

Analytics of the Modern:

An Introduction

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This book is intended as a reflection on the question of modernity. It has two general orientations. One is anthropological. What this means, simply put for now, is three things. First, it means that the essays gathered here treat modernity not in abstract terms but tangibly as an ethnographic object. Their aim, in other words, is not to come up with some grand, general account of modernity but to analyze its concrete manifestations. Second, it means that these essays examine the materialization of the modern not just in the West, as tends to be the case in most disciplines, but worldwide. Indeed, the bent of the volume is determinedly global, its empirical sites ranging from Italy and Ukraine to India, Brazil, and French Guiana. Finally, to be anthropological in orientation means that at the stake in the analysis of modernity is the value and form of the *anthropos* or human being (Collier and Ong 2003; Rabinow 2003). Said otherwise, the book is centrally concerned with the modern constitution of the social and biological life of the human.

The other orientation of the book is Foucauldian. This means that the intellectual point of departure for the essays in the volume is the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault. Particularly central to these analyses of modernity are Foucault's (2000) reflections on modern government. In these reflections, the term "government" generally refers to the conduct of conduct – that is, to all those more or less calculated and systematic ways of thinking and acting that aim to shape, regulate, or manage the comportment of others, whether these be workers in a factory, inmates in a prison, wards in a mental hospital, the inhabitants of a territory, or the members of a population. Understood this way, "government" designates not just the activities of the state and its institutions but more broadly any rational effort to influence or guide the conduct of human beings through acting upon their hopes, desires, circumstances, or environment. Sketched out in these reflections is thus a particular approach to analyzing modern political power – one that treats the state as only one element, albeit a rather important one, in a multiple network of actors, organizations, and entities

involved in exercising authority over the conduct of individuals and populations. The essays gathered here pursue, each in their own way, the particular style of investigation Foucault brought to bear on contemporary rule. They are concerned with analyzing what has been dubbed the “will to govern” (Rose 1999: 5). Of particular importance to such an analytics are three dimensions of government. First, there are the reasons of government. This dimension encompasses all those forms knowledge, expertise, and calculation that render human beings thinkable in such a manner as to make them amenable to political programming. Second, there are the technics of government. The technical is that domain of practical mechanisms, instruments, and programs through which authorities of various types seek to shape and instrumentalize human conduct. Finally, there are the subjects of government. This dimension covers the diverse types of individual and collective identity that arise out of and inform governmental activity.

All told, then, the essays gathered here amount to what could be called Foucauldian anthropologies of modernity. They are concerned with subjecting modern government – as a heterogeneous field of thought and action – to ethnographic scrutiny in a variety of empirical settings. In this introductory chapter, I would like to shed light on these Foucauldian anthropologies. I will start by detailing a bit more thoroughly Foucault’s thinking on the subject of modern government or what he calls governmentality. Some attention will be paid to how political power has assigned itself the duty of administering life. I will then elaborate on the three analytic dimensions that are the main concern of the essays – these are the reasons, technics, and subjects of government – as articulated in a body of interdisciplinary literature developing around Foucault’s work. And in the final section, I will provide a discussion of the anthropologies that make up the volume. The discussion will be focused around five main themes: colonialism, globalization, science, biosociality, and necropolitics.

Foucault and the Art of Government

Foucault’s thinking on the subject of modern government is best articulated in a series of lectures given at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979. The most important of these lectures is one entitled “Governmentality” (2000).¹ In this lecture, Foucault undertakes a genealogical analysis of the art of government. His opening move is to locate the emergence of this art in sixteenth-century Europe. There, as signaled in numerous political treatises of the time, certain questions regarding government exploded with particular force. These questions – which had to do with who can govern, how best to govern, how to be governed, and how to govern oneself and others – were discussed with respect to a broad array of issues: from that of the proper management of one’s self and the good government of children to that of the correct administration of the state by the sovereign. This intense interest in questions of government arose largely on account of

two major social developments. One was the breakdown of feudal institutions, which led to the formation of the modern state; the other was the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, which resulted in the spread of religious dissidence. As Foucault articulates it: “There is a double movement, then, of state centralization, on the one hand, and of dispersion and religious dissidence, on the other. It is . . . at the intersection of these two tendencies that the problem comes to pose itself with this peculiar intensity, of how to be ruled, how strictly, by whom, to what end, by what methods, and so on” (2000: 202).

