Africa, governmentality, and the international: Reflections on agency and the climate change negotiations

Carl Death
Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, crd@aber.ac.uk

Paper prepared for the BISA-Africa and International Studies ESRC seminar series #4
‘African agency: Implications for International Relations theory’
Department of International Politics, City University, 14 September 2011

Abstract. The use of Foucauldian governmentality theory in international politics has been heavily scrutinised recently, with articles by Jonathan Joseph and Jan Selby, among others, critiquing the way in which governmentality has been applied at the international level, and in so-called ‘non-liberal’ parts of the world. Africa has been frequently invoked in this debate as one of the limits of Foucauldian analysis, a realm of politics so far removed from the advanced liberal European societies in which Foucault’s own work was grounded that, it is implied, Africanist scholars should reject Foucauldian approaches and turn to other theoretical frameworks. This article responds to some of these critiques by drawing upon Africanist scholarship which does use the concept of governmentality, in particular the work of Jean-François Bayart. His notion of extraversion – to describe the manner in which African elites have sought to mobilise resources derived from their unequal relationship with the external environment – has important implications for African agency. This paper considers these implications in the light of previous discussions in this seminar series on aid and climate change negotiations. It argues that by treating governmentality as an analytical approach rather than a specifically neoliberal form of power relation, it can have considerable purchase in non-liberal societies, and can also tell us something interesting about the unevenness of contemporary global politics, namely the importance of forms of power and agency that work through practices of freedom and self government.

The place of Africa within the discipline of International Relations (IR) has often been characterised as uncomfortable, marginal or awkward. At least in part this results from a range of issues related to the troublesome question of African agency. It is commonplace to assert, for example, that mainstream neorealist assessments of state capacities give little

weight to most African states as agents in international politics. Whilst states like Nigeria and South Africa can, in some cases, plausibly claim to be regional powers whose actions reverberate beyond the continent, at the other end of the spectrum, it is claimed, there exist a range of states whose juridical sovereignty masks an absence of empirical sovereignty, bringing their status as autonomous agents into question.

The troublesome implications of African agency for IR theory go beyond this familiar assertion of state weakness and incapacity however. Indeed, it could be argued that one of the primary reasons why various branches of social and political science originating in western academies – IR theory, political theory, political sociology, political economy – seem somewhat uncomfortable with, and ill-fitted to, understanding and explaining African politics arises from their inadequate conceptualisation of African agency, and particularly African agents or subjects. The concepts upon which we rely, as shorthand, to refer to political agents or subjects – whether states, institutions, classes, civil societies or individuals – are not always easily or neatly translated into African political contexts. The question underpinning this seminar series – how African activism impacts on international politics – thus requires serious theoretical consideration of a set of prior questions: what do we mean by agency in an African setting? Which African actors impact on international politics? How are these actors/subjects constituted? Are the answers to these questions different in an African context than elsewhere?

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Although this paper does not attempt to answer these questions in a systematic manner, it is motivated by a desire to consider prior constitutive questions about the agents or subjects of African politics, rather than the effects of African activism. The broad contention of the paper is that the body of governmentality theory inspired by Michel Foucault is well-suited to address these constitutive questions.\(^4\) I suggest that the concept of governmentality can provide useful pointers for theorising African agency and subjectivity, particularly in terms of the ways in which power is exercised and rationalised through practices of freedom. However, the application of Foucault’s work in the African context has been recently subjected to a range of constructive criticisms, and it is through addressing some of these concerns – specifically regarding the where, what and why of governmentality – that this paper attempts to contribute to a broader discussion of African agency and the international.

It is often argued that African politics is far too different from the social, economic and political contexts Foucault’s own work addressed to enable meaningful adaptation, and more particularly that the focus in the governmentality literature on power through freedom has limited applicability in non-liberal societies. Africa, it seems, often functions as a limit at which attempts to theorise global politics from a Foucauldian perspective start to lose their purchase. This paper responds to such criticisms by arguing that governmentality can highlight instances of power working through forms of freedom even in supposedly illiberal African societies. It draws on what is sometimes referred to as the Anglo-governmentality school,\(^5\) which defines governmentality as, in Foucault’s words, an ‘analytical perspective for


relations of power in general’, rather than a synonym for specifically neoliberal power relations. One of the dangers of this broader analytical perspective on governmentality, however, is that it risks losing its specificity and simply becomes another synonym for power relations or global governance. This paper seeks to avoid this slippage in two ways. First, governmentality as I use it refers to a specific epistemology of power relations: in Foucault’s words as an ‘analytical grid’ for showing how sovereign, disciplinary, pastoral, liberal and bio-political forms of power interrelate. Second, governmentality as I use it refers to a specific ontology of power relations: rationalised and calculated regimes of government, which conduct the conduct of free and multiple subjectivities through specific techniques and technologies, within particular fields of visible government.

It is these two aspects of a governmentality approach which, I argue, make it well-suited for analysing African politics. The analytical approach enables comparisons between competing or overlapping governmental rationalities at different times and in different places, spheres and cultures, and the focus on power/knowledge, the plurality of authorities, the importance

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8 The literature on global governmentality does have many similar concerns to the literature on global governance, but it makes crucially different assumptions and theoretical commitments. For a good analysis of the difference between governance and governmentality see Ole Jacob Sending and Iver B. Neumann, ‘Governance to Governmentality: Analysing NGOs, States and Power’, International Studies Quarterly, 50, 3, (2006), pp. 651-672.
9 This attempt forms part of a broader project of attempting to clarify and refine the use of governmentality in international politics, which may be of less immediate interest to participants in this seminar on African agency, but which I suggest might be able to help deepen our understanding of how African agents are constituted.
11 This is derived from the ‘analytics of government’ proposed by Mitchell Dean, and is described in more depth below. Dean, Governmentality, p. 23.
of concrete practices, and the relationship between the visible and governable and the invisible and ungovernable resonates in many African cases. This will be shown through a number of brief illustrations in this article: Africa’s role in processes of globalisation, aid partnerships between donor and recipient countries, and the apparent failure of global climate change negotiations. Yet the paper concludes by suggesting that African politics is well-suited for a governmentality analysis simply because Africa illustrates many of the problems with which broader IR scholarship struggles in a global context. The challenges of understanding and explaining African agency makes more visible problems which are at best latent in how we theorise global politics. As such it is the similarity of problems regarding agency in Africa to problems elsewhere which emerges from this account, rather than Africa as a limit to IR theory.¹²

The following section begins by showing one way in which a governmentality-derived analysis can illuminate some of the constitutive questions underlying the problem of African agency through an engagement with the work of Jean-François Bayart. This is followed by a more detailed exposition of the critiques of global governmentality in Africa, before setting out a particular analytical framework which may help to resolve them. The following sections examine an aspect of these critiques in turn, illustrated with examples drawn from previous seminars in this BISA-ESRC series, specifically aid partnerships between donor and recipient countries and the climate change negotiations.

