

# International Relations as a Cultural System:

## An Agenda for Research

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### ABSTRACT

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The article presents a comprehensive agenda for research, where models of thought and research methods originating from social anthropology are applied to the field of international relations, which has traditionally been the domain mainly of political scientists. We suggest a number of possible anthropological approaches to the investigation of cultural aspects of international relations in the contemporary world. The aim is, on the one hand, to contribute new analytical perspectives to international relations, and, on the other hand, to open up a new field of inquiry in anthropology. A tactical intent can be added to our theoretical concern with cultural issues in international relations. It is already a standard argument of the international relations masters of ceremony that the growing body of epistemologically grounded critique may be intellectually stimulating, but that there is no need to change the traditional research agenda before the new voices have proven themselves in empirical work. Some of the new voices may see no need to rise to that challenge. For those who might just consider it, however, the suggestions made here may prove to be of some relevance.

### 1. The Issues

International relations have so far not been a topic of social anthropological research, which has largely concentrated on small-scale community studies. However, there are important aspects of international relations which can profitably be investigated with the methods and concepts available in social anthropology. Particularly at the present moment, when the Cold War has evaporated, anthropological approaches seem extremely appropriate. As long as the main adver-

saries within the international system were perceived to be the United States and the Soviet Union, which are in many regards culturally close, it was relatively simple to excuse the research focus on the logic of *raison d'état*. However, the international system is now undergoing a transformation, and the new conflicts could to a greater extent involve nation-states representing different cultural logics. The Gulf crisis may prove to be fairly representative of the type of conflicts which will dominate international relations in the time to come. Moreover, this is also the perception of American decision-makers (cf. Tunander, 1991). This new situation implies a new emphasis on cross-cultural communication, which should indeed be anthropological home turf.

Since our concern is to demonstrate the utility of interpretative approaches to the comparative study of international relations, the non-symbolic aspects of the field will not be explored here, although their importance may be crucial. Moreover, these aspects already receive much attention in the international relations literature. There is a cultural or symbolic aspect of all interaction, but we do not imply that analysis can always reduce other aspects of interaction meaningfully to culture, namely socially reproduced intersubjective meaning. Power politics and straightforward cost/benefit analyses are often of great interest, but we have not made them part of our present concern. The comparative advantage of anthropology consists in its concern with the all-pervasive cultural dimension of human existence. Since this dimension is characteristically held constant in most studies of international relations, there opens up a possibility for complementary, systematic exploration by specialists. We recommend a variety of approaches to this effect, some of them drawing on classical fieldwork methodology, some requiring discourse analysis, and all of them requiring a contextual understanding of world politics which is not presently part and parcel of any anthropologist's toolbox.

Some of the research strategies outlined can be realized through the application of conventional anthropological concepts and methods. A comprehensive research programme for the investigation of international relations as a cultural system would nevertheless need to take all of the aspects discussed in this paper into account. Moreover, their interrelations would have to be elucidated. Research methods other than participant-observation and systematic interviewing would then be necessary.

In looking at certain salient characteristics of the states system, we

propose to distinguish between three levels of abstraction from ongoing social life:

1. The level of the states system as a whole.
2. The level of interaction between the various elites of the nation-states, as well as aspects of transnational communication.
3. The level of domestic foreign policy-making.

Having made some conceptual demarcations and a brief review of the extant literature, we deal with strategies for research on each level of abstraction separately. We also touch on some of the interlevel connections.

### 1.1. *The Importance of Nation-States*

Although nation-states are hardly ever nation-states proper (virtually none are ethnically homogeneous, cf. Connor, 1972; Birch, 1989), the nation-state is the dominant form of political organization in the contemporary world — ‘the pre-eminent power-container of the modern era’ (Giddens, 1985: 120). Since the French Revolution and the advent of German romantic philosophy, state formations increasingly use nationalist rhetoric; by the 1990s, there are few sovereign political units of consequence which do not seek domestic and international legitimacy as, and cannot meaningfully be described as, nation-states. In earlier times, dynastic ideology may have been hegemonic in the discourse of the global system; presently, the nation-state is.

The ideology of the nation-state defines all the inhabitants of the state as citizens. Being a citizen is in principle, and frequently in practice, an imperative status. This implies that under certain circumstances a citizen who works for an alien power may be defined as a traitor. (This did not hold good to the same extent in the dynastic era; Clausewitz, for instance, could take a job with the Russian army without being publicly condemned in his native Prussia.) The lives and property of citizens are protected by the state; in return they contribute to its reproduction. Nationalist ideology has proven itself to be effectively mobilizing in situations of conflict.

As regards international relations, many early theorists and propagandists believed that the nation-state would serve as a peace-keeping and stabilizing force. Giuseppe Mazzini, the self-professed prophet of Italian nationalism, may serve as a representative example:

Natural divisions, the innate spontaneous tendency of the peoples will replace the arbitrary divisions sanctioned by bad governments. The map of Europe will be remade. The Countries of the Peoples will rise, defined by the voice of the free, upon the ruins of the Countries of kings and privileged castles. Between these Countries there will be harmony and brotherhood (Mazzini, 1912: 52).

This prediction has hardly turned out as an accurate one: Many of the gravest threats to human existence in the present age take on the shape of conflicts between nation-states and/or potential nation-states. Furthermore, since Mill and Marx, many radical and liberal theorists have held that the nation-state would decrease in importance, giving way to universalist ideologies transcending national boundaries. This has not proven to be the case either; the nation-state is presently a more important political entity for a larger number of people than ever before.

### 1.2. *What are Nation-States?*

The nation-state has several discriminating characteristics as a political agent, both if we compare it with dynastic states or empires and if it is compared to non-state polities.

The first distinguishing trait concerns its mode of legitimation. It discursively legitimizes itself through nationalist ideology. Nationalism, by definition, holds that the boundaries of the political unit should be coterminous with the boundaries of the culture (cf. Gellner, 1983: 1). This ideology can be regarded as a metaphoric form of kinship ideology or religion. Nationalism promotes an abstract, binary sense of community, and stresses the cultural continuity of its adherents. Nationalist leaders are envisaged as 'men of the people'; nationalism symbolism is usually equalitarian; all men and women are seen as equal before the flag. The notion of a national language symbolizes such a cultural continuity between top and bottom of the national hierarchy.