This raising of questions with respect to government signals, for Foucault, a major shift in thinking about political rule. The shift is from a sovereign notion of power to an art of government. Foucault explores this shift through an analysis of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. What he does is show that the idea of the art of government arose in explicit opposition to the theory of sovereign rule articulated by Machiavelli. In Machiavelli’s thinking, the prince’s chief goal in the exercise of power must be to protect and strengthen the principality. This last is understood not as “the objective ensemble of its subjects and the territory” but instead as “the prince’s relation with what he owns, with the territory he has inherited or acquired, and with his subjects” (2000: 205). The idea here is that sovereignty is first and foremost exercised on a territory and only as a consequence on the subjects who populate it. Indeed, it is the territory that is the fundamental element in Machiavelli’s principality. Everything else is a mere variable. This is not to say that subjects do not really matter. They do, but only as it concerns the law. At work here is the idea that the sovereign’s right to rule should be grounded in the notion of the common good. This notion “refers to a state of affairs where all the subjects without exception obey the laws, accomplish the tasks expected of them, practice the trade to which they are assigned, and respect the established order insofar as this order conforms to the laws imposed by God on nature and men” (2000: 210). The common good means, in other words, compliance with the law, either that of the worldly sovereign or that of God, the supreme ruler. This suggests that when it comes to the inhabitants of a territory what matters is that the law be observed. It indicates that the good for the prince is essentially that people should obey him. For sovereignty, then, the object is to preserve the principality (or territory) and concomitantly to subject the people to the law. Its end is really self-preservation through the force of law.

The idea of the art of government stands in sharp contrast to this sovereign notion of power articulated in *The Prince*. In the anti-Machiavellian political literature, being able to hang on to one’s principality is not quite the same thing as enjoying the art of governing. One crucial difference is that whereas sovereignty is exercised over a territory and, consequently, over the subjects who dwell in it, government is effected on a complex made up of men and their relation to things. As Foucault puts it:

What government has to do with is not territory but, rather, a sort of complex composed of men and things. The things, in this sense, with which government is to

be concerned are in fact men, but men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those things that are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, and so on; men in their relation to those other things that are customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, and so on; and finally men in their relation to those still other things that might be accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death, and so on. (2000: 208–209)

The key point here is that, for government, the issue of territory is only a secondary matter. What really counts is this complex of men and things. Indeed, it is this complex that is the fundamental target of government. Everything else, including territory, is simply a variable. A second key difference is that whereas the end of sovereignty is the common good, the object of government is the efficient and productive disposition of things. This means that with government it is not a matter of imposing law on people but of arranging things so as to produce an end appropriate to and convenient for each of the things governed. Entailed in this disposal of things is a multiplicity of specific goals: “For instance, government will have to ensure that the greatest possible quantity of wealth is produced, that the people are provided with sufficient means of subsistence, that the population is enabled to multiply, and so on” (2000: 211). Said otherwise, to dispose things means to properly manage wealth and resources, modes of living and habitation, and all those eventualities – accidents, epidemics, death, and the like – that tend to befall humans. For government, then, neither territory nor law hold much significance. The important thing is that men and things be administered in a correct and efficient way.

This thinking as regards the art of government, according to Foucault, was not to remain a purely theoretical exercise. From the sixteenth century on, it became linked directly to the formation of the territorial, administrative state and the growth of governmental apparatuses. At first, the practice of the art of government was concerned with introducing economy – “economy” here harks back to its original definition and signifies the wise management of individuals, goods, and wealth within the family – into political practice. That is to say, it was preoccupied with setting up at the level of the entire state “a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods” (Foucault 2000: 207). However, with the expansion of capitalism and the demographic growth of the eighteenth century, the practice of the art of government experienced a recentering: the theme of the family was supplanted with that of the population. What happened is that, through statistical forms of representation, population was identified as a specific objectivity: as an entity that had “its own regularities, its own rate of deaths and diseases, its cycles of scarcity, and so on” (2000: 216). As such, the domain of population was shown to involve a range of aggregate effects – such as epidemics, mounting spirals of wealth and labor, and endemic levels of mortality – that were not reducible to the dimension of the family. The consequence of such representation was to establish population

as a higher-order assemblage of which the family formed only one component. It was to dislodge the family from its supreme position as model of government and to resituate it as an element internal to population. Significantly, once this dislodging took place, the practice of the art of government grew to be above all concerned with populations. Its primary end became to manage such assemblages in ways that augmented their prosperity, longevity, safety, productivity, and so forth. As Foucault notes:

In contrast to sovereignty, government has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, and so on; and the means the government uses to attain these ends are themselves all, in some sense, immanent to the population; it is the population itself on which government will act either directly, through large-scale campaigns, or indirectly, through techniques that will make possible, without the full awareness of the people, the stimulation of birth rates, the directing of the flow of population into certain regions or activities, and so on. (2000: 216–217)

Starting in the eighteenth century, then, population emerges as the terrain par excellence of government. It becomes the object that government must bear in mind – where knowledge and practice are concerned – in order to be capable of managing rationally and effectively.