**Jean-François Bayart on African agency and governmentality**

Bayart’s work on the historical sociology of the state in Africa provides a useful illustrative starting point for understanding how attention to constitutive questions might enrich our

¹² As such I agree with Brown’s comment ‘that problems of “IR theory” in Africa, are in fact problems in IR theory wherever it is applied.’ See Brown, ‘Africa and International Relations’, p. 123; also Lemke, ‘Intra-national IR in Africa’.
theorisation of African agency. Whilst his argument is not often regarded as an attempt to theorise agency, Bayart is motivated by the desire to recapture an active African political subject, rejecting the passivity of the dependency theory account, whilst remaining sensitive to historic inequalities of power and wealth. His concept of extraversion draws upon the Foucauldian notion of governmentality to argue that the forms of rule practiced by African elites are characterised by the mobilisation of ‘resources derived from their (possibly unequal) relationship with the external environment.’ In distancing himself from the dependency arguments of authors like Walter Rodney and Basil Davidson he seeks to show that dependency, subjectivity and autonomy are related and co-constitutive categories, rather than analytical opposites. African dependency, or inequality, with respect to international agents and structures has therefore been ‘a major resource in the process of political centralisation and economic accumulation.’ This is illustrated through many African examples of globalisation: the export of vast quantities of primary resources essential for the global economy (including, increasingly, oil); the receipt of substantial quantities of international aid; the import of large quantities of consumer goods; the sending out of migrants and the receipt of remittances; Africa’s pivotal role in the world’s illegal narcotics trade; and the post-Cold War strategic significance of the continent since 9/11, the Iraq war, the Arab Spring and the new resources scramble. For Bayart, therefore, ‘Africa is thus, in its way, a player in the process of globalisation.’ ‘More than ever,’ he concludes, ‘the neo-Hegelian discourse of Africa’s marginality is nonsense.’

15 Ibid, p. xii.
16 Ibid, pp. xxxviii-xl; cf. 21, 100-101.
This active Africa is not a new phenomenon, however. It is one of Bayart’s central claims that the particular governmental rationality of rule which characterises African politics in the *longue durée*, the politics of the belly (*politique du ventre*), was manifested as much in the colonial era as in post-colonial Africa. Whilst colonialism was clearly externally imposed and coercive, it also drew upon forms of extraversion and appropriation, and the eagerness of some African elites to ‘buy into’ aspects of colonial life. As such Bayart’s analysis resonates with much revisionist African history which has sought to reclaim the agency and politics of the colonised, without falling into a binary trap of labelling such actions either resistance or complicity.\(^\text{19}\)

Bayart’s use of governmentality – whilst not elaborated at length – is central to his work.\(^\text{20}\) It is employed by Bayart 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 which government is understood as rule through the creation of autonomous subjects, rather than domination or coercion – an ‘action upon other actions.’\(^\text{21}\) He states clearly that a governmentality approach should ‘consist of identifying, in any given society, the principal discursive registers of politics.’\(^\text{22}\) In one provocative and nuanced line of argument, with interesting implications for the understanding of African agency, Bayart argues there are six major ‘formalities of action’ which have characterised Africa’s relations with the rest of the world in the twentieth century: coercion, trickery, flight, mediation, appropriation and

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20 On Bayart’s differences with Foucault, see Bayart, *The state*, pp. 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 (chapter 7) and Deleuze and Guattari (pp. 220-1). Yet he concludes that that the concept of governmentality – in contrast to other concepts such as hegemony, historical bloc, and culture – ‘is more likely to avoid the trap of unwarranted totalisation’ (p. 271).


rejection.\textsuperscript{23} For Bayart, these are all forms of conduct which occur within broader rationalities of rule and government. Crucially for the notion of governmentality, as will be explored in more depth below, subjects have some freedom to choose between these actions. They act with a degree of autonomy. Yet these formalities of action also play a role in the ongoing, iterative constitution of social and political actors. Rather than pre-constituted subjects affirming, resisting or escaping from government, these actions of coercion, trickery, flight, mediation, appropriation and rejection are key steps in the very formation of actors and subjects. Even flight – or ‘exit’ – ‘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 destabilising them.’\textsuperscript{24} 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 globalisation.’\textsuperscript{25}

This account of the various forms of agency which have characterised African relations with the international draws attention to the importance of the performative dimension of action.\textsuperscript{26} Identities and subjectivities do not simply pre-exist forms of action, but are themselves brought into being – \textit{enacted} – through action. As such Foucault’s attention to the important role of freedom within power relations is particularly apposite. It is a central contention of the governmentality literature that contemporary power relations work through practices of freedom and the ‘conduct of conduct’ of relatively autonomous subjects. It is at this point, however, that some of the critiques of its applicability to African politics arise.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, p. lvi.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, p. lxiii.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
Governmentality and Africa

Governmentality is a complex and contested bundle of concepts, approaches and ideas, which have at their heart the notion that power can work through practices of freedom as well as simply domination or coercion. For Nikolas Rose, ‘to govern is to presuppose the freedom of the governed’, and Miller and Rose argue that ‘power is not so much a matter of imposing constraints upon citizens as of “making up” citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom.’ It seems to me that critiques of the usage of governmentality in an African context fundamentally rest on the question of whether power relations can be said to work through practices of freedom in Africa, as will be seen in more detail below.

