

The Anthropology of International Institutions: How ethnography contributes to understanding mechanisms of global governance

10-12th June 2010

Address of the venue: Reid Hall, 4, rue de Chevreuse, 75006 Paris

This workshop will conceptualize mechanisms of international governance as anthropologists identified them through fieldwork in the multiple locations where international institutions operate. International institutions produce normative frameworks and diffuse them globally. They distribute resources and circulate knowledge through trans-national expert networks bringing into effect relationships of power and control from the metropolises to the remotest parts of the world. The aim of the workshop is to clarify conceptual challenges and commonalities international institutions represent and to give anthropologists working on different international institutions the opportunity to discuss their theoretical approaches to international governance and to compare their empirical findings. It will focus on the study of mechanisms of governance through different scales, as an initial theme for future cooperation. The participants will not only look at the official objectives and unintended consequences of international governance but also at how international institutions implicate collective and individual actors in their policy making, absorb critique, attempt to neutralize political conflict and create new political fields in competition and collusion with local actors and national governments. Participants will analyze issues ranging from audit and self-monitoring through to bestowing honor and shame as mechanisms of governance with which international institutions influence national and local governance and evaluate their own performance.

The workshop will take place over three days to leave ample time for conceptual discussion on the mechanism of international governance and for an exchange of empirical evidence from the different institutions studied by the participants. The workshop will comprise four half-day sessions with four or five presenters and a discussant and two round tables in the beginning and the end. As we want to produce a publication on the basis of the workshop proceedings, we require that papers should be written beforehand. Unlike a previous exploratory workshop that was open only to the presenters, this workshop will be open for doctoral students doing anthropological studies of international institutions for their PhDs and for colleagues from anthropology and other disciplines who are working on related topics. Only previously registered participants (a maximum of 50 people) will be admitted.



Thursday June 10th,

9:00 Birgit Müller (IIAC/LAIOS – CNRS/EHESS) – UMR 8177 – Paris - Welcome and Introduction

9.30 – 12.30h - Round-table – all participants

COMPREHENSION AND USE OF THE TERM “GOVERNANCE”

Five minute presentation by the participants explaining their use of the term governance.

14:30 – session 1

HOW INSTITUTIONS PRODUCE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

This session addresses how mechanisms of international governance such as diagnosing and modeling make a world that is governable by international institutions

Jane Cowan (University of Sussex)

Before Audit Culture: International Governance in Historical Perspective

Recent work in a wide range of international organisations reveals the imprint of neoliberal regimes on contemporary mechanisms of international governance. In this presentation, I will seek to place these contemporary mechanisms within a longer term historical perspective. I will focus on the League of Nations and, in particular, its supervision of minorities treaties in SE Europe. The presentation will outline the techniques and practices of supervision, the struggles around its scope and limits, and the ways that the various actors involved attempted to use or subvert supervision. It will use supervision as a site for thinking about continuities and discontinuities in the logics and techniques of international governance across the past century.

Christoph Brumann (Max Planck Institute, Halle)

Appropriating World Heritage: Nation, Culture, and Imagined Worlds in a Global Tournament of Value

With 186 signatory states and 890 sites inscribed on its prestigious list, the World Heritage Convention of 1972 is UNESCO's most visible activity and a major success story. Correspondingly intense are the signatory states' efforts to have further sites listed but also to protect the already inscribed ones from unwanted global interference. A key quality all sites have to meet is that of "outstanding universal value" (aka "OUV"), a questionable concept of course to an anthropologist who is used to think of all value judgments as culturally influenced and therefore particular. Based on participant observation at statutory meetings, interviews with key protagonists, and a critical reading of the vast documentary trail, the paper will scrutinize this specific mode of symbolic production, exploring the conscious and unconscious ways OUV is constructed, defined, detected, and denied within the World Heritage system.



Michael Goldman (University of Minnesota)
Speculative Governance and the Desire for Global Cities

By tracing the rise of the global imperative to convert our cities into “global cities,” which is supposedly integral to a nation’s ability to succeed in the global economy, this paper tries to explain new governance structures being constituted in the process. The paper suggests one can learn much about new mechanisms of transnational governance, which can be called “speculative governance,” by understanding the dynamic relations between international institutions (e.g., World Bank, Asian Development Bank) promoting these urban governance projects and the unfolding power relations within – and across —these cities in transition (e.g., Bangalore, Dubai, Singapore, Mumbai).

