Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field," trans. Loïc J. D. Wacquant and Samar Farage, *Sociological Theory* 12, no. 1 (1994): 1–18, doi.org/10.2307/202032.

39. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

40. Bob Jessop, "Bringing the State Back In (Yet Again): Reviews, Revisions, Rejections, and Redirections," *International Review of Sociology* 11, no. 2 (2001): 149–173, doi.org/10.1080/713674035.

41. Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 77–96, doi.org/10.2307/1962879; Janice E. Thomson, "State Sovereignty in International Relations: Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Empirical Research," *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1995): 213–233, doi.org/10.2307/2600847.

42. Strange, *The Retreat of the State*.

43. James Rosenau and Ernst Czempel (eds), *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1992); Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall (eds), *Power in Global Governance* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

organized has not been assessed and reassessed. In the pioneering work of Rob Walker⁴⁴ and Cynthia Weber,⁴⁵ for example, can be found a criticism of the myth constructed around the 1648 treaties of Westphalia, which overwhelmed any other understanding of state sovereignty by reducing it, *by definition*, to the expression of absolute authority over a territory and a people. The authors note that it is by nature a temporally and geographically determined social construct, and stress the need to think of new ways to envision the organization of power and the government of violence since it cannot be reduced, *on principle*, to a monopoly of legitimate physical force internally and to a struggle between sovereign and monopolistic entities externally. As a construct rather than an invariant, this monopoly of legitimate physical force accorded to the state and its recognition by others—characteristics of the sovereignty held up as a cardinal virtue of international relations by realist and liberal theorists—should therefore be reconsidered, and the foundational “distinctions” of the discipline questioned.⁴⁶ These authors believe that basing modern sovereignty on the public/private distinction around violence is more a matter of faith and unconsidered factors than of reality.⁴⁷ According to those theorists who could be described as hard constructivists, the sovereignty of the state has never existed *per se*, and nor has the monopoly of legitimate violence ever been total. Both, however, were imposed by the states themselves, through the work of their diplomats and legal experts, who promoted a perspective favorable to the dominant powers, before they were taken up and disseminated by International Relations theorists, who were themselves sometimes close to the halls of state power. It is only fairly recently that some analyses have highlighted not only the importance of nonstate powers, but also the possibility of an authority that is not based on a central government, hierarchical relations between private and the public actors, commands, and coercion.⁴⁸ Hence, the debate on the role of these foundational concepts remains intense in International Relations,⁴⁹ although it continues to be dominated by thinking about the role and the authority

44. Rob B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

45. Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

46. Patricia Owens, “Distinctions, Distinctions: ‘Public’ and ‘Private’ Force?,” *International Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2008): 977–990, doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2008.00750.x.

47. Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber (eds), *State Sovereignty as Social Construct* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

48. Jonathan Joseph, “The Limits of Governmentality: Social Theory and the International,” *European Journal of International Relations* 16, no. 2 (2010): 223–246, doi.org/10.1177/1354066109346886; Nico Krisch, “Liquid Authority in Global Governance,” *International Theory* 9, no. 2 (2017): 237–260, doi.org/10.1017/S1752971916000269.

49. Julia Costa Lopez, Benjamin De Carvalho, Andrew A. Latham, Ayse Zarakol, Jens Bartelson, and Minda Holm, “Forum: In the Beginning There Was No World (for It): Terms, Concepts, and Early Sovereignty,” *International Studies Review* 20, no. 3 (2018): 489–519, doi.org/10.1093/isr/viy053; Benjamin De Carvalho, Halvard Leira, and John M. Hobson, “The Big Bangs of IR: The Myths That Your Teachers Still Tell You About 1648 and 1919,” *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2011): 735–758, doi.org/10.1177/0305829811401459.

of the state⁵⁰ or, more recently, forms of “extralegal” or “organic” state authority.⁵¹ In addition to theoretical considerations, the persistence of this belief in both the sovereignty of the state and its monopoly has a practical impact, particularly in the way actors think of themselves and position themselves in relation to this supposed monopoly of legitimate physical force.⁵² Consequently, more so than the black box of the state, it is the black boxes of these actors, their social spaces, and their relationships with different parts of the state that need to be opened.

The configurations of the international social spaces of legitimate violence

The contributors to this Thema examine policies that have long been regarded as the expression par excellence of sovereign prerogatives: waging war, fighting terrorism, and negotiating peace. And yet, in their articles, the state operates like one protagonist among others, caught up in wider complex configurations, or like an actor whose role may only be indirectly sketched out. This shift in perspective, based on an analysis of the social organization underpinning these policies, enables a number of themes to be addressed: the vagueness that surrounds policies for perpetrating and preventing violence, the function and role of the state, and hence the legitimacy of the violence over which it has been given a monopoly.