The term governmentality is derived from mentalities or rationalities of government, with government understood in the broad Foucauldian sense of ‘the conduct of conduct’, rather than a state-centric or sovereign mode of political power. Foucault himself used the term ‘governmentality’ in at least three different ways, and in the broader governmentality literature inspired by Foucault the term has been used to describe the conduct of conduct in general, the analysis of different mentalities or rationalities underpinning government, and as a historically specific practice of rule emerging first in the eighteenth century in Western Europe but now associated with late twentieth century neoliberalism. It is my contention...

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29 Miller and Rose, *Governing the Present*, p. 53.
here, to echo some of the critics, that greater clarity and specificity in the use of the term would aid the further refinement of the governmentality literature.\textsuperscript{33}

One way to increase this clarity and specificity is to engage seriously with critiques of the concept. There is an increasingly broad Foucauldian-inspired literature on ‘global governmentality’, which has had its own critiques and rebuttals, although many of these exchanges have unfortunately merely resulted in more entrenched positions.\textsuperscript{34} A number of recent interventions, however, have particularly focused upon the role of African politics in these debates, where Africa has been invoked as a limit to liberal forms of government, beyond which it is argued analyses predicated on advanced liberal or neo-liberal formations of power cannot go. It is in this context that Jonathan Joseph 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 stretched in these zones.’\textsuperscript{35} Africa in general – although the only country Joseph refers to


in this article is Sierra Leone³⁶ – 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.’³⁷ These critiques do
raise some important issues, although the tone sometimes regrettably echoes somewhat stale,
tired and Kaplan-esque dismissals of life on the ‘Dark Continent’ as nasty, brutish and
short,³⁸ or Hans Morgenthau’s description of Great Power expansion ‘into the political empty
spaces of Africa and Asia’.³⁹

On the other hand, critiques of the applicability of poststructuralist or postmodernist
approaches have also come from within African studies.⁴⁰ Foucault has frequently been
caricatured as a Euro-centric, inward-looking theorist obsessed with textuality, discourse and
representation, and having little of value to say to those outside metropolitan café culture.⁴¹
Whilst the focus of this article is on the analytical utility of the governmentality approach,
rather than defending Foucault against charges of Eurocentrism, it is interesting to note that
this critique neglects the crucial role African politics played in the development of Foucault’s
own thought. 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

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³⁶ A more empirically grounded engagement in the politics of Tanzania and Ghana is presented in Joseph
‘Poverty reduction’.
³⁸ Robert Kaplan, The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the dreams of the post-Cold War world (New York: Random
House 2000).
³⁹ Quoted in Dunn, ‘Introduction’, p. 2; see Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics among Nations: The struggle for
⁴¹ Adebayo Williams, ‘The Postcolonial Flaneur and Other Fellow-Travellers: Conceits for a Narrative of
Redemption’, Third World Quarterly, 18, 5, (1997), pp. 821-841. For responses to the charge of Eurocentrism
against Foucault, see Ahluwalia, ‘Post-structuralism’; Arturo Escobar, ‘Discourse and power in development:
Michel Foucault and the relevance of his work to the Third World’, Alternatives, 10, 3, (1984-5), p. 378;
Vivienne Jabri, ‘Michel Foucault’s Analytics of War: The social, the international, and the racial’, International
from 1966-68, and was personally involved with student anti-government protests in Tunis against the Bourguiba regime.\(^4\) For Pal Ahluwalia, Foucault’s methodological transition from 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.’\(^4\) More substantively, this paper seeks to show that a governmentality approach, perhaps in contrast to some other Foucault-derived approaches, is less vulnerable to charges of poststructuralist abstraction as it is solidly focussed on concrete governmental practices, dominant forms of knowledge, and the politics of power relations.

Whilst critiques of Foucauldian thought in general, and governmentality in particular, have therefore come from a wide range of perspectives, some of the most constructive have come from the Marxist tradition. These critiques have been productive in that, whilst often broadly supportive of the use of governmentality to cast detailed empirical light on the operations of contemporary power relations – particularly in terms of the mobilisation of neoliberal free-market techniques of auditing, assessment, bench-marking, 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. Such critiques are not new, indeed, according to Gordon, 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.\(^4\) On the other hand, these critiques are broadly welcome in that they encourage those using governmentality approaches to refine their aims, concepts and conclusions.


\(^4\) Ahluwalia, ‘Post-structuralism’, p. 605; see also Foucault, ‘Interview with Michel Foucault’, pp. 279-80; Macey, *The Lives*, pp. 204-6.

\(^4\) Gordon, *Governmental Rationality*, p. 4.
Here I engage specifically with the critiques presented by Jonathan Joseph, some of which (particularly in the focus on Africa) intersect with the rather more sympathetic critiques articulated by Jan Selby.45 Both these authors have expressed their support for the use of governmentality in certain ways, whilst calling for its insertion within broader structural accounts of global politics. Joseph, for example, ‘draws on a broadly Marxist account of international relations in order to put governmentality in its proper place.’46 The central questions these critiques raise focus on the where, what and why of governmentality. The first of these questions has two dimensions, framed by Joseph as ‘whether governmentality, as a set of liberal techniques, really does apply to all parts of the globe,’ and secondly, ‘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.’47 It is the first of these that will particularly concern me here, as the global governmentality debates have been discussed extensively elsewhere. The question of whether governmentality can be applied to Africa will be discussed in some depth below.

The second question concerns what governmentality theorists argue is actually being governed. Joseph’s article Governmentality of what? draws a distinction between the government of populations and the government of states, concluding 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.’48 This concern with the subjects and objects of governmentality, and what happens when liberal governmentality appears to fail, opens up a broader set of concerns regarding the relationship of liberalism and neo-liberalism to the governmentality approach.

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.’ 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.

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.

