

## The Hegemony of Governmentality: Towards a Research Agenda

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### Abstract

*This contribution sets out a research agenda that explores the promises of combining theories of hegemony and governmentality in the study of world politics. It is argued that certain forms of governmentality are 'strategically selected' and form part of hegemonic strategies while hegemonic strategies are enhanced by techniques of governmentality. It is also important to look at the underlying context that allows for micro practices to be 'colonised' by macro actors and which drives such actors to use such techniques. The theory of hegemony is seen as better at highlighting the context in which strategic action takes place, while governmentality is better at showing the workings of the technologies and techniques that are deployed by strategies of governing. Hegemony and governmentality therefore form part of the back and forth between macro and micro, structure and agency, institution and practice, highlighting different aspects of this constant interaction.*

**Keywords:** Hegemony, governmentality, international relations theory, critical realism, Gramsci, Foucault

### 1. Introduction

The three contributions to the previous issue of this journal address the matter of hegemony in world politics and are united in their belief that IR scholars deserve a richer account of hegemony than the often asocial and ahistorical version that is provided by many realist accounts. Seeing hegemony as a process of domination, realist accounts fail to adequately ground this in human societies and their associated cultures, practices and beliefs. Nicholas Onuf and Simon Reich and Ned Lebow provide worthy alternatives to the realist view that emphasises dominance through force by virtue of a preponderance of material capabilities. In Onuf's case, we have dominance through the use of rules<sup>1</sup>. In the case of Reich and Lebow, capabilities are only one source of power and the realist account ignores what they call social power as a means of determining influence.<sup>2</sup>

I could raise concerns about what exactly Reich and Lebow mean by the social by raising the question of whether there are such things as social structures – or perhaps more pertinent for IR, structural power – out there in the world? And I could raise similar questions for

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<sup>1</sup> My Gramscian-Foucauldian reworking of this would be to say that dominance through rules is accompanied by dominance through techniques and technologies of governance, protected by the armour of coercion. Nicholas Onuf, "Center-Periphery Relations: What Kind of Rule, and Does It Matter?" *All Azimuth* 6, no. 1 (2017): 5-16.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Reich and Richard Ned Lebow, "Influence and Hegemony: Shifting Patterns of Material and Social Power in World Politics," *All Azimuth* 6, no. 1 (2017):17-47.

Onuf in wondering if there is more to the social than rules all the way down? But instead I will engage with some of these questions by raising a possible research agenda based around bringing together a social approach to hegemony and a view of contemporary global governance informed by arguments about governmentality. In some senses my approach is more conventional insofar as I follow a number of well-known IR scholars in turning to the work on hegemony by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Indeed, I, like many Gramscians, would respond to Reich and Lebow with the argument that Gramsci already has a more social understanding of hegemony that takes into consideration the ability of social groups to exercise their influence. However, the purpose of this contribution is not to get into a discussion of who offers the better account of hegemony, or to engage in the more philosophical issue of just what we mean by the ‘social’, or ‘rules’, or ‘material capabilities’. Instead, I outline a research agenda that starts from an inclination that maybe the best way to explore the current exercise of hegemony in world politics is to see whether it operates as governmentality.

I start by outlining a conception of hegemony that is informed by Gramsci, but which also emphasises the notion of social structure. I then give an account of governmentality before looking at how governmentality and hegemony might combine. I cannot here show in any detail how this works, but in bringing hegemony and governmentality together I challenge Gramscian approaches to account for the development and exercise of contemporary techniques and technologies of governance, while challenging Foucauldians to account for why these techniques and technologies have risen to such prominence.

## 2. Hegemony in Gramsci

The concept of hegemony, as it is best understood in the work of Antonio Gramsci, is not straightforwardly defined but develops through various arguments about the relationship between force and consent, state and civil society and structure and superstructure. Gramsci talks of the need to balance force and consent through the support of the majority<sup>3</sup> and the ‘contradictory and discordant *ensemble*’ of the political and cultural superstructures and the social relations of production.<sup>4</sup> Hegemony draws attention to the ways that social conditions of production, coercion, consent and leadership must combine in specific strategies that project themselves across a range of social institutions and practices. This can be understood through what Gramsci terms a historical bloc. This has two components. First, it addresses the way that a dominant group is able to construct a ruling alliance through offering concessions and incentives and through the articulation of certain ideas and interests. Second, it addresses the relationship between the ruling group and the socio-historical conditions within which this bloc can develop.

