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Governmentality and security in the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a critical theoretical exploration of the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The article examines the background to PEPFAR and its reauthorization in Washington DC in 2008 through the conceptual lens of governmentality. Building on existing work, it interprets PEPFAR as a programme for securing the welfare of populations. It also qualifies and extends this work in the following ways. Rather than representing a break with the history of geopolitics, it argues that PEPFAR emerged out of accommodations between geopolitics and governmentality. This point is developed through two takes on geopolitics, first in terms of the projection of sovereign power, and second in terms of articulations between PEPFAR and geopolitical economies of global health. The article suggests, first, that the geopolitics of sovereign power shaped the timing, scale and form of PEPFAR, and second, that PEPFAR articulated with geopolitical economies of global health through its mobilization of US-based corporations, non-governmental and faith-based organizations. The article extends existing work by examining the role of critical mobilizations in shaping PEPFAR, both in relation to questions of political economy and the contentious politics of life. Reflecting on the politics of global health, it considers the prospects for using ideas of security and the international response to HIV/AIDS as stepping stones towards the development of broad-based health systems.

1. Introduction

HIV/AIDS was recognized by medical science in 1981. The ensuing anxiety and social movement mobilization in the global North led to governments introducing broad packages of treatment, care and prevention for their own citizens. These packages were enhanced from 1996 with the introduction of highly active anti-retroviral therapy (ART), which can reverse the onset of AIDS and reduce viral loads to near-zero levels, extending life for a number of years. However, it was not until the turn of the century that those governments, under pressure from transnational social movements and elite advocacy, began to contemplate supporting such interventions for countries lacking the resources and systems to mount responses on their own. Things really began to change around 2000, when the UN and the US government began to frame HIV/AIDS not just as a health problem but as a matter of security (NIC, 2000, 2002; UN Security Council, 2000). Some NGOs and countries threatened to break the international patent regime that had kept the cost of anti-retroviral therapy (ART) beyond the reach of low and middle income countries, driving down prices. Developing countries issued declarations of commitment to dealing with their epidemics. 'Combating' HIV/AIDS (and other diseases) was adopted as a Millennium Development Goal and in 2002 a Global Fund was created to channel funding for HIV/AIDS (along with tuberculosis and malaria). Between the late 1990s and 2008, funding allocated for the response in low and middle income countries increased from less than $1 billion to $10 billion (WHO, 2008).

This article examines the programme that represents the largest single funding stream for the international response: the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The creation of PEPFAR was proposed, to the surprise of many, by President George W. Bush in his State of the Union speech in 2003, in which he stated that 'This nation can lead the world in sparing innocent people from a plague of nature' (Bush, 2003). Bush called on Congress to support the plan and to appropriate $15 billion over 5 years. Between 2003 and 2008, Congress in fact appropriated over $18 billion, with allocations for 2008 approaching $6 billion, meaning that the US was contributing over half of all funds allocated to the response in low and middle income countries. PEPFAR has thus played a major role in catalyzing the international response. Between 2000 and 2008 some four million people were placed on ART, and care and prevention programmes were expanded considerably. However, while UN member states adopted the goal of universal access to treatment, care and prevention services by 2010, the response is still only reaching a minority of those in need (UNAIDS, 2009). While activist groups hope the response will be a stepping stone to a larger and more equitable global health agenda (MSF, 2009; Ooms et al.,

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2008), prescriptions for the mix of interventions that will optimize efforts against HIV/AIDS are disputed. Some commentators have also begun to suggest that the response is off track (Chin, 2007) and distorting international health priorities (England, 2007). Such issues gained significance as the 2008 expiry date for the legislation authorizing PEPFAR approached.

So far there have been few critical theoretical explorations of the expanded international response. This article contributes to such explorations by considering PEPFAR through the conceptual lens of governmentality. Developed by Foucault (1991a, 2007), governmentality offers a useful approach for analyzing how complex phenomena become the objects of governmental rationality and practice. In particular, governmentality provides a way to examine the constitution of programmes for securing the welfare of populations.

