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SPECIAL ISSUE INTRODUCTION

Biopolitical Tensions after Pandemic Times

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INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a virus, SARS-CoV-2, started to spread around the world from its origin in Wuhan, China to create a pandemic that claimed millions of lives.[1] The editor of *The Lancet*, a leading medical journal, nevertheless suggested that the outbreak in 2020 would be better described as a syndemic,[2] which is characterised by 'biological and social interactions between conditions and states, interactions that increase a person's susceptibility to harm or worsen their health outcomes'. Viewed as a syndemic, the virus was placed in a wider context[3] but still one that was totally medicalised: 'In the case of COVID-19, attacking NCDs (non-communicable diseases) will be a prerequisite for successful containment'.[4] In many ways, a multi-risk framework has dominated analyses of the COVID-19

[1] World Health Organization, "Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)," Report, 2020, 5. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-china-joint-mission-on-covid-19-final-report.pdf. (Accessed 27 July 2023) The report explains how the virus was identified in one individual residing in Wuhan, leading to research on different stages of 'the outbreak' in China. By February 20, 2020, a cumulative total of 75,465 COVID-19 cases had been reported in China.

[2] Richard Horton, "Offline: COVID-19 Is Not a Pandemic", *The Lancet* 396:10255 (2020), 874. Merrill Singer, *Introduction to Syndemics: A Critical Systems Approach to Public and Community Health*, (2009).

[3] See also this special issue contribution by Jorge Vélez Vega and Ricardo Noguera-Solano, "A Critique of Pandemic Reason: Towards a Syndemic Noso-Politics," *Foucault Studies* 35 (2023).

[4] Richard Horton, "Offline: COVID-19 Is Not a Pandemic", 874. NCDs are, for example, cancer, heart diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes. These are statistically shown to be the leading cause of death in the world. By 'attacking' these, the assumption is that by better managing these conditions, the risk from COVID-19 will be reduced.

pandemic; an empirical calculus of the threat of infection, illness and death for individuals. But these analyses ignore an even wider context – the politics of life – espoused through reactions to the accentuated assemblage of threats. The dissemination of scientific expertise, but also questioning thereof, brought fundamental aspects of biopolitics to the surface and made them visible in the old, renewed and innovative responses to what became known as 'the pandemic'. The contributions in this special issue draw attention to this wider biopolitical context and show how much more than just the virus was implicated during and after the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic, (or syndemic), has attracted rich debate on how life could and should be best ordered and vitalized in practice – 'managing the virus is about managing people'[5] and interspecies relations. It is also a debate that has renewed theoretical interest in Foucauldian biopolitics, reaching scholars who were previously unfamiliar with the biologization of life and its changing historical expressions. Similar to previous cases of epidemic and pandemic threats, knowledge about the outbreak in 2020 mainly targeted *human* connectivity conceived as a matter of life and death. And when threats in any form rapidly flow through the population, so does the quest for new knowledge coupled with innovative ways of governing oneself and others. Depending on geographical positions and epidemiological preferences, the regulation of life via science, statistics and responsibility did, with COVID-19, not only diffuse logistically, motivated by biological longevity with racist implications,[6] but also opened up for ideas of future bodies and an expanded administration of life on a planetary scale. If the 'right to health'[7] originally demanded biopolitical intervention in the form of novel technologies of power that were flexible, economical and alluring enough, responses to COVID-19 have been suggested to permeate both discipline and sovereignty to remould and enforce them anew.[8]

In India, for example, the government response often sought to victimize the poor,[9] and migrant workers became the necessary casualties in the effort to portray the impression of quick and 'strong' leadership. The migrants were forced to walk back home, to a domestic sphere, often hundreds of miles, going unfed and untreated during the hurriedly imposed lockdown.[10] Some of them were killed by heavy vehicles while walking, and how many

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[5] Sally Riad, "The Virus and Organization Studies: A changing episteme," *Organization Studies* 44:6 (2023), 1013.

[6] Jordan Liz, "State racism social justice and the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Public Philosophy Journal* 3:1 (2020). Mark Horvath and Adam Lovasz, "Foucault in the Age of COVID-19: Permitting Contingency in Biopolitics," *Identities* 17:1 (2020).

[7] Michel Foucault, "The Crisis of Medicine or the Crisis of Antimedicine?," *Foucault Studies* 1 [1976] (2004), 6.

[8] Daniele Lorenzini, "Biopolitics in the Time of Coronavirus," *Critical Inquiry* 47:S2 (2021), S40-S45. Jessica Pykett and Anna Lavis, "Governance and policy in pandemics: approaches to crisis, chaos and catastrophe," in *Living with Pandemics: Places, People and Policy*, eds. John R. Bryson, Lauren Andres, Aksel Ersoy and Louise Reardon (2021).

[9] Sohini Sengupta and Manish K. Jha, "Risks and resilience: COVID-19 response and disaster management policies in India," *India Review* 20:2 (2021).

