

MATHIEU HILGERS

The historicity of the neoliberal state

Recent years have been marked by a proliferation of studies on neoliberalism. A considerable variety of topics has been investigated: health, education, labour, prisons, corporations, finance, history, cultural production and so on. But in spite of its diversity, most of this research bears in one way or another on the issue of the state in a neoliberal age. Some authors suggest that neoliberalism is characterised by the state (Clarke and Newman 1997; Prasad 2006; Haque 2008), whereas others argue that neoliberalism is characterised by its redeployment (Hildyard 1997; Ong 1999; Peck 2003; Ong 2006; Bayart 2007; Laval 2007; Lee and McBride 2007; Cerny 2008; Dardot and Laval 2009; Wacquant 2009a; Plant 2009). The latter trend is clearly dominant today, although epistemological and theoretical approaches to transformations of the state vary. Overall, conceptions of the state in the neoliberal age are deeply shaped by the specificities of the states that they study.

In an area dominated by an increasing number of Western-centred theories, Africa provides an excellent occasion to decentre the analysis. Like many global theories that have neglected Africa or considered it a 'black hole' (Castells 2010), and that are often articulated around a vision of 'worldwide convergence' (Ferguson 2006: 25–9), studies of neoliberalism seem sometimes to consider the Western neoliberal trajectory as the neoliberal trajectory *per se*. It is not surprising to observe that numerous global analyses of neoliberalism simply do not mention Africa at all (Campbell and Pedersen 2001; Soederberg *et al.* 2005 quoted in Harrison 2010). In this paper I will argue that the development of an analytical perspective that considers the production of neoliberalism 'at a global scale' – as suggests Wacquant in this volume – must take into account the trajectories of a variety of states. In order to identify both similarities and differences in neoliberal implementation, I will discuss three theses developed by Wacquant in this debate section of *Social Anthropology*, which aim to sustain a historical anthropology of neoliberalism: (i) neoliberalism is a political project that entails the reengineering of the state; (ii) neoliberalism entails a rightward tilting of the bureaucratic field and gives rise to a Centaur-state; (iii) the growth and glorification of the penal wing of the state is an integral component of the neoliberal state.

To facilitate the discussion, I propose, as others have done, a distinction between theoretical and practical neoliberalism (Harvey 2007; Ferguson 2010; Harrison 2010). Of course, theory and practice often mix; nevertheless this distinction is important to clarify the debate. Indeed, could we imagine discussing socialism without reading Marx? Conversely, could we understand the socialist period in Cuba, China, Russia or

Benin only by referencing *Capital*, without looking at the historical experience of these societies?

Theoretical neoliberalism is a body of literature mostly generated by economists. Practical neoliberalism includes (a) reforms or actions taken in the name of neoliberalism or based on its assumptions, of which the quintessential expression is the Washington consensus and (b) the embodiment of a principle of competition and maximisation in the categories of perception and practice of social agents and institutions. I will briefly consider the body of theoretical literature to show that the state has always been considered an essential component of neoliberal transformation. After that I will describe the application of this theory in Africa. However, there is never a perfect correspondence between theory and practice. Even if a theory has universal ambitions, implementations or effects of theory always happen in a reality with its own historical, social and economic configuration. Whereas some authors present neoliberalism as the decay of an inflexible state or as the inexorable advance of its right hand, it appears that neoliberal impact can never be understood in radical separation from historical configurations and has to be evaluated differently depending on context.¹ I hope to move beyond a Western-centred view of neoliberal expansion in order to show that considering the ‘historicity of the state’ (Bayart 1993) from a comparative perspective is necessary to understand neoliberal implementation and its variations.

Reengineering the state at the heart of neoliberal theory

In the first decades of the last century, the founders of neoliberalism agreed, despite their differences, that believing in the independence of the economy was the major mistake of liberalism and a major cause of economic collapse: market order is not a natural order (Audier 2008).² This is why it appeared necessary to create a political programme able to facilitate the emergence of spontaneous market order (Hayek in Petsoulas 2001: 2). The institutional approach is at the heart of neoliberalism and has implications in terms of law, the market and regulated deregulation. Unlike Marxist approaches, neoliberal perspectives do not consider economic structure as determinant in the last instance. Rather, the neoliberal challenge is to adjust both state and people in order to enable generalised competition (Dardot and Laval 2009: 175). Neoliberalism requires a strong state because the state is an essential prerequisite to a space of pure competition. As such, in neoliberal theory, reforms can hardly be limited to the economic. Competition requires that the state be properly positioned to correct the natural phenomena that hamper competition (e.g. the creation of monopolies, or price instability). The legitimacy of the state depends on economic growth; economic growth is determined by the ability of the state to shape a framework within which individuals are free to pursue their individual interests; this freedom in a world of competition should lead to the recreation and rebuilding of the state itself. Competition and maximisation become the organising principles of the state. The reengineering of the state appears clearly in neoliberal theory as a step necessary for triggering the

