

# Understanding African States in International Relations: On The Analytics of Sovereignty Versus Elite Governmentality

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## ABSTRACT

The African state, unlike its European counterpart is often naively described as lacking the attributes sovereignty, hence it is variously described as the hollow state, the managerial state, the enabling state, the surveillance state, the evaluative state, the skeleton state, the minimal state and a lame leviathan with limited agency in International Relations (IR). By extension, its experiences such as the adoption of neoliberalism and its associated conditionalities are said to be externally imposed with minimum input and policy autonomy from the continent's governing elites. This line of thinking presents African states as passive, dependent objects, apolitical and completely bereft of any authentic interests in IR. The dominance of this perspective has resulted in a one-sided, limited account of African experiences and realities which run much deeper than what the prevailing epistemological posture would make us believe. This article forwards an alternative perspective. It does so by going beyond the ensuing conceptual and analytical confusions and limitations to unpack the international experiences and realities of African states from the stand point of its governing elites. Drawing on Foucault's notion of neoliberal forms of governmentality, I argue that the latter are unabashedly autonomous constituency whose engagements are defined by commonalities of interests with their counterparts in the global arena. Hence the options they adopt are not merely crude impositions, but the result of negotiations and horse trading geared toward enhancing their agency and freedom.

**Keywords:** African states; Foucault; Neoliberal governmentality; Agency; International relations

## INTRODUCTION

The troublesome subject of African agency and autonomy has animated a great deal of discussions in critical IR theorising. Neoliberal form of power relations is a powerful and ubiquitous contender in the lively debate in IR over the question of African states sovereignty. Traditional theorising within the broader academic discipline of IR argues that the unprecedented extension of specifically neoliberal free market techniques of governing has unduly marginalised the exercise of African agency and freedom in IR. Such characterisation is underpinned by a somewhat reductionist and determinist understanding of agency precisely because it obscures and obfuscates aid-dependent African states agency in relations with donors. This is facilitated and increasingly enmeshed through practices, rationalities and technologies of neoliberal regime. It is important to clarify from the outset that I dispute the claim that African IR is

marginalised by neoliberal form of power relations on the basis that neoliberalism conceptualised here as an art of government is not about less government, but rather about governing more efficiently with other rationalities and technologies. Such a rationality of governing increasingly draws attention to the reconfigurations and even the increased role of African states actors in IR. In fact, I suggest that the emergence of the extension of neoliberal form of power relations has in fact become the key formative power in orchestrating and fostering various forms of African agency, self-government, and more fundamentally, reframing and recalibrating our understanding of the ensemble of social relations in its fidelity to neoliberal injunctions and dictum [1].

The narrow and the misleading understandings of African agency increasingly speaks to the broader epistemological and methodological parochialisms of the discipline of IR. In the

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existing literature, there is a relative dearth of prevalent studies on how neoliberal policies and reforms facilitate African agency in IR. This article attempts to contribute to the raging and lively academic discussion of African agency and critically examines its implications for IR. This article seeks to fix these missing dimensions by looking at African IR from a completely new perspective, one that destabilises and disrupts the paralysing idea of techniques of domination and subjugation in order to reconfigure African relationship with the external environment: one in which powerful western donor countries and International Financial Institutions (IFI's) impose their priorities on poor and weak post-colonial African states. This approach, I believe, would allow me to make sense of the subtle yet insidious ways in which power is exercised and rationalised through practices of agency and freedom; a break away from the important, yet determinist and structural accounts of African IR. I am concerned, however, to note how the relations between the so-called all-powerful western donor countries, international governing institutions and recipient African states is characterised by rationality of neoliberal art of government. In stark contrast to the tiresome, stale and tired tropes of an African state that is victimised, weak, powerless, passive, docile, governed, shaped and reshaped etc. by external actors, I suggest that power relations is far from a one-sided relationship between an allegedly passive, powerless, docile and a suppressed post-colonial African state object and an allegedly all-powerful western donor subject, for example [2].

The central argument of this article is that the existing relations between African recipient states and powerful donor countries and say IFI's is effectively underpinned by the element of relative agency and autonomy rather than merely abiding and docile conduct essentially accounted for on the simple ontology of domination or repression. My contention is that African governing political elites do exercise considerable agency in IR. The argument does not claim that the repressive and dominant forms of power incarnated by western donors and IFI's are completely absent. Quite the contrary, in fact. But my intention here, however, is in interrogating the powerful discursive framing of external policy interventions as a governmental logic, in that: neoliberalism is analysed in this article in terms of a broad field of related discourses and practices rather than as a monolithic project or merely a set of policy prescriptions; it is importantly highlighted that policies are not imposed through coercion and domination but rather through the normalisation of specific discourses of how to govern; and importantly it is highlighted that there is room for resistance and non-compliance as a form of counter-conduct [3].

I will discuss Michel Foucault's genealogical examination of neoliberalism as a distinctively modern way of governing in order to assess ways it can contribute to our understanding of African IR discourse. My argument is that the contemporary problematic posed sharply by the neoliberal form of power relations is not so much the 'retrenchment' of the African states as the African states refocusing its strategies, programmes and priorities. Foucault's analytic of neoliberal forms of governmentality provides a critical diagnostic framework for deeply problematising more explicitly the notion that African political elites are docile, weak etc. as well as for

reconceptualising the nature of African subjectivity in IR theory [4].

However, in recent years the applicability and utility of Foucauldian thought in general, and governmentality in particular in IR has been heavily criticised, especially concerning 'the question of the concept of global scalability'. The growing scholarly literature in IR argues that specific problems are inexorably prone to arise when the analytic of governmentality is applied in non-western contexts such as Africa. This article responds to such criticisms by arguing that such as an assertion is mistaken and grossly erroneous in that, relying heavily on the characteristically 'uneven' and the so-called unequal distribution of neoliberal governmental practices and discourses between the developed and those societies perceived outside the so-called developed West, it presupposes the study of governmentality, a field traditionally focused on internal conditions as discrete entities and spaces to our politics. I further argue that an overly simplistic analytical dichotomy between domestic-international, micro-macro-levels and the advanced liberal societies and the so-called illiberal context in many dominant scripts, obviously limit our overall understanding of the way in which the world is contemporarily ordered and governed [5].

