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Biopolitical Tensions After Pandemic Times

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EDITORIAL

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The editorial team is most pleased to publish this issue of *Foucault Studies.* The special issue comprises an introduction, eight articles and an interview with Elizabeth Povinelli (Columbia University, United States of America). Furthermore, the issue contains one review essay and two book reviews.

SPECIAL ISSUE: BIOPOLITICAL TENSIONS AFTER PANDEMIC TIMES

Edited by Annika Skoglund (Uppsala University, Sweden), the special issue contains an introduction and the following articles: Jean-Paul Sarrazin & Fabián Aguirre (University of Antioquia, Colombia & Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Colombia): "Governmentality, Science and the Media. Examining the 'Pandemic Reality' with Foucault, Lyotard and Baudrillard"; Mark Kelly (Western Sydney University, Australia): "Securing the Pandemic: Biopolitics, Capital, and COVID-19"; Adam Herpolsheimer (Temple University, United States of America): "Plague, Foucault, Camus"; Todor Hristov (University of Sofia, Bulgaria): "Fragile Responsibilization: Rights and Risks in the Bulgarian Response to Covid-19"; Jorge Vélez Vega & Ricardo Noguera-Solano (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico): "A Critique of Pandemic Reason: Towards a Syndemic Noso-Politics"; Subhendra Bhowmick & Mursed Alam (Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, India & University of Gour Banga, India): Foucault Meets Novel Coronavirus: Biosociality, Excesses of Governmentality and the "Will to Live" of the Pandemicariat; Joelle Abi-Rached (Harvard University, United States of America): "Critical Friendship After the Pandemic"; Pablo Martin Mendez (National University of Lanús, Argentina), "The Covid-19 Pandemic and the Freedom-Security Tension: Calibrating their Fragile Relationship". In addition to these contributions, the special issue contains an interview with Elizabeth Povinelli (Columbia University, United States of America) pertaining to the theme of the special issue.

Delighted to publish these articles, the editors of Foucault Studies are most grateful to Annika Skoglund for editing the special issue in the most efficient and meticulous way. Likewise, the editors are thankful to the editors of the special issue for organizing and carrying out the interview with Elisabeth Povinelli. The focus of the special issue as well as the content of the individual contributions to the special issue are described in the introduction of the special issue, drafted by Annika Skoglund.

BOOK REVIEWS

The book review section of the present special issue contains the following review essay:

- Valentina Antoniol (University of Bari, Italy), "Metamorphosis of Biopolitics. A Foucauldian Ecological Perspective and the Challenge of the Pandemic: A Review Essay of Ottavio Marzocca, *Biopolitics for Beginners. Knowledge of Life and Government of People*, Milan/Udine: Mimesis International, 2020".

In addition to this review essay, the book review section of the present issue contains the following book reviews:

- "Biopolitics and Ancient Thought", book review of Jussi Backman and Antonio Cimino (ed.). *Biopolitics and Ancient Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Reviewed by Morten Thaning (Copenhagen Business School, Denmark).
- "Post-pandemic South Asian governmentalities and Foucault: State power and ordinary citizens", review of Stephen Legg and Deana Heath, *South Asian Governmentalities: Michel Foucault and the Question of Postcolonial Orderings.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018 and Nancy Luxon, *Archives of Infamy: Foucault on State Power in the Lives of Ordinary Citizens*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. Reviewed by Nasima Islam (University of Calcutta, India).

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

Since 2020, *Foucault Studies* has updated and clarified guidelines for footnote references and bibliography. Most important to note in this respect is that the journal articles have all text references in running footnotes with most of the bibliographical information about the source, while the list of references ending each article provides all bibliographical information about the source as well as the DOI of the given piece (if there is one).

With the introduction of these changes, Foucault Studies has significantly increased its service to its readers since they now have essential information ready to hand in both the article and on the page studied.

As a consequence, *Foucault Studies* kindly asks authors of future submissions to follow the updated guidelines before they submit articles. Complying with these guidelines makes the submission and review process, as well as copyediting, a lot easier and more expedient. The details of the updated guidelines can be found on the homepage here: https://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/foucault-studies/about/submissions.

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a book providing a full reference is made to *Foucault Studies* as the original place of publication.

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The journal is most grateful to managing editors Rachel Raffnsøe, Andreas Dahl Jakobsen and Mathias Mollerup Jørgensen for their most reliable and highly competent assistance in running the journal. With this issue, Andreas Dahl Jakobsen steps down as managing editor to assume responsibility for other tasks. The editorial group would like to extend a warm thanks for his work over the years. Concomitantly, we welcome Mathias Mollerup Jørgensen as new managing editor and look forward to the collaboration. In addition to thanking Rachel Raffnsøe for taking care of the journal in the very best way since 2021, we would also like to thank Stuart Pethick for copyediting this issue of *Foucault Studies* with great care and meticulousness. Likewise, we would like to offer our thanks to Rachel Raffnsøe for her great work in creating the cover of this issue of *Foucault Studies.* Cover art has been created by artist Apinder Swain and is used by courtesy of Dastkari Haat Samiti. Finally, we would like to extend our thanks to the *Department of Business Humanities and Law* at *Copenhagen Business School* for its continuous and firm support of the journal.

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SPECIAL ISSUE INTRODUCTION

Biopolitical Tensions after Pandemic Times

SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORS
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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

[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

[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, "[…]

[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

[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

[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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[58] Petra Priscila Cardia, Flávia Thedim Costa Bueno, Claudia Lopes Rodrigues, Leandro dos Reis Lage, Marisa Palácios, "Pandemic solidarity: society's responses to state insufficiency," *Ciênc. Saúde Coletiva* 27:11 (2022). Grupo de Pesquisa Cidade e Trabalho, "(Micro)políticas da vida em tempos de urgência," *Dilemas: Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social*, Rio de Janeiro, Reflexões na Pandemia (2020). Renato Abramowicz Santos, "Redes e territórios: Ações de enfrentamento a processos de despossessão em tempos de pandemia," *Dilemas: Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social*, Rio de Janeiro, Reflexões na Pandemia, (2020).

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

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ARTICLE

Governmentality, Science and the Media. Examining the "Pandemic Reality" with Foucault, Lyotard and Baudrillard

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ABSTRACT. This article examines the legitimization process of the public health preventive measures implemented in many Western countries following the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak. Through concepts such as governmentality, disciplinarization and security mechanisms proposed by Foucault, we trace some of the basic principles and implications of the relationship between biopower and medicine, as well as the media dissemination of an official narrative on scientific truth. These reflections are complemented by the contributions of Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. Lyotard reflects on the relationship between science and a "performative game", whose own staging is the core of its criteria of truth. Baudrillard shows the relevance of a "hyperreality" in which the signs presented by the media take precedence over the experience of the subjects. We argue that a mediatized version of science, defined through a strong disciplinarization of knowledge and the censorship of dissident voices, played a key role in the establishment of consensus and the legitimization of policies that granted extraordinary power to governments and transnational elites. Although the work of Foucault in this demonstration is essential, the contributions of Lyotard and Baudrillard provide additional elements to understand a fundamental problem: the public acceptance of "truth" as an instrument of governmentality on a global scale.

Keywords: Governmentality, pandemic, legitimation, scientific debate, biopower.

INTRODUCTION

Since the World Health Organization –WHO– declared in March 2020 that there was a "pandemic" caused by a new coronavirus (Sars-Cov-2), governments around the world imposed a series of "public health preventive measures", including, first and above all, mandatory lockdowns of entire populations, which were justified according to the

predictions of the "experts" –notably the mathematical models of a team co-sponsored by the WHO and led by Neil Ferguson at the Imperial College, London.[1]

At the same time, government officials, as well as most of the mainstream media, legacy media and news outlets –hereinafter, the media– constantly disseminated what we call an official narrative that can be summarized as follows: a highly contagious and lethal virus threatened to kill anyone; we could all be infected and pass it on even if we were "asymptomatic"; and there was no effective medicine against the disease, so we should all stay at home as long as possible and wait for science to find a vaccine.

After declaring the "state of exception", "state of emergency" or "state of urgency", depending on the country, governments were able to take decisions ignoring many legal considerations and political debates that are usually indispensable in constitutional democracies.[2] Government officials were then able to carry out enormous transfers of public money to private companies. Thus, public health measures implied an unprecedented expenditure of state resources and an extraordinarily high level of population control.[3] The empty avenues in the normally crowded and hectic cities seemed to be the realization of a "perfectly governed city", a totally "disciplined society", as described by Foucault.[4]

The forecasts derived from the mathematical simulation models were alarming, so governments thought they should spare no effort. Generalized and compulsory lockdowns were presented as urgent and absolutely necessary in March 2020. In China, they were successfully implemented some weeks before. Italy followed the example, then France and many other countries, with very rare exceptions such as Sweden. In the words of the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, the government's absolute priority was "to save lives, *whatever it takes*."[5] While these types of ideas were disseminated by the media, the people, mired in fear and uncertainty, only had to keep themselves "informed" and act "responsibly".

"To guide" the practices of entire populations in this rapid, unquestionable and generalized way is perhaps the most advanced and extreme expression of what Michel Foucault called governmentality, understood as "the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target."[6] The objective of this article is to present a critical analysis of how this contemporary form of governmentality was legitimized by presenting itself through the media as "scientific" and as the inevitable consequence of "facts" and "reality". This analysis does not imply, of course, denying the existence of the virus or its effects on health, nor is it intended to invalidate all types of preventive health measures. It is an inquiry into the legitimation of power. As

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[1] Neil Ferguson et al., "Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) to reduce COVID-19 mortality and healthcare demand," *Imperial College London*, 4.

[2] Laurent Mucchielli, *La Doxa du Covid. Tome I* (2022), 45.

[3] Carlos A. Gadea and Rafael Bayce, "Coronavirus: una pandemia hiperreal," *Estudios Sociológicos* 39:115 (2021), 215-217.

[4] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* [1975] (1995), 198.

[5] Chloé Hecketsweiler and Cédric Pietralunga, "Coronavirus : les simulations alarmantes des épidémiologistes pour la France," *Le Monde*, March 15 (2020).

[6] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78* (2009), 108.

Lorenzini[7] puts it, Foucault invites us to recognize "that power is not good or bad in itself, but that it is always dangerous (if accepted blindly, that is, without ever questioning it)". Paraphrasing Foucault's words when he defined the concept of "critique",[8] it is important to question the pandemic truth on its effects of power and to question power on its discourses of truth about the pandemic.

According to Rabinow and Rose, government decisions regarding a viral disease constitute "a biopolitical space par excellence".[9] Furthermore, it has been observed elsewhere and until very recently (2020) that epidemics (including Covid-19) have favored the development of some forms of political control that make use of blackmailing, censorship and the demonization of the opposition by presenting it as a danger to the integrity of society.[10] During epidemics, one can clearly observe the enforcement of a centralized and comprehensive *medical* knowledge with considerable effects on people's lives. Biopower, explained Foucault, "made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life".[11] This transformation of lives relies on a discourse of truth which grants legitimacy to government's decisions.[12]

Governments and their health authorities argued that they were simply "following the science", but what is that "science" that the rulers followed? This is the contemporary manifestation of the knowledge-power that we are questioning. The executive's decisions were justified –and even demanded by the public– after the media constantly reproduced the official narrative for several weeks and showed the "scientific data", the statistics, the epidemiological curves and the numbers, which were supposed to be "indisputable".[13] Those were the "facts"; that was the "pandemic reality".[14]

According to the above premises, anyone who questioned the decisions taken by the governments could be branded as "denialist", "anti-science", "ignorant", "conspiracy theorist", or "irresponsible". Further scientific debate or political discussion became undesirable and even dangerous. We only had to listen to certain experts with their data and predictions. The humanities, philosophy, or social sciences would have nothing to say here, as if there was nothing epistemic, social or political related to the "management" of this crisis; as if a political decision as extreme, risky, and uncertain as the lockdowns –

[7] Daniele Lorenzini, "Biopolitics in the Time of Coronavirus," *Critical Inquiry* 47:S2 (2021), S41.

[8] Michel Foucault, *Qu'est-ce que la critique? Suivi de La Culture de Soi* (2015), 39.

[9] Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, "Biopower Today," *BioSocieties* 1 (2006), 208.

[10] Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (2020). For more examples of the abuses of power, particularly in the Global South, see: Mariana Sirimarco, "Entre el cuidado y la violencia. Fuerzas de seguridad argentinas en pandemia y aislamiento," *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 78 (2021), 93-109.

[11] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. 1. The Will to Knowledge* [1976] (1978), 143.

[12] Costas Constantinou, "Responses to Covid-19 as a form of 'biopower'," *International Review of Sociology* 32:1 (2022), 29.

[13] Mucchielli, *Doxa du Covid*, 14.

[14] Epidemiologists who advised governments, however, presented estimates, possible future scenarios which were not at all *facts*.

considered "draconian" by various analysts,[15] and particularly harmful for poor people in the Global South[16] – did not deserve some kind of discussion.

The analysis presented in this article begins with a revision of Foucault's work in order to show some relevant examples of how knowledge-power has been constituted. We can thus see how medicine, as part of a disciplinary mechanism, contributes to the process by which biopower penetrates all aspects of human life. On the other hand, we notice that medical science has been subjected to a process of "disciplinarization" by powerful actors on a global scale (such as large corporations and institutions of transnational governance), a process that has been overshadowed by the wide-spread belief that public health measures have nothing to do with politics and come from some sort of "independent" and "pure" research.[17]

Going beyond the "disciplinary mechanisms", we explore in a novel way Foucault's concept of "security mechanism", which proves to be useful in order to understand the legitimation of specific policies and the important role of the media in this process. That is why the last section of this article presents the thoughts of François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard, who – as Foucault did – delved into the question of language, truth and power. The three thinkers lived in the same period of time (until Foucault's premature death, of course), and can be considered as important contributors to the French post-structuralist movement. However, Baudrillard and Lyotard explored further the role of contemporary *media* communications and their effects on society.

In modern democracies, governments persistently appeal to expert and distant knowledge, in which we – as consumers of information – simply have to believe. According to Lyotard,[18] the proscenium of that science is the "performative game" of the media, in which the chosen signs reduce complexity to a Manichean duality of efficiency/inefficiency. And if we refer to the importance of the "truth" and "reality" presented by the media, the contributions of Baudrillard are also very relevant. Mathematical models, with their future scenarios, constitute a clear example of the "simulacra"[19] that, preceding reality, supplanting the very possibility of an event, are today, with their added "scientific nature", an outstanding instrument of governmentality.

WORDS, FACTS AND POWER

To say that power seeks to legitimize itself by appealing to the scientific nature of its decisions is, of course, nothing new. At least since the 19th century, a "good government" is the one which, supposedly, listens to science and molds its decisions accordingly. Even neoliberalism has been presented as a set of recommendations based solely on science.

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[15] Lars Gjerde, "Governing Humans and 'Things': Power and Rule in Norway During the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Political Power* 14:3 (2021), 472-492.

[16] See, for example: https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/pandemic-prompts-rise-poverty-levels-unprecedented-recent-decades-and-sharply-affects. See also: https://razonpublica.com/pobreza-abandono-ninos-adolescentes-la-pandemia-una-tragedia-callada/.

[17] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic. An Archaeology of Medical Perception* [1963] (2003), 51-52.

[18] Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984).

[19] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1995).

But during this pandemic episode of global governance, the name of science has been evoked in a particularly insistent manner. The extraordinary policies implemented in this period needed a very convincing justification in order to be accepted. A particular type of "hard science" (represented by the natural sciences, virology, or mathematics, amongst others) provided that special justification with its precise data, the numbers (which "never lie"), the statistical projections, and the unquestionable facts.

That is also the manifestation of a growing neoliberal tendency that Rose called "policy as numbers". Others have noted that "numbers are increasingly used to justify policy priorities. […They are] assumed to report 'the facts'; they are seen as authoritative, neutral, dispassionate, and objective". To believe this, we would have to ignore what sociology of science has empirically unveiled decades ago: that all scientific theorizing (and the "facts" they talk about) is a social construction. "Economic forces [for instance] tie down the researcher both as an independent capitalist and as an employee; in this position it is easy enough to squeeze him so as to extract a fact." The "reality", the "facts", and the statistics presented to us by the authorities in the media are all necessarily "fabricated" by humans. The same must be said about numbers, which are "no more obvious, neutral, and factual than any other form of data. Statistics are socially constructed in exactly the same way that interview data and survey returns are constructed". So, even "hard science facts" are the product of long chains of "mediations" in which many types of actors intervene. This does not automatically make them false (or fabricated by some malevolent conspirators, of course), but it reminds us that scientific statements are not the same as the objects they speak of, logos is not reality, and, to put it in Latour's terms, "facts" are not "autonomous."

Having partially inspired the sociology of science referred to above, Foucault noted that we must identify the "conditions necessary for the appearance of an object of discourse, […]the conditions necessary if it is to exist in relation to other objects". Any scientific discourse establishes some particular categories, defines its objects and, by the same token, it excludes other objects. Power/knowledge establishes categories, distinctions, and separations that are inserted into language and allow for the "appearance" of certain objects which are then taken for granted by the population. In 2020, as the "epidemiological curves" became the reality that we should care about, the "experts" and the media installed in our daily language unusual categories such as "asymptomatic cases"[20] and "covid deaths". The very word "pandemic" (with its fearful connotations) is now widely used to speak about the Covid-19 outbreak, but this is only possible because the WHO recently changed its definition of the word, so the number of cases and the severity of the disease would no longer be relevant.[21]

[20] The "asymptomatic" category has important biopolitical consequences. See Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (2007).

[21] The new definition is very short and simple: "A pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease". Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20190926022012/https://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/frequently_asked_questions/pandemic/en/ (accessed November 10, 2022).

Foucault invites us to question precisely what is taken for granted and to put into practice a "*rupture des évidences*"[22] upon which we build our knowledge and our consent. He insists that it is not a matter of finding out what is true and what is false (regarding the biological characteristics of a virus, for example); instead, we should be interested in "the connections which can be found between the mechanisms of coercion and the elements of knowledge."[23] It is a matter of unraveling the conditions and processes that allow a "fact" to be accepted as such without being questioned.[24]

THE EXCLUSIVE OWNERSHIP OF TRUTH

As we have seen, the pandemic "reality" and the "facts" allegedly came from scientific "experts". This authority "also involves the rules and processes of appropriation of discourse"[25]. In the midst of power relations, certain individuals or groups seize the "right to speak, ability to understand, licit and immediate access to the corpus of already formulated statements, and the capacity to invest this discourse in decisions, institutions, or practices".[26]

The United Nations' (UN) Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications (Melissa Fleming) said in an interview organized by the World Economic Forum (WEF) that the UN had worked with Big Tech companies, including Google and TikTok, to control information related to this "pandemic" and to climate change. She also acknowledged that the UN worked with doctors from all over the world, training them on how they should communicate and interact with their local communities. She asserted boldly: "We own the science, and we think that the world should know it".[27] Likewise, Anthony Fauci, then the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at the United States National Institutes of Health, one of the most media-covered bureaucrats, adviser to the presidency of that country and an important propagator of the official narrative, said: "I represent science", so "if you're attacking me, you're really attacking science. I mean, everybody knows that."[28]

While the media widely disseminated the words of those "authoritative" voices, public critics were stigmatized and excluded from public debate.[29] Big Tech companies and news agencies collaborated in this global crusade for "truth". Moreover, in the task of stigmatizing and discrediting voices not aligned with the official narrative, "fact-checkers" have contributed considerably; they appear to be independent agents who work purely for the

[22] Michel Foucault, *Qu'est-ce que la critique?*, 76.
[23] Ibid., 51.
[24] Ibid., 53.
[25] Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 68.
[26] Ibid., 68.
[27] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnarHXcGN8M Minute 47 (accessed May 15, 2022).
[28] https://www.cbsnews.com/news/transcript-dr-anthony-fauci-on-face-the-nation-november-28-2021/ (accessed July 20, 2022)
[29] Mitchell Liester, "The Suppression of Dissent During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 11:4 (2022), 53-76.

sake of truth, swiftly and decisively dismissing what would be false on the Internet.[30] We do not really know how they do it, and they do not disclose their research methodology, but their financial sources can be revealed. Reuters, Facebook, Google and Microsoft have their own fact-checkers. Many others work under the umbrella of the International Fact-Checking Network, which is run by the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, "a non-profit journalism school whose main financial supporters include Google and Facebook."[31] It is not surprising that the opinions of fact-checkers have great visibility in the Google search engine and in Facebook's social networks. Moreover, many smaller and apparently independent journalistic sites around the world resorted to these fact-checkers to report on the pandemic "reality".[32]

The UN Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications also affirmed that the UN has "worked" with "influencers", fact-checkers and with Google so that people can only access the "right" information. They wanted to *purify* our "polluted information ecosystems",[33] and that meant canceling or discrediting anything against the official narrative. Likewise, for the WHO, it was necessary to mobilize resources in order to fight the spread of the, so called, "misinformation" since the beginning of 2020.[34] Correspondingly, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have made considerable efforts to suppress videos, messages and personal accounts that presumably contradicted the governments and health authorities.[35]

Through these types of initiatives (which surely require considerable amounts of money), many of us could, at first, believe that there was a total consensus on this pandemic "reality".

But the apparent unity of a discourse, Foucault warned,[36] should not be confused with the absence of disputes, contradictions and exclusions that existed before a discourse is imposed. Although many critiques against the official narrative were based on claims which could not be scientifically proven (and some of them were simply lies favoring a political party), it is also necessary to recognize that many highly qualified scientists were excluded from the public debate after 2020. They questioned the public health measures and many of the fundamental "facts" about this pandemic. Some of their findings can be summarized as follows:

A) The lethality of the virus was much lower than the official numbers disseminated by the media.[37] B) Mathematical models used to forecast the evolution of epidemics have

[30] In many cases, of course, these fact-checkers and other agents looking for "misinformation" contributed to denouncing clearly false messages, like the ones proposing to inject bleach in the veins to kill the virus.
[31] Yaffa Shir-Raz, Ety Elisha, Brian Martin, Natti Ronel, Josh Guetzkow, "Censorship and Suppression of Covid.19 Heterodoxy: Tactics and Counter-Tactics," *Minerva* (1 Nov., 2022), 21.
[32] Mucchielli, *Doxa du Covid*, 103
[33] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnarHXcGN8M (accessed May 15, 2022).
[34] https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/let-s-flatten-the-infodemic-curve (accessed October, 2022).
[35] Shir-Raz et al., Censorship and Suppression, 9.
[36] Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1982).
[37] John Ioannidis, "Reconciling estimates of global spread and infection fatality rates of COVID- 19: An overview of systematic evaluations," *European Journal of Clinical Investigation* 51:5 (2021), 1-3.

failed too frequently.[38] C) The true causes of all the deaths could not be established with certainty, especially because most of the cases involved elderly people with co-morbidities.[39] D) There was not enough rigor to clearly distinguish who died with coronavirus (i.e., with a positive test result) and who really died of Covid-19; this lack of clarity is partly because RT-PCR tests are not suitable for diagnosing a disease.[40] E) Many people may have died not due to COVID-19 complications but because of the protocols used to treat the disease imposed indiscriminately by medical bureaucracies.[41] F) The protocols and recommendations of the global authorities prevented local doctors from using all their know-how and experience to help the sick.[42] G) The use of off-label medicines that could have saved lives was rejected.[43] H) New rules were established for the completion of death certificates that made Covid-19 appear more frequently as the cause of death.[44]

These types of critical remarks suggest that the official numbers of "covid deaths" could be questioned from a scientific point of view. Therefore, the cost/benefit ratio would not be so clearly in favor of the lockdowns (or, perhaps, many of the other health policies). We now know about the extreme harms caused by the lockdowns, harms which are even greater in the global South, where poverty has drastically worsened due to the limitations imposed by governments[45]. Even Ferguson's team admitted that their recommendation to "stay home" did not take into account *any* social or economic consequences.[46]

On the contrary, the scientists who pointed out the dangers of the lockdowns, or those who questioned the statistics, the protocols, etc. (as described above), were censored by the media and most of the main social networks;[47] they were also smeared in their own

[38] John Ioannidis, Sally Cripps, and Martin Tanner, "Forecasting for COVID-19 has failed," *International Journal of Forecasting* 38:2, 423–438. It should also be noted that Neil Ferguson's renowned model was based on "expert opinions" (without references), data from China (no comments on the reliability of this source), and "personal communications". See Ferguson et al. "Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions," 4.

[39] John Ioannidis, Catherine Axfors, Despina Contopoulos-Ioannidis, "Population-level COVID-19 mortality risk for non-elderly individuals overall and for non-elderly individuals without underlying diseases in pandemic epicenters," *Environmental Research* 188 (2020), 109890.

[40] Christian Perronne, *Les 33 questions auxquelles ils n'ont toujours pas répondu* (2022). See also Karina Reiss and Sucharit Bhakdi, *Corona, False Alarm?: Facts and Figures* (2020).

[41] John Leake and Peter McCullough, *The Courage to Face COVID-19: Preventing Hospitalization and Death While Battling the Bio-Pharmaceutical Complex* (2022).

[42] Russell Blaylock, "COVID Update: What is the truth?," *Surgical Neurology International* 13:167 (2022), 1-14. See also Laurent Mucchielli, *La Doxa du Covid (*2022).

[43] Paul Alexander et al. "Early multidrug treatment of SARS-CoV-2 infection (COVID-19) and reduced mortality among nursing home (or outpatient/ambulatory) residents," *Medical Hypotheses* 153 (2021), 110622.

[44] David Armstrong, "The COVID-19 pandemic and cause of death," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 43:7 (2021), 1614-1626.

[45] See, for instance: https://www.oxfam.org.nz/news-media/media-releases/covid-vaccines-create-9-new-billionaires/ (accessed May 1, 2022), and https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-chief-warns-hunger-pandemic-covid-19-spreads-statement-un-security-council (accessed November 15, 2021).

[46] Ferguson et al. "Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions," 2.

[47] Carlos Cáceres, "Unresolved COVID controversies: 'Normal science' and potential non-scientific influences," *Global Public Health* 17:4 (2022), 622-640.

academic communities and attacked by some official institutions.[48] A case that illustrates this problem is "The Great Barrington Declaration". Despite being written by highly recognized researchers in the field of public health, with outstanding careers at universities such as Oxford, Harvard and Stanford, this declaration was ignored by public health authorities, and its authors were stigmatized, called "fringe doctors", and canceled from social networks because they questioned the convenience of some measures.[49]

All the above-mentioned elements contributed to the delusion that the entire "scientific community", in a fully consensual manner, agreed with the official narrative and had no doubts about the "facts", the statistics, the curves and the recommendations given by the authorities. Furthermore, when the governments confidently say to the public that they are just "following science" (and people actually believe it), they seem to refer to an abstract, fictitious entity –which we will write hereinafter with a capital S–, a unified, indivisible and undisputed "Science", where absolute truth is produced without any political or economic interference. That apparently unquestioned and consensual "Science" was constantly evoked by the media, transnational organizations such as the WHO and the WEF, as well as by local authorities and institutions.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDICINE AND POWER

To understand the relationship between biopower and medicine, it is useful to consider Foucault's genealogical research into the history of power in the West, particularly the Church's pastoral power. The pastor governed the subject, guiding his/her thoughts and behavior, leading her/him towards salvation. "To govern" is "to direct"[50] in a physical sense and "to conduct someone" in the "spiritual sense of the government of souls".[51]

Later, it could be said that "the doctor governs the patient"[52] by imposing a certain regimen that would lead to health. The concept of "health", by the way, is related to that of "salvation". The link is not anodyne or simply etymological. From the eighteenth century on, "health replaces salvation".[53] Consequently, the medical profession "organized like the clergy" and was invested with powers over the body and mind similar to those exercised by the clergy over the souls.[54]

Just as the concept of salvation was an important instrument of power in medieval populations, the concept of health may also be functional to power in modernity. Furthermore, just as the Church's power was unquestioned by those who imagined it as a quasi-divine, pure and purifying entity, and beholder of sacred truths, Foucault reminds us that modern medical science enjoys a positive image since it is linked to the "great myth of the free gaze, which, in its fidelity to discovery receives the virtue to destroy; a purified

[48] Ety Elisha et al., "Retraction of scientific papers: the case of vaccine research," *Critical Public Health* 32:4 (2021), 533-542.
[49] Yaffa Shir-Raz et al., "Censorship and Suppression," (2022), 5 (Advance online publication).
[50] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78* (2009), 121.
[51] Ibid., 121.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, 198.
[54] Ibid., 31.

purifying gaze; which freed from darkness, dissipates darkness".[55] Correspondingly, the WHO can take, in a certain way and to some degree, the place that the Church had before. The WHO would be the institution where pure (disinterested) and purifying truths are produced for the world's salvation.