¹ Wacquant draws on Bourdieu’s distinction between the right hand and the left hand of the State. On this distinction see Bourdieu 1998: 9–17 and Bourdieu 2008.

² Including Lippmann, Röpke, Rüstow, Hayek, von Mises, Rueff, Marjolin and Rougier.

modification of subjectivities and social relations, for making them correspond to the metaphysics of the spontaneous market order.

The expansion of neoliberalism supposes the extension of market mechanisms to the lifeworld, as well as the emergence of a judicial apparatus that enables competition and frees up the potential of collective life for organising itself. As such, neoliberalism must change people. This is why, from Lippman to Thatcher's famous formulation, 'Economics are the method, but the object is to change the soul', neoliberalism is a political project. The necessity of making people adapt to a world of generalised competition supposes a radical reform that transforms the way in which they perceive their destiny. Education in the neoliberal condition was conceived as an essential requirement for social change. Far from obscuring the call for a re-articulation of the state in neoliberal theory (see Wacquant in this issue), discursive analyses of the birth of neoliberalism (Foucault 2004; Laval 2007) show that the first publications on neoliberalism foster the development of a politics of the human condition to realise the fantasy of the spontaneous order.³ In order to grasp the effect of this politics in Africa, we need to briefly restate the way and the context in which it has been deployed.

From theory to practice: Africa at the forefront of the neoliberal era

The creation of international institutions and the Bretton Woods agreements have been instrumental to the deployment of neoliberalism. Many scholars trace the implementation of neoliberal policies to the rise to power of conservative governments at the end of the 1970s in Great Britain and the United States. However, as we shall see, we must nuance the idea that America has constituted and still constitutes 'the living laboratory of the neoliberal future' (Wacquant 2009a). In many ways Africa has been on the vanguard of austerity and reforms of the kind now affecting such European nations as Ireland, Portugal and Greece. In Africa, the 1980s were marked by policies of stabilisation and structural adjustment (Hugon 2001). These interventionist policies led to waves of deregulation, privatisation and institutional reforms.

³ For Röpke, one of the founders of ordoliberalism, in the 'Civitas Humana', a 'market economy requires a firm framework which to be brief we will call the anthropo-sociological' (2002: 32, first publication 1948). Through a discursive and interpretive analysis of the founding texts of the neoliberal revolution in his 1978 and 1979 lessons on biopower, Foucault was probably the first social scientist to perceive the implication of the neoliberal project: competition, the first organising principle of the market, needs a framework provided by the state in order to be performed. The focus of leading scholars of that time on one-dimensional man or society (Marcuse 1968), on consumer society (Baudrillard 1998) or on the society of the spectacle (Debord 1994) has diverted the analysis of the real process of neoliberalism. One of the major contributions of Foucault's work was his analysis of how neoliberalism requires a reorganization of the state to achieve the utopia of the spontaneous market order. The reengineering of the state is the condition that enables the emergence and spread of a competitive market that imposes a process of socialisation and permanent formation on individuals. This permanent adjustment to the market will lead to the extension of market rationality beyond the market. Technologies of subjectivity encourage agents to optimise their individual choices through knowledge and to perceive the world in terms of competition and technologies of subjection regulate populations for optimal productivity. The governmentality approach has clearly seen that neoliberalism is not a strictly economical project but a political one, and more radically an anthropological and sociological one.

Debtors and creditors

The 1979 increase in interest rates (long-term and short-term nominal) by Paul Volcker, chair of the American Federal Reserve and the subsequent increase in the value of the dollar had worldwide consequences.⁴ These events amplified the debt of countries of the South and significantly strengthened the leverage of creditors over debtors (Aglietta 1999; Reno 1999: 23). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) came to the aid of the hardest hit nations on the condition that they submit their economic policy to IMF requirements. In the name of modernising and improving economies perceived as backward, stagnant, unbalanced and dysfunctional (Hugon 2001), most African countries became radical testing grounds for neoliberal policies. In the 1980s alone, 38 African governments accepted 244 conditional loans from the World Bank and the IMF (Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 132–3); 10 years later, the IMF was still operating in 36 countries (van de Walle 2001: 7). This massive, unprecedented presence across the globe of institutions promoting neoliberal policies had weighty consequences and makes the continent an important locus for studying the implementation of these policies.