Second, its mode of social organization is peculiar. The nation-state is historically concomitant with modernity. In a sense, it can therefore be seen as an organizational reply to the challenges posed by changes in the social structure of modernizing society; the replacement of *Gemeinschaft* forms of community with *Gesellschaft* forms; the replacement of mechanic solidarity with organic solidarity; the 'com-

partmentalization' (Berger et al., 1973) of human existence and other potentially disintegrating developments ultimately caused by technological change and enormous growth in the scale of systems of interaction. Characteristically, the ideology of the modern nation-state is transmitted through mass media and through a uniform educational system teaching in a national language. Its mode of state organization is bureaucratic, and the political system entails a highly distributive division of power, where very few individuals represent very many. The age of the nation-state is concomitant with the age of the first worldwide international system, and it is an age marked by social organization and information transmission on an unprecedented scale. Just as there can be significant cultural variations within modernity (cf. e.g. Wallerstein, 1988; Hannerz, 1989), however, there may be important variations of a similar scope between nation-states.

Third, there are important differences as regards the political organization of the nation-state compared with its historical predecessors in political organization, such as the segmentary lineage, the village council, kinship-based organization in general, and earlier state formations. The structure of leadership in the nation-state is anonymous, bureaucratic and highly hierarchical. Unlike small-scale political systems, where the old men under the banyan tree form a general paradigm of the highest level of political organization, there is little face-to-face contact between different branches of the leadership segment and between leaders and subjects. More generally speaking, there is no upper limit to the number of people which can be organized within a nation-state, and the difference in scale from those systems based on kinship as an organizing principle is in nearly all cases stupendous. Unlike tribal political systems, nation-states presuppose a professional bureaucracy; unlike the dynastic state, the bureaucracies of nation-states are not, in principle, employed on the basis of personal acquaintance and inherited rank.

There is no overarching power or authority system regulating intercourse between nation-states, notwithstanding attempts by international organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations. (One notes parenthetically that the very word 'international' as well as the names of the organizations bear witness to the hegemony of the nation-state in contemporary international relations, cf. Der Derian, 1989.) It is in this sense that the system of states can be regarded as anarchic, much in the same way as those systems of autochthonous kinship-based groups described by Gluckman (1955,

1963) and other anthropologists. However, as in the tribal system, we shall argue that international relations presuppose rules which to a varying degree are shared, where terms of discourse and interaction are defined.

### 1.3. *Some Relevant Previous Studies*

All of what has been said so far should be familiar both to social anthropologists and to international relationists. It remains true, nevertheless, that there is as yet no anthropology on the relationship between nation-states. This does not, of course, mean that the discipline has ignored the study of complex political systems altogether.

Notably, many classical works of political anthropology, dealing with questions of cohesion and conflict within and between small-scale societies, develop a form of analysis closely related to that of international relations. The more important of these studies include Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940), Evans-Pritchard (1940), Middleton and Tait (1958) and Gluckman (1963). Typically, these studies, focusing on questions of fission, fusion, conflict resolution and system reproduction, are functionalist in character and rarely take account of cultural differences made relevant in the interaction between political units. They are in this way complementary to those studies of ethnicity, such as Leach (1954), Mitchell (1956), Barth (1969) and Eidheim (1971), which emphasize the dynamic formation of ethnic identity through interaction. While the relevance of classical functionalist political anthropology in this respect lies in its analysis of system maintenance in the absence of a sovereign ruler, studies of ethnic identity formation exemplify anthropological methods for the study of interacting cultural universes as embedded in the ongoing social process. A related strand of anthropological research is represented in the writings of such scholars as Bailey (1963, 1969), Barth (1958) and Cohen (1969, 1981), who have analysed politics as strategic interaction and negotiation over values, frequently in multi-ethnic settings.

The formal relevance of political anthropology for the study of international relations is argued forcefully in an original essay by Masters (1964), who compares world politics to tribal political systems, arguing that their crucial similarity lies in their anarchical character.

One of the main problems which needs to be overcome in an anthropology of international relations is that of studying large-scale

systems. In the context of a highly ambitious, ongoing endeavour to study characteristics of large-scale social or cultural systems of the contemporary world anthropologically, Hannerz (1987, 1989) and others have argued the need for a macroanthropology (see Featherstone, 1990). Such a direction in anthropology would investigate the global significance of meaning-systems which are not spatially bounded. Hannerz argues that this can to a great extent be achieved through participant-observation and careful comparative analysis, which nevertheless presupposes an understanding of the properties of the 'global ecumene' — a social field of staggering dimensions. Hannerz's research programme is related to, on the one hand, Wolf's (1982) and others' historical anthropology, where properties of the world system are related to detailed analyses of life-worlds; and, on the other hand, to the hermeneutical study of identity in a modern setting (e.g. Forsythe, 1989), where analysis hinges on contextual knowledge which cannot possibly derive exclusively from participant-observation.

We have here a revealing case of mutual neglect between related disciplines. Richard Ashley has suggested that:

For practical realists, the predominant approach — the consciously invoked method, if you will — is found in [the] hermeneutic attitude. Morgenthau refers to this approach when he says that we 'retrace and anticipate, as it were, the steps a statesman — past, present, or future — has taken or will take on the political scene. We look over his shoulder when he writes his dispatches; we listen in on his conversations with other statesmen; we read and anticipate his very thoughts.'

Being practical in intent and hermeneutic in approach, practical realism is not and cannot be phrased in terms of another language outside its text-analogue, the world of traditional statesmanship (Ashley, 1981: 213).<sup>1</sup>

Where coincidental confluences of method already exist, the chances are that a conscious unfolding of parallels would prove fruitful.

A recent trend in social and cultural anthropology as well as sociology which deserves particular attention here is the study of nationalism. As advocated by Fallers (1974), the social anthropology of the nation-state exemplifies the potential of anthropology in analysis of macrophenomena, and shows its relevance in understanding the contemporary world. Some notable empirical studies, which together display some of the diversity in analytic approaches, are Kuper's

(1976) work on contemporary Jamaica and Kapferer's (1988, 1989) comparison of the Sri Lankan and Australian nationalisms. While Kuper is concerned with political processes of integration and potential disintegration in changing national Jamaican society, Kapferer concentrates on the symbolism of nationalist rhetoric. Both approaches are highly relevant here.