Thanks to the "medicalization of society",[56] medicine has become an instrument of power since at least the 18th century. The power of the biomedical sector has progressively grown, and today it has reached unprecedented proportions. Indeed, according to Rothman, we live today under a "biomedical empire" which is "more powerful than global industry—extending beyond each neoliberal government".[57] In these "pandemic times", its influence on our lives has become more obvious than ever, deepening and expanding a trend that began, as Foucault noted, centuries ago.

Foucault[58] observed that in the eighteenth century there was a process of homogenization, normalization and centralization of medical knowledge by the State. This modern "disciplinarization of knowledge"[59] means that truth can be established by centralized structures and pronounced only by certain authorities. The disciplinarization of medicine has been taking place through various strategies that range from the simple imposition of rules and codes to the payment of doctors' salaries and the financing of their research.[60]

Today, medicine is not only disciplined by the State (as described by Foucault). Most importantly, medicine is subjected to the authority of transnational organizations such as the WHO (or its multiple subdivisions in different regions of the world). However, it must be said that this organization's decisions depend on those who finance its research and its priorities.[61] Two of the most important donors to the WHO are the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and The Vaccine Alliance–GAVI (founded and funded by the same Gates Foundation). "Philanthropic" initiatives such as the Gates Foundation are important players in the new forms of power under financial capitalism, influencing the agendas of the organizations they support.[62] Other "authorities" in the biomedical sector, such as the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or the European Medicines Agency (EMA), are also heavily funded by private capital, mainly by the pharmaceutical companies.[63] So, most of the medical research and large clinical trials depend on global capital and its interests. This situation was already there, even before this "pandemic", as published by former

[55] Ibid., 51-52.
[56] Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, 32
[57] Barbara Rothman, *The Biomedical Empire: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic* (2021), 25
[58] Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*.
[59] For a reference to this concept, see: Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (2003), 174-186.
[60] Ibid., 48-53.
[61] John Harrington, "Indicators, Security and Sovereignty during COVID-19 in the Global South," *International Journal of Law in Context* 17:2 (2021), 249–60.
[62] Linsey McGoey, *No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy* (2015).
[63] Jon Jureidini and Leemon B. McHenry, "The illusion of evidence based medicine," *British Medical Journal* 376 (2022).

editors of prestigious journals such as The Lancet[64] or the New England Journal of Medicine.[65]

That type of medical research is, however, the source of legitimacy for many public health policies which affect the lives of billions of people, as we saw in 2020. The medical "guidance" of populations is therefore a form of "governmentality", understood basically as one of "the ways of conducting the conduct of men".[66] These capacities go beyond the direct action of the medical doctor on the patients. Doctors and local healthcare providers are "guided" (i.e., governed) by the "information", the standards and the recommendations coming from organizations such as the WHO.

The power of modern medicine resides partially in its ability to see what common people cannot. Since the 18th century, medicine "anticipated the invisible by means of a visible mapping out".[67] The potential of medical forecasting as a technology of governmentality is clearly observed through the case of this pandemic, when the mathematical simulations were presented as indisputable knowledge about a future catastrophe. The "experts" in the media made visible the "pandemic" with the help of very simple and colorful images, graphs and curves. In this way, we were supposed to see and understand this "reality" and the need for the preventive measures.

And with the same mathematical precision, the experts anticipated the end of this "pandemic". We were first told that once 70% of the population would get vaccinated, we would achieve "herd immunity", the virus would disappear and "the nightmare" would be over. Those words seemed to be appealing to the myth (referred to above) of "total disappearance of disease in an untroubled, dispassionate society restored to its original state of health".[68] This state is reached, in Foucault's terms, thanks to a "strict, militant, dogmatic medicalization of society, by way of a quasi-religious conversion".[69] In our case, we all had to believe in the total medicalization of society as the only way out of "the nightmare". Any doubt (or lack of faith) would be dangerous, especially if it made other people doubt.

The concept of health is closely related to the concept of security. So, medicalization of society also means, according to our global leaders, the only way to recover our *security*, another key concept within the mechanisms of governmentality, as we shall see in the next section of this article. Later, in 2021, the authorities from the Gavi Alliance,[70] UNICEF[71] and the WHO[72] told us that "no one is safe until everyone is safe". This type of

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[64] Richard Horton, "Offline: What is medicine's 5 sigma?," *The Lancet* 385:9976 (2015).

[65] Marcia Angell, "The pharmaceutical industry. To whom is it accountable?," *The New England Journal of Medicine* 342:25 (2000), 1902-1904.

[66] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79* (2008), 186.

[67] *Birth of the Clinic*, 91.

[68] *Birth of the Clinic*, 31-32.

[69] Ibid. 32.

[70] https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/no-one-safe-until-everyone-safe?gclid=CjwKCAjwpKyYBhB7EiwAU2Hn2bsiddt5Om9kYJMGiIxcOrzEqGl42F70Fcw0xneWvAgvR1KPz94IZBoCmqcQAvD_BwE

[71] https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/no-one-safe-until-everyone-safe-why-we-need-global-response-covid-19 (accessed May 1, 2022)

[72] https://www.who.int/news-room/photo-story/photo-story-detail/No-one-is-safe-from-COVID19-until-everyone-is-safe (accessed May 1, 2022)

sentence was meant to promote the vaccination of every human being. The founder and executive chairman of the WEF, Klaus Schwab, said it more directly: "As long as not everybody is vaccinated, no one will be safe". We must now deepen our reflection on the concept of *security* according to Foucault's contributions.

SECURITY MECHANISMS AND THE MEDIA

The idea of medical (in)security has played a key role in the discourse of influential organizations like the ones mentioned above. Potential risks justified the draconian measures, and we should all obey in order to be safe. Again, the strategy is not new. As Foucault noted, from the eighteenth century, the notions of risk and security provide justification to a particular technology of power: "security mechanisms".[73]

In principle, security mechanisms, according to a modern *Raison d'Etat*, "have to be installed around the random element inherent in a population of living beings so as to optimize a state of life".[74] This is a technology to govern more and to govern better. "The mechanisms introduced by biopolitics include forecasts, statistical estimates, and overall measures".[75] Their goal is to achieve a certain state of life that is considered, by the elites, as desirable. They define the limits of what is "acceptable" and "optimal for a given social functioning".[76] Thus, when the measurements, statistics and calculations indicate that a certain phenomenon is going beyond the "acceptable limits",[77] the interventions of the governments (a lockdown, for example) would become legitimate.

Statistics as a tool for biopower, in our current case, should not be understood merely as useful data for elites to take their decisions. Today, populations have received higher degrees of education than in past centuries, so they can read numbers and supposedly understand statistical curves when shown on a T.V. screen. Those numbers and curves, together with the explanations about the "risks", the "safe" or the "acceptable" were presented by the media as the justification for the measures. And just as the Science (referred to above) would be the site for the production of perfect and pure knowledge, statistics enjoy an image of mathematical precision and transparent objectivity. The figures and forecasts related to "Covid deaths" would then be unquestionable. Besides, the statistical curves showed –again, with the unmistakable clarity of a red line on our screens– that in the future those deaths would reach an "unacceptable" number, so we should have to do "whatever it takes" (like Macron said) to "flatten the curve".

Along with the establishment of the limits of what is (un)acceptable, as we have seen, the notion of "risk" is crucial for security mechanisms.[78] Nowadays, thanks to the media, this notion is to be communicated to the people, who then have to believe that there is a

[73] We will use this expression as equivalent to "mechanisms of security" or "security apparatuses", which are also used in different English versions of the original texts, and correspond to the French expressions of "mécanismes de sécurité" or "dispositifs de sécurité".

[74] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 246.

[75] Ibid., 246

[76] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 5.

[77] Ibid., 66.

[78] Ibid., 56-75.

threat; a "real risk" that can only be avoided if they behave in a certain way. This is how security mechanisms serve the purpose of "conducting the conducts".[79] There was nothing more instrumentalized by governments and the media than the notion-emotion of risk during this "pandemic". As regards the new coronavirus, the perceived risk was maximized by the media. All public attention was focused on one object, and nothing seemed to be more important in social life in 2020.

Security mechanisms developed together with the liberal (and capitalist) praise of freedom.[80] Under this technology of power, people are meant to move according to their own will, but they are governed (conducted or directed) through the modifications of the environment in which they live. This is why security mechanisms may seem less coercive than disciplinary devices, and for that very reason they may be more successful (and less noticed by self-appointed "critical thinkers") in our liberal modernity. Security mechanisms "will try to plan a milieu in terms of events or series of events or possible elements, of series that will have to be regulated within a multivalent and transformable framework".[81] They try to influence the movements of populations by changing their "milieu", and they are based on the study of causal relations: a change somewhere in the milieu will cause a certain effect somewhere else. It is about knowing, "through calculation, analysis, and reflection",[82] precisely what type of interventions will have a certain effect on populations and their movements.

Security mechanisms modify not only natural elements (by building roads or flooding fields, for example) but also any "elements of reality" related directly or indirectly to populations.[83] In our actual world, the milieu in which we live is filled with new information and communication technologies. We spend an increasing amount of time consuming data in front of our screens. This new, mediatized and digitalized milieu can be understood through the concept of the "infosphere", as proposed by Luciano Floridi. The infosphere is the informational environment in which we spend more and more time, and which is characterized by the growth of the digital space;[84] the infosphere includes alphanumeric texts, statistical data, hypertexts, pictures, mathematical formulae, video clips, etc.[85]

Considering that the security mechanism makes calculated changes to the milieu, some interventions in the infosphere can be a contemporary manifestation of this technology of power. In the context of this pandemic, some calculations would lead us to think that it was necessary to "flood" the infosphere with certain contents so that people would freely behave as the elites expected. An example of such calculations took place during "Event 201". Held at the end of 2019, this event brought together a group of powerful

[79] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 186.
[80] Ibid., 41-48.
[81] Ibid., 20.
[82] Ibid., 72.
[83] Ibid., 65-66.
[84] Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality* (2014).
[85] Betsy Van der Veer Martens, "An illustrated introduction to the Infosphere," *Library Trends* 63:3 (2015), 317-361.

organizations, such as The Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security,[86] the WEF and the Gates Foundation. They carried out a drill to establish the global measures that would be necessary in case a very dangerous virus, capable of spreading via the respiratory tract, would spread throughout the world (something surprisingly similar to what the media presented to us a few weeks later). As a result of the analysis and calculations made at this event, it was recommended to develop "the ability to flood media with fast, accurate, and consistent information",[87] in order to achieve global compliance to the measures and thus guarantee the security of the planet.

As we know, such "flooding" with an official narrative indeed took place from the beginning of 2020, involving not only the media but also many "alternative", "liberal" news outlets, social media platforms, and communication networks of all sorts. All of them "worked" with the UN and the WEF in a joint crusade to put Science and the "right information" in all our communication devices. We saw practically nothing else for months, and from the start of the lockdowns, it was very improbable to see any other points of view or critiques. Everywhere we looked, there was the same type of information. For instance, when we searched for information on quite unrelated topics, Google provided images, numbers or descriptions according to the official narrative. Even the *Google Maps* application showed official information on the pandemic, although we were just looking for an address.

LYOTARD AND BAUDRILLARD: LANGUAGE, TRUTH AND POWER

We have seen, with Foucault, some of the mechanisms which fuse the official narrative (presented as the only truth) and the exercise of power. In particular, how the security mechanisms allow setting complete control of an environment for a population. This line of thinking faces us with concepts related as "simulacra", defined for its capacity to replace the reality for its operational signs; and "performative game", the truth criteria of which depend on its own scope to unfold before the public. So, Lyotard notes that for the State or the capitalist partners of multinational companies, "scientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power".[88] On the other hand, the philosopher warns, science no longer finds its sacred enclosure in the university cloister; nor does it find its epistemic foundation, its legitimization, in philosophy, and its "decision makers" are no longer those of early modernity.[89] The displacement of this legitimizing element on which science rests in contemporary society lies at the core of the radical changes of strategy, scope and main actors that came into play during this "pandemic".

[86] Funded by the Gates Foundation. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_%26_Melinda_Gates_Foundation (accessed November 1, 2022).
[87] https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/exercises/event201/recommendations.html
[88] Jean Francois Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 46.
[89] Ibid., 49-50.

The question of knowledge is now more than ever a question of government.[90] For media Science (the Science presented to us by the media) as an instrument of power, what matters is its "performance". The strength of that turn is evidenced in the language game that has been privileged; the performative staging anchored in the "sensationalism" that subordinates and contains the language games of the true (denotative) and the fair (prescriptive) and exploits them through another type of town crier. The effigy of the certifier placed in the university cloister can no longer face a gigantic, mediatized staging.

> A crude proof of this: what do scientists do when they appear on television or are interviewed in the newspapers after making a "discovery"? They recount an epic of knowledge that is in fact wholly unepic. They play by the rules of the narrative game; its influence remains considerable not only on the users of the media, but also on the scientist's sentiments.[91]

When the performative game of language is privileged, we face the installation of a hermetic and inscrutable order, a tautological and circular form of totalization and totalitarianism, a form of "terror" –in the words of Lyotard[92]– in which all entities fit perfectly into the puzzle and nothing is questionable. The same media are the ones that provide the proof of their truth, which depends on its translatability into the simplified journalistic format and, in this way, becomes credible to the consumer public. Great scientific rigor (and even extreme secrecy) is practiced when it comes to discovering truths that will contribute to the development of technology (vaccines, for instance), but to open the debate (indispensable in science) about a global health policy does not seem desirable. The Science, precise (mathematical), triumphant, perfectly complete and immune to any criticism, is a very useful image for the State, as noted by Lyotard: "The state spends large amounts of money to enable science to pass itself off as an epic: the State's own credibility is based on that epic, which it uses to obtain the public consent its decision makers need".[93] In a pandemic, it is not appropriate to reflect on the measures; what matters is to "guide" and obey. From this perspective, philosophy and social sciences must keep quiet. They have nothing important to say, and they are not accurate enough; it is the time for technocrats to circumscribe, manipulate and guide as much as possible the flow of events in our lives, which delimit at their convenience the order of the possible.

With Lyotard, we notice that when the governments, local or global, use a statement such as "the population must be confined", their effect of power coincides with the statement, immediately installing us in the new reality thus created a bleak reality of deserted avenues. Instantly confined, bombarded by the staging of a discourse of performative legitimation, dazed and terrified, isolated from other social realities, our relevant reality is reduced to the screens, and we are fully installed in the bewildering realm of the tautological circulation of equivalent meanings. The postmodern condition is not about the lack of truth. It does not refer to a different period in history, as a naïve reader could think; it

[90] Ibid., 9.
[91] Ibid., 27-28.
[92] Ibid., 46.
[93] Ibid., 28.

is rather a case of how the legitimization displacement, according to the performative game of truth, has built an impenetrable shell in our global society, subsuming the language's modern games of legitimization (prescriptive and denotative) and locking down the whole population in a global governability with no cracks of dissent. It is also about how totalization, through the translatability of a complex message into media and the spreading of this message in this techno-science era, makes the debate suspect around "Democracy" (with capital letters), and, indeed, it works as a smokescreen.

"The terror" of the consensus channelled by media Science blocks all critical perspectives, describing and explaining "reality as it is", while only allowing the circulation of simplified truths structured with the same speed with which it has elaborated its facts. "Nothing inscribed on these screens is ever intended to be deciphered in any depth: rather, it is supposed to be explored instantaneously, in an abreaction immediate to meaning, a short-circuiting of the poles of representation".[94] We all repeated that simple "reality" on a daily basis; any questioning would be reduced to "denialism".

As we saw in 2020 and 2021, great efforts can be made to ensure that only one universal and definitive Science is imposed in the public space. All kinds of devices were arranged to protect this Science from potential non-aligned scientists. That is why:

> Countless scientists have seen their "move" ignored or repressed, sometimes for decades, because it too abruptly destabilized the accepted positions, not only in the university and scientific hierarchy, but also in the problematic. The stronger the "move," the more likely it is to be denied the minimum consensus, precisely because it changes the rules of the game upon which consensus had been based. But when the institution of knowledge functions in this manner, it is acting like an ordinary power center whose behavior is governed by a principle of homeostasis.[95]

The performative characteristic of this privileged type of governmentality implies the decoding of a message in terms of elements of a system of communicable signs: transparent, effective, mass consumable and simple: "if we manage to vaccinate 70% of the population, we will be able to remove our masks", or, "stay home, save lives". The translatability of the message to a communicable code depended, during this "pandemic", on reducing the complexity of the contingent to a system of signs and messages easy to understand by the entire global population. This communication process equates "reality" with measurements and data. This is why Baudrillard raises the question: "If information referred not to events but to the promotion of information itself qua event? If communication were concerned not with messages but instead with the promotion of communication itself qua myth?".[96]

Examining the importance of media communications, Baudrillard proposes the concept of "simulacra", defined by its capacity to replace reality for its operational signs on the screens. We consider that mediatized Science is part of the "precession of the

[94] Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena* (1993), 54.
[95] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 63.
[96] Baudrillard, *Transparency of Evil*, 50.

simulacra".[97] The catastrophic scenario that justified the most draconian policies was *first* and above all that of the simulations and mathematical models presented on our screens. In the reduction of meaning to the circulation of significations within a system of signs, as it is the case of mediatized Science, our non-mediatized experiences had to be ignored and be replaced by the duplication of its operative signs. Most of us were constantly consuming signs of the catastrophe, thereby suffering from the pandemic (and the new pandemic rules) without suffering from the disease. And the (very real) suffering caused by the governments' measures, such as lockdowns or other mobility restrictions, is still confused with the sign "pandemic".

"The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory –precession of simulacra– that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map"[98]. We had to rely completely on the map drawn by this mediatized Science in order to move; we had to see nothing but the map to conduct ourselves. "Simulation is characterized by a precession of the model, of all the models based on the merest fact - the models come first […]".[99] The mathematical simulations that predicted a terrifying reality of indefinite exponential growth were what we had to look at with total attention and mechanical assent. For the public, everything is framed and manipulated within a "neutral" informational space in an aseptic setting. Local politicians had to follow this "information" and the public opinion thus fabricated. In Baudrillard's terms, "there is nothing now to protect politicians from the virus of opinion; but nothing protects that opinion from the virus of information".[100]

The numbers, announced by the authorities in the media, were a more perfect, precise and real reality than the reality experienced in our local communities. They were what Baudrillard called the "hyperreality".[101] The growing media coverage – the omnipresence of the infosphere– allows "hyperreality" to prevail. It is a reality more important than anything else, with its truths, its facts; it is intended to cover the entire territory, preventing any other perceptions, perspectives or experiences. Behind each piece of information, an event disappears, and virtuality covers the territory. "It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double".[102]

In 2020, there was a hyperreality vociferated as "scientific".[103] This hyperreality then turned into the daily rumor of the people themselves, becoming common sense and public opinion. "The magnified impression of a catastrophe goes viral. […It is the] social construction of an excess believed to be scientific and prudent".[104] Paradoxically, people

[97] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1995).
[98] Ibid, 3.
[99] Ibid., 13.
[100] Jean Baudrillard, *Screened Out* (2002), 173.
[101] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.
[102] Ibid., 4
[103] Gadea and Bayce, "Coronavirus: una pandemia hiperreal," 228. [Our translation].
[104] Ibid., 225.

sought to alleviate the anxiety and uncertainty generated by the media by consuming more information in the media. In this way, there was a "hyperreal certainty."[105]

We also witness here a modern obsession for the emancipation from contingency through control, through the annihilation of an "enemy". The result is not virus control but social control by manipulating the signs of the virus, achieving the most impressive blow of governmentality on a planetary scale. Power depends on virtuality and, among other things, on the capacity –through the model, the map, the simulacrum– to designate the Other, the enemy, the threat. "Power exists only as long as it has this symbolic potency".[106]

The "Observable Reality" of pseudo-scientific journalism, as Lyotard[107] would call it, is based on the criterion of commensurability, which is inseparable from scientific-technical accumulation, and whose most immediate materialization is its operability. Computer language, translatable into media, is a technical-semantic transformation of the Causality Principle[108] and Sufficient Reason of Philosophy.[109] Only the calculable, the measurable, the computable is "real", and it is precisely so because it can be reduced, totalized and manipulated. We all became *potential* "asymptomatic" threats; we *could* all cause the death of someone else. An apparently scientific language but without any possibility of falsifiability.

Thus, we ask ourselves with Baudrillard: "what can medicine do with what floats on either side of illness, on either side of health, with the duplication of illness in a discourse that is no longer either true or false?".[110] It is no longer true or false because the language game that governs it is not epistemic, but performative, and its veracity criterion lies in its efficiency/inefficiency in representing itself, corroborating itself and projecting itself on our screens. The performative efficiency is what matters from a governmentality perspective: statistics were combined with videos of crying doctors and images of hangars full of coffins. The media communicated the horrors and chanted the arrival of our salvation through technological innovation. In both cases, it did not matter much whether their claims were true or false according to the scientific method. It was not necessary to present before the public –not even to the most demanding academic public– any scientific evidence on the general convenience of the lockdowns; why go to the trouble of "the production of proof" in a seamless order of "indisputable truths"?[111]

Without true scientific evidence regarding the causes of the deaths, the media performance of the terrifying figures and projections, together with emotional images and stories, were proof enough to justify the measures. As Baudrillard noted, it is all about credibility, and credibility depends on mediatized information. "Information long ago broke

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[105] Ibid., 210.

[106] Baudrillard, *Screened Out,* 43.

[107] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 7.

[108] The Causality Principle affirms that all (real) events have a cause. This principle sets a logical relationship between the case and the effect, and it is a classical principle in philosophy and epistemology.

[109] The Sufficient Reason principle states that everything must have a reason or cause. The philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) was its most famous proponent.

[110] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 4.

[111] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 25.

through the truth barrier and moved into the hyperspace where things are neither true nor false, since everything in the realm of information depends on instantaneous credibility".[112] We were *informed* about the "pandemic"; it was there, on the screens, before our eyes, there was nothing to question. "Unlike truth, credibility has no limits; it cannot be refuted, because it is virtual."[113]

With the provocative suggestion that the Vietnam War "was finished well before it started, that there was an end to war at the heart of the war itself, and that perhaps it never started",[114] Baudrillard did not intend to deny that there were casualties or bombardments in Hanoi by the United States Army but rather indicate the pre-eminence of the simulacra. The Vietnam War is the most represented and representative chapter of China's incorporation into the nuclear order of "peaceful" coexistence. History no longer has to be written after the event; history is written before, it is projected, the narrative is woven, it is built for viewers. The "fact" is controlled in all its characteristics before being an event.

CONCLUSION

The close relationship between medicine and "biopower" was manifested in an extraordinary manner during this "pandemic". Furthermore, the numbers became "reality" and the "Science" evoked and invoked everywhere re-incarnated that "great myth" of free, independent, pure observation, which would also be capable of purifying society and its infosphere. On this basis, policies became unquestionable, and those who dared to question or criticize them were vilified and stigmatized as "anti-science", "ignorant", "denialist", and "a danger" for society.

Beyond the disciplinarization of medicine by organizations such as the WHO and large financial capitals (often "philanthropic"), and beyond the power of medicine to discipline society, we explored here the contemporary expression of security mechanisms. This technology of government intervened ostensibly in our milieu, notably the infosphere. The figures, the data and, in general, the "information" corresponding to the official narrative "flooded" strategically the environment in which we live, thus conducting the conducts of the populations, governing without needing explicit violence. The conjunction of a disciplined medical science at the service of power, with a heavily intervened infosphere, generated a highly effective "media Science" in terms of governmentality. The considerations of the "experts" and the statistics determined our behaviors day after day, invading all aspects of human life. This manifestation of biopower was based on apparently simple and absolute truths. The pseudo-epidemiological language proliferated; the flooding generated consensus and politicians just had to follow.

That Science, as Lyotard points out, is now validated through media performance, and it is the same media that provide the proof of its truth. For the public, the governed population, it is no longer necessary to contrast the model with reality: the data of "media

[112] Baudrillard, *Screened Out*, 85.
[113] Ibid., 85.
[114] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 27.

Science" are more real than reality. They are a hyperreality pushing us to believe that there was neither the time nor the need to question, counter-balance, debate or dissent.

As we have seen, the critical analysis of health policies has been widely categorized as an anti-scientific stance. Foucault has also been falsely accused in pseudo-academic media of fostering the belief that science is simply a set of statements convenient to elites. But identifying the power relations behind the most widely accepted truths, behind media Science, and what is promulgated by global elites (in the U.N, the W.E.F., the U.S. government, for example), does not lead us to an unscientific position, a postmodern "anything goes", or a post-truth delusion. Perhaps more than ever before, we are governed by "facts" and data, and the most draconian policies have been legitimized by invoking a scientific truth.

This is not a discussion about whether reality exists or not, nor about the subjectivity-objectivity dichotomy, or about the scope, limitations and contemporary relevance of the modern scientific method. Nor is it about debunking all scientific statements as simple manipulations of power. It is about examining the acts of governmentality that seek legitimation through a discourse of scientific truth. That is why we claim Foucault's legacy and his influence on post-structuralists like Lyotard and Baudrillard.

Some elements of post-structuralist criticism are occasionally and superficially used by Trump supporters, adherents to cloudy conspiracy theories, or by relativistic militants of the postmodern Left. But those uses and distorted appropriations cannot invalidate the scholars' profound contributions. We recognize that within science there are statements that can legitimately be considered true. However, what we see with Lyotard and Baudrillard is the importance of performativity and mediatization of a supposedly scientific reality: what we have called a mediatized Science.

The performative statement is totalitarian and totalizing precisely because it is imbued with pretensions of truth, politically correct moralism, and prescriptions immune to all criticism: it is true because it is righteous and necessary. People must not think; they are the material upon which the information and the morality of the precept must resound. To reach levels of governmentality seen in this "pandemic", three elements are needed. In first place, the assent to the "terror" of an absolute scientific truth as described by Lyotard. In other words, they need full and collective assent to the idea that science corresponds to an infallible, unobjectionable and unattainable "reality". There would be no possibility of raising one's head and no objection, because it was said by an all-embracing Science.

The second element is the precession of a homogeneous and universal map (based on that "Scientific reality"). We need to disconnect from, and ignore the territory (even if part of it is our own body); we must constantly observe the digitized map of orbital circulation. The status and function of the mathematical models (simulations) within the security mechanisms help us to understand Baudrillard's concepts and metaphors (which are not always clear). We now have a very clear example of the importance of models and simulations that precede reality and become *more real* than reality.

The third element is the use of that "Scientific reality", that hyperreality, to legitimize total governance. The terrifying projections of Science would justify our assent and

submission. In the face of extreme fear provoked by the media, we sought security (salvation), and the rulers provided it with extreme measures. All political opposition (as it is necessary in a democracy) was neutralized by calling it "anti-scientific" and "irresponsible". Thus, we are exposed to the despotism of a biopower which presents itself as Science, hiding its political dimension and, by the same token, impeding democratic debates on decisions that affect the lives of most of us.

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ARTICLE

Securing the Pandemic: Biopolitics, Capital, and COVID-19

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ABSTRACT. In this article, I consider the interoperation of twin contemporary governmental imperatives, fostering economic growth and ensuring biopolitical security, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. At a theoretical level, I thereby consider the question of the applicability of a Marxist analysis vis-à-vis a Foucauldian one in understanding state responses to the pandemic. Despite the apparent prioritization of preserving life over economic activity by governments around the world in this context, I will argue that the basic problem that COVID-19 posed for the state was one of sheer unknowability and that the fundamental motive for the governmental response was a concern for security in Foucault's sense, that is, ensuring a baseline predictability in the social field, upon which economic activity, like myriad other social activity, is premised. I argue that this drive for security motivated states to appeal to medical experts to determine the direction of their response, who in turn applied a default model of quarantine. While we cannot be certain that the medically-guided response was optimal in terms either of health outcomes or economically, I argue it served its essential purpose by providing a structured framework for social action in the face of the unknown. While this is vital for the maintenance of the basic coordinates of capitalist society, I argue it nonetheless cannot entirely be explained simply by an appeal to Marxist categories and instead requires Foucault's insights into the medicalization of society.

