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Michel Foucault's Considerable Sway on International Relations Theory

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the considerable influence that Michel Foucault has had on International Relations theory. To do this, I will present a selection of important contributions to the discipline that have been inspired by his work. Firstly, I will show that the critique of rationalist and scientific paradigms in International Relations was in great part led by commentators who displayed strong foucaultian inspirations. Second, I will introduce a series of scholars who have made cogent uses of discourse analysis, which Foucault developed in philosophical and genealogical works. Lastly, I discuss the uses and interpretations of governmentality, biopolitics and sovereign power in the analysis of emerging networks of power at the international level. In this article, my central argument is that the application of Foucault's thought to International Relations has given way to a rich and ever-evolving research program and has had considerable impact on the opening and redefinition of the discipline.

Keywords: Foucault; International Relations theory; discourse analysis; governmentality; sovereign power

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Introduction

Michel Foucault's influence over several academic disciplines has been increasingly noted in recent years. There is an ever-growing army of scholars trying to co-opt or complement him and delving deeper into his work to discover previously overlooked facets, revelations or contradictions.

What is perhaps most surprising about Foucault's extensive legacy in International Relations is that his work does not directly address the notion of the 'international'. This lack of direct comment on the 'international' leads to a problematization of Foucault's relationship with International Relations. However, Foucault's influence on a series of important contributions to the discipline remains undisputed. The article's main objective is to survey and celebrate the scope of foucaultian IR. The longevity of Foucault's ideas in International Relations is both a testament to the remarkable acumen of his philosophical stance, and to the diversity and value of the toolkit he proffers scholars. However, this considerable variety makes it that much harder to identify a common thread among these diverse uses and interpretations of his work. At a fundamental level, I would argue that nearly all of these appropriations of Foucault presuppose the value of critically engaging with the central tenets of IR theory and carry an implicit warning about the political effects of fixating theoretical constructs such as the state, identity, security and sovereignty when speaking about the international.

My discussion of the foucaultian imprint on International Relations will shadow Foucault's own trajectory from the reconstitution and critique of the modern episteme in the *Order of Things* (1970) to the more practically oriented lectures on governmentality. Foucault's path was one of self-criticism, amendments and innovations, which defined and sharpened his understanding of notions such as truth, power, discourse, discipline, government and biopower. By following the development of Foucault's work and its integration in IR chronologically, this paper suggests that the ongoing integration of foucaultian insights complements and reinforces the existing body of work in International Relations. However, I will also address some of the criticisms levelled at Foucault's contributions to the discipline.

The following exploration will be developed in three parts. The first section will discuss the poststructural critique of neorealism, which is one of the most sustained theoretical challenges to the hegemony of power politics. Part two will address several of the notable uses of discourse analysis and their contributions to the study of violence and national identity. Part three will consider the use of governmentality in order to analyze emerging networks of power at the international level, and the ways in which

governmentality is being adapted to a discussion of the 'permanence' of sovereign power in International Relations. Although the brevity of this paper does not allow for a lengthy discussion of Foucault's work, each section will contain brief definitions of the analytical terms used by the author in order to establish clear links with their adaptation by scholars of International Politics. The Foucault-inspired contributions to International Relations represented here are necessarily selective and it is beyond the scope of this paper to mention them all. These contributions were chosen to demonstrate the scope of foucaultian inspired critiques of positivist and foundationalist International Relations theory, and the myriad research programs inspired by his scholarship.

Foucault and the Critique of Neorealism

Tracing the intellectual lineage of the early poststructural critiques of mainstream International Relations offers a particular challenge. Direct references to individual thinkers are sparse and their integration is at once multifarious, broad and personal. However, I contend that a closer examination of these contributions reveals significant foucaultian influences, which have been instrumental in destabilising the metanarratives at play in International Relations Theory.¹

In one of the earliest and most sophisticated attacks on neorealism, Richard K. Ashley calls upon Foucault, Derrida and a host of other poststructuralist thinkers to problematize the assumptions of the then-dominant form of theorizing in International Relations. Ashley is particularly interested in detailing the ways through which claims about international politics were established and in undoing the apparent coherence and unity of the discourses of 'anarchy' and 'sovereignty'. For Ashley, the presentation of the latter notions as self-evident, unproblematic and unified points of departure effectively forecloses alternative

¹ In his article 'Engaging Foucault: Discourse, Liberal Governance and the Limits of foucaultian IR', Jan Selby disputes the strictly foucaultian heritage of a selection of poststructuralist scholars like Rob Walker and Richard Ashley by arguing that thinkers like Derrida had a greater influence on their work. I argue that a closer look at their work reveals a greater foucaultian influence than Selby would allow. It is also necessary to mention that the occasional use of the term poststructuralism in this article partly refers to Foucault's work but also highlights the influence of mostly French deconstructionists and literary theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes. Influential scholars of International Relations such as David Campbell, R.B.J. Walker and Richard K. Ashley have taken their cue from a variety of poststructural philosophers and the visibility of Foucault's imprint, although important, differs from one individual to the other.

conceptualisations of the international realm. Ashley attributes these strategies of closure to a broader modern tendency that, in its effort to provide 'secure' foundations to knowledge, readily discards symptoms of discontinuity, contingency and ambiguity (Ashley, 1984).