Important theoretical texts on nationalism, which are seen as immediately relevant not only by anthropologists but also by sociologists, political scientists, and international relationists, include Gellner (1983), Anderson (1983), Smith (1986, 1991) and Giddens (1985). Giddens (1985) and Smith (1983), in particular, explicitly address international relations as an important field for interpretative research.<sup>2</sup> Macrosociologists such as Anderson (1974), Evans et al. (1985) and Skocpol (1979) have added to our understanding of social change by taking states, and the interaction between them, seriously.

Turning to the literature of international relations, the cultural dimension of interaction is programmatically neglected by most members of the dominant school of 'Realists' — the contemporary positivists in the field of international relations (e.g. Waltz, 1979). However, an 'English school' of International Relations critical of the Realists has provided a set of conceptual bridgeheads towards anthropology by debating to what extent an international system presupposes cultural continuity in order to function (although they do not use these terms). Claiming that international order can be enhanced through the enactment of rules aiming at, and presupposing, discursive consensus, these scholars have identified what they call an international society of states:

A society of states (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions (Bull, 1977: 13).

They therefore distinguish between the states system and international society, the latter being marked by consensus regarding the rules of discourse; that is, what we will, following Bourdieu's (1977, 1980: 115) lead, label the *doxa* — i.e. the unquestioning, unarticulated faith — of international relations.

A main concern of the 'English school' in international relations has



been to show how the form of discourse, the 'power code' of international society, has expanded to ever new nation-states following decolonization and social change (Bull and Watson, 1984; Gong, 1984; Mayall, 1990; Neumann and Welch, 1991). This ongoing, ambiguous process of social and cultural change is a highly relevant field of inquiry for anthropologists which can be studied from a variety of complementary angles.

## 2. Aspects of the Discursive Hegemony

The set of rules presupposed in the reproduction of international society can profitably be seen as a discursive hegemony in a Gramscian sense (Gramsci, 1971; Cox, 1983) or, sometimes, as a form of doxa of which agents may nevertheless become aware whenever the rules are challenged. Global hegemony is frequently studied in terms of economy; in this approach, important aspects of the hegemony are neglected. Further, hegemony is frequently thought of as economic monsters and political hawks; they may, however, also be seen as guarantors of a set of rules in which most agents (i.e. nation-states) have vested interests.

Bull (1977; also Wight, 1979: 111 ff.) has listed five discriminating features or institutions which serve to reproduce order in international society: the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war and great power management. However, notions of human rights and certain political principles (those of liberal democracy) further underlie international relations as normative prescriptions to which all agents must relate. It should be noted here that although nation-states formally rank as equals in international society, they do not in ongoing intercourse. Majorities of states in international fora such as the United Nations may be virtually powerless in practice. In this context, the main analytical dimension must be that of power, not that of culture. Our point is that on the discursive level participants in international society must justify their actions with reference to principles set by, and sanctioned within, the hegemonic structure. In one sense, politics is doing things with words, and for instrumental reasons of legitimacy and prestige, words do matter.

The rules and institutions necessary for the reproduction of international society have been developed within a European tradition of political culture. For instance, it can be claimed that at least since the

Treaty of Westphalia ending the Thirty Years War in 1648, religion has not been a defining characteristic of international society; many of the normative notions of the discursive hegemony can be traced at least to Locke. The history of modern Europe, including the emergence of particular colonial structures, has been decisive in determining the form of the current, historically and culturally specific, doxa of international relations.

A less apparent factor in the integration of international society is that of an international language. Formerly, French was widely used; today, English is the hegemonic language. It is instructive, for example, that the Central European states emerging from a folded regional structure where Russian was widely used, have immediately taken to conducting their foreign policies in English. However, regional variations clearly remain, both as regards the actual use of English and as regards the knowledge of the language by various individual agents.

The discursive hegemony of international relations has revealed itself as a powerful system able to resist change and to assimilate newcomers (Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989). Through decolonization, there has been a notable increase in the number of participant nation-states, but the rules and practices of international relations have not thereby been altered. Although many African politicians of the pre-independence period envisaged a break with the hegemonic discursive structures of the 'First World' in order to participate on their own terms, this has not come about. Most of the member-states of the OAU conform to important principles of the discursive hegemony in their foreign policies. The same holds good even for political discourse outside of the state sector. As Hannerz (1989: 214) notes, the 'critics of cultural imperialism in the Third World today . . . draw . . . on imported cultural resources for their modes of thought and discourse. The adversary culture is also transnational'. Furthermore, it has been confirmed that the rules of the hegemony remain even if a new hegemon (such as the USA in the postwar period) emerges. The hegemony is presupposed by the actors in international society; moreover, a high degree of predictability is under most circumstances in the interests of all, and so the maintenance of order in international relations remains a goal even for those nation-states whose representatives are quick to contrast order with justice.

We now turn to suggest ways in which the discursive hegemony of international relations can be studied anthropologically. At this level

of abstraction, the most important task consists in revealing the discriminating characteristics of the hegemonic system. This, we would like to argue, should be undertaken by anthropologists, not least because the concepts and models used by most international relationists themselves are intrinsically related to the hegemonic rules, and form part of the political system under scrutiny (Ashley, 1988: 235–41).

### 2.1. *The Rules and Ideology of International Society*

It has been argued that international society normally conforms to the shared set of rules. In this sense international society, reproduced by the ongoing interaction between elites, can be said to form a cultural community. Properties of the doxa or hegemonic symbolic structure can be revealed in a variety of ways, one of which is an investigation of processes of adaptation to the system, and responses by centrally situated agents.

Studies of the assimilation of neophytes can thus reveal central systemic properties. By identifying the processes through which new states become members of international society, the normative, rule-bound dimension of international relations becomes visible. It would be necessary to distinguish between different kinds of relations developing between the neophyte and other nation-states; trade, warfare, international organizations and diplomacy are some such kinds of emergent links which develop at differing rates. At the moment, neophytes like Lithuania and would-bes like the Palestinian Liberation Organization have entered international society in some, but not all, respects. Many fields of interaction can assume relevance (some of them, such as international sports, frequently neglected), and no hierarchy of issues can be postulated a priori (but cf. p. 251 below). Comprehensive comparative research on the processes leading to membership in international society can thus serve to disentangle the complex webs which make up any given nation-state's relationship with the global system, and can indicate the relative importance of each subsystem.

