

Transnational Topographies of Power: Beyond “the State” and “Civil Society” in the Study of African Politics

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I. Introduction

The study of politics in Africa has been reinvigorated in recent years by a new interest in what is called “civil society”. Political scientists, in particular, have turned their attentions to what they call “state/society relations”. But anthropologists, too, seem to have discovered in “civil society” a new and improved incarnation of their old disciplinary trademark, “the local”. Where political scientists have been understandably eager to leave behind their cold-war paradigms for livelier topics such as democratization, social movements, and public spheres, the modal anthropology student heading for Africa today will likely be on the lookout not for an intriguing culture or a promising village, but for an interesting NGO. This being the case, a critical scrutiny of the common-sense mapping of political and social space that the state/civil society opposition implies would seem to be in order. Beginning with the category “civil society” itself, I will try to show how the state/civil society opposition forms part of an even more pervasive way of thinking about the analytic “levels” of local, national, and global that rests on what I call the vertical topography of power. I will argue that calling into question this

vertical topography of power brings into view the transnational contexts of both "state" and "civil society", and opens up new ways of thinking about both social movements and states.

I will not attempt a genealogy of the term, "civil society", but will only note a few aspects of the changes in its meaning. Its origins are customarily traced to 18th century liberal thought, and especially to Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as Francis Hutcheson, Adam Ferguson and, later, Adam Smith, in whose thought the term is associated both with the developing conceptualization of society as a self-regulating mechanism, and with concepts of natural law. Better known to many is the Hegelian usage of the term to denote an intermediary domain between the universal ideal of the state and the concrete particularity of the family, a conception famously critiqued by Marx, and imaginatively reworked by Gramsci. Today, the term most often comes up in discussions of democracy, especially to refer to voluntary or so-called non-governmental organization (NGOs) which seek to influence, or claim space from, the state.

The term "civil society" still had a rather antique cast to it when I first encountered it in graduate seminars on social theory. But since then, it has gotten a new lease on life, chiefly thanks to the dramatic recent political history of Eastern Europe (Keane, 1988, Seligman, 1992). There, of course, communism had promised to lead to the gradual demise of the state. But instead, the state seemed to have swallowed up everything in its path, leaving behind no social force -- neither private businesses, nor church, nor political party -- capable of checking its monstrous powers. It was not the state, it seemed, but civil society that had "withered away". In this historically specific context, the old term had a remarkable resonance, and it licensed otherwise unlikely coalitions between actors (from dissident writers to the Catholic Church) who had in common only that they demanded some space, autonomy, and freedom from the totalitarian state.

Coming out of this rather peculiar and particular history, the term "civil society" came for many to be almost interchangeable with the concept of democracy itself -- nearly reversing the terms of Marx's famous critique, which had revealed the imaginary freedoms of capitalism's democratic political realm as an illusion, to be contrasted to the real unfreedom of "civil society", conceived as the domain of alienation, economic domination, and the slavery of the workplace. But this new conception (of "civil society" as the road to democracy) not only met the political needs of the

Eastern European struggle against communist statism, it also found a ready export market -- both in the First World (where it was appropriated by conservative Reagan/Thatcher projects for "rolling back the state") and in the Third World (where it seemed to provide leverage both for battling dictatorships and for grounding a post-socialist mass democratic politics). With little regard for historical context or critical genealogy, and in the space of only a few years, "civil society" has thus been universalized. It has been appropriated, for different reasons (if equally uncritically), by both the right and the left. Indeed, it has become one of those things (like development, education, or the environment) that no reasonable person can be against. The only question to be asked of civil society today seems to be: how can we get more of it?

I will argue that the current (often ahistorical and uncritical) use of the concept of "civil society" in the study of African politics obscures more than it reveals, and, indeed, that it often serves to help legitimate a profoundly anti-democratic transnational politics. One of my aims in this essay, then, is to point out the analytic limitations of the state/civil society opposition, and to trace its anti-democratic political and ideological uses.

But I also have a second, and less reactive, aim in exploring the specifically African career of the "civil society" concept. For in the course of criticizing the state vs. civil society formula, I hope to arrive at some suggestions about other ways of thinking about contemporary politics in Africa and elsewhere. In particular, I will argue that the "state"/"civil society" opposition brings along with it a whole topography of power, revealed perhaps most economically in Hegel's famous conception of "civil society" as "everything interposed between family and state" (see Gibbon, 1993). Hegel's formulation invokes an imaginary space, with the state up high, the family low, on the ground, and a range of other institutions in between. In what sense is the state "above" society and the family "below" it? Many different meanings characteristically get blurred together in this vertical image. Is it a matter of scale? Abstraction? Generality? Social hierarchy? Distance from nature? The confusion here is a productive one, in the Foucauldian sense, constructing a common-sense state that simply is "up there" somewhere, operating at a "higher level". This common-sense perception has been a crucial part of the way that nation-states have sought (often very successfully) to

Transnational Topographies...

secure their legitimacy through what Akhil Gupta and I have termed claims of vertical encompassment – claims that naturalize the authority of the state over “the local” by merging three analytically distinct ideas -- 1) superior spatial scope; 2) supremacy in a hierarchy of power; and 3) superior generality of interest, knowledge, and moral purpose -- into a single figure: the “up there” state that encompasses the local and exists on a “higher level”.