My contention is that the conceptual architecture of governmentality is suited to all sorts of inquiries into particular governing and governmental practices thereby opening up ways of analysing the shifting boundaries, overlapping and competing rationalities in all sorts of areas of government that constitute the problematic of our political present. While I concede that it may be particularly challenging in appropriating modes of governmentality as fitting for explaining the global workings of power relations in say Africa which exemplifies a non-Western, at the same time, I also wish to state that we cannot ignore it continually unfolding vibrant potential. To my mind, the proclivity, obsession and penchant to 'tame and provincialize' Foucault' as inward-looking theorist unhelpfully constraints its productivity and mystifies any serious engagement with it. Governmentality analytic transcends disciplinary borders and accounts for both micro and macro workings of contemporary power relations. It is interesting to note that in terms of scale of application, governmentality is not confined by definition to a precise domain determined by a sector of the scale, but should be considered simply as a point of view, a method of decipherment which may be valid for the whole scale, whatever its size [6].

As such, Foucauldian-inspired engagements with international politics should critically foreground various dimensions of particular practices, contingent ways and conditions of possibility that not only shape, but constitute objects of critical inquiry at particular local sites in a particular time. This article draws on what I called 'elite governmentality', an analytical perspective which articulates real engagement with the political actions operating within the international realm to interrogate African IR, one that focuses on interactions, negotiations, cooperation, competition and horse trading in the process of exercising agency, rather than one-way domination. One of the most crucial steps in an analytics of 'elite governmentality' is to ask how self-governing free actors are created by governmental

rationalities and the power relations embedded in them. The central questions posed are therefore: in what ways, do African political actors impact the international system? To what extent is Africa irrelevant to IR? The article also looks at how African agency looks like in it all instantiations to demonstrate the broader implication of these questions for IR theory? I suggest that Foucauldian notion of specifically neoliberal forms of governmentality offer a fruitful way of problematising African agency in contemporary IR scholarship. In the following I discuss how IR scholars have come to understand the place of Africa in dealing with powerful Western states [7].

### Conceptualising african agency in IR

How can one account for African agency in IR? IR mainstream theorists for different reasons have explored in greater depth how Africa has little or no room for manoeuvre in IR and surprisingly accorded limited coverage or uniquely treated only transiently. IR's unfortunate neglect of Africa it is determined, many pundits suggest, for its lack of agency in the international system owing to the preponderance of neoliberal prescriptions. Neoliberal rationality of government and its associated policy conditionality under the auspices of the Fund and the Bank over the last three, they assert, have weakened and most importantly diminished the role of the African agency in IR. The continent's sovereignty is thoroughly hollowed out through forms of interventionism such as Structural Adjustment Policies, Poverty Reductions Strategy Papers and what not. That the problematic of governmental interventions and/or policy prescriptions under neoliberal market-led principles and techniques in it fundamental sense, has systematically battered, eroded the powers and sovereignty of the African political subjects through deregulation, market liberalisation, privatisation, austerity measures etc etc. is beyond doubt. It is argued that external actors determine Africans realities and are therefore limited in their ability to impact decisions and directions, particularly in their dealings with the external institutions bringing their sovereignty into question [8].

During the 1980s, almost all African economies like their counterparts in other developing parts of the world found itself grappling with economic tragedy manifested in the form of increasing budget deficits, deteriorating balance of payments, hefty external debt burden, high inflation, worsening terms of trade as a result of a fall in demand for commodities. While internal factors played a part in creating Africans over-indebtedness and precarious balance of-payments crisis, well suffice it to say that Africa's debt crisis has been severely exacerbated by exogenous conditions and major developments within the wider global political economy; and therefore provided an important basis for the surge of neoliberal agenda in the 1980s and early 1990s. It was within this period that public sector was modelled after the predatory neoliberal economic doctrine and the emergence of all forms of social organisation became leaner, flatter, and faster including the retrenchment of the interventionist state. This grand narrative is prevailingly characterised by an 'unlimited generalization' of the market form. It is worth mentioning that while classic liberalism had called on government to respect the form of the market, in neoliberal economic doctrine, the market is no longer the

principle of self-delimitation by the government, but instead, the principle against which it rubs, or 'a kind of permanent economic tribunal' [9].

What is particularly striking is the fact that in much of the 1980s and 1990s African states were seen as the inert and unfortunate victim of exogenous forces. In such instances, African governments economically and politically became effectively marginal and largely forced to accept directions in matters of the economy and internal governance by external powers. The unprecedented restructuring of the African states based on the neoliberal perspectives and policies through the so-called structural adjustment policies according to James Ferguson diminished its sovereignty. Austerity measures in public spending linked with neoliberal reforms have constrained African IR and its ability to engineer the self-governing subject and any room for policy manoeuvre. For some critics African choices, actions, preferences and strategies within IR have been severely compromised by the intrusion of external powers [10].

It is suggested that regulatory external interventionist approaches have become institutionalised, legitimised and routinised part of contemporary international development to such an extent that 'there is now not very much left of the idea of a sphere of 'internal affairs' over which African governments have sole authority'. This pathetic situation has led to a hollowed out version of sovereignty in which the IFIs are prepared to intervene in almost all aspects of economic, political, and social life in Africa. In view of this, many African governments are now no longer in effective control of the national economic project. Interventionist global liberal governance agenda has trumped the sovereignty of the post-colonial African states so much so that one can hardly speak of these countries possessing de-facto independence in any meaningful sense. The Bank and the Fund's intrusive interventions in the case of Africa addresses the question of exactly how it has produced 'a wholesale disregard for the idea that there is a realm of internal affairs over which the government should be considered sovereign, and over which external agents, as a matter of principle and a matter of practice, should not have any authority' [11].

