The nature and scope of political geography

Natureza e propósito da geografia política

La nature et le propos de la geographie politique

Paul Claval

Université de Paris-Sorbonne.
Nº 29, rue de Soisy – 95600
Eaubonne - France
p.claval@wanadoo.fr

Resumo: Em vez de partir da análise do Estado e das outras formas de territórios políticos, este artigo concebe a Geografia Política como o estudo das dimensões de poder das relações sociais e suas correlações espaciais. Essa visão é mais ampla porque fornece uma introspecção melhor sobre os sistemas políticos de sociedades primitivas ou tradicionais, chama a atenção para a dissuasão e enfatiza o papel das redes. Também é útil para entender problemas políticos contemporâneos: a crise do Estado, o surgimento de novos estilos de identidade, a natureza da governança, a ameaça crescente do terrorismo e as novas formas das relações internacionais.

Palavras-chave: Geografia política; Relações de poder; Território; Redes; Governança; Terrorismo; Dissuasão.

Résumé: Au lieu de partir de l'analyse de l'Etat et des autres formes de territoires politiques, cet article défend une conception de la géographie politique fondée sur l'étude des jeux de pouvoir présents dans toutes les relations sociales, et sur la mise en évidence de leur signification spatiale. Une telle vue est plus large que la vue traditionnelle, car elle fait mieux comprendre les systèmes politiques des sociétés primitives ou traditionnelles, attire l'attention sur le rôle de la dissuasion et souligne le rôle des réseaux. Elle est utile pour comprendre les problèmes politiques du monde contemporain: la crise de l'Etat, l'apparition d'identités d'un nouveau style, la nature de la gouvernance, la menace croissance du terrorisme et les nouvelles formes prises par les relations internationales.

Mots-clefs: Géographie politiques; Relations de pouvoir; Territoire; Réseau; Gouvernance; Terrorisme; Dissuasion.

Abstract: Instead of starting from the analysis of the State and other forms of political territories, this paper conceives political geography as the study of the power dimensions of social relations and their spatial correlates. Such a view is broader, since it gives better insights on the political systems of primitive or traditional societies, pays attention to dissuasion and stresses the role of networks. It is useful for understanding contemporary political problems: the crisis of the State, the rise of new styles of identities, the nature of governance, the growing threat of terrorism and the new forms of international relations.

Keywords: Political geography; Power relations; Territory; Networks; Governance; Terrorism; Dissuasion.

Social groups are made of individuals who strive for the development of their human potential. Violence often precludes the fulfilment of this objective since it can destroy human life and deprive human beings from their rights and the benefits of their activity. Since individuals may rely on violence to achieve better results in their search for development, all societies have to limit and control its use in order to maximize their global development: political geography studies how this aim is achieved through the distribution of power within the social system.

The nature and aim of political geography

Political geography studies the spatial and territorial conditions, aspects and consequences of decision processes when they deal with collective goods and affect other persons or groups.

Political geography is more pecularly interested in the actions which:
- are intended for the provision of security, freedom and justice, i. e. the fundamental political public goods (as stressed by RAWLS, 1972);
- affect the status, rank and hierarchies of persons, groups and institutions;
- concern the access to the biological bases of social life: food on one side, and reproduction, i. e. women, on the other (as explained by gender and sexual studies);
- give to some people or groups a right of use on the bodies of other persons (this theme lost of its interest with the end of slavery - but has slavery completely disappeared ? Does it not take new forms? And the disposition of other's body has become a central theme in the political economy of sex);
- deal with access to economic resources, activities or employment (this was the main interest of political geographers during most of the 19th and 20th centuries);
- have an impact on the redistribution of income of wealth (an interest which grew mainly in the second half of the 20th century);
- deal with the access to information (which is sometimes an economic resource, plays a central in the preparation of political decisions and in their implementation, and appears as the foundation of public opinion).

The political process

There are two ways to conceive the organization of political geography: to start from the observation of States or other forms of polities; to explore the political processes in order to discover how they are structuring space and building territories. In my opinion, the second solution is more rewarding.