Such an image, of course, underlies the familiar public-private split, and the idea (of which Habermas makes much) of a “public sphere” that mediates between state and citizen. By imagining the family as a natural ground or base of society, as feminists have pointed out, it leaves the domestic out of the sphere of politics entirely. But this imagined topography also undergirds most of our images of political struggle, which we readily imagine as coming “from below” (as we say), as “grounded” in rooted and authentic “lives”, “experiences”, and “communities” (cf. Malkki, 1992). The state itself, meanwhile, can be imagined as reaching down into communities, intervening, in (as we say) a “top down” manner, to manipulate or plan “society”. Civil society, in this vertical topography, may appear as the middle latitude, the zone of contact between the “up there” state and the “on the ground” people, snug in their communities. Whether this contact zone is conceived as the domain of pressure groups and pluralist politics (as in liberal political theory) or of class struggle in a war of position (as in Gramscian Marxism), this imaginary topography of power has been an enormously consequential one.

What would it mean to rethink this? What if we replaced this vertical relation of state to society with a more “horizontal” way of thinking about politics, one that would (at least momentarily) displace the primacy of the nation-state frame of analysis, and re-arrange the imaginary space within which civil society can be so automatically “interposed between” higher and lower levels? As we will see, such a move entails rethinking “the state” and looking at transnational apparatuses of governmentality which I will suggest are of special significance in many parts of contemporary Africa, where states are, in significant ways, no longer able to exercise full sovereignty, or even (in a few cases) to function at all as states in any normal sense of the term. But it also, and at the same time, entails rethinking received ideas of “community”, “grassroots” and “the local”, laden as they are with nostalgia

James Ferguson

and the aura of a "grounded" authenticity. Using the politics of structural adjustment in Zambia and the South African civic movement as examples, I will try to show that both the "top" and the "bottom" of the vertical picture today operate within a profoundly transnationalized global context that makes the constructed and fictive nature of the vertical topography of power increasingly visible, and opens up new possibilities for both research and political practice. First, however, I wish to continue the interrogation of the contemporary conceptualization of the problem of "state/civil society relations" by showing how much it shares, at the level of the topographic imagination, with the older "nation-building" paradigm which it has largely replaced.

II. The vertical topography in the study of African politics: Two variants of a mythic structure

I will begin by considering two views of African politics which, sometimes in explicit opposition, often in implicit and confused combination, have dominated the intellectual scene in recent decades. The older paradigm sees nation-building as the central political process in post-colonial Africa, with a modernizing state in conflict with primordial ethnic loyalties. The newer view recommends the roll-back of an overgrown and suffocating state, and celebrates the resurgence of "civil society", often putatively linked to a process of "democratization". In deliberately presenting a highly schematic and simplified account of their distinctive features, my purpose is to reveal an underlying set of assumptions that they share.

"Nation-building"

The key premise of the "nation-building" approach to African politics is the existence of two different levels of political integration, and a necessary and historic movement from one to the other. The first such level, logically and historically prior, is the local or sub-national; this is the level of primordial social and political attachments, left over from the pre-modern past. Originally referred to by such labels as "tribal

organization" or "traditional African society", these supposed "givens" of African political life were thought to include structures of kinship, community, and (in some formulations) ethnicity. Later, Goran Hyden would summarize such local "primordial affiliations" under the singularly unfortunate rubric, "the economy of affection" (Hyden, 1983). Indeed, it should be noted that while such "primordialist" approaches to sub-national identities may fairly be described as out of date, they are very far from having vanished from the contemporary scene.¹

The second level of integration, in the "nation-building" scheme, is, of course, the national. Emergent, new, modern, nations were understood to be in the process of construction -- stepping out, as it were, for the first time onto the stage of world history. With national structures of authority struggling to establish themselves in the face of "primordial" commitments, "nation-building" appeared both an urgent task and a historically inevitable process. Yet the generally hopeful tone of the work in this tradition is shadowed by the phantom that stalks "nation-building" -- the specter of pre-modern resurgences such as "tribalism", or such manifestations of the lingering "economy of affection" as nepotism, corruption, and other banes of "good government". Failed nation-building, it follows, can only mean a resurgence of primordial affiliations (still the usual journalistic explanation for civil wars in Africa). State success, on the other hand, means the construction of new bases of authority resting on nation-state citizenship. Above the national level, finally, appears the international, understood largely as 1) a source of "aid", a helping hand in nation-building; and 2) a utopian image of the union of nation-states, with the key symbol of the UN as the promise of the universality of the nation form (cf. Malkki, 1994).

"Development", in such a view, is the natural reward for successful national integration, just as nation-building is the characteristic rhetoric of the developmental state. The strong, activist state thus naturally becomes the protagonist in the optimistic narratives of "national development" that flourish within this paradigm. This view of the world is perhaps sufficiently familiar as to make it possible to move ahead without further elaboration.