Yael Navaro-Yashin (University of Cambridge)
The Specter of Peace: ‘Division’ and ‘Settlement’ in International Governance, Anthropology, and Liberalism

This paper will inquire what sorts of anthropological methods and frameworks are needed for the study of a 'peace process' as arbitrated by the United Nations. The focus will be the long-term involvement of the United Nations in the resolution of the Cyprus problem. Various actors have been involved in this long-term 'peace process,' including local politicians from either side of the Cypriot divide, locally based technical committees set-up by the UN do design a new 'peace plan,' international experts advising the technical committees on various aspects of the Cyprus problem (such as the question of federalism, administrative power-sharing, property, the buffer zone, the presence of the Turkish army, the question of settlers from Turkey, etc.), members of NGOs employed by the technical committees as consultants, 'conflict resolution' specialists, as well as local peace activists. The negotiations between these various actors and the interactions between them in light of UN involvement in the making of a 'peace plan' is what I study as an anthropologist. The aim is to study the involvement of an international institution in re-framing local politics and sociality on the ground: how the 'peace process' is manufactured hands-on through the involvement and agency of various local and international actors, how it is contested by local communities, and how it is transformed.

Discussant: Sue Wright (University of Copenhagen)



Friday June 11

9:00 – 12:30 session 2

ACTORS IN AND SUBJECTS OF INTERNATIONAL POLICIES

This session examines mechanisms such as empowerment and mainstreaming through which international institutions involve and shape the collective and individual subjects with whom they interact

Lynne Phillips (University of Windsor)

Within and Beyond UN Governance: Exploring the Transnational Politics of Translation

This paper follows two travelling concepts – “food security” and “gender equality” – beginning with the international institutions that take responsibility for their global circulation (the FAO and UNIFEM, respectively) and ending with their intended recipients (campesino and women’s groups, respectively) in Brazil and Ecuador. Having undertaken research over the last decade to understand the governmental techniques of UN agencies such as the FAO and UNIFEM, recent fieldwork in these two countries has compelled a consideration of the un-enumerated activities – those not-counted and mis-counted – in the calculative practices of international institutions. Finding diverse groups of people (sometimes intersecting, sometimes not) working on building alternative frames for living based on another-world accountabilities, gives pause for thought regarding the governmental power of international agencies such as the UN to create a *global* understanding of the world. The paper contends that the politics of location remains important in the efficacy of governmental mechanisms of the UN and that we need to develop mobile ethnographies that look both inside and well outside the “institution” if we are to understand the variegated power that shapes people’s lives.

Birgit Müller (IIAC/LAIOS – CNRS/EHESS) – UMR 8177 - Paris

‘Participatory diagnosis’ of problems of food security by the FAO in Nicaragua

On the international level, the FAO wants to provide guidance in the allegedly technical debate about how to feed the undernourished one billion people in the world while it is torn and conflicted between governments, corporations and non-governmental organizations that play out their financial and strategic interests in the politics of control over food. On the local level the FAO claims to involve the hungry populations in developing tools for a participatory diagnosis of the problems of food security while applying anthropometric measures for determining who is undernourished. This paper examines, taking the example of Nicaragua, what values and practices are promoted by the FAO through the mechanism of ‘participatory diagnosing’. It looks at how the FAO tries to play a leading role among the numerous national and international governmental and non-governmental organizations intervening in Nicaragua in the production of



food, while carrying its internal divisions and contradictions from the international to the local level. It also analyzes how the local populations integrate the FAO and its resources in their own strategies and struggles for influence and survival.

Shalini Randeria (University of Zürich)

The (un)making of policy in the shadow of the World Bank: Infrastructure development, urban resettlement and the cunning state in India

The new architecture of global governance entails an increasing transnationalisation of policy-making. It is ambivalent in its effects on state sovereignty and citizenship rights. One of the consequences of these developments has been a transformation of the state itself, in part transnationalisation and in part privatisation, which also poses serious problems of accountability. In countries that have borrowed from the World Bank and IMF national policies today are negotiated between these institutions and the executive without either legislative deliberation or public participation. As non-state actors, supra-national and sub-national, begin to shape the formulation and implementation of soft law and policy, citizen's protest against these involve judicial contestation within state courts and international bodies. We delineate some of these shifts using ethnographic material from a World Bank financed urban infrastructure project, the MUTP being currently implemented in the city of Mumbai, India. We address the issue of overlapping sovereignties and fragmentation of citizenship rights along with their consequences for democratic decision-making. Moreover, we focus on the pragmatic judicial politics of activists in their quest for social justice.

