Talk of biopower in International Relations is coming into vogue. Drawing on works by Foucault, Hardt & Negri, and Agamben, IR scholars either talk of global biopower in service to some transcendent liberal regime, or existing in zones of sovereign exception. I argue that such predominant theorisations of biopower uncritically scale up Foucault’s concept, and are not consistent with Foucault’s methodological presuppositions. Therefore, talk of biopower in IR does not resonate with what Foucault sought to uncover. Hazy notions of empire, zones of sovereign exception, or global liberal governance are unclearly linked to the specifics of biopower, and the concept is thus ambiguously deployed to problematically theorise a number of disparate phenomena. These conceptualisations fail to accurately grasp the way biopower might be operating beyond the state. While accepting that helpful insights are generated by these deployments of biopower in IR, and that Foucault himself warned against slavish devotion to his work, I maintain that an accurate exposition of (Foucauldian) biopower in IR must adhere to the methodological principles Foucault outlined often and at great length.

While the presumed benefits of the deployment of Foucault in IR have been noted, an in-depth explanation of how these benefits are to be achieved is yet to be put forward. I will contribute to this project by elucidating how biopower emerges beyond the state while maintaining the tripartite relation between sovereignty, disciplinary power, and governmentality. I believe an investigation of biopower in international relations that subscribes to Foucault’s methodological precautions provides an ideal test case with which a Foucauldian IR can be outlined, ideal because it connects the subjectification of individuals to phenomena of totalisation. I argue that global or international biopower should be identified according to a genealogical method stemming from the biopolitics of states first elucidated by Foucault. I will suggest how an ascending analysis of biopower can be carried out in IR by adhering to Foucault’s methodological principles. Primarily this will proceed by investigating how ‘domestic’ mechanisms of security are becoming transnational.
This paper will begin with an explication of biopower according to Foucault, supplemented by other key theorists. It identifies mechanisms through which biopower acts upon life, namely statistics, and the way these mechanisms changed the way politics structure life. A new conceptualisation of population distinct from a mere aggregation of subjects was the catalyst for a new political rationality. Following this, the deployment of biopower in International Relations (IR) by prominent theorists is critiqued. This will show that, from a Foucauldian perspective, biopower in IR fundamentally diverges from what Foucault elucidated. The general criticism is that biopower is uncritically scaled up in conjunction with something called global liberalism, and represents a transcendental form of power that dominates global life. It finishes with the claim that these conceptualisations of biopower in IR fail to capture what is specific about the operation of biopower, especially as relates to the role of sovereignty. The third section then takes a brief detour to survey the junction of Foucault and IR more broadly, and reflects what has already been noted about the use of biopower in IR; that, through a double-reading based on the existence of a supposed global liberal order, Foucault’s insights are unreflectively scaled up. It then argues that adherence to Foucault’s methodological principles can overcome this problem, and could even overcome one of the more persistent problems of IR theory. This sets the scene for the final section – the beginnings of a foray into a more appropriate analysis of biopower in IR.¹ I argue that the junction of biopower and IR is a fruitful sight for an investigation into contemporary transformations of political rule. An analysis of biopower in IR that correctly interprets the role of sovereignty in its internationalisation will have much to say about the changing nature of contemporary sovereignty.

What is Biopower?

According to Michel Foucault (2009), ‘biopower’ refers to “[t]he set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power”,² and Lemke (2010) tells us that “biopolitics designates a political economy of life aiming to administer, secure, develop and

¹ This is a work in progress, and the final section is by no means water-tight. I welcome any feedback that may help to solidify a research agenda.
Biopower/biopolitics speaks to a web of relations that reflect the population as an object, the individual as its correlative, and the environment within which these two objects are situated. The most important objective of biopower, its raison d’être, is the health of the population. However, the health of the population is not ‘governed’ for its own sake. Instead, the health of the population is “an economic and political problem: population as wealth, population as manpower or labour capacity, population balanced between its own growth and the resources it [commands].”

This is a rationality which reflects the historical context in which biopower emerged. Sexual conduct, and later other naturally occurring phenomena, became subjected to regimes of institutionally centered practices which try to transform conduct into “concerted economic and political behaviour.”

Biopolitics, according to Dean (2010), also designates “a very broad terrain against which we can locate the liberal critique of too much government.” This is because inherent in its operation is the implementation of “complex organs of political organization and centralization.” Biopower thus represents a rupture with, yet transformation and continuation of an earlier form of power which Foucault called ‘pastoral power’, a form of power that simultaneously individualises and totalises. However, what is novel about biopower is its mode of operation. Where previous forms of pastoral power tried to intervene directly upon individuals, biopower governs in such a way as to operate at a ‘level of generality.’ A number of mechanisms, as opposed to more direct apparatus, are deployed. “The mechanisms introduced by biopolitics include forecasts, statistical estimates, and overall measures. Their purpose is not to modify any given phenomenon as such, or to modify a given individual insofar as he is an individual, but, essentially, to intervene at the level at which these general phenomena are determined, to intervene at the level of their generality.”

Central to this process is the constitution of norms, and the threat to society that

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5 Ibid., 26.


7 Ibid., 119.


liberalism wishes to assuage is that of a normalizing society that succeeds “in covering the whole surface that lies between the organic and the biological, between body and population.”\(^{10}\) It is within this context that ‘rights’ emerge. ‘Rights’ are “the [liberal] political response to all these new procedures of power,” a response that the traditional right of sovereignty “was utterly incapable of comprehending.”\(^{11, 12}\)

Biopower operates through the constitution of norms, and reflects the way that the general economy of power in modern societies can be conceived of as a domain of security.