Important to note here is that, as the care and growth of population becomes a fundamental concern of government, a novel technology of power takes hold. Foucault names this technology biopower. In *The History of Sexuality*, he remarks that biopower designates “what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (1980: 143). The point is that at stake in the management of populations is essentially nothing other than life itself. It is that the vital processes of human existence are what really matter when it comes to governing. This technology of biopower has assumed two basic forms. One form, which Foucault calls a biopolitics of the population or simply biopolitics, is concerned with population at “the level of its aggregate effects” (2000: 219). Here biopower takes as its target the population regarded as a species body: “the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary” (1980: 139). Put otherwise, biopolitics attends to the biological processes of the collective social body. It is concerned with regulating the phenomena that typify groups of living human beings: reproduction and human sexuality, the size and quality of the population, health and illness, living and working conditions, birth and death, and the like. The goal: to optimize the life of the population as a whole. The second form, which Foucault calls an anatomo-politics of the human body or simply discipline, “implies the management of population in its depths and its

details” (2000: 219). Here biopower centers not on the population per se but on the individual bodies that compose it. Indeed, the target of discipline is not the collective mass but the individual human body: the body taken as an object to be manipulated. The goal of discipline is to produce human beings whose bodies are at once useful and docile. It is to optimize the life of the body: to augment its capabilities, extort its forces, and increase its utility and docility. Biopower thus amounts to nothing less than the taking charge of life by political power. It points to how government has assigned itself the duty of administering bodies and managing collective life.

Such, then, is Foucault’s genealogical analysis of the art of government. What we get with this analysis is a rather particular understanding of modern political power. The name Foucault gives to this understanding is governmentality. There are at least three important elements to governmentality. One element is that the term “government” is assigned the rather broad meaning it enjoyed in the sixteenth century. It refers essentially to the conduct of conduct – to the more or less considered and calculated ways of thinking and acting that propose to shape, regulate, or manage the conduct of individuals or groups toward specific goals or ends. Said otherwise, government points our attention very broadly to any rational effort to influence or guide the comportment of others – whether these be workers, children, communities, families, or the sick – through acting upon their hopes, desires, or milieu. A second element is that there is a refusal to reduce political power to the activities of the state. Indeed, for Foucault, governing – that is, the regulation of conduct – is not merely a matter of *the* government and its institutions but involves a multitude of heterogeneous entities: from politicians, philanthropists, and state bureaucrats to academics, clerics, and medics. What thus counts in thinking about governmental power is not simply the state but also all these other actors, organizations, and agencies concerned with exercising authority over the conduct of human beings. The point here is simply that government takes place both within and outside state contexts. The third element is that the principal target of government is population. This means that political and other authorities have come to understand the work of governing as requiring them to act upon the particulars of human conduct so as to enhance the security, longevity, health, prosperity, and happiness of populations. All told, then, governmentality draws attention to all those strategies, tactics, and authorities – state and nonstate alike – that seek to mold conduct individually and collectively in order to safeguard the welfare of each and of all.

An Analytics

Significantly, the work of Michel Foucault on modern government has produced a burgeoning corpus of political, social, and cultural analysis. For simplicity’s sake, we shall refer to this interdisciplinary literature as governmentality. Scholars of

governmentality – as might be expected given foregoing discussion – have been most concerned with exploring those practices that take as their target the wealth, health, security, and happiness of populations. More specifically, they have been occupied with studying those assemblages of authorities, knowledges, and techniques that endeavor to shape the conduct of individuals and populations in order to effect individual and collective welfare. They have thus drawn attention to the intrinsic links between strategies for knowing and directing large-scale entities and schemes for managing the actions of particular human beings – to how the conduct and circumstances of individuals are connected to the security and well-being of the population as a whole. Focusing along these lines, scholars from a variety of disciplines have produced important studies on a broad range of subjects including: space and urban planning (Rabinow 1989); psychiatry, medicine, and psychology (Castel 1981; Ong 1995; Rose 1998); poverty and insecurity (Dean 1991; Procacci 1993); social insurance and risk (Ewald 1986; Defert 1991); the regulation of pregnancy and reproduction (Horn 1994; Weir 1996; Ruhl 1999; Greenhalgh 2003); programs for self-esteem and empowerment (Cruikshank 1999); criminality (O'Malley 1992; Rose 2000; Horn 2003); globalization (Ong 1999; Ong and Collier 2004); colonialism (Stoler 1995; Kalpagam 2002); and the regulation of unemployment (Walters 2000). The perspective of these studies does not amount to a formal methodology or a unifying theory of government. It is actually a perspective that draws attention to government as a heterogeneous field of thought and action – to the multiplicity of authorities, knowledges, strategies, and devices that have sought to govern conduct for specific ends. Nonetheless, it is possible to single out at least three closely related analytical themes along which their analyses are organized. A review of these themes will help better establish the aims and limits of the essays in this book.