The combination of these two components allows for hegemony, or hegemonic projects, to be seen as the missing strategic element or mediating position between structures and agents that helps explain why certain things happen in certain times and places, or within certain conditions and contexts. Hegemonic projects refer to the mobilisation of support around a programme of action based on the interests of the leading group while incorporating other groups and fractions and seeking the resolution of conflicts of interest in favour of the leading group. The notion of hegemony links such projects to the longer-term securing of

<sup>3</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 80.

<sup>4</sup> Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*, 49.

social cohesion and consensus. Historical bloc sets this in the context of socio-historical relations. As Robert Cox notes, the historical bloc is a combination of ideas, institutions and material conditions.<sup>5</sup> What a Gramscian approach offers is a clear view that different groups act according to particular interests, but that this is set in a wider context of the social relations with which they must engage. This can be ontologically grounded in the debates about structure and agency.<sup>6</sup> Drawing on critical realist arguments about this relationship I suggest below that hegemony plays a crucial mediating role in the structure – agency relationship.

Bhaskar<sup>7</sup> argues that while social structures do not exist independently of the activities that they govern, we must still distinguish between the conditions for human action and the activity itself rather than conflate them as might be said to occur in constructivist and structuration approaches.<sup>8</sup> Societies pre-exist the agents who live in them as an ever-present condition or material cause. But the structures of society are also the continually reproduced outcome of these agents' activities.<sup>9</sup> This process of social reproduction is largely unconscious because it is inscribed into our routines and activities. Only in particular circumstances (usually crises) do agents act in a more conscious way to change or transform these conditions. Hegemony can usefully be introduced at this point because, seen in relation to both structure and agency, it can be said to play a mediating role between the reproduction of social structures and conscious efforts either to transform or prevent the transformation of these underlying conditions. As Gramsci himself writes, 'incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves (reached maturity), and that despite this, the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making every effort to cure them, within certain limits, and to overcome them'.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in its agential sense hegemony relates to conscious, reflective, intentionality as is the case with hegemonic projects. However, our understanding of these must also recognise hegemony's relation to structural properties of pre-existing and relatively enduring social relations that possess powers of enablement and constraint. Hegemony stands in relation to structures and underlying social conditions and the more conscious, intersubjective, political and manifold activities associated with actual hegemonic projects and practices.

While Gramsci's own work does not contain a single, distinct approach, there are nevertheless some clear references to the underlying structural conditions that make hegemony possible. In defining the historical bloc, he talks of the 'complex, contradictory and discordant *ensemble* of the superstructures' in relation to 'the *ensemble* of the social relations of production'.<sup>11</sup> The relations between groups as manifested through institutions and practices are set within a structural context. In particular, Gramsci notes that hegemony 'must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity'.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Robert Cox and Timothy Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> For an IR view see; Colin Wight, *Agents, Structures and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 34-5.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism*, 34-5.

<sup>10</sup> Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*, 178.

<sup>11</sup> Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*, 366.

<sup>12</sup> Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*, 161.

Hegemony might also be seen as the problematisation of social structure insofar as it means recognising that deeper structural processes – most notably those concerned with economic production – do not automatically reproduce themselves, but need to be socially secured. Hegemony suggests that the relationship between such processes needs to be institutionally ‘fixed’. Capital accumulation can only occur through active state intervention while crisis tendencies can be offset by various forms of economic regulation. Hegemonic strategies, if they are effective, must try to root themselves in this ‘decisive sphere’ of economic activity, but this must also be related to broader issues of social cohesion. A Gramscian account of the postwar period thus uses the idea of historical bloc to account for the way that the realignment of the ruling bloc took place alongside deep-rooted changes in the economic system, the reorganisation of the labour process, the emergence of new forms of state intervention and new legitimating discourses. Consequently, as Cox notes:

Hegemony at the international level is thus not merely an order among states. It is an order within a world economy with a dominant mode of production which penetrates into all countries and links into other subordinate modes of production. It is also a complex of other international social relationships which connect the social classes of the different countries. World hegemony can be described as a social structure, an economic structure, and a political structure.<sup>13</sup>

At this international level, a new institutional settlement was guaranteed by the economic dominance of the US, backed up by military superiority and the promise of a liberal international order. It should be remembered, however, that Gramsci clearly saw international relations as following social relations, arguing that changes in geopolitics are the result of changes in social structure.<sup>14</sup> The postwar social hegemony was maintained through a combination of social contract and economic growth.<sup>15</sup> Failure of interventionist policies to sustain economic growth in the 1970s and failure to deal with deeper structural contradictions in the economy led to domestic and international crises and the emergence of new neoliberal strategies of intervention which started to gain the support of those in power.