"State and society"

"State and society" -- the self-proclaimed "new paradigm" in the study of African politics -- regards the state and its projects with new skepticism, and rediscovers "the local" as the site of "civil society", a vigorous, dynamic field of possibilities too long suffocated by the state. In place of a modernizing national state bravely struggling against pre-modern ethnic fragmentation, the image now is of a despotic and overbearing state which monopolizes political and economic space, stifling both democracy and economic growth. Instead of the main protagonist of development, the state (now conceived as flabby, bureaucratic, and corrupt) begins to appear as the chief obstacle to it. What are called "governance" reforms are needed to reduce the role of the state, and bring it into "balance" with "civil society". (Cf., from a huge literature, Hyden and Bratton, 1992, Carter Center, 1990, Fatton, 1992, World Bank, 1989, 1992, Rothchild and Chazan, 1988, Chazan et al., 1988, Harbeson, Rothchild, and Chazan, 1994).

The local level, meanwhile, is no longer understood as necessarily backward, ethnic, or rural. New attention is paid to such non-"primordial" manifestations of the local as voluntary associations and "grassroots" organizations through which Africans meet their own needs, and may even press their interests against the state. There is, in much of this newer research, an unmistakable tone of approval and even celebration -- not of the nation-building state, but of a liberated and liberatory civil society. Society, left to its own devices, it seems, might make political and economic progress; the problem now is how to induce the state to get out of the way, and to make it more responsive to "civil society's" demands. Hence the connection, repeatedly asserted in the "governance" literature, between democratization (conceived as making space for "civil society") and development (conceived as getting the state out of the way of a dynamic non-state sector). It is such a link, too, that accounts for the otherwise peculiar idea of a natural affinity between the draconian and decidedly unpopular measures of "structural adjustment", on the one hand, and populist demands for "democratization" on the other (a point I will return to shortly).

The "new" state-and-society approach is often posed as a simple opposition to the "old" nation-building (or "statist") model. But the two paradigms are not as different as might at first appear. In particular, the state and society paradigm uses

the very same division of politics into analytic "levels" as does the "nation-building" one, altering only the valuation of their roles. The "national" level is now called "the state", the "local" level "civil society". But where the older view had a new, dynamic, progressive national level energizing and overcoming an old, stagnant, reactionary local level, the new view reverses these values. Now the national level (the state) is corrupt, patrimonial, stagnant, out of date, and holding back needed change; while the local level (civil society) is understood as neither ethnic nor archaic, but as a dynamic, emerging, bustling assemblage of progressive civic organizations that could bring about democracy and development if only the state would get out of the way.

The international, too, appears in both paradigms, but with largely opposite functions. International agencies, especially financial ones, appear in the state-and-society view less as state benefactors and providers of "aid" than as the policemen of states -- regulating their functioning and rolling back their excesses through "structural adjustment". If the nation-building view imagined the international in the form of an idealistic UN, the state and society paradigm pictures a no-nonsense IMF: stern, real-world bankers, speaking what I have elsewhere called the language of economic correctness (cf. Ferguson, 1995).

The implications for "development" are clear, and again nearly the reverse of those of the nation-building approach. For the state and society paradigm sees development not as the project of a developmentalist state, but as a societal process that is held back by the stifling hold of the state; "structural adjustment" is needed to liberate market forces to work their development magic. Where the first paradigm saw the development problem as too much society, not enough state, the second sees it as too much state, not enough society.

The two views, it should by now be clear, bear a remarkable resemblance to one another, even as they are manifestly opposed. Indeed, everything happens as if the second model were, as Lévi-Strauss might say, a very simple transformation of the first. Through a structural inversion more familiar, perhaps, to analysts of myth than of politics, we are left with two paradigms that are simultaneously completely opposed to one another, and almost identical (see Figure 1, below).

James Ferguson

Figure One: Two paradigms, two analytic levels

	State & Society	Nation-Building
National	National Integration modernity: + democracy: + development: + progress: +	The State modernity: - democracy: - development: - progress: -
Local	Tribal, Primordial Attachments modernity: - democracy: - development: - progress: -	Civil Society modernity: + democracy: + development: + progress: +

Key:

modernity (+/-):	up-to-date, new / backward, old
democracy (+/-):	promoting democracy / inhibiting democracy
development (+/-):	creates econ. growth / obstacle to growth
progress (+/-):	dynamic, progressive / stagnant, anti-progress

Transnational Topographies...

III. The topography of "state and civil society"

It is obvious that there exists a range of phenomena in contemporary Africa that are not captured in the old nation-building optic that saw politics as a battle between a modernizing state and primordial ethnic groups -- hence the recourse to the idea of "civil society" to encompass a disparate hodge-podge of social groups and institutions that have in common only that they exist in some way outside of or beyond the state. Indeed, while the term, "civil society" is often not defined at all in contemporary Africanist literature, most authors seem to intend the classical Hegelian usage that, as I pointed out, includes "everything interposed between family and state". Others speak more specifically of civil society as a zone of contact where a politically organized and self-conscious "society" presses against, and sets the bounds of, "the state".²

But while definitions of "civil society" in this literature are usually broad and vague, in practice writers move quite quickly from definitional generalities to a much more specific vision that is restricted almost entirely to small, grassroots, voluntary organizations, leaving out of the picture some rather important and obvious phenomena. One is never sure: Is the Anglo-American Corporation of South Africa part of this "civil society"? Is John Garang's army in Sudan? Is Oxfam? What about ethnic movements that are not so much opposed to or prior to modern states, but (as so much recent scholarship shows) produced by them? Or Christian mission organizations, arguably more important today in Africa than ever, but strangely relegated to the colonial past in the imagination of much contemporary scholarship? All of these phenomena fit uncomfortably in the "state" versus "civil society" grid, and indeed cannot even be coherently labeled as "local", "national" or "international" phenomena. Instead, each of these examples, like much else of interest in contemporary Africa, both embodies a significant local dynamic, and is indisputably a product and expression of powerful forces both national and global.