The article builds upon, qualifies and extends work by Elbe (2009), one of very few international relations theorists to engage seriously with the response to HIV/AIDS. Elbe argues that the response marks an important moment in the governmentalization of security and a break with the history of geopolitics, with security being reframed in terms of the welfare of populations rather than the sovereignty of states. I build upon Elbe's work by showing how PEPFAR manifests governmental rationalities aimed at securing the welfare of populations. I qualify it by highlighting the importance of geopolitics to PEPFAR. I do this first, by showing how PEPFAR is bound up with the projection of sovereign power and second, by examining how the programme articulates with geopolitical economies of global health (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995; Sparke, 2008). I suggest, first, that the geopolitics of sovereign power shaped the timing, scale and form of PEPFAR, and second, that PEPFAR articulated with geopolitical economies of global health through its mobilization of US-based corporations, non-governmental and faith-based organizations. I extend accounts of governmentality in the response to HIV/AIDS by considering the role of critical mobilizations (Li, 2007; Tarrow, 1994, 2001). The article has three main sections. The first addresses conceptual issues; the second the creation and first phase of PEPFAR; and the third its renewal. In conclusion, the article reflects on the utility of governmentality, geopolitics and social movement theory in examining intersections between health and security and considers prospects for moving beyond the response to HIV/AIDS towards the development of broad-based health systems.

The article draws on a variety of sources on PEPFAR including: authorizing legislation; material published by the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC), which oversees the programme; policy briefings; speeches; material produced by advocacy groups; official and think tank reports; news reporting; newspaper columns and op-eds; and blogs. It also draws on two one-week periods of fieldwork in Washington DC in mid-2008 involving a total of 25 exploratory interviews (conducted on a non-attributable and non-citable basis) with people working in a variety of capacities on issues related to PEPFAR and US global health policy.

2. Governmentality, security and the international response to HIV/AIDS

Elbe (2009) partners governmentality with securitization theory to examine the framing of HIV/AIDS as a security issue and the subsequent international response. Before considering his approach in more detail, it is worth reviewing Foucault's formulation of governmentality.

2.1. Governmentality

Foucault used the term governmentality to describe a form of political rule that emerged in western European societies between the 16th and 18th centuries in response to problems generated by the growth of populations, cities and economies. He distinguished government from sovereignty, a prohibitive and deductive form of rule concerned with the seizure and control of things, especially territory. In the words of Guillaume de La Perrière, a 16th century political theorist, government was concerned with 'the right disposition of things arranged so as to lead to a suitable end' (cited in Foucault, 2007, p. 96). Foucault describes de La Perrière's concept of government in the following way:

> The things government must be concerned about ... are men in their relationships, bonds and complex involvements with things like wealth, resources, means of subsistence, and, of course, the territory with its borders, qualities, climate, dryness, fertility, and so on. "Things" are men in their relationships with things like customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking. Finally, they are men in their relationships with things like accidents, misfortunes, famines, epidemics and deaths. (Foucault, 2007, p. 96)[1]

The idea of government emerges along with the necessity and possibility of managing large scale phenomena in a more sophisticated way than permitted by sovereign power. While sovereignty was concerned primarily and ultimately with the power of the sovereign, the main correlate of governmental management (or biopolitics) was 'population', understood not as a collective of citizens, but a multiplicity with its own characteristics and relations that must be known (through scientific and calculative means) and shaped (through action at a distance rather than command and control). Furthermore, as Foucault (2007, p. 105) stated, 'What can the end of government be? Certainly not just to govern, but to improve the condition of the population, to increase its wealth, its longevity, and its health'.

Governmentality also emerges in relation to ideas of good economic management (notably in classical political economy) as a liberal political rationality, with concerns about governing too much, and adjusting 'apparatuses of security', which support population and insulate it from risks, so as not to interfere with rational economic behaviour. This was a modality of power distinct from discipline, which involved the production of 'docile bodies' through individuation and surveillance and was concentrated within institutions such as the prison, the school, the factory and the workhouse (Foucault, 1991b). Foucault suggested that in Western states it was the governmental mode of power that came to dominate, and that it continues to do so. The pre-eminence of governmentality did not mean, however, the disappearance of other forms of power. As Foucault (2007, p. 107) argued, 'In fact we have a triangle: sovereignty, discipline and governmental management, which has population as its main target and apparatuses of security as its essential mechanism.' The pre-eminence of governmentality reframes and in some cases inflates the significance of sovereignty and discipline. But neither sovereignty nor discipline forms the main grounding for modern power: rather it is the claim to protect, foster and optimize life that is most important.

2.2. Governmentality, securitization and HIV/AIDS

Elbe partners governmentality with securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998) to examine the implications of framing of HIV/AIDS as a security issue, a tactic deployed from the late 1990s onwards by an informal coalition of international bureaucrats, AIDS activists and security think tanks (Elbe, 2006).

[1] Foucault did not problematize the idea that government is concerned with 'men'. Indeed, though he was preoccupied with questions of sexuality, his understanding of biopower remained ungendered. This is a considerable weakness in his analysis, particularly when we consider Bush administration policy, which pretended to save women and girls in Afghanistan and innocents in Africa alike (Ferguson, 2005).