Foucault and Africa: Governmentality, IR theory, and the limits of advanced liberalism

Carl Death
Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University

Abstract

The use of Foucauldian analysis and political theory in International Politics has been heavily scrutinised recently, with articles by Jan Selby and Jonathan Joseph among others critiquing the way in which Foucauldian-inspired research has conceptualised ‘the international’. The role of Africa in this debate has been interesting, as it has frequently invoked as one of the limits of Foucauldian thought; a realm of politics so far removed from the advanced liberal European societies which Foucault’s own work addressed that it marks a point at which theorists should reject their Foucauldian theoretical frameworks and turn to other approaches. Beginning by briefly reflecting upon the significance of the Tunisian period to Foucault’s own work, this paper explores the invocations of ‘Africa’ in these debates, assesses the degree to which Foucauldian-inspired empirical and theoretical research on African politics is guilty of the charges laid down against them, and argues that Foucauldian-inspired governmentality approaches can have analytical purchase in non-liberal societies, and that they can also tell us something interesting about contemporary global politics.

Introduction

The protests across North Africa in recent months have prompted many commentators to draw comparisons with the waves of democratisations in Eastern Europe and Africa in 1989 and the early 1990s. For some these events in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya seem to confirm the incipient existence of latent, organic civil societies which have risen up as part of an ‘Arab Spring’ to topple authoritarian states (Hayes, 2011). Such claims recall John Harbeson’s earlier identification of African civil society as the “hitherto missing key to sustained political reform, legitimate states and governments, improved governance, [and] viable state-society and state-economy relationships” (Harbeson, 1994: 1-2) during the last major wave of popular protests.
A Foucauldian-inspired enquiry into these uprisings, in contrast, prompts us to ask different questions and holds different assumptions regarding the nature and role of civil society-state relationships. One of the insights of the governmentality literature has been to view civil society as an effect of power relations, rather than an actor which pre-exists power relationships, and Foucault sought to show how forms of power relation that work at a distance and through the creation of ‘free’, responsible, self-governing individuals and civil societies characterise contemporary politics (Foucault, 2007; 2008). As Graham Burchell notes, for Foucault civil society is not “a kind of aboriginal reality that finally we are forced to recognize; it is not a natural given standing in opposition to the timeless essential nature of the state. Not is it an ideological construct or something fabricated by the state. It is, he says, the correlate of a political technology of government” (Burchell, 1991: 141; see also Foucault, 2008: 296-7). This paper explores some of the implications of thinking about civil societies, individuals, states, and populations as correlates of political technologies of government, with a particular interest in the field of African politics.

However, the applicability of Foucault’s thought in general, and particularly the concept of governmentality, to global politics has come in for sustained criticism in some recent articles. African politics has played a particularly interesting role in these critiques, invoked as a ‘limit’ to liberal forms of government, beyond which analyses predicated on advanced-liberal or neo-liberal formations of power cannot go. It is in this context that Jonathan Joseph, whose work has provided a major impetus for this paper, approvingly quotes Larner and Walters’ assertion that “areas like sub-Saharan Africa are relatively bare spots on the map. The networks of capital and information associated with postindustrial progress are sparse and

---

1 This paper is Foucault-inspired, and engages with other Foucault-inspired literature. It is not concerned with clarifying or debating Foucault’s own work, or ascertaining whether he provides concepts that can be directly translated to other fields of research. It is rather an engagement in a set of debates with those who have been inspired by Foucault’s own research and mode of thinking, with the purpose of developing (potentially) similar approaches to different fields of research.
stretched in these zones” (Joseph, 2010b: 236, citing Larner and Walters, 2002: 421). Africa in general – the only country Joseph refers to in this article is Sierra Leone – is thus used to demonstrate the inadequacy of governmentality-inspired engagements with international politics, and Joseph concludes that “[i]f we are concerned with how techniques of governmentality build lasting social cohesion, then clearly areas like sub-Saharan Africa are currently non-starters” (2010b: 238-9).² This usage of Africa echoes the stale, tired and Kaplan-esque dismissals of life on the ‘Dark Continent’ as nasty brutish and short (Kaplan, 2000), or Hans Morgenthau’s description of Great Power expansion “into the political empty spaces of Africa and Asia” during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (quoted in Dunn, 2001: 2). Yet scepticism towards the applicability of poststructuralist or postmodernist approaches has also come from within African studies (see discussions in Abrahamsen, 2003; Ahluwalia, 2001; Shani, 2010). Foucault has frequently been caricatured as a Euro-centric, inward-looking theorist obsessed with textuality, discourse and representations, and having little of value to say to those outside metropolitan café culture (Williams, 1997).

Foucault’s Eurocentrism has perhaps been over-emphasised, however (Escobar, 1984-5: 378; Jabri, 2007; Vrasti, 2010). Whilst his intellectual focus was certainly on the historic emergence of regimes of power, knowledge and subjectivity within the West, Foucault lived and worked in Tunisia from 1966-8, and was closely involved with student anti-government protests in Tunis against the Bourguiba regime (Foucault, 2000: 279-80; Macey, 1993: 183-208). Foucault also appears to have considered a move to Zaire, and was attracted to “the sun, the sea, the great warmth of Africa” which he believed allowed him a sense of perspective and a better vantage point to reflect upon European social and political institutions (Ahluwalia, 2010: 599). For Pal Ahluwalia, Foucault’s methodological transition from

² A more empirically grounded engagement in African politics is presented in (Joseph, 2010a).
archaeology to genealogy can be attributed to his period in Tunisia, and “it was the student revolts of Tunisia that had the effect of politicising his work” (Ahluwalia, 2010: 605; see also Foucault, 2000: 279-80; Macey, 1993: 204-6).

The significance of this Tunisian experience for Foucault’s politicisation, and the echoes of 1966-8 in the Tunisian protests of 2010-11, prompted me to reflect on what Foucault’s work on governmentality might inspire for the analysis of contemporary African and global politics. Such a question, however, immediately comes up against the recent strident critiques of the relevance of governmentality outside Western advanced liberal societies. This paper is a response to these critiques, and it argues that Foucauldian-inspired governmentality approaches can have analytical purchase in non-liberal societies, and that they can also tell us something interesting about contemporary global politics. It does so through the following steps. In the following section the most relevant criticisms of the Foucauldian-inspired global governmentality literature are set out, and an initial methodological distinction between governmentality as an approach and governmentality as a description of a specific form of neoliberal power relation is established. I argue that governmentality is most useful conceptualised as an approach to the study of regimes of rule with particular attention to the conduct of conduct through certain visibilities, practices, knowledges and subjectivities, and to the interrelationship between sovereign, disciplinary and liberal power relations, rather than as a particular (liberal or neoliberal) form of power relation or rationality of rule. Subsequent sections respond to specific critiques regarding the where, what and why of governmentality.