Max Weber's categories and their embodiment into social institutions

Political geography explores the way somebody's decision are imposed on other persons or influence them. Max Weber proposed a fundamental distinction between three forms of power (WEBER, 1971):

1) **pure power**, which results from the imposition of one's will on other persons through the use of physical force and violence or the threat of them;

2) **authority**, when a group considers its sovereign as a legitime one and accepts to conform with the decisions he takes and the orders he issues;

3) **influence**, when a person or a group control the access to economic resources or employment, or the access to information.

Working on the bases provided by Max Weber, sociologists (like Amitai ETZIONI,1964; 1968), anthropologists (like Jacques MAQUET, 1970) and geographers (like Paul CLAVAL, 1978) have explored the ways these forms of power are embedded into the institutionalized systems of social relations which characterize societies. They stress the role of family (in its descendance and alliance dimensions), associations, markets, pedagogic relations, slave/master relations, tyrany, caste, feudal relations, bureaucratic relations, authority-power relations. Some patterns are egalitarian, others hierarchical.

This analysis is important since it shows that political life may be active in societies where there is no specialized political institutions, as in the tribes without rulers described by some anthropologists, which are often «societies against the State», as Pierre Clastres used to say (CLASTRES, 1974). Even in developed societies where an autonomous political system exists, a part of the power relations political geography has to explore is located outside the political sphere and relies on the familial, economic or cultural relations within the civil society.

The existence of an accepted authority results from the propagation of specific mental representations: the idea that a social hierarchy is a normal thing; the idea that individuals have an interest in negociating their own possibilities of judgement, decision and action against the access to higher levels of security and other collective goods in demand. There is no authority without a normative system which legitimates it: it means that the role of chamans, priests, philosophers and any other denomination for intellectuals, is essential for most systems.

The political process, mobility and circulation

The political process is made of decisons which are linked to:

- the exchange of women between groups (it was the main problem of political life in primitive societies; it is still significant today, as proved

by the tensions which develop between the ethnic groups which stick to endogamy and those which accept exogamy in contemporary multicultural big cities);

- the mobility of persons, which is a fundamental dimension of the experience of freedom, allows for an easier access to information, resources or employment, but appears as an encroachment on the autonomy of individuals when it is enforced upon them: people do not like to leave their homes for a distant place just in order to find a job;
- the circulation of economic goods, since it offers the political system opportunities to perceive taxes and pay for the charges it creates (in this field, conditions are quite different according to the way taxes are levied - either in kind or in money – and the persons of enterprises which have to pay, either the whole national population, or a few foreign companies exploiting mineral or other primary resources), and provide opportunities for the redistribution of income and wealth;
- the circulation of information, since the preparation of political decisions and their implementation always involves the gathering of data; since orders have to be diffused; since governmental decisions trigger reactions of the public (or covered) opinion.

The main reason for which a process approach is more efficient than a territorial one in political geography lies in the numerous links we have just noticed, since it is through them than the spatial dimensions of political life is mainly shaped.

The broadening of the list of political public goods offered by the rulers in exchange for the legitimacy they enjoyed was mainly linked, during the twentieth century, to the possibility they had to manipulate the economic circulation.

Political process, past, present and future. The normative aspect of political life

The political process has fundamental time dimensions: it involves always and at the same time the past, the present and the future.

The people who prepare and take political decisions have ways of thinking, opinions and *mentalities* they acquired from their families and the groups they frequented when young and as a result of their previous experience. Their action is conditioned by institutions, laws, rules, customs, habits, practices which are inherited from the past.

Most of the political decisions aim at the solution of contemporary problems: it is important to resolve local difficulties, help those who face natural or other catastrophes and reduce social tensions by actions which remove a part at least of the causes of social grievances.

Rulers are partly conditioned by the past. It is very important for them to look at what is presently going wrong if they wish to maintain their authority - especially in democratic countries, where a reelection always reflects what has been done during the previous mandate. They have also to develop strategies for the future in order to prevent new tensions and difficulties. The ambition of politicians is generally greater: they wish to improve the existing social system and change at least partly social rules in order to build a better society.