Through a reading of Foucault, Ashley casts radical doubt on the idea of Rational Man as the sovereign subject of representation, a conceptual premise that constitutes neorealism's very condition of possibility. In the *Order of Things* (1970), Foucault observes that a crucial epistemic change is taking place around the middle of the 18th century. Man is suddenly thought of as "the difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge" (1970: 310). As the interested source and object of representation, Man can no longer rely on the pre-established web of ordered relations characteristic of the classical *episteme*. He is left alone to confront the limitations of his knowledge about himself and the world. The physical world and the language that replicates it are no longer transparent; the precise historical origin of language is in fact unknown, and the exact properties of nature remain largely un-chartered. Kant, fully conscious of the inherently problematic character of representation, attempts to ground and legitimize claims to knowledge. By doing this, he initiates what Foucault describes as the typically modern propensity to "affirm man's finitude and at the same time completely deny it" (Rabinow and Dreyfus, 1982: 31). Through "critical reason", Kant attempts to establish Man as both an empirical being, subject to historical and intellectual contingency, and as a transcendental entity which would allow for a an "account of man as a self-producing source of perception, culture, and history" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 33). Foucault insists that the efforts to posit Man both as the empirical and transcendental source of representation are self-defeating and that the tension between the two poles will never be fully resolved until we let go of our anthropological discourse and of our obsession with the 'origins'.

Following Foucault, Ashley argues that state sovereignty was consciously defined as a valid ontological term by critical reason. In his words, sovereignty "invokes a figure of man who recognizes some specific limitations on his doing and knowing, not as external constraints, but as a virtually constitutive of his autonomous being as the necessary centre of historical narrative" (Ashley, 1989: 266). The very recognition of Man's limited ability to grasp the sources of representation turns into a reaffirmation of Man as the centrepiece of both history and rationality. The existence of Rational Man as an ahistorical, self-sustaining identity necessarily depends on a series of limitations. For neorealists, these limitations were clearly associated with the state, which connoted a pacified

domestic space and a stable hierarchical order. State sovereignty then provided the conditions of possibility for the exercise of Man's rationality. The state is presented as a self-identical space that is contrasted to an external environment that remains unchecked by a central authority, and therefore abandoned to chaos and unreason (Ashley, 1988: 238). The absolute nature of the state as a mode of organizing political and social beings implied an abstract ideal of internal order preserved from the vicissitudes of the outside. What lies outside of state boundaries is to be represented as a potentially ill-intentioned 'Other'.

The general ordering tendency of modernity is associated with what Ashley calls a heroic practice, which "is seen as ... more or less successfully replicated in a wide variety of ambiguous and indeterminate sites to discipline interpretation, fix meanings, impose boundaries, discipline what people can know and do, and, among other things, dispose people to the further replication of the practice itself" (1988: 243). Here, we can clearly identify references to Foucault's notions of 'power' and 'truth'. In contrast to its usual characterisation as the imposition of institutional or individual will, Foucault defines "power" as a creative and productive force that "traverses and produces things, induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (Foucault, 1980: 119). Its effectiveness does not lie in placing a mere limit on desire but in constituting social rites and instruments of domination that are both tolerable and efficient (1980: 86). Rather than being defined negatively through the prohibitive decrees of external authorities, the formation of subjectivity has to do with assimilating and perpetuating what is being presented as acceptable criteria for knowledge and being.

In order to make apparent the claims to knowledge that have been displaced or discarded by the dominant paradigms in each discursive formation, Foucault specifies how the general, yet strategically specific logic of 'truth' directs relations of power. Truth, Foucault says, "is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements... (and) is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it" (1980: 133). There are rules governing what constitutes a valid statement in linguistic constructions, clinical psychology or economic sciences. Especially when it comes to non-exact sciences, the consolidation of paradigms of knowledge is a consequence of a series of power effects that in turn reinforce and perpetuate certain criteria of validity. Ashley's critique of

neorealism draws significantly upon Foucault's claim that the foundational notions of Western political theory – Rational Man, Freedom, Legitimacy and Sovereignty – are contingent and not fixed. They have actually been constituted through a mixture of coercions, exclusions, struggles and strategic incitements that have taken different forms according to historical context.

As a dominant paradigm of knowledge, neorealism actively constitutes what can be said and thought about the international by affirming the division of the world into self-interested nation-states. As Ashley and Walker show, this voluntary epistemological closure can not be reconciled with the contemporary movement in the international sphere towards an increased fluidity of goods, people and technological advances (Ashley, 1988: 131 and Walker, 1993: 10). In itself, the variety, uncertainty and volatility implied by the term 'international' seems to require the restriction of a great variety of analytical and existential possibilities. State sovereignty also assigns particular conceptual, spatial and temporal limits to identity. As Walker asserts, "...it is this proliferation, affirmed by accounts of the modern state as ... container of all cultural meaning, and the site of sovereign jurisdiction over territory, property and abstract space, and consequently over history, possibility and abstract time, that still shapes our capacity to affirm both particular and collective identities" (1993: 162). The role of state sovereignty as a continuing foundational claim by IR theorists has tended to reinforce a conceptualization of identities as mutually exclusive and conflictual. The very basis for International Relations theory then participates in the creation and sustenance of mutually exclusive identities bound to oppose each other in an anarchical environment.

Although the critique of neorealism is undertaken on a variety of other fronts in the midst of the collapse of bipolarity, poststructuralist commentators such as Ashley, Walker, Derian, and Shapiro (1989) make prominent contributions. They expose the fragility of the assumptions upon which scientific and rationalist approaches to International Relations are based. These scholars have also initiated a lively epistemological debate that persists to this day. Foucault is one of the major inspirations behind this critical task, and therefore has some part to play in the opening-up and redefinition of the discipline as a whole.