First, the paper directly tackles the suggestion that governmentality only applies within domestic polities by discussing how governmentality scholars have sought to address global
and international power relations. The contention that governmentality only applies to advanced liberal societies is tackled by highlighting some of the more insightful governmentality-inspired analyses of African politics, with a particular focus on the work of Jean-François Bayart. The second section considers what is being governed by governmentality, and argues that it is the focus upon the creation of different types of states, civil societies, populations, and individuals that characterises a governmentality approach. The apparent failure of liberal forms of governance to create liberal citizens and civil societies does not, contra Joseph, invalidate it as an analytical approach. The final section addresses the critique that governmentality approaches do not sufficiently address causal questions, initially by discussing what might be implied by causality in these critiques, before proceeding to show that a governmentality perspective can in fact address questions of why global politics is the way it is. A governmentality analysis draws attention to the existence of uneven, heterogeneous spaces of global governance, where sovereign, disciplinary and liberal rationalities of rule are combined in varying degrees, of which contemporary African politics provides many salient examples.

Critiques of governmentality in International Relations (IR)
Criticisms of Foucauldian trespassing into international or comparative politics, whether friendly and constructive or indignant and dismissive, are certainly not new. However, the publication of Foucault’s lecture series at the Collège de France, Society Must be Defended (delivered in 1975-6; Foucault, 2003), Security, Territory, Population (delivered 1977-8; Foucault, 2007); and The Birth of Biopolitics (delivered 1978-9; Foucault, 2008), have reignited some of these debates and critiques over the usage of Foucault in IR (Joseph, 2009; 2010b; 2010c; Selby, 2007; see also the special issues of Global Society 23[4] in 2009, and International Political Sociology, 2[4] in 2010). Whilst these debates have discussed a range
of concepts and ideas including power/knowledge, discourse, biopolitics, the *dispositif*, security, archaeology and genealogy, in this paper I am primarily concerned with the debates around the use of governmentality in global or international politics, and its application to ‘non-liberal’ societies. Governmentality is, of course, a complex and contested bundle of concepts, approaches and ideas, but rather than begin with a definition this paper seeks to map a particular reading and use of governmentality through the recent critiques it has attracted.3

The most constructive and productive critiques of the application of governmentality in international politics have come from Critical Theory and Marxist-influenced approaches, rather than the neorealist and neoinstitutionalist branches of IR. These critiques have been productive in that, whilst often broadly supportive of the use of governmentality to cast detailed empirical light on the operations contemporary power relations – particularly in terms of the mobilisation of neoliberal free-market techniques of auditing, assessment, benchmarking, partnership and the creation of self-governing actors, at a distance from traditional loci of power and authority – they have sought to push governmentality theorists further in terms of the broader implications of such approaches. Whilst such critiques are not new – indeed, according to Gordon (1991: 4), it was precisely in response to leftist dissatisfactions with the ‘micro-politics’ of disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish* that Foucault sought to ‘scale up’ his analysis to forms of bio-power and governmentality in *The History of Sexuality* and subsequent lecture series (cf. Collier, 2009: 81-3; Neumann and Sending, 2010: 21-2) – these critiques are broadly welcome in that they encourage governmentality approaches to refine their aims, concepts and conclusions.

3 Some useful introductions to the concept of governmentality are available at Dean (1999), Gordon (1991), Foucault (2007: 87-114), Larner and Walters (2004), and Neumann and Sending (2010).
This paper engages specifically with the critiques presented by Joseph (2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c) and Selby (2007). Both these authors have expressed their support for the use of governmentality in certain ways, whilst calling for its insertion within broader structural perspectives on global politics. Joseph, for example, “draws on a broadly Marxist account of international relations in order to put governmentality in its proper place” (2010b: 224; see also Selby, 2007: 326). The central concerns these critiques raise focus on the where, what and why of governmentality. In terms of the first of these questions, Joseph asks “whether governmentality, as a set of liberal techniques, really does apply to all parts of the globe”, and “whether there is such a thing as a global governmentality – that is to say, not just governmentality operating in different parts of the world, but governmentality regulating the whole globe” (2009: 417-8). The role of ‘Africa’ in this line of questioning is particularly interesting, as will be shown below, as it seems to act as an ultimate limit, a foreign Other emblematic of that which governmentality cannot comprehend.

Joseph’s article Governmentality of what? enquires into the proper object of governmentality analysis, and of governmental techniques. He draws a distinction between the government of populations and the government of states, concluding somewhat paradoxically that “global governmentality is mostly about the unsuccessful regulation of populations and that it is precisely by virtue of this that the successful regulation of states can occur” (2009: 427). This concern with the object of governmentality, and what happens when liberal governmentality appears to fail, opens up a broader set of concerns regarding the relationship of liberalism, neo-liberalism and advanced liberal rule to the governmentality approach.

Some of these concerns stem from the way in which governmentality has been deployed in at least two crucially different ways by those using it empirically, stemming from Foucault’s
own ambiguous and varied usage (Joseph, 2010c: 202-3; Larner and Walters, 2004: 2-3).⁴

First, some have used it as a general approach, framework or method for analysing mentalities or rationalities of government. The ‘analytics of government’ proposed by Mitchell Dean is symptomatic of this approach, which advocates examination of the fields of visibility, regimes of knowledge, techniques and technologies, and forms of subjectification of a regime of government (1999: 20). This can be applied to almost any considered, or rationalised, form of government, including authoritarian rule (Dean, 2002). The second approach to governmentality regards it rather as a particular and historically specific rationality of rule, considered by Foucault to have emerged in the eighteenth century and to have been expressed in the neo-liberalism of the Chicago School and Ordo-Liberals of the second half of the twentieth century (Gordon, 1991; Lemke, 2001; Neumann and Sending, 2010). This is the use of governmentality which is often deployed synonymously with liberalism, neo-liberalism, or advanced liberal rule. Although these two usages are very similar, they have different implications in terms of the applicability of governmentality, and thus some clarification by those who use the word would be useful (cf. Joseph, 2010c: 202-3).

In this paper I follow Dean in using governmentality to refer to an approach to the study of regimes of rule with particular attention to the conduct of conduct through certain visibilities, practices, knowledges and subjectivities, and to the interrelationship between sovereign, disciplinary and liberal power relations (see Death, 2010a: 20). It is therefore a way of making sense of how the world is ordered and governed, rather than a description of a particular way of ordering the world. Whilst this usage of governmentality implies it can be used to enquire into any particular form or rationality of the conduct of conduct, it is certainly

⁴ Foucault himself used the term ‘governmentality’ in at least three ways (2007: 108), and the governmentality literature has subsequently used the term to describe government as the conduct of conduct, as a focus on the mentality or rationality underlying government, and as a historically specific practice of rule (see Walters and Haahr, 2005).
true that it has been most productive and incisive in its analysis of liberalism and neoliberalism as governmental rationalities.