These failures and subsequent thinking represent social dynamics rather than simply international ones. If we see a crisis of US hegemony at the global level, then we need to look into its social roots. Reich and Lebow’s critique of realism suggests this, yet they direct much of their argument towards making the case for US weakness and continuing decline, rather than exploring the social basis of hegemony. The question to ask of them is why, despite the all too evident weaknesses of the US, do we not find in China, the EU or some other emerging power, any sign of an alternative hegemon? The answer is surely that they lack the underlying social or structural power to put themselves forward as leading. The question of US weakness is only part of the picture because hegemony at the international level is not only an order among states. If hegemony really is social, then it is as much about things like changes in the economy, methods of economic production, the role of finance, understandings of the role of government and the state, cultural influence, and much else. The US might be declining as a hegemon, but changes in the global system cannot be understood separately from the social, economic and political changes that are taking place *within* the US. The neoliberal rethinking that now dominates global governance reflects ‘Americanism’

<sup>13</sup> Cox and Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order*, 137.

<sup>14</sup> Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*, 176.

<sup>15</sup> Cox and Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order*, 247.

in the same way that Gramsci saw Fordism as representing ‘Americanism’. There may be a crisis of hegemony, but it remains America’s crisis of hegemony. And the rest of the world continues to pick up the tab.

### 3. Governmentality

In contrast to the Gramscian approach to hegemony, governmentality may not be a theory as such but perhaps what William Walters calls ‘a cluster of concepts’ that we can use to critically analyse various forms of governance.<sup>16</sup> Indeed this definition itself reflects a certain way of thinking among many scholars who prefer to see governmentality as helping to make sense of the world through what Mitchell Dean calls an ‘analytics of government’.<sup>17</sup> This relates governmentality to various ways of seeing and perceiving, distinctive ways of thinking and questioning, the various rationalities of acting and directing and specific ways in which subjects are formed.

This is in contrast to the more ontological arguments about structure and agency outlined above. While an analytics of government clearly has ontological implications, there is a preferred tendency in Foucauldian scholarship to take this down a genealogical path while emphasising the relationship between the changing shape of the world and different discursive productions.<sup>18</sup> This leads to an understanding of governmentality in the broad sense, as a framework of analysis for understanding a wide range of power relations, albeit focussed on the idea that governing takes place through the ‘conduct of conduct’. Nevertheless, Foucault’s historical account of the emergence of governmentality does provide something of an ontological explanation with a focus on historical developments. In distinguishing this more specific focus from a general view of the shaping of conduct we can follow Walters in calling this *liberal governmentality*.<sup>19</sup> Liberal governmentality, as Walters goes on to note, is the most frequent, if not the only, understanding in Foucault’s own work and clearly underpins Foucault’s best known definition of governmentality

By ‘governmentality’ I understand the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument.<sup>20</sup>

The focus on population distinguishes this form of power from those more narrowly related to sovereignty and territorial control. It also clearly relates to what he calls biopower, as a set of mechanisms for the management of the human species<sup>21</sup> and pastoral power as a beneficent power exercised over a multiplicity rather than a territory.<sup>22</sup> Governmentality can also be distinguished from forms of disciplinary power as outlined in Foucault’s earlier works insofar as it operates in a less direct, less overtly coercive and more reflexive way. Like disciplinary power it is most effective when it is able to get us to govern ourselves, but does this through the ‘management and organization of the conditions in which one can be free’.<sup>23</sup> It is not, though, that governmentality replaces these other forms of power, but works

<sup>16</sup> William Walters, *Governmentality: Critical Encounters* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 2.

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 23.

<sup>18</sup> Walters, *Governmentality*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Walters, *Governmentality*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2007), 108.

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, *Security*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *Security*, 126-9.

<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2008), 63-4.

alongside them in a triangle of sovereignty-discipline-government, something that is clearly highly relevant for scholars of international politics.