The symbolic dimension of assimilation can perhaps best be delineated through interpretations of the strategies and reception of neophytes in international society. How do the new elites learn the rules, how are they perceived by agents centrally located, and what are the sanctions employed to deal with those who break the rules? Are failed attempts at participation caused by conflicting rules or structures of

relevance, or, as commonly assumed by the Realists, ultimately by conflicting interests? It cannot be taken for granted that all agents seek identical ends in international relations; rather, this is a hypothesis which may be tested by anthropological research. A comparison of state actions along this dimension can serve to distinguish between types of goals sought in international relations.<sup>3</sup>

A related strategy, which can perhaps be undertaken more easily, would consist in an investigation of why some 'applicants' are treated as second-class members of international society. Smith's Rhodesia and Salazar's Portugal are obvious cases here; so are South Africa and Israel. An analysis of international discourse on the issues in question would reveal important normative properties of international society.

Properties of the discursive hegemony can also be revealed in analyses of the structure of international transmission of information (Lerner (1957) is a much criticized involuntary example, highlighting the role of international broadcasting in 'modernizing' the Middle East). The ownership structure and geographic location of international news agencies, satellite TV stations and influential magazines and newspapers are important parameters. Analyses of their content can contribute to identifying hegemonic interests, and clearly show how such interests are communicated to an international audience.

## *2.2. Challenges to Hegemony: Alternative Networks and Rules*

The properties of the discursive hegemony are mainly reproduced through rulebound interaction between officially accredited representatives of the nation-state. As suggested above, there are several other subsystems of interaction which either contribute to or hinder the reproduction of the doxa of international relations. Such subsystems may or may not pose a challenge to hegemony. Notably, international relations which either depart from a set of alternative principles of organization or which profess to represent alternative sets of rules can plausibly be interpreted as challenges to the hegemony (Ashley, 1987: 427; Der Derian, 1989: 6).

Alternative principles of organization are evident in the organization of groups and networks orienting themselves towards international law, such as the members of the WCIP (World Council of Indigenous Peoples). Formerly seen as 'nations', now self-professed 'peoples', the relationship between such groups conflicts with the doxa of the system of states, since they do not acknowledge the nation-state

as a supreme authority. Thus, a small number of Saami activists who broke Norwegian law in the early 1980s could, thwarting Canadian and Norwegian authorities, flee to Amerindian reserves in Canada and receive protection there.

The political principles upon which such networks operate are also clearly more universalist than those of the system of nation-states; an individual, not a nation-state, can here be considered the vital unit of political action.

The relevance of such alternative networks can be explored most easily through investigating the points of conflict between non-state international networks, between states and the hegemonic system, and through comparing the rhetoric of these groups with that of the state within the system of nation-states. The networks alluded to need not be of an ethnic character; one might also consider the Socialist International or other international groupings representing principles of social organization theoretically incompatible with the requirements of the system of nation-states.

The modern world has also seen conscious attempts to change the rules of intercourse sanctioned within the system of nation-states. The 'tiersmondiste' ideology of the proponents of the New Economic Order of the 1970s can be interpreted as such an attempt, where many of the nation-states of the 'Third World' tried to promote a new set of values intended to regulate intercourse between nation-states; i.e. new rules regulating economic exchange. In retrospect, it is evident that this attempt was unsuccessful; it was rebuffed by the representatives of the discursive hegemony.

In international religious rhetoric, the ideology of the system of nation-states is replaced by a religious dimension operating along lines of inclusion and exclusion different from those entailed by the nation-state. The horizontal compartmentalization of the world into nation-states gives way to a vertical bifurcation into believers and non-believers. For example, the Ayatollah Khomeini could sentence Salman Rushdie to death although the latter was not one of his political subjects; in this case, there is an obvious conflict between the rules subscribed to by different actors.

Similarly, Iraq's annexation of Kuwait, and the subsequent taking and treatment of hostages as well as pronouncements to the effect that it was prepared to use chemical weapons in the threatened war against 'the West', was an open violation of the rules agreed upon by those nation-states supporting the discursive hegemony. The method-

ological advantage of studying the discursive hegemony through a focus on the sanctioned violation of rules is that such behaviour is easy to identify. Analyses of the international reactions can accurately reveal significant properties and the relative power of the discursive hegemony.

It would further be instructive to investigate properties of the relationship between nation-states professing to follow alternative sets of rules; e.g., Socialist or Islamic state formations. Thus, the empirical limits of the discursive hegemony in international society might be established, and the relative viability of alternative rules for international relations could be gauged. One notes that there seems to be a tendency that nation-states who proclaim their 'secession' from international society eventually return. Examples include France in the post-Napoleonic era, the Soviet Union partly since the early 1930s, and completely since the late 1980s, and Albania and Iran in the 1980s.

### 3. The Conditions for and the Reproduction of a Shared Discourse

We now move to the second level of abstraction; namely, the level of interaction between representatives of actual nation-states. Although there exists a huge political science literature on the subject, where semioticians and rhetoricians have already begun to analyse discursive aspects (e.g. Jönsson, 1990; Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989), this pursuit could benefit from a more sharply defined cultural focus.

#### 3.1. *Investigating the Elites*

The national elites, defined as the main carriers of international discourse and therefore important loci for research, are always small groups and can therefore be studied by means of the traditional research techniques of anthropology.

The first step should be to identify the elites relevant in the reproduction of the webs of interaction that make up the system, through identifying the loci of significant interaction. There are many fields of intercourse, and since there is no given hierarchy of issues one cannot a priori assume that, say, diplomats are more central than, say, tradesmen in reproducing the discursive order of international society. It is therefore necessary to make clear from the outset of an investigation

what any particular international network of elites is relevant for. It seems, for instance, that World Conventions of Numismatics, although involving international networks constituting highly specialized elites, can hardly be considered crucial in reproducing the discursive world order.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, anthropological inquiries into the international networks that reproduce the conditions of discourse necessary for the reproduction of international society may arrive at unexpected conclusions. For instance, informal networks may be shown to play a more salient part than commonly assumed, as may ostensibly non-political activities such as international sports. Two major tasks in this respect consist in identifying the nodal persons in international networks, and mapping the significant flows of information. Using anthropological methods it would thus be possible to assess the relative importance of informal networks in the reproduction of international society.