The final and perhaps most firmly stated critique has been directed at the perceived reluctance of governmentality theorists to consider ‘why’ questions. Joseph argues that “[w]hile Foucauldians will reply that the aim is to explain the how, not to get caught up in the why, without the causal why, the range and limits of how governmentality works are impossible to explain” (2010b: 242). Selby agrees, arguing that

Foucauldian tools can be used to theorise the ‘how of power’, as Foucault put it, but they cannot help us in understanding the ‘when’, the ‘where’ or (most significantly) the ‘why’ of power. The notion of ‘governmentality’, for example, while it can shed light on how populations are administered and subjects are constituted in, say, modern Turkey, or can point us towards the novel mechanisms by which the New Partnership for African Development is attempting to self-discipline African states into ‘good governance’, cannot itself be used to explain why the Turkish state is more governmentalised than the Syrian one, why there is so much ‘bad governance’ in Africa specifically, or indeed what the purposes and objectives of governmentality are (2007: 337).

Both Joseph and Selby suggest that Marxist and Neo-Gramscian frameworks can provide a governmentality approach with a broader structural context within which ‘why’ questions can be answered (Joseph, 2010c: 203-4; Selby, 2007: 340).

I agree that it is possible for governmentality analyses to proceed in conjunction with broader critical perspectives inspired by Marxist approaches to political economy. Indeed, Foucault’s own analysis in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* is frequently framed in these terms, as Joseph himself recognises (2010b: 229). In other cases, however, governmentality analyses could be deployed in conjunction with feminist, ecologist, or even
liberal anti-authoritarian critiques. Yet a governmentality approach should not be forced into a last instance reliance on identifying ‘relations of production’, ‘patriarchy’, or ‘human nature’ as underlying causal drivers, as Joseph notes elsewhere (2010a: 45). The primary utility of a Foucauldian approach to governmentality is providing methodological tools for a close, textured analysis of power relations in operation, and the temptation of framing these within an overall meta-theoretical structure is often worth resisting. Even its critics seem undecided on this point. In a single article, Joseph declares that “[m]y advice to the governmentality theorists is then: do not try and make it do too much”, before concluding, merely a page later, with the request that governmentality theorists help “explain the complex and contradictory workings of capitalist social relations in the twenty-first century. Of course one can ask, why try and do so much? But this is no different from asking, why do IR?” (Joseph, 2010c: 203-4).

As this last quote reveals, many of these critiques rest, in the end, on quite mainstream understandings of what IR is, and should be. This has resulted in many Foucauldian responses lambasting them for disciplinary boundary-policing, and a valorisation of Foucault as a rebellious transgressor destabilising established conceptions of social science, politics, and international relations (Debrix, 2010; Neal, 2009; Pasha, 2010). Without wishing to deny any of these points, this has enabled some evasion of the critiques’ most challenging points. The following sections therefore attempt to engage seriously with the challenges posed by the ‘where, what and why’ questions, and to use them to identify some of the most productive insights a governmentality approach to African and global politics can provide.
Where is governmentality? Africa and the international

In essence the main argument of this paper – or at least the first and most important step of the argument – is encapsulated in the following claim and counter-claim: critics of governmentality have argued that it is tied theoretically to either the domestic realm, or to international relations within and between advanced liberal states; in contrast I argue, drawing upon a wide range of governmentality-informed empirical analyses, that a governmentality approach can provide illuminating insights into the operation of politics in societies outside Western liberal democracies, as well as into the operation of contemporary global politics. This critique of ‘where’ governmentality is applicable has two dimensions: first that ‘the international’ has an ontological specificity that a domestically-orientated theorist like Foucault cannot grasp; and secondly that there are parts of the world (such as Africa) where governmentality does not work. This section will address these in turn.

The first claim, that Foucault’s work on governmentality was mainly confined to the domestic level and to micro-analyses of power and is therefore only problematically scaled up to the international or global dimension, is one that has provoked a great deal of attention, much of it in early debates over IR’s constitutive distinction between the international and domestic (Dillon, 1995; Walker, 1993). Selby argues that the main reasons “for IR’s narrow engagement with Foucault derive, as in the case of Gramsci, from the distinctive problems of ‘internationalising’ a theorist whose focus was primarily on the ‘domestic’ social arena” (2007: 325). He also highlights Foucault’s preference for micro-techniques of power (2007: 329), and argues that there is “an ontological specificity and irreducibility to the international, which poses distinctive analytical problems and demands distinctive theoretical tools” (2007: 326). Selby is not the first to have articulated these arguments and, as many Foucauldian theorists have pointed out, Foucault’s work does have the potential to destabilise claims about
the ontological specificity and irreducibility of the international, and therefore potentially poses a direct threat to the coherence and integrity of IR as a discipline (see Dillon, 1995; Neal, 2009; Pasha, 2010; Rosenow, 2009; Vrasti, 2010).

There are a number of lines of response to such a critique. The distinction between micro- and macro- analysis appears initially substantive, given Foucault’s repeated insistence on the necessity of studying power in its capillary forms and its effects, and his concerns with the processes by which individuals are subjectivised and made into self-governing citizens. However, Foucault’s work also contains many concepts – such as bio-power – which do enable focussing on larger-scale questions. Foucault spends some time in lecture series such as Society Must be Defended (Foucault, 2003: 43-62), Security, Territory, Population (Foucault, 2007: 285-306), and The Birth of Biopolitics (Foucault, 2008: 51-70) discussing the formation of nation-states, the international politics of early modern Europe, and the global expansion of liberalism. Moreover, according to Collier (2009), Foucault himself never subscribed to a distinction between micro- and macro- scales of analysis. In any case there are plenty of examples of empirical analyses which have taken Foucault beyond Foucault in order to explore the discursive effects of power at the global, regional, international, and world levels (Abrahamsen, 2004; Dillon, 1995; Escobar, 1984-5; Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Fougner, 2008; Jabri, 2007; Larner and Walters, 2002; 2004; Löwenheim, 2008; Luke, 1996; Zanotti, 2005). The work of Neumann and Sending is worth highlighting in this regard because of their explicit attempts to situate a governmentality approach within the bounds of the discipline of IR, arguing that ‘the international’ has shifted from a system of anarchy between sovereign states to a system characterised by liberal norms and forms of government (2007; 2010).
Fundamentally, however, perhaps the most significant insight of a governmentality approach is to refuse the ontological specificity of ‘the international’ and ‘the domestic’ (Rosenow, 2009: 500). A governmentality approach posits that these are not pre-existing irreducible entities, but that they are themselves the products of particular governmental rationalities and practices. An analytics of government approach (Dean, 1999) can help to understand how ‘the international’ was and is constituted through the emergence of particular mentalities of thinking about global politics that underpin practices such as foreign offices and embassies, diplomats and conferences, international law and the institutions of war; just as Foucault’s own work made an important contribution to historical sociology’s understanding of the rise of the modern state – through statistics, the idea of the national economy, the emergence of civil society and so on.