Reasons

The first analytical theme of the governmentality literature involves the political reasons or rationalities of government. According to Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, two of the foremost proponents of the governmentality approach, this domain designates:

the changing discursive fields within which the exercise of power is conceptualized, the moral justifications for particular ways of exercising power by diverse authorities, notions of the appropriate forms, objects and limits of politics, and conceptions of the proper distribution of tasks among secular, spiritual, military and familial sectors. (1992: 175)

Political rationalities may thus be generally conceptualized as intellectual machineries that render reality thinkable in such a manner as to make it calculable and governable. They point to the forms of political reasoning ensconced in

governmental discourse, the language and vocabulary of political rule, the constitution of manageable fields and objects, and the variable forms of truth, knowledge, and expertise that authorize governmental practice. Political rationalities, in short, name that field wherein lie the multiplicity of endeavors to rationalize the nature, mechanisms, aims, and parameters of governmental authority.

With respect to this first analytical theme, governmentality scholars generally have a couple of important concerns. One concern is with the epistemological character of political reasons (Rose and Miller 1992; Dean 1999). They are interested in how these rationalities both foster and rely upon assorted forms of knowledge and expertise – such as psychology, medicine, sociology, public policy, and criminology. Knowledges of this kind embody specific understandings of the objects of governmental practice – the poor, the vagrant, the economy, civil society, and so forth – and stipulate suitable ways of managing them. Moreover, such forms of knowledge define the goals and purpose of government and determine the institutional location of those authorized to make truth claims about governmental objects. Governmentality scholars, then, are occupied with how the practices of government are intertwined with specific regimes of truth and the vocation of numerous experts and authorities. They are concerned with “analyzing what counts as truth, who has the power to define truth, the role of different authorities of truth, and the epistemological, institutional and technical conditions for the production and circulation of truths” (Rose 1999: 30). These scholars thus highlight how, in order to govern efficaciously, it is necessary to “know.” They show that the activity of governing is possible only within particular epistemological regimes of intelligibility – that all government positively depends on the elaboration of specific languages that represent and analyze reality in a manner that renders it amenable to political programming.

The other important concern of governmentality scholars is with the problem-oriented nature of political reasons (Rose and Miller 1992; Dean 1999). They note that government is inherently a problematizing sphere of activity – one in which the responsibilities of administrative authorities tend to be framed in terms of problems that need to be addressed. These problems are generally formulated in relation to particular events – such as epidemics, urban unrest, and economic downturns – or around specific realms of experience: urbanism, poverty, crime, teenage pregnancy, and so on. The goal of governmental practice is to articulate the nature of these problems and propose solutions to them. Guided with this perspective on government, the governmentality literature tends to explore how certain events, processes, or phenomena become formulated as problems. Moreover, they are often concerned with investigating the sites where these problems are given form and the various authorities accountable for vocalizing them. To focus on government, then, is to attend, at least on some level, to its problematizations – to the ways intellectuals, policy analysts, psychiatrists, social workers, doctors, and other governmental authorities conceptualize certain objects as problems. It is to focus on how government is bound to the continual classification of experience as problematic.

Technics

The second analytical theme of the governmentality literature involves the technics or technologies of government – that is, how government takes on a technological and pragmatic form. The technological is that domain of practical mechanisms, devices, calculations, procedures, apparatuses, and documents “through which authorities of various sorts have sought to shape, normalize and instrumentalize the conduct, thought, decisions and aspirations of others in order to achieve the objectives they consider desirable” (Miller and Rose 1990: 8). It is that complex of techniques, instruments, measures, and programs that endeavors to translate thought into practice and thus actualize political reasons.

Governmentality scholars’ concern with the technological domain reveals itself best in two ways. One way is through the attention paid to specific technical instruments. These instruments encompass such things as: methods of examination and evaluation; techniques of notation, numeration, and calculation; accounting procedures; routines for the timing and spacing of activities in specific locations; presentational forms such as tables and graphs; formulas for the organization of work; standardized tactics for the training and implantation of habits; pedagogic, therapeutic, and punitive techniques of reformation and cure; architectural forms in which interventions take place (i.e., classrooms and prisons); and professional vocabularies (Miller and Rose 1990; Rose 1996, 1999; Dean 1999). Particularly important technical instruments are what Bruno Latour (1986) calls material inscriptions. These are all the mundane tools – surveys, reports, statistical methodologies, pamphlets, manuals, architectural plans, written reports, drawings, pictures, numbers, bureaucratic rules and guidelines, charts, graphs, statistics, and so forth – that represent events and phenomena as information, data, and knowledge. These humble technical devices make objects “visible.” They render things into calculable and programmable form. They are the material implements that make it possible for thought to act upon reality. The governmentality literature’s concern with technologies of government, then, draws attention to importance of technical means in directing the actions of individuals and populations. Without such means, the government of conduct cannot take place.