The notion of sovereignty has lost its significance as an institution that structures relations between African states and external agencies. In many respects, then, sovereignty is no longer a guiding or constitutive norm in contemporary IR, at least for a significant number of African states. Essentially at the very least, there is an overt and extensive intrusions of outside agencies in Africa affairs. As Harrison notes 'increasingly overt and extensive intrusions by outside agencies into what had been viewed as the extensive purview of sovereign governments ... (had) ... thoroughly discredited traditional notions of sovereignty in many parts of Africa' What is most apparent is that the donor states undisguised intrusiveness has ensured that African states governing elites intervention even under crucial circumstances is completely outlawed. From this perspective, he stridently criticises the recent attempts to reform governance in developing countries and further suggests that they represent 'the seemingly boundless arrogance of Western agencies who believe themselves to be in possession of truth about social life for everyone'. Since

1980s and 1990s, there has been normative shift in the way the territorial sovereignty of the Africa's poorest states has been unnecessarily circumscribed and defied. This has further more simply eroded the capacity of African governing actors to enact and implement policies effectively.

It has explained so clearly, since the so-called African 'crisis' or the 'African tragedy', virtually development practices in relation to the interventions of external forces like the Bank and the Fund have demanded the rearrangement of the entire social body of post-colonial African states. The nature of the Bank's intricate, intrusive and detailed interventions in the sovereign frontier – appears to reveal an attempt to instil a vastly expanded new global governance regime, discursive intervention, political and economic reforms, conditioned and routinely characterised by liberal norms and discourses of government. It is important to highlight the fact that involved in the second phase of structural adjustment policies was a radical shift from promoting a 'reduction in the scope of state action' to an emphasis upon the "nature of state action". Constructing the state as an 'embedding agent' and sovereign frontier' rather than a territorial trap it is particularly relevant and useful for understanding the strategy and policy practices of an increasingly wide range of powerful international financial institutions as legitimising a global political economy with its own designs, various mechanisms and institutional arrangements for fixing the various development challenges posed by the African region. Governance states Harrison reminds us, represents a manifestation of a grander and profoundly historical problematic: 'the politics of the encounter between the institutions of global capitalism and African nation-states'. Of greater concern is the way that 'the concept of sovereignty necessarily posits a state of self-containment or inviolateness that exists before intervention...'. The principle of sovereignty it is claimed, is '...empirically too provisional and theoretically too contested' to be of use in analysing Africa'. Broad frameworks of development intervention by the Bank and the Fund incredibly blurs the distinction between state economy and state society boundaries to rearrange the entire social body between state and society, and society itself: typical of liberal forms of governmentality. In this framing, Harrison clarifies that 'external-national distinctions become less useful'.

The nature of the Bank and the Fund's intricate, intrusive and detailed interventions in the sovereign frontier – appears to reveal much about the on-going attempts to instil a vastly expanded new global governance regime, discursive intervention, political and economic reforms, conditioned and routinely characterised by liberal norms and discourses of government. It would seem that lurking in the background of this vision of the Bank has been a never-ending list of 'new' reforms, 'benchmarks' and performance criteria which amounts to a transformation of states (via 'governance states') and societies (through social engineering as 'embedding neoliberalism') into an 'ideal' and stable type conforming the basic fantasies and values of neoliberal ideology in general and the Bank's current development model in particular. The argument is that the new intimate relationship is a product of the 'ascendance, or victory, of neoliberal fundamentals' led by the Bank's project to embed neoliberal interventions in the

sovereign frontier'. The result has been 'internalised neoliberal reform'. The implication, as a consequence of this is that we are left with the impression that such a project, initiatives, programmes and techniques necessarily lead to the presentation of the putative 'success stories' or 'showcase' in a continent associated with belligerent regulatory reform failures. If anything, the history of development policy is replete with initiatives and programmes, which turned out to have several ambiguous or simply bad implications. Or it might be more accurate to say has led to obviously bad outcomes. As shown by Harrison, Mozambique, Uganda and Tanzania, who have become 'star pupils' in the World Bank's new good governance aid fad, have today shown signs of governance deterioration.

In Sub-Saharan Africa the upshot has been interventions by the Bank that responds robustly and consistently to the more complex and diverse context of regional government structures. In line with the problematic assertion that aid, as a particular form of external influence, affect policy autonomy and agency of poor African states, Harrison makes the following statement: 'the donor-state relation is too intimate and interrelated to be understood as a dichotomy. Donors do not just impose conditionalities; they also work in a routinized fashion at the centre of policy-making'. The illuminating way with which Graham captures the complexity and the diversity of the debate that situates recent interventions by the Bank in Sub-Saharan Africa within the context of regional government structures and patterns prompts consideration of the role of liberal techniques and rationalities and forms of government within the international arena. Governance states thesis in Africa productively and unmistakably provide some of the most robust critiques which in turn is intimately linked to the shaping of a new terrain of very visible and undisguised development intervention by the Bank that has most evidently been informed by the emerging global governance regime. Hinging critically on 'a profound global project of socio-political engineering' and micro-management, in the case study on Tanzania, Uganda and Mozambique, may insightfully serve as a fertile ground to probe the technocratic state institution building approach of an array of powerful external actors with the final objective of ensuring that agency of transformation within various state ministries, departments and agencies 'internalise' the reform agenda. In this account, the key point is to claim that 'aid technicians and high-level civil servants have articulated the language of international development into their own policymaking and discussions with external agency representatives'.