“[B]iopower is not typical of the [preceding] legal code or the disciplinary mechanism, but that of the dispositif of security … [an] apparatus of security [that] inserts the phenomena in question within a series of probable events … [according to which] the relations of power … are inserted in a calculation of cost … [and] instead of a binary division between the permitted and the prohibited, one establishes an average considered as optimal on the one hand, and, on the other, a bandwidth of the acceptable that must not be exceeded. In this way a completely different distribution of things takes shape.”\(^{13}\)

The emergence of biopower does not eclipse, bracket off or cancel the preceding mechanisms; the disciplinary institution and the sovereign-juridical structure remain important techniques within a liberal governmentality focused on political economy and population processes. However, “[i]t is no longer a matter of bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty, but of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility. Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendour; it does not have to draw the line that separates the enemies of the sovereign from his obedient subjects; it effects distributions around the norm.”\(^{14, 15}\) Law, the expression of the sovereign’s

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 253.
\(^{11}\) ———, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume One*, 145.
\(^{12}\) The tension between biopower and political economy can be seen when Foucault states: “The fundamental objective of governmentality will be mechanisms of security … state intervention with the essential function of ensuring the natural phenomena of economic processes or processes intrinsic to population”; Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 352-53. This implies that mechanisms of security exist side-by-side, but operate according to different rationalities.
\(^{14}\) ———, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume One*, 144.
will, does not, however, “[fade] into the background”, within this new mechanism of security, but instead itself begins to operate “more and more as a norm … the judicial institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory.”

Ewald (1990) tells us that the conception of norms facilitates the shift from the level of the micro-political evident in disciplinary institutions, where norms (distinct from previous connotations of ‘rule’) first emerged but were specifically local in character, to that of the biopolitical, evident with the implementation of insurance schemes and social security systems. Norms, therefore, constituted by new forms of knowledge such as statistics, demography, epidemiology and psychology, provide a standard with recourse to which a population can be acted upon. Combined, such disciplines, or more accurately and to differentiate from ‘discipline,’ such ‘truth regimes’ provide the conditions both for an analysis of life on the level of populations, and to govern individuals and populations by practices of correction, exclusion, disciplining and optimisation, all based upon the constitution of norms. As Dean points out, “[a] norm … is not simply a value arrived at, but a rule of judgment and a means of producing that rule.” This is to say the norm does not exist prior to interventions that act on the population. Foucault (2009) uses the terms ‘normation’ and ‘normalization’ to make a distinction between biopolitical a posteriori norm formation (normalization), and a priori norms, upon which the disciplines are based (normation).

Disciplinary normation “consists first of all in positing a model, an optimal model that is constructed in terms of a certain result, and the operation of disciplinary [normation] consists in trying to get people, movements, and actions to conform to this model, the normal being precisely that which can conform to this norm, and the abnormal that which is

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15 Note on rationality: with raison d’état there are no longer enemies of the sovereign, but deviations from the norm.
16 Foucault, The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume One, 144.
18 This is a re-organization of something Lemke (2010) says, I have emphasised the role that norms play, and would argue that normalization constitutes a fundamental nodal point for all other techniques; Lemke, "From State Biology to the Government of Life: Historical Dimensions and Contemporary Persepctives of Biopolitics," 430.
incapable of conforming to the norm.”

The norm is thus primary to disciplinary normation, whereas within a biopolitical dispositif what is fundamental is “an interplay between these different distributions of normality and in acting to bring the most unfavourable in line with the more favourable.” A ‘normalizing,’ biopolitical, society is thus distinct from a disciplinary society (even though norms still exist within discipline) because normalization, distinct from normation, allows for individuals to be acted upon and modified by a range of interventions.

This new process of normalization was made possible by a number of novel factors. First was the development of statistics, in particular the technique of determining statistical probabilities. Second was the emergence of the concept of population as a process with its own natural tendencies; whereas previous conceptions of population saw it in negative or positive terms, as being deficient or an emblem of sovereign power, biopolitical population is conceived as dynamic. This conceptualisation of population as dynamic, and the emergence of new techniques of intervention based upon statistics, results in the establishment of what Foucault calls ‘mechanisms of security,’ whereby no longer is the population a collection of subjects, but it is instead a set of natural phenomena that “will have to be framed in such a way that they do not veer off course, or in such a way that clumsy, arbitrary, and blind intervention does not make them veer off course. That is to say it will be necessary to set up mechanisms of security. The fundamental objective of governmentality will be mechanisms of security … state intervention with the essential function of ensuring the natural phenomena of economic processes or processes intrinsic to population.”

Central to a mechanism of security, due to the understanding of a population as possessing its own inherent naturalness, is the idea “the population and environment are in a perpetual living interrelation, and the state has to manage those living interrelations between those two types of living beings.” Foucault thinks of this reality in terms of the mileu, as a site that, although expresses a naturalness, in that processes within it will be self-regulating, is not in itself natural; it is a phenomenon created by a relationship with the population. “The

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20 Foucault, Security, Territory, Population, 57.
21 Ibid., 63.
22 Ibid., 352-53.
mileu, then, will be that in which circulation is carried out. The mileu is a set of natural 
givens ... and a set of artificial givens ... The mileu is a certain number of combined, overall 
effects bearing on all who live in it. It is an element in which a circular link is produced 
between effects and causes, since an effect from one point of view will be a cause from 
another.”

24 The mileu is both a field of intervention and a site of uncertainty, and it is this 
problematisation of governmental practices that informs biopolitical rationality.