The socialization of elites is a related potential field of inquiry. How and why do certain individuals and not others become members of one or several elites? What difference does it make if members of the elite are in position or in opposition?<sup>5</sup> What are the differences in principles for recruitment to elitehood between nation-states? In some countries, family background is crucial. In others, formal education or other personal merits may be the only important criteria for recruitment. These principles can be elucidated and studied comparatively through regular anthropological field methods. The rhetoric and curricula of the institutions of learning in question, such as the American University in Lebanon or the now folded Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, the United States Information Agency's Visiting Programmes for different elites, foreign cultural institutions such as the British Council and L'Alliance Française, as well as diplomatic academies, give cues to the specificities of international elite culture. The learning of foreign languages is a key variable. Elite members who do not master English well may be severely handicapped from the outset. In this regard, it may be assumed that the cultural discrepancy between the forms of discourse learned by the elites during their socialization and that prevalent in other sectors of society is greater in countries peripheral to the hegemonic centres than in those close to it (cf. Galtung, 1990, for a similar point). Strategies chosen by elites during their socialization are contingent on the social structure of their respective countries. The importance of informal networking, during for example stays at universities abroad, clearly varies.

Granted that there is such a cultural discrepancy as assumed, elite members may profitably be analysed as brokers or entrepreneurs in the fashion developed by Barth (1963), Paine (1971) and others in social anthropology. Since it is taken as a premiss that there may be cultural differences between nation-states even at the bureaucratic level, but more so in the relationship between elites and the population, great skill in mediating between structures of relevance is required of the elites. They are in a sense cultural specialists who ideally master at least two sets of contexts relevant for international relations.

Cultural brokerage, at this level seen as interaction between elites, may be studied in a number of ways, some of which have already been suggested. One may also focus on the process of decision-making in international affairs, on the part played by so-called sherpas (mediators) meeting before important international summits and conferences, on the position of interpreters, on informal lobbying, and generally on the actual process of getting to Yes in international negotiations. Although the anthropologist's proclivity for studying informal organization should be particularly relevant in this regard, it would also clearly be relevant to undertake detailed semantic analyses of speeches, documents and informal conversations in this regard, thus identifying the common denominators or the system of signifiers that indicate the doxa of international relations.

The relationship between the elites and their domestic politics poses a number of related, but discrete problems which will be dealt with later.

### *3.2. Knowledge and Decision-making*

A set of problems closely related to understanding the elites is what one might provisionally call a social psychology of international relations, or perhaps more aptly, the sociology of knowledge of international relations. Provided the elites have been identified, one can turn to a comparative investigation of their perceptions of self, of other actors in the system and of systemic properties. Although elite socialization provides for a certain cultural continuity across national boundaries, variation may prevail in important respects.

First, some nation-states periodically act as though they have no stake in international society. As we have noted in passing, this may be because they programmatically choose to neglect hegemonic rules



or have not fully grasped those rules, or because they hold themselves to be so ostracized by international society that they have little to lose by breaking the rules. Yet there is the tendency that all nation-states are eventually assimilated under the aegis of the cultural hegemony prevalent in the global political system. Whether this is due simply to internalization, whether there is an element of hypocrisy becoming coercive, or whether perhaps there may be other reasons, is a question for anthropological research. Historical analyses of the development and the breakdown of alternative concepts of international society can also demonstrate the power of the hegemony.

Although nation-states are to a varying degree assimilated in the system to the extent that they participate in the rulebound discourse reproducing it, perceptions of the system may differ. A crude typology of attitudes to the system may be suggested: the unquestioning, the accepting, and the opposed. This typology may provide a convenient starting-point for comparative investigations of the kind of moral knowledge of the system on which agents base their actions.

One important general objective for action in international society is the increase of prestige or standing in the system. Prestige may be understood instrumentally. An actor is prestigious when it can use earlier foreign policy investments of various kinds to reduce the costs of reaching a particular goal. An indication of high prestige may be the ability to pursue one's interests without deploying direct power, and power relationships are of course crucial to any understanding of prestige. We maintain, however, that power relations can best be revealed in analysing the relationship between strategies, system perceptions and results, all of which have an important cultural dimension in that they are of course culturally defined.

An investigation of the strategies chosen by actors seeking to increase their prestige would therefore be central to our concern. Such strategies, many of them already analysed in meticulous detail, can involve defence spending, development aid, the chairing of international conferences, cultural programmes, etc. States are not the only actors seeking to reach their strategic ends through attempting to improve their prestige: When transnational oil companies fund kindergartens and environmental research programmes, the underlying long-term objective is to increase the profits of the company. As regards nation-states, the underlying objectives for their international actions cannot always be identified as easily. What exactly does the United Kingdom expect to get in return for funding scholarships for

students in the Third World? What are the strategic objectives of Norwegian development aid to Tanzania and why did Trinidad and Tobago grant Guyana inexpensive loans in the late 1970s? Symbolic capital or 'goodwill' of the kind alluded to can be built up cumulatively and is convertible. How is it converted? A careful hermeneutical reading of the processes in question and their relevant contexts would provide answers. Through the choice of strategies, actors position themselves in the system and reveal specific perceptions about self, others and the system as a whole. This kind of knowledge is extremely important, since it forms the basis for action in the system.

A different approach, which perhaps does more to reveal properties of the system, might focus on the cultural aspects of changes in actor perceptions.<sup>6</sup> Such changes, as manifested in changed patterns of action, result in varying, and in principle unpredictable, repercussions in other parts of the system. Thus, when the Soviet Union in the late 1980s changed its perceptions of the system particularly in regard to the utility of the use of force, the state was no longer seen as representing a challenge to the hegemony, and this further led to changes in the military policies of other countries. As a result, Iraq's military intervention in and subsequent annexation of Kuwait in the summer of 1990 was countered by the great powers working in concert, and thus acknowledging a shared set of rules in this respect. A different example is that of Germany before and after the Second World War: after losing the war, the Federal Republic of Germany switched to peaceful strategies in order to improve its wealth and international prestige. It is beyond doubt that the perceptions of self and system of postwar German leaders have been quite different from those of the preceding years.