Such an approach is potentially threatening to those who continue to hold to the idea that the international is a distinctive sphere of politics, following different rules and logics to the domestic. In this regard the disdain in which the discipline of IR is held by some political theorists, historical sociologists, political economists and historians is perhaps well-deserved (Bayart, 2007: 9-10; Callaghy et al, 2001). It is almost *de rigueur* within African studies to question the relevance or applicability of IR theory to understanding politics on the continent (Dunn, 2001; Jones, 2005). Yet, of course, international politics is of crucial importance to the history and politics of Africa, and a great many empirical and theoretical political analyses have sought to address the role of transnational linkages and global/local politics in Africa (Dunn, 2001; Ferguson, 2007; Callaghy et al, 2001; Clapham, 1996; Mbembe, 2002; Nordstrom, 2001).

---

5 There are of course many exceptions, and in recent decades it has become commonplace for IR theorists to problematise the ‘Great Divide’ between the international and domestic (e.g. Clark, 1999; Walker, 1993).
Most relevant for the present paper is the work of Jean-François Bayart, whose extraversion thesis on the state in Africa draws upon a governmentality approach to understand African forms of rule as characterised by the mobilisation of “resources derived from their (possibly unequal) relationship with the external environment” (Bayart, 2009: 21-2). His central thesis is a rejection of the neo-Hegelian image of a marginal Africa outside of history and the international, cut off or detached from the modern world, a bare spot on the map (Bayart, 2009: x-xi). He states baldly that “[t]he interaction between Africa and the rest of the world cannot be considered as a relationship, as Africa is in no sense extraneous to the world” (2009: xxxiii). Rather, Africa has played an important role in European, American and Middle Eastern history, and for African societies and elites, the external environment is and has been “a major resource in the process of political centralisation and economic accumulation” (2009: xii). Thus he argues that “sovereignty in Africa is exercised through the creation and management of dependence” (2009: xxvi), and this has been a feature of the longue durée of the African state, as true during the colonial period as during the Cold War and the 1990s (2009: xv-xix).

Bayart’s governmentality approach – whilst not elaborated at length – is central to his work. He uses it to distance himself from the dependency theory arguments of authors like Walter Rodney and Basil Davidson, and to show that dependency, subjectivity and autonomy can be related and co-constitutive categories, rather than analytical opposites (2009: xiii), as can resistance and complicity (2009: xxiii, 208, 250-3). Governmentality is employed by Bayart primarily as an approach to the study of forms of rule, rather than as a synonym for neoliberalism. He focuses upon the practices, technologies and mentalities of government, in

---

6 On Bayart’s differences with Foucault, see (2009: li and lxxxvii). Bayart’s analysis could not be described as purely Foucauldian (whatever that might mean), and many of the categories he employs throughout his analysis are borrowed from Gramsci (Bayart, 2009: chapter 7) and Deleuze and Guattari (Bayart, 2009: 220-1). Yet he concludes that that a governmentality approach – in contrast to the use of other terms such as hegemony, historical bloc, and culture – “is more likely to avoid the trap of unwarranted totalisation” (2009: 271).
which government is understood as rule through the creation of autonomous subjects, rather than domination or coercion – an “action upon other actions” (Bayart, 2007: xi; 2009: xiii, 267-8). He states clearly that a governmentality approach should “consist of identifying, in any given society, the principal discursive registers of politics” (2009: 271), and resisting the dichotomy between dominators and dominated (272). Thus the central thesis captured in the sub-title of his most well-known book, that Africa is characterised by the politque du ventre (the politics of the belly), is described in terms of a particular governmental rationality, or discursive register of politics. The politics of the belly reflects “the fact that both politicians and their fellow citizens share a particular governmentality together with the imaginary figures of power that are part and parcel of it. It is in terms of a system of power-through-eating” (2009: xxii; see also Mbembe, 1992, 2001).

Bayart also emphasises Africa’s insertion within broader formations of neoliberal globalization, especially in terms of the privatisation of relations between Africa and international/transnational actors: private security firms, aid agencies, warlords, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), drug smugglers, transnational corporations (TNCs), private foundations, and many others (2009: xxiv). “Africa is thus, in its way, a player in the process of globalisation” (Bayart, 2009: xl). Africa, for Bayart, is far from marginal: it exports vast quantities of primary resources essential for the global economy (including, increasingly, oil); it receives substantial quantities of aid; it imports large quantities of consumer goods; it sends out migrants and sucks in remittances; it is at the centre of the world’s illegal narcotics trade; and events like 9/11, the Iraq war, and Chinese investment and hunger for resources and geopolitical influence have given the continent a new strategic significance (2009: xxxviii-xl; cf. 21, 100-101).
Bayart’s analysis is useful because it highlights the mutually constitutive relationship between realms which IR critics of governmentality like Selby argue are ontologically distinct. As a theorist of the historical sociology of the African state, Bayart argues that “globalisation is simply an element in the ongoing formation of the state” (2009: xliv), and he explains that this is why his monograph on the African state contains no chapter entitled ‘Africa and the world’ as in similar overview books, because “[t]he ‘external dynamics’ are not really separable from the ‘internal’, and the postcolonial State has come about at the point where they meet” (2009: lxxxvii). Elsewhere, in a monograph on globalisation, Bayart observes the other side of this relationship, arguing that “globalization is ours because we have created it” (2007: x), and that “the ‘event’ of globalization appears … as the systematization of the historical experience of extraversion” (2007: 289). Thus his theory of extraversion, he argues, “bypasses a sterile distinction between the internal dimension of African societies and their insertion in the international system” (2009: xxxiii). As such Bayart’s work is a powerful rejoinder to those who would claim that a governmentality approach cannot address important questions of global and international politics.

The second element of the ‘where’ critique is that certain parts of the world are not conducive to a governmentality analysis. Joseph argues explicitly “that because the international domain is highly uneven, contemporary forms of governmentality can only usefully be applied to those areas that might be characterized as having an advanced form of liberalism” (2010b: 224). He does acknowledge that certain empirical cases can be productively analysed through a governmentality approach, such as the neoliberal rationality at work in the actions of international agencies and NGOs, peacekeepers, and private security companies. What concerns him, however, is the apparent failure of these govern-mentalities on the ground in certain parts of the world. Whereas the same mentalities might effectively work to create free,
self-governing, entrepreneurial individuals in Europe or North America (liberal societies), in places like Africa they are externally imposed and have limited effects, he suggests. “What we see in Africa, in the area of security and elsewhere, is a drive to neoliberal governmentality coming from the outside, something quite different from the governmentalization of Western societies” (Joseph, 2010b: 237). His conclusion is that governmentality theorists might more usefully confine their analysis to cases like the EU, whereas “[i]n other parts of the world the management of populations may have to rely on cruder disciplinary practices” (2010b: 239).