Keywords: biopolitics, capitalism, COVID-19, Foucault, Marxism, security

INTRODUCTION

From its onset, the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to pit two distinct imperatives of contemporary societies against one another: economic interests seemed to run counter to the biopolitical imperative to keep people alive. I will here consider how this clash poses theoretical difficulties for two prominent perspectives in contemporary critical social analysis, namely Marxism on the one hand and the thought of Michel Foucault on the other. Marxism has, following its progenitor, Karl Marx, tended to cast capitalism as inimical to human health. Such a perspective struggles to account for the overwhelming willingness

of capitalist states apparently to subordinate economic growth to the protection of public health in the face of COVID-19. Foucault for his part tended to see biopolitics and capitalism as cooperating at the level of "strategies of power"; from this perspective, the conundrum is to explain how tension between these imperatives in the context of the pandemic could be resolved. The solution to this ought in turn to shed light on the general nature of the relationship between them.

The task of this essay will thus be, employing conceptual tools provided by Marxism and Foucault, to map the contours of the global COVID-19 response in order to understand it in its own right, as well as to draw inferences about the relationship between economics and biopolitics in contemporary societies. I will argue that governmental responses to the pandemic indicate a deep synergy of biopolitics and capitalist economics that can best be understood by employing Foucault's concept of security.

BIOPOLITICS AND CAPITALISM

The status quo ante COVID-19, particularly since the 2008 financial crisis, was an era of capitalist ascendency. Over the preceding forty years, almost every state had increasingly focused on the goal of ensuring economic growth, even though paradoxically this period had actually been one of relative economic stagnation in much of the West. This reflected a tightening of the influence of capital over the state and a reassertion of the facilitation of capital's insatiable pursuit of profit as the primary role of the state associated with the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism. This has even affected soi-disant Marxist states, foremost among them the People's Republic of China, that have embraced nakedly capitalist practices explicitly as a means to drive economic growth. Indeed, Marxism in any form, even when entirely rejecting capitalism, is economistic and hence oriented towards growth,[1] which is precisely the tendency that has allowed hybrid models like China's to develop.

As well as being focused on economic growth, however, every contemporary state is also *biopolitical*. I mean this term specifically in Foucault's sense: I will not here dwell on the diverse alternative conceptions of biopolitics emanating from other thinkers.[2] On Foucault's conception, biopolitics involves two essential elements. Theoretically, it represents the use of biological knowledge in statecraft. Practically, it implies the use of demographic techniques in a broad sense to constitute a 'population' associated with a given state, in contradistinction to earlier forms of state which essentially controlled a territory, wherein people were within the purview of a state only by dint of being present there. The state constitutes the population as such by caring for people, in particular their health. The late modern, biopolitical state thus draws not only its strength but also its legitimacy from its capacity to keep its citizens alive and healthy.

Biopolitics has not historically found itself in conflict with capitalism. Both phenomena emerged in their mature form at approximately the same time, viz. the late eighteenth

[1] On this convergent economism of Marxism and liberalism, see Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* [1997] (2003), 13.

[2] For a detailed survey of the history of varied uses of this term, see Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitics* (2011).

century, with biopolitics providing something useful to capitalism in the form of a stable society of healthy workers and consumers. The healthiness of the population and that of the economy are strongly correlated: in general, the economy requires a certain healthiness of the population (and more particularly of workers) and health requires a functioning economy (tax receipts power the health service and people with higher incomes are ceteris paribus able to maintain better health).

A Marxist might argue, however, that at a certain point a 'contradiction' between capitalism and biopolitics must heave into view, with capitalism only allowing workers to be so healthy, both because capitalists will not bear the costs of public healthcare beyond the point where it benefits them and because there are investments in industries that either cause ill health (e.g. junk food, cars, and firearms) or indeed depend on it (the healthcare industry itself). Thus, getting rid of capitalism could be expected ultimately to benefit public health by removing these limits to it. We might indeed perceive in the course of the class conflicts of the twentieth century in many countries a hard-won redirection of resources towards healthcare and away from capitalist profits in various ways and to varying extents, most obviously in the state-socialist economies of Eastern Europe, but also in the social democracies of Western Europe.

Karl Marx himself indeed had little to say about disease other than to note capital's indifference towards it: 'Capital therefore takes no account of the health and the length of life of the worker, unless society forces it to do so'.[3] There is an interesting contrast here with Engels, whose early solo work, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, is singularly concerned with questions of health – but this is precisely in his later view not a view reflective of the common scientifically materialist viewpoint he and Marx would later develop.[4] The most proximal Marxist thinker in Foucault's own orbit, his sometime-mentor Louis Althusser, himself had almost nothing to say about health and medicine, despite spending much of his life in medical institutions, other than to weakly – and even then in a manuscript published only posthumously – include the 'medical apparatus' in his listing of 'Ideological State Apparatuses' and point the reader in a footnote to Foucault's then-emerging body of work.[5] Althusser's recurrent references to Foucault's early work on medical topics (by which I mean his first three books, which focused serially on psychology, madness, and medicine) might themselves be taken to testify to a need to supplement Marxist thought with something like Foucault's own.[6]

However, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic suggests not so much that Marxist understandings of the importance of health under capitalism require supplementation as that they are simply wrong, inasmuch as it apparently saw states disregard economic consequences in implementing measures to protect their populations from this novel disease. From a theoretical point of view, this might be taken to falsify Marxism, insofar as Marx

[3] Karl Marx, *Capital 1* (1976), 381.

[4] Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1958). For Engels' retrospective assessment of this text, see his Preface to the English Edition of 1892 appended in this edition.

[5] Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* [1995] (2014), 160, 220.

[6] Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital* [1968] (1970) 45, 103.

explains politics via a theory of the state as a 'disguised dictatorship' of the dominant, capitalist class, who use the state as a means to further their interests, i.e. profits.[7]

The pandemic thus posed a serious challenge to my own theoretical fusion of Foucault's insights with Marx's.[8] In my view, despite sharply disagreeing with Marxism on particular points, such as economic theory, Foucault largely takes the insights of Marxism (such as the class nature of capitalist society) for granted as an established framework of understanding in his milieu that did not require restatement.[9] Still, Foucault's contributions do amount to a rejection of any claim by Marxism to be total, and thereby of any reductivist form of Marxism that pretends to understand power solely by an appeal to economics. In practice, however, it is unclear that either Marx or any form of Marxism has really been quite so crass. Nonetheless, Foucault's thought stands as a challenge to orthodox Marxism inasmuch as Foucault's analyses seem to obviate the necessity even to consider the economic dimension of social phenomena at all, insofar as Foucault seems to be able to bracket this entirely in his work at times yet still produce a coherent analysis, something that has led to a consistent denunciation of Foucault from some quarters of Marxism.

The question here then is not so much whether Foucault and Marxism can be rendered entirely compatible without any friction or remainder – they cannot – but whether the politics of COVID-19 indicates the truth or applicability of one over the other, or whether an analysis can be reached that preserves at least the major insights of both approaches. Three years on from the initial declaration of the pandemic, I believe we can indeed now see deep synergy between the apparently economically masochistic, biopolitically attuned state responses to COVID-19 and the neoliberal nature of the contemporary state: even if the former did not immediately serve the objective of continuous growth in national GDP, they have safeguarded and promoted capitalist profit ultimately. In accordance with Foucault's insights, I see this as having been arrived at not through some shadowy conspiracy but via a strategic coherence of competing social forces rearranging and reorienting itself as the pandemic developed.[10] In this, a Foucauldian analysis, far from falsifying Marxism, helps to explain how Marxist insights continue to apply.

I will argue that the emergency situation constituted by COVID-19 saw civil society (both people and bourgeoisie) look to states for protection, and states in turn defer to medical experts. These experts curated a societal intervention aimed at protecting the health of the population but which from the point of view of the state had as its ultimate aim not the health of the population per se so much as the maintenance of social order, pending a staged return to normality. In this, the biopolitical state has shown itself to have as its principal role the construction of certainty rather than the protection of life itself as such. In our capitalist societies, this role means the continuation rather than disruption of

[7] The classic exposition of this is the first chapter of V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* [1918] (1992), which in turn consists entirely of exegesis of Marx and Engels' writings on the topic.

[8] See in particular M. G. E. Kelly, *Biopolitical Imperialism* (2015).

[9] For detailed discussion of Foucault's variable relation to Marx and Marxism, see Mark G. E. Kelly, *Foucault and Politics* (2014), *passim*.

[10] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1* [1976] (1978), 92–95.

capitalism, since this is a major component of our social structure, if not its sine qua non. I will thus suggest that, while the politics of the COVID-19 pandemic are not fully explicable without a Foucauldian supplement to Marx, we can, through the application of Foucauldian analysis, see how Marx's insights remain applicable insofar as our societies remain primarily focused on economic wellbeing even at the expense of public health.

I will draw these conclusions from a preliminary survey of the contours of international governmental responses to the pandemic. I take the apogee of these to be the 'lockdown' measures adopted by most governments, which gave way in turn to something less extraordinary, mass vaccination, which nonetheless had some unprecedented features in its specific application to COVID-19.

POLITICIZATION

With its initially alarming survival prognosis and uncertain epidemiology, COVID-19 triggered extraordinary biopolitical responses from almost every government in the world that were prima facie likely to crash their economies. In the course of March 2020, the month in which the World Health Organization officially declared there to be a pandemic, much of the world, encompassing 3 billion people, went into 'lockdowns': novel restrictions on individual freedom of movement.[11] While the precise restrictions varied from place to place, it was in all cases immediately clear that the economic impacts would be dire. Governments thus deliberately introduced measures to combat the spread of the disease in the full knowledge that they would cause economic recession at the very least. Given that most governments around the world treated the achievement of economic growth as an irrevocable goal, for them to wilfully sabotage their economies was surprising.

Governments did adopt initiatives to try to mitigate the negative economic consequences of the pandemic responses. I lack the space here to catalogue these in their international variety, although I will mention an indicative sample. Businesses forced to cease operations received payments to support them through this period. Larger retailers, such as the major supermarkets in the United Kingdom, or Walmart in the US, were deemed essential, hence exempted from locking down. Already-growing digital retailers – such as Amazon, app-based delivery companies, and content streaming services – experienced something of a bonanza as people stuck at home turned to them. The economy at large was bailed out via quantitative easing, pre-emptively repeating the measures adopted to deal with the Great Financial Crisis of 2008 (GFC), with central banks similarly further reducing interest rates, which had already been lingering at historically low levels since the GFC. As after the GFC, the new liquidity thus generated largely flowed into the coffers of the already-wealthy rather than the populace at large. Those made unemployed enjoyed temporarily boosted unemployment benefits, although they were still generally left worse off than when employed.

[11] Linda Lacina, "Nearly 3 billion people around the globe under COVID-19 lockdowns," World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/todays-coronavirus-updates/ (accessed June 29, 2023).

The pattern of the response here seems to suggest a relative unconcern with the economic situation of the poor in favour of the wealthy, but this nonetheless seems like something of an afterthought: while governments clearly favoured capital in various ways in this moment, this was only a supplement to a basic policy designed to protect lives of people in general. Thus, while the short-term economic damage was less than generally anticipated, governments took measures in the reasonable expectation of severe negative economic repercussions. Might this not imply, in the final analysis, that the protection of health was a more important priority for states than any economic consideration?

The principal reason for thinking there is no such implication is that the economic cost of refusing to take countermeasures in the face of the pandemic did not seem prima facie to be any less serious than taking them. That is, the uncontrolled spread of the virus stood to impact economies, both directly by incapacitating and killing people, and indirectly via a broader social crisis: experts predicted unstemmed contagion would lead to a dramatic wave of hospitalizations that could have quickly overwhelmed medical facilities and then led to 'cascade failure' of health systems, as infections among medical personnel and overloading of facilities meant ordinarily trivial medical emergencies would be impossible to deal with, and thus deadly, not to mention overwhelming the limited facilities in intensive care (particularly respirators) to keep the worst-affected COVID patients alive, meaning that COVID-19 itself would become far more deadly than it otherwise was. Uncontrolled spread compounded by health system failure could further be anticipated to produce widespread panic and indeed a form of voluntary lockdown, in which fearful citizens avoided contact with others by shutting themselves in their homes. This combination would conceivably have been worse, both for human health and for the economy, than a deliberate, limited, targeted and controlled lockdown.

This might seem to constitute an adequate answer for the Marxist, namely that governments were willing to countenance economically deleterious countermeasures simply because the economic prognosis for not taking these was even worse. However, any such calculation was uncertain: there was no immediately comparable case to draw on to conclude what the consequences either of locking down or not doing so would be. Even now, years after the fact, it is difficult to say exactly what the net impact of the lockdowns has been, be it on the economy, human health, or on society at large. While there are examples of societies that did not lock down, which one might therefore adduce as control cases, there are problems with doing so. I will discuss these cases' peculiarities more below, in the section entitled 'Paradigm', but for now, it is enough to mention the basic difficulties in making inferences from them to the efficacy of particular measures. To take the case of a country that did not lock down that is closest in proximity to and most apt to be compared with many that did – Sweden – its economic performance, per capita COVID-19 death toll, and post-COVID excess death toll have all broadly been in line with those of other Western European countries, even if one can cherry-pick stark differences between its performance and that of particular other neighbouring countries: when it comes to COVID deaths, for example, Sweden had more than twice as many per capita as its less densely populated locked down neighbour Norway but significantly less than in more populous nearby developed countries like Britain and France that implemented

lockdowns.[12] The obvious inference, then, in relation to lockdowns would be simply that they were inconsequential, but this conclusion cannot be safely drawn for at least two reasons. For one thing, Sweden's pandemic experience did not occur in isolation but rather a broader context that included its neighbours' lockdowns, such that economic and health impacts in Sweden were affected by these.[13] Moreover, although Sweden did not formally lock down, in common with other countries that did not, it adopted various control measures short of a lockdown, and the population in various ways voluntarily limited its behaviour, such that the differences between the Swedish case and those of countries that formally instituted lockdowns, which themselves varied in their extent and severity, is not simply black-and-white.

The epistemic bottom line here, I am suggesting, is simply that it is not possible to say whether or not lockdowns were necessary or useful. This does not, however, imply that it was not a reasonable precaution to institute them nonetheless. Indeed, I will in effect claim that it was. My claim is rather that it was not an obvious decision to make from a purely economically interested point of view: there is no solely economic case for the a priori desirability. Instead, I will argue that they were implemented not as an economically rational response to a quantifiable economic threat but more as a response precisely to a situation of profound uncertainty that sought to deal with uncertainty itself as a threat to the economy and indeed to the operation of the state and society.

Given the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, people in general were rationally motivated by the desire to avert a worst-case scenario, both because of their fear of the risks to the health of individuals and because of the fear of social consequences. Public opinion in early 2020 was overwhelmingly in favour of swingeing measures to stymie the spread of the virus.[14] A standard Marxist analysis here would pit a popular concern of ordinary workers for their own health against the desire of capitalists to keep the economy open and generating profits for them. It is far from clear, however, that capitalists were in general opposed to implementing lockdowns and similar measures, even if they may have been generally *reticent* in this regard. As individuals, capitalists were approximately as apt as anyone else to be concerned by the virus and its possible consequences (one might say that their wealth affords them access to superior health care and distance from the hoi polloi, hence affords them relative unconcern – but, contrariwise, the very wealthy are disproportionately aged, making them more vulnerable on average to COVID than the general population). Marx's comments noting the indifference of capital to the health of workers predate virology, but the infectiousness of disease was known before that, hence constituting a self-interested motive for concern with public health by capitalists ignored by Marx. Nonetheless, capitalists are always sensitive to impacts on their bottom lines. The net result was that business at large did not lobby for a particular solution: different

[12] World Health Organization, "WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard," https://covid19.who.int/?mapFilter=deaths (accessed March 23, 2023).
[13] Howard D. Larkin, "COVID-19 Health Policies and Economies in Nordic Countries," *JAMA* 328:11 (2002).
[14] In the USA, clear majorities in March 2020 favoured all measures that would become the main planks of the 'lockdown' approach. Pew Research Center, "Views of how officials, public have responded to COVID-19," Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/03/26/views-of-how-officials-public-have-responded-to-covid-19/ (accessed June 29, 2023).

industries stood to be affected differently, and there was no consistent voice from the bourgeoisie actively demanding a particular course of action. Given the possible catastrophic downside risks of not locking down in the face of COVID-19, vested economic interests were willing to tolerate and even support lockdowns once they were proposed, particularly as openly opposing them would potentially be disastrous for their public relations. Thus the attitude of business fell within the gamut of popular opinion in either supporting or at least acquiescing to the antiviral regime, while perhaps tending, with the right-wing of public opinion, to be relatively wary of it.

Regarding the public, however, it does not seem either that popular pressure forced governments to adopt countermeasures in relation to COVID-19, given these countermeasures were relatively internationally uniform and thus do not seem to have varied regularly in accordance with the degree of popular pressure: where they did vary, this was for other reasons, as I will describe in brief below.

What we saw was, rather, capital and people motivated not so much to actively demand anything as to yield to the state as their protector. This is the general pattern one should expect in an emergency situation. Indeed, one of the points of having a state, in particular from a (neo)liberal perspective, is that it comes into play in extremis in situations where the simple logic of the market becomes inadequate: the neoliberal insight into market economics is precisely that the market is not in the last instance perfect or self-sustaining but always needs the state to keep it working.[15]

MEDICALIZATION

The politicians who run governments were not the authors of the pandemic response, however. Rather, they in their turn deferred to medical experts. There are multiple reasons for this deference. Generically, politicians themselves lack the expertise to craft a response and thus must fall back on national plans and expert advice. In view of their relevant ignorance, politicians acting without expert advice would take on an enormous moral risk of responsibility for untoward consequences. Thus, government in this situation operated like any major contemporary organisational bureaucracy in following 'proper steps' such that management could not be determined to be legally liable for negligence regardless of the outcome. This is a form of 'risk society' response, but one which is more about mitigating risk of prosecution and reputational damage to individuals than to society at large, although the two things are not unrelated, inasmuch as the reason that politicians might be at risk if they did not consult relevant experts would be that this would be presumed to risk greater damage to others.

While there was popular pressure for a response, it was inchoate: the public did not independently demand particular measures. Insofar as they could do this, it could only be by rallying behind demands made by medical experts. These experts did already have considerable purchase in the public mind, through their wider purchase in society, as I will canvass in the section 'Medical Society' below. This in turn then meant that public

[15] See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* [2004] (2008).

pressure pushed governments in the direction they would likely have to take in any case, which is to turn to the medics. Unlike politicians, medical experts had a plan, and, regardless of the precise nature of the action they recommended, or how it was modulated, the very provision of that plan constituted a solution to the basic problem of uncertainty posed by the novel, threatening situation.

Politicians did seek to modulate pandemic countermeasures in various ways that accorded with their interests, which included mollifying their publics. One might cite here the near-exception of the United Kingdom, which initially followed a "herd immunity" approach without lockdown but dramatically changed course as cases spiked. Recently leaked WhatsApp messages of former UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock reveal an obsession with managing appearances determining specifics of the pandemic response.[16] Democratic politicians' pandering to their electorates nonetheless worked with the raw material of medical recommendations. It is no coincidence that both some of the weakest and most extreme responses were conversely found in relatively undemocratic states, where politicians felt able to ignore medical advice to a much larger extent.

The expertise of the medical authors of pandemic responses was, for their part, limited to disease. They did not, significantly, have expertise in the social and economic dimensions of implementing disease control measures on a national scale. Indeed, given the unprecedented nature of the lockdowns – at least in recent history – no one had entirely adequate expertise or knew fully what they might entail. The medics – and more specifically virologists and epidemiologists – who crafted the response knew how viruses spread between people and through populations (although, in point of fact, they did not and could not yet fully understand exactly how COVID-19 spread). By contrast, experts who had insight, for example, into negative consequences that might occur when people 'shelter in place' for long periods, such as social psychologists, were neither consulted nor heeded when they did issue cautionary pronouncements. [17]

The medical experts prioritized averting an anticipated negative event – cascade failure in health care – over caution in relation to possible negative social and economic ramifications of their countermeasures. It is reasonable to suspect that their knowledge of the consequences of disease vis-à-vis their relative inability to predict the downside risks of broad social countermeasures might have contributed to this bias. It seems likely that a different set of experts would, in accordance with their different expertise, have made different recommendations.

However, the medical experts did not ignore only unquantifiable or spiritual problems outside their ken: rather, the response they crafted produced consequences deleterious to people's health. These included mental illness, increased alcohol consumption, sedentary behaviour, deferred surgical operations and diagnoses of diseases, and reduced attendance at hospital emergency departments of patients with non-COVID conditions. To some extent, these consequences were unforeseeable or at least unforeseen, and it would also be true to suggest that unrestricted spread of COVID might have been presumed to lead

[16] Jacqui Wise, "Leaked Messages Reveal Casual Policy Making—and Love for Whitty," *BMJ* 380 (2023).

[17] For example, Giada Pietrabissa and Susan G. Simpson, "Psychological Consequences of Social Isolation during COVID-19 Outbreak," *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020).

to the same phenomena on a perhaps even greater scale, but nonetheless I think it is true to say that there was scant consideration given to downside risks even of a distinctly biomedical nature in relation to pandemic response policies.

The lack of consideration of downside risks applies to all COVID-19 countermeasures, including mass-masking (e.g. the social and psychological consequences of mask-wearing for all kinds of social interaction, most notably in educational and childcare settings) and to the accelerated approval of vaccines. The latter is particularly noteworthy because the need for rigorous testing of new medications to guard against the risk of side effects is a standard axiom of contemporary ethical medical practice. Given that the vaccines in question employed novel mechanisms, not testing them sufficiently to assure their longer term safety was stratospherically risky: it meant that the possibility that this vaccination programme would do more harm than good could not be excluded. Yet, the medical establishment stood foursquare behind it, insisting on the safety and efficacy of the vaccines and pillorying any, including those within it, who demurred.

It remains unclear to what extent COVID-19 itself has harmed our populations vis-à-vis the extent of damage of countermeasures adopted to prevent it harming our populations, let alone what would be the case without those countermeasures. We know only that there have been significant excess deaths in the post-COVID era. Attempts have been made to differentiate deaths from COVID versus those caused by the countermeasures by subtracting from the number of excess deaths those certified as having been caused by COVID directly, which indeed in most countries does leave a very significant number of excess deaths not explained by the direct impact of the virus.[18] However, inasmuch as the certification of the cause of death is an opaque art that is never entirely accurate, it is not possible to exclude that COVID-19 itself is not implicated directly in all excess deaths.[19]

For my purposes here, in any case, this matters only insofar as it accentuates the epistemic difficulties posed by the pandemic: even if one could show that mitigation measures were more damaging than doing nothing, this would not in itself imply that the decisions were not reasonable based on the information available at the time. Decisions are necessarily made on the basis of incomplete information. My point rather is that this information did not itself point decisively in the direction taken. Even the inherent biases of medical experts do not explain their willingness to override contradictory medical considerations: the oft-invoked 'evidence' and 'science' were insufficient to justify the action taken. Thus, more needs to be said to explain what was done in, in particular, the clear bias towards action of all involved. Like the economic case for the COVID-19 response, I will argue that the public health case ultimately is not a rational one based on empirical knowledge of various possible scenarios so much as a defensive reaction against the unknown as such.

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[18] Weijing Shang, Yaping Wang, Jie Yuan, Zirui Guo, Jue Liu and Min Liu, "Global Excess Mortality during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Vaccines* 10:10 (2022).

[19] Cf. David Armstrong, "The COVID-19 pandemic and cause of death," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 43:7 (2022). Attempts have also been made to suggest that the countermeasures are responsible by comparing Sweden, which did not employ lockdown measures or mask mandates and has relatively few excess deaths, with other countries. However, the most direct comparator for Sweden, its neighbour Norway, which did lock down and mandate masks, has a near-identical low level of excess deaths.

SECURITY

As David Armstrong notes in relation to the way that COVID is assigned as a cause of death, there is a significant tendency in medicine to elevate the significance of the "unnatural."[20] One might suggest that this, in the form of a perception that COVID-19 constituted an unnatural disruption, causes medical experts to obsess about it rather than being concerned about the converse impact of amelioration efforts. Such an action bias is what we might, in describing the day-to-day behaviour of an ordinary person, call "panic," in which, in fear of an unknown quantity, one acts incautiously in a way that is apt to cause other harms. Panic does not imply actual harm occurs but only a certain indifference to harm from other sources due to the focus on the initial danger. Panic generically occurs not only in proportion to the scale of a threat but also to the lack of knowledge or information about what to do in the face of it, thus in a situation where action is clearly required but an established response is lacking. The most acute problem posed to governments by COVID-19 was not so much the disease itself as the lack of a predetermined response to it.

States had anticipated the sudden emergence of a novel pandemic and attempted to prepare for that eventuality, but their planning did not encompass the now-familiar extraordinary responses adopted in the face of COVID-19. Rather, their plans envisaged what amounted to modulations to social normality: streamlining intake and increasing capacity at hospitals, monitoring the spread of disease and issuing health advice to citizens while prioritising the development and distribution of vaccines.[21] While all of these measures were employed in 2020, there was no prior contemplation of lockdowns or mask mandates. The simple reason for this lacuna is that planning was generally for a novel influenza strain, presumed to be less infectious and/or lethal than COVID-19 was initially understood to be in 2020, or else developed in direct response to coronaviruses like SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV that were more deadly than COVID-19 but also much less infectious.

Faced with a disease that was not immediately entirely knowable and which threatened concatenating effects on society which were themselves unknowable, the most urgent need was to protect or create a framework of known variables within which social actors could operate. Governments, capitalists and ordinary people all desire predictability. Our societies run on it (just-in-time logistics being a particularly clear example of this, as well as a vulnerability exposed by the pandemic). Even the most disenfranchised citizen wants the coordinates of our economies – services, goods, prices, the legislative framework – to remain relatively stable so as to allow them to make decisions with some idea of what the implications will be. At an opposite extreme, even those who apparently profit

[20] Ibid.

[21] See, for example, the UK Department of Health & Social Care, 'UK pandemic preparedness', GOV.UK. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-pandemic-preparedness/uk-pandemic-preparedness#uk-pandemic-preparedness-plans (accessed June 29, 2023) or the US CDC, 'National Pandemic Influenza Plans', Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/planning-preparedness/national-strategy-planning.html (accessed June 29, 2023), or the World Health Organization, *Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response* (2009), which at its most critical point unsurprisingly simply defers to national plans.

from instability, such as traders in exotic financial derivatives that go up when markets go down, need things to move only within limits: hedging only works to an extent, and when enough things go wrong simultaneously, the entire financial system itself is placed in jeopardy. This need for predictability in the face of unknown quantities is what, for Foucault, essentially gives rise to what he designates "security": "the management of . . . open series [that] can only be controlled by an estimate of probabilities."[22]

Foucault problematizes security in his 1978 Collège de France lectures. This concept here displaces that of 'biopolitics' – so prominent in his publications and lectures of 1976, but used only once in the 1978 series[23]– as his term for the politics germane to the population as such.[24] This does not imply any change of substantive position on Foucault's part, however, so much as a change of conceptual focus. Foucault still began the lectures with a declaration of his intention to turn his attention to 'bio-power',[25] and he would go on to invoke biopolitics as such in the title of the following year's lecture series.[26] Rather, he problematizes security as integral to biopolitics: even if he does not spell out exactly how the two things are related, it is nonetheless clear enough that the health of the population is intimately connected to its security. What the concept of security provides is a hinge for joining biopolitics to the concept of 'government' that dominates Foucault's thought in these last years of the 1970s.

Foucault's understanding of 'security' is fundamentally a matter of the calculation and management of risk on a probabilistic basis. I am suggesting that this requires limits to be placed on risk. Our society can deal with the extent to which illness, for example, is inherently aleatory where it concerns any given individual, as long as the rate of illness at a societal level remains within regularly circumscribed limits. All I mean by this, in concrete terms, is that, for example, our society copes with the variable existence of illness and its waves as long as it does not overwhelm the overall provision of medical care. This is precisely what COVID-19 threatened to explode. It is also precisely something that no downside risk of pandemic counter-measures threatened in the same way: no matter how bad the results of some of these might be – even if they on aggregate are worse than the damage they prevented – they do not threaten to overwhelm our contingency management.

Without baseline predictability, we risk social chaos, which in itself entails not only economic collapse but threatens human life in ways that are impossible to predict,

[22] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, [2004] (2007), 20. The question of security is never dealt with by Foucault in great detail. It is of course invoked eponymously in this lecture series, *Security, Territory, Population*, and Foucault does discuss it there to some extent, but, because Foucault's lecture series were named in advance, the titles reflect Foucault's preoccupations before he wrote the lectures. Accordingly, it is in his preceding Collège de France lecture series, *Society Must Be Defended*, that Foucault discusses security more than anywhere else. For a wide-ranging study of the theme of security in all its various historical senses, one might read Frédéric Gros, *The Security Principle* (2019). Gros, however, does not cover the notion of security I am working with here, that of security as predictability, at all.