For Harrison, as for Chang, 'these days, there is virtually no area on which the Bank and the Fund do not have (often very strong) influence – democracy, judicial reform, corporate governance, health, education, and what not'. Many commentators make clear that foreign aid as a particular form of external influence affect policy autonomy and agency of poor African states. Using Ghana as an exemplary point of reference, Williams provides an exhaustive analysis of how the Bank's approach to neoliberal social transformation works out in practice; and how these are intimately connected with concrete forms of governmental logics, rationalities, and technologies aimed to improve governance in the country. His analyses have been influential and also have explanatory power regarding the dominant policy

framing of interventionist agendas of the Bank's in respect of Ghana (and this applies reasonably to other developing countries). A particularly critical development has been the way various cases of the Bank's interventions and bundle of practices aimed to improve governance have been foisted on the Ghanaian state to pursue certain policies and specific development models. And, to a large degree, these governmental interventions and policy prescriptions have been boundlessly promoted by the construction of a variety of 'institutional frameworks, regulatory practices, and imposition of brutal forms of economic discipline, accepted as international best practices'.

In the case of Ghana, these are related to the privatisation and commercialisation of state-owned enterprises, public finance management, land administration, decentralisation and local government development, institutional development in the financial sector, development of micro and small enterprises, and civil-society building through community water and sanitation projects, rural development projects and literacy and functional skills projects. And in fact, when seen through the lens of governance tools and discourses, these kinds of programmes are not at all unique to Ghana— but they do illustrate how the more regulatory external interventionist approaches have become institutionalised and legitimated and routinised part of contemporary international development to such an extent that 'there is now not very much left of the idea of a sphere of 'internal affairs' over which (these) governments have sole authority'. In short, neoliberal forces, assumptions, policies, and programmes have reduced African states capacity in IR to an exponentially lower level. Critical approaches such as these implicitly help politicise and demonstrate how African agency in IR has been compromised.

However, in contrast to these critical approaches, this article will argue that in the second decade of the twenty-first century, African elites have reshaped and remodelled the existing relations with donor nations and international governing institutions within the international realm. I contend that African elites have assume a type of political subjectivity and agency that affirm their sense of self around imperatives congruent with the logic of neoliberal project. There is a new starting point to the established and received notion of the analysis of African IR that goes beyond over-determined, problematically reductive, unreflective and uncritical engagement of neoliberal grand narrative. To break free from the determinists and structural accounts of African IR requires a careful re-thinking of how African elites exert agency in the international system. This approach instead situates the increasingly popular and standard narrative of African IR at the intersection between subjectivity and agency in neoliberal governmentality. This approach of course has significant correspondence with neoliberalism as discourse for the central reasons of both 'structure' and 'agency' which is both empowering and constraining; 'thus adequately capturing the discursive production of neoliberalism'. This is important mainly because, exogenous forces bound by policy and programmes are both constituted by and constitutive of the subjectivation characterised by assertiveness, intensive engagement in aid disbursement and intervention norms, in reshaping existing relations with Western donors. Such issues go

to the very heart of this subject which disappointingly, IR scholars have either downplayed or ignored in their discussions in African agency. In the following I will show how Foucault's genealogical examination of neoliberalism provides a more nuanced diagnostic approach to new forms of subject for critical scrutiny of African IR.

### Foucault and neoliberal forms of power relations

Foucault's genealogical examination of neoliberal governmentality offers a novel conceptual framework serves as a useful illustrative starting point for our understanding and theorisation of African sovereignty and agency in IR. Here I engage with Foucault's seminal lectures on the history of governmentality delivered to demonstrate the historical ontology of neoliberalism and the way that it is rooted in the political and the practices of contemporary governing. His usage of neoliberalism in these lectures distinctively differs from the standard political economy critique that tends to view neoliberalism as a set of policies: privatisation of state enterprises, trade liberalisation, regulation of capital, maximising corporate profits, dismantling the welfare state, unregulated direct foreign investment and the reductions in state spending and regulation of virtually every kind. The lectures analyse neoliberal project as a form of governmentality: a particular and historically specific rationality of governance that produces new kinds of political subjects and a new organisation of the social realm reminiscent of Chicago School and German Ordoliberalism in the second half of the twentieth century. Foucault's analysis of governmentality refers to 'the conduct of conduct', or self-government and of the government of others working through practices of freedom and autonomy rather than through coercion. Governmentality as patented by Foucault can refer to strategies, techniques, methods, mechanisms and technologies deliberately employed to govern subjects either directly or indirectly by structuring the field of possibilities, the configuration of subjectivity itself under the action of government. Governmentality as a historical variants of technology/neoliberal logic of governing in the seventeenth century was reproduced within the context of liberal vision of government in the eighteenth century.

To be sure, governmentality is neither synonymous with liberalism or neoliberalism. It can be asserted that it is precisely such logic of reasoning that prompts consideration for the study of neoliberalism that leaves open the possibility of non-liberal and non-Western forms of governmentality. In stark contrast to the prevalent assumptions that problematically present the African political elites as passive, docile and enthusiastic recipients ready to conform to the regulatory edicts imposed liberal model policy interventions: I feel that it is critical to point to how neoliberalism might inspire resistance by looking at the constraining forces that cause the governmentalisation of populations to fail. Foucauldian genealogy of neoliberalism explicitly highlights the understanding of governing as immanent to its object, which challenges classical liberal understandings of the naturalness of the market and developed neoliberalism as a coherent framework of governmentality, seeing market mechanisms as the basis for legitimating government or for achieving its aims. Foucauldian-inspired

analyses outlines neoliberalism beyond the confused discussion of neoliberalism as authoritarian policy directives but rather as a governmental rationality, in the sense of capturing the constitutive and productive element of power relations as unmistakably drawn out in policy interventions provides the context for the assertion for this article. Foucault's account of neoliberalism with emphasis on relations of interaction provides an excellent example and illuminating insights to enrich our theorisation of African IR. In what follows, I want to encourage a discursive readings of questions regarding African insertion in IR discourse which remarkably acknowledges freedom and unabashed agency working through particular rationalities, technologies, techniques and forms of subjectivity. In this article, I show that African continent agency and policy autonomy in IR have strengthened tremendously by neoliberal rationality of government.