Biopower emerges as a new technology of power focused on the problem of the 
population, not as a group of subjects, nor as a multiplicity of individuals, but as an object 
that interacts with an indefinite number of elements. This conceptualisation of society, does 
however, make visible phenomena that occur only at the collective level, with a longitudinal 
temporality, thus displaying regularities or constants that can become subject to governmental 
rationality. The complexity of social processes leads to a new constellation of power 
relations. The traditional juridical-legal techniques of the sovereign, and the disciplinary 
techniques that emerged under a mercantilist reason, are reactivated according to a 
mechanism of security that attempts to regulate life, still to maximise and extract forces, but 
within an aleatory and unpredictable environment – the mileu. “The specific space of 
security refers then to a series of possible events; it refers to the temporal and the uncertain, 
which have to be inserted within a given space. The space in which a series of uncertain 
elements unfold…”

25 It is within this space that biopolitical mechanisms such as statistics 
emerge, and thus ‘general’ phenomena are determined (a level of generality). The 
phenomena in question initially emerged as an effect of socialised medicine within the 
context of a massive demographic upswing, namely, the growing administrative capacity of 
an increasingly institutionalised medical apparatus.

26 Statistics played a fundamental role in the process of making visible overall phenomenon. Demographic analysis is established, 
ratios of births to deaths are recorded, rates of reproduction and fertility statistics. 
Accordingly, birth control practices are introduced, working practices that had deleterious 
effects on life-expectancy and productivity are eliminated, medical care is coordinated, public 
hygiene, immunisation and vaccination campaigns are launched, and so on. Other
mechanisms are also introduced to deal with accidents, anomalies and old age, which supplement the traditional apparatuses of assistance: insurance and safety regulations, for example.

Biopolitics reflects the way that the general economy of power in modern societies can be conceived of as a domain of security. This represents the way in which the treatment of life in general, the life of people, has changed according to the governmental rationality of society. No longer, as it was under a juridical conception, is government merely concerned to let people live and to take life as it sees fit, it is now concerned with making people live, that is, subjectifying them according to a web of relations tied up with economic and political effects. Disciplinary power began this transformation, and biopower takes it to a new level. With discipline you have the initial capture of the individual body, a technology integral for the management of a demographic explosion and to facilitate industrial processes in service to a statist principle. Discipline logically emerged first – a localised technique, or constellation of techniques, like surveillance and training – as a direct response to particular situations and economic analyses. However, although the disciplinary institution was gradually dispersed throughout society, it nevertheless remained a fragmentary regime due to its spatial requirements. Later, with the conceptualisation of the living environment, including the population, and the mileu understood as a multiplicity of open relations, we have a

“second technology which is centered not upon the body but upon life: a technology which brings together the mass effects characteristic of a population, which tries to control the series of random events that can occur in a living mass, a technology which tries to predict the probability of those events (by modifying it, if necessary), or at least to compensate for their effects. This is a technology which aims to establish a sort of homeostasis, not by training individuals, but by achieving an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers... Both

27 This is not to say disciplinary effects did not escape the institution, but it is true that they remained most effective within spatially delimited frameworks; “discipline in fact always tends to escape the institutional or local framework in which they are trapped. What is more, they easily take on a statist dimension in apparatuses such as the police, for example, which is both a disciplinary apparatus and a state apparatus (which just goes to prove that discipline is not always institutional)”; Foucault, Society Must Be Defended, 250.
technologies are obviously technologies of the body, but one is a technology in which the body is individualised as an organism endowed with capacities, while the other is a technology in which bodies are replaced by general biological processes.”

Biopower in IR

Biopower has entered IR discourse primarily through two influences; Hardt & Negri (2000), especially with reference to their concept of ‘Empire’; and Agamben (1995), with his concept of ‘Bare Life’. Both of these (sets of) authors acknowledge an explicit debt to Foucault, yet both also claim Foucault’s concept of biopower is deficient, and go on to modify it. For Hardt and Negri, Foucault’s thought was dominated by a structuralist epistemology which reintroduced a functionalist analysis that “sacrifices the dynamic of the system, the creative temporality of its movement, and the ontological substance of cultural and social reproduction… What Foucault fails to grasp finally are the real dynamics of production in biopolitical society.”

Meanwhile, Agamben finds Foucault’s distinction between sovereign power and biopower superfluous and that “[t]he Foucauldian thesis [needs] to be corrected or, at least, completed, in the sense that what characterizes modern politics is not so much the inclusion of zoē in the polis – which is, in itself, absolutely ancient – nor simply the fact that life as such becomes a principal object of the projections and calculations of state power. Instead the decisive fact is that, together with the process by which exception becomes the rule, the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and...

28 Ibid., 249.
inclusion, outside and inside, bios and zoē, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction.”

These authors appreciate the insight Foucault generated with the concept of biopower, but ultimately find that in its original form it is unable to fully grasp the important features of modernity. Hardt and Negri’s ‘materialist’ approach seeks to discover the originary productive forces that animate the biopolitical body, a context indicative of the “process of the constitution of the world”, that apparently Foucault’s biopower fails to comprehend. Agamben, on the other hand, seeks to explain the concept of the sovereign exception in terms of biopower, which Foucault’s distinction between sovereign power and biopower cannot accommodate.