The other way governmentality scholars manifest their concern with the technological domain is through a focus on the programmatic character of government – that is, on how government tends to be conceptualized into existence in programmatic form. The programmatic may be taken to be that:

realm of designs put forward by philosophers, political economists, physiocrats and philanthropists, government reports, committees of inquiry, White Papers, proposals and counterproposals by organizations of business, labor, finance, charities and professionals, that seek to configure specific locales and relations in ways thought desirable. (Rose and Miller 1992: 181)

Government is programmatic in the sense that it assumes that the real can be programmed – that it can be made thinkable in such a manner as to make it amenable to diagnosis, reform, and improvement. This programmatic character manifests itself most directly in specific programs of government – that is, in practical schemes for reforming reality. Governmentality scholars tend to train a good deal of attention on these programs of government. They focus on how such governmental schemes conceptualize, manage, and endeavor to resolve particular problems in light of specific goals. They attend to how specific programs go about shaping the environment and circumstances of specific actors in order to modify their conduct in very precise ways. All in all, this emphasis on the programmatic calls attention to the eternally optimistic disposition of government – to its firm belief that reality can be managed better or more effectively and thus achieve desired ends.

Subjects

The third analytical theme of the governmentality literature involves the subjects of government – that is, the diverse types of selves, persons, actors, agents, or identities that arise from and inform governmental activity. In relation to this final theme, as Mitchel Dean puts it, governmentality scholars tend to ask:

What forms of person, self and identity are presupposed by different practices of government and what sorts of transformation do these practices seek? What statuses, capacities, attributes and orientations are assumed of those who exercise authority (from politicians and bureaucrats to professionals and therapists) and those who are to be governed (workers, consumers, pupils and social welfare recipients)? What forms of conduct are expected of them? What duties and rights do they have? How are these capacities and attributes to be fostered? How are these duties enforced and rights ensured? How are certain aspects of conduct problematized? How are they then to be reformed? How are certain individuals and populations made to identify with certain groups, to become virtuous and active citizens, and so on? (1999: 32)

To focus on the subjects of government is thus, on one level, to direct attention to how governmental practices and programs seek to cultivate particular types of individual and collective identity as well as forms of agency and subjectivity. It is to emphasize how government is intimately involved in making modern subjects – whether it be as workers, citizens, consumers, students, or the like. The importance of such subject-making is that through it – that is, through attaching individuals to particular identities, through getting them to experience themselves as specific kinds of beings with certain kinds of capacities and qualities – government is able to mold human conduct in such a way as to bring about individual and collective wellbeing. On another level, to focus on the subjects of government is to deal with how particular agents cultivate “their own” selves and identities. The idea here is that while governmental practices might seek to create

specific kinds of subjects, it does not mean that they necessarily or completely succeed in doing so. Individuals can and do negotiate the processes to which they are subjected. For governmentality scholars, then, it is important to look not just at the forms of collective and individual identity promoted by practices of government, but also at how particular agents negotiate these forms – at how they embrace, adapt, or refuse them.

Anthropology and the Practices of Modernity

Taking their inspiration from Foucault and the governmentality literature, the essays in this volume are fundamentally concerned with examining the modern will to govern.² The approach they take to this will to govern is anthropological in nature. To be anthropological means, first of all, that these essays deal with modern government principally as an ethnographic object. “Ethnographic” here has a rather particular connotation. The concern of the essays is not with describing a place and its people – that is, with analyzing an *ethnos*. Nor is it with searching for meaning – that is, with investigating culture. This is what one usually thinks of when the word “ethnography” is evoked. Rather, the concern of the chapters is with materiality. It is with examining the concrete manifestations of modern government – the way it is materialized in very specific practices. The practices these essays generally focus on correspond to the three analytical themes presented above. These are the reasons, technics, and subjects of government. Accordingly, the essays, to varying degrees, pay attention to the problematizations, forms of expertise, and assorted types of knowledges that render human beings thinkable as governable objects; to the practical mechanisms, instruments, and programs through which authorities seek to actualize particular political rationalities; and to the sundry types of individual and collective identity that specific practices of government attempt to mold in order to instrumentalize human conduct. To be anthropological also means that the essays gathered here are not content to limit their analyses of modern government simply to “Western” settings (e.g., the United States, Europe). Instead, they are collectively global in scope. Their empirical locations encompass Sri Lanka, French Guiana, France, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Africa, Brazil, Guatemala, Italy, Ukraine, and the United States. The concern here, I should note, is not with “describing” these places, but with these places as milieus or environments in which and through which government occurs. Indeed, we will see that milieu – proper environment, setting, local particularities – matters very much when it comes to governing. Finally, to be anthropological in nature means that at the heart of the examination of modern government is the *anthropos* or human being. Indeed, a central concern of the essays is with how practices of government put the social and biological life of the human in question. It is with the problematization of human beings as citizens, objects of knowledge, living entities, targets of

regulation, and so forth. All in all, then, as I noted earlier, the texts in this volume are preoccupied with bringing ethnographic scrutiny to bear on the practices of modern government in an array of empirical sites. They add up to what I have called Foucauldian anthropologies of modernity.