Kristin Sandvik (Peace Research Institute Oslo)

Negotiating the Humanitarian Past: History, Memory and Unstable Cityscapes in Kampala, Uganda

In the context of the international refugee regime, the recent institutionalization and legalization of humanitarian bureaucracies and human rights protection mechanisms have generally been viewed as marks of progress. However, these developments may also serve as vehicles for subjugation and control in global migration management. In this essay, I examine how discourses on human rights and the humanitarian assistance imperative shape the categories of reference to the past, through which ideas of refugeness and of humanitarianism are mediated. The interactions between legal protection officers from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and urban refugees in Kampala, Uganda are characterized by formal and informal negotiations over urban residence permits, financial support for basic needs, refugee status and resettlement to the West. The credibility of individual and collective narratives and imageries is central to the distribution of resources: an inherently unstable past operates as a communicative resource, as refugees and humanitarians try to agree on the wider macro history of the region, and the background story and identity of the particular individual.



Irène Bellier (IIAC/LAIOS – CNRS/EHESS) – UMR 8177 - Paris

The constitution of a collective subject for international policy making: the case of Indigenous peoples global activism and actorship at the United Nations

Since 1977, Indigenous peoples representatives are actively engaged in global negotiations and have progressively defined the mechanisms through which their voice is being taken into consideration. While a process of mutual recognition can be observed in some sectors of the UN which can be labeled as philo-indigenous, in a manner that can be well described, we observe how marginal they remain in other key sectors of global decision-making that are of interest for them. In a short presentation, I will intend to describe how indigenous activism proceed to make space in the world of States, how and to which extent the international institutionalization of indigenous issues contribute to changing national policies affecting the situation of indigenous communities locally.

Discussant:

14:30 – 18.00 session 3

POLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS : DILUTING CONFLICT AND RENDERING IT TECHNICAL

The session examines the mechanisms through which international institutions render political conflicts technical, for example by acting as 'a neutral broker' and mobilizing a superior objective knowledge.

Marc Abélès (IIAC/LAIOS – CNRS/EHESS) – UMR 8177 – Paris et *Maximo Badaro* (Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Argentine)

Expertise, Diplomacy and Politics at the World Trade Organization

This paper focuses on the Secretariat of the WTO. On the one hand, in the name of technical expertise - in providing support for the various councils and committees as well as technical assistance to developing countries, in monitoring and analyzing the members' trade policies--the secretariat acts as an influential de facto partner in the WTO's key events of negotiation. On the other hand, the fact that the Director-General is not only the head of the secretariat, but also the chair of the negotiation committee, gives him considerable de facto influence over the course of the negotiations. This study points out the various perceptions of this acknowledged subtle power within the WTO, including, so far in our research, the perspectives of those officials responsible for the major programs of the organization, and members of the Director-General's staff. In particular, I will reflect on two key areas of negotiation that the WTO manages: that of



agricultural policy, especially the cotton issue, and that of the accession of new members. Beyond the very technical dimension of negotiation, what is at stake are differing conceptions of equilibrium in global economics.

Paul Dima (University of Paris 1)

The managerial tools of global governance, a legal anthropology outlook.

What are the management techniques used by international institutions to design the future of human societies? The particularity of these managerial technologies in the Western tradition is that they are ultimately rooted in the use of force: “the ultimate argument for converting the interpretations of the world into a single one: the threat to use force in order to be understood”¹. This tool made explicitly available to the Security Council of the United Nations, remains in the domain of the implicit in other arenas of international governance. International institutions are “the heirs of a thousand years of legalism forged by the Romans as a weapon that diffuses its technique of ordering, the law”².

In an attempt to “civilize” the use of force, a worldwide legal system was implemented, and a judicial body was built, the International Court of Justice. More recently, a Dispute Settlement Body was developed to give the World Trade Organization, the means to enforce its agreements. Managerial technology is efficiently put to service by other institutions like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, which developed with the tool of “conditionalities” a formidable weapon against the whims of insubordination and the reminiscences of sovereignty by insubordinate states. The technique of contracting is mobilized to tie the States and compel them to swear allegiance to the imperative of managerial efficiency.

The use of “soft law” which seems to be non-binding and in appearance a simple statement of principle without enforcing implementation, is also an effective technique available to international institutions. The normative nature of the principles assures their efficiency. The simple enunciation of the principle is enough to give it, its legal value. Soft law is in itself a process of ordering.

I will analyse on the basis of ethnographic material collected the degree of constraint that these tools exercise on the States. Some issues of global governance seem to require a high degree of legal constraint whereas others are left to the voluntary compliance of States. From there emerges the beginning of a response to the question “in the name of what” humanity is thus governed ? It also indirectly answers the question *who* governs the world?