The majority of Foucault's arguments about governmentality are concentrated on a specifically liberal form of rule that works, in particular, through the encouragement of free conduct, self-awareness and more generally, an appeal to the freedom of the governed. As Busse says,<sup>24</sup> modern governmentality is unthinkable without the freedom of the individual. This modern governmentality, in contrast to more directly coercive forms of power, works from a distance and seeks to create free and active subjects. It is thus always concerned with its own limits and follows a rationality of governance that aims to respect the freedom of the governed by allowing things to take their natural course. In particular, governing well comes to be understood as respecting the freedom of social and economic processes, that is the spheres of civil society and the market.<sup>25</sup> Based on the *laissez-faire* principles of political economy, liberal governance finds its expression in civil society and is legitimated through a concern not to 'govern too much'.<sup>26</sup> However, Foucault recognises freedom as a social construction that operates through a variety of social practices that reinforce rational, normalised conduct. Liberalism works 'not through the imperative of freedom, but through the social production of freedom'.<sup>27</sup> Foucault goes on to argue that: 'Liberalism is not acceptance of freedom; it proposes to manufacture it constantly, to arouse it and produce it, with, of course, [the system] of constraints and problems'.<sup>28</sup> Liberal governmentality requires political economy as its major form of knowledge and security as an essential technique for the protection of interests in the workings of freedom. Freedom, in other words, operates by means of an economic 'regime of truth' and through accompanying processes of policing and securing.

If we consider dominant forms of governmentality today as assuming a more neoliberal character, this is so in the sense of a reflexive critique of the postwar institutional settlement and the failures of socio-economic regulation – both national and international. Neoliberal governmentality is more reflexive and pragmatic about the socially situated and embedded character of human conduct. It strives to promote the norms and values of the market in ever more areas of social life. This is no mere economic doctrine, but a means of governing based on the dynamics of competition and enterprise. Models of competitive or entrepreneurial conduct must reach not just to institutions and social practices, but right down to the self-understanding and self-governance of individuals. These individuals are appealed to, or even (if a harder poststructuralist line is taken), constructed as, free but responsible for their actions. There are various new contrivances associated with this neoliberal form of rule – Rose's analysis of 'advanced liberalism'<sup>29</sup> points to new mechanisms of expertise, a pluralisation of social technologies and governance through quasi-autonomous bodies, and a new specification of the subject as consumer.

The question to be addressed to IR scholars is whether these features, described by Rose as 'advanced liberalism' can be applied to all societies? Do these mechanisms of rule operate on a global scale? Can they spread outwards from the 'advanced liberal' centre? These, I

<sup>24</sup> Jan Busse, "Theorizing Governance as Globalized Governmentality: The Dynamics of World-Societal Order in Palestine," *Middle East Critique* 24, no. 2 (2015): 172.

<sup>25</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 319.

<sup>27</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 65.

<sup>28</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 65.

<sup>29</sup> Nikolas Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," in *Foucault and Political Reason*, eds. Osborne, Barry, and Rose (London: UCL Press, 1996), 37-64.

suggest, are crucial questions for applying governmentality to global politics.

#### 4. Hegemonic Governmentality

The term hegemonic in realist parlance suggests full dominance. In a Gramscian sense, this dominance is not necessarily total but goes through a process of construction, reconstruction and contestation. The idea behind a Gramscian approach to governmentality is that it allows that certain forms of governmentality become hegemonic while also drawing attention to its far from stable character. This is to ask about the conditions under which governmentality itself comes into being, to look at its opportunities and limitations and the strategic issues these pose. This argument is premised on the view, articulated by a number of critics<sup>30</sup> that while governmentality might be good at showing *how* contemporary forms of governance work, it cannot on its own explain *why* these work in the way that they do. A wider picture and deeper social ontology is needed if we are to understand variations in governmentality and why certain neoliberal forms of governmentality have become prominent within certain societies and within most international organisations. Interestingly, the critics all draw on Marxism and critical realist philosophy to make this point. Their deeper social ontology refers to the underlying social relations or structural context that enables and constrains the actions of various social groups. These social relations also enable and constrain the functioning of governmentality and help explain why it is that governmentality has an uneven and contested influence across the international domain. Underlying social relations also provide the context within which social groups act in a strategic way and it is in order to address this strategic element that the question of hegemony is brought into the picture.