[10] Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha and Mursed Alam, "Scattered Chapatis, Mangled Bodies: Semiology for a Nation," *Newsclick.in* (2020). https://www.newsclick.in/scattered-chapatis-mangled-bodies-semiology-nation.

actually died from COVID remains uncertain, given their deaths were refused official recognition. These bodily costs, even disqualified deaths, were an ironic consequence of the preventive measures being introduced. Similarly divisive policies were adopted in Brazil,[11] a response that became infamous worldwide[12] for its targeting of precarity.[13] Less known, however, are the bottom-up responses, with grass-roots initiatives that filled logistical gaps at street level. Together with networks of voluntary actors in urban peripheries or indigenous and traditional *Quilombola* territories, people took it upon themselves to disseminate recommendations from the WHO. They even distributed face masks and rubbing alcohol, as well as basic items of food, to prevent those living on a day-to-day basis from exposing themselves to dangerous work conditions. From India to Brazil, two dominant social effects thus appear – the exposure of failing logistics and citizens' voluntary implementation of new logistics.

The problem of how to govern whom, what, and how have, in previous Foucauldian studies, also been discussed in relation to novel legislation in Asia,[14] emergency protocols in Australia,[15] closed borders in Italy, Malta and Greece,[16] Chinese lock-down[17] and quarantine in the Philippines.[18] Despite locking-down those citizens conceived as 'belonging' and locking-out those deemed as 'not belonging',[19] the pandemic resulted in futile attempts to recover state sovereignty without looking fragile.[20] Further studies of the policing of behaviours traditionally known to feed viruses,[21] such as intoxication in bars and nightclubs[22] and sloppy hygiene in office toilets or at home,[23] testify to a human that resists discipline.[24] Not limited to the problems with human discipline, wilder, interspecies connectivity has also entered the

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[11] Conectas Direitos Humanos, "Boletim n.10 – Direitos na Pandemia: Mapeamento e análises das normas jurídicas de resposta à Covid-19," (2021), São Paulo: Conectas.

[12] Rafael Dall'Alba, Christianne Famer Rocha, Roberta de Pinho Silveira, Liciane da Silva Costa Dresch, Luciana Araújo Vieira, Marco André Germanò, "COVID-19 in Brazil: far beyond biopolitics," *The Lancet* 397:10274 (2021).

[13] Márcia Pereira Leite, "Biopolítica da precariedade em tempos de pandemia," Dilemas: Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social, Rio de Janeiro, Reflexões na Pandemia (2020), 1-16.

[14] Victor V. Ramraj, *Covid-19 in Asia: Law and Policy Contexts* (2020).

[15] Laura Glitsos, "COVID-19 and the 'perfectly governed city'," *Journal for Cultural Research* 25:3 (2021).

[16] Martina Tazzioli and Maurice Stierl, "'We Closed the Ports to Protect Refugees.' Hygienic Borders and Deterrence Humanitarianism during Covid-19," *International Political Sociology* 15:4 (2021).

[17] Pengfei Li, "Conceptualizing China's spatial lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic: a neo-liberal society or a pre-liberal one?," *Social Transformations in Chinese Societies* 17:2 (2021).

[18] Merimee T. Siena, "A Foucauldian discourse analysis of president Duterte's constructions of community quarantine during COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines," *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* 36:1 (2022).

[19] David Theo Goldberg, "Tracking Capitalism and COVID-19," Los Angeles Review of Books (2020).

[20] Andrey Makarychev and Tatiana Romashko, "Precarious sovereignty in a post-liberal Europe: The COVID-19 emergency in Estonia and Finland," *Chinese Political Science Review* 6:1 (2021).

[21] Bert De Munck, "The Human Body Must Be Defended: A Foucauldian and Latourian Take on COVID-19," *Journal for the History of Environment and Society* 5 (2020).

[22] Luigi Pellizzoni and Barbara Sena, "Preparedness as Governmentality. Probing the Italian Management of the Covid-19 Emergency," *Sociologica* 15:3 (2021), 61-83.

[23] Janani Umamaheswar and Catherine Tan, "'Dad, wash your hands': Gender, care work, and attitudes toward risk during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Socius* 6 (2020).

[24] James K. Meeker, "The political nightmare of the plague: The ironic resistance of anti-quarantine protesters," in *COVID-19: Volume II Social Consequences and Cultural Adaptations*, ed. Michael J. Ryan (2020).

biopolitical scene to encompass the dangers of a haphazardly jumping virus.[25] 'Life' has been emphasized to consist of more complex interspecies relations than previously acknowledged, necessitating novel understandings and updated implementations of biopolitics that correspond to such aleatory 'life'.[26] COVID-19 has thus made talk of a global malaise and Earth-encompassing chronic emergency easier,[27] mobilizing a prolific language of pathological concepts needed in 'our big war' against the incessantly transforming 'invisible enemy' and its unpredictable whereabouts.[28]