The manifest weakness of Joseph’s argument here is its lack of empirical grounding, or consideration of any empirical research that uses a governmentality approach in these ‘other parts of the world’.7 Whilst Bayart’s theoretical argument is nuanced and persuasive, he cannot be accused of producing abstract arguments ungrounded in empirical research. Rather, much like Foucault himself, Bayart’s methodology is one of detailed historical archaeology and political genealogy. ‘Africa’ is not an undifferentiated mass to Bayart (as it seems to appear in some of Joseph’s work, in contrast), but rather his historical sociology of the state proceeds through textured accounts of politics in Cameroon, Côte D’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Burundi, as well as comparative reflections on ex-British and Portuguese colonies. The argument that the governmentality approach is unsuited to politics outside Western liberalism is rendered flimsy by such a detailed account of the micro-practices and governmental rationalities at work across African societies, and between Africa and the world. “More than ever,” Bayart concludes, “the neo-Hegelian discourse of Africa’s marginality is nonsense” (2009: lxx). There are many further examples of theoretically sophisticated empirical research on societies in Africa and the rest of the

---

7 Joseph’s article on poverty reduction strategies does, in contrast, engage with some theoretically-informed empirical research on countries like Uganda and Tanzania (2010a).
world which also draw upon governmentality frameworks (Agrawal, 2005; Chatterjee, 2004; Comaroff, 1998; Duffield, 2001; Ferguson, 1994; Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Jackson, 2005; Mbembe, 2001, 2004; Robins, 2002). As Arun Agrawal argues, “[t]reating governmentality as an analytical construct exposes its potential usefulness in investigating the nature of institutionalized power outside of Western modernity” (2005: 219).

At this point, it is possible that some of the critics of governmentality will be prepared to concede that a governmentality approach offers some useful and productive insights into the analysis of societies outside of Europe and North America, and even into the relationship between them and the rest of the world. In short, that governmentality as an analytical approach has some purchase, for example in responding to Joseph’s plea that “we must be aware of the particular nature of different societies” (2010b: 241), and his suggestion that “IR theorists should be interested in looking at the relationship between the dominant dynamics in the international system and the specific conditions in different places” (2010c: 203). The empirical work referred to above does precisely this. The critiques presented by Joseph and Selby, however, argue that the implicit or explicit association of governmentality with liberal, neo-liberal, or advanced liberal form of rule means that its usefulness must be limited in societies where these are not the dominant forms of rule. It is to these concerns – and the question of what happens when liberal governmental rationalities fail – that the next section turns.

**What is governmentality? The failure of liberal governmentality**

If governmentality as a broader approach to analysing forms of rule is well attuned to the differences between different societies and forms of rule, critics of the governmentality literature have expressed concern that in its narrower association with liberalism, neo-
liberalism and advanced liberalism as specific rationalities of rule it risks overly homogenising global politics, or even imputing to global politics a liberal character that it might not possess. The dangers of confusing governmentality as a broadly applicable approach to research, and governmentality as a specific neoliberal form of rule, seems to be the source of Joseph’s warning not “to give governmentality such a generalized form that it explains all social relations across the globe” (2010b: 241). In examining the usage of governmentality deployed by Iver Neumann and Ole Jacob Sending, he develops the following critique:

Neumann and Sending note that ‘liberalism is a particular logic of governing – a form of power that is characteristic of modern society, which operates indirectly by shaping and fostering autonomous and responsible individuals’ (2007: 694). Given this definition, can the idea that power is exercised over ‘free’ subjects really be applied to Afghanistan? Do we find in sub-Saharan Africa the exercise of power through free and autonomous individuals? Can the rationality and ethos of liberalism really be applied to the Middle East? (Joseph, 2010b: 242).

Aside from the rather bold brush strokes here that, in an almost Huntingtonian style, defines freedom, autonomy and liberalism as foreign to Afghanistan, the entirety of sub-Saharan Africa, and the whole of the Middle East, this critique appears to rest upon a rather rigid and implausible operationalisation of governmentality. The question of ‘what’ is being governed in the governmentality literature thus requires closer attention.

In fact, in an earlier and much more nuanced article Joseph develops this question far more insightfully. His article Governmentality of what? (2009) raises some important questions for governmentality theorists, specifically regarding the question of the objects and subjects of government. Regrettably, however, Joseph largely confines his analysis to the government of
states and populations, argues in quite a doctrinaire fashion that “'[g]overnmentality of what?' should always mean governmentality of populations” (2009: 425), and concludes somewhat confusingly that “global governmentality is mostly about the unsuccessful regulation of populations and that it is precisely by virtue of this that the successful regulation of states can occur” (2009: 427; see also the discussion in Joseph, 2010a). Such an assertion, doubtlessly reached in order to ‘fit’ governmentality more manageably into IR theory, would unhelpfully limit the scope of analysis, were governmentality theorists to take Joseph’s advice. In contrast, rather than determining a priori what the focus of the governmentality approach is or should be, precisely one of the most important steps in an analytics of government is to ask what forms of subjectivity are created by governmental rationalities (Dean, 1999: 32). Thus states (Fougner, 2008; Neumann and Sending, 2010), populations (Sending and Neumann, 2006), international institutions and organisations (Zanotti, 2005), civil societies (Burchell, 1991), individuals (Agrawal, 2005), markets and corporations (Duffield, 2001; Leander and van Munster, 2007), regions (Larner and Walters, 2002), the global and ‘the international’ itself (Larner and Walters, 2004; Neumann and Sending, 2007, 2010) are all potential objects of a governmentality approach. The task of an analytics of government (Dean, 1999) is to map the ways in which economically rational African states are produced through benchmarking and rating systems of good governance (Abrahamsen, 2004: 1463; Fougner, 2008; Löwenheim, 2008); or how indigenous peoples are constructed through colonial anthropology, transnational NGO advocacy, and local activism (Hodgson, 2009); or how responsible civil societies are produced through techniques of public participation and engagement (Death, 2006; 2010a).

Those who have used governmentality to refer to specifically liberal rationalities of government must certainly be careful not to give the impression that power relations in all
societies are best defined in terms of the creation of free, responsible, autonomous liberal individuals competing rationally in open markets (cf. Lipschutz, 2005). To do so would be to confirm Selby’s claim that “the internationalisation and globalisation of Foucault’s model of power is necessarily both premised on, and productive of, a paradigmatically liberal internationalist understanding of world order” (2007: 334). Joseph concurs, suggesting that “[t]he ironic danger of over-applying the concept of governmentality in IR is to reinforce the ideological claim that we live in a liberal international order” (2010b: 242). I am not sure, however, that this is what many governmentality theorists, or those applying the concept empirically, actually do. Indeed, such criticisms have also been posed by those working within the Foucauldian governmentality literature, such as Stephen Collier who sees a tendency to reify and totalise governmentality – usually synonymously with ‘neoliberalism’ – and characterise all global power relations, everywhere, as governmental and neoliberal (Collier, 2009: 97-8).