Although the strength of a governmentality approach is its attention to fine detail, this should not lead to the study of such practices being given some sort of ontological primacy, or, to use Laura Zanotti's more nuanced words, favouring, 'modest' relational ontologies over 'substantialist' ones.<sup>31</sup> While much of his work is clearly focussed at the micro level, Foucault acknowledges that there is a back and forth between the micro and macro which we might interpret here as a back and forth between governmentality and hegemony. Micro powers, while having their own specificity, may be taken up and used by the state, or by ruling groups seeking to utilise them as part of a macro strategy of governing. He argues that 'we have to analyse the way in which the phenomena, techniques and procedures of power come into play at the lowest levels; we have to show, obviously, how these procedures are displaced, extended, and modified and, above all, how they are invested or annexed by global phenomena'.<sup>32</sup> Hence Foucault deliberately focusses on the 'infinitesimal mechanisms of power' while asking how these might be useful to the bourgeoisie. He argues that, in the case of madness, the bourgeoisie found a use for the techniques of exclusion, the surveillance apparatus and the mediocalisation of sexuality, madness and delinquency. The 'micromechanics of power', at a certain point in time, came to constitute the interest

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Joseph, *The Social in the Global: Social Theory, Governmentality and Global Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Ngai-Ling Sum and Bob Jessop, *Towards Cultural Political Economy: Bringing Culture Back into Economics* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2012); Jan Selby, "Engaging Foucault: Discourse, Liberal Governance and the Limits of Foucauldian IR," *International Relations* 21, no. 3 (2007): 324-34; Jonathan Davies, *Challenging Governance Theory: From Networks to Hegemony* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2011); Stephen Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 24, no. 3 (1995): 399-423; Richard Marsden, *The Nature of Capital: Marx after Foucault* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>31</sup> Laura Zanotti, "Governmentality, Ontology, Methodology: Re-thinking Political Agency in the Global World," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 38, no. 4 (2013): 289-90.

<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 2004), 30-1.

of the bourgeoisie.<sup>33</sup> Because these methods of individualisation and normalisation were consistent with the generation of economic profit and political control they were colonised and supported by the macro mechanisms of the state apparatus. Contrary to what Gill claims,<sup>34</sup> Foucault clearly does make macro level claims about how privatised power and new disciplinary techniques can be linked to the development of the capitalist mode of production as a means of exploiting labour power more effectively<sup>35</sup> and he notes the close links between disciplinary techniques and the apparatus of production.<sup>36</sup> This can be read as consistent with an understanding of hegemony insofar as, rather than starting with an abstract model of Leviathan, both approaches start with the actual techniques and mechanisms of domination.<sup>37</sup>

Foucault was obviously concerned to redress the balance regarding the macro and the micro. The micro level is important because power is emergent in a given place and time as an ill developed cluster of relations.<sup>38</sup> What Foucault calls ‘great strategies of power’, exercised at the macro level, ‘depend for their conditions of exercise on this level of the micro-relations of power’.<sup>39</sup> However, this process also moves in the other direction as macro powers seek to ‘produce new effects and advance into hitherto unaffected domains’.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Foucault has a two-way understanding of the state as both colonised and coloniser. It is both the terrain through which various micro practices find their rationality and that which spreads this rationality to new areas of the social. This has been picked up and developed in Bob Jessop’s work where state power is seen as both the contingent outcome of various practices and also the very means by which existing micro relations of power can be codified, fixed, consolidated and institutionalized.<sup>41</sup> A similar point is made in Thomas Lemke’s argument for seeing the state as an effect of political strategies and social relations of power. On the one hand the state is to be understood as ‘an emergent and complex resultant of conflicting and contradictory governmental practices,<sup>42</sup> on the other, the state occupies a strategic position of some primacy. Lemke points to Foucault’s own argument that in contemporary societies

the state is not simply one of the forms of specific situations of the exercise of power - even if it is the most important - but that, in a certain way, all other forms of power relation must refer to it. But this is not because they are derived from it; rather, it is because power relations have become more and more under state control... Using here the restricted meaning of the word 'government', one could say that power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions.<sup>43</sup>

Rather than distinguish, as Zanotti does, between relational and substantive ontologies, Jessop and Lemke’s reading of Foucault shows that it is possible to develop a relational ontology (or at least a relational view of the state as a series of codified and institutionalised power relations, strategic interventions and social conflicts) alongside substantive ontological

<sup>33</sup> Foucault, *Society*, 32.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Gill, *Power and Resistance in the New World Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 130.