By staying open to such different effects of the pandemic, this special issue presents a variety of both empirical contexts and theoretical angles with the shared aim of understanding the pandemic through an expansion of Foucauldian analysis. Empirically, the contributions to the special issue richly illustrate how the quest for more knowledge about COVID-19 had different impacts depending on geographical locations, preexisting administrations of populations and self-regulation among individuals. Notably, two empirically detailed contributions from Bulgaria and India depict individuals' responses to pandemic regulations. These contributions highlight how apparatuses of security generally work through conflicting knowledges and the formation of willing and unwilling subjects. During the pandemic, assessments of willingness and complicity thus surfaced to a great extent, which facilitated the calibration of government through risk and fear as much as solidarity and care. In addition to the creative expansion of jurisdiction, people were encouraged in innovative ways to take responsibility beyond legal demands and encouraged to unite in creative, emotional ways, notably as a response to those who denied the significance of the threat. In India, for example, military helicopters scattered rose petals over COVID-19 hospitals and naval ships fired guns at the ocean in demonstrations of national solidarity and gratitude towards 'Corona warriors'. In other examples from around the world, people took it upon themselves to express sympathy. In the U.K., people came to their doors once a week to 'clap' with kitchen utensils to show appreciation for the efforts of healthcare workers, and, in New Zealand, citizens were inspired to place teddy bears in windows.[29] These efforts had no direct effect on the progression of the virus, but they seemed important gestures and signals of common purpose that reassured displays of solidarity in the face of an implacable foe.

The contributors in this special issue do not only base their insights on very different cultural experiences of the pandemic but also offer a variation of analyses by using Foucault's works, and beyond, differently. Theoretically, they either contradict, complement or enhance analyses by juxtaposing Foucault and other theorists or thinkers, such as Camus, Marx, Marzocca and Lyotard. Complemented by an interview with anthropologist Elisabeth Povinelli with a focus on the Virus as an analytical figure,[30] and an article by Joelle Abi-Rached titled *Critical Friendship after the Pandemic*, the playful combination of thinkers represented in

[25] Miguel Vatter, "One health and one home: On the biopolitics of Covid-19," in *Coronavirus, Psychoanalysis, and Philosophy*, eds. Fernando Castrillón and Thomas Marchevsky (2021).
[26] Maurizio Meloni and Miguel Vatter, "Biopolitics after COVID," *Theory and Event* 26:2 (2023).
[27] Andreas Malm, *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century* (2020).
[28] Julian Reid, "Our Big War," *Los Angeles Review of Books,* (2020).
[29] Susanna Trnka, "Rethinking states of emergency," *Social Anthropology* 28:2 (2020).
[30] Elisabeth Povinelli, *Geontologies: Requiem for Late Liberalism (2016*).

this issue provide dimensions that can be useful for crafting a post-pandemic reflexivity. The different theoretical angles treat COVID-19 as an entry point for gaining insights into contemporary biopolitics; to query 'who' were included and excluded in the notion of a 'collective wellbeing', what this 'wellbeing' actually consisted of, and how we could think about it, and act, in alternative ways. Situated within this plurality of insights, we thus hope to enrich comparisons between different Foucauldian understandings of pandemic effects.

CONTRIBUTIONS

For those unfamiliar with Foucauldian biopolitics and its extensions, there is Valentina Antoniol's review essay titled *Metamorphosis of Biopolitics. A Foucauldian Ecological Perspective and the Challenge of the Pandemic,* which gives a broad introduction to the topic of the special issue. Antoniol underscores the rejuvenation of biopolitics through COVID-19. Grounded in Ottavio Marzocca's book, *Biopolitics for Beginners. Knowledge of Life and Government of People,*[31] Antoniol explicates the usefulness of biopolitics for understanding population management before, during and after the outbreak of COVID-19. The links between biopolitics, discipline and governmentality are traced in Foucault's various works, with details into the new affiliations and expert movements that infuse contemporary biopolitics. By reviewing Marzocca's detailed accounts of the most basic and more complex elements of biopolitical rule, Antoniol suggests that not only beginners but also more established scholars can be guided in fruitful directions in thinking further with *Biopolitics for Beginners*. Antoniol reiterates how Foucault has been advanced and/or criticized and has contributed to the vivacity of Italian philosophy on biopolitics. Antoniol's review essay is, accordingly, a clear entrance to fruitful intellectual diversions beyond Foucault and of interest to those who wish to explore how biopolitics as a 'central and strategic form of government' has thrived on COVID-19.

In a book review of *Biopolitics and Ancient Thought*, written by Jussi Backman and Antonio Cimino[32], dominant theorizations of biopolitics are complicated by an elaboration of the ancestry and genealogy of biopolitical practices and ideas that date back to ancient Greece. While the author of the book review, Morten Thaning, has captured the core argument of the book, he also explores whether the discourse of biopolitics emanates solely from ancient Greece or if one could find traces of it in other ancient cultural and philosophical practices as well. The sections on Aristotle and Plato, along with Socrates' intervention on the non-deterministic hermeneutics of biopolitics, are well articulated, and, subsequently, the "possibility of an analysis of politics without ontological pretensions" prompts Thaning to discuss Agamben's approach to ancient biopolitics. This leads to further philosophical forays from Cimino's critique of the methodological and conceptual framework of Agamben's approach to ancient biopolitics and the tripartite distinction between natural life, bare life and political life. There is an interrogation of Agamben's sharp opposition between *bios* and *zoē*, something which, the reviewer notes, has "convincingly been shown to be confusing and misleading" but is left to the reader of the book to explore further. Furthermore, Thaning invokes the question on how

[31] Ottavio Marzocca, *Biopolitics for Beginners. Knowledge of Life and Government of People* (2021).
[32] Jussi Backman and Antonio Cimino, eds. *Biopolitics and Ancient Thought* (2022).

ancient biopolitical thinking differs, or coheres, with Foucault's theorisation and offers insights into how to analyse contemporary biopolitics in a world affected by the pandemic.