All these critiques will be addressed in more detail below, through examples such as aid partnerships and the climate change negotiations. Before this, however, it is perhaps useful to clarify in more detail what I mean by governmentality, and how the so-called Anglo-governmentality approach differs from other uses of the concept. This is particularly necessary because many of the critiques posed by authors like Joseph and Selby can be resolved, or at least clarified, by greater precision from those deploying the term.

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50 Selby, ‘Engaging Foucault’, p. 337.
Anglo-governmentality and an analytics of government framework

There are two primary and crucially different ways in which governmentality has been used in IR, which stem from Foucault’s own ambiguous and varied usage. First, some have used it to describe a particular and historically specific rationality of rule, which Foucault argues emerged in the eighteenth century and was then expressed in the neo-liberalism of the Chicago School and German Ordo-Liberals in the second half of the twentieth century. This use of governmentality is often deployed synonymously with liberalism, neo-liberalism, or advanced liberal rule. It is this usage to which Joseph and Selby have primarily objected, arguing it risks seeing global politics as uniformly liberal, and overemphasising the success of the neoliberal project in places like Africa. In contrast, the second use of governmentality regards it more 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 regimes of government through their fields of visibility, regimes of knowledge, techniques and technologies, and forms of subjectification. This distinctive way of asking questions can be applied to almost any considered, or rationalised, form of government, including authoritarian rule, and is in line with the way in which Foucault’s own understanding of governmentality was developing in his later work into an ‘analytical perspective for relations of power in general’, as well as the way in which governmentality has been subsequently employed by theorists such as Bayart, and the so-called Anglo- or British school of governmentality studies.

54 Dean, Governmentality, p. 20.
55 Dean, ‘Liberal government’.
56 Foucault, Security, p. 388.
57 Dean, Governmentality; Miller and Rose, Governing the Present; Rose, Powers of Freedom.
Some describe the difference between these two usages in terms of the former presenting governmentality as an ontology and the later presenting governmentality as an epistemology. This is rather too stark, as both usages imply ontological and epistemological positions. On the contrary I would describe the former as an analytical perspective for neoliberal forms of power relation, whereas the latter is, in Foucault’s words, an ‘analytical perspective for relations of power in general’. Of course, the risk this latter, broader definition presents is that governmentality comes to mean everything and nothing. The remaining parts of this section seek to justify this usage of governmentality from Foucault’s own work, as well as showing how governmentality differs from other conceptualisations of power. Barnett and Duvall’s influential four-fold typology of power as compulsory, institutional, structural or productive will be used here in contrast.

In this paper I follow Foucault’s description of governmentality in *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, where he remarks that it should ‘be considered simply as a point of view, a method of decipherment.’ At this point Foucault justifies his lengthy discussion of German neoliberalism in two ways – one methodological, one ‘a reason of critical morality’ – both of which are of interest. The first, methodological reason is to try out governmentality as an analytical framework. Foucault clarifies that ‘what I have proposed to call governmentality, that is the way in which one conducts the conduct of men, is no more than a proposed analytical grid for these relations of power.’ He goes on to suggest that

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60 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 186.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
valid when we are dealing with phenomena of a completely different scale, such as an economic policy, for example, or the management of a whole social body, and so on.\textsuperscript{63}

The second reason, which Foucault describes as a critical morality, takes issue with the neoliberal attack on the state which tended to locate the welfare on the same continuum as the authoritarianism of Nazism and Communism.\textsuperscript{64} Foucault’s act of critique is to distinguish between the governmentality underpinning the Keynesian welfare state, which he describes as a ‘statified governmentality born in the seventeenth and eighteenth century’, and the governmentality underpinning fascism and the totalitarian state. The latter he describes as a ‘party governmentality’.\textsuperscript{65} He goes on to argue that twentieth century governmentalities have been characterised by the ‘reduction of state governmentality’ through two alternative trajectories: ‘through the growth of party governmentality, and … an attempt to find a liberal governmentality.’\textsuperscript{66} What emerges here is therefore an approach to governmentality as a kind of grid, or means of distinguishing and differentiating between competing rationalities of rule.

Such an approach to governmentality illustrates how it relates to, but also differs crucially from, other familiar Foucauldian forms of power, such sovereign, disciplinary, pastoral, liberal and bio-power. Whilst in some of his earlier work we sometimes get the impression that one form of power is being replaced by another (sovereign by disciplinary power in \textit{Discipline and Punish}; or discipline by bio-power in \textit{The History of Sexuality}, for example), in the later lecture series he is clear that they are rather combined and recombined in different ways, and justified according to different rationales. For example, in the emergence of the statist governmentality of the eighteenth century ‘we have a triangle: sovereignty, discipline,
and governmental management, which has population as its main target and apparatuses of security as its essential mechanism.\textsuperscript{67} The deployment of governmentality as a way of approaching the analysis of world politics does not therefore imply the redundancy of sovereign, pastoral or disciplinary modes of power, but rather it provides a grid designed to examine how they relate to each other. In this sense governmentality 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.

As such a governmentality approach operates at a different level of analysis to other typologies of power, whether Foucauldian categories of sovereign, discipline, pastoral, liberal and bio-power, or more familiar IR schemas such as Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall’s categories of compulsory, institutional, structural, and productive power.\textsuperscript{68} Barnett and Duvall set out a matrix consisting of relations of interaction (compulsory and institutional power) and relations of constitution (structural and productive power) on one axis, and direct (compulsory and structural) and diffuse (institutional and productive) forms of power on the other. Their emphasis on the importance of taking relations of constitution as well as relations of interaction into account provides the context for the assertion with which this paper began: that questions regarding African agency need to also consider how African agents are constituted and made into subjects, as well as asking how these agents interact with the international.

Barnett and Duvall locate Foucauldian and poststructuralist accounts of power relations within their category of productive power: ‘socially diffuse production of subjectivity in

\textsuperscript{68} Barnett and Duvall, ‘Power’. 
systems of meaning and signification’. However, the analytics of government approach advanced here is not so much a particular type of power, but an analytical approach to questions of power in general. It provides a grid or framework to map the ways in which compulsory, institutional, structural and productive forms of power are combined and overlap, working through particular calculated rationalities, visibilities, knowledges, technologies and subjectivities.