<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), 85-7.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, 221.

<sup>37</sup> Foucault, *Society*, 34.

<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Writings and Other Interviews 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 199.

<sup>39</sup> Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 199.

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 200.

<sup>41</sup> Bob Jessop, *State Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 152.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Lemke, “An Indigestible Meal? Foucault, Governmentality and State Theory,” *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 50.

<sup>43</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New York Press), 345.



claims about macro level processes and power relations, not least the development of capitalism and the bourgeoisie, their needs and requirements and the role of the state and other institutions in relation to these.

Macro powers like the state work, therefore, through the codification of a whole number of power relations that make their functioning possible.<sup>44</sup> Understanding this as a two way movement helps explain something like the development of neoliberalism as a process by which a variety of micro-practices become ‘invested, colonized, used, inflected, transformed, displaced, extended and so on by increasingly general mechanisms and forms of overall domination’.<sup>45</sup> Neoliberal governmentality becomes hegemonic governmentality when a specific set of micro practices are adopted by or coalesce into a particular macro strategy of governance. This is compatible with Nikolas Rose’s argument that neoliberalism emerged in the 1980s as a ‘contingent lash-up’ of thought and action.<sup>46</sup> Here neoliberalism is regarded as an assemblage of various open-ended micro-practices and techniques, lacking an overall logic, but which could be gradually colonised at the macro level and given the coherence of a neoliberal rationality. Once ‘translated’, these practices could be redirected to a number of domains like the welfare system where free market logic had previously been considered inappropriate. However, to push this argument further does require a stronger strategic focus that examines the active role of different social agents with particular interests. These act through the state and other leading institutions and international bodies and in response to underlying socio-economic pressures and the ensuing failure of postwar regulation.

It is worth investigating, therefore, how certain forms of governmentality are strategically selected and are encouraged and promoted in particular ways. While Foucault, Rose and others might recognise that the state and social groups can take up existing tactics and techniques and use these strategically, they do not (or refuse to) provide adequate explanation of why they might do this (a strategic question relating to group interests), nor what it is about either the agents or the structures that allows them (or does not allow them) to do this (a structural or ontological question which, according to critical realism, is about how powers and liabilities are conferred). I would suggest that while Foucault’s account of power may be concerned with its exercise, there is something of a denial or avoidance – as there is among many of his proponents – of the ontological conditions that make this possible and which enable certain agents to utilise various powers in a strategic way. This is reflected in a weak theorisation of state power and group interests as causes of power. Both of these problems might be redressed through introducing hegemony as helping to orient, steer and conduct these otherwise isolated micro practices.

A successful hegemonic strategy is one that is able to find the right balance between economy, state and civil society (whose relations are sometimes understood through the Gramscian notion of ‘integral state’,<sup>47</sup> intervening through a mixture of economic and extra-economic means. Although this focus on the economy has more prominence in Gramscian inspired scholarship, such a view is certainly not incompatible with the approach of Foucault’s later governmentality lectures and might in fact strike some common ground. Indeed, when Burchell discusses Foucault’s work on ordo-liberalism he speaks in similar

<sup>44</sup> Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 122.

<sup>45</sup> Foucault, *Society*, 30.

<sup>46</sup> Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 27.

<sup>47</sup> Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*, 267.

terms of an approach that sees the market as secured and supervised by the state, requiring certain institutional conditions and active government involvement.<sup>48</sup> Jessop argues that these lectures indicate a growing interest in the complex and contingent relationship between problems of political economy and statecraft without reducing the state to either a capital-logic or a class-instrumental one.<sup>49</sup> Bringing Foucault and Gramsci together would mean placing emphasis on the institutionalised nature of the economy as well as the strategic importance of the state which enjoys a privileged role in the codification of power relations through apparatuses of hegemony.<sup>50</sup>

To what extent does the privileged role of the state extend to global politics? For a long time the key role of the state was obvious. But the rise of global governance has been accompanied by the common view that power has been shifting away from the states system in favour of local, regional or transnational actors and institutions. I would suggest instead, that it is worth looking into how dominant states – the states of the ‘advanced liberal’ centre – are using global governance to promote their own interests. Rather than power slipping away from states, global governmentality works to reinforce the power of the ‘core’ over the ‘periphery’ while seeking to disguise this fact. The concepts of hegemony and governmentality help explain this seeming paradox.