[23] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 120. In a footnote here it is indicated that, in Foucault's manuscript for the lecture, this sole invocation of this concept in this series is couched in scare quotes.

[24] Ibid., 11.

[25] Ibid., 1.

[26] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

precisely because we are dealing with prospects beyond our ability to cognize in their unpredictability. Since COVID–19's primary threat to predictability seemed to be the possibility it would overwhelm health infrastructure, a major component of our self-regulating social system, the first priority of the response was to protect that infrastructure. In Britain, the slogan "protect the NHS" (National Health Service) thus became the centrepiece of public communication to explain the necessity of the COVID lockdown, achieving equal billing with saving people's lives, itself the purpose of the NHS. If hospitals are overwhelmed, how can people do any of the things they normally do which run some risk of a trip to the emergency department? How can I drive or work when incurring relatively minor injuries might see me die waiting to see a doctor? This threat was sufficiently grave that it licensed governments to undertake normally unconscionable restrictions on personal liberty and economic activity. It is here, I would suggest, that the circle of economic sacrifice for economic salvation is squared.

PARADIGM

While this answers the question of the willingness of – and indeed necessity for – governments to adopt a dramatic, decisive and potentially damaging response to the pandemic, it does not explain why almost all governments adopted such similar measures. It is important for my purposes to explain this in order to deal with objections that the ubiquity of these responses indicates that in fact it was empirically obvious that they should be undertaken or, indeed, that it was conversely the result of a global conspiracy. Against such alternatives, I will suggest that the reason for the similarity of the response lies in the existence of entrenched medical power in our contemporary society, as analysed by Foucault.

In particular, it is striking how few countries forewent lockdowns entirely, considering the expense and difficulties that these entailed. There was no explicit global coordination of the near-universality of lockdowns: the World Health Organization (WHO), which had responsibility for coordinating international pandemic response, never advised countries to lock down, even though it did later caution countries about the risks of lifting lockdown measures prematurely and did prompt countries to introduce "stricter measures" than it then deemed to have occurred when they introduced lockdowns.

Countries that forewent lockdowns fall into several categories, but they all had peculiarities that explain their divergence. Sweden is effectively a category unto itself, inasmuch as it was the only developed country to forego lockdowns entirely and did so for the unique reason that its government determined it did not have the constitutional power to effect one.[27] Japan, South Korea and Taiwan avoided formal lockdowns because their populations voluntarily complied with – and indeed to some extent communally enforced

[27] Lars Jonung, 'Sweden's Constitution Decides Its COVID-19 Exceptionalism', Working Paper 2020:11, Department of Economics, School of Economics and Management, Lund University (2020).

– de facto lockdown measures, couched legally as mere advice.[28] Some territories (two western states of Brazil, some western states of the USA, and the country of Iceland) can be said to have avoided the need to lock down due to their low population densities. Certain one-party states' refusal to lock down (Belarus in Europe, Nicaragua in Central America and Tanzania in Africa, the latter influencing also the response of its small neighbour Burundi) can be attributed to a lack of concern about the sentiments of their populations or of other states.[29] Lastly, there was the perverse case of Uruguay, a country that adopted early stringent measures which were so successful it felt no need to introduce a full lockdown, which then resulted in loss of control and spiking cases (although its total death toll remained lower than that of neighbouring countries).

I have argued that governments had to act in the face of the uncertainty of the pandemic to produce security. Authoritarian societies perhaps required such action less than others because they generate security through measures not available to liberal democracies, just as lockdowns were not available to Sweden due to its liberality. Although this might explain why certain countries forewent lockdowns, however, it does explain the ubiquitousness of lockdowns elsewhere.

The determination of the form of the pandemic response as lockdown might be described as 'overdetermined', in the sense developed by Sigmund Freud and applied to political analysis by Althusser,[30] meaning that there are multiple factors pointing in this direction, any one of which might have been sufficient by itself to explain it. There was an absence of any obvious alternative, an obvious efficaciousness (we can say a priori that reducing the circulation of people reduces the circulation of the virus, since people are its vectors), an effect of political mimesis by which countries follow one another's public policy examples, and a fear among political leaders of being found wanting when having not done what other countries did: how could a government explain to its populace that they have suffered mass death or health system failure because their government failed to do what every other government did?

Despite this overdetermination, the ubiquitousness of these measures must nevertheless be considered remarkable given the predictability of resistance to such swingeing restrictions on people's modi vivendi (even if, in the event, immediate pushback was generally muted). That is to say that, even though there was a signal lack of any alternative and many mutually reinforcing motivations for lockdowns, the possibility of popular

[28] M. Jae Moon, Kohei Suzuki, Tae In Park and Kentaro Sakuwa, "A Comparative Study of COVID-19 Responses in South Korea and Japan: Political Nexus Triad and Policy Responses," *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 87:3 (2021).

[29] Belarus, according to official figures, had the lowest COVID-19 fatality rate in Europe. While many have alleged that this is because the government falsified the figures, Belarus also officially has the most hospital beds per capita of any nation in Europe except Monaco, which might also have influenced the outcome positively. Nicaragua has by far the lowest rate of reported COVID-19 deaths of any country in the Americas – while some have cast doubt on these figures, Nicaragua is less authoritarian than Belarus and consequently these figures have greater credibility. Nicaragua's idiosyncratic alternative to lockdowns was door-to-door educational visits by "health brigades." Tanzania and Burundi recorded some of the lowest death rates in Africa and the world respectively.

[30] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1999); Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," in *For Marx* (2005).

reaction against them on the streets or at the ballot box posed a significant countervailing factor to introducing them. There are also some associated negative public health effects, mentioned already above.

Conspiracy theorists have tended to conclude from their apparent underdetermination by the virus alone, along with their transnational ubiquity, that the COVID-19 control measures were the aim in themselves, with the novel coronavirus serving only as a pretext to introduce measures that states already longed to implement, in effect averring that COVID countermeasures were really driven by shadowy political cabals. Such objections might indeed have a Foucauldian flavour, referring to Foucault's writings on discipline and panopticism – one thinks in particular of Giorgio Agamben's writings on this topic.[31]

Such interpretations, however, are in my view falsified by the enthusiasm of governments for ending lockdown restrictions. The overall pattern worldwide has been consistently for both governments and peoples, after an initial phase of relative enthusiasm for restrictions, to become eager to end them. An acute case in point would be Australia, which inadvertently on multiple occasions eliminated COVID-19 entirely from its shores, at great cost, through lockdowns and contact tracing but then deliberately adopted a bipartisan policy of reopening its international borders and hence reintroducing COVID-19 once it reached a certain level of vaccination (although, in the event, most of the country accidentally became reinfected with the virus ahead of that planned reopening). International observers often focus on the fact that Melbourne, Australia's second largest city, spent longer in cumulative lockdown than anywhere else on earth, and hence think Australia's COVID suppression measures exceptionally draconian, but in fact, for most Australians, the relative absence of COVID-19 from the country meant they had to endure almost no COVID-19 restrictions during the second half of 2020 and through 2021. Despite this relative absence, Australians overwhelmingly supported reopening the borders in order to end the one major restriction all Australians did continually face, viz. on international travel.

The primary reason for the quasi-universality of the pattern of global governmental responses to COVID-19 lies, I would suggest, not in conspiracy so much as in the tendency of expertise towards consensus. Foucault is often cited in relation to academic consensus, specifically with his insight that particular *epistemes* in any given discipline and in any particular historical period determine what kind of things may be said.[32] However, it is more apt here to refer to Thomas Kuhn's sociological insights about the way in which scientific disciplines in practice enforce a broad conformity of views around particular 'paradigms'.[33] While the world may be divided into different political and hence socio-medical jurisdictions, medical knowledge is organized now on a global basis that ensures a conformity of opinion – which is not to say that all doctors agree, only that, as Kuhn describes, no matter how many dissenters there might be, the dominant consensus will marginalize them. This is to say that the key to understanding the uniformity of

[31] Giorgio Agamben, "L'invenzione di un'epidemia," *Quodlibet.* https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-l-invenzione-di-un-epidemia (accessed 27 November 2023).
[32] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* [1966] (1989).
[33] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970).

governmental responses to COVID is to understand that it was relatively uniform in delegating decision-making to medical experts, who were in turn effectively of a single mind. One might also suggest that there is a kind of global paradigm for governmental knowledge too that experts in the art of government themselves tend towards.

MEDICAL SOCIETY

This answer leads us in turn to the questions of why the delegation of decision-making to medics was itself so internationally invariant and where the medics' paradigmatic response comes from, given the novelty of the situation they confronted.

Aside from the mimetic contagion of responses from one government to another, the answer to the first question is that medical authorities already had a stable position of power within all modern societies prior to the pandemic. This power is far from total under normal circumstances. This pandemic saw politicians take up science then not as an automatic response but as a last resort in a situation where they could not find ready answers from their preferred ideologies and think tanks. Indeed, I am suggesting that it was precisely because the way forward was so uncertain, not only from a public health point of view but also from a purely economic one, that scientists were able to come to the fore: if there had been a clear and simple pay-off of human lives for material profit, it would at least have been possible to advocate or surreptitiously manoeuvre to trade lives for money. Our society after all routinely ignores scientific health advice to engage in policy that is dangerous to the point of endangering all life on earth, from allowing pollution to allowing rampant climate change, or, more mundanely, allowing general access to alcohol, motor vehicles and, in some countries, guns. In all these cases, a combination of economic interests and popular (albeit always to some extent manufactured) political pressure prevents the public health science from determining policy. COVID-19, by contrast, posed a situation in which economic theory, elite plutocrats, and popular opinion had no clear pre-prepared solution and which, moreover, threatened not only lives but the fabric of our social mechanics. In such a situation, the state must step in to guide the situation but itself lacked a clear logic for dealing with the emergency. Medicine offered one. This logic was, however, unavoidably inadequate to the complexity of the public health role it was called upon to fill, meaning that advocates with a medical background offered guidance without knowing with certainty what effects it would ultimately have in terms of public health. This did not matter, however, from the point of view of states, whose aim was not to produce a more positive health outcome per se so much as to produce security. The reliance on medical advice moreover only ever meant to be a temporary, emergency measure: once the dangerous unpredictability passed, governments would return control to the private sector and markets, and were indeed always explicit that this return to pre-COVID normality was their medium-term goal.

To an extent, no doubt, it is simply natural to turn to virologists and epidemiologists in the face of a viral epidemic. However, to explain why this approach was so ubiquitous, it is necessary to refer to medicine's pre-existing social purchase. Armstrong notes the development in the course of the twentieth century of 'surveillance medicine', diffusing

out from the hospital through the social body, following individuals throughout their lives and anticipating and intervening to prevent rather than passively await the arrival of illness at the medical institution.[34] Foucault casts the result as a situation in which 'there is no longer anything outside medicine'.[35] The interventions to combat COVID-19 built on this ubiquitous surveillance to extend medical control. This extension was natural once medical expertise was empowered: quarantining people, masking them, spacing them from one another and vaccinating them simply represents the application of well-established medical practices to the social body at large, in a way that indeed has historical precedents that stretch to before the beginnings of modern medicine. That it is so natural to virologists, epidemiologists and immunologists goes some way to explaining the lack of consideration they gave to its downside risks. While surveillance medicine is attuned to "risk factors" as far as the generation of illness is concerned, this implies only the attempt to progressively eliminate the "lifestyle" factors that cause disease, not any appreciation that attempts to intervene in population health might reflexively cause health problems.

While lockdowns were new to most who experienced them, at base they represented the return of old, crude methods. Foucault notes that 'since the end of the Middle Ages',[36] there has existed a principle that, in the case of a plague, 'all people must stay in their dwelling in order to be localized in a place. Every family in its home and, if possible, every person in his or her own room'.[37] Indeed, outside of mainland China at least, COVID-19 lockdowns have been less onerous than this historic model inasmuch as there was no systematic monitoring of stay-at-home orders but rather only a piecemeal enforcement applied to people who appeared in public places, and some monitoring of particular infected individuals. Lockdowns thus represented a resort to an historically established practice that simply has not been much needed in recent decades, but which has nonetheless continued to determine the broad orientation of modern medicine towards infectious disease, its paradigm. From a medical point of view, we might even say that the lockdown is the default state of society: it begins by isolating the patients as individuals and only after allows the palliative of movement where it deems it medically permissible. For Foucault, the 'two major models for the control of individuals in the West' begin in the procedures developed in the Middle Ages for respectively corralling lepers in distinct spaces and monitoring plague victims in their own houses.[38] In this regard, modern power was medical from its inception. Foucault indeed suggests that 'One might argue in relation to modern society that we live in the "open medical States" in which medicalization is without limits'.[39]

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[34] David Armstrong, "The Rise of Surveillance Medicine," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 17:3 (1995).
[35] Michel Foucault, "The Crisis of Medicine or the Crisis of Antimedicine?," *Foucault Studies* 1 (2004), 15.
[36] Foucault, "The Birth of Social Medicine," 144.
[37] Ibid., 145.
[38] Michel Foucault, *Abnormal* [1999] (2003), 43 ff. For a detailed discussion of Foucault's distinction here, see Mark Kelly, "What's In a Norm? Foucault's Conceptualisation and Genealogy of the Norm," *Foucault Studies* 27 (2019).
[39] Foucault, "The Crisis of Medicine," 15–16.

From the point of view of medicine, the world is an unruly mess that is normatively undesirable, which is to say abnormal. Medicine today has acquired a general mission to normalize reality. As Foucault has it, 'Today medicine is endowed with an authoritarian power with normalizing functions that go beyond the existence of diseases and the wishes of the patient'.[40] This of course has been further extended in the course of the pandemic response, including in novel directions, such as censorship: the expansion of medical power in response to COVID-19 has dovetailed with increasing censoriousness in our society that characterizes 'disinformation' (a term that is applied in practice with some indifference both to deliberate attempts to misinform people and to sincerely held beliefs at variance with the expert consensus) as 'harmful' and hence makes the control of speech a matter of medical necessity. I am thinking in particular in this regard of the censorship latterly applied on social media to content questioning the COVID-19 vaccines.[41] This has turned a Kuhnian paradigm in medical knowledge into a more broadly enforced social norm. This enforcement has of course been well-meaning, inasmuch as COVID countermeasures were themselves understood to be life-saving, and measures such as lockdowns and vaccination lose their efficacy if the information environment leads people to disbelieve in them. However, as Foucault notes, medicalization itself produces popular resistances.[42]

We can also see in the COVID-19 response perhaps a continuation of a tendency, identified by Foucault, for medicine to become unmoored from health outcomes. Foucault alleges that twentieth century medical expansion failed to improve the health of the population. He refers specifically to the discovery of antibiotics and creation of the NHS: although any number of individuals can attest to being saved from death by these, they did not increase overall population health.[43] Indeed, for Foucault, this mid-twentieth century is marked precisely by a shift of medical focus towards the needs of the individual rather than the health of the population as a whole.

Foucault suggests the reason for this plateauing of population health is that the major measures necessary to socialize and modernize health care had already been taken by the beginning of the twentieth century. He thus suggests that newer interventions tend to kill as much as to cure, for example, the invention of anaesthesia allowed surgeons to conduct procedures that were previously impossible but are also very risky, with uncertain long-term prognoses. Although it is still too early to say with anything like definitive certainty, there is a possibility that the COVID-19 interventions have followed a similar pattern. Foucault specifically warns about the harmful potential of genetic manipulation in particular,[44] which might said to be operative in the case of the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines and their understudied side effects.

[40] Ibid., 13.
[41] Yaffa Shir-Raz, Ety Elisha, Brian Martin, Natti Ronel and Josh Guetzkow, "Censorship and Suppression of Covid-19 Heterodoxy: Tactics and Counter-Tactics," *Minerva* (2022).
[42] "The Crisis of Medicine," 16.
[43] Ibid., 17.
[44] Ibid., 10.

How could medicine have become unmoored from its basic business of improving human health? The simplest and shortest answer, supplied by Foucault himself, is marketization: "the human body has been brought twice over into the market: first by people selling their capacity to work, and second, through the intermediary of health."[45] Foucault here likens medical marketization to the basic dynamic of capitalism itself, explicitly as a doubling of the process of exploitation identified by Marx. The basic idea is obvious enough: markets drive medical procedures on a competitive basis, not on the basis of improving human health. How can this apply though to the creation of the NHS, which ostensibly made medicine public and hence went in the opposite direction? We can understand this, I think – although the issue is ultimately too complex to fully elaborate here – in the way that left-wing Marxists have sought to understand the Soviet Union, namely, on the basis that formally non-capitalist systems nonetheless retain hierarchies and markets in a way that lead to something like profits being extracted by bureaucracies and apparatchiks. While patients do not directly pay the NHS, it is nonetheless a bureaucratic behemoth that is hungry for resources and pays many of its senior employees, most notably the doctors, but increasingly also bureaucrats, handsomely with public funds. New and more medical procedures mean ceteris paribus more funding. We can also refer to the straightforward and increasing interpenetration of public health with private commerce. This is an endemic problem in such systems, most basically in the way in which public healthcare pays private pharmaceutical companies and other suppliers. Foucault is unequivocal that this is in fact the most important vector through which medicine has been marketized: 'Those who make the biggest profits from health are the major pharmaceutical companies', not doctors.[46] It is accordingly the pharmaceutical industry that has increasingly captured medicine: witness the increasing capture by pharma of regulatory bodies in recent decades and the increasing pharmaceuticalization of health care.[47]

This entirely accords with the pattern of the COVID-19 response, which culminated in a massively expensive pharmaceutical quasi-solution. While vaccination was touted as a panacea, its explicit promise only ever extended to greatly increasing the survivability of the virus and to some extent slowing transmission, while the ongoing mutation of the virus ensured indefinite revaccination would be necessary. Simply lessening symptoms of COVID-19 in itself was enough to end the public health crisis by greatly reducing the danger of cascade failure to the health system, hence ending the emergency from the point of view of security, even though the virus remains globally endemic.

The solution of vaccination tied together every stakeholder: it offered a basis for ordinary people to resume normal life, to governments who wanted to restore economic normalcy, and to medics whose dream is to inoculate disease out of existence. From the point of view of the Western pharmaceutical industry, exactly the opposite aim was fulfilled:

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[45] Ibid., 16.

[46] Ibid., 18.

[47] Liza Vertinsky, 'Pharmaceutical (Re) Capture' *Yale Journal of Health Policy, Law and Ethics* 20 (2021), 146; John Abraham, 'The Pharmaceutical Industry as a Political Player', *The Lancet*, 360:9344 (2002); John Abraham 'Pharmaceuticalization of Society in Context: Theoretical, Empirical and Health Dimensions', *Sociology* 44:4 (2010).

their expensive, novel, patented medications would not end the pandemic but rather require indefinite further doses. Importantly, moreover, this was a neoliberal solution: it was furnished by the market and could allow markets to resume normal operation.

CONCLUSION

My analysis of the politics of the COVID-19 pandemic has thus now schematically employed a Foucauldian analysis to reach Marxian conclusions, ones that Marx himself and indeed later Marxists fail themselves to provide a framework adequate to reach (although there are any number of Marxist thinkers not mentioned here whose thought might provide further relevant analytical insights). The vaccination program itself implies a confluence of the interests of capital with those of the working class unanticipated by Marx, not least because in his day healthcare had yet to become a major industry and source of profits. What Marx did anticipate is the implicated move of capitalism from profiting from surplus value extraction to rent seeking, which is what the pharmaceutical profit model primarily amounts to inasmuch as it is based on ownership of intellectual property rather than the production of the product per se. The resultant health–industrial complex can be expected to prioritize profitability over benefits to its consumers, particularly when one considers the possibility that 1. more efficacious but less profitable/patentable remedies might be disfavoured and 2. there are systemic incentives not to cure profitable diseases. Indeed, this motivational structure is a classic case of a situation where capitalism requires regulation and other state interventions in order to save capitalism itself from the possible consequences of allowing its rapacity to go unchecked, in this case specifically by harming public health.

For all that Marxism seems able to capture the basic coordinates of the pandemic response, it does not seem fully adequate to explicate what we have seen since 2020, even when alloyed with some Foucauldian insights. Rather, we need a full appreciation of the extent to which strategies of power in contemporary society, while always needing to be integrated into capitalism, are not reducible to class or economics. Foucault identifies multiple dynamics with relative autonomy in relation to the economy, even if they ordinarily serve it, which allow the state to temporarily diverge from the aim of capital accumulation. These are, namely, in the current context, biopolitics, security, and medicalization. Commentators often miss the extent to which Foucault intended "bio-politics" to designate the hybridization of the science of biology with politics (not least because Foucault himself is far from punctilious in insisting on this point).[48] It is no accident that we have seen a systematic genuflection to 'the science' and 'the experts' in this pandemic, and it is because science and scientific expertise are genuinely important forces in modern societies.

This all has implications in two apparently contradictory directions. On the one hand, the Marxist suspicion of the bourgeois state seems somewhat exaggerated in light of this:

[48] Indeed, Foucault is never fully explicit about this derivation but consistently draws the connection: Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, 139; *Society Must Be Defended*, 250; 'The Birth of Social Medicine' in *Power: Essential Works of Michel Foucault* Vol. III, 137.

while there is good reason to be critically suspicious of the motives of the state, keeping people alive is nonetheless one of its real missions, not merely for hypothetical reasons but categorically. On the other hand, we ought to be suspicious of the medical state precisely because its care for our lives is in itself a means of controlling us. From Marx's perspective, looking after workers' lives is part and parcel of the proletarian cause against an uncaring exploitative bourgeoisie. From Foucault's perspective, however, systems created to care for us are far from politically benign or even neutral but rather have their own logics and intentions which we might find necessary to resist, and these work not only when they fail to promote but can actually work through the production of positive health outcomes. With Foucault, however, I do not mean actively to promote the resistance of any particular mechanism of power, however, still less to enjoin a paranoiac opposition to all power, but rather to offer a dispassionate and descriptive analysis that might potentially serve to inform political action.

While there is critical potential in this analysis, like Marx's own analyses, it also points to a certain inevitability and even desirability of what has taken place within the logic of our social system. The health of the population in a biopolitical society requires the stability of the state. With neoliberal governmentality, it also requires the health of the market since this is the organising principle of society and state. So securing state and economy is always already in the interests of public health. While negative vaccine reactions have been the tragic fruit of a pandemic response that showed indifference to such consequences, attempts to derive a systematic lesson from these politically tend towards a libertarian individualism that ignores the needs of society at large, as well as the costs of inaction. The conspiracy theoretic view of COVID-19 imagines the status quo ante as a kind of state of nature which has been artificially distorted by state interventions, when in fact it was already artificially constructed and maintained. While medicalization, neoliberalism, and even capitalism itself as such are susceptible to critique, governmental response to the pandemic was overdetermined by these and could only have been different given significantly different social coordinates, as indeed applied in certain specific countries.

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ARTICLE

Plague, Foucault, Camus

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ABSTRACT. In January 1975, Michel Foucault contemplated the nature and formation of what in subsequent years he would come to know as governmentality. For Foucault, plague marks the rise of the invention of positive technologies of power, where these relations center around inclusion, multiplication, and security, rather than exclusion, negation, and rejection. In a point that might at first seem ancillary to his central argument, Foucault comments on stylized works about plague, such as those, according to the lecture series' editors, exemplified by Albert Camus. In footnote fifteen of the January 15, 1975 lecture, in reference to what Foucault deemed the "literary dream of" plagues, the editors list Camus' 1947 novel *La Peste*, among other works, as representative of 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.". This article places Camus' novel and other works in conversation with Foucault on governmentality, subjectivation, and truth to demonstrate the ways in which individualism itself can be viewed biopolitically. In so doing, it offers an urgent intervention that speaks powerfully to and is exemplified by the current global pandemic. Plague serves both as this literary dream and as a discursive mechanism engaged simultaneously with regimes of truth and the individuals constructing them. By pairing Foucault's historical understanding of the invention of positive technologies of power with Camus' treatment of "the absurd" in and out of the plague context, one uncovers the interrelation of governmentality, subjectivation, and truth.

Keywords: Albert Camus, plague, governmentality, subjectivation, truth

INTRODUCTION

Though "plague" is a rather ubiquitous word that serves as a stand in for many types of annoyances or even as a metaphor for an abundance of things one simply does not like,[1]

[1] I am thinking of catty middle school putdowns like "you're a plague on my existence" or as a more gendered reference to something like a "plague of boys that that just won't leave me alone…" Obviously, the absurdity of juxtaposing something as serious, devastating, and pathological as "the plague" with the banal exploits of adolescence is not lost on me, however, hopefully this article makes clear that even the benign

most concretely, plague is a reference to the many historical pandemics/epidemics where some pestilence[2] ravages a community. This word has reared its gnarly head again and again in the preceding few years[3] – tossed around cautiously as the modern world has been forced to endure its own pandemic, with its own complexities and its own mechanisms of regulation.[4] Of course, that begs the question about what modern society can or has learned from plagues of the past. Are we conducting ourselves in the same manner? Are we reacting to the same fears? What can plague in the historical sense tell us about our current predicament? Foucault suggested that the plague of the middle ages in Europe was a turning point in the formation of "positive technologies of power" that would begin to structure existence from the 16th and still into the 17th centuries.[5] But, was that a solitary event indebted to a particular *épistémè* and a particular discursive regime? Or are we destined to experience similar phenomena each time disease sprawls throughout and across global communities, no matter the ways in which a population is subjectivized or otherwise engaged with truth?

It is one thing to recognize the ways in which a series of historical developments have shaped and shifted the trajectory of humanity, but it is quite another for such an analysis to highlight the ways in which those, what in the grand scheme of existence account for little more than momentary fluctuations, are constantly and repeatedly reified both in similar situations and in that which is only homologous in some abstract or esoteric capacity. Existence does not require something as monumental as plague to tighten the reins of governmentality, to perpetually and emphatically lay down the hammer of subjectivation, or to structure the nature and interplay of varying regimes of truth. Applying these Foucauldian concepts and mechanisms to life's commonalities, idiosyncrasies, and even what the future has in store is, if anything, academically expected. Works of that nature are useful if idealistic, helpful if grandiose, and even poignant if unnoticed. But what happens when the cataclysmic heuristic happens again? When no analogy—"it was *like* a plague"—is required? Should anything change now that the literary device is back on our doorstep and not just an exercise in elegant historicity and sublime theorizing?

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metaphorical usages of "plague" are rooted in mechanisms of governmentality, processes of subjectivation, and ultimately technologies of truth.

[2] Most commonly, those caused by the bacteria Yersinia pestis, but other diseases or viruses can also rightfully be called "plagues." See Robert J. Littman, "The Plague of Athens: Epidemiology and Paleopathology," *Mount Sinai Journal of Medicine* 76:5 (2009), 456-467.

[3] With a heavy dose of irony, cf., e.g., Landon Y. Jones, "Camus's 'Plague' Foretold Coronavirus," *Wall Street Journal*. https://www.wsj.com/articles/camuss-plague-foretold-coronavirus-11586386641 (accessed November 23, 2023).

[4] For a general discussion analyzing how Foucauldian concepts can be useful in facing the COVID-19 global pandemic, see Daniele Lorenzini, "Biopolitics in the Time of Coronavirus," *Critical Inquiry* 47:S2 (2021).

[5] Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (2003); Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978* (2007); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1974] (1995). See also, Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976* (2003) and Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (2008).

This article argues all and none of those points, suggesting instead that plague is as allegorical as it is historical – as trans-actional[6] as it is a function of reality. Plague serves as a discursive basis for governmentality, subjectivation, and truth, all while being neatly nestled within biopolitical mechanisms and man's interaction with "the Absurd." In turn, this paper will be *partitioned* into three parts. First, using Camus' novel *The Plague*[7] as a *commensurate*, literary representation of plague, I will recount Foucault's exploration of plague as it bequeaths governmentality, utilizing his descriptions from both *Abnormal* and *Discipline and Punish* (as well as briefly summarized in *Security, Territory, Population*). Utilizing Camus' prose as an allegorical vehicle for Foucault's philosophical insights, the existentialist impact of governmentality becomes clear and sets the stage for the ways in which the subject is born. As such, I will follow the emergence of these techniques of governing conduct through subjectivation and the biopolitics of the individual, pairing Foucault's epoch most directly concerned with biopower[8] with Camus' philosophical treatment of "the Absurd" in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.[9] Through this combination of concepts, "the absurd" can be realized as a biopolitical driver in and of itself. Lastly, with this biopolitical subject in tow, I will follow each author and return to plague to uncover the ways in which manifestations of truth and truth acts are in and of themselves absurd discoveries.