Taking advantage of the openings brought about by the critique of the metanarratives at work in the neorealist conception, several poststructuralist scholars turn their attention to the analysis of discourse and, more specifically, to the ways in which discursive power-strategies constitute national identities. In doing so, they move towards more

historically and practically oriented research programs. This followed the trajectory of Foucault's own work from the *Order of Things* to the *Archaeology of Knowledge*.

Discourse analysis and Identity Formation

Discourse analysis has generated a rich research program in International Relations. The purpose of these studies has generally been to expose the arbitrary nature of the distinctions purported by traditional accounts of world politics, with an emphasis on deconstructing the notion of fixed cultural and national identities. Such accounts often have often concentrated on the linguistic strategies through which otherness and enmity have been constituted. As Jef Huysmans notes, this kind of research "brackets the level of the mediating structure; it stresses how shifts in the categories and agents 'filling' the enemy and friend positions effect changes in international practices and the identity of the units" (2002: 47). This section will present Foucault's definitions of discourse and genealogy as well as some of the significant uses of these notions in International Relations. It will close with a mention of some of the criticisms addressed towards Foucault's understanding of discourse.

In *The Order of Things* (1970), Foucault engages in a critique of contemporary attempts to prove the existence of non-contingent meanings. He claims to have discovered a space that cannot be reduced to ahistorical man, or to an understanding of human agency made intelligible with reference to the structure of shared practices (structuralism). He develops this new avenue in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), and begins by presenting an element central to this unexplored analytical direction; the *statement*. He defines the latter not as a proposition, an utterance or a speech act, but as the network of rules that make such things as propositions, utterances or speech acts meaningful. A statement's meaning then depended entirely on 'the field of use in which it (was) placed' (Foucault, 1969: 104). It can be placed in a variety discursive formations (larger bodies of knowledge such as political economy and natural history amount to discursive formations), themselves constituted through the aggregation of a great variety of statements. These create relatively autonomous logical spaces in which the individual parts (the statements) are defined through their position in a system (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 49). In the *Archaeology*, Foucault essentially asserts that discourse is the backdrop against which distinctions and similarities are established and

against which objects are organised in order to generate manageable forms of knowledge.

Several years later, Foucault turns his attention to social practices as opposed to formal rule-based systems. He thus begins to explore the possibility of defining subjects, knowledge categories and techniques of government through the actual historical practices in which they were involved. In so doing, Foucault uses a revised version of Nietzschean genealogy.² Instead of identifying a linear progression in a variety of study areas, as was commonly done by the social scientists of his day, Foucault's genealogies demonstrate that the interpretations that had currency at a particular time actually result from the arbitrarily imposed resolution of a great many unspoken struggles (Foucault, 1980: 83). Importantly, the constitution of objects of knowledge as true or false depends on the work of power that is premised upon on a series of simultaneously purposive and anonymous exclusions.

The distinctions between archaeology and genealogy are fairly subtle; however, most of the scholarly work focused on discourse analysis in International Relations integrates elements of both methods. While archaeology provides the conditions of possibility of knowledge, genealogy reveals the constraints that are placed upon it (O'Farrell, 2005: 68-69). For International Relations scholars, the emphasis is put on specifying the ways in which discourses produce socio-political relations, and on the practices through which coherent identities, historical continuities and foreign policies are created.

In *Writing Security* (1998), David Campbell describes the historical and discursive processes through which American identity has been constituted. Because Campbell's study provides one of the best examples of genealogical work in International Relations³, it is worth considering in more detail. Campbell maintains that, in the historical evolution of the United States up to the present, the consolidation of American identity has been informed by a series of localized and generalized differentiations. The inherent instability of the United States' identity, composed almost exclusively of immigrants, has required the constant use of powerful symbols and unifying historical narratives "so that which is contingent and subject to flux is rendered more permanent" (Campbell, 1998: 31). Campbell

² See Foucault, Michel (1977) *Nietzsche, Genealogy and History* in Bouchard, D.F (ed.) 'Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, Selected Essays and Interviews', Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

³ Although an honourable mention goes to Jens Bartelson's (1995) excellent *Genealogy of Sovereignty*.

argues that American identity itself partly overcomes its own internal contradictions by externalising them in a highly charged differentiation with ethnic, cultural or ideological opponents. He outlines the history of the internal constitution of the U.S. through a succession of stark exclusions, starting with the English settlers' brutal encounter with Amerindian tribes. Convinced that their mission was to materialize God's kingdom on earth, Puritans identified the untamed wilderness of North America and its original inhabitants as obstacles to their religious and cultural project. The settlers' own attributes of purity, industriousness, and civilization were articulated and enhanced through the characterization of Amerindians as licentious, stupid and barbaric. The advancing colonization of the West, depicted in most textbooks on American history as a manifestation of the 'frontier spirit', symbol of courage and perseverance, is also one of bloody encounters with the 'Other'. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the mounting number of immigrants from continental Europe and Ireland and of black slaves transported from Africa, contributed to the delimitation of a superior identity; characteristically white, male, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. Throughout the 20th century, however, American 'nationhood' endeavoured to overcome or sideline its own internal contradictions by externalizing them in a highly charged differentiation with ideological and, more recently, cultural opponents (both at home and abroad), all the while re-asserting the universality of its founding principles. The discursive constructions that follow 9/11 essentially draw on the same historically constituted modalities of exclusion.⁴

Arguing against the assumptions of mainstream International Relations Theory, Campbell insists that "the state's reality holds, not to a pre-determined conception of being, but to the combination of regularly repeated acts" (Campbell, 1998: 10).⁵ He asserts that the constitution of American identity within a bounded territorial space depends on the continual performance of rituals of exclusion and positive characterizations. The general lines of American nationhood and subjectivity emerge out of their integration and perpetuation of dominant discourses, themselves bound by struggles, reversals, novel combinations and historical transformations.