Hardt and Negri locate the “dynamics of production in biopolitical society” within the organisation of global capital. In particular, “[t]he huge transnational corporations construct the connective fabric of the biopolitical world in certain important respects.” These “great industrial and financial powers”, they argue,

“produce not only commodities but also subjectivities. They produce agentic subjectivities within the biopolitical context: they produce needs, social relations, bodies, and minds – which is to say, they produce producers. In the biopolitical sphere, life is made to work for production and production is made to work for life.”

This statement reflects Hardt & Negri’s departure from Foucault, with the reintroduction of Marxist-inspired analyses of production. They hope to account for the ‘why’ of world order, and in attempting to do so analyse biopower in terms of productive labour. They argue recent transformations in productive labour, namely its tendency in becoming immaterial, communicative, and ‘immediately social’ produces new subjectivities according to a global mechanism of exploitation. The problem with their analysis is that their attempt to rectify

32 Ibid., 32.
33 Whereby “the exploitation of living immaterial labour immerses labour in all the relational elements that define the social”; Ibid., 29.
Foucault’s supposed neglect of agency implicitly reintroduces a superstructural component, precisely what a Foucauldian methodology seeks to avoid. As Coleman & Agnew point out, by de-territorialising the contemporary world and de-actualising the place of politics, Hardt and Negri produce a transcendent/immanent dichotomy that “implicitly reinstates a transcendental view of history – the ‘view form nowhere’ with all of its fallibilities.”

Hardt and Negri’s conceptualisation of the biopolitical production of empire is a response to the increasingly complex relationship between life and capitalism, an approach which expands the realm of biopower from biological to include psychological components, notably desire. “Biopolitical production,” therefore, “entails the implication of all the body’s capacities, desire, language, affect, and style into the networks of activities productive for capital.” Hardt and Negri thus generate an idea of immanence based on production; without this productive principle, “nothing allows society to become political.” This ontology of production reveals the potentially transformative immanence embodied in the subjects of capitalism; it apparently “reveals the way in which the world is continually made and remade by the bodies and desires of the many, thus exposing the way in which the world can be made otherwise.” However, this immanence is juxtaposed with the transcendent nature of Empire, a juxtaposition that problematises the efficacy of individual agency. According to Hardt and Negri, Empire “effectively encompasses the spatial totality … effectively suspends history … [and] operates on all registers of the social order extending down to the depths of the social world.” The site of Empire is therefore everywhere and nowhere at once, completely penetrating the social world, a transcendent regime that would always seem to have the upper hand.

Both Hardt & Negri and Giorgio Agamben modify Foucault’s concept of biopower according to dissimilar views of sovereignty. Hardt & Negri’s de-territorialising analysis of contemporary world order generates a global conception of sovereignty, in which the dialectic of modern sovereignty between civil and natural realms has come to an end.

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36 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 164.
38 Hardt and Negri, Empire, xiv-xv.
Agamben, on the other hand, maintains a distinction, albeit purely formal, between the inside of sovereignty, and the outside as a zone of exception. Agamben argues that a distinction between sovereign power and biopower is a misinterpretation resulting from the historical concealment of biopower by sovereign power. His work

“concerns precisely this hidden point of intersection between the juridico-institutional and the biopolitical models of power. What this work has had to record among its likely conclusions is precisely that the two analyses cannot be separated, and that the inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original – if concealed – nucleus of sovereign power.”

Due to Agamben’s view of sovereignty, it is clear that his conception of biopower is fundamentally dissimilar to Foucault. Some go so far as to say they are not talking about the same thing. Agamben’s biopower rests on the idea that ‘bare life’ is its object, a mode of life that is exposed to an unconditional threat of death via the suspension of sovereignty, a foundational practice that serves to perpetually constitute sovereign power. Bare life exists in a ‘state of exception’, a constitutive operation that links bare life directly to sovereign power. The state of exception thus produces bare life which is the hidden foundation of biopolitics, which itself had been concealed until Foucault identified practices of government that made it explicit. This objectification of bare life is absolutely incongruent with Foucault’s subjectification of the life processes of a population. It also directly contradicts Foucault. For Agamben, sovereign biopower produces bare life to establish itself, a process that is “immensely reductive,” while for Foucault, the practice of biopower is productive – to turn the mere “being” of life into “well-being.” Ojakangas sums up the problem with Agamben’s perspective most succinctly when he says that “[b]io-power needs a notion of life that corresponds to its aims.”

The necessary correspondence between biopower and ‘more-than-life’ does mean Agamben is effectively talking about something different to what Foucault meant. Schinkel

(2010) even resolves this divergence in a model based on citizenship as a technology of government. On this reading Foucauldian biopolitics is directed towards the bios, taking as its object the social body, while Agambean biopower is a zoēpolitics externally directed to persons outside the state.\textsuperscript{44} This is an important and helpful distinction, but it leaves unresolved what branch of biopower is most pertinent to the study of international relations. Like Hardt & Negri, the influence Agamen’s work wields within the discipline of IR forces a complete appraisal of his conceptualisation, and from a Foucauldian perspective methodological problems upset his argument. In Nietzsche, Genealogy, History Foucault eschews the search for truth in origins, whereby history becomes a handmaiden to philosophy.\textsuperscript{45} Agamen does not observe this methodological precaution and effectively identifies an originary moment, whereby the articulation of the concepts of zoē and bios by Aristotle constitute the birth-moment of sovereignty. Not only does this “naively and problematically [assume] that there was once a separation between zoē and bios,”\textsuperscript{46} Blencowe points out that this reading also de-historicises biopower in a dual sense. First it removes Foucault’s work from its contexts of concern with constructed and historical statuses, which “[forecloses] any transhistorical distinctions such as zoē/bios, bare life/human life, or nature/culture”. Second, “the historical specificity of notions that are central to biological thinking, such as species, is obliterated while all thought of living physicality is subsumed under a ‘mere’ physicality.”\textsuperscript{47} The genealogical component of Foucault’s insight is thus completely removed, and an abstract transhistorical category –zoē – is introduced.