Ultimately, it is not my intent to simply analyze the similarities between these two authors' treatment of plague, per se; instead, through collocation, I seek to pair these authors in ways that uncover something newfangled for each. For Foucault, the ability to build a Camusian account of both biopolitics and subjectivation will uncover the ways in which both are fundamentally absurd, and for Camus, the addition of Foucauldian frameworks to his philosophical project will reveal the *discursive* structure that undergirds man's inevitable engagement with absurdity. Throughout each section, I will integrate contemporary examples from the COVID-19 global pandemic as both concise examples of the ways in which our current condition proliferates the plague phenomena but also as an ironic catharsis for all the predictable ways the "plague" paradigm is explicated and has

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[6] Though possibly a tad esoteric, I am using "trans-actional" here as Foucault did in *The Birth of Biopolitics* when he went great lengths to describe civil society: "Civil society is like madness and sexuality, what I call transactional realities (*réalités de transaction*). That is to say, those transactional and transitional figures that we call civil society, madness, and so on, which, although they have not always existed are nonetheless real, are born precisely from the interplay of relations of power and everything which constantly eludes them, at the interface, so to speak, of governors and governed." Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 297. The professor that introduced me to the world of Foucault, Ed Cohen, insisted on the importance of this notion when reading Foucault during a seminar I took in 2017 where a *very* preliminary version of this paper was concocted. Like sexuality and society, plague too is a discursive construct that "although [it has] not always existed [is] nonetheless real" and as such "born precisely from the interplay of relations of power and everything which constantly eludes them." Ibid. Juxtaposing this reality as it is across (trans) *actions*/*acting* with how it serves functionally as a causal instrument is key for understanding the concept.

[7] Albert Camus, *The Plague* [1947] (1991).

[8] In terms of Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France, this epoch begins with *Abnormal* and *"Society Must Be Defended,"* but becomes more explicit in *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*. See also Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction* [1976] (1990).

[9] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* [1942] (2018).

remained the same.[10] Coronavirus marks a clear occurrence of plague as a totalizing force, both in the Foucauldian and Camusian senses.

PLAGUE BEGETS GOVERNMENTALITY

In January of 1975, during a lecture at the Collège de France[11] and later that year in *Discipline and Punish*,[12] Foucault contemplates the nature and formation of what he would soon come to know as governmentality or the structured techniques by which subjects are governed.[13] For Foucault, plague marks the rise of the invention of positive technologies of power, where these relations center around inclusion, multiplication, and security, rather than exclusion, negation, and rejection. As opposed to the exiling of lepers,[14] Foucault suggests that the partitioning and regulation of both populations and bodies became[15] the response; "the replacement of the exclusion of lepers by the inclusion of plague victims as the model of control was a major phenomenon of the eighteenth century. […] A certain territory was marked out and closed off: the territory of a town, possibly that of a town and its suburbs, was established as a closed territory."[16] This alludes to what Foucault describes more succinctly two years later in *Security, Territory, Population*: "[t]hese plague regulations involve literally imposing a partitioning grid on the regions and town struck by plague, with regulations indicating when people can go out, how, at what times, what they must do at home, what type of food they must have, prohibiting certain types of contact, requiring them to present themselves to inspectors, and to open their homes to

[10] More often than not, I will use political and cultural incidents from the United States of America: not because these examples are any more or less paradigmatic or any more or less poignant but only because of my increased familiarity given my own positionality. That is not to say what happened in America should always be extrapolated elsewhere, but it stands to reason that if this American experience at all resembles that of 16th and 17th century Europe or of Camus' early 20th century Algerian creation, it might just as well bear resemblances with other spatiotemporal realities.

[11] See Foucault, *Abnormal*.

[12] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

[13] Though Foucault gives three meanings for his use of governmentality, the first is most crucial for our purposes: "the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument." Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 108. Translator Graham Burchell utilized multiple previous translations of this February 1978 lecture when completing the English translation of *Security, Territory, Population*. This first English translation was based on an Italian version as transcribed and edited by Pasquale Pasquino, first published in *Aut Aut* 167-8, September-December 1978, and it read as follows: "[t]he ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security." Michel Foucault, "Governmentality" [1978], in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (1991), 102 (reprinted as, "Governmentality" [1978], in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Vol. 3*, Power (2000))

[14] *Abnormal*, 43. For a direct contrast of the two societies, see *Discipline and Punish*, 198-200.

[15] Foucault stipulates this different model was "reactivated" rather than newly established: "something else, a different model, was not established but reactivated." *Abnormal*, 44.

[16] *Abnormal*, 44-45.

inspectors."[17] So, in turn, plague, and more specifically the plague-stricken town, is the culminating event where mechanisms of power broadly concerned with conduct become explicit and inescapable systems of surveillance, discipline, and regulation.

This phenomenon, this historical moment, this system of surveillance and partitioning stands in stark contrast to what Foucault calls the "literary dream of" plagues.[18] Editors Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni expand on this "literary dream" citationally in a footnote, listing works spanning millennia,[19] of which Albert Camus' 1946 novel *La Peste* (English translation 1947, *The Plague*) is the most recently penned. Taking this footnote as referential,[20] what Foucault utters in his lecture suggests that these texts represent "a kind of orgiastic dream in which plague is the moment when individuals come apart and when the law is forgotten."[21] This deduction may be apt for Thucydides and Lucretius, but a reputable reading of Camus' tome clearly indicates the same system Foucault postulates.

Consider Foucault's analysis, that "[i]n each street there were overseers, in each quarter inspectors, in each district someone in charge of the district, and in the town itself either someone was nominated as governor or the deputy mayor was given supplementary powers when plague broke out."[22] Camus paints this picture vividly in his novel as overseers inspect "house by house" the town of Oran,[23] partition "particularly affected central areas,"[24] and inordinate power was given to solitary individuals, in this case, the prefect

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[17] *Security, Territory, Population*, 9-10.

[18] *Abnormal*, 47

[19] "Cette littérature commence avec Thucydide, Istoriai, II, 47, 54, et T. Lucretius Carus, De natura rerum, VI, 1138, 1246, et se prolonge jusqu'à A. Artaud, Le Théâtre et son double, Paris, 1938, et A. Camus, La Peste, Paris, 1946." Michel Foucault, *Les Anormaux: Cours au Collège de France, 1974-1975*, (1999). In the English edition, the footnote is largely the same, "This literature begins with Thucydides, Istoriai (History of the Peloponnesian War),vol. 2, 47, 54, and Lucretius, De na/ura rerum (On the Nature of the Universe), vol . 6, 1 1 38, 1246, and continues with A. Artaud, Le Theatre et son double (Paris, Gallimard, 1938). English translation: The Theater and Its Double, translated by Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1 958), and A. Camus, La Peste (Paris: s.1., 1 946) English translation: The Plague, translated by S. Gilbert (London: s.1., 1 948)." *Abnormal*, 54 fn. 15.

[20] It is hard to imagine that Foucault did not have Camus in mind when he refers to this "extremely interesting body of literature in which the plague appears as the moment of panic and confusion in which individuals, threatened by visitations of death, abandon their identities, throw off their masks, forget their status, and abandon themselves to the great debauchery of those who know they are going to die." *Abnormal*, 47. And in *Discipline and Punish* shortly thereafter: "[a] whole literary fiction of the festival grew up around the plague suspended laws, lifted prohibitions, the frenzy of passing time, bodies mingling together without respect, individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized, allowing a quite different truth to appear." *Discipline and Punish*, 197. I know not whether Foucault was referencing *The Plague* either time, but some scholars do admit that Foucault was "more of an enthusiastic reader of Camus than of Sartre" [in the original Portuguese "mais leitor entusiasta de Camus do que do próprio Sartre."]. Ernani Chaves, "Do 'sonho literário' ao 'sonho político' da peste: Foucault, leitor (crítico) de Camus," [From the "literary dream" to the "political dream" of the plague: Foucault (critical) reader of Camus] *Voluntas: Revista Internacional de Filosofia* 11:e21 (2020), 2, which gives me pause.

[21] *Abnormal*, 47.

[22] *Abnormal*, 45.

[23] "[H]e had no idea what had happened, but knew that several districts of the town had been isolated for twenty-four hours for a house-to-house inspection." Camus, *The Plague*, 159-60.

[24] "The authorities had the idea of segregating certain particularly affected central areas and permitting only those whose services were indispensable to cross the cordon." *The Plague*, 168.

rather than the governor or deputy mayor Foucault describes.[25] In some ways, Camus' work serves only to imagine the historico-legal descriptions with a new setting and a cast of characters that experience the disciplinary mechanisms firsthand that Foucault illuminates decades later. In one instance, Camus writes that "[t]he authorities had the idea of segregating certain particularly affected central areas and permitting only those whose services were indispensable to cross the cordon. Dwellers in these districts could not help regarding these regulations as a sort of taboo specially directed at themselves, and thus they came, by contrast, to envy residents in other areas their freedom."[26] This indicates the direct effect "regulations" have on the conduct of citizens through partitioning and segregation but also how discursive mechanisms like "the taboo" have an ancillary, social effect on second-order conduct (envy at the freedom of others) as well. I would venture as far to say that Camus elucidates how governmentality can only be realized through engaging with this notion of the absurd – or maybe more poetically, "that revolt of the flesh."[27]

At this point, one must define "the absurd" and in turn question how such a notion is ever engaged. Camus is relatively illusive in terms of the definition itself, preferring instead flowery language, metaphor, or any other of the masking rhetorical tricks one might imagine to lead readers toward a more holistic confrontation with the term instead.[28] In a delectable sense of irony, this illusiveness is nothing less than the absurd pursuit applied to that which is only slightly less monumental than human purpose and existential meaning. For Camus, "the Absurd" is the inability for man to find answers to the very questions that spur their own being. How one might engage with such a notion is yet another pursuit, and an absurd one at that. Still, it requires a kind of subversive traversing for man to submit to this disciplinary power. Man must transcend their corporeal capacities – those inherent in their being – to join the multiplicity of relations structuring existence as such. And it is that "revolt of the flesh" which allows man to set aside this human predicament (the Absurd) and engage. To engage is to be governed.

With this engagement in mind, returning to plague, the culmination of forces makes for a clear enough situation – one whose magnitude is evident only through its mechanics. The evolution from the regulation of conduct, through partitioning and visual

[25] "An order to that effect can be issued only by the Prefect" and "The most he could do was to put the matter up to the Prefect." Ibid. 30.

[26] Ibid. 168-69.

[27] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 14. It is fitting that our introduction to Camus' most celebrated work of philosophy begins here, with "time carr[ying] us." Ibid. 13. This foreshadowing –this "*enumeration* of the feelings of the absurd"—will have to serve us for now, until this "worst enemy" is *truly* recognized. Ibid. 13-14.

[28] To demonstrate, albeit mirroring the illusiveness, contrast Camus' first usage of absurdity in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "[w]hat, then, is that incalculable feeling that deprives the mind of the sleep necessary to life? A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and this life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity" with his last: "[t]he absurd thing is that it should be the soul of this body which it transcends so inordinately. Whoever would like to represent this absurdity must give it life in a series of parallel contrasts." *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 6 and 127 (the latter quote being from the *Appendix: Hope and the Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka*).

surveillance, to the continuous documentation of the information gathered (as well as the structure of the system in place that necessitates any data to be collected)[29] represents a discursive shift in the disciplinary mechanism. Foucault shows this, stating that "everything thus observed had to be permanently recorded by means of this kind of visual examination and by entering all information in big registers."[30] This discursive shift is what allows for the newfound multiplicity to structure man in new ontological ways, mediated through both time and space. In relation to coronavirus, this shift was expounded again, this time through digitalization. Gone were the strictly visual observances and manual recordings as algorithms and data conceptualizations came to continually update the status of the virus on every scale imaginable.[31] Access to the registers faces a shift as well, for with COVID-19, the ability for individuals to check the number of cases in their area and eventually the number vaccinated became the stated purpose of what in the Foucauldian context is an explicit means of disciplinary power.

Camus predicted this phenomenon as well, writing, "[o]n the following day the next of kin were asked to sign the register of burials, which showed the distinction that can be made between men and, for example, dogs; men's deaths are checked and entered up"[32] and "[h]e knew that, over a period whose end he could not glimpse, his task was no longer to cure but to diagnose. To detect, to see, to describe, to register, and then condemn, that was his present function."[33] This personal description of these acts of surveillance brings governmentality to life in a way that induces readers to vicariously experience the emotions and affects enmeshed in this disciplinary conduct. In that sense, Camus' prose functions as what Foucault often describes as "the art of government," if only on this individualized scale; nevertheless, these words reify many of the implications of the conduct in which they describe.

The first of these two Camus quotations acknowledges the perspective of the governed as they are required to confront life and death, albeit repackaged and stripped of their magnitude now that they are mere statistical information. A contemporary analogue from the early days of our pandemic – say, an astute individual searching a COVID-19 tracker[34] in their area for an uptick in cases before a trip out in public – takes on a similar tone,

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[29] It is not particularly ground-breaking that a system of regulation would record the laws themselves, how they function, and when they were enacted; that was in existence centuries prior, but for the surveilling techniques to be self-surveilling as well adds an additional layer to this disciplinary model. For a clear representation of this disciplinary model, see *Discipline and Punish*, 196-97.

[30] *Abnormal*, 45

[31] Manners of surveillance extend past even what my imagination could create, but for an introductory review of how epidemiological surveillance was handled, see Nahla K. Ibrahim, "Epidemiologic surveillance for controlling Covid-19 pandemic: types, challenges and implications," *Journal of Infection and Public Health*, 13:11 (2020), 1630-38 and for a general review of state surveillance measures see Kristine Eck and Sophia Hatz, "State surveillance and the COVID-19 crisis," *Journal of Human Rights* 19:5 (2020), 603-12.

[32] *The Plague*, 176.

[33] *The Plague*, 192.

[34] See generally, CDC COVID Data Tracker. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home (accessed November 23, 2023). But, for an analysis of the ethical concerns involved in COVID-19 tracking apps, see Renate Klar and Dirk Lanzerath, "The ethics of COVID-19 tracking apps – challenges and voluntariness," *Research Ethics* 16:3-4 (2020), 1–9.

delimited again through digitalization but with the expansion of ubiquitous access to this type of information in turn making the structure of this disciplinary power less obvious or pronounced. The second quotation recenters the state actor – in this case, Rieux the medical doctor – largely in a position of power and control. This character is forced to reconcile what once was his role (curing the ill) with what it is now (diagnosis, detection, registration) and what it will ultimately be (condemnation). In all of these cases, confronting the absurd nature of these disciplinary mechanisms seems just out of reach for the individual in question given the immediacy of their needs in terms of the everyday actions required to continue "living," but, lingering just to the side, at the precipice of their endeavor, is a sneaking suspicion that their current predicament is unlike that which has come to resemble existence. However, outside of such an ephemeral and situational epiphany, these predicaments show just the opposite: how ordinary disciplinary regimes of this function and potency have become, how quotidian surveillance can be, and how accustomed one becomes to governmentality altogether.

Still, in the plague-stricken town, surveillance is compounded by the notion of inspection, "[t]he gaze is alert everywhere: 'A considerable body of militia, commanded by good officers and men of substance', guards at the gates, at the town hall and in every quarter to ensure the prompt obedience of the people and the most absolute authority of the magistrates, 'as also to observe all disorder, theft and extortion'."[35] This gaze was on full display during the COVID-19 pandemic as lockdown and quarantine measures were not only enacted,[36] but enforced.[37] Their warrantability, both ethically and in terms of what was legally justifiable, became a matter of contestation around the globe.[38] Now, for

[35] *Discipline and Punish*, 195-96.

[36] The vastness and variation of legal measures taken in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic were immense. For data at the global level, see Thomas Hale, Noam Angrist, Rafael Goldszmidt, Beatriz Kira, Anna Petherick, Toby Phillips, Samuel Webster, Emily Cameron-Blake, Laura Hallas, Saptarshi Majumdar, and Helen Tatlow, "A global panel database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker)," *Nature Human Behaviour* 5 (2021), 529-38. In the United States, collection and analysis of the initial state legal reactions to the onset of the pandemic can be found at Center for Public Health Law Research, "Covid-19: State Emergency Declarations & Mitigation Policies," *LawAtlas.org* https://www.lawatlas.org/datasets/covid-19-emergency-declarations (accessed November 23, 2023).

[37] Enforcement mechanisms differed all across the world. In Nigeria overreach and illegalities were reported, Aliiu O. Shodunke, "Enforcement of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown orders in Nigeria: Evidence of public (non)compliance and police illegalities," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 77 (2022), 103082, whereas in the United States many laws were left unenforced. Griff Witte, "Coronavirus Shutdowns Have Gone Nationwide. Many Police Departments Aren't Enforcing Them." *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/coronavirus-shutdowns-have-gone-nationwide-many-police-departments-arent-enforcing-them/2020/03/25/56be5ed2-6e00-11ea-a3ec-70d7479d83f0_story.html (accessed November 23, 2023). Further, to see examples of the political impact of this enforcement, *see* Damien Bol, Marco Giani, André Blais, and Peter John Loewen, "The effect of COVID-19 lockdowns on political support: Some good news for democracy?," *European Journal of Political Research* 60:2 (2021), 497-505.

[38] In the United States in particular, this contestation was prevalent to say the least, but for an analysis regarding the trends in the types of laws introduced and passed, whether they expanded or limited public health authority, and how they managed to do so, *see* Elizabeth Platt, Katie Moran-McCabe, Amy Cook, and Scott Burris, "Trends in US State Public Health Emergency Laws, 2021-2022," *American Journal of Public Health* 113 (2023), 288-96.

Camus, these agents likewise symbolize the militarization of space and time,[39] but they have also come to represent the sheer absurdity of the townspeople's existence—how the order and control of the police is never out of step with the fear and angst that comes with inspection.[40] This absurdity might have boiled over during the COVID-19 pandemic as new fault lines between ideological groups emphasized the ways in which the conventional "us vs. them" attitudes were malleable in ways that kept them untethered from anything resembling classical dogmatism.[41] A political divide did grow in new and perhaps unexpected ways,[42] but the same sectarian hegemony was all but entrenched through an unbridled reactionaryism that just happened to maintain the conventional partisan alignment.[43]

Both authors show us that "[t]he plague is met by order; its function is to sort out every possible confusion: that of the disease, which is transmitted when bodies are mixed together; that of the evil, which is increased when fear and death overcome prohibitions."[44] Yet, for one, Foucault, plague serves as the linchpin for the introduction of governmentality, while the other, Camus, is concerned with the impact this phenomenon has on the individual. That being said, Foucault is not inherently silent on this phenomenon: "[plague] lays down for each individual his place, his body, his disease and his death, his well-being, by means of an omnipresent and omniscient power that subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way even to the ultimate determination of the individual, of what characterizes him, of what belongs to him, of what happens to him."[45] However, this is the backdrop to which Foucault contrasts the competing dreams of plague.

First, the literary dream where "[a] whole literary fiction of the festival grew up around the plague suspended laws, lifted prohibitions, the frenzy of passing time, bodies mingling together without respect, individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized."[46] A similar allusion has certainly been present in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic; news reports have painted

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[39] *The Plague*, 146.

[40] *The Plague*, 111-12. See also Ibid. at 303-06.

[41] Lauren Jodi Van Scoy, Bethany Snyder, Erin L. Miller, Olubukola Toyobo, Ashmita Grewal, Giang Ha, Sarah Gillespie, Megha Patel, Aleksandra E. Zgierska, and Robert P. Lennon, "'Us-Versus-Them': Othering in COVID-19 public health behavior compliance," *PloS One* 17:1 (2022), e0261726. See also, e.g., Lei Han, "Reading Chinese anti-COVID-19 pandemic narratives on facemasks as the art of disaster governance: a semiotic and biopolitical survey," *Social Semiotics* 33:2 (2020), 278-285.

[42] See, for example, Sarah K. Cowan, Nicholas Mark, and Jennifer A. Reich, "COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy Is the New Terrain for Political Division among Americans," *Socius* 7 (2021), 1-3.

[43] Ann-Kathrin Rothermel, "What anti-gender and anti-vaccines politics have in common – the construction of gender and the Covid-19 pandemic in right-wing discourses," *Engenderings – London School of Economics and Political Science*. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2022/04/11/what-anti-gender-and-anti-vaccines-politics-have-in-common-the-construction-of-gender-and-the-covid-19-pandemic-in-right-wing-discourses/ (accessed November 23, 2023).

[44] *Discipline and Punish*, 197. See also, *The Plague*, 128 (""After all," the doctor repeated, then hesitated again, fixing his eyes on Tarrou, "it's something that a man of your sort can understand most likely, but, since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes toward the heaven where He sits in silence.").

[45] *Discipline and Punish*, 197.

[46] *Discipline and Punish*, 197.

isolated incidences as "chaos"[47] and "panic,"[48] or worse, as indicative of the impending deterioration of society's most treasured, time-tested, and functionally imperative conventions.[49] The social configuring inherent in this type of sensationalism certainly cognizes an interesting phenomenon where the disciplinary conditions of governmentality create or uncover a new discursive reality, and for Foucault, it is this hyperbolic retelling that "allow[s] a quite different *truth* to appear,"[50] but, in terms of the disciplinary mechanisms themselves and that which they are more readily said to configure, this same moment constitutes "a political dream of the plague,"[51] where something parallel occurs:

> [N]ot the collective festival, but strict divisions; not laws transgressed, but the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life through the mediation of the complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power; not masks that were put on and taken off, but the assignment to each individual of his 'true' name, his 'true' place, his 'true' body, his 'true' disease.[52]

Interesting here is this interplay between truth and the individual. The truth *of* the individual is created by these plague regulations and their strict divisions. This truth is what allows for the individual – what necessitates individuality even. In some ways, this connected realization is premature, as plague not only structures and orders this collection of individuals: it births them as such, the individual *through* a population. Strikingly, and in somewhat reciprocal terms, Camus describes this as inherent bleakness and the destruction of individuality:

> Some […] even contrived to fancy they were still behaving as free men and had the power of choice. But actually it would have been truer to say that by this time, mid-August, the plague had swallowed up everything and everyone. No longer were there individual destinies; only a collective destiny, made of plague and the

[47] Searching google for COVID-19 articles from early 2020 to the end of 2021 with "chaos" in the title presented interesting results. For one shining example among many, *see, e.g.,* Angela Giuffrida and Lorenzo Tondo, "Leaked coronavirus plan to quarantine 16m sparks chaos in Italy." *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/08/leaked-coronavirus-plan-to-quarantine-16m-sparks-chaos-in-italy (accessed November 23, 2023).

[48] Similar results abound when it comes to "panic," though toilet-paper panic-buys seemed to catch the majority of the headlines: see, e.g., Noor El-Terk, "Toilet paper, canned food: What explains coronavirus panic buying," *Al Jazeera*. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/13/toilet-paper-canned-food-what-explains-coronavirus-panic-buying (accessed November 23, 2023). Articles specific to US related panic buys struck a different chord, Ed Pilkington, "US sales of guns and ammunition soar amid coronavirus panic buying," *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/us-sales-guns-ammunition-soar-amid-coronavirus-panic-buying (accessed November 23, 2023).

[49] Amy L. Fairchild, "Science Can't Save Us From Coronavirus Panic," *Foreign Affairs*. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-03-10/science-cant-save-us-coronavirus-panic (accessed November 23, 2023).

[50] Ibid. 197. (emphasis added)

[51] Ibid. 197-98.

[52] Ibid. 198.

> emotions shared by all. Strongest of these emotions was the sense of exile and of deprivation, with all the crosscurrents of revolt and fear set up by these.[53]

Perhaps what Camus describes is more similar to the present. COVID-19 was a totalizing force that through quarantine and lockdowns created some kind of universalized experience that privileged progress over desire.[54] Largely, the pandemic forced individuals to embrace a collectivist attitude, even if only momentarily and without sincerity. In many ways, what Foucault demonstrates in terms of disciplinary power is all but recapitulated each time a fresh pandemic arises.[55] Yet, should it be said that each instance forges individuality anew? Here, the discrepancies between authors amount to the strongest argument in favor of their unity. For Camus, the central focus is on the ways in which individuality collapses, while Foucault is primarily concerned with the ways in which this disciplinary power creates. It would appear that this political dream is multi-faceted and uneven. Both authors are describing the regulation of conduct, though Foucault describes that regulation in a way that we will come to see as the moment the subject is born, whereas Camus is describing what at least conceptually comes next: how individual subjects contemplate and endure this enforced individuality. The question remains whether the fruits of that contemplation are always already constituted *within* subjectivation.

PLAGUE BEGETS SUBJECTIVATION

What Camus leaves unsaid, Foucault speaks of explicitly; this second central theme regarding plague is that of subjectivation or the process of becoming a subject. The process of subjectivation is crucial to maintaining the disciplinary model brought on by the positive technologies of power introduced through plague: "[i]t is therefore not a matter of taking the individual at the level of individuality but, on the contrary, of using overall mechanisms and acting in such a way as to achieve overall states of equilibration or regularity."[56] These overall states are a clear indication of the transition towards "population,"[57] yet still, the centrality (or to use Foucault's verbiage "instrumentality") of the individual and individuality cannot be ignored.[58] In fact, and perhaps surprisingly, paired with these structural forces, this notion of individuality becomes the nexus for Foucault's understanding of biopolitics. But without Camusian absurdity, it must be asked whether this analysis ever rises to the level of free will or anything involving agency. This question is answered in the negative regardless, but Camus' declaration that "[t]here is but one moral code that the absurd man can accept, the one that is not separated from God: the

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[53] *The Plague*, 167.

[54] This sentiment might be best captured through the ubiquity of platitudes like "15 days to stop the spread" or "we're all in this together," but the impact the pandemic had on collectivism cannot be ignored. See Niklas Harring, Sverker C. Jagers, and Åsa Löfgren, "COVID-19: Large-scale collective action, government intervention, and the importance of trust," *World Development* 138 (2021).

[55] *Cf.* Kathryn A. Glatter and Paul Finkelman, "History of the Plague: An Ancient Pandemic for the Age of COVID-19," *The American Journal of Medicine* 134:2 (2021), 176-81.

[56] Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended"*, 246-47.

[57] *Security, Territory, Population*, 42.

[58] *Abnormal*, 46

one that is dictated"[59] is dependent on Foucault's formulation of the subject. As we will see, for the absurd man, "[h]e who, without negating it, does nothing for the eternal,"[60] plague serves as the discursive framework that makes dictation both possible (as in the analysis of governmentality) and required (that of subjectivation).

Taking a step back momentarily from the absurd man, we see that "the plague implies an always finer approximation of power to individuals, an ever more constant and insistent observation. With the plague, there is no longer a sort of grand ritual of purification, as with leprosy, but rather an attempt to maximize the health, life, longevity, and strength of individuals."[61] However, though plague (or, as was the case, a particular historical plague from the 16th and 17th centuries)[62] is the spark, this regulation of bodies and the intersection of power and purity does not depend on plague alone as its biopolitical driver. For this, we must direct our attention to a particular historical development, considered broadly, that Foucault alludes to in his history of governmentality:[63] *homo œconomicus* and the establishment of the subject of interest through the subject of right.

With the development of various forms of counter-conduct within the Christian pastorate,[64] the break between the function of pastoral power and that of the subject becomes clear, but there is still something to be uncovered before the formation of civil society: the economic man. This economic man, latinized as *homo œconomicus*, "is someone who pursues his own interest, and whose interest is such that it converges spontaneously with the interest of others."[65] This again seems eerily similar to Camus' absurd man as the Algerian posits that "[a] mind imbued with the absurd merely judges that [moral] consequences must be considered calmly"[66] and that "such a mind will consent to use past experience as a basis for future actions."[67] This description is nothing more than the pursuit of interest applied to ethics. As such, it can be said that both the absurd man and *homo œconomicus* are the people "who must be let alone,"[68] so for the time being, at least conceptually, how these positive technologies of power can *subject* an individual remains unanswered.