⁴ On this see David Campbell (2002) "Time is Broken: The Return of the Past in the Response to September 11".

⁵ This statement could be more easily attributed to Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), where she asserts that gender is a more of a performance than a universally valid *identity*. For Butler identity is 'performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (1990: 25).

Other scholars such as Henrik Larsen have set out to offer an alternative approach to the 'traditional' foreign policy analysis, which Larsen associated with scholars such as Rosenau and Holsti. Starting from Foucault's analysis in *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Larsen asserts that meaning and language are situational, self-referential and not exterior for the analyst to untangle; they are both part of the manner in which the researcher will emit hypotheses. If ideas are considered at all in the analysis of foreign policy decisions, they are seen as static 'variables' in an array of other variables (1997: 7). Larsen takes the case of 'Europe' as a discursive formation and shows how France and Britain each underwent modifications in their conceptual relations with 'Europe' at the end of the 1980's. Inspired by Foucault's understanding of discourse, Larsen aims to demonstrate the dynamic integration of sub-discourses with the more general statements on Europe. He further surveys the re-conceptualizations of the idea of Europe in relation to both Britain and France at the institutional and discursive levels.

In her study of the U.S. counterinsurgency policy in the Philippines, Roxanne Lynn Doty (1993) examines how the subjectivity of both Filipinos and Americans is constituted through language. Heavily influenced by Edward Said's (1979) notion of Orientalism, she argues that the discursive positioning of both protagonists involves a hierarchy of identities; Americans are associated with benevolence, efficiency and moral responsibility, while Filipinos are seen as having precisely the opposite qualities. The formation of identity here works according to an oppositional logic that can be traced in the linguistic construction of the 'Other'. In contrast to traditional approaches of Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations, discourse analysis assumes that "words, language and discourse have a force which is not reducible to either structures or cognitive attributes of social actors" (1993: 301). For Doty, as for Larsen, language possesses its own rules of constitution without being an unchanging object that can be invariably appropriated by individuals for their own purposes. Individuals are not 'the loci of meaning' (1993: 302); instead, their subjectivity is constructed through linguistic and conceptual categories that are assigned specific positions within larger discursive formations. Political interventions are made possible through the conceptual association of needs, characteristics and aspirations to specific groups and subjects.

In an effort to systematize the study of discourse in critical International Relations at the end of the 1990's, Jennifer Milliken (1999) reviews the various "theoretical commitments" of poststructuralism.

Typically, “discourses are understood to work to define and to enable, and also to silence and to exclude, for example, by limiting and restricting authorities and experts to some groups, but not others, endorsing a certain common sense, but making other modes of categorizing and judging meaningless, impracticable, inadequate or otherwise disqualified” (1999: 229). Following Milliken’s argument, political practices are permeated by dominant discourses that shape subjectivity and constitute meaningful objects. This understanding of discourse draws heavily on Foucault’s conception of power and truth. Throughout a discontinuous series of historical struggles, particular forms of knowing and studying social reality assert themselves over others. Identities or knowledges that do not correspond to these momentary ‘regimes of truth’ are resisted and discarded. ‘Difference’ is subject to linguistic categorization and the constitution of identity is once again established in oppositional terms. In keeping with this model, the study of International Relations would involve examining the congruence between the linguistic constitution of the enemy and the formal authority of experts and policy makers to demonstrate their mastery of dominant cultural and discursive paradigms (1999: 229).

As Milliken notes, many scholars in philosophy and the social sciences have criticized the notion that the historical study of the formation of an object of knowledge can only lead us to identify discontinuity, ruptures and silences. Given all the discontinuities and breaks identified by Foucault in the study of discursive formations, Milliken is struck by how “dominant discourses have been largely *continuous*”; frameworks of binary opposition seem to repeat themselves steadily (1999: 246). She insists on the ability of poststructural discourse analysis to identify continuity and to propose coherent research programs that stand in contrast to other, more static treatments of discourse. Along similar lines, Ole Waever (2002) argues that poststructural advances in the analysis of discourse should provide for a more systematic study of language and identity in foreign policy. He suggests a notion of discursively produced identity that is “both *structured* and *more unstable*” (2002: 22). The discontinuities found in discursive formations, just like those found in political practices, can be understood according to a set of basic concepts and codes that prevail in a political culture (2002: 30). According to Waever, the explanation of change and continuity must rely on a series of identifiable and lasting concepts in order to escape the foucaultian juxtaposition of disjointed histories.

Discourse analysis, often used in updated and augmented forms in present-day International Relations, has contributed greatly to our understanding of the dynamics of violence and identity-formation in

national and international contexts. Beyond the largely oppositional framings of these studies, however, I would argue that scholars must look more closely at the material and institutional elements which implicate the modalities of identity-formation within larger rationalities of rule. In this spirit, I will now consider Foucault's developments pertaining to governmentality.