Colonial Reasons

The volume is divided into five thematic sections. The first section is largely engaged in expanding the geographical vision of modernity Foucault presents in his genealogy of governmentality. The problem with this genealogy is that it is disconcertingly silent about the emergence of modern government outside the geography of the West. It is as if governmentality were simply a product of modern Europe – fully constituted within its borders. The essays in this section rectify this Eurocentric conceit by focusing on the career of governmentality in the colonies. They draw attention to how Europe's colonial outposts were key sites in the development of modern governmental practices.

In chapter 1, David Scott tackles the relocation of governmentality in a colonial context through spotlighting the case of British rule in Sri Lanka. A main concern of the essay is to show “that to understand the project of colonial power *at any given historical moment*, one has to understand the character of the political rationality that constituted it.” To illustrate this point, Scott discusses two political rationalities operating in colonial Sri Lanka. One was mercantilism or sovereignty. Under this rationality, which held sway between 1796 and 1832, the principal object of colonial power was the “extraction of tribute” – tribute for the defense and aggrandizement of the state and monarch. Accordingly, the ways of life of the colonized population – their habits, distinctions, and religious observations – did not figure prominently in colonial calculations. What mattered was simply that colonial subjects “knew their place” and “obeyed when commanded.” The second political rationality was governmentality. Under this rationality, which came to prominence after 1832, colonial power was no longer directed at extracting wealth. Instead, it was aimed at improving the social conditions of the population. This improving entailed the alteration of the conduct or habits of the colonized. The goal was to produce – through new technologies, institutions, and forms of knowledge – self-interested subjects with “a progressive desire for industry, regularity, and individual accomplishment.”

In chapter 2, Peter Redfield confronts the colonial relocation of governmentality through an exploration of the penal colony in French Guiana. The starting point for this exploration is Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1979). In this book, which focuses on the birth of the prison, Foucault mentions that the deportation of criminals to overseas colonies constituted an alternative to their detention in prisons. However, he offhandedly dismisses this practice as a “rigorous and distant form of imprisonment” that achieved little as regards colonization or economy (1979: 272, 279). Redfield questions this dismissal and takes seriously the emergence of the penal colony as a viable colonial alternative to the

prison. His basic argument is that the penal colony, as instantiated in French Guiana, constituted a negative form of governmentality. The logic of this argument is as follows. A key goal of French administrators was to foster the life of the penal population. They sought to achieve this end through arranging the social and physical environment in such a way as to favor the production of rehabilitated subjects capable of survival and proper self-management. However, far from being a technology that cultivated the wellbeing of the populace, the penal colony wound up as a machinery of infirmity that produced high mortality rates and low norms of health. There was thus a major gap between stated goals and actual effects. What this suggests, according to Redfield, is that “rather than governmentality we have something like its negative impression: a deployment of the possibility of government without its fulfillment.” It indicates that political rationalities of colonial power contain within them the possibility of inefficiency, mismanagement, imperfection, and failure.

Global Governance

The second section of the book is concerned with situating the practices of modern government in a global frame. The inclination in the governmentality literature has been to disregard how global processes are affecting the nature of contemporary government.³ Indeed, their analyses tend to proceed as if the intensification of global interconnectedness were of little relevance to how the activity of managing individuals and populations is conducted. The essays in this section remedy this neglect through exploring specific ways in which globalization is reshaping the terrain of government (Perry and Maurer 2003: xiii).

In chapter 3, Aihwa Ong examines this reconfiguration of governmental practice through the example of South-East Asia. Her basic argument is that, in this area of the world, globalization has led to the development of what she calls “graduated sovereignty.” This concept refers to how, in order to remain globally competitive, South-East Asian countries – Malaysia and Indonesia, for example – have had to cede some aspects of state power and authority to corporate entities and supranational organizations. Significantly, this has produced a situation in which, depending on the particular mix of state and nonstate agencies involved in governing a particular domain, “different sectors of the population” have become “subjected to different technologies of regulation and nurturance.” The result of such differential technological treatment has been to endow different populations with very different kinds of rights, caring, and protection. It has been to create a system of uneven distribution, or “variegated citizenship,” in which some subjects are nurtured and afforded rights and resources, while others are largely neglected.

In chapter 4, James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta take up their exploration of how global developments are reshaping the territory of government through a focus on India and Africa. One of their main observations, particularly as regards Africa, is that many contemporary states are not quite able to carry out the functions

typically associated with the modern nation-state. In this context, the work of governing has not just ceased. Rather, it has been outsourced, at least in part, to an array of nonstate transnational organizations. For example, with respect to state economic policy, entities such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank have a direct hand in shaping many of its aspects. And as regards education, there are a good number of grassroots groups, such as Christian development NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), which partake in building and operating schools. All across Africa, then, state regimes are operating within a larger assemblage of governance composed of transnational NGOs and other large-scale nonstate agencies. Ferguson and Gupta refer to this larger assemblage as an “emerging system of transnational governmentality.”