Two phases of implementation can be distinguished. The first, begun in the 1980s, consisted of adjustment policies that focus on the economy; the second, started in the 1990s, was marked by political adjustments in favour of democratic processes that were supposed to move beyond the failures of structural adjustment programmes of the previous decade.

The first phase involves a drastic compression of public spending, the suspension of subsidies for products of basic need and the liberalisation of an economy more oriented towards export. Although these reforms were only partially completed, today it is universally recognised, including by the World Bank and the IMF, that they were a failure overall.⁵ Beyond their intrinsic limitations, they were used in the 1980s to keep elite classes in power and to strengthen patrimonialisation in various states. In effect, given that in postcolonial Africa access to dominant positions in government is

⁴ Scholars generally attribute to these events the Mexican economic and financial crisis of 1982, the increase of national debts, and the growth of the financial market thanks to the circulation of these debts via securitisation and the creation of complex financial products.

⁵ Although neoliberal policies sometimes have ‘pro-poor’ intentions or orientations (Ferguson 2010), and although they have helped both directly and indirectly to force governments to enact reforms in favour of freedom of the press, multipartism, and administrative decentralisation and deconcentration, we must admit that they have also had destructive effects. The gravest of these involuntary consequences has been described by William Reno in the case of the Liberian war. In the ‘80s, when Liberia had a population of 3 million, 16,000 civil servants were fired, one third of the country’s civil service, following pressure from the World Bank. The weakening of public institutions, now deprived of workers, resulted in an inability to redistribute aid resources; the pay cuts suffered by remaining public workers, including soldiers, profoundly reduced the power of the state to reconfigure power relations. Economic liberalisation gave warlords opportunities that transformed political issues. Warlords specialised in violence and predation even as civil society became militarised. Violence became the main means of controlling the distribution of wealth since the state was too weak to control the market. The civil war, which lasted from 1989 to 1997, left over 8% of the population dead. It allowed Charles Taylor to take over the markets of gold, diamonds and copper, to invest in clientelistic networks of the state, and to militarise the economy even as he opened the door to foreign corporations capable of backing up his power and facilitating the export of natural resources. In 1990, when Taylor controlled the country, his inability to access loans obliged him to maintain a state of violence in order to control and organise the country’s strong men and networks of resource accumulation (Reno 1999: 45–111).

a precondition to access to positions where it is possible to accumulate wealth (Bayart 1993), the wave of privatisation clearly allowed the elites in power to tighten their grip on entire sectors of the economy. The 1980s were marked by a move: the reduction of public employees and of public investments led to increased domination at the top of the state and to political recentralisation. In other words, as van de Walle has shown (2001: 275–6), the decline in state abilities has favoured patrimonialism, weakened accountability measures and promoted corruption, including the acquisition of illegal sources of income and advantage in the civil service (*rente de situation*).

Over time, a consensus has arisen among economists as they observe the quasi-permanent state of crisis in numerous African countries: the problem is not so much one of putting good policies in place as it is one of carrying them out (van de Walle 2001: 9–10). The failure of IMF and World Bank policies led these organisations to demand not only economic structural adjustment, but also political adjustment as a condition to aid (de Villiers 2003). As such, the perspective of the World Bank is clear: structural adjustment requires a ‘strong state’ (World Bank quoted in Harrison 2010: 41),⁶ and no longer a mere strategy of bypassing or counterbalancing the state by strengthening civil society and NGOs (Bratton and Hyden 1992). In other words, the failure of previous policies requires state intervention. Only then can the necessary corrections be made that will foster the social and political climate to ‘create the conditions under which neoliberal “theory” can be realized and can function’ (Bourdieu 1998: 109).