Governmentality and International Relations

The first two stages of critique inspired by Foucault opened the way for an alternative understanding of International Relations by questioning the distinctions between domestic and international, sovereignty and anarchy, and between Rational Man and Irrational Man. Discourse analysis endeavoured to identify the practical and linguistic instantiations of the above distinctions. In an effort to go beyond the levels of discourse and epistemological critique, several commentators sought to incorporate some of Foucault's later and lesser-known work on governmentality. The sustained critique of state-centric approaches and the emergence of a global liberal space after the Cold War provided an opportunity to conceptualise the 'international' as an object of knowledge, manipulation and transformation. Several International Relations scholars have started to reconstitute the 'practices, programmes, techniques and strategies' that take the international as a terrain of intervention (Larner and Williams, 2004: 4). In this section, I will revisit Foucault's definition of governmentality, before providing a brief overview of how this term has been extended to the study of the 'international'.

Foucault's (1977) work on surveillance, discipline and punishment in the nineteenth century was criticized by many on the left for its failure to represent the more general relations between the state and society (Gordon, 1991: 4). While Foucault was receptive to this objection, he did not wish to continue the long tradition of political theory attached to the location and legitimation of authority. Rather, Foucault extended the method he had perfected in the examination of how individuals were "separated, studied, aggregated and scrutinized" according to new institutional and organizational grids, to regularities than could be observed within the population as a whole (Foucault, 1977: 139). At the end of the eighteenth century, in and amongst the political transformations that led to the gradual displacement of royal authority, the 'population' emerged as a distinct object, which had to be observed, managed and secured. As a result of these developments, "Western man was gradually learning what it meant to... have

a body, conditions of existence, probabilities of life, an individual and collective welfare, forces that could be modified, and a space in which they could be distributed in an optimal manner. For the first time in history... biological existence was reflected in political existence" (1978: 142). The optimization of life is integral to a distinctly liberal rationality of government. Within such a mentality of rule, life is best enhanced and guided through the production of political and economic freedoms (Foucault, 2004a: 65). Government then enlists individuals in processes of self-transformation in order to approach the standards set by distinct mentalities of rule at the level of an entire population.

At this point, it is possible to identify the appearance of a different kind of power, one that is distinct from both sovereign power and discipline. This form of power brings 'life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and (makes) knowledge-power an agent of transformations of human life' (1978: 143). What Foucault terms "biopower" amounts to the various ways in which life is encrypted in order to be rendered into a calculable, modifiable matter. Biopolitics is then a mode of government that regulates life through biopower. Whilst government consists in the more general architecture of rule at any given time, biopolitics can be viewed as the aggregation of means and strategies to manage and direct populations.

Foucault's work on government was limited to the consideration of national spaces. In order to extend governmentality's analytical remit, International Relations scholars must assume the existence of a global population, or at least of a dense network of local and international institutions, upon which transnational forms of liberal rule operate. As Ferguson and Gupta point out, global governmentality "includes transnational alliances forged by activists and grassroots organizations and the proliferation of voluntary organizations supported by complex networks of international and transnational funding and personnel" (Ferguson and Gupta, 2005: 115). In contrast with the transposition of modernized planning in the 1960s or with the imposition of fiscal discipline on recipient countries in the 1980s, the emerging compact of international development appeals to the inherent ability of individuals as well as state and non-state actors to integrate the now universal norms of entrepreneurship and good governance. In line with the progressive displacement of state functions toward self-regulating spaces such as the market and the third sector, international governmental and non-governmental organizations take on a more active role in the elaboration and implementation of particular criteria for targeted populations.

Following Foucault's conception of power, Jacob Sending and Iver Neumann point out that "the ascendance of non-state actors in shaping and carrying out global governance-functions is not an instance of transfer of power from the state to non-state actors... (but is rather an) expression of a *change* in governmentality by which civil society is redefined from a passive object of governance to be acted upon and into an entity that is both an object *and* a subject of government" (2006: 658). An approach focusing on governmentality sees the recent re-orientation of world governance not as a straightforward transfer of authority from sovereign states to civil society institutions, but as a strategic displacement of managerial techniques and functions. The role of the state and of multinational corporations in international development schemes is increasingly taking the form of supervision and partnership.

Studies in international governmentality generally aim to unpack the global liberal strategies implied by the informal and institutionalised promotion of rights, obligations and values. More specifically, these studies serve to bring forth the political, economic and legal criteria with which individual subjects and states are obligated to comply if they are to become successful participants in the expanding network of global norms and institutions. As Michael Merlingen notes, "IGOs (international governmental organizations) discursively constitute phenomena as problems whose solution requires international interventions" (2003, 368). Agents of international development therefore discursively constitute institutionally 'weak' and economically deprived countries as spaces of intervention. In so doing, they objectify and assess these countries according to specific performance criteria and knowledge practices. Statistical and formal reports pertaining to indexes of prosperity, rates of participation in civil society projects, and the relative success or shortcomings of democracy workshops in faraway towns and villages, construct a multitude of micro-standards that regulate the activities of individual subjects taking part in development practices. International governmental and non-governmental organizations monitor the behaviour of recipient countries along with local participants and coordinators. If these local actors fail to comply with the specific standards set in program guidelines, then a set of disciplinary measures are levied against the offenders (Merlingen, 2003: 369). Typically, within a neoliberal rationality, these measures involve a mixture of normalizing, positive incitements and more strictly punitive gestures.