### **Problematising the analytics of “elite governmentality” vrs african sovereignty in IR**

Mainstream IR scholars have disregarded ideas of African agency in IR. The point of departure for this article is that contrary to some of the prevailing view Africa is not marginal in IR scholarship. I argue that African sovereignty is constitutive of contemporary rise of governmentality presciently described by Foucault as governmentalising the state and its increased role in IR. This approach to African IR is very relevant, indeed, indispensable in that it relies on a conception of neoliberal form of governmentality which remarkably denotes how the principle of sovereignty is a constituent part of the international realm. Despite the predominant opinion that current neoliberal policy reforms adopted by African states undermine their sovereignty as some inadvertently suggest, largely failing to incorporate the continent into their analyses of international power. Neoliberal African states remain the central fulcrum in its dealings with the external environment; reflective of the changing substantive content of African critical agency in IR discourse. Here African states are re-conceptualised as having control over a development policy agenda to position itself in a strategic position even in the most asymmetrical of contexts in the international realms. This implies they are not merely rationalised production of free and autonomous subjects but also capable of constituting advocacy relations with other international entities. Not the least remarkable, and perhaps the most characteristic, is the fact that neoliberal rationality of government does not reduce the sovereignty of the post-colonial African state, but instead, reconstitutes it in accordance with underlying liberal governmental rationalities. In this regard, I am particularly interested in how neoliberal rationalities of government shape and reshape African political elites subjectivity in the light of the most significant shifting discourses and practices of governance in IR. Of course, I concede that there are problems, challenges, absences but this is something that IR scholars should decode. And one of the most important questions demanding consideration, in determining African IR.

Indeed almost all scholars commenting upon African agency, argue fairly convincingly that the expansive market reforms

pioneered since the 1980s onward was about the ‘rolling back’ of the paternalistic and vampire postcolonial African states. African agency therefore, commentators suggest, has been effectively compromised by overwhelming cutbacks in important government programmes and deregulation of economic activity. However these assumptions may sound, it is important to understand that it is both factually incomplete and methodologically flawed as neoliberal interventions foster greater independence and agency through strategically engaging with the disparate and diverse groups within the global environment. Regardless of all the talk about the ‘retrenchment’ of African states, less government or deregulation at large, under neoliberalisation government spending as Gross Domestic Product percentage has been on the rise since the 1970s emphasising the ‘degree of control recipient governments are able to secure over implemented policy outcomes’ maintains that neoliberalism has resulted not in the shrinking of governments, but in their expansion (measured in terms of social expenditures) in order to ‘compensate’ for the negative effects of neoliberal globalisation, such as growing competition and the mobility of capital, the race to the bottom in labour standards, labour flexibility, and unemployment caused by industrial relocations’. Interestingly, when examined from the perspective of neoliberal form of governmentality, however, African agency in IR has not diminished but rather refocused its strategies and priorities to govern more efficiently as the principle of a form of conduct that aims to produce freedom as an effect of how government is exercised. In opposition to the reduction of African states role required by neoliberal government my suggestion is that the current neoliberal regimes have led to a progressive restructuring and governmental reregulation. It agrees, and claim that ‘the irony that should not be lost on anyone is that neoliberal regimes have enacted more legislation and regulation than social democratic ones’. This can be put in another way. Neoliberal style of government facilitates as effectively as possible the conditions under which the state could act and interact autonomously from even the most seemingly powerless of positions. The reality is that the nature of contemporary African-donor relations are being strengthened by neoliberal regimes.

I say, the era of neoliberalism has effectuated and produced flatter and faster state organisations, rather than plain learner and weaker ones. African sovereignty constitutes the very basis of neoliberal government as the necessary and voluntary partner in the exercise of government; and, still more, supports rather than questions the relevance of African IR. It should be emphasised that global political economy and sovereignty are indissolubly intertwined and bounded together; perhaps even more controversially, they are mutually inclusive sites tied in a positive-sum game in the production of the state and international system. Crucially neoliberalism as an art of government overlaps and leans on varied governmental programmes: ‘(the) art of government according to truth, (the) art of government according to the rationality of the sovereign state, (the) art of government according to the rationality of economic agents, and more generally, according to the rationality of the governed themselves’. The recognition of the importance of African agency and autonomy necessitates an

invitation for well-considered and consensual interventionary practices and understandings. The point here, in short, is that neoliberal formation of the state cannot be thought to reject state intervention into market or curtailed African policy autonomy. Neoliberal rationality of government entails a radically new perspective of the market which rearticulates, reinserts and re-inscribes liberal governmentality by means of a strong state as the political form of market liberty, of competition, of entrepreneurialism, and of individual self-responsibility.

To understand the subject of agency in Africa's IR we need to shift the focus away from generalised accounts of Africa as a supplicant actor. An account of subject of African agency must attuned to how it has carved out a subtle but substantial degree of agency in relations with donors; a thorough analysis has not gone into this however, and merits further study. I make the argument that African actors are able to exert assertive agency in their various encounters with external partners.

Arguably, the liberal presumption of the ontological givenness or quasi-natural phenomenon of market rationality which serves as a limit to the state when best left to its own devices, I argue that the state has a crucial role to play in fostering and redefining market rationality. By this token, the state's legitimacy is therefore productively indexed from its market constructivism which must be created, produced and reproduced by dint of benign political interventions and orchestration. This point is highly salient because, neoliberal regimes serve to effectively engender mutual dependency between international –and, equally importantly, African political elites. Neoliberal interventions and prescriptions are not about less government, but also more fundamentally and quintessentially about governing more efficiently with other rationalities, programmes and means. It is about shifting the focus and priorities of government, and not about pushing government out of the equation which I argue is completely naïve, quaint and superficial at best. It is particularly through certain state-sanctioned institutions, business-friendly fiscal, monetary, and social policies that neoliberal rationalities of government strategies are refracted, reinforced and reproduced. This framework of governance, and, more centrally, the focus on the subtle circulations of power increasingly builds on the growing interest in the shift to governance approaches of societal intervention challenges fundamentally the traditional IR theorising. Contrary to critical approaches that may perceive African political elites and governments and the African states system as increasingly circumscribed and peripheralised, what is in fact occurring is the governmentalisation of the African states and its different practices of governing in IR. Essentially, a more decentralised way of governing through different networks of power institutions: one mostly concerned with states and its political apparatuses as the constitutive basis upon which power relations are codified through new governmental projects and modes of calculation. Added to this is the fact that new forms of neoliberal rationalities of government deconstruct and re-shape the meaning and modes of operation of the African state agency, yet this is not simply Western domination of a passive neoliberal African state. Rita Abrahamsen in her account of new forms of aid partnership between donor and recipient states