In summary, both sets of authors discussed above commit, from a Foucauldian perspective, fundamental methodological errors. Hardt & Negri explain power relations according to a transcendent logic, and explicitly break one of Foucault’s methodological rules; “not to attempt some kind of deduction of power starting from its centre and aimed at the discovery of the extent to which it permeates into the base, of the degree to which it

\textsuperscript{44} Willem Schinkel, “From Zoopolitics to Biopolitics: Citizenship and the Construction of ‘Society’,” European Journal of Social Theory 13, no. 2 (2010): 156.
\textsuperscript{47} Blencowe, ”Foucault’s and Arendt’s ‘Insider View’ of Biopolitics: A Critique of Agamen,” 115.
reproduces itself down to and including the most molecular elements of society."\(^4^8\)

Meanwhile, Agamben’s analysis is also anti-genealogical, in that it places the present need of explaining zones of exception at the supposed origin of sovereignty, albeit an origin that perpetually re-inscribes itself as the function of sovereignty. Yet both sets of authors have a predominant influence in the IR literature, over a dearth of more accurate Foucauldian readings. It should seem odd then, that when the shortcomings of biopower in IR literature are identified, it is Foucault that gets the blame. This is especially so when Foucault made it quite clear that, although his concepts and insights were produced to be freely interpreted and redeployed according to the directions of others’ investigations, certain methodological principles were integral to his work. I maintain that a Foucauldian IR can only be built upon a certain level of methodological adherence to these principles.

The direction in which Agamben, and Hardt & Negri have ultimately led biopower is best represented by Michael Dillon, probably the most explicit and prolific theorist of biopower in IR.\(^4^9\) Dillon is particularly interested in the ramifications of Foucault’s insights into security, war, and race, and views biopolitics from this perspective. For Dillon, the central import of biopower is not that it is a strategy which promotes life, but that in promoting life its central concern is to differentiate between the fit and unfit.

“Biopolitics is therefore always involved in the sorting of life for the promotion of life. Sorting life requires waging war on behalf of life against life forces that are inimical to life.”\(^5^0\)

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\(^5^0\) Dillon and Neal, "Introduction," 8.
War becomes a central concern for Dillon because, as Foucault first states in *The History of Sexuality, vol 1*, biopower not only is a power that fosters life, but concomitantly disallows life.\footnote{Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume One*, 138.} Foucault, however, did not pursue this line of inquiry to fully develop its implications, and Dillon’s project launches itself from the point made by Bigo that “[t]he question of security as it relates to war, and to international war, is not really discussed by Foucault and the Foucaultians.”\footnote{Bigo in Dillon and Neal, “Introduction.” See also Didier Bigo, “Security: A Field Left Fallow,” in *Foucault on Politics, Security and War*, ed. Michael Dillon and Andrew W. Neal (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).}

Dillon’s concern with war is founded, as it also was for Foucault, on Foucault’s concept of race, which is much broader than race conceived as a simply biological trait, it instead refers to the political enfranchisement of life; in a biopolitical regime, rather than being a taken-for-granted ethnic marker, racial fitness “is ultimately dependant upon utility measures for the promotion of life biologically.”\footnote{Dillon, “Security, Race, War,” 168.} Dillon therefore draws on *Society Must Be Defended*, which is effectively Foucault’s genealogy of the modern state. In this re-reading of history the formation of states is seen as the institutionalisation of the results of war, whereby a certain conceptualisation of life is promoted at the expense of others, and modern politics is seen as the extension of (race-)war by other means. The institutionalised warfare that is modern politics is biopolitical in that it continues to promote a certain form of life at the expense of others, and that this biopolitics hides its violent side by focusing on its imperative to foster life. From this foundation, and the focus on the idea that liberal biopolitical states must proactively ‘let die’ to ‘make live,’ Dillon argues that there exists a regime of global liberal biopower. For example, the global effort to combat terrorism is theorised as part of global biopolitical strategy due to the necessity to make secure the type of life that biopower defends, from which the type of life ‘terrorists’ promote diverges.\footnote{———, “Governing Terror: The State of Emergency of Biopolitical Emergence.”} Dillon problematically correlates ‘international warfare’ with biopower. Centered on the idea that modern politics represents an inversion of war, his general thesis appears to be based on the idea that conflict in the international sphere is gradually being incorporated into an institutional framework that is assumed to be biopolitical. He thus exemplifies a double-reading common in the literature, whereby biopower is scaled-up in connection to globalised liberalism.
Dillon’s overriding concern with the martial expression of the imperative to ‘make live’ is linked to a discourse of value provided by capitalism. In his view liberalism is necessarily biopolitical,\(^55\) and global liberal governance is intimately allied with the globalisation of capital.\(^56\) His alliance of global capitalism with global liberal governance, lies at the root of his conclusion that biopower is going global. For him, “[t]he biopolitical imperative to make live finds its expression today … in making life live the emergency of its emergence; for that is what species life is now said to be”,\(^57\) and species-life is intimately related to a discourse of value, provided by capitalism. According to Dillon,

“[i]n as much as the liberal form of rule takes species life, as well as subjectivity, as its referent object of rule, the liberal way of rule also governs by reference to species properties, principal among which is contingency… Contingency is foundational, especially to how the operations of living systems are now conceived.”\(^58\)