A starkly different starting point for an analysis of the pandemic can be found in Adam Herpolsheimer's paper, titled *Plague, Foucault, Camus*, which clarifies the combined governmental and literary production of "the plague". Through a dialogic or conjunctive reading of Foucault and Camus, Herpolsheimer exemplifies how a combination of philosophy and literature can create a new angle on the pandemic. Showing how, for Foucault, "plague marks the rise of the invention of positive technologies of power", Herpolsheimer argues that such mechanisms of power historically have pivoted around strategies of "inclusion, multiplication, and security, rather than exclusion, negation, and rejection". Foucault's theorization on the "stylized works about plague" are shown to be "exemplified by Albert Camus". Citing numerous textual details, this contribution to the special issue convincingly explains how Foucault's narration of the "literary dream of" plagues echoes Camus' 1947 novel *La Peste*, representing what Foucault described as "a kind of orgiastic dream in which plague is the moment when individuals come apart and when the law is forgotten." By juxtaposing Camus' novel and other works in conversation with governmentality, subject formation, and truth, Herpolsheimer demonstrates "the ways in which individualism itself can be viewed biopolitically". The plague, according to the author, conflates dream and discourse, where regimes of truth reciprocally constitute those individuals who spelled out the truth. By conjoining Foucault's interest in the history of power relations as generative with Camus' treatment of "the absurd", Herpolsheimer creatively brings forth a historical continuity, expanding our understanding of how pandemics can surface differently over time.

Other authors of the special issue engage with the more recent specificities of the will to truth, or rather truth*s*, that ensued in professional and lay media. During the early months of 2020, many voices acknowledged a new COVID infection sweeping the world but thought it no worse than a 'minor flu'. Given how the events unfolded, it thus became possible to ask if there even was a 'pandemic' caused by a certain virus and its mutations. Media reports of widening spread, together with overwhelmed hospitals and an increasing death toll, then persuaded many that this was no ordinary infection. Juggling with uncertainty, embedded in models of the future course of the infection, scientists made assumptions about the potential effects of various preventive measures. Face masks were produced in vast quantities - some even had 'I care' written on them - and many were willing to wear them. Yet the take up was not universal or consistent, and, in the overall knowledge production, some citizens and even governments became known as 'pandemic resistors' (or negationists) due to their counteractions. Caring differently, they either questioned if COVID was any worse than annual influenza or accepted it as being as unavoidable as any other major natural event, such as a tsunami or an earthquake. Through this debating, and generation of very different claims to truth, the pandemic quickly became a global event where people aligned with contrasting worldviews while confessing their loyalties in one way, then another. This tension informed policies that, on the one hand, accepted deaths of older citizens, or those with prior illness, as simply bringing forward events by perhaps a few months or years, and, on the other, created novel

categories of the 'vulnerable', rolling out particular protections, particularly in terms of vaccination priority.[33]

Jean-Paul Sarrazin and Fabián Aguirre discuss the negotiations of truth by introducing additional theorists to enhance a Foucauldian analysis. Indeed, the threats from the pandemic were ideally suited to reinforcing population management strategies so that the biopolitical space was the centre of activity. But the exercise of biopower requires legitimacy and therefore a particular discourse of truth. The struggles between those 'just following the science' and those branded as denialists, conspiracy theorists, and the like, are evidence of the importance of stating clearly and then promoting a version of truth. This is the point at which François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard, both contemporaries of Foucault, can offer an additional dimension to biopolitical strategies. Both Lyotard and Baudrillard were concerned with how truth was presented and justified, particularly in the media. They therefore offer a way of exploring the day-to-day struggles of science, knowledge and truth that occurred throughout the pandemic. The authors thus uncover a micro-physics of power that might otherwise be overlooked with a more broad-brush analysis of the place of biopolitics in the management of pandemic populations.

Another contribution by Jorge Vélez Vega and Ricardo Noguera-Solano seeks to reveal "the politics of truth about the pandemic, and health measures", helping us to forge "a critical attitude" that questions both biopolitical governmental measures and the narratives they build on. Hence, by taking a critical stance theoretically, Vélez Vega and Noguera-Solano offer a critique of the global pandemic strategy suggested by the WHO in the paper titled *A Critique of Pandemic Reason: Towards a Syndemic Noso-Politics*. By scrutinizing these policies through "a historical perspective on the virus", Vélez Vega and Noguera-Solano turn to Foucault and teases out how the pandemic is coupled to an "art of governing human beings at the point of interaction between politics and medicine". By defining this nexus of politics and medicine as 'noso-politics', a mechanism "used to control the body of the population via authoritarian measures exercised in the name of the health of the population", Jorge Vélez Vega and Ricardo Noguera-Solano narratively expose how such a mechanism implements its force by institutionalizing an instrumental and mechanistic truth about the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

A meticulous analysis of everyday power relations and their generative continuity is offered by Тодор Христов (Todor Hristov) in *Fragile Responsibilization: Rights and Risks in the Bulgarian Response to COVID-19*. Hristov empirically details population segmentation with a focus on measurement, calculations and statistics, illustrating the particulars of the Bulgarian response to the pandemic and individual citizen reactions thereto. The reader learns about the intricate methods of calculation and reasoning underpinning the expertise, and decisions taken by officials, such as the Bulgarian "National Crisis-Management Staff". The paper further explains how a fragile responsibilization of individuals fed further attempts to calculate population characteristics *en masse*. Regulations were made legitimate and possible via innovative methods of calculation, which in itself became a main concern when incalculability