Although the concept of governmentality can reveal a great deal about the emerging modes of intervention in the lives of citizens in developing countries, the application of this construct to International

Relations is still at an early stage of development. Foucault's study of the various historical combinations pertaining to the liberal rationality of government presupposes the nation-state as the delimited space within which governmental relations can take place. In the end, governmentality rests on the more fundamental assertion of a delimitative and coercive power inherent in the territorialisation of states. Some commentators have begun to address this particular issue.

The Sovereign Power/Biopower Nexus in International Relations

Several scholars⁶ have begun to explore the possible interrelationship between governmentality and sovereignty in the international realm. This development has taken place in the context of a growing interest in governmentality as an approach to International Relations, and of a concern for the modalities of national and international security strategies following terrorist attacks on Western soil. Most poststructuralists working in the field today would still insist on the arbitrary and exclusionary features of sovereignty, but few would go so far as to completely discard the state as a major player in the creation and perpetuation of global liberal governance. Furthermore, the fact that sovereign power is somewhat under-theorized in Foucault's work has prompted many scholars to address this apparent deficiency by returning to a series of lectures he delivered before starting his work on governmentality (*Society Must be Defended*) or by referring to Agamben (1998, 2005) and Schmitt (1985). In the following section, I give a brief account of how these problematiques have been presented in International Relations and in Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2000). I conclude with some remarks on the applicability of governmentality to the international realm.

Most IR scholars influenced by Foucault intend to unveil and destabilize the assumptions behind modern knowledge constructions of International Relations theory. However, these scholars cannot deny the permanence of political and territorial units in the contemporary world. Julian Reid and Michael Dillon maintain that "sovereignty remains an important aspect of the organization and operation of international power, including that of contemporary liberal peace" (2000: 127). When

⁶ See Claudia Aradau (2007), Claudia Aradau and Reus Van Munster (2007), Michael Dillon (1995) (2004), Michael Dillon and Julian Reid (2000, 2001), Julian Reid (2007), Andrew Neal (2004, 2006), Sergei Prozorov (2007), Jenny Edkins, Pin-Fat and Shapiro (2004), Vivienne Jabri (2007), Jef Huysmans (2007), Dauphinée and Masters (eds.) (2005). All these authors examine the security problematiques of the post Cold War order as well as the particular conceptualisations that have emerged out of the War on Terror.

considering biopolitical regimes in their national and international guises, it is indeed difficult to ignore the initial delimitation of the territories and populations upon which government acts. It is also impossible to ignore the decisions pertaining to the needs and the means by which these populations are kept safe. Dillon maintains that governmentality necessarily relies on “the forceful delimitation of the spaces in which it can operate. These, of course, are precisely what all the spectacles, assertions, legislative, territorializing, and identifying practices of sovereignty itself help to furnish and establish” (1995: 333). The constitution of a juridical ensemble supposes, as Foucault demonstrates, the forceful unification of warring ‘nations’ in a state and the forceful delimitation of territorial boundaries.⁷ These boundaries are perpetually reasserted through powerful discursive and legislative injunctions. A variety of exclusionary modes and practices are enacted in order to defuse the inherent fragility of national identity and physical borders; practices of exclusion are integral to presumably stable forms of cultural and national identification. The performance of sovereign power is therefore visible in the discursive formulation and institutional validations of what constitutes an ‘imminent threat’ to the population as well as in the specification of preventive or defensive measures needed to secure it. The material objectives regarding national security, in terms of institutional and military preparedness, are intimately related with the necessary consolidation of an object to secure, that is, a population bound by emotional solidarity and in accord with the political responses adopted by its governing bodies.

Taking after both Foucault and Agamben, Dillon attests that “any power over death, such as that which classically characterized sovereign power, must nonetheless also be implicated simultaneously in the specification of the life whose life it is that it ultimately desires to command” (2004: 59). Here, sovereign power’s initial gesture to capture life is intimately bound with its specification through biopolitical calculations. Power over death and decisions to enact security measures are at once prior and contemporaneous to biopolitical stratagems. Following Foucault’s lead, Dillon rightly insists on the specification of life as a crucial aspect in the understanding of subjectivity.

In his book, *The Biopolitics of The War on Terror* (2006), Julian Reid makes use of Foucault’s inversion of Clausewitz’s aphorism to explore the war-like strategies through which liberal regimes have asserted and perpetuated themselves globally. Aiming to unsettle the normative claims of cosmopolitan liberalism, and the practices it intends to promote globally, he

⁷ See Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* (2003).

refers back to Foucault's genealogy of disciplinary methods and rationalities in 19th century France and England. Reid argues that the disciplinary techniques developed to pacify and regulate the domestic populations of developed Western states are now being applied to objectify and correct the behaviour of the countries where terrorism or other forms of defiance take hold. As he contends, the current reaction of liberal states to the threat posed by terrorism only confirms their continuing 'willingness to wager on their abilities to suborn the life of their enemy to the superiority of the forms of peace and humanity on which their own ways of life are founded' (Reid, 2006: 11). The reintroduction of the disciplinarian elements inherent in the promotion of cosmopolitan democracy lends a welcome critical edge to Reid's account.