Contingency is a new epistemic domain associated with probability analysis, risk analysis, and “increasingly, a wide variety of techniques for patterning behaviour employed extensively from anti-terror surveillance, health and commercial marketing to [bibliometric and informetric techniques to investigate the Internet],”\(^59\) and “allied to the radical contingency of species existence is an account of species existence as a life of continuous complex adaptation and emergence.”\(^60\) This perspective reflects “pluripotent life, characterized by its continuously unfolding potential” (Dillon & Reid 2009: 85). Such life is immanently dangerous, both to itself and other life forms, and for biopower to be effective it must identify life as either of these two options, by attributing value to one, and not the other. Dillon points out that once a discourse of life is established, an discourse of value ineluctably follows, and therefore that “‘[s]pecies’ means classification as such, classification as living

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\(^{56}\) Dillon and Reid, "Global Liberal Governance: Biopolitics, Security and War," 41.

\(^{57}\) ———, *The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Make Life Live*, 85.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 82.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 85.
thing and classification as value, specifically monetary or capital value. These three things are locked into a very tight and radically interdependent triangulation.”

Dillon’s substitution of species for population, however, is problematic. His concept of species replaces Foucault’s emphasis on population, the unearthing of which provided the ontological traction for the emergence of biopower; “species-being is a biopolitical imaginary in which ‘life’ is taken as the referent ontopolitical object of governance, self-governance and rule.” The major conceptual implication of the use of species, instead of population, is Dillon’s position that the biopolitical question is not confined to that of territorially-constituted populations, thus setting the conceptual stage for a global biopolitics of the human race. This problematic conception of species-being as the referent ontopolitical object of global biopower is a result of his neglect of the concept of mileu, and especially the role sovereignty plays in the global mileu. The mileu, for Foucault, is the space that frames security; “it refers to a series of possible events; it refers to the temporal and the uncertain, which have to be inserted within a given space.” Furthermore, his discussion of space identifies that this space, the mileu, is acted upon by all three governmental regimes in his tripartite division of modern power;

“problems of space are equally common to all three. It goes without saying for sovereignty, since sovereignty is first of all exercised within the territory. But discipline involves a spatial division, and I think security does too, and the different treatment of space by sovereignty, discipline, and security is precisely what I want to talk about.”

By neglecting the concept of mileu, Dillon inevitably neglects, or at least misrepresents the role sovereignty plays in constituting a biopolitical regime, which in turn allows him to scale up biopower.

62 Ibid.: 2.
63 The neglect of this important aspect leads to a fundamental misreading of Foucault by Dillon, when he says, “Foucault identifies ‘circulation’ as the space of operation of biopolitics” (Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008: 268). However, the space of operation of biopolitics is actually the mileu. Along with causality, circulation is the problem of biopolitics, a problem which is at stake and addressed within the mileu: “The mileu, then, will be that in which circulation is carried out” (Foucault 2007: 21 Italics mine).
65 Ibid., 11-12.
66 Ibid., 12.
In an effort to link the operation of sovereignty to a global population, Dillon, drawing on Agamben, likens a continuous state of exception at the level of state sovereignty to a continuous state of emergence at the global level, claiming that “governmental power – specifically in the forms increasingly characteristic of global liberal governance – is, like sovereign power, a certain strategic ordering of power relations that derives from insisting on a state of emergency.” Dillon likens a state of exception whereby the outside is constituted through its relationship with the inside, effectively blurring the spheres of inside/outside which sovereign power claims to establish and preserve, an analogous, global, state of emergence, or emergency, as Dillon puts it, creates zones of indistinction subject to governmental power. This governmental power, global and liberal in nature, subjectivises states of emergency within a knowledge/power relationship that problematises them biopolitically according to the concept of species. Dillon thus situates biopower within a space of security that implies ‘global-liberal’ ‘security’ operations, involving international terrorism and humanitarian events, constitute the operation of biopower. Dillon’s redeployment of sovereign power as post-sovereign governmental power significantly modifies the tripartite governmental regime Foucault imparted to us. This is not to say that biopower can only ever remain situated within a sovereign state – such a claim would deny the transgressive nature of Foucault’s analysis. However, the methodological manner in which Dillon redeploys the role of sovereignty, thus introducing a transcendental nature, sits uncomfortably with Foucault’s methodological precaution not to theorise in a top-down manner.

Dillon’s analysis is a misrepresentation of the concept of population, which he represents as species. Senellart tells us liberalism “constitutes the condition of intelligibility of biopolitics,” whereby “subjects of right over whom political sovereignty is exercised appear themselves as a population that a government must manage.”