What is more, this is certainly not what Foucault’s later lectures on governmentality give license to. Whilst in the early stages of formulation one sometimes gets the impression that one form of power is being replaced by another (sovereign by disciplinary power in Discipline and Punish; or discipline by bio-power in The History of Sexuality, for example), where these lines of research are most fully developed, such as in the Security, Territory, Population lectures, he is clear that rather than one mode replacing the other, “we have a triangle: sovereignty, discipline, and governmental management, which has population as its main target and apparatuses of security as its essential mechanism” (Foucault, 2007: 107-8). The deployment of governmentality as a way of approaching the analysis of world politics does not therefore imply the redundancy of sovereign or disciplinary modes of power (Dillon, 1995), but rather how they are combined. To draw attention to the particularly neoliberal
governmental rationalities that characterise NGO or international financial institution (IFI) behaviour in Tanzania, Uganda or Mozambique for example, does not necessarily imply that the same governmental rationality will predominate in the DRC, Somalia or Sierra Leone.  

Crucially, therefore, a governmentality approach draws attention to the fact that liberal rationalities of rule have always established boundaries between those for whom freedom and individuality is appropriate, and those who need tutelage and civilising, and those who need pacification or extermination. Thus Selby’s argument that “the globalisation of a Foucauldian model of power ends up inspiring a quintessentially liberal, rather than realist, reading of international politics” (2007: 336) appears to be seriously mistaken. In drawing attention to the power relations at work within liberal forms of rule, and the centrality of struggle within ‘the political’, a governmentality perspective seems in fact to share far more with critical realist readings of global politics, as Neumann and Sending argue (2007; 2010).

This attention to the stratifications, distinctions and boundaries drawn by prevailing liberal rationalities of government does raise certain questions about the places in which they appear to fail, or limits beyond which they cannot operate, as Joseph highlights.

This leaves a situation in which governmentality appears not to work in certain parts of the world, yet where international organisations seek to intervene precisely on this basis. Clearly the task that flows as a consequence of this – something not achieved by most IR approaches to governmentality – is to explain governmentality through its failure and to point to the way that techniques developed in one part of the world have been imposed on societies with quite different social conditions as a form of the exercise of power by Northern-dominated institutions (Joseph, 2009: 427).

8 For an excellent discussion of how “governance states” are established by the IFIs in Africa and treated differently to other potentially ‘failing’ African states, see Harrison (2004).
Although I am somewhat reluctant to entirely accept the argument that governmental forms of power are primarily imposed on or over other societies by domineering Northern states or institutions (recalling Foucault’s warning “let us not look for the headquarters that presides over its rationality” [1998: 95]), I am happy to broadly agree with Joseph on this point. The activities of the World Bank (Ferguson, 1994; Joseph, 2010a; Neumann and Sending, 2010: 141-5), World Economic Forum (Fougner, 2008), UN (Jaeger, 2010; Zanotti, 2005), NEPAD (Abrahamsen, 2004), NGO-led development or humanitarian aid (Duffield, 2001; Sending and Neumann, 2006), and private peace- and security-building interventions (Leander and van Munster, 2007) have all been productively analysed through their governmental rationalities. Of course, such activities can often be regarded as having ‘failed’ according to the broader criteria of having established Western-style liberal civil societies, human rights and free markets. Yet “explaining governmentality through its failure” (Joseph, 2009: 427) is actually quite a common approach in Foucauldian-inspired analyses.

Foucault famously suggested in *Discipline and Punish* that one should ask “what is served by the failure of the prison?” (Foucault, 1991: 272). Similarly, in his analysis of development projects in Lesotho, James Ferguson notes their failure to achieve their own targets, and he rather focuses on their “unintended outcomes” (Ferguson, 1994: 20). The promotion of ‘good governance’ (Abrahamsen, 2004; Harrison, 2004; Löwenheim, 2008) has identifiable effects and structures global politics in particular ways in terms of certain mentalities, institutions and practices; thus whether or not specific states actually ‘succeed’ or change their practice as a result of the good governance discourse is a slightly different question (Löwenheim, 2008: 268). Furthermore, it is precisely in terms of what might be called spaces of contragovernmentality, ungovernability, anarchical governance, or the borderlands of global

---

9 The distinction between enquiries into the causes of specific events, and enquiries into the constitution of the conditions of possibility for events, is one that is discussed by Neumann and Sending (2007: 696). They argue that a governmentality approach is orientated towards the latter rather than the former.
politics, that a governmentality approach to African politics can contribute most to our understandings of world politics (cf. Ferguson, 2007; Jackson, 2005; Luke, 1996; Tosa, 2009), as the next section will attempt to show.

**Why governmentality? The borderlands of international politics**

The third and final response to these critiques of the use of governmentality in IR addresses the alleged failure of the governmentality approach to answer ‘why’ questions, rather focusing on the ‘how’. A brief initial response to this allegation is that it seems to rest upon a rather artificial and unhelpful distinction between ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. However, this section attempts more than just a defence of governmentality. I argue that it is through the potential of a governmentality approach to map the fragmented, uneven, heterogeneous, overlapping, fractured spaces of global politics – not just in Africa – that it can help to explain why the world might look the way it does.

The critique of governmentality approaches with regard to their apparent inability to answer ‘why’ questions has already been noted. Simply put, such critiques seem to demand a mono-causal or ultimate underlying explanation for why events occur. In the end, for Marxists like Joseph and Selby, global politics is the way it is because of modern capitalist modes of production and consumption. As such the ‘why’ critique relies upon a markedly impoverished and attenuated conception of causality. Selby, for example, argues that Foucault

directed his critiques primarily against liberalism, focusing above all on the ‘how’ rather than the ‘why’ of modern power, and he thus provided only limited tools for analysing core features of international politics: its inter-societal ‘between-ness’, its concentrations of power, the centrality of state interests and rivalries, and its marked unevenness (2007: 339).
Concentrations of power, the centrality of the state, and the unevenness of international politics all seem to be aspects of international politics that can be perfectly plausibly explored through ‘how’ questions. Indeed, when questions of causality are expanded to include proximate as well as underlying causes, necessary and sufficient causes, context, meaning and understanding as well as explanation, and the implausibility of mono-causal and foundational explanations in social science are admitted, then the stark division between ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions seems to break down. A sophisticated answer to a ‘how’ question – such as how do partnerships between aid agencies and African governments function? (Abrahamsen, 2004) – weighs various factors, explores the context, explains the discursive framing, highlights the role of key actors; in short contributes a nuanced response to a similar ‘why’ question – such as why do partnerships form between African governments and aid agencies? In fact all ‘why’ questions could equally be phrased ‘how did it come about that x occurred?’ Therefore the often-drawn distinction between how and why questions is not particularly helpful.\(^\text{10}\) The reason why Foucault explicitly resisted the ‘why’ formulation was his reluctance to provide a foundational, last instance, ultimately mono-causal answer, such as ‘the mode of production’, ‘human nature’, or ‘patriarchy’.\(^\text{11}\)