[33] For a summary of why and how inequalities surfaced in general with COVID-19, see, for example, Martin Parker, "Beginning, Again," in *Life After COVID-19: The Other Side of Crisis,* ed. Martin Parker (2020), or Patrizia Zanoni, "Whither Critical Management and Organization Studies? For a Performative Critique of Capitalist Flows in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Management Studies* 58:2 (2021).

surfaced as a visible problem. To theoretically understand this phenomenon, Hristov extends the Foucauldian framework to elaborate on the distinction between the molecular and molar, derived from the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.[34] Through this approach, Hristov manages to focus on those that are underdefined instead of those that are statistically captured as "normal objects of biopolitics". According to the author, population control was not mainly about the accomplishment of quarantine, and keeping the danger isolated, but about investigating and splitting the population into productive and unproductive circulations to maximize the former and minimize the latter. This shows how biopolitics operates differently depending on numerical modalities and existing ways to define citizenship and belonging. Poignantly, Hristov ends by capturing individual resistance to the administration of circulation, showing how unwillingness to vaccinate and follow other regulations is not only deemed irresponsible but classified as a form of "criminal individualism". By digging into court decisions, he reflects on the individual reasons for why some people have chosen actively to violate the regulations, despite their acknowledgement of their own pandemic responsibility towards others. Conclusively, Hristov sharply illustrates how ways of life interfere with Bulgarian state control of biologized life in humanly mundane ways.

The topic of productive circulation[35] is also brought up by Mark Kelly, who emphasizes the role of capitalism for understanding how biopolitics thrived on the pandemic around the world. Kelly starts by juxtaposing Marx against Foucault,[36] asking: is the pandemic response best explained in terms of economics or biopolitics? To a certain extent, capitalism and biopolitics were complementary; as Foucault himself noted, 'the two processes - the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital - cannot be separated'.[37] Yet, for Kelly, there was a limit to that alliance in the final analysis as the insatiable logic of capital trumped the health or welfare of the population. Even so, he wonders whether the politics of COVID-19 require a choice between the two sides and concludes that the health of the population in a biopolitical society requires the stability of the state, which is also a core requirement of capitalism.

Kelly's contribution complements previous studies of importance for understanding the marriage of biological health and economic health. A study of the U.K., for example, shows how the momentarily lost entrepreneurial spirit was quickly reawakened.[38] Technologies were innovated to keep the population circulating despite the danger, resulting in countless businesses for surveillance, swabbing, diagnosis and reporting. The oft neglected military

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[34] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia 1* [1972] (1983).

[35] Iain Munro reviews and compares how different domains have applied Foucauldian biopolitics in relation to the administration of circulations, expanding from populations to circulation of resources and commodities. "The Management of Circulations: Biopolitical Variations after Foucault," *International Journal of Management Reviews* 14.3 (2011).

[36] For an introductory comparison of the different methods and politics of Marx and Foucault, see Ken C. Kawashima "The Hidden Area between Marx and Foucault," *Positions: Asia Critique* 27:1 (2019).

[37] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975] (1977), 221.

[38] Thomas Ahrens and Laurence Ferry, "Accounting and accountability practices in times of crisis: a Foucauldian perspective on the UK government's response to COVID-19 for England," *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 34:6 (2021).

roots of 'logistical life' for the enabling of efficiency and pacification[39] boosted the growth of a 'private apparatus of security' during COVID-19.[40] Existing business logistics emerged as a more visible strategic partaker in biopolitics, lessening the requirement of states to be seen as the sole stable centres for the required administration, calculation and securing of a logistical order. Corporations had to advance their logistical responsibilities, secure timely crucial commercial deliveries and make sure to limit COVID leakage at border crossings. The freedom-security relationship was both re-positioned and refined, adding new reciprocal biopolitical ties between the private and public sectors to coalesce rigid/bureaucratic and flexible/commercial population management. The searching for a new, revitalized, logistical order was perhaps best epitomized in the quests for transparency about public-private collaborations, as in the public scrutiny of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who was accused of cutting a deal on vaccines by swiftly text messaging Pfizer's CEO.[41]

Pablo Martin Mendez's article, titled "The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Freedom-Security Tension: Calibrating their Fragile Relationship", pinpoints how pandemic population management in general became very crude – to the point where, in Latin America, it was thwarted by conspiracy theories and competing notions of both freedom and collective wellbeing. Mendez explains how the far-right movement attempted to save the moral values linked to liberal capitalism by reinventing old stories about a communist anti-liberal conspiracy.[42] The political polarization between the liberal and communist emerged to become a relatively successful rhetoric that aligned with already existing fear. In effect, this accentuated debate among the general populace about the best way to govern. No longer was the question of government reserved for policy experts, even if these experts thought it was. Instead, Mendez highlights how new understandings of freedom "constrained the effectiveness of state public health interventions", as detailed by Brazilian academics.[43] By exemplifying how measures were rolled out by various authorities, from lock-down to reopening, Mendez analytically clarifies the historical contingency of the "plague-stricken town", the "self-regulation strategy" and the "minimum security" rationality, suggesting these still are helpful for understanding the remoulded freedom-security relationship that emerged during and after the pandemic.