It means that it not only a time dimension which is encapsulated into the political process. A normative one is as well present. In order to reduce the existing unequalities and to create a better political society, politicians have to hold a clear idea of the nature of unequality and justice. Values do not exist in this World. They are born form the human capacity to create non tangible images of what has to be. These images are situated in a beyond from which people develop an idea thanks to the intuition they develop of the existence of immanent forces in the things and beings which surround them, the revelation of God's will through prophets, the aptitude of philosphers to acceed to the sphere of Pure Reason, or of other philosophers - or historians - to depict the Golden Age of past societies or the utopias of future ones (CLAVAL, 1984).

As a result, the political process is always stretched over time and over the chasm which normally exists between this World and the other ones people built in their minds.

The collective dimension of the political process

There are political systems where decisions are the monopoly of an individual sovereign ("I am the law" said Louis XIV), or a small ruling class or party. Even in these extreme cases, the political process has collective dimensions.

The decisions have to be prepared, which means that information has to be collected, data gathered, persons consulted: a plurality of people is always involved in that phase. The decision itself is seldom a solitary one: in their headquarters, marshalls or generals ask for the advice of their staff; ministers have also staffs of advisers; in most regimes, the most important choices result from a deliberation within the cabinet, which means that all the ministers are involved and have a possibility to participate in the discussion before the final decision.

Laws and orders have then to be published and implemented, which means that rulers have to rely on public bureaucracies, which have the responsability to tell them wether their orders are obeyed or resisted, observe those who withstand the official regulations and take action against them (FOUCAULT, 1976).

The State has also to keep an eye on the way private enterprises and other private bureaucracies function, since an important part of the power structure of any polity is imbedded into them. It has to devise means to control or influence them.

Anyone, in the political sphere, is aware of the fact that a decision is more efficient when it is willingly accepted by the population: hence the wide interest in the conditions of governance in contemporary political sciences - which is a belated effect of the Weberian analysis of the conditions in which power is exerciced.

Political process, political mechanisms and the spatial organization of power

Two models of mechanisms: the rational State, the dissuasion system and their spatial correlates

Political decisions are not always reached in the same way. It is possible to oppose two forms of mechanisms:

- The rational State has three main characteristics: i- its head exercices an absolute sovereignty upon its territory, which means that foreign nations have no legal possibility of influencing its decision process; ii- the ruler holds the monopoly of the use of violence and physical power within his national territory, which means that he has not to negociate his decisions with his subjects; iii- the rational State has boundaries which are internationally recognized. The three characters are associated. The Prince is an absolute sovereign since he enjoys the monopoly of the use of violence within the boundaries of his State, and the other Monarchs have renounced to exert any power outside their own territories. The defence of the Sate boundaries is all the more efficient because his sovereign concentrates all the information and is the only one entitled to take decisions in this field - which means a perfect coordination of action.

- The process which is conducive to decisions in a dissuasion system is the exact reverse of that which characterizes a rational State. In such a system, pure power and violence are not banned; they constitute the essential argument of discussion and confrontation. It does not mean that wars are frequent. Any ruler knows that there are many risks in his situation. In order to reduce the risks he is subjected to, his only solution is to rise the price his potential ennemies had to pay if they decide to attack him. When the dissuasion process plays on the international scene, this explains the role of military armaments, efficient defence lines - and after World War Two, nuclear dissuasion: when the risk for an aggressor is to be as completely ruined as the country he attacks, the only solution for him is to keep quite (CLAVAL, 1992).

Dissuasion systems are more frequent than people generally think. Everyone is aware of their role in the tribes without rulers British anthropologists described in Sudan or Nigeria (EVANS-PRITCHARD, 1937; FORTES and EVANS-PRITCHARD, 1940; MIDDLETON and TAIT, 1958): whenever a member of a segment in these lineage structures attacked a member of another clan, robbed him some cattle or killed him, all the group tried hard to convince the culprit or his segment of lineage, to pay a just compensation for his misdeamenour. The risk of a general conflagration was such that everyone was active in preventing it through diplomatic action.

Dissuasion systems have spatial characteristics: each segment of the global society controls a part of the political scene: it is a situation of fact, not of right. It means that there is no other mean to prevent external interference from another power in a territory that to rise the cost of such an intervention, and capitalize on the threat of an issue which should be catastrophic in order to negotiate in a power position.