That being said, an analytics of governmentality provides remarkably versatile tools which add nuance and depth to empirical analysis, and there is nothing to stop Marxists, feminists, critical theorists, political ecologists, realists or other approaches drawing upon these tools in order to help explain international politics and support their own broader theoretical arguments (Rose \textit{et al}, 2006: 101). Indeed Foucault himself, at certain points, situated his explorations of the micro-physics of power within the broader context of the development of

---

\(^{\text{10}}\) Acknowledgements are due to Hidemi Suganami for our ongoing discussions on this point.  
\(^{\text{11}}\) Joseph seems to agree in a later article where he notes that “[i]t is important, however, to resist the reductionist tendency to explain what happens in governmentality by appeal to some lower level.” (Joseph, 2010a: 45).
capital (Foucault, 1991). Joseph, however, urges Foucauldians to go further, arguing that “[a]ny theory of the international that utilizes the concept of governmentality must at the very least be supplemented by a theory of uneven and combined development” (2010b: 242). Yet Marxist theories of uneven and combined development (Joseph draws upon Justin Rosenberg) are not the only theories that can conceptualise an uneven international. Indeed, their tendency to see unevenness in terms of the difference between rather than within particular societies in fact renders them a rather less radical rendering of global heterogeneity than a governmentality approach might provide.13

One of the ways in which a governmentality approach can provide provocative answers to broader ‘why’ questions is through its attention to the tendency of liberal rationalities of government to divide and draw boundaries. Governmentality theorists, as well as historians, anthropologists and philosophers from other traditions, have highlighted the close relationship between liberal rationalities and practices of government, and markedly illiberal, authoritarian and coercive forms of politics (Bayart, 2007: 277; Chatterjee, 2004; Dean, 2002). One could use a governmentality approach to show how the creation of particular visibilities and invisibilities, the relationship between the production of responsible self-governing subjects and the repression of irresponsible subjects, and the interplay of liberal and illiberal techniques of rule have produced ‘borderland’ regions of world politics: in no-go inner-city districts or protesting townships in South Africa (Death, 2010b: 568), slums like Kibera (Tosa, 2009), stateless regions like South Kivu in the DRC (Jackson, 2005), conflict regions in Darfur (Leander and van Munster, 2007), the vast tracts of land under conservation which

12 Joseph recognises this, and that a governmentality approach could be combined with different theoretical frameworks (2010b: 229).
13 For example, Joseph argues that “we ought to develop a sociological approach that sees the international as an uneven terrain made up of different societies each at different stages of development with different institutional features. This means that we need to consider the specific socio-historical conditions of each country.” (2010c: 203). This seems to reify an international (= uneven) and domestic (= smooth) division in global politics, and produces a very billiard-ball-ish picture.
now lie outside formal state control (Dunn, 2009; Mbembe, 2002: 76), or enclave oil refineries or offshore rigs in Angolan and Nigerian coastal waters (Ferguson, 2007). As Chatterjee argues, “the real space of modern life consists of heterotopia” (2004: 7, 36), in the sense that prevailing forms of liberal governance produce a multiple, cross-cutting, shifting classification of populations, a heterogeneous conception of the social. In a related vein, Pal Ahluwalia describes how the ubiquitous East African petrol station can be seen as islands of the West, of modernity, of light and energy and architecture and smooth lines; yet they are also places of convergence for informal traders, taxis ranks, an unofficial market-place, and a site of the illicit shadow economy (Ahluwalia, 2001: 127). The recurrent metaphor of the shadow (-state; -economy), of light and dark, shade and relief, captures something of the heterogeneous political geography of these borderland African spaces (Ferguson, 2007: 15-7; Nordstrom, 2001), as well as recalling the Deleuzian language of rhizome plateaus of global politics (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; see also Neumann and Sending, 2010: 44).

Once we begin to see such ungovernmental spaces in Africa, or what Mbembe calls “fragmented forms of sovereignty” (2002: 77), however, we soon begin to also see them in the heart of advanced liberal societies in the West: in Guantanamo Bay, in inner-city ghettos in Baltimore or Glasgow, at student occupations and mass marches, or in eco-communes in mid-Wales or British Columbia. The interstices and rhizomatic fractures in the supposedly smooth space of Western liberalism are thereby illuminated through the contrast with more familiar ‘Third World’ examples (Bayart, 2007: 288). As Bayart suggests, echoing a long tradition in which Africa has been theorised as Europe’s Other, “[i]n many respects Africa is a mirror. However distorting it may be, it reflects our own political image and has a lot to teach us about the springs of our western modernity” (2009: 269).

14 As Mbembe (2004) and Robins (2002) highlight, the reverse is also true. Africa also has examples of shining secure shopping malls, pristine golf courses, multiplex cinemas and well-governed spaces of order, civilisation and the freedom to consume.
What is significant, however, is that these liminal spaces are not the manifestation of a lack of order, of rationalised government, or of regulation. They can still be analysed through a governmentality approach. Joseph’s claim that “the concept of governmentality does not necessarily bring anything new to an analysis of lawlessness in Sierra Leone, the displacement of populations by war or the role of guerrilla movements and village chiefs” (2010b: 236) seems to assume that civil war Sierra Leone was defined by an absence of order, government (in the Foucauldian sense as the conduct of conduct), and authority. On the other hand, scholars and ethnographers of such warzones have shown that there are political economies of conflict (Leander and van Munster, 2007; Nordstrom, 2001), there are formalities of action involved in the displacement of populations and the management of refugees (Duffield, 2001; 2007), and there are calculative and rationalised forms of conducting conduct even in the atrocities committed against civilians (Hoffman, 2004). As Nordstrom’s ethnography of warzones in Angola and Mozambique shows, these networks have cultural and political codes of conduct; “they are governed by social principles, not merely the jungle law of tooth and claw” (2001: 220).