The state, meanwhile, when apprehended empirically and ethnographically, starts itself to look suspiciously like "civil society". Sometimes, this is literally the case, such as when NGOs are actually run out of government offices as a sort of moonlighting venture ("An NGO?" a Zambian informant of mine once remarked, "That's just a bureaucrat with his own

letterhead.") Perhaps more profoundly, as Timothy Mitchell has argued, the very opposition of "state" and "society" is built on an illusion, the idea that each is "really" an enframed entity, composed of reified and disembodied structures. Instead, as recent work on actually-existing state practices suggests (e.g. Gupta 19xx, forthcoming), states may be better viewed not in opposition to something called "society", but as themselves composed of bundles of social practices, every bit as "local" in their social situatedness and materiality as any other.

Such work suggests that to make progress here we will need to break away from the conventional division into "vertical" analytic levels that the old "nation-building" and the new "state and society" paradigms share. In the process, we will manage to break out from the range of questions that such a division imposes (how do states rule, what relations exist -- or ought to exist -- between state and society, how can civil society obtain room to maneuver from the state, etc.), and open up for view some of the transnational relations that I will suggest are crucial for understanding both ends of the vertical polarity. Let us consider what a focus on transnational contexts has to tell us, first about the putative "top" of the vertical topography ("the state") and then about the supposed "bottom" ("grassroots" civic organizations).

"The top"

If, as neo-liberal theories of state and society suggest, domination is rooted in state power, then rolling back the power of the state naturally leads to greater freedom, and ultimately to "democratization". But the argument is revealed to be fallacious if one observes that, particularly in Africa, domination has long been exercised by entities other than the state. Zambia, let us remember, was originally colonized (just a little over a hundred years ago) not by any government, but by the British South Africa Company, a private multi-national corporation directed by Cecil Rhodes. Equipped with its own army, and acting under the terms of a British "concession", it was this private corporation that conquered and "pacified" the territory, and set up the system of private ownership and race privilege that became the colonial system.

Today, Zambia (like most other African nations) continues to be ruled, in significant part, by transnational organizations that

are not in themselves governments, but work together with powerful First World states within a global system of nation-states that Fred Cooper has characterized as "internationalized imperialism".³

Perhaps most familiarly, international agencies such as the IMF and World Bank, together with allied banks and First World governments, today often directly impose policies upon African states. The name for this process in recent years has been "structural adjustment", and it has been made possible by both the general fiscal weakness of African states and the more specific squeeze created by the debt crisis. The new assertiveness of the IMF has been, with some justification, likened to a process of "re-colonization", implying a serious erosion of the sovereignty of African states. It should be noted that direct impositions of policy by banks and international agencies have involved not only such broad, macro-economic interventions as setting currency exchange rates, but also fairly detailed requirements for curtailing social spending, restructuring state bureaucracies, and so on. Rather significant and specific aspects of state policy, in other words, are, for many African countries, being directly formulated in places like New York and Washington.

Such "governance" of African economies from afar represents, as critics have not failed to point out, a kind of transfer of sovereignty away from African states and into the hands of the IMF. Yet since it is African governments that remain nominally in charge, it is easy to see that they are the first to receive the blame when "structural adjustment" policies begin to bite. At that point, democratic elections (another "adjustment" being pressed by international "donors") provide a means whereby one government can be replaced by another; but since the successor government will be locked in the same financial vice-grip as its predecessor, actual policies are unlikely to change. (Indeed, the government that tries can be swiftly brought to its knees by the IMF and its associated capital cartel, as the Zambian case illustrates vividly). In this way, policies that are in fact made and imposed by wholly unelected and unaccountable international bankers may be presented as democratically chosen by popular assent. Thus does "democratization" ironically serve to simulate popular legitimacy for policies that are in fact made in a way that is less democratic than ever.

James Ferguson

"The bottom"

Civil society often appears in African Studies today as a bustle of grassroots, democratic local organizations. What this ignores is, of course, as Jane Guyer has put it "the obvious: that civil society is [largely] made up of international organizations" (Guyer, 1994:223).⁴ For, indeed, the local voluntary organizations in Africa, so beloved of "civil society" theorists, very often, upon inspection, turn out to be integrally linked with national and transnational-level entities. One might think, for instance, of the myriad of South African local women's groups that are bankrolled by USAID or European church groups (Mindry, forthcoming); or of the profusion of "local" Christian development NGO's in Zimbabwe, which may be conceived equally well as the most local, "grassroots" expressions of civil society, or as parts of the vast international bureaucratic organizations that organize and sustain them (Bornstein, forthcoming). When such organizations begin to take over the most basic functions and powers of the state, as they very significantly did, for instance, in Mozambique (Hanlon 1991), it becomes only too clear that "NGO's" are not as "NG" as they might wish us to believe. Indeed, the World Bank baldly refers to what they call BONGOs (Bank-organized NGOs) and now even GONGOs (Government-organized NGO's).⁵

That these voluntary organizations come as much from the putative "above" (international organizations) as from the supposed "below" (local communities) is an extremely significant fact about so-called "civil society" in Africa. For at the same time that international organizations (through structural adjustment) are eroding the power of African states (and usurping their sovereignty), they are busy making end runs around these states and directly sponsoring their own programs or interventions via NGOs in a wide range of areas. The role played by NGOs in helping Western "development" agencies to "get around" uncooperative national governments sheds a good deal of light on the current disdain for the state and celebration of "civil society" that one finds in both the theoretical and the policy-oriented literature right now.