Vagueness as an approach

According to many analysts, our current situation is marked by a further blurring of the boundaries between the public and the private, war and crime, soldiers and civilians, and enemies of the state and political opponents.⁵³ The concept of policing, used by Anthony Amicelle in his contribution to this Thema,⁵⁴ illustrates this trend. He investigates how international banks contribute to the fight against terrorism by using algorithmic tools to monitor their customers, and shows that

50. Georg Sørensen, *The Transformation of the State: Beyond the Myth of Retreat* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Stephan Leibfried and Michael Zürn, *Transformations of the State?* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Genschel and Zangl, “L’État et l’exercice de l’autorité politique.”

51. Roland Paris, “The Right to Dominate: How Old Ideas about Sovereignty Pose New Challenges for World Order,” *International Organization* 74, no. 3 (2020): 453–489, doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000077.

52. Cyril Magnon-pujo, “Normer la violence privée? La construction sociale d’un contrôle des compagnies de sécurité privée,” (PhD diss., Paris 1 Panthéon–Sorbonne University, 2015); Jacobo Grajales and Romain Le Cour Grandmaison (eds), *L’État malgré tout. Produire l’autorité dans la violence* (Karthala, 2019).

53. Michel Dobry points out that while there seems to be a degree of consensus around this assessment, not every author puts forward the same timeline in support of this blurring of boundaries, with some dating it to September 11, 2001, others to the end of the Cold War and, in some cases, to the Second World War or the French Revolution. Michel Dobry, “Exposé conclusif” (concluding presentation at the “Gouverner la violence? Dynamiques normatives autour de la violence contemporaine” conference, Idex–Lyon, Triangle, Université Lumière Lyon 2, November 8, 2019).

54. Anthony Amicelle, “Policing & big data. La mise en algorithmes d’une politique internationale,” *Critique internationale* 92, no. 3 (2021): 23–48, doi.org/10.3917/crui.092.0026.

not everything that comes under the heading of policing is the responsibility of the police, but is now the responsibility of a wide variety of actors.

However, the observation that there is a blurring of boundaries is often combined with more normative considerations. To a certain extent, the increase in vagueness and indeterminacy is implicitly seen as a contributory factor in dysfunction and disruption, while clarity and determination alone are seen as producers of efficiency.⁵⁵ This imprecise view probably suffers from an intellectualistic bias that takes “the things of logic for the logic of things.”⁵⁶ That at least is what the contributors to this thematic section imply in their commitment to showing the practical effectiveness of indeterminate categories: far from being dysfunctional, vagueness is in fact one of the conditions for the implementation of policies that inflict or prevent legitimate violence. In Afghanistan, for example, the war conducted by NATO was initially presented as part of a Comprehensive Approach, that is, a low-intensity form of intervention focusing on the security/development continuum. However, as Julien Pomarède shows in his article,⁵⁷ this category became so fluid during the interactions between the American and European allies that the most intensive and lethal military operations (the “Surge”) could eventually be described as falling entirely within it. This vagueness enabled NATO’s member states to maintain a minimum compromise so that it could follow the strategies determined by the United States as closely as possible, without the Europeans “losing face.” More importantly, this also helped legitimate the intensification of military action throughout Afghanistan. Similarly, in the United States, the “medicalization” of the death penalty has helped ensure the punishment’s social acceptance by euphemizing the violence it puts on display (see Nicolas Fischer’s contribution⁵⁸). Finally, peacebuilding functions as such a vague label that each agency is able to adopt it to promote its own actions, thereby helping to keep it alive (see Sandrine Lefranc’s contribution⁵⁹).

The blurring of boundaries, differentiation between social spaces and the role of the state

What happens to the state in these expanded configurations of actors? In the light of the four articles gathered in this Thema, it would seem inappropriate to describe such assemblages of power too hastily as a blurring of boundaries since the impact of these very boundaries continues to be structural.

55. Dobry, “Exposé conclusif.”

56. Dobry, “Exposé conclusif.”

57. Julien Pomarède, “Nettoyer, contrôler et cibler: Les engrénages de violence et la guerre de l’OTAN contre le terrorisme en Afghanistan,” *Critique internationale* 92, no. 3 (2021): 71–94, doi.org/10.3917/crii.092.0074.

58. Nicolas Fischer, “Le droit des contrats contre la peine de mort: Controverses contemporaines autour du commerce international des produits nécessaires aux injections létales aux États-Unis,” *Critique internationale* 92, no. 3 (2021): 49–69, doi.org/10.3917/crii.092.0052.

59. Sandrine Lefranc, Comment une chimère est devenue une politique internationale: L’arène de la “paix positive,” *Critique internationale* 92, no. 3 (2021): 49–69, doi.org/10.3917/crii.092.0098.