Making use of both discourse analysis and governmentality, Vivienne Jabri's *War and the Transformation of Global Politics* points to late modern wars as multifaceted power containers which do not only suggest "a sovereign capacity to kill, but the power to discipline and to regulate social life" (2007: 61). In the context of contemporary wars, of which Iraq is a prime example, the modification of local structures and behaviours through extensive regulatory designs has become intimately linked with the physical violence wrought on designated populations. Importantly, the extension of liberal peace is now conducted in the name of humanity and relies on the discursive categorization of those who oppose the perpetuation of the cosmopolitan project as 'monstrous' or 'inhuman' (2007: 65). As Jabri points out; "crucial to present day modes of colonization and their display of sovereign power is that such display combines with legitimizing discourses that constitute the recipient, or target, populations as subjects of humanitarian concern" (2007: 151). Expressions of sovereign power are then accompanied by discursive objectifications that lend legitimacy to the disciplining and transformation of populations. Jef Huysmans, in the *Politics of Insecurity* (2007), examines the question from the perspective of migration and asylum in the European Union. He does so by drawing the differences and possible overlaps between a "juridical-territorial rendering" of the European Union with its inbuilt definition of legal and illegal movement, and a "biopolitical technique" which monitors the European population and identifies the elements that are potentially prejudicial to its overall health and prosperity (Huysmans, 2007: 103-104). In his analysis, Huysmans combines the linguistic and existential constitution of objects of insecurity with the technocratic rendering of security issues that concern the European Union as a territorial and 'cultural' entity to great effect.

Among the other interesting attempts to elucidate the kinds of power at work in the contemporary world within International Relations is Edkin's and Pin-Fat's introduction to their edited volume *Sovereign Lives* (2004). Following Foucault and Agamben, they distinguish between a "relationship of power [which] 'acts upon [the subject's] actions'" and a "relationship of violence [which] 'acts directly and immediately on the other'" (2004: 9). The reversibility and flexibility that characterizes biopower is contrasted with the immobility and starkness of sovereign power. For Edkins and Pinfat, the proper consideration of sovereign power's primordial hold on bare life is an opportunity to both accept bare life as it is and contest the ban imposed upon it. If, as they contend, the resistance to the sovereign ban reintroduces the possibility of posing properly political gestures, it is impossible to conceive of such an intimation within a relationship of power, as any subjective action is already presupposed and integrated in a schema of biopolitical potentialities.

At this stage, it is worth pausing to consider one of the more incendiary and thought provoking works of the last ten years, *Empire* (2000), which has had considerable influence on the above selection of International Relations scholars. The authors' ambitious objective is to re-articulate the multiplicity of human struggles in our age unto a new plane of immanence, which opposes the intangible yet compelling power of Empire to that of the multitude. Whilst the book is self-consciously experimental and offers a projection of future struggles that is largely theoretical and hypothetical, it is a brave attempt to make sense of the diffuse and confusing nature of contemporary reality through a collage of the more important currents of thought of our day. While I cannot go into a detailed appraisal of this imposing work, I will single out some of the issues that are relevant to our present discussion.

Against a liberal understanding of global changes as the result of spontaneous interaction between market forces and civil society, and in contrast with the thesis that a single power centre is orchestrating the disposition of global forces, Hardt and Negri suggest that Empire "stands clearly over the multitude and subjects it to the rule of its overarching machine, as a new leviathan. At the same time, however, from the perspective of social productivity and creativity (ontological), the hierarchy is reversed" (2000: 62). They argue that sovereignty, as one of the main ordering functions of modernity and as one of the main vectors of the extension of capital, is being subsumed unto the plane of immanence/empire (2000: 332). This plane of immanence is constituted through the self-perpetuating activity of what Hardt and Negri call a "new

economic-industrial-communicative machine – in short, a global biopolitical machine” which is in it of itself the source of an emerging “imperial normativity” (2000: 40). A new transnational form of power is created through the mutually reinforcing dissemination of the all-pervasive legal and normative requirements of cosmopolitan governance and of the technological and financial advances within global capitalism. Apart from being characterized by the spatial and temporal accelerations (in terms of the flows of goods, capital and people) brought about by technological advances, Empire presupposes a new notion of right. Where the old modern sovereign right was intent on drawing lines and boundaries, right now constitutes a global assemblage of power in which differences and particularities are actually endorsed, replicated and utilized (2000: 138). This new universal right is characterized by a seemingly boundless ethos of acceptance and inclusion and is premised upon the conviction that a set of fundamental ethical and moral rules applies to humanity as a whole. Imperial biopolitics, in keeping with Foucault's definition, simultaneously individualizes subjects of governance by transcribing and controlling particularities, and totalizes by relating and integrating these specificities to globalized normative expectations.

When the virtual, self-perpetuating biopolitical machine encounters breakdowns or serious derogations to its universal ethical codes, however, imperial right rears its head to redress the problem. In Hardt and Negri's words, “Empire is formed not on the basis of force itself but on the basis of the capacity to present force as being in the service of right and peace” (2000: 15). They present sovereign power as a rapid-response instance that resurges when the security of certain global biopolitical processes is put in doubt.

Is Governmentality Truly Global?

The above accounts have a great deal to tell us about the general inscription of life at the global level. Issues such as poverty, migration and transnational crime are increasingly constructed as risks to an international biopolitical whole.⁸ Accordingly, they are constituted as problems that can be known, analysed and remedied through borderless schemas of transcription and intervention. Indeed, initiatives that attempt to impart self-sufficiency in remote localities throughout the developing world are intimately connected to the management of migratory flows, which are deemed to affect the

⁸ On this see Mark Duffield's (2010) excellent article ‘The Liberal Way of Development and the Development-Security Impasse’.

stability and wellbeing of the world population. However, it seems that the theoretical leap made from Foucault's analysis of government within national spaces to the analysis of a global kind of governmentality is rarely questioned in the current literature. There are several preliminary points to be made about this extension.