But challengers to African states today are not only to be found in international organizations. In the wake of what is widely agreed to be a certain collapse or retreat of the nation-state all across the continent, we find a range of forms of power and authority springing up that have not been well

described or analyzed to date. These are usually described as "sub-national", and usually conceived either as essentially ethnic (the old primordialist view, which, as I noted above, is far from dead), or alternatively (and more hopefully) as manifestations of a newly resurgent "civil society", long suppressed by a heavy-handed state. Yet can we really assume that the new political forms that challenge the hegemony of African nation-states are necessarily well-conceived as "local", "grassroots", "civil", or even "sub-national"?

Guerrilla insurrections, for instance, not famous for their "civility", are often not strictly "local" or "sub-national", either -- armed and funded, as they often are, from abroad. Consider Savimbi's UNITA army in Angola: long aided by the CIA, originally trained by China, with years of military and logistic support from South Africa, and continuous funding from US right-wing church groups. Is this a "sub-national" organization? A phenomenon of an emerging "civil society"? What about transnational Christian organizations like World Vision International, which (as Erica Bornstein has recently pointed out) play an enormous role in many parts of contemporary Africa, organizing local affairs and building and operating schools and clinics where states have failed to do so (Bornstein 1995)? Are such giant, transnational organizations to be conceptualized as "local"? What of humanitarian organizations such as Oxfam, CARE, or Doctors Without Borders, which perform state-like functions all across Africa?

Such organizations are not states, but are unquestionably state-like in some respects. Yet they are not well described as "sub-national", "national", or even "supra-national". Local and global at the same time, they are trans-national -- even, in some ways, a-national; they cannot be located within the familiar vertical division of analytic levels presented above. Not coincidentally, these organizations and movements that fall outside of the received scheme of analytic levels are also conspicuously understudied -- indeed, they seem to be largely invisible to theoretical scholarship on African politics, tending to be relegated instead to the level of "applied", problem-oriented studies.

In all of these cases, we are dealing with political entities that may be better conceptualized not as "below" the state, but as integral parts of a new, transnational apparatus of governmentality. This new apparatus does not replace the older system of nation-states (which is -- let us be clear -- far from

being about to disappear), but overlays it and coexists with it. In this optic, it might make sense to think of the new organizations that have sprung up in recent years not as challengers pressing up against the state from below but as horizontal contemporaries of the organs of the state -- sometimes rivals, sometimes servants, sometimes watchdogs, sometimes parasites, but in every case operating on the same level, and in the same global space.

Such a reconceptualization has implications for both research and political practice, insofar as these depend on received ideas of a "down-there" society and an "up-there" state. In particular, I will examine some of these consequences for two sorts of actor with a special stake in the "grassroots": social movements, on the one hand, and anthropologists on the other.

"Grassroots" politics without verticality?

What does the critical scrutiny of the vertical topography of power mean for progressive social movements that have long depended on certain taken-for-granted ideas of locality, authenticity, and "bottom-up" struggle? An extremely illuminating example comes out of the practice, and self-criticism, of the South African civic movement. Organized, politically powerful local civic organizations, of course, played a huge role in the struggle for democracy in South Africa. With national political organizations banned, township civics built networks, organized boycotts and demonstrations, educated cadres, and made many townships no-go areas for the white regime's troops and policemen. Civics took up key government functions, and sometimes developed remarkably democratic internal institutions. At the height of the anti-apartheid movement, the civics were not just protest groups, but something approaching a genuinely revolutionary force -- as the apartheid regime itself recognized.

I will here draw on the recent writings of Mzwanele Mayekiso, a township organizer in the Johannesburg neighborhood of Alexandra, and a true heir of Antonio Gramsci (in an age of many pretenders). Mayekiso sees very clearly the shortcomings of much fashionable celebration of "civil society". Simply lumping together everything outside of the state may have had its utility in the struggle against totalitarian rule in

Eastern Europe. But in South Africa, he insists, it is disastrous; it conceals the diametrically opposed political agendas of distinct and antagonistic social classes. For Mayekiso, the socialist, it makes no sense to allow the Chamber of Mines and the Mineworkers' Union to be simply thrown together as "civil society", in opposition to "the state". Moreover, the unthinking valorization of "civil society" for its own sake contains the risk of "following the agenda of imperialist development agencies and foreign ministries, namely, to shrink the size and scope of third world governments and to force community organizations to take up state responsibilities with inadequate resources" (p.12). Instead, Mayekiso proposes an eminently Gramscian solution: a determination to work for what he calls "working-class civil society". It is this which must be strengthened, developed, and allowed to preserve its autonomy from the state. Mayekiso cites two reasons for this: 1) to build a base for socialism during a period when a socialist state is not yet a realistic expectation; and 2) to serve as watchdog over the state while pressing it to meet community needs in the meantime.