Tara Schwegler (University of Chicago)

Speaking with Neoliberal Authority: The World Bank and Neoclassical Economics in Mexico

This paper explores how neoliberal economic knowledge is invoked to support the divergent interpretations of World Bank officials and Mexican technocrats as to the origin and content of

¹ LEGENDRE Pierre, *Dominium Mundi, l'empire du management*, Paris, Mille et une nuits, p. 9.

² LEGENDRE Pierre, *Op. Cit.* p. 28.



the New Law of Social Security in Mexico. Adopted in 1995, the New Law embraced a partial privatization of Mexico's old-age pension system by moving from a fully-funded, pay-as-you-go-model to a system of individual accounts administered by private fund managers. The unmistakable neoliberal bent of the reform prompted analysts to conclude that Mexican technocrats and World Bank officials had acted in concert to foist the reform on a skeptical public. My ethnographic research, however, reveals that despite their supposed ideological affinity, Mexican technocrats and World Bank officials offered sharply divergent accounts of the genesis and development of the New Law of Social Security. This divergence includes a number of factors, but it centers on the interpretation of neoliberal economics. Whereas World Bank officials pointed viewed the Mexican reform as a version of standard neoliberal orthodoxy, Mexican technocrats claimed that the reform was a reflection of Mexico's unique social, political, and economic circumstances.

This divergence is provocative because it runs counter to the deep-seated assumption that forms of expert knowledge neutralize politics. The paper traces the divergent accounts in order to reveal how members of each group attempt to establish an authoritative interpretation of neoliberalism. The fundamental question is, why do World Bank officials and Mexican technocrats articulate their differences through the idiom of neoliberal economics? What does the form of their contestation reveal about the relationship between Mexican policymakers and World Bank officials?

Flávia Lessa de Barros (University of Brasilia)

Networks and civil society organizations in the strengthening of the World Bank governance – perspectives from the Brazilian experience

I will make use of case studies to analyze the interactions between the World Bank and civil society networks in initiatives related to sustainable development and poverty alleviation in Brazil. I will focus more on the conditions under which the interactions occur, on their structures and dynamics, and on the representations of the social actors involved, than on the policies and projects they are related to. The World Bank promotes capacity building and involves civil society organizations in different ways: as interlocutors, partners, consultants and service providers. Previously existing networks, social movements and other collective forms are instrumentalized by the World Bank to reach its policy objectives in the country. The Bank also stimulates and supports the creation of networks to facilitate the sharing of development and organizational models as well as to strengthen and disseminate its operations. In the beginning, from the standpoint of the civil society organizations, the networks were basically a means to strengthen themselves and to resist or to confront the World Bank and other IFIs. However, the networks also became a strategic mechanism of control and regulation of the World Bank in its interactions with Brazilian civil society organizations. The evolution of these interactions is marked by conflicts and collaborations. The case studies explore some resulting ambiguities and contradictions, their impacts on the agendas, identities, profiles and political alignments; the organizations and movements' modes of organizing and reproducing themselves, as well as the relations internal to the field of civil society in Brazil. The visions, discourses and practices I will



refer to are the result of field research with leaders and staff of the World Bank and of some networks of civil society organizations.

Discussant: *Johanna Siméant* (University of Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne)

Saturday June 12 session 4

9:00 – 12.30h TECHNIQUES OF INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE

Different international agencies have different powers (WTO's enforcement mechanisms through the Dispute Settlement Body at one extreme and FAO's recommendations on best practices at the other). This session analyses the techniques of international governance in the different institutions, their differences and communalities and the mechanisms of audit and of self-monitoring (for example through honor and shame) through which international institutions try to influence national and local governance and to evaluate their own performance.

Peter Bille Larsen (EHESS and IHEID)

Theorizing international guidance culture:

Politics of technicality, NGOs and playing in the environmental governance field

How are we to make sense of the continuous production and proliferation of guidance in the realm of international institutions?

In the following I argue that anthropological analysis of guidelines is imperative to understand the contemporary dynamics of international organizations, including here both multilateral organizations and NGOs.

Indeed, an anthropology of international institutions will need to address how much activity is centred not only in globally-agreed upon standards, but a much more fuzzy, yet pervasive, reality of principles, tool-kits, guidelines and good practice, not only in global decision-making bodies, but in the everyday technical bureaucracies, projects and dialogues at the country-level.