adroitly argues that 'the power of partnerships does not lie primarily in relations of domination, but in techniques of cooperation and inclusion'. Foucauldian approaches of neoliberal art of government is not about economic globalisation or rejection of state intervention into market (to say the least. Neoliberal rationality of government ensures the state intervenes in the social fabric to secure the smooth functioning of an artificial and fragile market. The market is in principle the best way of organising the economy and to some very large extent all sphere of social life. I find this claim bizarre, as it fails to account for how it requires a strong state being there, 'fundamentally, to serve the market as establishing the best-possible conditions for it to prosper'. Foucauldian understanding of neoliberalism primarily relies on a reciprocal tolerance understanding of market according to which market is not reducible to the state because it must form its constitutive condition.

Foucauldian archaeology of neoliberalism in this sense reconstructs and reimagines a governmental logic which is decidedly contrary to the liberal idea of government at least in its standard understanding: one in which the market legitimises the state and the individual liberty as a key concern of governmental rationality and political economy as opposed to the one which in fact undermines it. Of course, the role of the African political elites in neoliberal rationality of government is regulating an otherwise rational, effective and harmonious market. The crux of the matter lays in the neoliberals' viewpoint of government as strictly speaking no longer as one of 'laissez faire' market fundamentalism and retreat of the state (à la Foucault). Liberal governmentality principle of non-intervention in the market could only amount to "naïve naturalism" about the economy. Neoliberalism as a matter of fact is no, 'laissez-faire', but instead a 'cultivation of the market, a 'culture of entrepreneurship'. Liberal politics of 'laissez faire' is the defining feature for understanding the naturalistic view of the market. 'Laissez faire' market fundamentalism more provocatively actually work to strengthen the neoliberal state and, more broadly, neoliberal apparatus.

Here it is that I part company, on the portrayal of African states as been the inert victim of exogenous and suggest that such depiction betrays a somewhat reductionist understanding of African IR. Now, it can in no sort be admitted that African actors have established a sustained track record of assertiveness during which the continent has seen long-term economic growth. The sovereignty of African states, is always and in fact as far as practicable necessarily thriving. To be sure, loss of sovereignty of African states and leaders as constructed through academic and policy discourse, I believe undermines the ontological and epistemological assumptions of IR scholarship premised upon bounded and viable states. I venture to suggest that neoliberal technologies of governing do not depart from, reject, and push the state out of the equation as such but, rather, tries to mobilise other rationalities, programmes, and means to govern more efficiently. To borrow the words of neoliberal '(g)lobalization may well require big, not small, government' in order to provide both active labour market policies – such as 'retraining programmes, public employment services, targeting of problematic populations such as school dropouts' – and

passive social programmes – such as employment protections, unemployment benefits, and retirement policies. It convincingly argues that the ‘compensatory state’ thesis highlights how the growing uncertainty and risks caused by the process of neoliberal globalisation has pushed societies to demand and receive ‘a larger government role as the price of exposing themselves to greater amounts of external risk’. As Neumann and Sending have emphasised, ‘the meaning and role of sovereignty are largely defined by governmental rationalities that now increasingly operate on the global level’.

Neoliberal regimes in substantive ways have eminently progressed “from hostility against the state to the desire for a strong state’, from deregulation to re-regulation, ‘from passive reduction of social spending and job protections to active use of welfare to promote market efficiency’. Similarly pointedly highlights how neoliberalism has shifted ‘from budget cuts to regulation-by-audit ... from privatization to public-private partnership, from greed-is-good to markets-with-morals’. Whitfield and Fraser for instance point out that ‘even whilst arguing that sovereignty has been ‘lost’ claim ‘African political elites almost always have a degree of choice over whether or not to accept aid from a particular source at a particular time’. Thus, rightfully suggest that liberal rationalities of governing in large part, do rely upon and even foster various forms of unabashed African agency and subjectivity: such a rationality of governing draws attention to active and even leading role of African states in IR. In the same manner, Brown strenuously rejects the predominant assumption that African sovereignty and self-governance have been unduly curtailed by development assistance, and strikingly reaches the conclusion that post-colonial African states are not only the central constitutive subjects of the international realm but are also increasingly heavily endowed with the autonomy and freedom with which to contest, resist and engage in negotiations over the terms of aid relationships. It recognises that to govern is to presuppose the freedom of the governed ‘and that ‘power is not so much a matter of imposing constraints upon citizens as of ‘making up’ citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom’. An important consequence of the emergence of the so-called ‘governance states’ and the new emphasis on ‘governance with government’ have been an increasing intensification of deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations of global politics; in that the discourse and practices of development have deproblematized, delegitimized and prodigiously normalised the ever increasing interventions of a plethora of external actors in terms of addressing the development problems of aid-recipient countries particularly Africa through ambitious projects of social and political engineering.

What characterises this thought is that neoliberal free market economy can only be realised and made possible by means of a strong state authority and decisive political engineering; the explicit aim of which is to define their approach as a distinctive contribution to neoliberal reasoning. It is for this reason that the Bank and other major donors require ‘success stories’ of African states to validate their own prescriptions, and thus their international credibility as effective development institutions. African political elites have influenced and modified policy interventions rather than simply surviving within the global

system. African political elites according to this argument have room to manoeuvre. It seems to me that construction of ‘governance states’ by the Bank and others is to justify the existence of ‘successful’ states which do not, however, conform to Western political sensitivities. It is also clear that the attempt to construct ‘governance states’ by the Bank was to provide a conducive environment to promote regulatory and liberal project’ beyond ‘the West’.