It is useful to keep in mind that Mayekiso is writing from the position of an extraordinarily successful political organizer. The South African civics have been a formidable force to be reckoned with, not only in the anti-apartheid struggle, where their organization and political energy proved decisive, but also in their post-independence role. The civics have been successfully transformed from agents of all-out resistance to the apartheid state (aiming -- among other things -- to make the townships "ungovernable"), to well-organized autonomous structures ready to lend support to some state campaigns while vigorously attacking and protesting others. A national organization of civics, SANCO (which Mayekiso headed), is today a major player on the national scene, and serves as an independent advocate for worker and township interests -- all of which makes it at least a bit more difficult for the ANC government to sell out its mass base.

But the post-independence era has also presented some profound challenges to Mayekiso's Gramscian praxis, which he analyzes with remarkable honesty and clear-sightedness. In particular, Mayekiso has come to recognize that the policies of the new South African government are constrained not only by the balance of forces in South Africa, but also by the forces of transnational capital, which "denude the ability of nation-states to make their own policy". Faced with the threat of a

capital boycott, there may be limits on how far even the most progressive South African government can go down the road to socialism. The traditional nationalist approach, based on organizing the masses to put pressure on the government, has no effective response to this situation. Vertical politics seems to have reached its limits.

Such failures of strictly national politics-from-below lead Mayekiso to a very interesting critical reflection. Recalling the long struggle of the Alexandra Community Organization during the apartheid years, he acknowledges that its success grew not simply from its strong base in the community but from strategic transnational alliances. In fact, the ACO, he reports, received most of its funds not from the community, or even from within the country, but from international sources. Dutch solidarity groups, US sister city programs, Canadian NGOs, Swedish official aid, even USAID at one point -- all were sources of aid and support for Mayekiso's "local organizing", which (we begin to realize) was not quite so "local" after all. But Mayekiso does not apologize for this. On the contrary, he uses a reflection on the successful experience of the ACO to begin to develop what he calls "a whole new approach, a 'foreign policy' of working-class civil society" (p. 283). After all, he says "there is a growing recognition that poor and working class citizens of different countries now have more in common with each other than they do with their own elites" (p. 283), while "the ravages of the world economy are denuding the ability of nation states to make their own policy" (p. 280). In such circumstances, challenges from below within a vertically-conceived national space cannot succeed; but "international civic politics is a real alternative to weak nation-states across the globe" (p. 280).

Traditional leftist conceptions of progressive politics in the third world (to which many anthropologists, including myself, have long subscribed) have almost always rested on one or another version of the vertical topography of power that I have described. "Local" people in "communities" and their "authentic" leaders and representatives who organize "at the grassroots", in this view, are locked in struggle with a repressive state representing (in some complex combination) both imperial capitalism and the local dominant classes. The familiar themes here are those of resistance from below, and repression from above, always accompanied by the danger of cooptation, as the leaders of today's struggle become the elites against whom one must struggle tomorrow.

Transnational Topographies...

I do not mean to imply that this conception of the world is entirely wrong, or entirely irrelevant. But if, as I have suggested, transnational relations of power are no longer routed so centrally through the state, and if forms of governmentality increasingly exist that bypass states altogether, then political resistance needs to be reconceptualized in a parallel fashion. Many of today's most successful social movements have done just that (as the example of the South African civics in part illustrates). But academic theory, as so often, here lags behind the world it seeks to account for.

To be sure, the world of academic theory is by now ready to see that the nation-state does not work the way conventional models of African politics suggested. And the idea that transnational networks of governmentality have taken a leading role in the de-facto governance of Africa is also likely to be assented to on reflection. But are we ready to perform a similar shift in the way we think about political resistance? Are we ready to jettison received ideas of "local communities" and "authentic leadership"? Critical scholars today celebrate both local resistance to corporate globalization as well as forms of grassroots international solidarity that some have termed "globalization from below". But even as we do so, we seem to hang on stubbornly to the very idea of a "below" – the idea that politically subordinate groups are somehow naturally local, rooted, and encompassed by "higher level" entities. For what is involved in the very idea and image of "grassroots" politics, if not precisely the vertical topography of power that I have suggested is the root of our conceptual ills? Can we learn to conceive, theoretically and politically, of a "grassroots" that would be not local, communal, and authentic, but worldly, well-connected, and opportunistic? Are we ready for social movements that fight not "from below" but "across", using their "foreign policy" to fight struggles not against "the state" but against that hydra-headed transnational apparatus of banks, international agencies, and market institutions through which contemporary capitalist domination functions?

Consider a recent article in the Los Angeles Times on the worldly engagements of the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico. ("Zapatistas in Transition from Fighting to Fashion", April 21, 1996, p. A4). The Zapatistas, we learn, have become celebrities, and have been discovered by the jet-set. Oliver Stone was photographed receiving the trademark wool mask and pipe from sub-commander Marcos during a recent visit to the

James Ferguson

guerillas' headquarters. Danielle Mitterrand (widow of the former French president) recently dropped by. And so on. Most shockingly, Marcos himself has apparently appeared in a fashion spread for the Italian clothing firm, Benetton. The sub-commander appears in camouflage dress, the glossy photo captioned: "You have to go to war. But what will you wear? Camouflage visual dynamic: light, photogenic . . . ideal for the soldier who goes from war to war and who doesn't have time to change". Benetton even offered to be the official outfitter of the Zapatistas, but here Marcos drew the line. "Compañeros," he told reporters solemnly (through his mask), "we have decided that it is not suitable to wear sweaters in the jungle".