In the contemporary situation, it might be particularly interesting to consider the new forms of knowledge relevant in the new nation-states of the Third World. Which are these forms of knowledge, and how are they related to other current perceptions of international relations, domestic and foreign?

Last, but not least, the relationship between knowledge and decision-making can be revealed in situations where the respective agents represent alternative interpretations of their interaction. In such contexts, there may be actual disagreements over rules of interaction. When a delegation from the Norwegian foreign ministry visited India and Pakistan in the mid-1980s, their Indian hosts were offended because they had gone to Pakistan first, seeing this as an

indication of the relative importance accorded each country by the visitors. This interpretation was different from that of the Norwegians, who had not believed that this would make any difference, and had therefore regarded the drawing up of the itinerary simply as a technical problem. A similar example is provided by certain African foreign delegations, occasionally arriving with an entourage of fifty or more for bilateral talks. Although perhaps a sign of prestige in some African contexts, a court of these dimensions is unquestionably seen only as a burden in the context relevant for their Western hosts. Yet another example involves differing cultural interpretations of hostage-taking, which may be part of the normal political procedure in some cultural contexts, but constitute a severe breach on the hegemonic rules of international society.

Furthermore, there are domestic prestige projects; expensive stadiums, monumental buildings or the like, which may not actually increase the country's prestige internationally, as they may be interpreted as wasteful and megalomaniac 'white elephants' within the discourse of the hegemony. The 'chest-pounding' sometimes exhibited internationally, e.g. by Saddam Hussein of Iraq, who stated in 1990 that he would gas half of Israel, kill all Americans, etc., is apparently intended to show the external world and the domestic public how fierce the leader in question is. However, the hegemonic rules leave little room for rhetorical hyperbole. Consequently, 'chest-pounding' may easily give rise to interpretations which may be unexpected by the pounder himself (cf. Chagnon, 1983, on chest-pounding among the Yanomamö).

Misunderstandings and ambiguities of this kind can be analysed in relationship to substantial properties of the discursive hegemony. In this way, inequality of power and global influence can be accounted for, since one can in most cases identify the actor who plays the game according to the hegemonic rules. Small countries like the Netherlands can, through superior knowledge of the rules, lay claims to an international prestige, and therefore influence quite out of proportion to its military and economic power. However, negotiations or disagreements over rules in international relations can also be analysed in the terminology of language-games (Wittgenstein, 1983) as representing different, socially constructed perceptions of reality where neither is ontologically privileged. This would be the less biased mode of analysis, but it might also be the mode of analysis less useful in understanding processes in the real world.

### 3.3. *The Implicit in International Relations*

Since the rules of discourse sanctioned by the hegemony are themselves implicit under normal circumstances, it might seem superfluous to deal with the implicit in international relations separately. However, an explicit focus on the implicit, as it were, is often called for when exploring the various meaning-aspects of international relations at a sophisticated analytical level. Notably, properties of the doxa of international relationships can be unveiled, and thereby the fundamental indexicality of interaction becomes visible — even interaction which is apparently strictly rulebound.

The relationships that make up international society, and the demarcating acts which define relevant differences between nation-states, are often explicitly expressed. Few actors doubt what is the chief meaning of a military base or a passport law. However, similar effects in demarcating differences can be achieved through implicit means; in apparently insignificant events or in the implementation of policies with ostensibly other ends than those of positioning a nation-state strategically in relation to another.

Subtle indications of intentions and interests in the international field, some of which are intentional, are often referred to as signalling behaviour. This has been studied by Cynkin (1988), who focused on Soviet and American signalling of regional intentions in Central Europe during the 1968 and 1981 crises, and by Tunander (1989), who traced and interpreted the movements of nuclear submarines in the North Atlantic semiotically. The fact that the common norms of international relations are strong enough to allow this kind of esoteric communication strengthens the claim of international relations to be taken seriously as a cultural system.

Development aid is another field of international relations where the implicit is of potentially great importance in forging bonds which are not an intrinsic part of the relationship explicitly established by foreign aid. Sometimes, the strategic objectives of the donor-state are fairly obvious, as in the case of Belgium, which channels about 80% of its total aid budget to its former colony Zaïre. Furthermore, development aid is sometimes openly seen as a form of economic and political investment. Indeed, in the case of Japan, transfers similar to what is often called development aid go by the name of strategic aid. There are, however, important implicit aspects of aid policies, notably with the messages communicated to other potential donors. In the Belgian

case, it is as though one admonishes others to 'keep their hands off' Zaïre. Surely, nation-states can also seek to increase their international prestige through apparently impartial, humanistic aid policies; this may plausibly be said to be the strategy of the three Scandinavian countries. Only a careful hermeneutical reading of policies, including comparative interpretations of the domestic and international presentation of aid policies and programmes, can reveal the relevant aspects of what aid does, means and says.

Trade relationships, sometimes seen as paradigms of purely contractual relations, refer to wide-ranging cultural contexts which become visible only when intended trade fails or by studying actor perceptions directly. For example, whereas the Japanese at one point carried out what they perceived as trade with China, the Chinese emperor perceived the flow of goods from Japan as a form of tribute. The contractual relations of trade are indexical for other kinds of relations; the frequent use of trade blockades and embargoes as political strategies indicates this. Of course, the relative density of international trade networks also indicates the degree of assimilation on the part of the participants.

A fourth field of interaction where the implicit typically sheds light on the observable pattern of interaction is that of diplomacy. Power relations underlie diplomatic relations, but as suggested in an earlier paragraph such differences can be expressed as relevant cultural differences. An American diplomat is prepared to accept greater cultural deviance from a diplomat from an oil-rich Arabic country than from somebody from a poor African country. Perhaps, and it would be worthwhile to find out, the least powerful countries in international society are those to whom it is most important to follow the hegemonic rules.

#### 4. Domestic Politics and International Relations

Political scientists have analysed the impact of domestic politics on international relations from a number of angles, one of them being to compare foreign policy-making processes in different nation-states (Caporaso et al., 1987). Even so, the cultural dimension is hardly ever singled out for special study.

#### 4.1. *Loyalties*

Since the nation-state is the supreme political unit in international relations, the forms of integration in historically situated nation-states are of great relevance. Our general question here is: What can loyalty to the nation-state imply, on the elite level and elsewhere?