Starting in the 1990s, according to van de Walle (2001): between one third and one half of aid went toward financing political reforms. In addition, the continent has seen a wave of democratisation as well as political decentralisation and deconcentration; these changes can also be traced to other factors, including a surge of popular uprisings that was closely tied to structural adjustment plans (Hilgers 2010).⁷

Reengineering the state and technologies of government

Considering these facts, one must share Wacquant’s analysis that neoliberalism leads to an attempt at reengineering the state (thesis 1), an attempt officially based on ‘commodification as the extension of the market or market-like mechanisms, based

⁶ ‘Market-driven development could not succeed without a strong social and institutional infrastructure, including a strong state’ (World Bank quoted in Harrison 2010: 41).

⁷ From that time on, we can sketch out two major orientations in the sociohistorical trajectories of African countries. The first involves a strengthening of the state of law and the establishment of real democracy. The regimes of the countries in this category share the pitfalls of democracies from other continents (corruption, nepotism, populism, difficulty ensuring the separation of powers. . .), but they are far from the single-party systems that defined the 1970s and 1980s. Benin, Ghana, Namibia and Mali are nations that regularly see changes in power at the top of the state, and where a true opposition exists when a given party is in power. The second tendency is to put up a facade of pluralism. In this case, reforms have not prevented politicians from holding on to power and avoiding any alternation. Many countries have followed this path: Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Guinea-Conakry, Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Uganda, Togo, Zimbabwe. . . There are of course exceptions to these two extremes, such as more democratic countries – South Africa, Botswana, Cape Verde – and autocratic countries such as the Sudan, Somalia and Swaziland, an absolute monarchy with no opposition party since 1968.

on the notion that such mechanisms are universally optimal means for efficiently allocating resources and rewards' (Wacquant in this volume). However, the reality is far from corresponding with these theoretical principles and as I have mentioned the consequences of such reorganisation of the state in Africa were unexpected.

In many countries, the second wave of neoliberal policies imposed by international institutions clearly reinforced the paradox of a state that is both omnipresent and completely absent. This situation has given rise to a number of debates among scholars. Some pointed to a buttressing of the state through mechanisms of privatisation, such as the delegation of the use of legitimate force, taxation, security and border control to private companies. These mechanisms benefited political elites and sometimes helped maintain them in power. In addition, structural adjustment plans have been used in the service of sometimes extravagant wealth accumulation. Often starting from an approach based on governmentality, research has shown the role of privatisation and criminalisation in the formation of the state in Africa (Bayart *et al.* 1998; Hibou 1999; Bayart 2004, 2006, 2007).⁸ Privatisation thus no longer appears as a sign of a weakened state, but rather as an element of its reorganisation in the neoliberal era. On the other hand, generalised informalisation of state functions has favoured corrupt behaviour (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2007b: 7). This, along with disinvestment in material structures, health and education, has led to a 'decay of the state' (*déliquescence de l'Etat*) (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2007c: 116). Empirical research conducted on daily governance and public services has drawn a clear picture of this phenomenon (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2007a; Blundo and Le Meur 2009; Körling 2011).

The state is thus both more present and visible, but at the same time more absent and weak, capable of coercion through informal measures (violence, threats, intimidation and firing recalcitrant civil servants or sending them to remote posts) but incapable of fulfilling its social obligations. In certain cases, we see a state that is expanding and even becoming stronger in some ways. Yet its weakness and porousness are revealed on a daily basis. The state thereby shows itself to be not an apparatus, but a set of processes that are not always linked to institutions – or that, in any case, cannot be reduced to these.

In his paper Wacquant analyses the 'trope of individual responsibility as motivative discourse' as another component of the neoliberal state redeployment (thesis 1). In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, this trope is indeed present even if according to some authors 'the development of new technologies of government' is very limited (2010: 173). For Ferguson, neoliberalism in Africa is 'not very "neo" at all', policies of deregulation led instead to a 'matter of old-style laissez-faire liberalism in the service of imperial capital [...] it has raised the specter of a kind of recolonization'. Nonetheless, it seems possible to identify certain technologies of government whose importance should not be underestimated, notably in their ability to strengthen this trope of individual responsibility.

First, we should recall that Ferguson himself has shed light on ways in which neoliberalism has imposed itself as a technology of governance over and above ideology, as the most efficient, rational and pragmatic means of finding solutions to problems (Ferguson 1990). The hegemonic technocratic vocabulary of 'good governance' is articulated on the basis of axioms posed as scientific truth. Scientific capitalism presents itself as the only

⁸ For an analysis of the transition from the politics of the belly to the criminalisation of the state in Africa, see the new preface to Bayart (2006: i–lxviii).

possible path toward supposedly non-ideological, rational and depoliticised solutions to political situations. Such depoliticisation has contributed in Africa, as elsewhere, to an abandonment of the political dimension of certain debates in favour of a strictly technical and problem-solving vocabulary, including in affairs of political development such as decentralisation, popular and civic participation (Ferguson 2006).