If this strikes one as funny (as it did me), it is useful to think about exactly what the joke is here. For at least part of the humor in the story comes from its suggestion that a group of supposed peasant revolutionaries have, in their inappropriate appetite for Hollywood celebrities and Italian clothing, revealed themselves as something less than genuine ("from fighting to fashion"). After all, what would a "real revolutionary" be doing in a Benetton ad, or lurching with Oliver Stone? But this reaction may be misplaced. As Diane Nelson (1996) has recently argued, First World progressives need to rethink our ideas of popular struggle, and to prepare ourselves to learn from third world transnational "hackers" with a sense of media politics, as well as a sense of humor -- and from movements that offer us not a pure and centered subject of resistance, but (like the sub-commander) a quite different figure: masked, ambivalent, impure, and canny. Like the South African civics described by Mayekiso, the Zapatistas present us not with authentic others fighting for a nostalgic past, but with media-savvy, well-connected contemporaries, finding allies horizontally, flexibly, even opportunistically, but effectively. For there is obviously real political acumen in the Zapatista strategy. Celebrity attention and world press coverage may well help to protect Chiapas communities against potential aggression; the cost to the Mexican state of political repression surely rises with the amount of press coverage (and public-relations damage) that it entails. More profoundly, the image of destabilization through guerrilla warfare, properly circulated, is perhaps the Zapatistas' most potent political weapon. Capitalism is built on perceptions, and Mexican capitalism is built on an especially precarious set of perceptions -- particularly, on the idea that it is an "emerging market" soon

to join the ranks of the "tigers" of East Asia, a carefully-nurtured perception that has supported a huge burst of speculative capital investment in the Mexican economy from the US and elsewhere. The real damage to the Mexican economy (and thus to the Mexican ruling class) may not come so much from the Zapatistas actual raids, as from the effect that the fear of such raids has on the Mexican stock market, and on the all-important "confidence" (as they say) of the international bondholders who have the Mexican economy in their pocket. A guerrilla war conducted in images on the pages of the New York Times fashion magazine, then, may not be so out of place after all. Indeed, it may well be the most tactically effective sort of warfare that the terrain will support.

The globalization of politics is not a one-way street; if relations of rule and systems of exploitation have become transnational, so have forms of resistance -- along lines not only of race and class, which I have emphasized here, but also of gender, sexuality, and so on. Gramsci's brilliant topographic imagination may be a guide to this new political world, but only if we are willing to update our maps from time to time. The image of civil society as a zone of trench warfare between working people and the capitalist state served the left well enough at one moment in history, just as the vision of a self-regulating zone of "society" that needed protection from a despotic state served the needs of an emergent bourgeoisie in an earlier era. But invoking such topographies today can only obscure the real political issues, which unfold on a very different ground, where familiar territorializations simply no longer function. Rethinking the taken-for-granted spatial mapping that is invoked not only in such terms as "the state"/"civil society" but also in the opposition of "local" to "global" (and in all those familiar invocations of "grassroots", "community", etc.), in these times becomes an elementary act of theoretical and political clarification, as well as a way of strategically sharpening -- and not, as is sometimes suggested, of undermining -- the struggles of subaltern peoples and social movements around the world.

Toward an ethnography of encompassment⁶

Just as a rethinking of the vertical topography of power has special consequences for political practices that depend on

James Ferguson

unexamined tropes of "above" and "below", it also contains special lessons for forms of scholarship that have traditionally found their distinctive objects in vertically conceived analytic "levels". Working through these conceptual issues, I suggest, might well point in the direction of promising new directions for research. For making verticality problematic not only brings into view the profoundly transnational character of both the state "level" and the local "level", it also brings the very image of the "level" into view as a sort of intensively managed fiction.

To say this is to point toward an enormous ethnographic project (which, in collaboration with Akhil Gupta, I am only beginning to explore), that of exploring the social and symbolic processes through which state verticality and encompassment are socially established and contested through a host of mundane practices. On the one hand, such a project would entail the ethnographic exploration of the processes through which (insofar as state legitimation goes smoothly) the "up-there" state gets to be seen as (naturally and common-sensically) "up there". The spatialization of the state has usually been understood through attention to the regulation and surveillance of the boundaries of nations, since the boundary is the primary site where the territoriality of nation-states is made manifest: wars, immigration controls, and customs duties being the most obvious examples. But while this is a rich area of investigation, it is only one mode by which the spatialization of states takes place. The larger issue has to do with the panoply of everyday technologies by which the state is spatialized, by which verticality and encompassment become features of social life, commonsensical understandings about the state that are widely shared amongst citizens and scholars. The policing of the border is intimately tied to the policing of Main Street in that they are both rituals that enact the encompassment of the territory of the nation by the state; these acts represent the repressive power of the state as both extensive with the boundaries of the nation and intensively permeating every square inch of that territory; both types of policing often demarcate the racial and cultural boundaries of belonging, and, are often inscribed by bodily violence on the same groups of people. Nor is this simply a matter of repressive state power: state benevolence as well as coercion must make its spatial rounds, as is clear for instance in the ritual touring of disaster sites by aid-dispensing US presidents. It is less in the spectacular rituals of the border than in the multiple, mundane domains of bureaucratic practice that

Transnational Topographies...

states instantiate their spatiality. Rituals of spatial hierarchy and encompassment are more pervasive than most of us imagine them to be; an ethnographic focus allows these everyday practices to be brought more clearly into focus.