First, one might consider the sources, forms and consequences of divided loyalties among citizens (cf. Smith, 1986). Divided loyalties can take on several forms. Among certain ethnic minorities, members may situationally switch between loyalties to different nation-states. This may be the case with for example Hungarians living in Romania or certain immigrant groups in the United States. Only the nation-state in which one actually lives can under normal circumstances use sanctions against such groups. The presence of ethnically distinctive groups potentially loyal to another nation-state, an *irridenta*, is usually seen as an obstacle to nation-building. In some cases, furthermore, loyalties to foreign political agencies are potentially damaging to the relationship between the nation-states in question. Consider, for instance, the fact that some Irish-Americans raise funds for the IRA, and the presence of variegated groups of political refugees in many states, e.g. high-profile Kenyan dissidents in Britain.

On the other hand, divided loyalties may take on the form of double loyalties and thus strengthen the bonds between the nation-states. This may be said to be the case of for example Jewish groups in the USA, who have played a major part in the development of US–Israeli relations. It may also be the case of less conspicuous migrant groups, such as Greek migrants to the USA who hold two passports and who reproduce informal US–Greek networks on a personal scale, chiefly through kinship. The consequences of such ‘double national identities’ for bilateral relationships have yet to be explored. The dimension of power enters, mediated by hegemonic standards and rules. Migration between two countries thereby functions in different ways in the respective countries, depending on their respective place in relation to the hegemony. Indeed, the differences in the situation of British migrants to Pakistan and Pakistani migrants to Britain as regards local expectations of loyalty, may certainly shed light on the cultural differences at work and the power structures within which they are evaluated. This field, too, has yet to be thoroughly explored. One field which has already been fairly well covered, however, is the divided loyalties of elites working in the bureaucracies of international

governmental organizations (e.g. Weiss, 1975). Nevertheless, participant observation may be expected to shed new light on the divided loyalties of such groups.

Religions, international networks of indigenous peoples, and socialist or communist ideologies have earlier been mentioned as alternatives to the system of states as an organizational structure on a global scale. In the domestic field, the contradiction between such ideologies and that of the nation-state may under certain conditions be expressed as conflicting principles of loyalty. And, finally, the existence of espionage against a country which plausibly could be expected to be the only focus of loyalty indicates that loyalty can be purchased.

The actual significance of divided loyalties may be less than it seems from the rhetoric in use on both sides. The history of the nation-state, albeit brief, is replete with examples of nation-states seeking to strengthen their internal cohesion through designating minorities as enemies of the nation. Nevertheless, there are definitely alternative forms of personal loyalty which serve to mitigate the power monopoly of the nation-state, although they rarely pose a real threat against state supremacy (cf. Eriksen, 1991). Anthropological studies of ethnicity and migration, extant ones reinterpreted and fresh ones alike, can contribute significantly to an understanding of these issues.

#### 4.2. *Domestic Regimes*

Any comparative study of political regimes runs the risk of being caught up in the normative perceptions and perspectives of the hegemony; in a sense, the social sciences, including anthropology, form part of the legitimizing structure of the hegemony (Ashley, 1988). Nevertheless, there are important issues here which need to be confronted. Interesting work on the political culture of communist regimes has been carried out by Brown (e.g. 1984) and others, and scholars like Hunt (1987) and Iriye (1981) have attempted analyses of the USA along such lines. The strength of anthropology in this respect lies in the sensitivity to contextual variables, enabling us to understand the regimes of contemporary nation-states in a language more sophisticated than often functionalist and behaviouralist terminology of US quantitative political science (Pye and Verba, 1965).

The general question to be posed here is: how does the type of political government in a nation-state influence its foreign policy?

One dimension which needs to be explored comparatively by anthropologists is that of popular participation in domestic politics, or the relationship between state and society. If a regime is faced with a legal, vocal opposition; if it risks being confronted with popular demonstrations, petitions and a poor rating at the polls, it must take measures unnecessary for a totalitarian or otherwise authoritarian regime. Nation-states where the bulk of the population is well integrated at a national level are usually more closely monitored by their citizens than those which are poorly integrated. How can this influence their participation in international society?

It may also be assumed that there are cultural differences in the way bureaucracies function in the modern world. It has sometimes been claimed, simplistically of course, that modern African bureaucracies are simply tribal councils writ large. Although anthropologists have done extensive research on decision-making in other political systems, the bureaucracies of nation-states have hardly, if ever, been studied comparatively in a detailed way.

A further dimension which clearly varies culturally in the modern world is the relationship between the elites and the wider population. Relevant variables are the forms of legitimation, the degree of cultural continuity between elites and population, and, crucially, the 'transformation rules' applied in brokerage between the language-games (international and domestic) in question.

#### *4.3. Domestic Ideologies and International Relations*

Nationalism (or, if one prefers, nationalisms) must serve as a common denominator in the comparison of ideologies of modern nation-states. A main question to be pursued in our context is that of the relative mobilizing potential of nationalism and consequences for external links.

Since the degree of national integration varies greatly between nation-states, comparative studies of the spread of nationalism on the nation-state level are called for. International relationists often employ the hypothesis that ideologically divided societies may choose aggressive foreign policies to strengthen internal cohesion; however, withdrawal from the international scene is also a plausible strategy.

Variation in the degree and forms of modernization, furthermore, is rarely accounted for by international relationists, but such variation



is, as has been repeatedly indicated by anthropologists, crucial in understanding the politics of nation-states comparatively. Combining the two perspectives, one may understand the peculiar, context-specific dynamics of nationalism domestically and internationally simultaneously.

There are differences as to the effectiveness of nationalism as a legitimizing device domestically. Being a binary ideology of metaphoric kinship dividing people into insiders and outsiders, nationalism is potentially strongly homogenizing and integrating. In nation-states where segmentary ideologies, which entail degrees of we-ness, are strong, the mobilizing potential of nationalism is, possibly, conversely weaker (Eriksen, 1991). Nation-states which are ruled by 'ethnocracies' may be assumed to have a weaker mobilizing potential than those ruled representatively. By implication, it might seem that, effectively, nationalist nation-states are less flexible in their foreign policies than nation-states where nationalism is weak (where segmentary or universalist ideologies predominate), since the sheer political weight of a fairly uniformly patriotic population narrows the range of options. All of these hypotheses, logically consistent, presently lack empirical support. At least one nation-state, Israel, is similar to tribal societies like the Maasai in defining the political unit not in terms of actual borders but in terms of the territory inhabited at any given time by the 'people' in question. This idea is in direct opposition to hegemonic rules of international society, and should be singled out for further study.