Secondly, the continuing climate of precariousness favours ideologies of participation and of taking control of one's own future; these ideas spread alongside political decentralisation and continue to thrive in local communities. Even if such discourses often lead to failure or abuse, we must not minimise the significance of the legitimacy that they confer on those who appropriate them, even if only for private ends. Given a context of liberalisation with no or little help from the state, taking hold of one's own destiny – being an 'enterprising self' in the Foucauldian sense – can constitute a necessary condition for survival and success. We have seen over the last 20 years the proliferation of development agents who articulate their projects in education, health or culture precisely on the model of the enterprise (André 2009; Andrieu 2009). Beyond this specific field, the effects of neoliberal policies in Africa have given rise to a multitude of entrepreneurs 'who are not necessarily traders, promoters, petty bosses or businessmen in informal sectors' (Saint-Lary 2009: 9); entrepreneurial self-development now extends to the spheres of politics, religion, social issues and culture. We can see a parallel here with the growth of Pentecostal movements, whose pastors, as entrepreneurs *par excellence*, embrace an ideology of self-realisation and prosperity; that is, the ethics that underpin such movements (Laurent 2003; Marshall 2009) corresponds especially well with the spirit of neoliberalism. This entrepreneurial logic, espoused by agents with extremely limited means, unfolds in a context where figures of success appear to be those who have succeeded in 'managing their affairs', 'getting business' or 'having a plan'. In the context of a 'moral economy of corruption' (Olivier de Sardan 1999), or a 'moral economy of ruse and resourcefulness' (*débrouille*) (Banégas and Warnier 2001), recent transformations on the continent have led to an 'important remodeling of modes of political subjectification as well as a redistribution of moral points of reference' (Banégas and Warnier 2001: 8).

Finally, political decentralisation has often been accompanied by land development and redistribution projects that have strengthened notions of private property and discourses around autochthony (Geschiere 2009). The ability to point to one's autochthonous roots is to assure oneself greater access to economic and social resources (Hilgers 2011b). Discrimination of individuals based on their 'original' belonging has occasionally been codified in law, as in Ivory Coast and Cameroon. Autochthony constitutes a mode of categorisation that enabled the identification and administration of populations. Even when it has not been officially incorporated into the law, such discrimination has had a major impact on social relations among citizens and between citizen and state in numerous countries (Hilgers 2009).⁹ It thus seems that the neoliberal era in Africa is accompanied by specific technologies of power, some reinforce the

⁹ As a reminder, the notion of governmentality refers to 'the set of practices by which one can constitute, define, organize, and instrumentalize strategies that individuals, in their freedom, can have with regard to each other' (Foucault 2001: 1547). Let us note in the context of this debate that on this point, the work of Loïc Wacquant presents similarities with approaches based on governmentality. Although their intellectual framework can be traced to authors with different conceptions of power and the state – Bourdieu and Foucault – the work of Wacquant and Ong, for example, bears certain parallels. The management of racial relationships and the criminalisation of

‘trope of individual responsibility’ but not necessarily as the ‘cultural glue’ described by Wacquant that pastes commodification, corrective workfare and expansive penal policy together.

Welfare and workfare in Africa

Indeed I have greater doubt as to whether we can generalise Wacquant’s ideas that (a) neoliberal expansion necessarily entails a transition from a regime of ‘disciplinary social policy, with the shift from protective welfare (. . .) to corrective workfare’ and that (b) we are currently observing an ‘expansive and pornographic penal policy’ (theses 1 and 3).

If neoliberalism implies the atrophy of the social state, we can say once again that numerous African countries are on the vanguard. Indeed, many citizens in Africa have never received a cheque for unemployment or disability benefits, or for that matter any other public aid for survival, however minimal. Yet, though the radical wave of privatisation and reduced public spending has caused the termination of many public employees, it has very rarely required an administrative operation to reduce the social state, since in so many cases the social state is already extremely limited or non-existent. Moreover, in spite of their dramatic social consequences, neoliberal policies have, paradoxically, not uniformly ignored poverty or simply left it to market forces (Ferguson 2010). Some countries that have undergone structural adjustment have nevertheless implemented social reforms. For political reasons Ghana, Niger and Nigeria have tried to enact health reforms that would ensure universal coverage. Such reforms are often little more than empty shells, but we should remember that the delegation of social missions by the state to NGOs has sometimes led to an improvement of existing structures. Whereas in Europe the co-production of public services is often the sign of the decline of the social state, in Africa this co-production has sometimes, but not always, lead to greater efficiency (Körling 2011).