This is not to claim, however, that all forms of power are equally amenable to a governmentality analysis. An analytics of government is designed for particular types of power relation. For Dean, the ‘study of government does not amount to a study of politics or power relations in general; it is a study only of the attempts to (more or less) rationally affect the conduct of others and ourselves’. As stated above, these programmatic forms of power can be described in terms of their regimes of knowledge, forms of subjectivity, techniques and technologies, and fields of visibility. Although Bayart does not directly employ this framework, it is possible to use his empirical work to develop an analysis along these lines.

Forms of knowledge: A governmentality analytic is particularly attuned to the rationalities and mentalities at work in regimes of government. It focuses upon power relations which are calculated, weighed up, planned and justified, rather than more arbitrary, subconscious or unconsidered power relations, and asserts that forms of verification, truth-making, legitimation and relations of power/knowledge are central to the way in which contemporary regimes of government operate. As Rose describes it, ‘to govern, one could say, is to be condemned to seek an authority for one’s authority.’ The extraverted, privatised African

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69 Ibid, p. 43.
70 Dean, Governmentality, p. 198.
71 Ibid, p. 23.
72 Rose, Powers of Freedom, p. 27.
state, in Bayart’s analysis, operates according to rationalities of patronage, grandeur and reciprocity, which ‘link the “lowest of the low” with the “highest of the high” through the agencies of continuous news, requests, gifts and far from disinterested symbolic celebrations.’

Subjectivities: Regimes of government produce and work through plural and multiple free subjects. A state-centric or sovereign perspective is not able to capture the constitutive and productive element of power relations, as Barnett and Duvall illustrate in their description of productive power. These subjectivities could be the familiar rational *homo economicus* of neo-liberal orthodoxy, but other subjectivities such as non-governmental organisations, private corporations, states, international organisations, scientific bodies and experts, civil societies and social movements are also brought into being through particular governmental rationalities. Bayart’s analysis reveals a pluralised world of multiple agents and subjects, including patrons and clients, transnational actors, kinship networks, religious groups and political parties. His account of party politics in Cameroon is an excellent example of the ‘reciprocal assimilation’ of traditional chiefs and educated elites who share similar discursive registers and political practices, and therefore inhabit a blurred zone of interaction between the state and society.

Techniques and technologies: Methodologically, an analytics of government begins from the bottom-up, in the sense of investigating manifestations of power relations at their point of application. These techniques and technologies – auditing and benchmarking processes, ratings systems, public-private partnerships, development plans, sustainability strategies, and

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75 For example, Foucault describes civil society as ‘the correlate of a political technology of government’ in Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 296.
so on – bring into being particular subjectivities. In this vein Miller and Rose argue that it is only through the ‘little instruments’ of psychologists, accountants, town planners, educators and so on, that rule can actually occur.\textsuperscript{77} Bayart shows how the postcolonial African state works through concrete techniques of public demonstrations and audiences, patron beneficence and munificence, and routinised acts of kindness and cruelty, as well as the ‘little instruments’ of international donors and development partners.\textsuperscript{78}

\textit{Fields of visibility:} Finally, a governmentality approach is attuned to the clashes between competing rationalities, the gaps, fractures and inconsistencies between governmental rationalities, and the creation of particular visible fields of government alongside other invisible, ungoverned spaces. As Rose notes, ‘to govern, it is necessary to render visible the space over which government is to be exercised.’\textsuperscript{79} Specific governmental rationalities will also be in competition with other rationalities, and they will rarely be completely smooth or successful processes. It is in these liminal spaces between competing rationalities and alternative visibilities that resistance can emerge.\textsuperscript{80} Bayart shows how the creation of particular visible realms of government – the nation, the court, the city – are paralleled by the creation of informal and invisible realms of ungovernability, such as the black market, trans-border trade, and the inner circle of the ‘big man’.\textsuperscript{81}

These distinctive features of a governmentality approach are illustrated in the following sections, which respond to some specific recent critiques of the application of

\textsuperscript{77} Miller and Rose, \textit{Governing the present}, p. 6.  
\textsuperscript{78} Bayart, \textit{The State}, chapter 2.  
\textsuperscript{79} Rose, \textit{Powers of freedom}, p. 36.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, p. 277.  

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governmentality to African politics, as well as showing how a governmentality analysis can be utilised in the empirical analysis of aid relationships and climate change negotiations.

**Where is governmentality? Africa and the international**

The first of the criticisms of governmentality is that it should be limited to the domestic politics of advanced liberal states, not applied in global or illiberal contexts. In contrast this paper argues that a governmentality approach can provide illuminating insights into the operation of power relations in societies outside Western liberal democracies, as well as into global-local relationships. 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. The former claim has animated a great deal of debate about the use of Foucault within IR for several decades, and therefore this article will focus on the second strand of the ‘where’ critique, arguing that an analytics of government approach can be usefully applied to African politics, and Africa’s insertion in global processes.

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

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be characterised as having an advanced form of liberalism.’$^{83}$ 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-mentalties 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.

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?$^{84}$

His somewhat sweeping conclusion is that governmentality theorists might find richer material in European cases, whereas ‘[i]n other parts of the world the management of populations may have to rely on cruder disciplinary practices’. $^{85}$

This critique can be answered in two ways: through empirically contesting its generalisations, as well as by theoretically clarifying the usage of governmentality. Empirically, Joseph’s

$^{84}$ Ibid, p. 242.
$^{85}$ Ibid, p. 239.
argument rests upon showing a clear distinction between some parts of the world which have liberal civil societies and economically rational actors and populations, where governmentality works, and other parts of the world (such as Africa) which are illiberal and do not have civil societies and economically rational actors and populations. The central claim is that power relations working through practices of freedom apply in liberal societies, but not in Africa. The problem is that Joseph’s work does not show this, but merely asserts it. Indeed, rather than solid empirical evidence, what such arguments often rest upon are assumptions about African ‘Otherness’, illiberalism, irrationality and marginality that have characterised neo-Hegelian and Huntington-esque portrayals of Africa for a long time. In contrast, scholars of civil society or legal activism in South Africa, Ghana or Botswana, or the emerging markets in mineral exploitation, intensive agriculture or mobile phone communication across the continent, might express a little more circumspection about the complete absence of liberal norms, free civil societies, or neo-liberal markets in Africa.