Based on different sources, Nasima Islam discusses related topics in the book review titled "Post-Pandemic South Asian Governmentalities and Foucault: State Power and Ordinary Citizens". Islam presents two important contributions for those who wish to bring forward Foucault's ideas and modes of critique for novel cultural contexts. As Islam notes, "[…]

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[39] Julian Reid, *The Biopolitics of the War on Terror: Life Struggles, Liberal Modernity and the Defence of Logistical Societies* (2006).

[40] Peter Fleming, Richard Godfrey and Simon Lilley, "Conceptualizing business logistics as an 'apparatus of security' and its implications for management and organizational inquiry," *Human Relations* (2022), 18.

[41] Daniel Boffey, "EU executive rebuked for not disclosing Von der Leyen-Pfizer texts," *The Guardian*, Jan 28 (2022).

[42] Isabela Kalil, Sofía C. Silveira, Weslei Pinheiro, Álex Kalil, João V. Pereira, Wiverson Azarias, and Ana B. Amparo, "Politics of fear in Brazil: Far-right conspiracy theories on COVID-19", *Global Discourse* 11:3 (2021). Jakub Wondreys and Cas Mudde, "Victims of the Pandemic? European Far-Right Parties and COVID-19," *Nationalities Papers* 50:1 (2020).

[43] Jessica Farias and Ronaldo Pilati, "COVID-19 as an undesirable political issue: Conspiracy beliefs and intolerance of uncertainty predict adhesion to prevention measures," *Current Psychology* 42:1 (2023).

it is high time that we analyse and evaluate works of iconic thinkers such as Michael Foucault in the context of the Global South in order to understand if they can be deployed to decolonize discourses". Islam introduces us both to *South Asian Governmentalities: Michel Foucault and the Question of Postcolonial Orderings,* edited by Stephen Legg and Deana Heath, and to *Archives of Infamy: Foucault on State Power in the Lives of Ordinary Citizens,* edited by Nancy Luxon. The first book uses the idea of governmentality to examine the formation of States and problematizations in South Asia, taking from Foucault's contributions to thinking differently about power and State while at the same time showing how his research fails to acknowledge that "European governmentalities were always a product of colonial and imperial entanglements".[44] That is, governmentality does not only influence how we understand practices of government in geographies outside of Europe. Furthermore, it is necessary to revisit governmentality in Europe and situate it within broader contexts for a better understanding of how citizenship, and conduct of conduct, constitutes colonial subjects in tandem with European citizens. In her review of the chapters, Islam notes their usefulness for analysing the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the global south.

The second book reviewed, *Archives of Infamy: Foucault on State Power in the Lives of Ordinary Citizens* (edited by Luxon),[45] is a collection of commentaries and new translations of articles authored by Foucault, such as *Lives of Infamous Men* from 1977.[46] Islam highlights the important contribution in Arlette Farge's and Foucault's *Disorderly Families,*[47] which is introduced by Luxon.[48] Here, the reader learns how their archival research adds to contemporary feminist and queer perspectives on power, the state and governmentality. Even if *Archives of Infamy* is not explicitly debating decolonization, Islam's review draws out the connection between sexuality and the birth of biopolitics, for example, to be analytically mobilized in order to understand the place of the "sexual contract" in colonial contexts.[49] Islam also makes explicit how these analyses are useful for understanding spheres of intimacy and tensions that emerge between the private and public. Sometimes these tensions are left in contradiction, including overt refusal to State intervention. At other times, complicity arises via voluntary alignment with State authority, for example to govern conflicts within the family. In the *Lettres de Cachet* archives, this is expressed in the very gesture of writing to the Sovereign with pledges for a reinstalment of order. Even if the books reviewed by Islam do not directly

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[44] In this sense, they follow the contribution of important scholars, e.g., Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed. Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (2004); Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (2017); Terri-Anne Teo, Elisa Wynne-Hughes, eds. *Postcolonial Governmentalities: Rationalities, Violences and Contestations* (2020).

[45] Nancy Luxon, ed. *Archives of Infamy: Foucault on State Power in the Lives of Ordinary Citizens* (2019). See also a previous review by Julian Molina, *Foucault Studies* 30 (2021).

[46] Michel Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men," [1977] in *Archives of Infamy: Foucault on State Power in the Lives of Ordinary Citizens,* ed. Nancy Luxon (2019).

[47] Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Disorderly Families: Infamous Letters from the Bastille Archives*, ed. Nancy Luxon (2016).

[48] Nancy Luxon, "Introduction: Policing and Criminality in Disorderly Families," in *Archives of Infamy: Foucault on State Power in the Lives of Ordinary Citizens* (2019).

[49] Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (1995). Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (2006). Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995).

analyse the COVID-19 pandemic, the review carefully explicates how these extrapolations of Foucault's scholarship open up novel paths for future analyses of post-pandemic diverse contexts.