Unless we assume that practical neoliberalism corresponds with theory in every detail, it is extremely difficult to make generalisations about the consequences of neoliberal policies carried out at a global scale, but in extremely varied contexts.¹⁰ Of course, in many places state investments in education and health were cut, and the

poverty described by Wacquant (2009a, 2009b) resembles a form of ‘graduated citizenship’ (Ong 2006: 78–9) stemming from the particular relations between citizenship, state and market. In each of these analyses, the distribution of rights and recognition varies according to ethnoracial bias and position in the social structure. Racial and ethnic bias plays a decisive role in the distribution of rights and obligations that the state imposes on the individual. The types of citizenship described by Ong depend on relations of domination resulting from the total effect of different strategic positions of optimisation, the will of a dominant class and a multiplicity of discursive elements in an unstable matrix where discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power. Management by race and class, as described by Wacquant, constitutes a specific form of the graduated exercise of power that is capable of engendering differentiated types of citizenship. However, unlike Ong, Wacquant does not argue that regimes of rights and citizenship are differentiated within and outside national boundaries according to ethical situations that are rationally apprehended in function of the market. Note that in a former book Ong has tried to combine a Bourdieusian approach in term of capital with a Foucauldian perspective (see Ong 1999: 88–93).

¹⁰ Ferguson reminds us that in some countries – India, Brazil, South Africa – neoliberal policies were enacted alongside a growth in social spending (Ferguson 2010).

number of state employees reduced; yet, in countries profoundly marked by neoliberal policies, but where social policy and social security are nearly non-existent, we have been logically unable to observe a universal and systematic shift from welfare to workfare. Let us nevertheless notice that here, as in the area of security and prisons, South Africa is perhaps an exception. Indeed, many publications in anthropology document the radical neoliberal turn in sub-Saharan Africa (Ferguson 2006; Chalfin 2010; Harrison 2010; Konings 2009, 2011), but few of them focus on penalisation, and those that do are directly inspired by the case of South Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006). The Comaroffs' work documents, notably, the obsession with law and order in that country and in the postcolony more generally:

rising criminality is not a simply a reflexive, antisocial response to poverty or joblessness, scarcity, or other effect of structural adjustment [...] It is part of a much more troubled dialectic: a dialectic of law and dis/order, framed by neoliberal mechanisms of deregulation and new modes of mediating human transactions at once politico-economic and cultural, moral and mortal. (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006: 4–5)

These authors also highlight the public obsession with criminality. Nevertheless, this argument cannot be generalised to include all of sub-Saharan Africa.

In West Africa, for example, it has been established that urban growth, increasing inequality, the persistent economic crisis, the development of consumption, at-risk youth, unemployment, the collapse of school systems, armed conflicts and instruction in the use of weapons have led to an increase in criminality, especially in cities (Fourchard and Albert 2003). Moreover, the transformation of the state through structural adjustment plans has encouraged 'the development of criminal organizations whose activities spread across national, regional and international boundaries' (Fourchard 2003: 33; Bayart *et al.* 1998). The liberalisation of the media has given a greater echo to discourses on insecurity.¹¹ However, at the same time, the 'fight against crime and urban insecurity has never been a priority of the colonial and the postcolonial state in most West African countries' (Fourchard 2003: 44). It is difficult to establish precise figures for all countries, even though certain studies show that in spite of being overpopulated, West African prisons have the lowest volume of prisoners in the world (*L'Atlas du Monde diplomatique* 2002).