The mechanics of territory: 1 - legitimacy

The political process has spatial and territorial implications. To run a polity on a pure power basis is a costly and inefficient venture, since control costs are heavy and the control system has adverse effects, because the persons in charge of it have a possibility to develop their own power. As a result, most of polities rely on the combined exercice of authority (which reduces the information costs) and power (for controling or eliminating rebels or deviants). The problem is then: at what conditions, in a polity, a political system may appear as a legitimate one? The answer varies with the roots of authority (CLAVAL, 1978).

In many cases, specially at the time when States first appeared, the root of authority was religious: the king was at the same time a priest in charge with the worship of the collective Gods; something of this situation was preserved in China, when the Emperor performed rituals of fertility, every Spring, for the prosperity of all the land he controlled.

The links between the divinity and territory could take other forms. In some cases, the sovereign was considered as a God, which strengthened its authority. In the case of a universalist faith, he was entitled for a universal domination - it was the main characteristic of Empires.

In other cases, the Prince had just received a delegation of authority from God. It means that its power had territorial limits, since other Princes had received a similar delegation to fulfill the divine Will in other areas: in Western Europe, the result was the idea that all nations had an equal right to exist.

From the sixteenth century, a process of laicization of political thought started. It took two orientations: either a rational or a national one. For many of

the theoreticians of the Enlightenment, the justification of the power of a Prince did not reside in its origin, but in the way it was used: at the time of Enlighted despotism, kings and emperors from Portugal to Russia tried to gain a new form of aknowledgement through the performance of conspicuous policies of modernization. It meant that the size and limits of States could be arbitrary: it did not impair their legitimacy.

At the end of the eighteenth century, with the triumph of the idea of representative political system, the legitimacy of the State ceased to be based on the Reason of Philosphers and became rooted in the people which delegated the power it was naturally endowed with. In Western Europe, the populations gathered by the old monarchies considered themselves as nations; in the United States, the unity was born from the resistance to England and the participation in a new Covenant; elsewhere, in central and eastern Europe, it was equated with ethnic memory - which was later conducive to many difficulties.

The mechanics of territory: 2 - identities

The people who live in a polity have to give a meaning to their lives. Such a result is generally achieved through the development of collective identities.

Until the twentieth century, all the historical societies combined two types of cultures: the vernacular or low culture of most of their population, and the elite or high culture of their ruling classes. The vernacular cultures were based on the direct passing down through obervation, imitation and word of attitudes, gestures, practices, know-hows, rules, etc. It meant that their members had a direct comprehension of the setting in which they lived and of their identities: thanks to these circumstances, local identities were unproblematic, since they were preserved through the existence of what Pierre Nora called *milieus* of memory (NORA, 1984).

National identities, the second major component of Western identities, were built on the testimonies of history. In order to provide them with territorial markers, a policy of preservation of historical monuments was launched in most countries during the nineteenth century. The school system played a central role in the development of these identities through the teaching of a national language, history and geography (ANDERSON, 1983).

National identities are often expressed through the use of symbols. Jean Gottmann already stressed the role of «iconography» in the genesis of territories in the early 50s (GOTTMANN, 1952).

Western countries are living a double crisis of their identities. Because of the modern medias, the nature of vernacular cultures has been utterly modified: its passing down from generation to generation has ceased to be a local process. Since they are transfered through the modern medias, contemporary vernacular cultures have as universal sources today as their elite equivalents. Hence a crisis of local

identities, and in many cases, the development of policies aiming at the preservation of vernacular landscapes in order to safeguard local roots for vernacular cultures.

Western philosophies of history were universalist. Nations played for them a central role from the end of the eighteenth century because they were considered as the best mean to realize the universalist objectives of Western civilization even within a limited area - the results there achieved will ultimately diffuse all over the World. The criticism of modernity, which struck Western ideologies since thirty years, have deprived nations of their former mission: hence the crisis of national identities - and of the national States based on them (BADIE, 1995).

Identity feelings exist at other scales - regional, or universal, for instance -, but had not, until now, the same significance as the local and the national ones. Class and religious identities have however always to be explored.