The second way in which Joseph’s claim that governmentality cannot apply in Africa can be contested is theoretically. Here the definition of governmentality employed is critical. Whilst using governmentality synonymously with neoliberalism does indeed restrict its applicability, the use of governmentality as an analytical framework or grid for understanding power relations more generally, as set out in this paper, renders it more broadly applicable. From this perspective, Joseph’s suggestion that different forms of power relation might be at work in African cases than in Western Europe or North America is eminently plausible, and a governmentality analysis can be deployed to explore these differences. Such an analysis can be specifically focused on exploring the various subjects and objects of governmentality.

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What is being governed? The failure of liberal governmentality

Joseph’s article ‘Governmentality of what?’ raises some important questions for governmentality theorists, specifically regarding the question of the subjects and objects of government. Regrettably, however, Joseph largely confines his analysis to the government of states and populations, argues in quite a doctrinaire fashion that the “governmentality of what?” should always mean governmentality of populations’, and concludes 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.’\(^{88}\) Such an assertion, doubtlessly reached in order to fit governmentality more manageably into statist IR theory, would unhelpfully limit the scope of analysis, were governmentality theorists to take Joseph’s advice.

In contrast, rather than determining a priori who or what is being governed, precisely one of the most important steps in an analytics of government is to ask what forms of subjectivity are created by governmental rationalities.\(^{89}\) Thus states,\(^{90}\) particular populations,\(^{91}\) international institutions and organisations,\(^{92}\) civil societies,\(^{93}\) individuals,\(^{94}\) communities,\(^{95}\) markets and corporations,\(^{96}\) regions,\(^{97}\) and even ‘international society’ itself,\(^{98}\) are all potential objects and subjects of government. A governmentality perspective is specifically interested in how such agents are both subjects and objects of government – self-governing free actors –

\(^{89}\) Dean, Governmentality, p. 32.
\(^{90}\) Fougner, ‘Neoliberal’; Neumann and Sending, Governing the Global Polity.
\(^{91}\) Sending and Neumann, ‘Governance to governmentality’.
\(^{92}\) Zanotti, ‘Governmentalizing’.
\(^{97}\) Larner and Walters, ‘The political rationality’.
\(^{98}\) Larner and Walters, Global Governmentality; Neumann and Sending, Governing the Global Polity.
and the power relations that this entails, as can be seen when we consider aid and
development partnerships.99

Rita Abrahamsen argues that debates over new forms of aid partnership between donor and
recipient states have tended to view the relationship as either one of greater freedom and
independence for recipient states (‘African ownership’) or, alternatively, as continued neo-
colonial donor dominance. She suggests, in contrast, that whilst new aid partnerships such as
Poverty Reductions Strategy Papers (PRSPs) or the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) do not represent African emancipation or the removal of power
relations, ‘the power of partnerships does not lie primarily in relations of domination, but in
techniques of cooperation and inclusion.’100 The power of such partnerships is to internalise
norms and practices of good governance, self-monitoring, accountability and transparency,
i.e. the production of ‘modern, self-disciplined citizens and states that can be trusted to
govern themselves according to liberal democratic norms.’101 Importantly these do not merely
govern recipient states, as Joseph suggests, but also a whole range of quasi-governmental
institutions, political actors, NGOs, community partners, and even international agencies.

Furthermore, whilst other analysts have interpreted this emphasis on partnership dialogues
and post-conditionality as actually diminishing African control and agency,102 Abrahamsen
argues they represent ‘both new forms of agency and new forms of discipline.’103 Similarly,
Graham Harrison describes how such governmental technologies are producing new forms of

pp. 1453-1467. See also Fougner, ‘Neoliberal’; Löwenheim, ‘Examining the state’. In this seminar series aid
partnerships were discussed by Alastair Fraser. See Lindsay Whitfield and Alastair Fraser, ‘Negotiating aid: The
structural conditions shaping the negotiating strategies of African governments’, International Negotiation, 15,
100 Abrahamsen, ‘The power of partnerships’, p. 1454.
101 Ibid.
102 See Lindsay Whitfield (ed.), The Politics of Aid: African Strategies for Dealing with Donors (Oxford; OUP
2009); Whitfield and Fraser, ‘Negotiating Aid’, p. 358.
state formation in Africa: transnationalised ‘governance states’ in which external and domestic actors are so interlinked it is virtually impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins.\textsuperscript{104} This draws attention once again to the central issue with which this paper began: that constitutive questions about the nature of African agents or subjects must come before attempts to assess the degree of control or ownership wielded by African states in aid negotiations.\textsuperscript{105}

Harrison’s analysis also highlights another important dimension of the governmentality approach. His discussion of the production of ‘governance states’ in Tanzania, Uganda and Mozambique illustrates how different governmentalities are at work in different places and at different times. Certainly, as Joseph’s critique implies, the ‘good governance’ strategies of the World Bank and other donors are not uniformly successful in producing disciplined and responsible states across Africa. For every Tanzania and Ghana there is a Zimbabwe and a Somalia. Crucially, however, 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, those who need tutelage and civilising, and those who need pacification or discipline.\textsuperscript{106} As Miller and Rose note, contemporary liberal governmentalities entail ‘obligations of responsible self-government for the majority, and the expert management or frank control of those marginalised anti-citizens [or ‘failed’ African states] unwilling or unable to accept those burdens.’\textsuperscript{107} Thus Selby’s argument that ‘the globalisation of a Foucauldian model of power ends up inspiring a quintessentially liberal,


\textsuperscript{105} Whitfield and Fraser, ‘Negotiating Aid’, p. 343. Whitfield and Fraser do acknowledge the difficulty of defining and identifying exactly who, what or where control is located within African states (pp. 350 and 358), but their analytical framework and conclusions persist in maintaining a firmly statist, billiard-ball model of interaction (e.g. p. 365).