Technico Sciences

The third section of the book underscores the technological nature of scientific knowledge. The basic assumption here is that knowledges cannot be understood simply as contemplative pursuits. Rather, they have to be viewed as eminently practical phenomena. Or, to phrase it in Nikolas Rose’s terms, they have to be viewed as “intellectual technologies” – as specific ways of seeing and diagnosing that represent and analyze reality in a manner that renders it not only intelligible but also amenable to political programming (1998: 120). The point, simply put, is that knowledges are in themselves technical means that enable interventions into social processes.

In chapter 5, David Horn engages this understanding of knowledge as technical means by focusing on the “invention of the criminal anthropologist” in nineteenth-century Italy. Emphasized in the essay is how this figure emerged “as a new kind of scientific expert, qualified to read the deviant body and to diagnose social dangers.” Two key points are worth noting here. One is that the ability of the criminal anthropologist to establish scientific authority rested fundamentally on tools and techniques. These ranged from mundane instruments like compasses, eye charts, measuring tapes, and magnets to more exotic mechanisms such as the Anfosso tachianthropometer, Broca’s auricular goniometer, and Sieweking’s esthesiometer. What these instruments enabled the criminal anthropologist to do is measure the body and claim the capacity to produce objective knowledge about it – particularly about its normality and pathology. The second point is that the criminal anthropologist “measured, palpated, shocked, sketched, photographed, and displayed” bodies not for the sake of creating abstract knowledge but “in order that judges, penologists, educators, and social planners might be guided in the identification and treatment of individuals, and in the development of appropriate measures of social hygiene.” Otherwise said, the knowledge that this scientific expert produced was fundamentally practical: designed to intervene in social life.

In chapter 6, Adriana Petryna undertakes her exploration of knowledge’s technological character by focusing on the management of the aftermath of

the Chernobyl (Ukraine) nuclear disaster. One of her main arguments is that, “with Chernobyl, science left the domain of the experiment and became central to . . . regulating the terms in which individuals are included in the public realm of citizenship.” When the Chernobyl catastrophe took place, Ukraine was still part of the Soviet Union. Consequently, it was the Soviet administration that initially managed the fallout. Their response can generally be described as technically lax. They established a high threshold of allowable radiation dose intakes; significantly restricted the size of the area considered contaminated; and only selectively measured individual and population-wide exposures. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, the responsibility for managing the Chernobyl aftermath shifted principally to the new state of Ukraine. Ukrainian officials promptly denounced the Soviets as having willfully disregarded the lives of exposed populations, and then set a new course of intervention. This new course entailed lowering the radiation threshold dose, expanding the territories judged contaminated, and stepping up efforts to collect knowledge about and identify exposed populations. Perhaps more significant though, in a context where the state was generally downscaling its social welfare system, a large number of newly designated Chernobyl sufferers were afforded compensation – in the form, for example, of preferential and free medical treatment. The significant thing about this is that, in this downscaled welfare context, claiming biological injury – through the medium of scientific knowledge – becomes one of the few legitimate ways for individuals to get access to social protection: that is, citizenship.

Biosocial Subjects

The fourth section focuses on how contemporary genetic knowledges and technologies are giving shape to new practices of life. What has generally happened is that, as a result of new understandings of vital processes at the molecular level, life has become open to all kinds of calculated intervention and reformation. The ramifications of this capacity to know and manipulate the basic elements of life are tremendous. It essentially means that: “Existence is being lived according to new coordinates, a new game of life is now being played” (Rose 2001: 16).

In chapter 7, Paul Rabinow refers to this new game of life as biosociality. Or, to be more specific, biosociality names how the new genetics is operationalizing nature in such a manner as to model it “on culture understood as practice.” The idea here is simply that biological life is no longer regarded as destiny or fixed endowment but as something to be reworked. It is that the vital order is coming to be “known and remade through technique” and thus turning overtly artificial. One important instantiation of biosociality that Rabinow highlights is the “formation of new group and individual identities and practices” out of new genetic truths. What he shows is that, through genetic screening practices, individuals can now be revealed to be at risk of developing certain genetic disorders. Notably, these individuals, as well as those actually living with particular maladies, are joining into groups and demanding recognition, calling for civil

rights, and making claims on the use of biomedical research and technologies. For example, there are “neurofibromatosis groups who meet to share their experiences, lobby for their disease, educate their children, redo their home environment, and so on.” As vital processes become an object of technical manipulation, then, we end up with the cultivation of new subjects – which one might call biosocial – who understand themselves through their biology and engage in all sorts of new life practices aimed at fostering individual and collective health.