Subhendra Bhowmick and Mursed Alam expand the relevance of Foucault for the global south further in their paper titled "Foucault Meets Novel Coronavirus: Biosociality, Excesses of Governmentality and the "Will to Live" of the Pandemicariat". The authors conceptualize the *Pandemicariat* to emphasize analytically how the pandemic exacerbated the vulnerability of certain population groups, in their case Indian migrant workers. Inspired by Judith Butler and others with an interest in the precariat,[50] the paper carefully attends to those 'dangerous' minorities who were often neglected in the dominant responses to the pandemic but whose existence was obviously well known yet partly unwanted. The *Pandemicariat* consisted, according to the authors, of hapless survivors; an underclass left to die while the middleclass was biologically enabled to live and be vaccinated. This conceptual focus brings a critical class analysis to the fore and explains how the making live and letting die of biopolitics during the pandemic conflated with existing structuring of productive and unproductive bodies – the postcolonial Indian way of making some die. To end, the paper nevertheless points out that the *Pandemicariat* could not be deprived of their spirit; their togetherness and way of life was sustained during and after the pandemic, at the same time as others willfully aligned with the grand togetherness of biologized life.

To complement the growing expertise on Foucault and postcolonialism, the special issue includes an interview with Elizabeth Povinelli titled "Virus as a Figure of Geontopower or How to Practice Foucault Now?". Povinelli has contributed to understandings of colonial experiences firmly based on her commitment to, and relationships with, the people in Belyuen, situated in the Australian Northern Territory. By developing these relationships since the 1980s, and by advancing the metaphorical Virus as a figure of late liberal practices, she has been able to pose new questions from the perspective of those who have had to endure colonial tactics and strategies. In her case, guided by questions embedded in the travails of endurance[51] among her friends and family in Karrabing/ Belyuen, she thus asks: "how do we listen to him [Foucault] in a new way, a way that he himself perhaps couldn't hear?". In this way, she has succeeded to demonstrate how indigenous peoples refuse to serve contemporary liberal expeditions to model them, particularly their 'difference', as inspiration for how to live life, in general, differently.

To apprehend Povinelli's intricate anthropological intellectualism, as well as the journey of her theorizing self (*theoroi*), the interview is structured in two sections. In the first part, Povinelli shares her encounters with the works of Michel Foucault and the specific positions from which she has read, in close company of others, the first volume of *History of Sexuality*. Inviting the interviewer and reader to this moment, when Foucault's ideas were experienced

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[50] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004). Mursed Alam, "Violence and perilous trans-borderal journeys: the Rohingyas as the nowhere-nation precariats," in *Violence in South Asia: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Pavan K. Malreddy, Anindya S. Purakayastha and Birte Heidemann (2019).

[51] For a critical discussion about the sourcing of political subjectivity in indigenous endurance and their 'capacity for persistence', see David Chandler and Julian Reid, *Becoming Indigenous: Governing Imaginaries in the Anthropocene* (2019), 74.

as an *Event* that changed frames and ways of thinking, makes explicit the new affiliations many developed as new social movements grew via experimentation with norms, concepts and horizons of emancipation.[52] Reading *History of Sexuality* "against itself", while trying to understand the emergence of late liberal practices to govern difference in Australia, Povinelli has engaged critically with Foucault from the very beginning and worked to move his thought forward in order to understand settler liberal governance. The second part of the interview bridges from the early Povinelli to her later insights on the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, she draws attention to how the Virus as a figure of governance was already visible from within colonial spaces as part of the ancestral catastrophe represented by the arrival of the Europeans. Recalling the massive deaths by the viruses introduced by the Spanish and the Portuguese in the 16th century, she also shares her thoughts on how "the *figure* of the virus could be helpful to try to understand *this particular virus* [Sars-Cov-2]" (emphasis added). Furthermore, she argues that this particular experience can help us develop "an ethics of extinguishment as different from a discourse of war" that has been at the centre of Euro-Atlantic political thought. According to her, the COVID-19 pandemic not only disorganized or strengthened threads of power/knowledge but also offered the potentiality of an *Event*. The pandemic allowed the emergence of new problem spaces and strategic assemblages to unfold in a productive way.

Another theorizing self appears in the review essay written by Joelle M. Abi-Rached titled *Critical Friendship after the Pandemic*. The essay is based on a critical engagement with Foucault with the aim of revisiting the connections between critique and governmentality in order to think about it differently. Acknowledging the contradictions of both science and philosophy, Abi-Rached proposes critical friendship as "an epistemological starting point, a way of *performing* a critique of contemporary scientific practices and discourses". Abi-Rached, having experienced this delicate position herself, is well aware of the difficulties of reconciling critique and policy-making. Drawing from Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour, Aristotle, Jacques Derrida, and Isabelle Stengers, she brings philosophy down to Earth, guiding the reader carefully to understand science as a discursive apparatus; a sort of tool for diagnosing the present. Such a dimension, she proposes, could be reconciled through the acknowledgment of one's own perspective (a *prise de position*), which also means to assume one's own part of a common world. By advancing Stengers' discussion, this is what Abi-Rached calls a "critical middle voice". It is a voice committed to being close to other sciences and to the process of decision-making, that is, the voice does "not merely critique from afar but has a say and a stake in the making of the polis". Joelle M. Abi-Rached suggests how to open our political imagination, drawing not only from Foucault's discussion on the nexus between governmentality and critique as desire of not being governed *in this way* but from contemporaneous thinkers that have been exploring the perceptions of togetherness in the Anthropocene. That is, she argues that the idea of "critical friendship" can point us to some possibilities of this togetherness – we are here, now, with our lives and bodies at risk, so there is no "outside" or "above". Through the idea of "critical friendship", Abi-Rached provokes us to examine how critique can, at times, be inhabited as a kind of comfortable position of "naming the errors" without engagement to