We can thus observe a phenomenon perfectly opposite to the one described by Loïc Wacquant when he argues that the penalisation of poverty is a key element of the neoliberal political project, enabling it to express state sovereignty and impose new cognitive categories, or when he contends that

the ongoing capitalist 'revolution from above' commonly called *neoliberalism* entails the enlargement and exaltation of the penal sector of the bureaucratic field, so that the state may check the social reverberations caused by the diffusion of social insecurity in the lower rungs of the class and ethnic hierarchy as well as

¹¹ Even so, it is difficult to link this exclusively to neoliberalism since, as Fourchard remarks, 'similar phenomena occurred during the British 19th century or during the first period of the Third Republic in France (1870–1914)' (2003: 32–33).

assuage popular discontent over the dereliction of its traditional economic and social duties. (Wacquant 2009a: 305)

The difference between sub-Saharan Africa and the US or Europe is that penalisation of poverty is not necessarily a core element of the neoliberal project. Economic deregulation, supervisory workfare and punitive criminal justice do not necessarily travel together. In other words, and once again, the impact of the neoliberal process is not homogenous. An analysis of state historicity is fundamental to explain and understand these many variations within an apparently common neoliberal framework. Everywhere states have been redeployed under the constraint of neoliberalism, but the particular trajectories of states have seriously affected the way in which these redeployments have been carried out.

This said, I do not claim that Wacquant's contention is incorrect, especially since it is so well argued for the contexts that he has studied.¹² I think, on the contrary – though it would be necessary to prove this hypothesis empirically – that the generalisation of the penal effect that he observes in some contexts is actually the epiphenomenon of a deeper reality: beneath its apparent apology of freedom, neoliberalism produces a specific state that reinforces control and coercion. Prisonfare is the idiosyncratic expression – produced by certain neoliberal states – of a more profound trend that is the intrinsic coerciveness of the neoliberal state. In some cases, this coercion has been accompanied by an increase in military investments.¹³ The 'privatization of the state' (Hibou 1999) as it functions in Europe, Asia, America and Africa is a major component of the neoliberal state that changes the face of this coerciveness. A particularity of the state's management of coercion is that the 'discharge'¹⁴ of its missions – tax collection, war, law, the maintenance of social order, control over the flow of people – is distributed to private companies to accomplish a part of its mission, or else informally privatised by civil servants.

Today empirical studies of public structures conducted in several West African countries describe states under construction (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2007a) that maintain a sort of distant family resemblance with the centaur state described by Wacquant (thesis 2). This state is one that assumes opposite faces when addressing the two extreme ends of the social structure: above, it is caring, generous and solidary, but below, it is oppressive, contemptuous and often coercive. Even so, as I have tried to show, these two faces do not systematically reflect the atrophy of the social state and the hypertrophy of the penal state.

Another point which seems fundamental to grasp the variation of neoliberalism but which does not appear in Wacquant's analysis is the question of struggles and resistance. According to Konings (2011), beyond the multiple trajectories of societies in Africa the

¹² And I thank him, as well as *Social Anthropology*, for the opportunity for this debate, because it has allowed me to nuance my own analysis. As such I will no longer contend that 'massive incarceration is one component necessary to the equilibrium of the neoliberal state' (Hilgers 2011a: 361), but rather that 'massive incarceration is one component necessary to the equilibrium of *certain* neoliberal states'.

¹³ However, with few exceptions (Burundi, Mauritania, Zimbabwe, Chad, Sudan, Mauritania, Djibouti), no African country was officially known to spend over 4% of GDP on military expenditures in any of the years 2004–2009 (World Development Indicators 2010).

¹⁴ The notion of discharge comes from Weber, who described how it helped reduce the cost of medieval state functions. The idea has been recently remobilised by different authors who analyse private indirect government (Hibou 1999; Mbembé 2001).

diversity of neoliberal experiments in the continent could also be explained by the variety of resistances to neoliberalism. Scholars have clearly demonstrated the direct correlation between the adoption of structural adjustment programmes and protest movements in Africa (Bratton and van de Waele 1997: 133). Beyond the reforms that largely benefited political elites and the austerity measures that have provoked riots in many countries since the beginning of the 1980s, these protests are also linked to the progressive erosion of governmental authority, perceived as the bearer of new constraints imposed from outside. The effects of structural adjustment programmes are nevertheless many, and it remains necessary to conduct more detailed comparative analyses in order to identify the relation between the adoption of reforms, the state's coercion and popular protest. However I think that a historical anthropology of neoliberalism at a global scale must take into account the multiple forms of resistance and their impact.