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68 For an alternative critique, which examines Dillon & Reid’s reification of ‘liberal war,’ see (Chandler 2009).
69 Dillon’s (mis)use of the concept of species is perhaps influenced by Foucault’s ambiguous use of the term ‘global.’ Dillon partly justifies his global thesis with Foucault’s statement that “after a first seizure of power over the body in an individualising mode, we have a second seizure of power that is not individualising but, if you like, massifying, that is directed not at man-as-body, but man-as-species” (Dillon 2007: 45; Foucault 2004: 243). While it may seem like Foucault is talking about a biopolitics of the human race, the phrase seizure of power belies such a reading. Foucault uses the term global often, to refer to an overall or comprehensive space, and specifically for biopower such a space is the sovereign state or, in essence framed by sovereignty. Man-as-species actually speaks to the globalisation of the human sciences rather than the globalisation of biopower.
70 Senellart in Foucault, Security, Territory, Population, 383.
71 Ibid.
population is the founding principle that Dillon evokes when he refers to the administration and production of life. However, such activity cannot be linked to a complex regime of global liberal governance, because it implies “complex systems of coordination and centralization” found at the level of the state.\textsuperscript{72} As Senellart confirms, “[b]iopolitics therefore can only be conceived as bioregulation by the state.”\textsuperscript{73} This statement points to the concrete practices of government carried out by the state. Dillon therefore elides the explicit relation posited by Foucault between the population and sovereignty constituted by a seizure of power, and misses the importance of the relationship between sovereign power and biopower – which are reduced to each other in Agamben’s work – in particular the fact that it was with recourse to the administrative power of sovereignty that biopolitical techniques of government – namely the use of statistics and establishment of mechanisms of security – managed to objectify population(s). Due to the blurring of inside/outside, the specific mechanisms by which populations are formed and governed – sovereign, disciplinary, biopolitical – are lost to analysis.

Dillon’s conceptualisation of sovereignty neglects the actual practices of a juridical-legal-regulatory apparatus that serves to capture and objectify/subjectify a population, a seizure of power over a population that was integral to the operation of biopower as Foucault saw it. The elision of this aspect of sovereignty is also present in the works of Hardt and Negri, and Agamben. A more accurate reading of biopower in IR, at least if we wish our work to resonate with what Foucault sought to uncover, needs to pay close attention to the continued operation of state sovereignty in biopower, both domestically and internationally. This dilemma is engaged with in the final section, but first an overview of the junction of Foucault and IR sets the scene by highlighting the promise of a Foucauldian IR, specifically with reference to the role of sovereignty.

**Foucault and IR**

Foucault was primarily an interrogator of liberal capitalist societies, and as Selby (2007) pertinently notes, much IR appropriation of Foucault has, through a double-reading,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{72} _______. Society Must Be Defended, 250.
  \item \textsuperscript{73} Senellart in _______. Security, Territory, Population, 381.
\end{itemize}
unreflectively scaled up his insights on the basis of a supposed world order reflecting the same liberal nature that Foucault engaged with. International political relations, he notes, “are read first as liberal and, on the strength of this, these global liberal realities are analysed as the products of disciplinary and bio-political power. Without such an effective ‘double reading’, a characterisation of contemporary world politics as ‘globalised bio-politics’ would be impossible.”

This reflects a predominant criticism of ‘Foucauldian IR,’ that is its supposed propensity to reinscribe contemporary discursive framings of power, liberal or realist. The problem is not, however, with Foucault but with the discipline itself. These accounts of Foucault in IR reflect a discipline struggling to adapt to change, a “conflation between the fluidity of the international and the frozen waters of IR that have been produced by disciplinary fiat.”

Criticisms of Foucauldian IR represent an inability to overcome the universal categorisation of the ‘international’ that discursively and ontologically frames IR. Following Calkivik, the strength of Foucault's work lies precisely in its ability to unsettle established accounts of the international. He asks, rather than subjecting Foucault to “the court of disciplinary reason that operates by sacrilizing [sic] its object – ‘the international’ – could one not work with Foucault toward unravelling this ‘it’ and attending to [its] historical and political production?” Calkivik’s argument goes right to the heart of the Foucauldian method:

“I start from the theoretical and methodological decision that consists in saying: Let’s suppose that universals do not exist. And then I put the question to history and historians: How can you write history if you do not

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75 David Chandler, "Forget Foucault, Forget Foucault, Forget Foucault..." *International Political Sociology* 4, no. 2 (2010).
accept a priori the existence of things like the state, society, the sovereign, and subjects?"\(^{79}\)

This decision elides top-down analyses of power and encourages an approach from the opposite direction, a micro-physics, “or in other words looking in historical terms, and from below, at how control mechanisms could come into play.”\(^{80}\) Not only does this avoid interpretations of power that reinforce contemporary dominations, it also avoids issues with the ontological framing of IR by identifying the state as a transactional reality. Therefore, the primacy Foucault afforded a micro-physical approach is not, *pace* Selby, an ontological primacy.\(^{81}\) Instead it is precisely the micro-physical approach that obviates any ontological difficulties involved with overcoming the domestic/international dichotomy. Indeed, Foucault’s “special kind of history” itself replaces ontology.\(^{82}\)

Foucault’s elucidation of biopower was implicitly a response to criticisms that such “micro-physical architectures, techniques and procedures” are insufficient to interrogate the extent of power-relations. Extending Foucault into the realm of IR therefore becomes not only possible but necessary if insights generated within liberal capitalist societies are to be placed in a contemporary (not necessarily liberal) international context. Unless one wishes to claim that local realities are isolated from global processes, some instances of the micro-physical architecture of power relations will only be explained by the internationalisation of Foucault. Hindess supports this position when he says that “if government in the general sense that Foucault identifies is a matter of aiming to structure the possible field of action of others, and sometimes oneself, there is no reason why the concept should not be extended beyond the limits of the state to the study of international affairs.”\(^{83}\) There can be no argument today that power relations transcend state boundaries, and it is precisely Foucault’s micro-physical approach that allows us to trace these power relations.

This is essentially to argue that there are no ontological constraints to Foucauldian IR – it is a fundamentally transgressive philosophy, and “in contrast to theories which assume

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\(^{80}\) Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 32.