If we take current approaches to international interventions – peacebuilding, democratisation, humanitarian support, poverty reduction and development strategy – governmentality certainly helps explain the general trend of responsabilising subjects and governing through a liberal appeal to the freedom of the governed to behave in a responsible way. The mechanisms of global governance work through the use of a range of technologies and techniques that govern through appeals to free conduct while strictly monitoring, benchmarking and measuring such things as performance, capacity and competitiveness. This process can be described as increasingly governmentalized insofar as international interventions appear as less directly coercive and more indirectly supportive – governing at a distance through empowering local actors, incentivising good conduct and enhancing human, social and institutional capacities. The flip side of this intervention is however, the very discipline that it seeks to conceal. While these international interventions might still be seen to be concerned with populations as their main target, this is less as an end goal than the means by which the main governmentality effect is achieved – which is not necessarily to directly govern global populations, but to use such a concern as a means to govern the behaviour of states. The World Bank and other international organisations recognise that the most effective way to promote global governance is to target states and their governments, using the wellbeing of their populations as a means to legitimate this. Following Michael Merlingen, we might call this targeting of state policy by state dominated international organisations an international governmentality of states, or ‘the international conduct of the conduct of countries’.<sup>51</sup>

His leads me to suggest that there are two, unequal, processes of governmentalisation going on simultaneously. In the ‘advanced liberal’ states we find the governmentalisation of

<sup>48</sup> Graham Burchell, “Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self,” in *Foucault and Political Reason*, eds. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose (London: UCL Press: 1996), 23.

<sup>49</sup> Jessop, *State Power*, 153.

<sup>50</sup> Jessop, *State Power*, 153.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Merlingen, “Governmentality: Towards a Foucauldian Framework for the Study of NGOs,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 38, no. 4 (2003): 367.

the state from within. Here we find, not a weakening of state power, but what Nadine Voelkner calls an evolving process of governmentalisation that redefines the state's competences and domains of operation.<sup>52</sup> Then in global politics we find concerted efforts to governmentalize the poorer states and societies from without. Again, it is the state that is the main target, but the techniques of governance operate from a distance by incentivising local actors. How these two processes combine and how it is that in some countries governmentalisation of the state takes place from within, and in others from without requires, in my view, discussion of the nature of power politics and the operation of hegemony. It cannot be done by remaining solely within a governmentality perspective but requires an examination of the conditions of possibility of governmentality itself, or more precisely, from an IR perspective, why it is that in some parts of the world governmentality is occurring within states while in other parts of the world it is being forced upon weaker states, with varying results, by more powerful actors. Of course this is not to pretend that everything can be explained through a crude distinction between governmentality from within and from without. It is perfectly possible that alternative governmentalities and hybrid systems develop within a range of different societies. But what a theory of hegemony offers, that the concept of governmentality does not, is a means for identifying the dominant global dynamics and the socio-historical context that both gives rise to but also constrains the operation of governmentality in its various manifestations.

To summarise, hegemony points to the role of the dominant groups in the dominant states. This finds expression as 'global governance' in and through the leading international institutions. However, the dominant form of global governmentality is fragile, may be contested and there may also be a variety of forms of governmentality across different societies. This leads us to suggest further exploration of the relationship between hegemony and governmentality through two possible (and maybe interconnected) research agendas.

First would be to expand the notion of governmentality beyond a purely liberal understanding in order to try and describe a range of different forms of governance. This article has questioned such an approach but does recognise that it has some validity. Whether it is useful to try and describe different varieties of governance as forms of governmentality or whether the dangers of conceptual stretching outweigh the benefits can be decided on a case by case basis. But insofar as we are primarily concerned here with global governmentality, then we might maintain our focus on dominant neoliberal forms while recognising that these might be forced to adapt to particular circumstances and to different local practices rationalities. Neumann and Sending capture this neatly in suggesting there are a variety of prototypes developing, where the limits of a neoliberal form of intervention may generate a diversity of combinations or even hybrid forms.<sup>53</sup> But here again, to maintain such a position requires us to step aside from governmentality and examine the limits imposed by underlying social and material conditions and other – structural, cultural, institutional and agential – forms of selectivity.