The mechanics of territory: 3 - control

There is a third component in the mechanics of territory: control. Any political system has to gather information over the areas and populations it rules, provide for the diffusion of its legal decisions, offer the political goods which are in demand - security, freedom, justice, at least, as well, in modern democracies, as health and education -, watch over the way law is applied, locate the opponents and control their actions.

The theory of *suveillance* is well known since the publications of Michel Foucault (FOUCAULT, 1976). In order to control a population, the only solution is to have observation points which control the territory all around. In order to achieve good results, an observation point has to look over a limited area, which has to be as transparent as possible. For keeping a close watch over prisonars, the best solution was the double cylinder of the *Panopticon* (1791). For the looser watch over the general population which political systems have to maintain, it was enough to run a hierarchical system of administrative territories centred on towns or cities where the governmental offices, its police services in particular, were located.

In representative political regime, the same set, or another set, of territorial partitioning is used as constituencies for electoral consultations.

Spatial models of political geography

Out of what we have presented, it is possible to deduce a whole gamut of models of spatial organization of the political process. We have chosen to focus on two of them:

1. In the first model, political life is organized on a territorial basis: all the Planet is covered with States. In each of these states, the Sovereign holds the

monopoly of the use of physical force and violence (GOTTMANN, 1973; BADIE, 1995). The solidity of States is all the more great because they coincide with the limits of nationalities, benefit from strong local and national identities and have efficient administrative systems of territorial divisions.

There are international relations. Since the States enjoy a total sovereignty, there is no possibility to build international institutions which would control the international scene and prevent, through the use of force, the triggering of conflicts and wars between States. The only possibility is to rely on the mechanism of dissuasion. The first classical model of political geography is a two-level one: political life relies on peaceful decision making within the national territories, and on the use of violence, or the threat of it, on the international scene. Such systems are not completely stable. Within each State, tensions can appear, with periods of tensions, crises and revolutions. On the international scene, the balance of power is always a fragile one. Periods of more or less generalized international warfare appear when a new balance of power is developing.

2. In the second model, there is no territories where rulers enjoy the legal monopoly of the use of violence. There are power structures which are located in different places. Around each of them, local rulers manage to control a territory - often, a relatively small one. They achieve these results because their power is locally accepted as a legitime one, which reduces the costs of control, or because everyone is aware of the means of coercion local rulers control. In such a model, dissuasion mechanisms are working both at the lower and upper levels. Fragmentation is, however, not total, since local rulers' polities participate in networks which support and help them in time of tensions and conflicts. Political life is structured along networks and not based on territories.

In order to function smoothly, such systems have to allow for long distance relations: hence the management, through agreements negociated among the local polities and rulers, of corridors for trade and other forms of relations, and of neutral places for holding meetings (BONNEMAISON, 1992). The «tribes without rulers» and Stateless societies of anthropologists offer good examples of such types of organization – see Kabylia for instance (MIDDLETON and TAIT, 1958).

The interest of such models is to remind that political life is always organized on a multi-scale basis: geographers have to explore what happens within each polity, and the way relations develop between them.

The evolution of political geographies

The spatial patterning of power and political life changed over time. We present here a short overview of this evolution.

The genesis of autonomous political systems and their spatial forms

It is important to explore the political life of societies where there are no autonomous political institutions, but it is mainly on the societies where such structures exist that political geography concentrates. The genesis of modern political institutions was a long process. There were many problems to solve (MANN, 1986):

- ideological problems: polities can develop only where religions and (or) ideologies legitimize the concentration of power in the hands of a caste, a group or a person;
- communication problems, since the rulers have to receive informations concerning all the area over which their power dominates; in this field, the invention of writing played an essential role, since it allowed for an easier and safer transmission of news and orders, and the preservation of objective testimonies of former decisions or agreements;
- economic problems, since the rulers have to levy taxes and to mobilize them in different points according to their domestic or foreign objectives; hence the significance of the monetarization of economy: it is easier to centralize levies and to control their use if they are not in kind;
- military problems, since the objective of internal and external security involves the presence of an armed force partly dispersed on all the territory and partly concentrated in strategic locations.