[52] See short reflection on these years by Michel Foucault, "Preface," [1972] in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia 1* (1983).

the world as a common space for which it is necessary to take responsibility - an idea that brings us back to the interview with Elizabeth Povinelli and her discussion of philosophy as an ethics and askesis extended to obligations we have with others and their worlds.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

What the contributions to this special issue have made obvious is the plurality of ways in which something like a pandemic can be experienced and academically understood through Foucauldian analysis. If academic debate previously stayed close to the most obvious repressive measurements, including disciplinary subjugation[53] and creative jurisdiction, the contributions in this special issue rather attend to how opinionated debate about such 'draconian policies'[54] fuelled confusion and generated everyday interest in the best way to govern among the general populace. Inspired by different contexts, the authors direct the reader away from an 'evil system of surveillance over will-less bodies'[55] to analyse instead how different truths and rationalities emerged via lay knowledge and ambiguously willing subjects. With different emphasis, the contributions thus 'evoke the contingency of the ways in which we have come to constitute ourselves as subjects and objects of our own practices of truth-telling'[56] in relation to the expressed pandemic.

Transnational crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have two broad social effects related to biopolitical logistics. That is, such crises expose the weak points in any social organisation and make its logistics appear in a new light. The pressure on hospitals, intensive care units and shortages of personal protective equipment, for example, exposed the already known unpreparedness of governments for the pandemic,[57] while the way in which biopolitics operates was clearly revealed with the hyperactive administration and regularization of populations that emerged. Analysis of the pandemic response therefore provides an opportunity, a sort of natural experiment that takes this exposure to its limits, by tracing mechanisms through

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[53] Anne Wagner, Aleksandra Matulewska, and Sarah Marusek, "Pandemica panoptica: Biopolitical management of viral spread in the age of COVID-19," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law - Revue Internationale de Sémiotique Juridique* (2021).

[54] Lars Erik Løvaas Gjerde, "Governing humans and 'things': power and rule in Norway during the COVID-19 pandemic," *Journal of Political Power* 14:3 (2021), 474.

[55] Bert De Munck, "The Human Body Must Be Defended: A Foucauldian and Latourian Take on COVID-19," *Journal for the History of Environment and Society* 5 (2020), 119.

[56] Rowland Curtis, "Foucault beyond Fairclough: From Transcendental to Immanent Critique in Organization Studies," *Organization Studies* 35:12 (2014), 1760.

[57] Stefan Elbe's argument in "Pandemics on the radar screen: health security, infectious disease and the medicalisation of insecurity," *Political Studies* 59:4 (2011) can be compared with a contrasting argument made by Lyle Fearnley, who suggests that 'the response to the COVID-19 pandemic [was] a successful demonstration of the global health security paradigm' and points out that the unpreparedness often has been taken for granted in "From global to planetary health: Two morphologies of pandemic preparedness," in *The Viral Politics of Covid-19: Nature, Home and Planetary*, eds. Vanessa Lemm and Miguel Vatter (2022), 16. Earlier outbreaks, such as SARS, MERS and Ebola, paved the way for the increased development of analysis and modelling for the anticipation of novel viral epidemics, which is why molecular sequencing capacity, as well as technologies for new vaccine development, were available. Much preparedness infrastructure was thus in place even though the shock of the pandemic was experienced as logistically overwhelming, especially for health services and people in general.

which biopolitics is logistically reinforced, even in unexpected, less instrumental, ways. In addition to direct instrumental management of populations, a transnational crisis can, in addition, increase a sense of social solidarity as a balance to overt state control. Social bonds that hold populations together are reinforced, as in the case of Brazil, with its emerging pandemic logistics at street level, and Latin America with its reactivation of networks of care and mutual aid.[58] These different ways in which biopolitical logistics are facilitated are two of the broad effects of the pandemic that have been explored in the papers in this special issue, and, no doubt, they will be further examined in years to come.

Taken together, the contributions craft nuanced insights about the accentuated re-investment in life and freedom that emerged and clarify that this re-investment was not mainly driven by disseminated expertise about viruses and epidemiology but by all the talk about oppressive power, security and freedom. COVID-19 thus 'evolved to become a debate about the distribution of power in society—central government versus local government, young versus old, rich versus poor, white versus black, health versus the economy'.[59] It was a debate that surfaced exceptionally well, fuelled by calls for transparency, to permeate the everyday and re-position the question: how to govern in the best way? As if enamored of power, open, enforced debate about how *not* to govern was, during and after the pandemic, seemingly hard to escape - even for Foucauldian-inspired intellectuals. We hope this special issue has managed to elucidate these and other productive power relations further, entertaining our mutual capacities to think about, and affirm, 'life' differently after pandemic times.

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[59] Richard Horton, "Offline: COVID-19—a crisis of power," *The Lancet* 396:10260 (2020), 1383.

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