In his contribution, Amicelle demonstrates the great importance of a resolutely empirical approach to thinking about such matters. The contribution of banks to the fight against money laundering, terrorism, and crime is often presented as the vector of a kind of dedifferentiation between the banking sector and state security. However, the results of his ethnographic investigation into algorithms installed to monitor financial flows in a bank suggest such conclusions should be significantly modified. Behind the rhetoric of complexity, the fieldwork demonstrates the relative simplicity of the algorithms, a simplicity resulting precisely from the structural difficulties involved in linking the worlds of finance and security, as well as from the relationship between banks and federal authorities. In light of the need for these algorithms to be communicable, comprehensible, and explicable between the various social spaces involved, this sociotechnical apparatus is an indication of the structural differentiation of these spaces and the maintainance of their functioning according to specific social logics.

Fischer's examination of the controversies surrounding the use of products required for lethal injections in the United States enables him to explore what could be described as a reaffirmation of structural differentiation or, more precisely, a breakdown in collusive transactions between two social spaces.⁶⁰ For several decades, pharmaceutical manufacturers ignored—i.e., turned a blind eye to—the lethal uses to which their drugs—originally intended for the treatment of patients—were being put. A number of NGOs revealed the previously invisible uses and relationships in various forums, thereby triggering a structural warning that forced each sector to abide by its own social logics (on the one hand, administering capital punishment, on the other, treating illnesses). This disruption of relations between the federal authorities and the pharmaceutical industry (producers and distributors) has complicated the enforcement of sentences in the United States. It has contributed to an increase in the number of delays and “failures” (the latter giving rise to fierce protests), such that a scenario involving the effective disappearance of capital punishment has again become a possibility in the United States. It has also had separate impacts on both of the parties involved. The federal states have attempted to reaffirm the principle of political sovereignty (by applying “secrecy laws” regarding the composition of lethal injections, or by reclassifying these substances as government “weapons”), while the greater demand for monitoring of the use of their products has led manufacturers to centralize previously fragmented drug distribution networks. Nothing in Sandrine Lefranc's article on the social space of transitional justice suggests that it is the state that lies at the heart of international policies for the

60. We use the term “collusive transactions” to mean relations between actors located in different social spaces that appear to have little or no legitimacy from the point of view of the specific logic of each of these spaces. Michel Dobry, “Valeurs, croyances et transactions collusives. Notes pour une réorientation de la théorie de la légitimation des systèmes démocratiques,” in *À la recherche de la démocratie. Mélanges offerts à Guy Hermet*, ed. Javier Santiso (Karthala, 2002), 103–120.

prevention of violence. The peacebuilding actors she presents stand in opposition to the dominant state approach to resolving armed conflicts, advocating solutions that sideline political elites, who are usually the main actors, and relying on “civil society organizations.” The state is not the author’s main concern. And yet, the state is everywhere, but between the lines. Indeed, the position these NGOs have carved out for themselves in the international arena stems precisely from their ability to differentiate themselves from government policies. They exist on the international scene as organizations critical of the intergovernmental order. Consequently, far from blurring the situation, it is in their interest to exploit the differentiation of roles and preserve the boundaries between them and the state, thereby reasserting the specific nature of the state’s perspective. In uncovering these mechanisms, Lefranc also invites us to reconsider the role of beliefs in determining whether violence is legitimate or illegitimate. Actors in the field of transitional justice do not necessarily seem to believe in the effectiveness of the solutions they advocate. They know that many of their interventions, particularly the earliest ones, were not as successful as they might have hoped, but this does not stop them from advocating these alternative methods for resolving armed conflicts. Apart from the beliefs of peacebuilding actors, their proposals for “positive peace” are based primarily on the interdependencies in which the actors are engaged. They can only have a role to play in the international arena if they state that they have nothing to do with pragmatic government experts and keep well away from them. Following this path, also taken by Julien Pomarède, means that the considering the legitimacy of the state’s monopoly of violence is less about turning explicitly to the actors’ beliefs than to the social organization underlying these policies. Hence, the monopoly attributed to the state is explored in this article not in terms of the dynamics of the concentration of power, but in terms of the social division of labor—in other words, the contribution of different social spaces to role differentiation. It is in the linking of social spaces that, paradoxically, remain separate that the government of violence is constructed, along with the definition of this violence itself. The violence is driven by the interdependencies and interactions between the social spaces that produce these policies, and not simply by the beliefs of the actors. It is these collusive and conflictual relations that shape the policies for perpetrating and preventing violence, and that give rise to the monopoly of legitimate violence that this Thema sets out to investigate.⁶¹ ■

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