At the same time, however, it is part of my argument that new forms of transnational connection increasingly enable "local" actors to challenge the state's well-established claims to encompassment and vertical superiority in unexpected ways, as a host of worldly and well-connected "grassroots" organizations today demonstrate. If state officials today can still always be counted on to invoke "the national interest" in ways that seek to encompass (and thereby devalue) the local, canny "grassroots" operators may trump the national ace with appeals to "world opinion" and e-mail links to the international headquarters of such formidably encompassing agents of surveillance as "Africa Watch", "World Vision", or "Amnesty International".

Where states could once counter local opposition to, e.g., dam projects by invoking a national-level interest that was self-evidently "higher than" (and superior to) the merely "local" interests of those whose land was about to be flooded, today "project-affected people" are more likely to style themselves as "guardians of the planet", protectors of "the lungs of the earth", or participants in a universal struggle for human rights, and to link their "local" struggles directly to transnationally distributed fields of interest and power. Such rhetorical and organizational moves directly challenge state claims of vertical encompassment by drawing upon universalist principles and globally-spatialized networks that render the claims of a merely national interest and scope narrow and parochial by comparison. Taking such new territorializations of political struggle as an object of research would require explicit ethnographic attention to the way that the claims of verticality that have historically been monopolized by the state (claims of superior spatial scope, supremacy in a hierarchy of power, and superior generality of interest, knowledge, and moral purpose) are being challenged and undermined by a newly transnationalized "local" which fuses the grassroots and the global in ways that make a hash of the vertical topography of power on which the legitimation of nation-states has so long depended.

What this implies is not simply that it is important to study NGOs and other transnational non-state organization, or even to

trace their inter-relations and zones of contact with "the state". Rather, the implication would be that it is necessary to treat state and non-state governmentality within a common frame, without making unwarranted assumptions about their spatial reach, vertical height, or relation to "the local". What is called for, in other words, is an approach to the state that would treat its verticality and encompassment not as a taken-for-granted fact, but as a precarious achievement – and as an ethnographic problem. Such a project would be misconceived as a study of "state-society interactions", for to put matters thus is to assume the very opposition that requires to be interrogated. Rather, what is needed is an ethnography of processes and practices of encompassment, an ethnographic approach that would center the processes through which the exercise of governmentality (by state and non-state actors) is both legitimated and undermined by reference to claims of superior spatial reach and vertical height.

Such a view might open up a much richer set of questions about the meaning of transnationalism for states than have up to now been asked. For in this perspective, it is not a question of whether a globalizing political economy is rendering nation-states weak and irrelevant, as some have suggested, or whether states remain the crucial building blocks of the global system, as others have countered. For the central effect of the new forms of transnational governmentality, if my argument is correct, is not so much to make states weak (or strong), as to reconfigure the way that states are able to spatialize their authority and stake claims to superior generality and universality. Recognizing this process might open up a new line of approach into the ethnographic study of state power in the contemporary world.

Notes

¹ Consider, for instance, that Hyden was able as recently as 1992 to speak (in a widely cited and highly influential article) of local social structures of kin and community as "ascriptive", "part of the natural world over which human beings have limited control". The term "primordial", Hyden acknowledges, may be problematic. Instead, therefore, he prefers the term "God-given", "indicating that they have a character that does not lend itself to alteration by human beings at will." Such "god-given" structures are opposed to state and civic structures that are, in contrast, "man-made" (Hyden 1992:11). The failure to grasp what might be problematic about

the term "primordialist" here could hardly be more complete. But Hyden's view is not an insignificant one in the world of current Africanist scholarship. Indeed, he is a recent president of the African Studies Association, and usually reckoned one of the most influential political scientist of Africa.

² For a range of definitional strategies, see the essays in Harbeson, Rothchild, and Chazan (1994), as well as Bayart 1986.

³ I borrow this evocative term from remarks made by Cooper at a workshop on "Historicizing Development" at Emory University in 1993. It should be noted, however, that I am here connecting the term to larger claims about transnational governmentality that I do not believe Cooper intended to make in his own use of the term.

⁴ Guyer's insightful discussion of the significance of the international affiliations of African "civil society" parallels my argument here in important ways. The fact that she does not use her observations about the transnational character of Nigerian organizations to question what I have called the vertical topography of power, however, is shown with special clarity in her own definition of "civil society" as "those organizations created by nonstate interests within society to reach up to the state and by the state to reach down into society" (1994:216).

⁵ I am grateful to Parker Shipton for pointing this out to me.

⁶ Parts of this section are adapted from a recent oral presentation which I co-authored with Akhil Gupta. Most of the ideas in this section, as well as a number of the actual sentences, should therefore be regarded as jointly authored.

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