The notion that the state must desist from intervening in the rationality and the market dogma is quintessentially liberal idea at least in its standard understanding. The market in reality legitimises the state as a key concern of governmental rationality as opposed to the one which in fact undermines it, for example. I that maintain neoliberalism is completely different thing altogether. I suggest that there is an intricate and interwoven relationship between the state and market through which the state can derive its legitimacy albeit in the service of the economy. It is precisely through certain state-sanctioned institutions and Western dominated international organisations that neoliberal form of government strategies are refracted, reinforced and reproduced. With all global governance theorists claim that the state is no longer the sole actor of governance in the contemporary IR, it is my contention that organisations like the Bank and the Fund can only operate with a significant degree of freedom of autonomy and agency from the state. Simon Springer brilliantly captures it well when he argues that ‘neoliberalism is more than a state form or particular set of policies’. Simon Springer claims that ‘it is politically important to consider neoliberalism as a discourse through which a political economic form of power-knowledge is constructed’. Neoliberal project and its associated assumptions is an attempt to reconstruct and reconfigure the uncanny relation between market and the state. In neoliberal art of government the existence of the market is made legitimate by the state and certainly not the other way round. It therefore seems safe to say that in analysis of neoliberalism, the most important feature underlying neoliberal government has been –and still is–its anti-naturalistic and constructivist view of the market in which the market is no longer just a quasi-natural phenomenon but rather serves as a constructivist vision for government.

Regardless of any tangentially related counterarguments that critics may cite, I assert that prevalent understandings of neoliberal modes of governance is not about the triumph of market society over national sovereignty or disembedding of the market from mechanisms of social regulations. Indeed the emergence of neoliberal modes of governance has been outstandingly and exceptionally made possible not by the ‘retreat of the state’ and ‘domination of the market’, but by the active involvement of the state which has vigorously fostered processes of economisation and marketisation in all spheres of human activity. The present rationalities of government in many respects is a ‘repetition’ of classical liberalism after a Keynesian interlude’. In an interesting twist of irony, the Bretton Woods institutions have begun to re-position, re-politicise, re-embed and re-Christianise the post-colonial African states as a new biopolitical logic of governmentality in the face of the now largely discredited and infamous Washington Consensus (policy reforms based on the uncritical faith in market).



Often the predominant view is that policy intervention and problematic forms of governance agenda of the Bank, the Fund and bilateral donors are marked by some kind of omnipotent leviathan, of course, not the kind Hobbes suggested, though. However, the deepest problem with this common view is that while correct, I would like to suggest is (at least) somewhat naïve and at best misguided, as it seems oddly unaware of the contradictory and complex processes of mutual constitution of the making and breaking of boundaries, evinced in the contested flows and counter flows of practices, rationalities and discourses – derived from various spatial and temporal configurations – which specifies the productivity of power relations as distinct from techniques of domination and coercion. It is worth some pause to reflect this idea that in considering the specific case of brutal forms of state intervention the concept of governmentality is better at explaining practices, specific techniques and technologies of power framed through the notion of normalisation that underlie dominant forms of contemporary practices of governance. That is, the construction of ‘modern, self-disciplined citizens and states that can be trusted to govern themselves according to liberal democratic norms’. It seems to me that this line of thinking is more tenable and perhaps opens up new analytical possibilities and critical tools we can develop to reconceptualise and offer fresh perspectives to undress African IR.

Importantly there have been struggles against externally imposed neoliberal structural adjustment policies as a particular form of external influence in the streets and in lecture halls of Africa. Foucault in his lecture on genealogy of neoliberalism indicates how ‘series of governmental rationalities overlap, lean on each other, challenge each other, and struggle with each other’. The subject remakes herself, rather than being the passive recipient of neoliberal discipline evidently highlighting the critical thrust of neoliberal governmentality studies. For the purpose of this article I will only confine myself to intellectual resistance. Africanist scholars have severely critiqued externally imposed neoliberal structural adjustment and indicated alternatives. Of course, this highlights that the African bureaucracies have not surrendered supinely without some fight. These are superabundantly evident in the alternative frameworks, plans and programs such as the Lagos Plan of Action, (1980); African Economic Community (AEC); The African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programme for Socio-economic Recovery and Transformation (1989) and the African Charter for Popular Participation and Development (1990), Poverty Reductions Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) provided by African elites. The creation of these bodies indicates quite clearly the governing elites desire to influence Africa’s development through indigenising Africa’s development policy and addressing its inherent development problematic. Bretton Woods institutions and the so-called development partners have dangled the carrot of aid in African elites attempt to develop an alternative framework for reconstruction for the future of the continent. Nevertheless the legitimacy and sovereignty of African states has never been more apparent. More recently, African national bourgeoisies have made strategic choices with

regard to pertinent issues such as participation in global negotiations over climate change, aid disbursal, bilateral agreements, climate change, migration, realigning development strategies, coalition-building and intervention norms which have brought much-needed breath of fresh air, visibility, influence and its own pay-offs for African states. This is a marked deviation from already existing formations of power relations in the constitution of African agents and subjects in the second decade of the 21st century.