Conclusion

Neoliberalism is a utopia. It has undergone many theoretical variations since the founding texts mentioned at the beginning of this essay, but it still rests today on the fiction of the spontaneous order of the market.¹⁵ To make it possible, theorists suppose that neoliberalism requires a state capable of creating the social conditions of possibility for its realisation. Even so, in spite of many efforts and their effects, this utopia is always only partially achieved. As such, the analysis from Africa does not propose a vision of what true neoliberalism is, or could be, but rather shows that a change of viewpoint is necessary in order to account for its complexity. The sociohistorical trajectory of the state plays a decisive role in the deployment of neoliberal policies. In regions where the social state was nearly non-existent, the implementation of neoliberal policies did not happen in a way identical to what we can observe in the North. The variety of trajectories, even within a country or continent, demonstrates that neoliberalism is a major element, but just an element, that helps determine the configuration of the state. At a moment when Europe and other parts of the world are being shaken by crisis, an analysis of the historicity of sub-Saharan African states reminds us of certain principles that still make sense beyond the continent.

Unlike certain hasty declarations of the end of neoliberalism (Stiglitz 2008; Cassen and Ventura 2008),¹⁶ we can hypothesise that the present crisis is strengthening it. In Africa, we have seen how the growth of debt has significantly intensified the power of creditors in state construction. It has played a decisive role, as is now the case in Europe, in the imposition of depoliticised neoliberal measures created by international institutions. As Lazzarato (2011) has demonstrated, by supposing that the foundation of social relations is not based on exchange but on the asymmetry of the creditor-debtor relationship, the threat of debt insolvency enables diagnoses whose objective is to actualise the metaphysics of the spontaneous market order. At the same time,

¹⁵ For a stimulating genealogy of the roots of neoliberalism and of 'economic man' going back to medieval thought, see Laval (2007).

¹⁶ 'Neo-liberal market fundamentalism was always a political doctrine serving certain interests. It was never supported by economic theory. Nor, it should now be clear, is it supported by historical experience' (Stiglitz 2008).

such treatments impose a relationship that reinforces mechanisms of material and symbolic domination between creditor and debtor.¹⁷ Responses to the crisis, rather than questioning the neoliberal utopia, consist of corrective measures that seek to make the workforce more flexible and encourage competition – of which the state is now the first representative – in order to arrive closer to the perfect theoretical order.

A second factor joins the effects of submission to unrepayable debt. Although I have pointed to certain aspects of techniques of a neoliberal governmentality in Africa, I agree with Wacquant's critique of governmentality studies that are sometimes 'overly broad and promiscuous, overpopulated with proliferating institutions equally infected by the neoliberal virus'. Certainly, the proliferation of definitions of neoliberalism makes it a difficult concept to grasp, and the diversity of state trajectories modifies the forms it takes. But 30 years of socialisation to neoliberal policies, having forced the individual to become an 'enterprising self' in order to adapt to a market ordered by competition, have had their effect. These 'proliferations' are the sign that neoliberalism is involved in the concrete structure of the lifeworld and human experience, and exerts a real influence over the ways in which agents think and problematise their lives.

The effects of neoliberal policies are anchored in bodies, representations and practices. If radically different policies were enacted today, the effects of their predecessors would not be instantly erased. As André shows in her analysis of the persistence of cultural heritage among working classes in postindustrial contexts, even when economic and social structures are transformed, the cultures that were linked to them do not disappear suddenly, and representations and practices linked to previous social structures persist in new forms and continue to affect new structures (André 2012). This is also why practical neoliberalism takes different forms. And, to answer Wacquant, it is for this reason that we must distinguish, and combine, three approaches to neoliberalism: culture, structure and governmentality (Hilgers 2011a). For even when representations and practices are partially a product or effect of infrastructures, they become embodied, undergo a relatively autonomous development and are deployed in a way that continues to affect the structures that produced them. This last point was already made by theorists and practitioners of neoliberalism when they asserted that it is necessary to change souls.

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Mathieu Hilgers

Laboratoire d'Anthropologie des Mondes Contemporains (Lamc)

Université Libre de Bruxelles

50 avenue F.D. Roosevelt, 1050 Bruxelles, Belgium

Mathieu.Hilgers@ulb.ac.be

¹⁷ Unfortunately, I do not have space here to provide more details on the 'techniques of fashioning the debtor subject' (Lazzaratto 2011: 100). Key examples of this include the United States, where students incur debt for their studies, housing and consumption, or Greece, where, given a context of recession, the ratio of debt to GDP hit 120% and today one can say – as a pastiche of Sarkozy's campaign slogan – citizens must 'work more to earn less' (Lazzaratto 2011: 90).

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