\(^{81}\) Selby, "Engaging Foucault: Discourse, Liberal Governance and the Limits of Foucauldian IR," 331.


given limits to their object and to explanation and judgment, Foucauldian theories emphasise the fluidity and fragility of limits.”\(^{84}\) The deployment of Foucault in IR is therefore to be directed towards the blurring of the boundaries between domestic and international politics, and thus the continued displacement of the state as the primary site of analysis:

“[T]he Foucauldian international relations scholar will pay more attention to the sub-state and trans-state strategic relations of power through which the state is enabled to effect its appearance as a unitary actor in the international context.”\(^{85}\)

Considering the problematic of state/sovereignty is one of the major stumbling blocks of an IR theory that hopes to account for contemporary changes in international politics, Foucault’s methodological legacy is eminently suitable for IR theory. However, it should be remembered that the displacement of sovereignty does not make sovereignty a redundant category, only that it is no longer the primary prism of understanding politics. It continues to play a central, albeit deconstructed, role, and the difficulties associated with internationalising Foucault can be directly attributed to the continuing relevance of sovereignty.

**Biopower and IR**

I argue that it is at the junction of biopower and IR that the relevance of sovereignty is highlighted, and that the elision or misrepresentation of sovereignty in influential accounts of ‘global biopower’ is the main causal factor leading to claims that global liberal governance biopolitically orders life. Central to my argument is the material role sovereignty continues to play, not only domestically, but also internationally. Domestically, or more appropriately, internally, this materiality represents the concrete biopolitical practices of government that states continue to embody, be it through things like the collection of statistics, the enforcement of law, or the coordination of mechanisms of security, such as a national health apparatus. Internationally, or externally, it refers to the way sovereignty was the precondition of an international art of government mutually conditioned by multiple sovereignties, albeit an art of government that is being problematised by contemporary phenomena. A

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\(^{84}\) Hutchings, "Foucault and International Relations Theory," 125.  
\(^{85}\) Ibid., 114.
‘problematisation’ of external sovereignty is needed to complement Foucault’s
problematisation of internal sovereignty, and I believe this can be done by investigating how
the sovereign-material aspect of biopower is transcending territorial boundaries. For example,
the way statistics, health regulations, and regulatory apparatuses in general are linking up
internationally. Such practices would represent another reinscription of the internal/external
binary, a reterritorialisation of sovereignty, the construction of a boundary that Foucault’s
bottom-up methodology would help us to understand.

Foucault’s displacement of sovereignty and articulation of governmentality stems
from an argument that “sovereignty works at the level of the symbolic, while government
claims to act on the real,” and that this symbolic device is a technology of government, or a
performative practice. This is, in effect, a deconstruction of sovereignty, undertaken to
avoid its mode of rule which conceals techniques of power that are ultimately domineering,
while nonetheless maintaining it as an analytical category. With reference to Bartelson’s
(1995) genealogy of sovereignty, which he deconstructs along three axes, the source and
locus of sovereignty are jettisoned, while its scope remains. Foucault therefore displaces
the symbolic effects of sovereignty and treats it as a technique that territorialises
governmentality. The territorialisation of governmentality embodies state performativity; the
actual practice of ‘policing’ a population according to a biopolitical rationality. One example
of this is ‘border performativity,’ “which takes as its theoretical starting point the idea that
borders are not only geographically constituted, but are socially constructed via the
performance of various state actors.” The internal dimension of sovereignty territorialises
governmentality by empowering various state (and non-state) actors to intervene in society on
behalf of its biopolitical objectives.

Externally, sovereignty has served to structure a field of activity that facilitates the
internal dimension of governmentality. This means the external dimension of sovereignty is

seen from a different perspective than internal sovereignty. Externally, sovereignty has not possessed the symbolic aspect that it has internally, and instead has always played a material role. As Lui-Bright points out, “[r]ather than a hindrance to the development of an art of government, the idea of sovereignty in interstate relations helps to secure the conditions that make the art of government that Foucault speaks of possible.”90 The external dimension of sovereignty has thus also served to territorialise biopolitical governmentality, by facilitating multiple internal projects of policing populations. Therefore, the “modern art of government” is not only concerned with the government of populations;

“but also the larger population encompassed by the system of states itself. It addresses this task first by promoting the rule of territorial states over populations, and secondly by seeking to regulate the conduct both of states themselves and of members of populations under their control. States are expected to pursue their own interests, but to do so in a field of action that has been structured by the overarching system of states to which they belong.”91

This perspective highlights the junction of biopower and IR, and intimates at competing governmentalities. I argue that an ascending analysis of biopower focusing, in particular, on how it interacts with what is commonly referred to as (international) neoliberalism, will generate pertinent insights into how biopower is becoming international.

Central to this approach will be an investigation of how biopolitical techniques that Foucault identified as having been territorialised by sovereignty are perhaps transcending their sovereign dimensions. Specifically, I will look at the way particular mechanisms of security are transcending sovereign territorialities. For example, national medical apparatuses whose regulatory components are converging transnationally, or more broadly, the way sovereignty is in some respects disaggregating into functional parts which then

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network transnationally. Thus I will be analysing how a deterritorialisation of biopower is generated by the convergence of biopolitical and international neoliberal rationalities, a process inevitably accompanied by reterritorialisation. This reterritorialisation, I argue, points to a more accurate reading of international/global biopower and constitutes the expansion of biopolitics, or what I call the internal dimension of sovereignty. Not only will identifying the reterritorialisation of biopower provide insights into the rationality of neoliberalism, especially the connection between its national and international dimensions, but it will also help us to understand the changing nature of contemporary sovereignty.

References


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92 This is an interesting and perhaps fruitful insight generated by Slaughter. See especially Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004).