Discourse analysis is a highly relevant research method in this field. The language of nationalism is rooted in a European tradition of political culture. Drawing on this symbolism, many non-European politicians must nevertheless seek to convert it convincingly to a recognizably 'local' idiom. Such processes of conversion — or of 'bricolage' if one prefers — may indicate both discontinuities between the international language of nationalism and local discourses, and differences between nationalisms.

Usually wishing to cater to the language of the hegemony internationally, nationalist ideologues may use contradictory rhetoric internationally and domestically. While the US state may use blacks in its international presentation of self, as in the manning of ambassadorships to the United Nations or South Africa, blacks are never used domestically as symbols of nationhood. Generally, the language of nationalism ought to be a fertile ground for comparative anthropological inquiry (cf. Kapferer, 1988, for a rare example of such a

study); in our regard, the legitimation of foreign policies, domestically and internationally, is particularly interesting.

#### 4.4. *Domestic Social Organization*

Variations in degrees and forms of modernization have been mentioned. However, in our context variations are relevant only to the extent that individuals function as citizens, i.e. are to some degree integrated in national society. There are several variables which need to be considered here.

First and perhaps foremost, the complexity of the domestic institutional framework varies in relevant respects. The degree of national integration on the part of the citizens is important insofar as it indicates the relative mobilizing potential of nationalism. It adds little to the power and prestige of a country to contain fifty million people unless they contribute to the maintenance of the nation-state.

The number and significance of different social institutions, such as transnational companies, with an international orientation are further important variables. First, the importance of non-diplomatic international relations is in ways not immediately evident interrelated with the foreign policy of a given nation-state. Second, the presence of many internationally oriented institutions implies the likely presence of several elites and a possible division of power reducing the relevant number of options on the part of the political rulers. Again, the broker role of elites may be a convenient locus of inquiry, which in this case may betray not only aspects of the international discursive hegemony or the cultural discontinuity between international relations and domestic legitimation, but also aspects of the differences in objectives and outlooks between the various elites of a nation-state.

Domestic social organization further influences the policies of other countries vis-à-vis any given nation-state. Apartheid is an obvious example which, indeed, in addition to leading to various forms of boycott, has stimulated Panafricanism through giving African leaders a common cause.

The kind of social stratification prevalent in a nation-state, and the rules employed to reproduce it, is also an important variable well suited for anthropological investigation. It has been assumed that a form of meritocracy in the labour market is complementary with nationalism; sometimes, an ideology of meritocracy is seen as a condition for successful nationalism and national integration. This view

has recently been challenged by Kapferer (1988), who describes what he regards as a hierarchical form of nationalism in Sri Lanka. The relationship between rules for social mobility and principles of social stratification on the one hand, and the power of nationalism on the other, deserves closer scrutiny.

Focusing again on the elites, it would be instructive to compare rules and practices for social mobility and the justification of privileges internationally, the common denominator being the language of international relations, variables being, among other things, criteria of local prestige. An example, apt although perhaps politically ill-chosen, would be that of certain Third World elites specializing in raising aid funds from abroad, which are then converted into personal wealth. In some cases, this problem — which can credibly be interpreted as being one of conflicting cultural values — has been resolved in an analytically interesting way: Whereas it may be said that the cultural differences between the state agencies of donor and recipient rendered efficient aid impossible, private development agencies in the two countries proved culturally compatible. Thus, funds were channelled from the state agency to NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations). Avoiding the local bureaucracy, they cooperated directly with NGOs in the recipient country. The fact that such policies are never made official clearly indicates the overall importance of the nation-state as the supreme political entity.

### 5. Conclusion: Beyond the Bongo-Bongos

Unlike the study of the foreign policy of any given nation-state, international relations is a research field of staggering scale and of elusive substance. This is certainly one important reason why anthropologists have been reluctant to study it. We hope to have indicated that such diffidence is not necessarily well founded, since the concepts and methods of anthropology can make an important contribution to our understanding of large-scale political processes in the contemporary world. In the global village, small scale is not necessarily small fry; however, this should not keep us from studying large-scale phenomena like international relations. Why are some nation-states more successful internationally than others? How have Israel and The Netherlands achieved their important positions in international politics? Why does parliamentary democracy seem to be a failure in virtually

every African country? In what senses does nationalism pose a threat to world peace, and in what senses does it function integratively? We do not pretend to have provided answers to any of these questions, but we hope to have suggested how anthropology can produce them.

#### NOTES

1. See also Ashley (1987: 407): 'The critical analyst's pose vis-à-vis international politics is not, for example, that of an ethnomethodologist studying a "primitive" culture'.
2. Ironically, Giddens's main motivation for writing on the nation-state was the opposite of ours. His central concern in the early 1980s was that of the imminent danger of nuclear war; ours is that of the new possibilities for research in a period when that danger has decreased dramatically and cultural differences assume a greater importance in international relations and analysis.
3. Political scientists often make a rough distinction between status quo powers and revisionist powers in this regard. Anthropologists ought to be able to relieve such an obvious case of conceptual constipation.
4. However, a few international relationists specializing in 'people's diplomacy' carry out analyses on the assumption that such behaviour may change international society indirectly.
5. There may be relevant differences between countries regarding the turnover of personnel in governing positions. The same personnel may be involved in different statuses vis-à-vis their foreign counterparts, and their relationship may change, particularly in nation-states with frequent changes in government. Political affinities between leaders change in significance when power constellations change; conflicts between for example party affinities and national cooperation may be experienced on the personal level. Leading politicians who are ideologically close through for example the Socialist International may find it difficult to pursue their close relationship when one of them is replaced by a Christian Democrat in the national government. The way in which such dilemmas are handled may reveal important properties of the discursive field of international relations.
6. Again, there exists a substantial political science literature (e.g. Jervis, 1976), which could benefit from the added anthropological perspective.

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