\textsuperscript{107} Miller and Rose, \textit{Governing the Present}, p. 218.
rather than realist, reading of international politics’ appears to be seriously mistaken.\textsuperscript{108} In drawing attention to the power relations at work within liberal forms of rule, and the centrality of struggle between different governmental rationalities, a governmentality perspective shares far more with critical readings of global politics.\textsuperscript{109}

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.\textsuperscript{110}

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’\textsuperscript{111}), I am happy to broadly agree with Joseph on this point. The activities of the World Bank,\textsuperscript{112} World Economic Forum,\textsuperscript{113} UN,\textsuperscript{114} NEPAD,\textsuperscript{115} and many development

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\textsuperscript{109} Neumann and Sending, ‘The International’; Neumann and Sending, \textit{Governing the Global Polity}.


\textsuperscript{111} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume 1} (tr. R. Hurley), (London: Penguin 1998), p. 95.


\textsuperscript{113} Fougner, ‘Neoliberal’.

\textsuperscript{114} Jaeger, ‘UN reform’; Zanotti, ‘Governmentalizing’.

\textsuperscript{115} Abrahamsen, ‘The power of partnerships’.
or humanitarian NGOs,\textsuperscript{116} 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 we can also ask ‘what else might these failures be doing?’ As it turns out, ‘explaining governmentality through its failure’ is actually quite a common approach in Foucauldian-inspired analyses.\textsuperscript{117}

Foucault famously suggested in \textit{Discipline and Punish} that one should ask ‘what is served by the failure of the prison?’\textsuperscript{118} 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.’\textsuperscript{119} The promotion of ‘good governance’ has identifiable effects and structures global politics in particular ways in terms of certain mentalities, institutions and practices;\textsuperscript{120} on the other hand whether or not specific states actually ‘succeed’ or change their practice as a result of the good governance discourse is a slightly different question.\textsuperscript{121} Furthermore, it is precisely in terms of what might be called the borderlands of global politics, sites in which dominant liberal governmentalties do seem to fail or are replaced by other governmentality rationalities, that the approach set out here potentially has the most to contribute.

### 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

\textsuperscript{116} Duffield, ‘Governing the borderlands’; Sending and Neumann, ‘Governance to governmentality’.
\textsuperscript{117} Miller and Rose, \textit{Governing the Present}, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{119} Ferguson, \textit{The Anti-Politics Machine}, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{120} Abrahamsen, ‘The power of partnerships’; Harrison, \textit{The World Bank}; Löwenheim, ‘Examining the state’.
\textsuperscript{121} Löwenheim, ‘Examining the state’, p. 268.
focusing on the ‘how.’ Indeed the perceived structuralism or functionalism of the
governmentality approach sometimes seems to preclude questions of agency, intentionality or
causality at all. 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 fragmented, uneven, heterogeneous, overlapping,
fractured spaces of global politics – not just in Africa – that it can help to explain why the
world looks the way it does. The ability of governmentality to interrogate the constitutive
foundations of African agency is an important part of this potential.

The critique of governmentality approaches with regard to their alleged inability to answer
why questions has already been noted. 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.122

It is not clear, however, why Selby believes questions of concentrations of power, the
centrality of the state, and the unevenness of international politics cannot be addressed
through a governmentality approach. Moreover, the distinction between ‘how’ and ‘why’
questions seems overdrawn on both sides.123 Foucault’s own discussion of such questions was
far more nuanced than many of those who have subsequently invoked this distinction.124

123 See, for example, Dean, Governmentality, p. 29.
When we move beyond thinking of causation as solely limited to direct, mechanistic, efficient, push-pull relationships – described by Kurki as the Humean conception of causation, which has dominated positivist models of social science – a more sophisticated, nuanced and even ‘commonsensical’ discussion of causality can involve a mixture of proximate as well as underlying causes, necessary and sufficient causes, context, meaning, understanding and explanation.\textsuperscript{125} Any satisfactory discussion of causation weighs various factors, explores the context, explains the discursive framing, highlights the role of key actors and agents, and asks both how and why questions. In fact, all why questions could equally be phrased ‘how did it come about that x occurred?’ 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.’\textsuperscript{126} Whilst these underlying drivers might constitute part of any causal conversation,\textsuperscript{127} a governmentality approach also involves more or less explicit causal claims, through an analysis of the constitution of particular acting subjects, the functional role of particular constellations of practices and technologies, and the role of particular regimes of knowledge and fields of visibility in making causal pathways visible, calculable, and repeatable. Certainly, different theoretical approaches – such as a governmentality approach, a neo-Marxist approach, or a critical Realist approach – will adopt different methods, will ask different questions, and will regard different answers as more or less central, but they all mobilise the language of causality in different ways. Recognising this, being more explicit about causal claims, and refusing an overly simplistic division between ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions means, for Kurki, that the ‘theoretical insulation between causal and constitutive  

\textsuperscript{126} 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, ‘Poverty reduction’, p. 45.  
approaches, and between different theoretical camps focused on different kind of causal factors, becomes more difficult to justify.\textsuperscript{128}

The problem is that for some critics it seems that only a Marxist-derived theoretical approach is capable of providing answers to causal questions about the international. Simply put, for some critics, global politics is the way it is because of modern capitalist modes of production and consumption. Joseph argues that ‘[a]ny theory of the international that utilises the concept of governmentality must at the very least be supplemented by a theory of uneven and combined development.’\textsuperscript{129} 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 \textit{between} rather than \textit{within} particular societies in fact renders them a rather less radical portrayal of global heterogeneity than a governmentality approach might provide.