Michael Mann presented in the 80s a thought provoking reflection on the evolving structures and nature of political architecture and political life in the Antiquity and through the Middle Ages (MANN, 1986). The forging of States was possible, in countries like Egypt or Mesopotamia, from the 4th millenium B. C., but their structures were still fragile. Their rulers could exert only a limited control over the areas they dominated. The decline of commerce and long distance economic relations in the lower Middle Ages had dramatic consequences on the life of polities: except in the Middle East where economic life had remained prosperous, political systems had to be rebuilt on new principles. Since monetary economy had much declined, the Sovereign lost a good part of his former contol on his subordinates: hence the development of feudal regimes.

The Age of the Westphalian State

Bertrand Badie showed a few years ago that the basic institution which chanelled most of political life in Western civilization, the modern State, appeared in its classical form as an outcome of the treaties of Westphalia, in 1648 (BADIE, 1995). It is the reason for which he spoke of the Westphalian State to designate an

institution which dominated the national and international scenes for at least three centuries.

The Westphalian State is a purely rational State: it has guaranteed boundaries; on the international scene, it has the same formal rights than all the others. On the domestic scene, rulers enjoy the legal monopoly of the use of violence, which allows them to decide freely.

The Westphalian State evolved: it was born at the time of the absolutist monarchy; it went through the Enlightened despotism of the eighteenth century and the different forms of the national ideologies. It resisted the socialist revolutions of the first half of the twentieth century. It appeared as so natural a form of polity that it was exported all over the World, specially at the time of decolonization, and imposed upon societies which had not the same ethnic, cultural and economic characters as the Western ones (BADIE, 1992). Throughout all these transformations, the Westphalian States retained its basic characteristics: its formal political independance and the ensuing freedom of choice for its rulers.

The corollary of the Westphalian State was the existence of an international scene where dissuasion was the dominating mechanism. Nobody had the possibility to exert a legal power at this scale. All the States enjoy the same rights. The consequence was that an international order could only result from an equilibrium of forces, which reflected partly the economic and demographic components of the situation, but ultimately resulted from the use, or potential use, of armies and navies, and the capability of each country to rely on it.

As in each system of dissuasion, the life of the different polities was normally relatively easy thanks to the maintaining of a system of international circulation: it was achieved, from the mid of the 17th century, by the principle of free navigation on the seas, which offered all the States with a seashore an access to all the other. The opening of the seas was mainly achieved through the action of Britain (and a few other States) - the international system was an unequal one. It worked because one of its participants, Britain and later the United States, was committed to the maintaining of what appeared to them as an essential factor of stability.

The contemporary decline of the Westphalian State and the forms of international life associated with it

The contemporary changes in the political geography of the World have several causes (CLAVAL, 2003):

1. The consequences of the Two World Wars were so dramatic that it seemed imperative to create new forms of international organization: the Society of Nations after World War One, the United Nations Organization after World War Two. Since World War Two was partly the result of the collapse of the international market in

1929, a new set of International Institutions was developed in this field: the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Cooperation and Development, the organization of the GATT (now the International Commerce Organization).

The idea was quite evidently to ban the use of force and violence on the international scene. Because of the atomic weapons race, the dynamic of dissuasion did not disappear: it never appeared as crucial as between 1960 and the collapse of the Soviet Union. But in many fields, and because of the development of an increasing number of international institutions, the Westphalian State has lived.

2. Because of the technological innovations which occured during the twentieth century, the conditions of transport and communication have much changed: cheaper costs for transfering goods from a place to the other, quicker moves for travellers, possibilities to diffuse intantaneously all over the World increasing volumes of information. Globalization had important effects on the conditions of economic life: until fifty years ago, the productive phase of economic *filières* had to be located within limited areas since their functioning involved too important flows of information to be exchanged over long distances; today, this conditions were relaxed, which means that nations have lost most of the influence they could exert on economic life.

Until fifty years ago, international life was easily controlled by States since there were relatively few participants in international trade and other forms of relations: mainly enterprises, those involved in navigation, trade and the production of raw materials, on one hand, and Christian missions or humanitarian organizations on the other. Today, with the rapidity and low price of air transport, the number of people who travel abroad is much larger. The role of non-governmental organizations is more important than ever in the past.