Regardless, this notion of being let alone conjures up the expectation that man will facilitate his own interest by nothing more than his being in the first place. Again, the

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[59] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 66-67.
[60] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 66.
[61] *Abnormal*, 46.
[62] *Security, Territory, Population*, 9-10.
[63] "Basically, if I had wanted to give the lectures I am giving this year a more exact title, I certainly would not have chosen "security, territory, population." What I would really like to undertake is something that I would call a history of "governmentality." *Security, Territory, Population*, 108.
[64] An earlier version of this paper involved an analysis of what Foucault describes as the "five main forms of counter-conduct" developed during the middle ages. Ibid. 204. However, with the help and advice of Prof. Daniele Lorenzini, I have come to realize how such an in-depth analysis of counter-conduct was ancillary to the principal aims of this paper. However, as an introduction into this subject, as an investigation into the philosophical nature of Foucault's shift from counter-conduct to critical attitude, see Daniele Lorenzini, "From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude: Michel Foucault and the Art of Not Being Governed Quite So Much," *Foucault Studies* 21 (2016), 7-21.
[65] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 270.
[66] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 67.
[67] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 68.
[68] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 270.

analogy to the COVID-19 pandemic is glaring where we encountered vast swaths of society unable to discern how even their being might impact others.[69] However, if we can assume some degree of existential turmoil within this pursuit,[70] for Camus, this dilemma becomes fundamental as a means for facing life itself: "[f]rom the moment absurdity is recognized, it becomes a passion, the most harrowing of all. But whether or not one can live with one's passions, whether or not one can accept their law, which is to burn the heart they simultaneously exalt—that is the whole question."[71] Still, this leaves the relation between interest and subjectivation underdefined. Foucault continues,

> The person who accepts reality or who responds systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment, appears precisely as someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment. *Homo œconomicus* is someone who is eminently governable. From being the intangible partner of laissez-faire, *homo œconomicus* now becomes the correlate of a governmentality which will act on the environment and systematically modify its variables.[72]

The introduction of a temporal element is key here as this added metaphysical dimension serves to qualify *homo œconomicus* as a subject with the ability to discursively straddle the present and the future and thus the interest in question is either attained or attainable. Camus threads that same concept of time but into consciousness or, maybe more specifically, being conscious of life's inherent absurdity:

> [O]ne day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. "Begins"—this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows. What follows is the gradual return into the chain or it is the definitive awakening. At the end of the awakening comes, in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery.[73]

Conflating this economic man with the absurd man Camus illustrates is not an exact analogue; *homo œconomicus* is governable *because* consciousness begins, because his own interests can be realized, yet the absurd man is in some ways forced to confront what that pursuit would entail. The irony here is that for the economic man, time is revelatory – that which allows him the chance to attain; but for the absurd man, time is what forces him to confront the potential meaninglessness of life. The COVID-19 man, if you will, is somewhere in between, equipped with hope for an inevitable post-pandemic life where that

[69] At the risk of sounding too cynical, I should acknowledge that research shows some degree of the inverse occurred as well. Bojana Bodroža and Bojana M. Dinić, "Personality and context-related factors of helping and helping-related affect during early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic," *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 64 (2022), 89-98.

[70] For Foucault, I think this assumption is negligible if not wholly unimportant.

[71] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 22.

[72] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 270-71 (emphasis added).

[73] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 13.

chance to attain resumes, while stuck in the present confronting the degree to which that inevitability is certain. Consciousness here is that which induces the vitality of the absurd.

Still, for Foucault, consciousness alone is not what delivers the economic man, for there has been an introduction of "a subject who is not so much defined by his freedom, or by the opposition of soul and body, […] but who appears in the form of a subject of individual choices which are both irreducible and non-transferable [in relation to the subject]."[74] This subject of individual choices is the "truly serious philosophical problem,"[75] even if those admittedly high stakes are not immediately obvious. Foucault asks "[w]hat do I mean by irreducible?"[76] And, perhaps Camus already provided an acceptable answer: that which made any simpler would become paradoxical.[77] What is clear for each philosopher is that choice is not synonymous with freedom. And for many, COVID-19 made tangible that discrepancy as individuals have had to face just how little freedom is present in the irreducible choices one faces in a pandemic: Why do you lock down? Why do you wear a mask? Why did you get vaccinated? Why do you quarantine? If pressed, most if not all of those questions are reducible to the same paraphrase Foucault used when referring to Hume, "why is illness painful?"[78]

Further, Foucault questions "whether this subject of interest or form of will called interest can be considered as the same type of will as the juridical will or is capable of being connected to the juridical will."[79] To put it another way, he is asking the degree to which an irreducible question (like choosing between pain and not-pain, i.e., the basis for interest) is constitutive of that which makes one a *legal* subject. Again, Camus answers, though this time more illusively, "[w]hat interests me, indeed, is knowing and describing the force that leads them back toward the common path of illusion."[80] Though Foucault does

[74] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 271-72.

[75] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 3.

[76] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 272.

[77] "The very simplicity of these paradoxes makes them irreducible." *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 17. Foucault's answer is lengthier but still poignant, "I will take Hume's very simple and frequently cited passage, which says: What type of question is it, and what irreducible element can you arrive at when you analyze an individual's choices and ask why he did one thing rather than another? Well, he says: "You ask someone, 'Why do you exercise?' He will reply, 'I exercise because I desire health.' You go on to ask him, 'Why do you desire health?' He will reply, 'Because I prefer health to illness.' Then you go on to ask him, 'Why do you prefer health to illness?' He will reply, 'Because illness is painful and so I don't want to fall ill.' And if you ask him why is illness painful, then at that point he will have the right not to answer, because the question has no meaning." The painful or non-painful nature of the thing is in itself a reason for the choice beyond which you cannot go. The choice between painful and non-painful is a sort of irreducible that does not refer to any judgment, reasoning, or calculation. It is a sort of regressive end point in the analysis." (emphasis added). *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 272

[78] To demonstrate using just one of my examples: "You ask someone, 'why do you lockdown? They will reply, 'I lockdown because I do not want to catch [or spread] coronavirus?' You go on to ask them, 'Why do you not want to catch coronavirus?' They answer, 'Because I desire health'" and from there the hypothetical is identical. However, these examples may differ slightly in that with COVID-19 precautions there was inherently (or maybe optimistically) a degree of acknowledgement of the role of the collective in vaccination, quarantine, wearing masks, and perhaps even lockdowns. Still, no matter how many questions involved in the reduction, some version of preferring life over death is always the end result.

[79] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 273.

[80] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 102.

not go as far as to suggest a common path of illusion, he does state that "in the state of nature and before the contract, these interests are threatened,"[81] and thus "to protect at least some of their interests they are forced to sacrifice others."[82] This notion of the contract is key as it is representative of interest altogether, "interest appears here as an empirical source of the contract. And the juridical will which is then formed, the legal subject who is constituted through the contract, is basically the subject of interest, but a purified subject of interest who has become calculating, rationalized, and so on." [83]

However, Foucault reminds us that "the appearance and the emergence of the contract have not replaced a subject of interest with a subject of right"[84] and thus sews some doubt as to the uniformity between juridical will and interest:

> [J]uridical will does not take over from interest. The subject of right does not find a place for itself in the subject of interest. The subject of interest remains, subsists, and continues up to the time a juridical structure, a contract exists. For as long as the law exists, the subject of interest also continues to exist. The subject of interest constantly overflows the subject of right. He is therefore irreducible to the subject of right. He is not absorbed by him. He overflows him, surrounds him, and is the permanent condition of him functioning. So, interest constitutes something irreducible in relation to the juridical will.[85]

The crucial insistence at issue is less about the construction of a contract and more about what the contract constructs. The interplay here is interesting because the governable subject is manifested *through* the juridical instruments that structure their existence: *homo œconomicus* is situated in a duplicitous field of governed conduct on the one hand and the discursivity of interest on the other.

Perhaps expectedly, "the subject of interest is never called upon to relinquish his interest."[86] However, it would appear that if interest can be linked to passion, not only the economist would be shouting absurdity:[87] "[f]rom the moment absurdity is recognized, it becomes a passion, the most harrowing of all. But whether or not one can live with one's passions, where or not one can accept their law, which is to burn the heart they simultaneously exalt—that is the whole question."[88] It stands to reason that the passion of interest is imbued with the absurd, as the "absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart."[89] Foucault cements this "wild longing" as "[n]ot only may each pursue their own interest, they must pursue it through and through by pushing it to the utmost, and then, at that point, you will find the elements on the basis of which not only will the interest of others be preserved, but will

[81] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 273.
[82] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 273.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid. at 274.
[85] Ibid. at 274.
[86] Ibid. at 275.
[87] See ibid. "The economists' [response] to this is: Absurdity!"
[88] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 22.
[89] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 22.

thereby be increased."[90] That being said, in Camus' rigid adherence to the individual, he misses the key trait that sets interest/passion apart, "the will of each [individual subject] harmonizes spontaneously and as it were involuntarily with the will and interest of others."[91] COVID-19 demonstrates just how necessary individual interest is in the creation of a collective interest.[92] Moreover, Camus misses that "[t]he production of the collective interest through the play of desire is what distinguishes both the naturalness of population and the possible artificiality of the means one adopts to manage it."[93] Still, Camus acknowledges that "[t]he mind' s deepest desire, even in its most elaborate operations, parallels man's unconscious feeling in the face of his universe: it is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity,"[94] and thus the cycle continues.

All in all, plague has now left us with governable subjects, yet this subject of interest is not without predicament: "interest […] is dependent upon on an infinite number of things. The interest of the individual will depend on accidents of nature about which he can do nothing and which he cannot foresee."[95] Whether it be through the political tensions of the present or the developmental limitations of the past, even in the face of a "chaos of an experience divested of its setting and relegated to its original incoherence,"[96] "all these involuntary, indefinite, uncontrollable, and non-totalizable features of his situation do not disqualify his interest or the *calculation* he may make to maximize it."[97] Hence, the question remains, for the economic man, the absurd man, and the COVID-19 man as to whether, "all the knowledge on earth will give me nothing to assure me that this world is mine."[98] Truth, as a cutting example of counter-conduct, is obstinate, "[y]ou must not because you cannot. And you cannot in the sense that "you are powerless." And why are you powerless, why can't you? You cannot because you do not know, and you do not know because you cannot know."[99] Moreover, "the constitution of a specific subject, of a subject whose merits are analytically identified, who is subjected in continuous networks of obedience, and who is subjectified (*subjectivé*) through the compulsory extraction of truth."[100]

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[90] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 275.

[91] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 276.

[92] Clifton Van der Linden and Justin Savoie, "Does Collective Interest or Self-Interest Motivate Mask Usage as a Preventive Measure Against COVID-19?" *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne De Science Politique* 53:2 (2020), 391–97.

[93] *Security, Territory, Population*, 73.

[94] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 17.

[95] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 277.

[96] Originally this line is in reference to "the spiritual adventure that leads Kierkegaard to his beloved scandals," but I find it useful outside of that explicit context. *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 26.

[97] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 278 (emphasis added).

[98] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 19.

[99] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 283.

[100] *Security, Territory, Population*, 184-85.

PLAGUE BEGETS TRUTH

Foucault's initial interest in plague did not begin with governmentality and the positive techniques of power exhibited in Europe during the middle ages. No, Foucault began exploring plague as a discursive mechanism much, much earlier, both in terms of his career and historical developments. Foucault's first voyage into plague and the plague-stricken society instead begins with Oedipus, [101] Thebes, and "Truth" as Foucault analyzes a particular aspect of truth, namely its relationship with power-knowledge.

Foucault first explores Oedipus, and this specific manifestation of truth in the final lecture of his first year of lectures at the Collège de France, *Lectures on the Will to Know*.[102] Foucault instills in us that "[t]he whole of the Oedipus tragedy is permeated by the effort of the whole city to transform the enigmatic dispersion of human events (murders, plagues) and divine threats into [certified] facts. When the *miasma* reigns in the city, it is because there is something to be known."[103] So, here, from the outset, Foucault is imbedding the "phenomenon" of plague, the literary dream of the plague even, with/in the search for truth – plague *is* a problem *because* there is something to be known/there is something to be known *because* plague *is* a problem. But, he continues, "[t]he truth is what makes it possible to exclude; to separate what is dangerously mixed; to distribute the inside and outside properly; to trace the boundaries between what is pure and what is impure."[104] Truth is mechanistic, a positive technology of power, utilizable as a technique for governing.

Foucault does not elucidate on this relationship with governmentality this early in his tenure at the Collège de France, because he is instead focused on the dichotomous nature of what is being separated and distributed. In fact, one year later, Foucault continues and expands in a lecture held at Buffalo University entitled "Oedipal Knowledge," where these duplicitous binaries set the stage for the symbolic "halves" Foucault uses to paint the play thematically,

> The halves which come to complement each other are like the fragments of a symbol whose reunited totality has the value of proof and attestation. Oedipus is a "symbolic" story, a story of circulating fragments, which pass from hand to hand and the lost half of which one is looking for: from Phoebus to the seer, from Jocasta to Oedipus, from the messenger to the shepherd—so from the gods to the kings and from the kings to the slaves. And when, finally, the last slave leaves his hut with the last fragment of knowledge still needed in his hand, then the "narrative" half has joined the "oracle" half, the "incest" half has joined the "murder" half, the "Theban" half has joined the "Corinthian" half, and the total figure is

[101] Sophocles, "Oedipus the King," in *The Three Theban Plays* (1984). Foucault notes that he is focused on "the tragedy of Oedipus, the one we can read in Sophocles" and that "'I'll leave aside the problem of the mythical background to which it is linked." Michel Foucault, "Truth and Juridical Forms" [1974], in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Vol. 3. Power* (2000), 17. As such, we will leave this mythical background aside as well.
[102] Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1970–1971* (2013).
[103] Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know*, 185.
[104] Ibid. 187.

> reconstituted. The tessera has been reformed from its scattered fragments. The *sumbolon* is complete.[105]

This mechanism is crucial for the uncovering of the particular power-knowledge component at issue. In fact, the play "is representative and in a sense the founding instance of a definite type of relation between power and knowledge [savoir], between political power and knowledge [connaissance], from which our civilization is not yet emancipated."[106] The "fitting together and interlocking"[107] nature of these halves is a tacit reminder that "[t]he exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome."[108] For Oedipus as well as the reader, the existence of the halves themselves is not where the "action" lies but the coming together and buttressing of those halves that incite and develop what comes next – what is to be known. Of course, this play rests holistically on competing knowledges. There is the divine knowledge of the Oracle and the mystical Teiresias.[109] The human knowledge that "Oedipus and the whole city of Thebes are seeking"[110] is multifaceted; on the one hand, the citizens seek knowledge through testimony and confession, which leads to truth, which stands in sharp contrast to the tyrannical knowledge that Oedipus conjures: "the king and those around him held a knowledge that could not and must not be communicated to the other social groups. Knowledge and power were exactly reciprocal, correlative, superimposed. There couldn't be any knowledge without power; and there couldn't be any political power without the possession of a certain type of knowledge."[111] Still, Foucault surmises that "[Oedipus] himself *is* the plague the gods have visited on the city"[112] and that

> It is this power-knowledge that is exposed, risked, endangered by the plague of Thebes: if the king does not know what is to be done, if he does not know who is responsible for the defilement, if he does not know to whom the purifying rite must be applied, then he will be lost along with the city.[113]

What is interesting here is that the "cure," so to speak, for plague is the same exclusion/partitioning that begets governmentality a millennium or so later. However, that manifestation of governmentality occurring in the 16th and 17th centuries was levied onto a population through a totalizing and structured multiplicity of discursive power which then served to regulate the conduct of individuals, whereas, in Ancient Thebes, according to Foucault, the king alone functions as the totalizing and structured multiplicity of discursive power and his access to truth/the truth is what determines or accounts for the

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[105] "Oedipal Knowledge," in *Lectures on the Will to Know*, 234-35.
[106] Foucault, "Truth and Juridical Forms,." 17.
[107] "Truth and juridical forms," 19.
[108] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (1982), 789
[109] For a splendid analysis of Foucault's continued and constant use of Oedipus, see Corey McCall, "Oedipal fragments: Reconsidering the significance of Oedipus for James Bernauer and Michel Foucault," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 47:8 (2021), 951-52.
[110] "Truth and juridical forms," 18.
[111] "Truth and juridical forms," 31.
[112] "Oedipal Knowledge," in *Lectures on the Will to Know*, 243. (emphasis added).
[113] "Oedipal Knowledge," in *Lectures on the Will to Know*, 244.

directionality of the hypothetical biopolitical prerogative, in this case a habitable and even prosperous city. Of note, as was the occurrence in the Christian Pastorate between these two historical moments, the birth of the subject is required to shift the matrix of salvation (as an axial and indexical phenomenon) from being held within an individual (the sovereign) to being conceptually (and spatially) determined by an entire population.

In some ways, we have seen a similar prognostication during our own contemporary plague. Exchange oracles for the medical community attempting to understand the novel coronavirus, and kings with the political leaders attempting to make manifest solutions to the global crisis, and you have a similar story. Key for each is access to knowledge and access to truth, both delineated through relations of power.

Foucault again delves into the Sophocles play in 1980 in his *On the Government of the Living* lectures, dedicating the first four lectures of the year to Oedipus and truth.[114] Inescapably, this exploration now begins by connecting truth with governmentality, "one cannot govern without in one way or another entering into the game of truth."[115] Likewise, "there cannot be any government without those who govern indexing their actions, choices, and decisions to a whole set of bodies of knowledge."[116] Knowledge here is of course discursive and so too is this process of "indexing." However, Camus is not silent on this matter either. Relatedly, in an invocation for subjectivity and a certain nostalgia for contentedness, Camus beckons that "relative truths are the only ones to [stir him];"[117] he harkens more directly elsewhere "that no truth is absolute or can render satisfactory an existence that is impossible itself."[118] Emphatically, neither philosopher is suggesting that an ultimate and discernable body of knowledge need exist to bring forth the governable subject, but, and Foucault utilizes Oedipus directly to make this point, the tertiary space connecting subjectivity and truth requires *action* (the truth-telling of the slaves in Oedipus' case) as "what was said in a sort of enigmatic and suspended truth at the beginning of the play []become[s] the inevitable truth to which Oedipus is forced to submit and the spectators themselves have to recognize."[119] Camus bears witness to this as well, early in his 1947 novel, though outside of the Oedipal context, stating, "The truth is that everyone is bored, and devotes himself to cultivating habits. Our citizens wor[k] hard, but solely with the object of getting rich. Their chief interest is in commerce, and their chief aim in life is, as they call it, "doing business.""[120] It is this understanding of the townspeople of Oran that predicts their eventual reaction to plague. In other words, in each

[114] Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1979-1980* [2012] (2014), 1-92.
[115] Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, 13.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Albert Camus, "Summer in Algiers" [1950], in *Lyrical and Critical Essays* (1970), 90. The translation here is "that move me," but, in addition to shifting the pronoun reference, I have utilized an older and perhaps more colorful translation of "m'émeuvent" that captures the inner turmoil and cause to action that these "relative truths" conjure for Camus.
[118] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 25-26.
[119] *On the Government of the Living*, 41-42.
[120] *The Plague*, 4.

instance, truth is not revealed so much as it is revealed *again*, and then with a multiplicity of connections between the bodies of knowledge and action.

Still, in regard to Oedipus, the king must reconcile himself, his truth, and his role as the sovereign: "[i]n order to govern the city, does one need to transform those who do not know into those who know? Is it necessary to transform all those who do not know into people who know?"[121] These questions beget another: what truth must be known for one to be governable? For Oedipus, that answer is relatively simple: uncovering the truth was the answer to both plague and his own demise; his speaking the truth of himself freed the city and in turn kept them governable. For the rest of us, since "[w]e are obliged to speak of ourselves in order to tell the truth of ourselves;"[122] it is not enough to be in the presence of truth or to simply access the truth:

> In this obligation to speak about oneself you can see the eminent place taken by discourse. Putting oneself in discourse is in actual fact one of the major driving forces in the organization of subjectivity and truth relationships in the Christian West. Subjectivity and truth will no longer connect so much, primordially, or anyway not only in the subject's access to the truth. There will always have to be this inflection of the subject towards its own truth through the intermediary of perpetually putting oneself into discourse.[123]

And just like that, we are back to the individual. But as such, we are incised with the juridico-discursive framework that comes with it; we are in control and controlled for. We are simultaneously the means for accessing truth and a truth within itself. Likewise, here we see the formation of the self, "[t]he self has, on the contrary, not to be discovered but to be constituted, to be constituted through the force of truth."[124] It is this creative constitution of the force of truth that allows for the individual to even be discursively possible. As such, this individual is constantly in motion and constantly changing. Applied to our current situation, in the midst of a global pandemic,

> [O]ne no longer needs to be king, to have killed one's father, married one's mother, and ruled over the plague to be forced to discover the truth of oneself. It is enough to be anyone. One does not have to be Oedipus to be obliged to seek one's truth. No people in the grip of the plague asks it of you, but merely the whole, institutional, cultural, and religious system, and soon the whole social system to which we belong.[125]

And if COVID has actually shown us anything, it is the grandiose ways in which an individual's *own truth*, for some, is to be privileged above all else. This was made manifest from the outset of the pandemic as skepticism about the medical consensus or even the

[121] *On the Government of the Living*, 56.
[122] Ibid. 311.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Michel Foucault, *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self, Lectures at Dartmouth College, 1980* (2016), 210.
[125] *On the Government of the Living*, 311-12.

presence of anything troubling at all was the reaction from a sizeable portion of society.[126] This grew into competing imaginaries of the state of existence, where all truth became not only contested but, in many cases, weaponized. In a way, Camus predicted this emphatically in the first moments of "plague;" it was doubt and hope that served to structure how everything was handled. In fact, it was this connection to a truth, albeit if only hopeful, that allowed for living at all:

> But these extravagant forebodings dwindled in the light of reason. True, the word "plague" had been uttered; true, at this very moment one or two victims were being seized and laid low by the disease. Still, that could stop, or be stopped. It was only a matter of lucidly recognizing what had to be recognized; of dispelling extraneous shadows and doing what needed to be done. Then the plague would come to an end, because it was unthinkable, or, rather, because one thought of it on misleading lines. If, as was most likely, it died out, all would be well. If not, one would know it anyhow for what it was and what steps should be taken for coping with and finally overcoming it.[127]

Everyone is permitted some semblance of epistemological access to what they think might occur in the future and the degree to which any other truth shapes them further, but this capacity for unraveling is marked not by any objective, ontological truth but instead only by one's relation to truth as such. Still, Oedipus is the shining example of the hubris that comes with the ability to seek, and worse to attain, what constitutes truth. The succinctness that comes with the truth – with knowing the truth – keeps the subject governed and, in some ways, eliminates the possibility for freedom altogether. For certain, "[i]n the end, what befell Oedipus was that, knowing too much, he didn't know anything,"[128] and that might just be what absurdly befell/s us all, both in and out of Coronavirus.

So, truth itself is not the answer but the mechanism that binds the population together. Truth is required for that which makes governable subjects possible altogether but, more importantly, truth is the final variable within the power-knowledge relation that keeps everything in motion. In that sense, the answer to Rieux's question is the same no matter if we ask it about plague or if we ask it about truth, "[b]ut what does that mean—'plague'?"[129] That is the question. "Just life, no more than that."[130] That is the answer. And still, to take Camus' sentiments even further, in the face of such surreal/mundane sublimity/ordinariness, how might one "[j]udg[e] whether life is or is not worth living[?]"[131] If it takes place every day, might we not wait for this last judgment?[132]

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[126] Ashley Kirzinger, "The COVID-19 Pandemic: Insights from Three Years of KFF Polling," *KFF.org*. https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/the-covid-19-pandemic-insights-from-three-years-of-kff-polling/ (accessed November 23, 2023).

[127] *The Plague*, 40-41.

[128] "Truth and juridical forms," 32.

[129] *The Plague*, 307.

[130] *The Plague*, 307.

[131] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 3.

[132] Albert Camus, *The Fall* [1956] (1991), 111.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

With that, we have come full circle. From Camus to Foucault and back again, the notion of plague has demonstrated the degree to which governmentality must exist for the birth of the subject and, in the biopolitical sense, the regulation of conduct in the plague-stricken town is a prerequisite for a preservable life, inescapable from a discourse of truth thrust on a population. This reality rears its head in ancient Greece, in medieval Europe, in fictional 20th century North Africa, and even in the present. The COVID-19 Global Pandemic, *inter alia*, has shown us that there is still conduct to be governed, there is still truth to create, and there are still life processes to manage. If anything, this article hopefully shows the degree to which current predicaments are comparable or even indistinguishable from how we have come to discern historical moments of the past. As such, plague is little more than a discursive framework for how to engage that which brings death, thrust on a society already condemned to decipher a multiplicity of ways of living.

Still, what does plague mean for one *to live* truly? And what does plague mean for Sisyphus?—the one who pays the price "for the passions of this earth."[133] Is that in and of itself a sign of having been governed or presently being governable? The passions of this earth? What of absurdity? Is the search for truth an absurd pursuit? Camus states that "[t]here exists an obvious fact […] that a man is always a *prey* to his truths. Once he has admitted them, he cannot free himself from them. One has to pay something. A man who has become conscious of the absurd is forever *bound* to it."[134] Surely Foucault would agree. Prey and bondage both indicate regimes of discipline, and they are not particularly subtle. What does it mean to be prey to truth? What does it mean to be bound to the absurd? In each the attachment is hierarchical though solitary. And for Foucault, admitting these truths requires a specific and hegemonic positionality: "there is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of otherness; the truth is never the same; there can be truth only in the form of the other world and the other life (*l'autre monde et de la vie autre*)."[135] Caught between these two characterizations of truth, the absurd and the other, is a milieu of subjectivation and choice. In the face of this other world and the other life, Camus declares "I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone"[136] and that "[l]iving is keeping the absurd alive,"[137] whereas Foucault postulates "how to live if I must face up to the fact that 'nothing is true'?"[138] Choosing to live with the truth and choosing to live at all. Perhaps it is actually Sisyphus that "constantly reminds us that very little truth is indispensable for whoever wishes to live truly and that very little life is needed when one truly holds to the truth."[139] And perhaps instead, if

[133] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 120.
[134] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 31 (emphasis added).
[135] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984* (2011), 340.
[136] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 40.
[137] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 54.
[138] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 190.
[139] *The Courage of Truth*, 190.

Sisyphus does not exist, everything is permitted.[140] Might that be what it means to "imagine Sisyphus happy[?]"[141] Must that be the truth?

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[140] Both Foucault in *The Courage of Truth* and Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* allude to this cardinal Dostoevsky passage.
[141] *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 123.

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ARTICLE

Fragile Responsibilization: Rights and Risks in the Bulgarian Response to Covid-19

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ABSTRACT. This article discusses the Bulgarian response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Bulgarian case is characterized by an ineffective constitution of the individuals as subjects of responsibility for the health of the population, which resulted in a vaccine coverage considerably lower than the European average. The article argues that the fragile responsibilization is an effect of the response to the pandemic that, building on older post-socialist regulations of the access to healthcare, instead of restricting the circulation of bodies in general, tried to differentiate between economically productive and unproductive circulation and to limit only the latter by progressively increasing its differential costs (both in terms of time and efforts and in terms of risks). An analysis of the legal actions against quarantine violators, however, suggests that such a strategy stimulated the public to respond to the pandemic by calculating risks, and if the social actors nevertheless behaved irresponsibly, it was often because they took into account not only the risks posed by the virus but also smaller-scale risks affecting their social support networks. The authorities, however, tried to repair the unreliable responsibilization by articulating an *ad hoc* right to health defined at the level of the population. That biopolitical right to health was crucial to the implementation of certificate requirements. It was harmonized with individual rights by opening up fields of choice such as the choice between vaccination and daily testing. However, since the differential costs of the higher-risk options seemed irrational, the constellation of individual rights and right to health left a growing residue of irresponsible conducts justifying a further intensification of control.

Keywords: Biopolitics, Responsibilization, Control, Risk, Right to health, Covid-19, Bulgaria

INTRODUCTION

In the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, the public authorities implemented measures that cut deeply into everyday life. The measures could only work if the people were involved. Therefore, it seemed vital to constitute each and every person as a subject of responsibility

for the health of the population. In the case of the Balkan countries, however, responsibilization brought about unexpected effects: a significant share of vaccine hesitancy, low vaccination rates, and widespread neglect of sanitary measures. The effects are particularly salient in the case of Bulgaria, which is the focus of this article. I will argue that the responsibilization of the Bulgarians went awry notwithstanding that they recognized their responsibility for the health of others. Responsibilization was infelicitous because the meaning of responsibility was underdetermined by risks that could not be generalized beyond the everyday-life situations of the social actors and hence were indiscernible in the scale of population.[1] Since the health authorities did not take into account such smaller-scale risks, they explained the unintended effects of the pandemic regulations in terms of a lack of responsibility, and they tried to prevent irresponsible behavior by progressively increasing the risk of sanctions. The government and the judiciary justified that approach by referring to a right to health defined *ad hoc* in terms of risks for the population. In the course of the enforcement of that biopolitical right, the health authorities attuned it to individual rights in such a way that the latter were incorporated into an apparatus of security that both reproduced and extended the rationality of postsocialist biopower.