In chapter 8, Karen-Sue Taussig, Rayna Rapp, and Deborah Heath similarly take up the question of biosocial subject formation. The biosocial subjects they focus on are Little People (LPs) – that is, people living with various forms of heritable dwarfism. Highlighted in their analysis is how LPs deploy an ethics of self-care in order to resist the normalizing practices of modern power. In the contemporary United States, LPs live in a society characterized by what Taussig et al. call flexible eugenics. This term refers to how advances in biotechnology – such as gene therapy, prenatal testing, and genetic diagnosis – are making it possible for people to improve, and desire to improve, their biological assets and achieve individual perfectibility. A key implication of flexible eugenics is the possibility of the United States becoming a genetically normalized society: a society where the ability to intervene into life processes and detect “abnormal” genetic states – such as dwarfism – will lead to the elimination of such states. In this context, one thing that LPs are doing – specifically those associated with the Little People of America (LPA), a national advocacy organization for people of short stature – is resisting “the push to perfectibility.” They are resisting this push through rejecting the stigma associated with atypical bodies and affirming the value of dwarf children and of dwarves having babies. What we have here again, then, are subjects who understand themselves through biology. In this case, though, their desire is not necessarily to overcome this biology but to engage in life practices that affirm it.

*Necropolitical Projects*⁴

The final section of the book explores what could be called the underside of biopower. We can call this underside “necropolitics” (or perhaps hygienic governmentality). Foucault, of course, famously defined biopower as “what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations” (1980: 143). Thus defined, scholars have generally interpreted this technology of power as simply a life-affirming power – one aimed at investing life and making it grow. However, Foucault also noted that there was another side to biopower. It is often the case, he suggested, that “entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity” (1980: 137). This means that biopower does not just foster life; it also routinely does away with it in order to preserve it. The reasoning here is that the death of the other – that is, of those deemed dangerous, unfit, or diseased – will make life in general more healthy and pure.⁵

The idea, then, is that under the logic of biopower, it is possible to simultaneously protect life and to authorize a holocaust.

In chapter 9, Diane Nelson explores the underside of biopower by focusing on the waging of war in Guatemala. She discusses two wars: one is the civil war (1962–96) that took place between the right-wing military state and, roughly speaking, leftist revolutionaries; the other the war against malaria (1955 to the present). From the perspective of the state, the goal in each instance was to eliminate the enemy. In the case of the civil war, the state sought to accomplish this end largely through techniques of terror and violence – massacres, torture-murder, and disappearance. The result was very much a genocidal politics: thousands upon thousands of people were put to death. In the case of the war against malaria, the state pursued its objective through organizing “brigades to fan out across the countryside to test for malaria, hunt mosquitoes, destroy breeding areas, administer quinine for free, and spray down walls.” The result was, if not the elimination of malaria, the definite improvement of the health of the population. The situation we end up with in Guatemala is thus one in which the state is at once a purveyor of death and life. There is no contradiction here though: the elimination of revolutionaries, like the elimination of malaria, is done in the name of protecting the life of the social body.

In chapter 10, João Biehl takes up his examination of the underside of biopower through the case of AIDS policy in Brazil. Highlighted in this account is Brazil’s creation – with the help of activists, politicians, economists, and scientists – of an impressive administrative apparatus designed to contain the spread of AIDS through community-mediated prevention projects and to extend the lives of people afflicted with the disease by making drug therapies freely available. These efforts, according to officials, have produced vital results: they have led to a decline in both new AIDS cases and AIDS mortality rates. This is not all there is to the story though. Biehl also shows that the AIDS apparatus does not target all populations alike. A large number of the poorest of the poor, for example, have only sporadic contact with AIDS testing services and medical care. These individuals are just not objects of prevention and treatment programs. Their lives are not deemed worthy of being extended. The result: numerous poor people with AIDS are dying in abandonment. The implicit logic here is that the death of these unhealthy elements will lead to a more vigorous and productive citizenry.

Such, then, are these Foucauldian anthropologies of modernity. And such is this volume. Provided here is essentially an introduction to a particular way of thinking and style of analysis: one that draws attention to the heterogeneous forces – forms of knowledge, types of authorities, and practical mechanisms – that seek to shape the conduct of individuals and populations in order to effect certain ends. What we get is a concern with how practices of modern government are materialized in specific times and places. The hope is that readers will find productive this attempt to make our present intelligible.

Notes

- 1 The work of several scholars informs the reading of Foucault presented here: Rabinow (1984), McNay (1994), Hindess (1996), Dean (1999), and Rose (1999).
- 2 The anthropological concern with the “will to govern,” as will become clear, is somewhat different from that of Foucault. In his periodization of the modern, Foucault reaches back to and assigns a great deal of significance to sixteenth-century arts of government. By contrast, the essays in the volume concentrate on the post-Enlightenment period and most actually deal with current events. So for anthropologists what matters about the modern is not so much its emergence as its present-day manifestations.
- 3 Notable exceptions include Perry and Maurer (2003) and Ong and Collier (2004).
- 4 I’m borrowing the term “necropolitical” from Achille Mbembe (2003).
- 5 This death does not have to be direct death (or the literal act of putting to death). It could also be indirect death: the act of exposing to death, of multiplying for some the risk of death, or simply political death, expulsion, rejection, or exclusion.

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