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.’\textsuperscript{130} This seems to reify an international (= uneven) and domestic (= smooth) division in global politics, and produces a very billiard ball-like picture of world politics. This picture is also present in Selby’s invitation, cited earlier, to governmentality theorists to explain ‘why the Turkish state is more governmentalised than the Syrian one, [or] why there is so much “bad governance” in Africa specifically.’\textsuperscript{131} Rather than relying upon a mono-causal or ultimate explanation rooted in capitalism and relationships of

\textsuperscript{128} Kurki, ‘Causes of a divided discipline’, p. 216.
\textsuperscript{130} Joseph, ‘What can governmentality’, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{131} Selby, ‘Engaging Foucault’, p. 337.
production, as one suspects Joseph and Selby might prefer, a governmentality approach can produce a much more nuanced and differentiated answer to such questions – based of course on concrete empirical analysis. Cultural, religious, ideological, political, historical, and economic factors all interact in the production of particular rationalities, mentalities and practices of rule, as Bayart’s work on the development of the postcolonial African state shows.

To illustrate the potential of a governmentality analysis to engage in causal conversations this section briefly considers the role of African agency in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol negotiations. These negotiations have been the subject of several papers in this seminar series so far, which have highlighted the increased prominence, visibility and influence of African states and blocs.132 Whilst I would not wish to claim that a governmentality approach can explain all that is important about these negotiations, or that other analytical frameworks have nothing to offer, I do argue that a broader view of the systemic function of such negotiations within the wider context of postcolonial governmentalities can be illuminating.

Attempts to negotiate a follow-up to the Kyoto Protocol on global greenhouse gas emissions for the post-2012 period took a serious knock-back in Copenhagen in 2009, and at subsequent meetings in Cancun (2010) and Bonn (2011) there has been little hope that a new binding treaty will be agreed either in Durban (2011) or prior to the end of the Kyoto agreement in 2012. Yet, despite this waning faith in the multilateral process, and despite negotiating outcomes which consistently seem antithetical to the interests of African states, African

interest and participation in the negotiations is rising. This appears somewhat paradoxical. The majority of African states, which are low emitters with a high vulnerability to future climate changes, would seem to have a vested interest in strong global action to regulate greenhouse gas emission. The absence of such global regulation might be expected to lead to disenchanted and ‘exit’ or ‘flight’ from the negotiations, i.e. seeking alternative arenas or institutions for action. South Africa, which played a prominent role in Copenhagen as a key member of the BASIC coalition behind the Copenhagen Accord and the prominent host of the 2011 COP17 meeting in Durban, similarly poses something of a paradox, as the relatively high per capita carbon dioxide emissions and growing economy might be expected to lead to a foot-dragging or more cautious stance (as it has in the USA). In contrast South Africa has emerged as a potential proactive leader on mitigation, announcing ambitious targets and mobilising diplomatic interest in the regime.\footnote{Carl Death ‘Leading by Example: South Africa, Summity, and Global Environmental Politics’, \textit{International Relations}, (forthcoming, 2011).}

Viewed from a governmentality perspective, however, the participation of African states in the negotiating process is itself significant, regardless of any concrete outcome in the negotiations. Being seen to be prominent and proactive by both other states, and in some cases by domestic constituencies, fulfils an important performative function. It is part of a broader governmental rationality of enacting the role of strong, responsible, globally-engaged states, taking the lead on climate responsibility.\footnote{Carl Death, \textit{Governing Sustainable Development: Partnerships, Protests and Power at the World Summit} (Abingdon: Routledge 2010).} Participation in this evolving climate governmental regime – with its scientifically-derived legitimacy; multiple actors at global, regional and local levels; myriad instruments of monitoring, forecasting, mitigation, adaptation, financing and negotiating; and creation of ‘the global climate’ as a new field of highly visible and calculable government – has its own pay-offs for African states. It is an
important way to not only mitigate climate impacts, but also to gain new potential resources for adaptation (extraversion) and to enact the kind of environmentally responsible transnational states, with the capacity to monitor and audit emissions and forecast impacts, that the international community expects (global liberal governmentality). This is true for South African diplomats who seek to revitalise their status as leading mediators and bridge-builders in international politics, as well as for more unexpected actors such as Ethiopia, Sudan and the DRC, whose representatives have been highly visible and who seek to project the image of functional, responsible and effective statehood.

By focussing on how these freely adopted, willingly performed roles are themselves the product of particular power relations and forms of the conduct of conduct, a governmentality analysis can bring a more nuanced understanding of how African agency is constituted and exercised. This paper does not seek to claim that such a perspective can answer all our questions about the impact of African agency on international relations, but rather it has sought to answer some of the critiques of the application of governmentality in Africa, and to show that a governmentality analysis can help map the relationship between different forms and mentalities of power, as well as helping to explain why certain governmentalities operate at certain times and places, rather than others.

**Conclusion**

A governmentality approach can be used productively to analyse the ways in which power relations in Africa – as elsewhere – work through the calculated and rationalised production of free and autonomous subjects. As such it has the potential to contribute to discussions

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about the impact of African agency in international politics through highlighting the power relations at stake in the constitution of African agents and subjects. Just as liberal governmentalities have always relied upon violence and coercion as well as practices of freedom, so do illiberal governmentalities (such as Bayart’s ‘politics of the belly’) produce forms of free subjectivity alongside more sovereign, disciplinary, pastoral and bio-political power relations. Africa is not therefore marginal to international politics, and need not be marginal in IR theory. The problems confronted in efforts to theorise global politics – in particular the blurring of binaries such as domestic/international, public/private, power/freedom, hierarchy/anarchy, state/society – are also problems in theorising African politics. As Bayart suggests with thinly veiled sarcasm, ‘we are forced to admit that the analysis of politics in Africa opens the door to a wider reflection on the nature of politics.’

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.’ ‘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.’ It is in this commitment to making evident the continual political contestation at work in establishing and maintaining forms of rule, and to revealing the mentalities and practices at work in constituting political agents, that the critical thrust of governmentality studies becomes evident. The study of governmentalities is motivated by the desire ‘to strengthen the resources available to those who, because of their constitution as subjects of government, have the right to contest the practices that govern them in the name of their

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139 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 313.
140 Ibid.
freedom.\textsuperscript{141} Such a critical project is clearly relevant to contemporary African political struggles – as well as to political struggles elsewhere.

\textsuperscript{141} Rose, Powers of Freedom, p. 60.