Quite obviously, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, African elites have increasingly reasserted itself by fashioning out new relationships with new powers and new actors such as China, Brazil, Singapore, Malaysia and India. This is emblematic of African elites determination to chart its own policy course which in and of itself is a product of particular power relations and forms of the conduct of conduct. It is imperative therefore to give up on the fantasy that African agency is compromised and marginalised in IR. Notwithstanding the proclamation of Afro-pessimist, African elites are reclaiming their right to think for themselves as free and autonomous subjects. It is also to be borne in mind that recent decades have witnessed a fundamental shift especially with regard to African elites policy preferences and reorientations which shape the way in which African agency is complexly framed, for example, in IR. It is argued, very plausibly, that despite the unprecedented onslaught of neoliberal globalisation and significant structural constraints imposed on Africa by global economic and political inequalities, the role of the African elites remains crucial in redefining and restructuring its policies which represents African emancipation and how they have contested the practices that govern them. I heartily join in Carl Dearth’s assertion of turning the tired tropes on its head in the analysis of African IR. The result of what has been said is, that African sovereignty in IR is not a chimerical, but one in which African actors have been critical to the implementation of policies in the name of their freedom which makes the continent to be hopeful rather than hopeless. And this amounts only to opening up a different perspective in approaching African IR. The road towards neoliberal governmentality is fraught with defiance and possible frictions.

Whilst governmental strategies and tactics of power essentially try to govern the everyday life of individuals, as captured in Foucault’s famous definition of government as “conduct of conducts— paradoxically such rationality constructs subjects that self-reflectively govern themselves or attempt to resist normalised conduct and subjugating discourses and practices. The point is to highlight that by recognising the implicit contradictions and fractures intrinsic to discourses of neoliberal form of government, productive of specific kinds of subjects, it avoids naively assuming that aid-dependent African governments supinely accept normalising discourses of imposition. I am firm in my conviction that aid-dependent African governments rather acutely recruit alternative discourses to productively and strategically resist neoliberal subjectification that has been instrumental in highlighting the fact that there is always the possibility for reversibility of the status quo. It seems to me, therefore, that aid-recipient governments have more effectively resisted their docility by opposing (passively as well as actively)

policy practices or reforms; and should prompt IR scholars to widen the basis for theorising the agency of Africa in IR. The foregrounding of Africa states as agents therefore necessitates and offers an alternative formulations to the existing conceptualisation of African IR.

## CONCLUSION

This article has proposed an alternative to the existing conceptualisations of African agency in IR. I have refuted the lack of sovereignty of African IR arguments and asserted why scholarly discussion of agency, is extremely useful for understanding the dynamics of the continent's relationship with Western donors and IFIs. Through an engagement with the work of Foucault I have illuminated various ways that African states do not withdraw from IR rather, it is constructed discursively as an active and interventionist state – acting through society from below, rather than from above: an 'action upon other actions'. Using African greater agency in the processes of neoliberal globalisation, I have illustrated how governmentality approach can be used productively to analyse the interplay between donors, IFIs, recipients and agency. I have shown how power relations between donor and recipient African countries work through the calculated and rationalised production of forms of free subjectivity through highlighting its potential to contribute to discussions about the impact of African IR.

It seems to me that Foucault's re-articulation and rephrasing of the relation between the market and the state challenges our traditional view of how to govern that appear to characterise our contemporary times – that is, our present –is subjected to an increasing governmentalisation of power mechanisms as the role of the African state has been defused and radically reconstituted into different circumstances. Foucault's analysis thus potentially leaves open the field of possibility and visibility that sets neoliberalism apart from the modern liberal view. Yet for Foucault—the anti-naturalistic and constructivist view of the market must specifically be understood as a distinctively 'new art of government'. I suggest after Foucault that neoliberal project has to be read as a signature technology of governing in which rational economic action is suffused and remarkably orchestrated through the subject's conduct toward him or herself.

It is thus my submission that using Foucault, if we want to understand the specific forms that the extended application of the market frame takes in contemporary times then certainly, we need a careful analysis of the new ways in which the social world is governed and becomes governable. Such an analysis exposes the shifts in the relation between the market and how it rearticulates, reinstalls and re-ensemble our governmentalities. In classical liberalism, the power of the market lies precisely in the fact that it explicitly presented a limit to what government does and do. I have established that in neoliberal art of government the market becomes a concurrential mechanism through which the governing practice of government can be rationalised. Close to Foucault's heart, which is germane to my analysis is that in neoliberal art of government the market rather than providing a panoptic view, 'becomes a sort of permanent

economic tribunal that claims to assess government action in strictly economic and market terms'. All of these developments accurately reflect what Foucault meticulously identified as the crux of the liberal governmentality which circulates and permeates within the state and its agencies.

But more decisively, at issue, in fact – is that for me – and contrary to the populists and simplified readings that in the neoliberal states there is a turn away from the states and towards markets, a stronger consensus emerges that it is something that can only ever be a myth or chimera within the modern governmental logic. I have argued that neoliberal economic reforms needless to say, indispensably needs the protection of strong states. It needs their powers of enforcement in our modern view on politics as government. Apart from anything else, the minimalist, skeleton, lame state, I presume, is hopelessly utopian. It exists nowhere in space. I have argued that the state in the contemporary times – that is, for our present –is subjected to an increasing governmentalisation of power mechanisms as the role of the state has been defused and radically reconstituted into different circumstances.

In these senses, Foucault's concept of governmentality provides us with an analytical axis which makes it possible to effectively decode the neoliberal policy agenda of a 'retreat of the state' as a technique of global governance. By all accounts, Foucault more than any one person must posthumously be rewarded for positively recognising and alerting us that our modern idea of neoliberal market relations has become increasingly denaturalised, a factor which tends to remain heavily underappreciated but potentially significant. The flipside of the coin is that perhaps, it becomes all the more urgent and intensely pertinent to investigate whether or not this approach at all articulates and provokes a genuine alternative that problematises the epistemic of economisation and ontologises the neoliberal form of power relations in an exceedingly compelling way. And finally, there is a need for mainstream IR scholars to develop ontological and epistemological bases to understand African IR. For this is an era in which African states and leaders have reshaped existing relations with Western donors and fashioned new relationships with rising powers, and one in which African states and leaders have been increasingly engaged in global negotiations over intervention norms in IR. The realisation of the above suggestions – such as African agency in IR may require a critical re-examination and re-conceptualisation of neoliberal regimes and assumptions.

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