Just as liberal forms of rule have relied upon the differentiation of populations into the responsible, the mad, the criminal, the young, barbarians, savages and so on, so sovereign and disciplinary forms of rule also have particular rationalities and mentalities, visibilities and differentiations, micro-capillary techniques of power, and forms of subjectivity (Dean, 1999: 131-9; 2002). As Mark Duffield’s work has shown, the “borderlands” of global politics – a metaphor for “an imagined geographical space where, in the eyes of many metropolitan actors and agencies, the characteristics of brutality, excess and breakdown predominate” – are governed through a multiplicity of partnership agreements, auditing, subcontracting, global
compacts, public-private networks and logics of marketisation, privatisation, and liberal techniques of governance (Duffield, 2001: 309-10).\textsuperscript{15} Interventions, whether over UN peacekeepers in the DRC, air strikes in Libya, or policing protests in London, are weighed according to cost-benefit calculations, risk assessments, probability scenarios, and legal codes of conduct. Through such calculations certain spaces and certain populations are constructed and defined as requiring liberal order, whilst others can be isolated or quarantined. A governmentality approach is directed at enquiring into the various constellations and combinations of sovereign, disciplinary, and liberal rationalities of rule in these cases. As Neumann and Sending argue, global politics “is increasingly organized around debates and struggles over what should be governed through liberal forms of government and what should be governed through police forms of government” (2010: 11).

A good example of the way in which governmentality approaches are able to capture the interrelationship between violence and consent, coercion and freedom, is the growing literature on colonial governmentalities (Comaroff, 1998; Dutton, 2010; Mbembe, 2001; Scott, 1995). It is a central claim of Bayart’s argument, for example, that the particular rationality of rule which characterises African politics in the longue durée, the politics of the belly, was manifested in the colonial era in much the same way as in post-colonial Africa. Whilst colonialism was clearly coercive, and relied upon the violence of the police, the tax-collector, the indirect rule of the local chief, the metropolitan military, the school-master and the prison officer, it also drew upon forms of extraversion and appropriation, and the eagerness of African elites to ‘buy into’ aspects of colonial life (Bayart, 2009). He charts the existence of six major “formalities of action” which have characterised Africa’s relations with

\textsuperscript{15} Mark Duffield subsequently clarified that “the biopower outlined by Foucault in relation to European and the nation-state is different from development as an international biopolitical regime” (Duffield, 2007: 15), but his argument is certainly not that, as Selby and Joseph claim, Foucauldian approaches cannot be applied outside the West. Rather he seeks to illuminate the specificities and particularities of regimes or rationalities of rule in different settings and at different scales. This approach has clear resonances with the argument set out here.
the rest of the world in the twentieth century: coercion, trickery, flight, mediation, appropriation and rejection (Bayart, 2009: lxvi). Even patterns of action such as flight – or ‘exit’ – can be understood as elements of evolving rationalities of rule, in the sense that “[f]light continues to contribute to the formation of the State in terms of a space that is relative and contested: whole regions or populations escape the control of central authorities without subverting or even destabilizing them” (Bayart, 2009: lxiii; see also Mbembe, 2002: 67). Such actions do not escape the view of a governmentality analysis, as they are simply a shift in particular rationalities of government and conduct. Refugees throw themselves into the hands of other states, or international organisations, and thus “flight is not tantamount to disconnecting oneself from the world, as it may seem at first sight, but is rather a mode of insertion or reinsertion into world affairs, and even of globalization” (Bayart, 2009: lxiii).

A governmentality approach – whether to colonial power relations, forms of rule in civil war Sierra Leone, or the auditing and benchmarking of governance states like Tanzania and Uganda – therefore focuses upon the blurring of the lines between power and freedom, government and resistance, state and society. For Bayart, the concept of governmentality “condenses that subtle tension between servitude and consent”, and it “restores the element of indeterminacy found in globalization as a whole” (2007: 287). Joseph comes close to this appreciation when he notes that we have to remember that, for Foucault, governmentality is always part of an axis comprising sovereignty, discipline, and government. Which of these predominates? The uneven, power infused, nature of the international system makes this issue crucial. If governmentality does not work in some parts of the world, does it revert to disciplinary power? (Joseph, 2010c: 203).
The uneven, fragmented, heterogeneous nature of global politics does exactly raise the question of the relationship between sovereign power, discipline and liberal government. But, contrary to Joseph’s assumption, it is not the case that if liberal governmentality doesn’t work it reverts to disciplinary or sovereign power. Rather, the relationship between the points of the triangle is constantly shifting, and a governmentality approach is directed toward the analysis of this interrelationship. Collier describes this as a “topological field comprised of heterogeneous techniques, procedures and institutional arrangements” (2009: 98). Governmentality is an approach to analysing global politics, not a form of power that either works or doesn’t work.

**Conclusion**

I have argued that a governmentality approach can be, and has been, used productively to analyse not only many societies outside the supposedly liberal Western world, but also to examine the interrelationship between the domestic and the international – perhaps better described as the global and the local (Callaghy et al, 2001). The ‘failure’ of some of the techniques of international liberal order – aid, development, peace-building, etc – are not evidence of the failure of governmentality. Rather we should ask what is served by their failure and what are the relationships between the forms of power and rule that emerge in their place? A governmentality approach can help answer these questions.

I have argued here that governmentality is perhaps most usefully conceived as an approach, or an analytics of power, which explores how forms of liberal or neo-liberal rule relate to other disciplinary, sovereign, pastoral, bio-political and police forms of power. Foucault concluded his lecture course *The Birth of Biopolitics* by reflecting on how a “series of governmental rationalities overlap, lean on each other, challenge each other, and struggle with
each other” (2008: 313). “What is politics, in the end,” Foucault asks, “if not both the interplay of these different arts of government with their different reference points and the debate to which these different arts of government give rise? It seems to me that it is here that politics is born.” (2008: 313).

This point can be illustrated through a brief, final return to North Africa. Foucault was clearly deeply affected by his experiences during the Tunisian protests of 1966-68, during which he supported radical students financially, he hid a printing machine used for anti-government pamphlets in his garden, and he was increasingly subjected to police surveillance and harassment (Macey, 1993: 204-6). This period gives the lie to the frequent portrayal of Foucault as a detached or politically passive intellectual. So too can the Foucault-inspired governmentality approach refute accusations that Foucauldian theory is incapable of making sense of African politics, or global power relations. There is considerable potential for theoretically-informed empirical research into the politics of the recent Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, or the Libyan revolt, drawing upon a governmentality approach. These events have focussed attention on constitutive questions: how are African civil societies produced and subjectivised? How are states problematised, made fragile, rebuilt and stabilised? What are the consequences of viewing such processes through liberal, democratic, critical or religious lenses? What roles do global power relations play in conditioning and constituting local politics? And through what micro-practices do particular forms of government, rule, and resistance become constituted – such as self-immolation, online networking, regional journalism, the mass march, the sit-in, diplomatic defections and recognitions, international assessments and justifications for military strikes, the management of refugees, humanitarian disasters, and the policing of crowds? Such an approach is very different to those who focus on enquiring into how civil societies can be empowered to overthrow tyrants, or what
interests underlie Western intervention. They are, however, important and appropriate objects of research, which can help us to understand both the constitution of politics in supposedly ‘non-liberal’ parts of the world, as well as something about the character of contemporary global power relations.

Bibliography