Hard and Negri's notion of imperial right supposes a global form of governmentality that is based on the immaterial authority of liberal cosmopolitan norms. This means that no individual on earth can escape the double bind of juridical and biopolitical objectification. However, a superficial look at the different forms of life in the international realm points to a highly uneven integration of those modes of objectification. In fact, the degree to which life is invested by biopower varies greatly from one context to the other. If governmentality works through the freedom of subjects, as Foucault tells us, and if it necessarily relies on specific institutional, material and cultural support networks characteristic of liberal polities, it is perhaps a little hasty to speak of an undifferentiated and ubiquitous governmentality at the international level. Even if the dissemination of ethical norms and performance standards through the ever more present and numerous agencies of international development suggests that a transnational form of governmentality is beginning to emerge, the effectiveness of advanced liberal norms depends on pre-existing dispositions to internalize the requirements set out by neoliberal attitudinal and institutional models. As Jonathan Joseph points out, 'the fact that the rest of the world does not enjoy the same conditions of advanced liberalism means that the *nomos* of governmentality has great difficulty turning itself into a world order' (2010: 224). In spite of the interesting avenues already explored by studies on global governmentality, I think a more qualified use and interpretation of the approach is in order. It is often the case that governmentality is best applied to very specific regulatory regimes and to countries where the conditions are amenable to such an analysis.⁹

The fact that the material conditions for governmentality to take hold are not present everywhere begs us to reconsider the sources of this imbalance. Here, Joseph (2010) and Selby (2007) suggest that a Marxian perspective would be a helpful way to redress the oversights in many of the studies on global governmentality. This is a potentially fruitful solution but there are many philosophical difficulties associated with this endeavour. On other counts, the fact that Foucault did not really concern himself with countries in the developing world makes the postcolonial contribution to International Relations all the more important. In contrast with the latter

⁹ See for example Walters and Haar (2005) and Fournier (2011).

Foucault's writings on governmentality, postcolonial writers rightly insist on domination and discipline as the prevalent forms of power in the relations between North and South. Equally, feminist authors, whilst having appropriated Foucault's insights on power, the body and sexuality, have rectified his near omission of women and gender.¹⁰ Both of these critical strands, which sadly remain at the margins of the discipline, have proved invaluable not only in extending, deepening and critiquing Foucault's main predicates but also in reaffirming the plight, existence and identity of innumerable citizens across the globe. A greater appreciation of postcolonial and feminist authors, many of whom bear a foucaultian influence, would undoubtedly contribute to broaden the scope of International Relations and sharpen its critical edge.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to highlight the variety and the importance of Foucault's influence on International Relations theory, and to argue for the need to interrogate the common interpretations of sovereignty, power and identity. As I have attempted to demonstrate, Foucault's influence on the critical redefinition and opening of the discipline has been substantial. Thanks in part to the critique of rationalist and scientific approaches to International Politics by foucaultian scholars, the range of themes and issues studied within the field has increased greatly. Similarly, the introduction of discourse analysis to the study of violence and national identity, has contributed to a broader understanding of these matters than a neorealist perspective would have offered. Discourse analysis has also had considerable appeal for more mainstream schools of International Relations theory. Governmentality, one of the rapidly expanding appropriations of Foucault's work, has proven to be a particularly valuable insight into the constitution of global networks of power and into the formation of new kinds of subjectivity. The approach is itself undergoing a critical reinterpretation that aims to integrate state violence, socio-economic inequalities and discourse to its analytical remit. We have also seen that the application of governmentality beyond the national space is a recent occurrence and that it needs to be qualified carefully when applied to the study of the international realm, which is far from being evenly governmentalized.

¹⁰ Here, it is important to note that Foucault's questioning of the idea of the Subject is contrary to the emancipatory leanings of many postcolonial and feminist writers.

The combinations, critical commentaries and detailed empirical investigations that have been inspired by Foucault in International Relations are proof enough of his influence. The incredible vivacity and precision of his thought is being heralded by his admirers as much as his detractors. Whilst not providing us with a ready-made political program to counter different the different forms of power (sovereignty, government and discipline) he has identified, Foucault leaves us with a 'critical attitude' which enables us to question the taken-for-granted representations and gestures that structure our lives and ascribe arbitrary limitations to our subjectivities.

Although this is not the place to go into a defence of Foucault's notion of resistance, I would like to hint at the sort of critical attitude that accompanies his philosophical stance. Out of the many twists and turns that led him to abandon governmentality for an extensive genealogy of the Western Subject, Foucault became increasingly preoccupied with the possibility of going beyond power. In one of his later essays, *What is Enlightenment?* (1984), Foucault tells us that he has always remained at the limit of the moral promise of the Enlightenment, of which liberalism is an embodiment, by refusing to give in to a reformulation and pursuit of its universal ideals. Essentially, Foucault insists on the contingency of the political, and seems to suggest that it is less dangerous to pursue changes in the disposition of power according to the requirements of the present situation than to provoke changes by following the essentialized notions of humankind purported by modern ideologies. Foucault invites us to an ethos of absolute caution and enjoins us to question the modalities of knowledge about society and the self. By dismissing the idea of the modern subject, whose rationality and unity secure the foundations of the essential categories of international politics, Foucault has unwittingly sparked an epistemological awakening within International Relations and has completely changed the way we talk about power, national identity and state sovereignty within the discipline. His contribution to the critical opening of International Relations is now beyond doubt.

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