The first section of the article describes the pandemic strategy of the Bulgarian authorities. The second section examines the rationality of the allegedly irresponsible behavior on the basis of particular legal actions against quarantine violations. The third section outlines the reinterpretation of the right to health as a collective rather than individual right in the context of the pandemic, and it argues that the apparatus of biopolitical security triggered by the pandemic has the potential to transform rights into a mechanism of control.

THE BULGARIAN RESPONSE

The medical authorities confirmed the first Bulgarian cases of Covid-19 on March 8, 2020.[2] A couple of days later, the Parliament declared an emergency. The government had to

[1] Comparable arguments based on calculations of underdefined quantities can be discerned, for example, in the analysis of the rationality of the U.S. anti-quarantine movements in James Meeker, "The political nightmare of the plague: The ironic resistance of anti-quarantine protesters," in *COVID-19* (2020), 109-121.

[2] The current account of the Bulgarian response to the pandemic is based on Ekaterina Markova, *Obshtestvo pod Kliuch: Problemi na Sociologicheskoto Izsledvane v Systoianie na Kriza* [The Lockdown Society: Problems of Sociological Research in Times of Crisis] (2021), Dimityr Stoykov et al., "Upravlenie na Pandemiata ot Covid-19: Podhodi, Merki, Rezultati," [Governing the Covid-19 Pandemic: Approaches, Measures, Outcomes], (2020). Both studies argue that the pandemic regulations have had unintended effects on Bulgarian society, whose cohesion has been already eroded by high levels of individualism and anomie. The studies describe in detail the timeline of the measures taken by the government and incorporate the findings of nationally representative surveys of attitudes towards the regulations, such as Gallup, "Osnovni Izvodi i Hipotezi ot Nacionalno Prouchvane na Obshestvenoto Mnenie 'Cennosti, Solidanost i Obshtestvenite Naglasi po Vreme na Koronakrizata'," [Basic Findings and Hypotheses of the National Survey "Values, Solidarity and Social Attitudes During the Coronacrisis], Gallup International. https://www.kas.de/documents/286758/286807/Gallup+Bulgarisch.pdf/f7fb6513-b7e6-e1c8-4509-0dbc9020a1db?version=1.0&t=1592561631839 (accessed June 2, 2020); Gallup, "Veroyatni niva na razprostranenie na

respond, otherwise it would seem irresponsible towards life itself. An epidemic, however, is more than a number of individual cases; it implies the transformation of individual cases into numbers and the quantification of an open series of epidemiological events into rates, probabilities, losses, and risks.[3] To respond, the government needed to calculate. Since the number of the Bulgarian cases was still small, the authorities turned to global calculations. The latter were tainted by uncertainty because the accumulation of a sufficiently large number of cases was still in progress. Nevertheless, there was no doubt that, instead of focusing on the inward flows of air, water and food to healthy bodies, as in classical sanitary science,[4] the response should rather target the outward flow of the virus from contagious bodies. Hence, the National Crisis-Management Staff tried to limit contact with contagious bodies by putting in a three-week quarantine for the infected, their contact persons and the arrivals from high-risk countries. As Covid-19 could be asymptomatic, and it was impossible to identify the infected exhaustively, the authorities placed a ban on public gatherings, closed shopping malls, nightclubs, and gyms, made masks and social distancing mandatory, and recommended working from home or shifting to distance learning. Additionally, since the global calculations differentiated the contagion risks by correlating them to variables such as age and underlying medical conditions, the National Crisis-Management Staff advised the vulnerable social groups to stay at home, and they later introduced a two-hour shopping window reserved exclusively for aged persons. Nevertheless, it seemed reasonable to assume that a population of spreaders roamed through the country and left contagious traces on things, putting healthy bodies into a mediated contact with the disease.

A population is more than just numerous bodies; it is a body of numbers.[5] Normally, to calculate the numbers that characterize a particular population, for example, morbidity or mortality, one needs a mass of registrations of individual cases on a definite territory

koronavirusa u nas i gotovnost za vaksinirane," [Probable levels of Covid-19 transmission in the country and attitudes to vaccination] (2021); Gallup, "Lipsata na dostatachno dostoverna informatsiya za vaksinite sreshtu COVID-19, preboleduvane na virusa i nalichie na hronichni zabolyavaniya sa sred nay-chesto nazovavanite prichini za otkaz ot vaksinatsiya sreshtu COVID-19 kam momenta," [The lack of sufficiently reliable information on Covid-19 vaccines, recovery from disease as well as chronic conditions are the most frequent motivations for refusing to vaccinate against Covid-19 at the moment], Gallup International. https://www.gallup-international.bg/44426/possible-levels-of-coronavirus-dissemination-and-willingness-to-vaccinate/ (accessed February 18, 2021); Alpha Research, "Godina sled nachaloto na Covid pandemiata: Kak se promeni zhivotyt ni," [A year after the start of the Covid pandemic: How has our life changed], Alpharesearch.b. https://alpharesearch.bg/post/976-godina-sled-nachaloto-na-kovid-pandemiata-kak-se-promeni-jivotut-ni.html (accessed February 28, 2021); Trend, "Naglasi na balgarite spryamo koronavirusa i konspirativni teorii," [Attitudes of the Bulgarians to Covid-19 and conspiracy theories], Trend. https://rctrend.bg/project/нагласи-на-българите-спрямо-конспира/ (accessed June 30, 2020).

[3] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of the Medical Perception* (1973), 26, 29; the concept of risk in this article is drawn from François Ewald, "Insurance and Risk," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (1991), 199; for a discussion of risks in the context of biopolitics, see Dušan Marinković and Sara Major, "COVID-19 and the Genealogies of Biopolitics: A Pandemic History of the Present," *Sociologija* 62:4 (2020), 494.

[4] David Armstrong, *A New History of Identity: A Sociology of Medical Knowledge* (2002), 8-10.

[5] See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978* (2007), 99.

during a definite period of time. During the pandemic, however, the national health inspectorate registered spreaders only sporadically, and since it was unable to localize them precisely, it associated the spreaders with the cities conceived of as open milieus rather than as definite territories. Hence, the numbers that characterized the spreaders (such as transmission rate or level of exposure) turned out to be incalculable. Therefore, the health inspectorate described this underdefined group mostly by indefinite quantities as 'many', 'often', 'usually'. Nevertheless, the authorities treated the spreaders as a population characterized by regularities that were in the process of being established. For instance, during the first months of the pandemic, the National Crisis-Management Staff assumed that the high-risk spreaders were young people with extensive and frequent social contacts spending a lot of time in parks or schoolyards. Furthermore, the inspectorate believed that although the spreaders could not be defined or described statistically, they would be identified in a piecemeal fashion in the course of the gradual accumulation of results from rapid antigen tests. As a consequence, in contrast with the territorialized, statistically defined, molar populations, which are the normal object of biopolitics, the health authorities conceived of the spreaders as a deterritorialized, statistically underdefined and in that sense molecular population. That population involved risks that were also molecular insofar as such risks were statistically incalculable and could be evaluated only in terms of indefinite quantities.[6]

To stop the transmission of the virus, the government had to control the activity of the spreaders. The contagious population, however, could not be captured by the partitioning grid of the quarantine. Furthermore, the movement of the spreaders could not be restricted without stopping the circulation of bodies in general, which would amount to restricting the circulation of goods and labor and hence to hampering economic growth and incurring losses.[7] The limitations on free movement brought about economic risks, and the authorities had to balance them with health risks. To that end, the Crisis-Management Staff made a distinction between economically productive and unproductive circulation of bodies and focused on the latter.[8] In effect, the measures were limited so as to

[6] This is intended as a reference to the distinction between molecular and molar derived from the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (see *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1983), 89, 183). The interpretation of the concept of molecular is shaped by the argument about the transposition of biopolitics from molar to molecular plane developed by Nikolas Rose and Paul Rabinow (see Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, "Biopower Today," *Biosocieties* 1 (2006), 212; Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power and Security in the 21st Century* (2007), 4).

[7] The Bulgarian government was able only to a limited extent to cover such losses by transforming them into public debt, as most European countries, and the emergency funding promised by the European Commission, tied up with the green transition, was not enough to compensate for the potential losses.

[8] In contrast with more popular categories such as essential or first-line workers, the distinction between productive and unproductive circulation actually retraces the dividing line between production and services. For example, textile factories, which provide a significant share of female employment outside of the cities, can hardly be considered essential in times of pandemic. Nevertheless, the authorities deemed the accumulation of bodies on the shopfloor productive and consequently allowed the factories to work on the condition that seamstresses wore masks and maintained social distance. The approach to industry did not change even after the outbreaks of infection in some factories (the health authorities responded to the latter by putting the workers into quarantine). However, one should also take into account that the rationality of the Bulgarian approach to the pandemic has not been explicitly articulated. The discussion in this section is intended as an

cover mostly the unproductive movement: as quarantine amounted to a loss of labor, the Staff gave a restricted definition of contact as cohabitation that excluded coworkers; the health authorities did not limit the accumulation of bodies at the workplace or on public transport, and even the strictest regulations allowed outdoor dining on the condition that customers maintained social distance.

The distinction between productive and unproductive bodies, however, did not solve the problem of how to control the movement of the contagious population in the open milieu of the cities; it actually exacerbated the problem. Although the Staff hoped to compensate for the health risks brought about by the circulation of bodies by sanitary measures such as masks and social distancing, which supposedly widened and protected corporal borders, the hope soon faded.[9] In response, the Staff tried to restrict the unproductive movement of bodies further. To that end, the authorities resorted to a rationality developed in the course of the post-socialist healthcare reforms that can be summarized along the following lines. Access to healthcare during the socialist period was free. After the shock liberalization and the 1997 hyperinflation crisis, free healthcare no longer seemed economically affordable. Hence, access had to be severely limited. However, it felt impossible to draw a dividing line between the population whose life was valuable enough to get access to care and the population exposable to the risks of poverty, disease and death.[10] Instead, access to healthcare was limited by transforming it into a market. Thus, medical care differentiated into a spectrum of services of graded costs, quality and risk reflecting the dissimilar economic and social capital of the consumers.[11] In effect, "the

account of what would have made the response rational. Although the response of the authorities is essentially a compromise between the rationality of biopolitical apparatuses of security and disciplinary mechanisms as quarantine, one should neither describe it as a compromised response nor evaluate it by postulating a norm, registering the deviations from the norm and then explaining them by corruption, inability or the irrationality of the population. A Foucauldian approach should rather consist in explaining the rarity (Michel Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge* (1972), 134-135) of the response, how the compromise between heterogeneous rationalities is shaped by a balance of power or, more properly, by a balance between power mechanisms, conflicting knowledges, incongruent regimes of jurisdiction and veridiction.

[9] On sanitary science as a regime of protection of the boundaries of the body, see Armstrong, *A New History of Identity,* 10-11).

[10] In *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (1997), Michel Foucault argues that biopolitical apparatuses transform the sovereign power of life and death into racism. Of course, Foucault's concept of racism is irreducible to "the traditional form of a mutual contempt or hatred between races" (268), racism is rather "inscribed as a basic mechanism of power, as it is exercised in the modern states" (264). To simplify, characteristic features of racism as a biopolitical mechanism are: reconceptualization of the right to take life as a right to expose to the risk of death (256); establishment of a caesura within the population (255); intensification of the life of one segment of the population by exposing the other, disqualified segment to significant risks (255). If the post-socialist authorities reduced public healthcare expenditure by establishing a caesura between a segment of the population enjoying health services and a disqualified, excluded segment exposed to an asymmetric risk of death, such an approach would amount to social racism. The transformation of healthcare into a market, however, stratified the population and exposed the lower-income strata to asymmetric risks without triggering the mechanisms of state racism. In that sense, the market has dissociated the death-function (258) from the sovereign right of life and death as well as from sovereignty in general.

[11] The emergence of a healthcare market was conceived of as a "shock therapy". In contrast to the markets studied by conventional economics, it was created in a short period of time by means of legislative norms

right to equal health for all was caught in a mechanism which transformed it into an inequality".[12] The city underclass and the population of the distant, particularly mountainous areas became virtually excluded from the system, and not because their right to healthcare was curtailed but rather because they could not afford to pay the price of its exercise (additionally increased by the cost of administrative procedures and traveling). In sum, the 1997-2001 healthcare reform has invented a situated, post-socialist solution to the problem of how to limit claims for the betterment of life if they exceed the available resources:[13] to associate medical care with a market mechanism modulating the costs of implementing the right to health.[14]

The response to the pandemic was shaped by a similar rationality transposed onto the plane of security. In the context of the pandemic, security should not be reduced to maintaining order or eliminating threats. Its imperative rather consists in the intensification of life. Biopolitical security is the machine of collective wellbeing, and quite like inoculation, instead of preventing crises, it operates amidst the crises and tries to cancel them out by acting on risk factors.[15] To overcome the health crisis caused by Covid-19, the Bulgarian health authorities tried to differentiate the cost of access to nodes where numerous individual trajectories converged. At the very beginning of the pandemic, the Minister of Health quickly closed shopping malls, gyms, dancing schools, and nightclubs, and later prohibited access to seemingly more innocent attractions such as parks, beaches and the mountains. The measures, however, provided a number of exceptions: for outdoor events, important services at the malls, markets, libraries, galleries, museums, driving lessons, swimming pools, dog owners, and assisted reproduction; and during the course of the pandemic, the exceptions multiplied further. More importantly, the police started to control the nodes of the road network with the heaviest passing traffic. The idea was first tested for two weeks in the ski resort Bansko. A couple of days after the start of the blockade of Bansko, the police were tasked to control the outward flows of people from all the cities. The control, however, did not amount to a quarantine, because it was again intended to split circulation into the productive and unproductive and to minimize only the latter. Workers could enter or leave the cities if they handed over a declaration by their employers at the police checkpoint, while business owners enjoyed an unrestricted freedom of movement as long as they took the effort to certify themselves. Since the outward

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and unrestrained privatization. The transformation of healthcare into a market funded by private health insurance brought about a rapid devaluation of public assets, such as the existing hospitals, and a severely restricted access to health services. On the unintended effects of "shock therapy" on post-socialist economies in general, see Grzegorz Kolodko, *From Shock to Therapy: The Political Economy of Postsocialist Transformation* (2000), 101-107.

[12] Michel Foucault, "The Crisis of Medicine or the Crisis of Antimedicine?" *Foucault Studies* 1 (2004), 18.

[13] It is important to note that such claims do not have an internal limiting principle; see Michel Foucault, "The Risks of Security" [1985], in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984. Vol. 3. Power* (1997), 373.

[14] The concept of differential vulnerability proposed by Daniele Lorenzini, ("Biopolitics in the Time of Coronavirus," *Critical Inquiry* 47 (2021), 543) describes the effects of the link between the right to health and biopolitical control. This article hopes to develop the concept further by discussing the security function of markets and the effects of the differential distribution of risks.

[15] On inoculation as a privileged example of biopolitical security, see Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 24, 86-88.

flows from the cities decreased less than expected, the authorities suspected that many travelers were using fake documents, so they threatened an investigation and significantly increased the sanctions for violating the emergency measures. The regulations, however, once again failed to bring about the expected effect, and the Staff started to progressively increase the sanctions in the hope of making the control more efficient.

In general, the concept of control covers heterogeneous mechanisms. Perhaps the mechanisms of control share a family resemblance that one can describe as modulation of flows, in contrast to the binary logic of inclusion/exclusion.[16] Nevertheless, modulation can work differently, and in the context of the Bulgarian pandemic regulations, the control consisted neither in blocking population flows, as was the case, for example, with early-modern quarantine,[17] nor in maximizing the positive and reducing the negative elements of the circulation, as in the case of modern apparatuses of security.[18] In the context of the Bulgarian response to the pandemic, controlling meant limiting the circulation by means of increasing its differential costs, both in terms of time or efforts invested in the preparation of the necessary documents and in terms of risks such as being turned back by the police, investigated or even punished. Such a regime of control limited the movement of social groups that did not have enough administrative, educational or social capital to certify their right to leave or enter the cities as well as the movement of vulnerable molecular populations such as pensioners, precarious workers, and commuting unskilled workers whom employers did not take care to certify or refrained from certifying (often because the company did not want to expose itself to the risk of an investigation). Nevertheless, such impoverished or vulnerable populations had not been excluded from circulation, as they could still get in and out of the cities if they managed to pay the additional, non-monetary cost of movement (for instance, if they risked forging a declaration or putting in the time and effort to avoid major roads). The control through increased differential costs did not prevent movement; it only reduced the probability that the unproductive populations would choose to travel instead of staying at home.[19]

FRAGILE RESPONSIBILIZATION

The measures against Covid-19 could not be imposed by force, because they permeated the texture of everyday life. The measures could work only to the extent that each and every person recognized their responsibility for the health of the population (in that sense,

[16] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript to the Societies of Control," in *Negotiations* (1995), 178-179; Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (1988), 72. The concept of control developed by Gilles Deleuze has the advantage that it emphasizes the cumulative effects of molecular forces, including molecular risks and subjectivities, on the functioning of biopolitical apparatuses of security. Since the molecular plane of the pandemic regulations is important to the argument of this article, in the hope of making it more coherent, I have substituted control for the Foucauldian concept of security.

[17] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), 197-198; *Security, Territory, Population*, 24.

[18] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 34.

[19] After the weakening of the first wave of the pandemic, the police control of outward traffic was abandoned, but the police still blocked the Roma neighborhoods of the capital on account of being high-risk zones.

their biopolitical responsibility) and complied with the regulations they were subjected to. In the Bulgarian case, that recognition was a cumulative effect of different mechanisms: the orders of the Minister of Health that constituted the individuals as subjects of legal responsibility enforced by the police and the courts, the media that interpellated the public through incessant declarations of war on the virus, anxious accounts of the dangers of contagion, appeals for personal and collective responsibility, and reproaches for irresponsible conduct. In effect, by the end of the first wave of the pandemic, an overwhelming majority of more than 80% of the respondents in a national survey declared that they recognized their responsibility for the containment of the virus.[20] Nevertheless, there was a widespread perception that a significant population of irresponsible spreaders ignored in practice the sanitary measures which they approved of in theory.[21] The perception was confirmed by surveys carried out by the Ministry of the Interior, registering a stubborn, banal, everyday-life resistance to police control that could be illustrated by the following statement of an officer working at one of the traffic checkpoints:

> We [the Bulgarians] are undisciplined: I am reprimanding boys without masks and they are responding: "What now, are you the one who is going to fine us?" We will not recognize the danger until it affects us. I am not an expert; I cannot say if the virus is real. The fine of 300-500 leva [approximately 150-250 EUR], however, is real and appropriate, but the Minister of Defense breaks the regulations, they give him the minimum fine of 300 leva, and then he is saying on all the TV talk shows that he is going to pay the fine later, when he has the money. … How can one expect the people to respect the regulations when a minister behaves like that.[22]

The inefficiency of the responsibilization, notwithstanding the general recognition that each and everyone was responsible for the containment of the virus, became even more salient after the start of the immunization campaign. The global demand for vaccines exceeded the supply dramatically and the government bought them at the price of a particularly scarce, in a sense luxurious commodity, yet the national demand was so sluggish that, although vaccines were distributed free of charge, the coverage reached 10% only at the end of May 2021. The first surveys of the attitudes to vaccination registered significant amounts of hesitation even with the massive information campaigns launched by the government and later by the European Commission. The first nationally representative survey actually made the motives behind vaccine hesitancy even less clear. The survey found that 28.5% of unvaccinated respondents declared that they had recovered from Covid-19 and 25.9% expressed distrust of mRNA vaccines, but the motives of 48.1% of the respondents resisted classification since they provided heterogeneous and often conflicting

[20] 81% of the respondents in a May 2020 national survey agreed to that, as opposed to 8% who approved the statement that the government was responsible and 11% who declined to answer the question. See Gallup, "Osnovni Izvodi i Hipotezi," [Basic Findings and Hypotheses], 21.

[21] NCPR, "Obshtestveni Naglasi po Vyprosi, Svyrzani s Covid-19," [Social Attitudes on Covid-19 Related Issues] (2020).

[22] MVR, "Izsledvane v Hoda na Dejstvieto: Obshtestvenite Naglasi v Situacia na Kriza" [Survey in the Course of Development: Social Attitudes in a Critical Situation] (2020), 7.

justifications.[23] In effect, at the peak of the Delta wave in the autumn of 2021, the vaccination rate in the country was about 20%, far less than the EU average of 70%.[24]

The authorities considered the violations of the pandemic regulations and the unwillingness to vaccinate as "irresponsibility and criminal individualism".[25] Experts explained it through deep distrust in the public authorities,[26] through conspiracy theories,[27] and even through hybrid operations of devious enemies.[28] Despite the seductive banality of such accounts, however, they bring up difficult questions: How can irresponsibility coexist with a general recognition of the individual and collective responsibility for the biopolitical risks of the pandemic? If irresponsibility is irrational, then how can we explain its pervasiveness? Should we transpose psychiatric concepts such as hysteria from the

[23] See Gallup, "Lipsata na dostatachno dostoverna informatsiya…" [The lack of sufficiently reliable information…] (2022); the respondents usually combined a reference to a medical condition (often irrelevant to vaccination, such as hypertension, lung or heart problems) with the argument that they did not need to vaccinate because they did not have many social contacts or with the claim that they had postponed immunization because of their practical circumstances or because they needed more information about the mRNA vaccines. Vaccine hesitancy in Bulgaria differs from the situation in other EU countries mostly because of the large share of underdetermined justifications. An EUrobarometer survey identified in Bulgaria (69%), Romania (63%), Slovakia (55%), Croatia (54%), Latvia (51%) and Greece (48%) levels of vaccine hesitancy significantly higher than the European average (31%; EUrobarometer, "Public Opinion in the European Union," Standard EUrobarometer, 95 (2021), T123). A Croatian study found that the most salient reasons to refuse or postpone immunization were distrust in the efficiency of vaccines (66%) combined with a belief in natural immunity (71,9%) and a disbelief that Covid-19 posed a significant health risk (66,4%; see Dragan Bragić et al., "Determinants and reasons for coronavirus disease 2019 vaccine hesitancy in Croatia," *Croatian Medical Journal* 63:1 (2022), 89-97). A Romanian study identified as a most salient motive the anxiety about long-term side-effects of the mRNA vaccines that could not have been detected in the relatively short period of clinical trials (Loredana Manolescu et al., "Early Covid-19 Vaccination of Romanian Medical and Social Personnel," *Vaccines* 9 (2021), 1927). A broader literature review of studies on vaccine hesitancy in Eastern Europe mentions as reliable predictors conspiracism, misinformation, religious or spiritual attitudes (Popa, Adelina et al., "Determinants of the Hesitancy toward COVID-19 Vaccination in Eastern European Countries and the Relationship with Health and Vaccine Literacy: A Literature Review," *Vaccines* 10 (2022), 672). However, the studies and the literature review do not report a share of respondents whose motives have been difficult to classify, perhaps because of the methodological design of the studies.

[24] BNR, "Balgariya uskori vaksinatsiyata s 14% za 10 dni," [Bulgaria has accelerated vaccination with 14% in 10 days], Balgarsko Nacionalno Radio. https://bnr.bg/burgas/post/101509313 (accessed August 6, 2021).

[25] Ljubomira Nikolaeva-Glomb, "Zaradi Bezotgovornost Mozhe da se Pojavi Bylgarski Variant na Koronavirusa," [The Irresponsibility Can Cause the Emergence of a Bulgarian Variant of Covid-19], Bulgaria on Air. https://www.bgonair.bg/a/36-sutreshen-blok/239901-mozhe-da-se-poyavi-balgarski-variant-na-koronavirusa-zaradi-bezotgovornost-kam-obshtestvoto (accessed September 21, 2021).

[26] Margarita Bakracheva, Martin Zamfirov, Cecka Kolarova, and Elena Sofronieva, *Zhivot vyv Vreme na Kriza (Covid-19)* [Life at Times of Crisis (Covid-19)] (2020), 17-18.

[27] Boyan Zahariev and Ivajlo Yordanov, *Naglasi kym Vaksinite i Vaksiniraneto sreshtu Covid-19 v Pet Romski Obshtnosti v Stranata* [Attitudes towards Vaccines and Vaccination against Covid-19 in Five Roma Communities in the Country] (2021), 49.

[28] Aleksander Nikolov, "Rusia Prevyrna Krizata s Covid-19 v Oryzhie za Hibridno Maroderstvo i Psihologicheski Terorizym," [Russia Has Weaponized the Covid-19 Crisis for Hybrid Marauding and Psychological Terrorism], Factor.bg. https://faktor.bg/bg/articles/rusiya-prevarna-krizata-s-kovid-19-v-orazhie-za-hibridno-maroderstvo-i-psihologicheski-terorizam (accessed May 10, 2021).

individual to the biopolitical plane?[29] Should we assume that people are immature and need to be subjected to an authority "in areas where the use of reason is called for"?[30] I find the first approach uncritical and the second critically dangerous to any emancipatory politics. Yet, if irresponsibility is rational, then what is its rationality?

Tormented by the last question, I started to collect court decisions on violations of the quarantine. In the first month of the pandemic, the General Prosecutor's Office started more than 50 legal actions of that type. Most were settled, but even when it came to trial, the defendants did not contest their responsibility but tried to explain to the court the rationality of their irresponsible behavior. The minutes of the trials are still inaccessible, yet the court decisions occasionally summarize the explanations given by the accused, and their rationalizations can be extrapolated to other types of behavior that evaded biopolitical responsibilization in the course of the pandemic. Let us look at the summaries of three typical cases:[31]

> Erkan (pseudonym) was working abroad, and since he lost his job due to the pandemic regulations, he returned to his home village in the north-east. He was quarantined there. A couple of days later, two relatives of Erkan who lived in the same village decided for unknown reasons to visit another member of the family in a nearby village. Since there was no public transport connecting the two villages and only Erkan had a driver's license, the relatives asked him to drive them. The police stopped the car at a road checkpoint, reported a violation of the quarantine, and in consequence Erkan was sentenced to six months' probation. The judge decided not to fine him "because of his dire material circumstances".[32]

> When the pandemic broke out, Boris (pseudonym) was working in the United Kingdom. He lost his job and came back home. He was put in quarantine at his permanent address in a village near the town of Kazanlak. However, Boris did not have any money. Thus he decided to go to a pawn shop in the town and, using his stereo speakers as collateral, he got a loan of 100 leva (approximately 50 EUR). At the same time, the police checked his home address. At the court, Boris did not deny either his responsibility or the fact that he violated the quarantine. Hence, the judge sentenced him to 6 months' probation and fined him 10000 leva (approximately 5000 EUR).[33]

> Angel (pseudonym) entered the country from Turkey. He was quarantined for two weeks in his hometown, but on the following day a local police patrol recognized him while he was drinking soda at the bus station. At the court, Angel explained

[29] See, for example, Elaine Showalter, "Hystories Revisited: Hysterical Epidemics and Social Media," in *Performing Hysteria: Contemporary Images and Imagination of Hysteria* (2020).

[30] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenmen" [1984], in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984. Vol. 1. Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth* (1997), 305.

[31] This is a personal evaluation that is not based on a quantification or formalization of the cases, as the account of the rationality of irresponsible behavior below. It is reliable to the extent it is convincing.

[32] Case No. 77/2020, Tervel District Court.

[33] Case No. 873/2020, Kazanlak District Court.