The production of guidelines, guidance and “best practice” in virtually all fields of international action and organizations has mushroomed within the last few decades. Whether dealing with micro-credit, health services, participation or administrative reform, international organizations are not short of expert/ practitioner advice, best practice methodologies and success criteria. Indeed, soft guidance is a core feature common to most international organizations. How are we to understand and conceptualize this proliferation of guidance, normative ideals and prescriptive practice? This paper argues that guidelines are central to how international institutions are seeking to reconfigure themselves and their relationships, not only with wider civil society organizations and nation states, but also internally and with other international organizations. Such guidance production is also at the core of negotiating relevance and maintaining position



within the international governance, consolidating normative processes and linking up with diverse localities.

Having been involved in several international guidance initiatives, I seek to bridge concrete experiences and ethnography with the multi-sited, pluri-directional and global dimension of guidance culture. I particularly focus on the production of guidance in the realm of biodiversity

conservation illustrated by field-data from the Peruvian Montaña to illustrate a number of possible entry points to tackle guidance culture. Several anthropological readings are proposed to illustrate how guidance as a contemporary social, political and cultural phenomenon can be approached. The guidelines I include may not seem the most recent, the most used. Yet, as I will seek to show they harbour prototypical qualities of a genre common among international organizations.

Stephan Groth (University of Göttingen)

Metapragmatics on the Global Stage: The Multiplicity of Meaning in International Negotiations

International negotiations within the UN system bring together a diverse number of actors and organizations, each carrying ideosyncratic and institutional expectations and intentions. Enmeshed in global processes and interwoven with one another in multiple ways, these negotiations are influenced not only by content-related aspects, but also by technical, strategic, and ideological factors. The multiplicity of actors involved in these processes of global governance is accompanied by a multiplicity of language ideologies, grounded in specific conceptualizations of fundamental presuppositions about these processes and their subject matters. Using the example of the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (IGC on GRTKF) within the sphere of activities of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), it will be shown how the fragmentation of meaning, perception and intention in international negotiations manifests itself in language ideologies. It is argued that their origins can be traced back to reconstruct intentions as well as fundamental conceptions about the negotiated subject matters. Applying the methodological and theoretical framework of linguistic anthropology, an ethnographic approach is proposed to analyse ideologies and intentions in international negotiations.

Marion Fresia (University of Neuchâtel)

The fabric of international refugee law : Power dynamics within the Executive committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

As many other UN institutions, UNHCR has often been perceived as a homogeneous actor, defending the interests of its main donor countries – the United-States and the European Union. Yet, very few researchers have actually looked at this institution from the “inside”, and no one really knows through which processes state actors influence its politics and activities. Based on a professional experience of two years within UNHCR and on a number of interviews conducted



with its staff and its Member States, this paper provides some insights on this complex issue, by exploring the social role of its executive committee – the ExCom. Consisted of 72 Member-State, this governance body is responsible for approving UNHCR's annual budget and program, for providing guidance on UNHCR's objectives and priorities, and for developing soft law (also called “conclusions”) on international refugee protection issues. The author will pay particular attention to this “fabric” of international law by analyzing its power dynamics and social logics and by looking at its practical function beyond its official role. Based on this case study, the

author will reflect more generally on the power dynamics within UN organizations, suggesting that they are not just institutions dominated by donor interests, but rather international public arenas shaped by the interests of a multiplicity of state and non-state actors (diplomats; international experts; NGO's), mobilizing different strategies (obstruction ; depolitization ; lobbying) and drawing on different sources of legitimacy.

Tobias Kelly (University of Edinburgh)

International Human Rights Monitoring and the Political Logic of Shame: The United Kingdom and the UN Committee Against Torture

In the wake of the events of September 11 2001, the British government instituted a system of indefinite detention for non-citizens who were suspected of terrorist offences but could not be prosecuted under criminal law or deported. In the following years the policies and practices of the British government in this area were subjected to monitoring by the UN human rights system. International human rights monitoring works, in large measure, through the political logic of shame, in that it hopes to produce change through public exposure. Such shaming processes bring with them assumptions about visibility and accountability. Focusing on the example of the interactions between the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) and officials from the UK, this paper explores the work of shame in international human rights monitoring practices. It argues that, given its technical and political limitations the focus of the CAT is on procedures, standards and further monitoring mechanisms, producing forms of exposure and responsibility that emphasize the managerial and technocratic.

Discussant: Laëtitia Atlani-Duault (University of Nanterre)

14:30 – 17:00 **Round table - all participants**

HOW ANTHROPOLOGISTS APPROACH GLOBAL PARADIGMS ON THE LOCAL AND GLOBAL LEVEL

This session addresses how international governance operates on different scales. How does it transform political relationships and how is it transformed by political actors from the global to the local level? How do anthropologists approach shifting global paradigms on the local and global level?