The other research agenda would be to consider the relationship between hegemony and governmentality in the context of a broader understanding of liberalism that rejects the way it

<sup>52</sup> Nadine Voelkner, "Governmentalizing the State: The Disciplining Logic of Human Security," in *Security and Global Governmentality: Globalization, Governance and the State*, ed. Miguel de Larrinaga and Marc Doucet (Abingdon: Routledge: 2010), 142.

<sup>53</sup> Iver B. Neumann and Ole Jacob Sending, *Governing the Global Polity: Practice, Mentality, Rationality* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 44.

has come to be identified with democratic and consensual politics. Indeed as Beate Jahn has demonstrated, liberal principles such as private property, individual freedom and government by consent require non-liberal practices and a conception of a non-liberal ‘other’, particularly in relation to the international sphere.<sup>54</sup> Because governmentality emphasises governance from a distance, there might be a tendency to neglect the coercive aspect of this. Wanda Vrasti notes that governance through freedom might be combined with more imperial tactics and certainly today includes sanctions, coercion and military intervention.<sup>55</sup> A Gramscian approach is clearly more open to this. And to put the matter in Gramscian terms, the issue for governmentality is whether to include this coercive element in our understanding along the lines of governmentality as liberalism plus coercion, or to understand liberalism as governmentality plus coercion. Such formulations might be somewhat schematic, but again they point to the need to step beyond governmentality and look at its wider context of operation.

## 5. Conclusion

The concept of governmentality, on its own, superbly highlights the combinations of techniques and technologies of governing but can it – does it even want to – explain why these have come into being or why they work in different ways in certain places? If our concern is with why neoliberal forms of governmentality come to dominate international organisations and various forms of global governance, then we need something like hegemony to explain how governmentality relates to macro strategies within a structured social context. Hegemony explains why certain techniques and technologies become dominant by linking these to strategic actions within a structured social and historical context. This should not, however, mean adopting a reductionist explanation that simply draws on a notion of economic rationality or mode of production to explain how governmentality works.

On the contrary, the adoption of a Gramscian view should mean that the underlying conditions upon which hegemony depends are at the same time thrown into question insofar as their continued reproduction through social activity is not automatically given, but needs to be socially secured and institutionally embedded. This makes the question of strategy much more prominent than it is in Foucauldian approaches. Hegemony is contested, hegemonic projects can be challenged. Hegemony is forced to operate across a complex social terrain. Indeed, by ‘bracketing out’ this wider social context there is a real danger that governmentality theorists in IR miss out on what is, after all, a fundamental feature of IR, the unevenness of this terrain and all the gaps, limits and failures that this produces. If we ignore the issue of wider social ontology, then there is a real danger that some notion of global governmentality itself becomes a social ontology and may delude us into thinking that governmentality is now universal and irreversible.

Types of hegemony and governmentality are both emergent social features insofar as they are dependent on underlying conditions of possibility like relations of production. However, they are not mechanically determined by such conditions and have their own irreducible properties and characteristics. The concept of hegemony is better at highlighting some of

<sup>54</sup> Beate Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism: Theory, History, Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>55</sup> Wanda Vrasti, “Universal but not Truly ‘Global’: Governmentality, Economic Liberalism, and the International,” *Review of International Studies* 39, no. 1 (2013): 56.

the wider social features – things like historical context, institutional setting, the role of social groups and processes of project construction. The reading offered here also challenges IR approaches to consider hegemonic projects in relation to deeper structural conditions. The concept of governmentality, meanwhile, covers much of the finer detail and can in turn be described as a condition of intelligibility for hegemony in the sense that it completes hegemony and explains the ‘how’ of governance without reducing it to the conditions from which it emerges. It provides a detailed account of the existing micro practices and other resources which have their own specificity and might pre-exist particular hegemonic projects, but which Foucault shows can be colonised and brought together through macro-level strategies. Indeed, hegemony and governmentality are part of the constant back and forth between macro and micro, between structure and agency and between institution and practice. Each has its merits in explaining different aspects of these. But when it comes to explaining the social whole, it is difficult to conceive of one without the other and equally difficult to understand the puzzle of why IR scholars have not made more use of their combination.

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