3. Globalization is not the only process which transforms economic life. Since the 20s and 30s, it had became evident that the majority of national territories were not big enough to take full advantage of the economies of scale the new technologies could offer. Some possibilities of adaptation could be used: small sized countries specialized in the products for which the economies of scale were the less significant (agriculture or some equipments); middle sized ones concentrated on the productions for which they were big enough for the existing economies of scale; only the bigger ones, the USA essentially, could capitalize on all forms of scale economies.

From the early 50s, many nations began to seek for another solution: they tried to develop Custom Unions or Common Markets. It meant that States lost a large part of the power they could exert in the economic field. Supra-national institutions were created in order to insure theses forms of supranational economic cooperation.

4. The ideological context had deeply changed during the last fifty years. The idea of progress, which was central in both the liberal and socialist versions of Western cultures, has been severely criticized. The results of technical progress are impressive, but many of them are damageable for people. The philosophies of history, with their belief in the advent of a state of universal bliss for humanity on this Earth, have lost their credibility as well in Western societies as in non-Western ones.

This ideological change had important consequences on political structures: national territories have lost the support they had for a long time found in the philosophies of history. Nations have ceased to appear as the most convenient tools for promoting progress. As a result, national identities have been badly impaired. The class identities upon which relied the socialist countries have experienced a similar crisis. Hence the growing role of other forms of identities, either local, ecological or religious ones.

5. The political scene of today is undergoing rapid changes. Formally, it is still dominated by apparently Westphalian States, but the unequality between them has never been so great: some of them have so few resources to mobilize that the temptation is great for them to become rogue States and sell their sovereignty to international criminal organizations or terrorist enterprises (BADIE, 1995; 1999; 2002).

Because of the crisis of national identities and of the ideologies of Progress, the domestic structure of States which had enough resources to pay for an efficient administrative system and ambitious welfare policies has changed. Their population is more divided than in the past, with the growth of regionalist or localist movements and the development of a strong ethnic or religious consciousness among recent migrants. Because of the new facilities of travel and communication, these groups develop stronger relations with similar communities in the domestic area or abroad.

We are living a transition between the true Westphalian State system and forms of network structures in which each community struggle for the control of a limited territory and a right of access to neutral axes of communication and places of encounters and employment. For some groups, the role of the State has to be reduced to the guarantee of this right of access - but supranational or international forms of policy could as well achieve this result.

In order to avoid more severe forms of decline, States have to develop new strategies and accept to share a part of their former responsabilities with other territorial structures: it is the central problem of modern governance.

6. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, nuclear dissuasion has ceased to play as central a role in the international relations as during the previous fifty years. It apparently opened the way for a better functioning of the international institutions created during the twentieth century.

The dynamics of dissuasion did not, however, disappear. It just took other forms: it is relatively cheap and easy, for a fanatic group, to organize bomb attack on innocent civil populations. It is a new way to influence decision making and contest the power of established States and rulers.

7. Most societies have today democratic regimes, which means that their political life presents an alternation of phases, the electoral ones, when a logic of power competition is at work, and the periods in-between, when the elected government is free to develop the policy it has been elected for.

The reality is substantially different. The democratic electoral system worked relatively well before the development of the modern medias. Today politicians live with an eye on the results of polls, which means that the process of negociation and dissuasion has been reintroduced in the periods where they had to disapper. In many countries, the defeated parties use the democratic rights to organize a permanent guerilla warfare on the front of social and economic life, using of strikes and public meetings or happenings as a mean to contest the democratic results of electoral consultations.

It is the reason for which the study of political life in all its dimension, its domestic geostrategies more particularly, is so important.

Conclusion

This reflection on the nature and scope of political geography was intended to show the interest on an approach based on the analysis of the political process instead of a direct territorial approach: it covers all the aspects of political life, explains most of its aspects, shows the diversity of the political architectures which were experienced in the past or function today in this field.

This reflection stresses also the origin and causes of most contemporary political problems: the crisis of the State, the decline of former types of identities, the rise of terrorism as a fundamental problem in national and international life. It shows the growing role of networks structure in the politicial field.

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