> that he needed to go out to buy some food. A couple of witnesses confirmed that, yet they also mentioned that he said explicitly that he planned to have a coffee after the shopping. Thus the judge decided that Angel was aware that his behavior posed a risk to society and intentionally incurred that risk. In consequence, Angel was sentenced to six months' probation. The judge commented that although Angel deserved an effective prison sentence, the penalty was reduced because of his very old age.[34]

The accounts that the accused in quarantine violations give of their irresponsible behavior reproduce a series of incomplete, partially defined functional relationships that can be summarized in the following diagram: The responsibility imposed by the pandemic regulations is a responsibility to others. More importantly, it is a responsibility to virtual others represented as numbers, to numeric others, to a population inhabiting a territory that extends beyond the horizon of everyday life. In 31.1% of cases in the first pandemic year, the offenders explained that they breached their duty to the population because they responded to the demands of close others. In another 28.6% of cases, the defendants violated the regulations because no one responded to their needs.[35] In both types of cases, the accused recognized their biopolitical responsibility before the court, and in that sense they were successfully constituted as responsible subjects. Yet, the offenders were also responsive subjects; they needed to respond to or get a response from close others, and their responsiveness outweighed the legal responsibility imposed by the sanitary regulations as well as the symbolic responsibility imposed by the media. The overpowering of responsibility by responsiveness cannot be explained by the inability of the defendants to make rational calculations or to take risks into account. On the contrary, the offenders recognized their individual responsibility and responded to the appeal to calculate risks, and if their calculations nevertheless seemed irrational to the court, it was because they took into account molecular risks ignored by the health authorities.[36] As many others in a society in which social rights have been devalued and the access to public goods has been graded according to economic and social capital, the offenders relied on a social support network that redistributed, lowered, and occasionally even covered the cost of failure, infirmity or

[34] Case No. 699/2020, Kazanlak District Court.

[35] In the other 40.3% of cases, the defendants did not provide any justification for their behavior.

[36] Several studies on the attitudes to pandemic regulations captured comparable forms of reasoning, mostly in marginalized groups such as the Indian migrant workers who tried to incorporate in their risk calculations the uncertain duration of the lockdown or the Pakistani respondents taking into account the risk posed by the hospitals themselves (which many considered higher than the risk of Covid-19; see Muhammad Rahman et al., "Mental Distress and Human Rights Violations During COVID-19: A Rapid Review of the Evidence Informing Rights, Mental Health Needs, and Public Policy Around Vulnerable Populations," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11:603875 (2021). A review of literature on trust in Covid-19 vaccines identifies as important factors the decision to postpone vaccination, the concerns about commercial profiteering, and the general attitude towards risk (Alessandro Sapienza and Rino Falcone, "The Role of Trust in COVID-19 Vaccine Acceptance: Considerations from a Systematic Review," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20:1 (2023), 665), and one can hypothesize that, in responding to the impassioned, dry questions in the surveys, the subjects tried to express indefinite quantities such as "still too much risk" or "already too much profit" emerging out of molecular calculations of the acceptable levels of risk or of the right moment for vaccination.

accidents. Such networks do not coincide with the nuclear or wider family but are molecular rather than molar, and thus often exclude relatives while including neighbors, friends, and coworkers. More importantly, social support networks function as gift economies imposing upon the actors the obligation to give, to receive and to reciprocate, all of which involve an obligation to respond.[37] Thus, from the perspective of the defendants, failing to respond to close others meant shirking an obligation incurred by a series of gift exchanges that they could not afford to stop; or, alternatively, their irresponsible behavior was motivated by the lack of response from close others and the public authorities, an unresponsiveness that threatened to turn everyday life into a struggle for survival.

To sum up, the responsibilization in the course of the pandemic failed in cases in which small-scale, situated, underdetermined risks to the social network outweighed the biopolitical risks.[38] Consequently, the subjects recognized that it was true that they were responsible for the health of the population conceived of as a virtual other but nevertheless ignored that responsibility because of the need to respond to or get a response from others.[39]

RIGHT TO HEALTH AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

In the hope of achieving widespread vaccination, the health authorities fell back once again on the strategy to stimulate responsible behavior by progressively increasing the sanctions against and hence the risks of irresponsibility. At the end of 2021, the Minister of Health introduced green certificates to access shopping malls, hypermarkets, public institutions, and indoor public activities. The measure was widely criticized because the

[37] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1966), 10-11. The national and international authorities do not distinguish such gift economies from corruption as long as some of the persons involved in the exchange are state employees or hold a public office. It is perhaps the reason why corruption seems so pervasive that it is justifiable to consider Bulgarian society in general as abnormal, potentially dangerous, and it produces a perception of vulnerability shared by both the public and the authorities.

[38] I believe that a similar rationality shaped reluctance to vaccination because the social actors calculated the reduced risk of severe illness together with molecular risks associated with the costs of traveling to the city, of taking a day off at work, of waiting for vaccination together with many, possibly contagious others, the chance to offset the risk of infection by limiting contacts or by avoiding the accumulation of people, the stories about a brief indisposition or tiredness after immunization circulating in many social and personal networks, the risk that the vaccines, being based on a new technology, could involve risks that were still unknown and therefore incalculable. Of course, this is once again a generalization based on personal observations rather than on quantifiable data.

[39] On the other hand, the subjects treated the biopolitical risks as a matter of everyday-life importance if they were mediated by the social support networks. Due to the lack of relevant sources on the effects of the mediation of biopolitical risks by social support networks, I will illustrate that point by a personal story. I am living in a relatively large village in the foothills of a mountain. My neighbors generally ignored the pandemic regulations because they did not seem to matter due to the very limited social contacts as well as the fact that although the mortality increased significantly during the pandemic, it seemed to be an effect of the restricted access to urgent care medicine. However, a neighboring family got infected, and the grandfather, who was in his sixties with a heart condition, did not survive the virus. Then, tragically, responsibility no longer seemed an abstract problem. On the contrary, the members of the family are still trying to decide on responsibility in recurring conflicts over who brought the virus home, who should have been less negligent, who was imprudent, reckless, and unresponsiveness to the others, how the tragedy could have been avoided, and if vaccination would have made a difference.

vaccination coverage was below 25%, and the certification of the recovered was still non-functional. The authorities justified the limitations on free movement by a reference to a right to health.

Michel Foucault associated the emergence of the right to health (irreducible to the right to life) with the redistribution of the costs of healthcare by public insurance in the wake of the Beveridge report.[40] International law, which still justifies the right to health by deriving it from the right to life, provides it with different aspects, such as the right to healthy working conditions or the right to access healthcare.[41] The most relevant conceptualization in the context of the pandemic, however, is art. 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which declares the "right of everyone to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health"[42] and obliges the national governments to control epidemics. Furthermore, according to art. 25 of the Syracuse Principles,[43] the need to protect public health is a legitimate ground for limitations or derogations of human rights. Bulgaria has ratified both documents. Additionally, the constitution of the country obliges the government to defend the health of the citizens.[44] Therefore, after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government claimed that the entitlement to limit individual rights flowed from its international and constitutional duties (although, unlike the other Balkan countries, it did not comply with the precondition to notify the UN Human Rights Committee of a derogation of human rights).[45]

The situation, however, was changing rapidly, and to save the time needed for a sanction by the parliament, in May 2020 the government pushed through an amendment of art. 63 of the Health Act.[46] The previous version of the act stated that in case of an "exceptional epidemic situation", the Minister of Health could introduce sanitary measures, and

[40] Foucault, "The Crisis of Medicine or the Crisis of Antimedicine," 5-6.

[41] For a review of the legal framework of the right to health provided by international law, see United Nations (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), "Statement on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and economic, social and cultural rights," E/C.12/2020/1 (2020), retrieved from https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3856957; Dainius Pūras et al., "The right to health must guide responses to Covid-19," *The Lancet* 395:10241(2020), 1-3; Lisa Forman and Jillian Kohler, "Global health and human rights in the time of Covid-19: Response, restrictions, and legitimacy," *Journal of Human Rights* 19:5 (2020), 547-556.

[42] United Nations (General Assembly), International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. *Treaty Series,* vol. 999, Dec. 1966, retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights. Sadly, the individual right to health recognized by international law is limited by the available resources. See Lisa Forman and Jillian Kohler, "Global health and human rights in the time of Covid-19: Response, restrictions, and legitimacy," 548.

[43] United Nations (Economic and Social Council), *Syracuse Principles on the Limitation and Derogation Provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. Geneva: United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1985, Art. 25.

[44] Constitution of Republic of Bulgaria, 56 *State Gazette* (13.07.1991), retrieved from https://www.parliament.bg/bg/const., Art. 52, &3.

[45] See Audrey Lebert, "Covid-19 pandemic and derogation to human rights," *Journal of Law and the Biosciences* (2020), 3.

[46] Health Act. 44 *State Gazette* (13.05.2020), retrieved from https://www.mh.government.bg/media/filer_public/2021/03/08/zakon_za_zdraveto.pdf. The parliament actually avoided the problem of potential limitations of human rights by referring to the constitutional duty of the government to defend public health. See *Parliamentary Record*, 44th Parliament, 21st extraordinary sess., 08.05.2020, https://parliament.bg/bg/plenaryst/ns/55/ID/10295.

citizens were obliged to cooperate with the health authorities. The new version empowered the minister to declare an exceptional epidemiological situation and to impose restrictions on individual rights (including the right to free movement). The constitution, however, granted the power to declare the suspension of normal legal order to the parliament, and the amendment to the Health Act did not specify the acceptable limitations of human rights. The president attacked it at the Constitutional Court. The latter supported the bill and argued that the declaration of an exceptional epidemiological situation did not constitute a state of exception because it did not undermine the division of power.[47] Instead, the Court construed the pandemic as a disaster and accordingly took the opinion that the emergency powers of the health minister did not violate the constitution. As to limitations of rights, the Court followed the Syracuse Principles and declared that they were justified insofar as the government responded to a pressing need, pursued a legitimate aim, and the limitations were proportional to that aim.[48] Since the president attacked the amendment to the Health Act also on the ground that the limitations were of an unspecified nature and duration, the Court supported the bill with the argument that the emergency authority granted to the health minister reflected the nature of pandemic risk; since risk was measured in epidemiological variables such as rate of reproduction or mortality that changed too rapidly, it was impossible to incorporate a definition of unacceptable risk into law.

The decision of the Constitutional Court, however, opened up a number of gaps in the seamless web of law. (1) A defining feature of sovereignty consists in creating a zone of undecidability in which facts pass over into norms and norms merge into facts.[49] The Court has transformed the fact of the pandemic into an incomplete norm that had to be supplemented with more facts to become applicable. Insofar as the norm entitles the health minister to define the facts which determine the application of the norm, he is granted a sovereign power. That sovereign power, however, is not the power of a sovereign; the minister is only able to exercise it as a member of a coalition of actors, which includes governmental agencies, public institutions, and experts in epidemiology, medicine, statistics, and sociology. In that sense, the exceptional powers granted to the health minister amount to a sovereignty without a sovereign. They are inscribed in the normal legal order as an underdetermined entitlement to defend the life of the population, almost a blank lettre du cachet to be filled in accordance with the development of the epidemiological situation.[50] Nevertheless, since that sovereign entitlement is recognized as an

[47] Nevertheless, the exceptional epidemiological situation constitutes a state of exception in the sense of Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, (1998), 18.

[48] United Nations (Economic and Social Council), *Syracuse Principles on the Limitation and Derogation Provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Art. 10. A detailed discussion of the history and legal interpretation of the standards of necessity and proportionality can be found in Alessandra Spadarro, "Covid-19: Testing the Limits of Human Rights," *European Journal of Risk Regulation* 11 (2020), 317–325.

[49] Agamben, Giorgio, *State of Exception* (2005), 29.

[50] On lettre du cachet as a form of dissemination of sovereignty beyond the figure of the sovereign, see Michel Foucault, "Truth and Juridical Forms" [1973], in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. Vol. 3. *Power* (1997), 373, 65-67. On lettre du cachet in relation to psychiatric expertise, see Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at Collège de France 1974-1975* (2003), 37.

element of the normal legal order, and since it is not included in it as an exception, it has to be based on a corresponding right rather than on the might of the sovereign. (2) The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights articulates the right to health as an individual right. The Bulgarian Constitutional Court, however, felt that the right to declare an epidemiological state of exception could not be justified on the basis of individual rights because it went far beyond the familiar national and international practice of imposing limitations on health grounds. Hence, the Court reinterpreted the Syracuse Principles as an implicit recognition that the population was a subject of a right to health. To that end, the constitutional judges made a distinction between individual and collective health,[51] and they argued that although the latter was not associated with a legal right in itself, it was a higher-order value because individual lives were unthinkable without the community; therefore, health as a public value imposed obligations on the individual citizens reflected in the emergency powers of the health minister.[52] (3) As it was mentioned above, the Constitutional Court construed the pandemic as a form of natural disaster. In consequence, the declaration of an exceptional epidemiological situation fell under the scope of the Defense Against Natural Disasters Act. The Act, however, defined the grounds for declaring a state of exception in terms of danger.[53] The Court reinterpreted danger as risk and in effect recognized risk as the basis for the collective right to health. However, in contrast with danger, which can be described as actual or imminent, risk is potential and ineradicable; it is essentially a probability that can never reach the full absence of 0 or the full presence of 1.[54] Even when the risk is minimal, it inescapably exists or insists, and the concept of an exceptional epidemiological situation would be meaningless if it does not refer to some magnitude of risk or to some threshold beyond which the epidemiological situation becomes exceptional. The existing legislation, however, described that threshold in indefinite quantities such as "serious threat"[55] or "significant effects".[56] Since the application of the relevant norms depended on indefinite quantities that could not be defined by law, the Court decided that the threshold of unacceptable risk should be defined by experts. In effect, the emergency powers to limit individual rights came to be distributed among a coalition of epidemiologists, clinicians, statisticians,

[51] The legal formula used by the Constitutional Court was 'right of the community to health'.

[52] Any right imposes an obligation. If one has the right to do something, the others are obliged not to interfere (see, for example, the authoritative discussion in Wesley Hohfeld, "Some Fundamental Legal Conceptions as Applied in Judicial Reasoning," *Yale Law Journal* 16 (1913), 552-556). If one transposes that classical concept of rights in the strict sense to the context of the pandemic, then, insofar as the population has a right to health, and the individuals are not the population, they are obliged not to interfere with regulations intended to protect the public health. Thus individuals are subjects of duties rather than of rights, and the right to health splits into two planes: the individual plane of responsibilities, and the biopolitical plane of entitlements.

[53] Defence Against Disasters Act, 60 *State Gazette* (07.07.2020) https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2135540282, Art. 48, &1.

[54] On the other hand, the transposition of the concept of risk into the field of law transformed the concept itself because the Constitutional Court conceived of it as a fact rather than as a calculation. In that sense, risk was reified.

[55] United Nations (Economic and Social Council), *Syracuse Principles on the Limitation and Derogation Provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Art. 25.

[56] Defence Against Disasters Act, Art. 48, &3B.

politicians and administrators. (4) Because of the gaps that the decision of the Constitutional Court opened up in the web of law, the obligation to defend public health turned into a right to health defined by biopolitical variables calculable only at the level of the population (such as reproduction rates, daily confirmed cases per thousand people, number of Covid-19 patients in intensive care per million, estimated cumulative excess deaths, and share of the population who completed the vaccination protocol). In consequence, the decision of the Constitutional court rearticulated the individual right to health as a properly biopolitical right.[57]

It was that biopolitical right to health that provided the legal basis for the implementation of green certificates. The measure, however, provoked an unexpected form of opposition. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee filed a claim against the government for infringement on the children's rights to education and argued that green certificates were already unnecessary at this point of the pandemic. The Committee also criticized the disproportionate pressure on disadvantaged social groups and the unfair advantage of the industrial sector, which was allowed to operate without restrictions.[58] The national ombudsman threatened to take the government to court since it failed to provide free tests for all who did not want to vaccinate.[59] Additionally, a survey among the industrial employers found that more than 30% of the respondents believed that green certificates infringed on human rights.[60] Since the opposition to green certificates turned out to be very popular, the nationalist parties tried to capitalize on it by organizing protests, and one of the parties almost started a legal action on the grounds that green certificates were a form of segregation.[61] Later on, together with the major opposition party GERB, the nationalists

[57] The biopolitical right to health is not merely an extension of the parallel individual right, and one can argue that in the context of the pandemic they could actually conflict (see for example Patrycja Dąbrowska-Kłosińska, "The Protection of Human Rights in Pandemics - Reflections on the Past, Present, and Future," *German Law Journal* 22 (2021), 1032).

[58] "BHC obzhalva zapovedta na Ministerstvoto na zdraveopazvaneto v chastta, zasjagashta zatvarjaneto na uchilishtata." [BHC files a complaint against the section of act of the Minister of Health concerning the lockdown on schools], *BHC*. https://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/news/20211026-press-bhc-challenges-covid-19-school-closures (accessed 26.10.2021). The BHC appeal actually reproduced one of the most effective legal arguments against the pandemic regulations, referring to their disproportionate effects on vulnerable populations. For an analysis of the argument and its effects on the US management of the pandemic, see Audrey Lebert, "Covid-19 pandemic and derogation to human rights", 8-9.

[59] Zdrave, "Ombudsmanat poiska vednaga bezplatni antigenni testove i sertifikat za antitela," [The Ombudsman Demands Immediately Free Test and T-Cell Certificates], Zdrave24.bg. https://www.24zdrave.bg/article/10309384 (accessed 20.10.2021).

[60] The bulk of the respondents, however, declared that they supported the measure as long as it provided an exemption for industrial labor. See Econ, "Spored edna treta ot rabotodatelite s"s zeleniJa sertifikat se narushavat choveshki prava," [According to one third of the employers, the green certificate is an infringement on human rights], Econ.bg. https://econ.bg/Новини/Според-една-трета-от-работодателите-със-зеления-сертификат-се-нарушават-човешки-права_l.a_i.791463_at.1.html (accessed November 4, 2021).

[61] Dnes, "'Vazrazhdane' gotvi zhalba do KS zaradi zelenija sertifikat v parlamenta," [The Renaissance party is planning to appeal to the Constitutional Court because of the requirement of green certificates for entering the Parliament]. Dnes.bg. https://www.dnes.bg/politika/2022/01/07/vyzrajdane-gotvi-jalba-do-ks-zaradi-zeleniia-sertifikat-v-parlamenta.516300 (accessed January 7, 2022). Blagoevgrad24, "VMRO: Vavezhdaneto na zelen sertifikat e socialen genocid! Kacarov da popade ostavka!" [The VMRO party: The implementation of green certificates is a social genocide! Kacarov shoud resign!] Blagoevgrad24.bg.

appealed to the Constitutional Court against the green certificate requirement for entering the parliament (the requirement, however, was annulled before the Court was able to consider it).[62]

The opponents of green certificates voiced important concerns. Indeed, was the ambition to increase vaccination coverage a legitimate goal in the sense of the Syracuse Principles? Were the limitations proportionate? Was the measure necessary if the current wave of the pandemic already subsided? What if the health authorities implemented the certificates in response to the emergency visit of the EU Health Commissioner Thierry Breton, who reproached the government for being irresponsible towards EU partners and warned that the country could give rise to a new and more dangerous Covid-19 variant?[63] The opponents of the green certificates, however, relied on a concept of individual rights that did not take into account the biopolitical justification of the measure. The latter depended on the threshold of unacceptable risk defined by experts, and the experts almost unanimously supported the implementation of the certificates. Since the opponents were unable to base their criticism on alternative calculations, their arguments seemed baseless. Therefore, although no one had managed to file a formal appeal, the chairwoman of the Constitutional Court declared that, judging by the available risk evaluations, the green certificates did not violate human rights.[64] Relying on her authoritative opinion, the Sofia first-level court alone rejected more than twenty legal actions by private citizens claiming that the measure infringed on their right to free movement.[65] Let us illustrate the nature of the legal actions by two cases:

> Todor (pseudonym), a stagehand at the National Theater, filed a complaint that the government announced the implementation of green certificates on a Friday afternoon and the restrictions came into effect on the Monday, thus he was unable to vaccinate, and there were no available testing options at the city center. Todor decided to go to work regardless, but the guards did not let him in. Then he tried to sneak into the theater together with a group of colleagues, but the guards caught

https://www.blagoevgrad24.bg/novini/Bylgaria/VMRO-Vuvezhdaneto-na-zelen-sertifikat-e-socialen-genocid-Kacarov-da-popade-ostavka-1138343 (accessed October 20, 2021).

[62] DeFacto, "Sas stanovishte na trima sadii Konstitutsionniyat sad prekrati deloto za zeleniya sertifikat," [An opinion of three judges puts an end to the appeal against the green certificate to the Constitutional Court], DeFacto.bg. https://defakto.bg/2022/03/24/с-три-особени-мнения-конституционния/ (accessed March 24, 2022).

[63] Actualno, "Evrokomisar predupredi, che Balgarija mozhe da se prevarne v iztochnik na nov variant na COVID-19," [An EU Commissioner Warned that Bulgaria Can Become the Source of a New Covid-19 Variant], Actualno.com. https://www.actualno.com/healthy/evrokomisar-predupredi-che-bylgarija-moje-da-se-prevyrne-v-iztochnik-na-nov-variant-na-covid-19-news_1673533.html (accessed November 19, 2021).

[64] Mediapool, "Predsedatelkata na KS: Zelenijat sertifikat ne ogranichava prava," [The Chairwoman of the Constitutional Court: The Green Certificate does not Infringe on Human Rights], Mediapool. https://www.mediapool.bg/predsedatelkata-na-ks-zeleniyat-sertifikat-ne-ogranichava-prava-news330000.html (accessed December 12, 2021).

[65] BTV, "Delata sreshtu zyelyeniya sertifikat: Administrativniyat sad v Sofiya otkhvarli zhalbitye," [The Lawsuits against the Green Certificate: The Sofia Administrative Court Dismisses the Claims], Btvnovinite.bg. https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/delata-sreshtu-zelenija-sertifikat-administrativnijat-sad-v-sofija-othvarli-zhalbite.html (accessed 01.11.2021).

> him, which caused a scandal, and he was consequently fired. The court rejected his complaint with the argument that the collective right of health imposed obligations on the individuals that could not be trumped by the right to free movement.[66]
>
> Maria (pseudonym) appealed to the Commission for Defense Against Discrimination that her right to free movement was unjustifiably restricted because she had already recovered from Covid-19, but the national registry of recovery certificates was still inoperative. Although the government tried to compensate for that by issuing recovery certificates on the basis of T-Cell tests, her T-cells turned out slightly below the threshold, so she was refused certification. The Commission rejected the appeal, citing her obligation to comply with the measures in the name of the public right to health. Dissatisfied, Maria started a legal action against the Commission. The court, however, dismissed her claim on the ground that she failed to define the particular legal norms violated by the Commission or the Minister of Health.[67]

However, the argument against green certificates was weak not only because it did not refer to alternative risk evaluations. Both the government and the courts argued that a certificate requirement did not limit the individual right to free movement because it gave one a choice. However, it was precisely because it did not violate individual rights and precisely because it opened up a field of choice that the implementation of green certificates led to the identification of an irrational population. The alternatives to vaccination have different costs: since one could get a jab at the mall or on the way to work, it took an insignificant amount of time and effort; since the mechanism of public debt had deferred the costs of mass immunization to the future, vaccines seemed to be almost gifts; in contrast, daily testing consumed considerably more time, effort and money, and restricting one's movement and social life amounted to marginalization. Insofar as the differential costs of vaccination were significantly lower, it was irrational to choose the alternatives. Moreover, against the background of the media interpellation that to vaccinate meant to act responsibly, choosing the alternatives seemed irresponsible. Therefore, the actors who avoided vaccination displayed irrational and irresponsible conduct. The national Covid-19 database, and the databases of applications such as Covidcheck or ViruSafe, registered the instances of such conducts, put them together, calculated their health, economic or political risks, and correlated the risks to quantitative phenomena such as morbidity, mortality, virus transmission rate, and conspiracist attitudes, phenomena which are characteristic of a kind rather than of individuals. In effect, the subject of irresponsible conduct was conceived of as a population. To the health authorities, that population represented a point of concentration of risks threatening to bolt into an epidemiological crisis. Hence, the authorities found it rational to reduce the risks by further increasing the differential costs of irresponsible and irrational conducts, and a month later, the National Crisis-Management Staff already discussed the implementation of a mandatory certificate

[66] Case No. 72583/2021, Sofia District Court.
[67] Case No. 1653/2022, Burgas Administrative Court.

requirement for public employees, medical personnel, and school teachers,[68] and if that failed to produce a significant effect, for public transport.[69] As a result, the harmonization of green certificates and individual rights brought about an intensification of control.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic has implemented a powerful security apparatus. It is both similar to and different from the regimes of power described by Michel Foucault: like sovereign power, it defends the public order; like disciplines, it trains individual bodies; like biopolitics, it acts on populations characterized by phenomena irreducible to individual cases, such as vaccination coverage, virus transmission or mortality rates. Yet, in contrast with disciplinary power, the security apparatus of the pandemic does not operate in a closed space decomposed into a grid of individual positions; in contrast with biopolitics, it acts on molecular, individualized populations that, due to the accumulation of big data, one can break down even into a set of populations of one (insofar as individual behavior displays quantifiable regularities). In contrast with sovereign power, the pandemic security a pparatus does not counter threats; rather, it acts on risks that cannot be eliminated because they are intrinsic to the population, quite like mortality or morbidity. In the Bulgarian case, the health authorities tried to control the risks of the pandemic by intervening at points at which they intensified beyond the normal levels: attractions such as parks or shopping malls; the nodal points of the traffic network; the slowdown of economic growth; quarantine violations; vaccine hesitancy. The government hoped to reduce such excessive risks by increasing the differential cost of high-risk behaviors (not only in monetary terms but also in terms of time, effort and risk of sanctions).

The public and legal authorities justified that approach by reference to an *ad hoc* right to health whose implementation depended on biopolitical phenomena such as the virus reproduction number. That biopolitical right to health did not conflict with individual rights. On the contrary, individual rights were an important element of its mechanism: the sanitary measures could work only if each and every person was constituted as a subject of responsibility for the health of the population; individual rights opened up fields of choice and therefore constituted the individuals as subjects of responsibility for their choices. Since some choices involved excessive risk for the population, they contradicted the responsibility imposed by the right to health, and if one nevertheless made such choices, then one displayed irresponsible behavior for which she or he could be held responsible precisely because he or she enjoyed individual rights.

[68] See BTV, "Na praga na novi merki: Obsyzhda se zelen sertifikat za uchiteli, socialni rabotnici i medici," [At the threshold of new measures: The authorities are discussing a green certificate for teachers, social workers and medics] Btvnovinite.bg. https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/na-praga-na-novi-merki-obsazhda-se-zelen-sertifikat-za-uchiteli-socialni-rabotnici-i-medici-obzor.html (accessed October 18, 2021).

[69] See Alexandar Dimitrov, "Ako zelenite sertifikati ne srabotjat, oshte po-strashni merki skovavat Balgaria," [If green certificates do not work, even more fearsome measures are going to freeze life in Bulgaria], Blitz. https://blitz.bg/zdraveopazvane/ako-zelenite-sertifikati-ne-srabotyat-oshche-po-strashni-merki-skovavat-blgariya_news847975.html (accessed October 26, 2021).

Furthermore, the data accumulated in the course of the pandemic allowed the health authorities to articulate the subjects of such irresponsible conducts as molecular, under-determined and deterritorialized populations: quarantine violators; spreaders evading the restrictions on movement; young people gathering at malls or parks despite the fines; and the unenlightened and distrustful masses postponing or refusing vaccination.[70] To act on the irresponsible populations, the health authorities started to increase progressively the differential cost of their choices. Since such interventions ignored the small-scale, situated risks whose accumulation shaped high-risk conduct, the latter seemed not only irresponsible but also irrational; it indicated an immaturity and an inability to exercise individual rights which, in turn, justified further restrictions on free movement and social life. The growing pressure on the irresponsible populations, however, left a growing residue of irresponsible behaviors. As a result, the attempts to control the risks of the pandemic brought about a self-extending control whose power, justified by the need to defend the life of the population, grew in proportion to risk.

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[70] Any regime of responsibilization articulates discursive figures of irresponsibility representing conducts discarded as noise, a worthless residue, an absence of work (in the sense of Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 12; "Madness, the Absence of Work," *Critical Inquiry* 21:2 (1995), 295). Such figures mark the limits in which it is possible to pose and solve the issues of responsibility. In that sense, the figures of imprudent behavior are a condition of possibility of responsibilization as a discursive practice. For instance, when Louis-Paul Abeille, at the dawn of modern security apparatuses, argued that the risk of famine should be contained by the free play of market forces rather than by state intervention, he assumed that the economic agents will make prudent choices taking into account their own interests if not the interests of others. Yet, since the assumption was too abstract to be based on individual cases and too concrete to be deduced from general concepts, Abeille defined it by contrasting rational economic behavior to the irresponsible conduct of the masses that looted the warehouses instead of making the calculation that, after only a couple of months, the market would cancel out the shortage of wheat and reduce the risk of hunger in the following years (see Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 66).

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ARTICLE

A Critique of Pandemic Reason: Towards a Syndemic Noso-Politics

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ABSTRACT. The main objective of this article is to provide a critique of the pandemic strategy suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO) and implemented by various countries from March 2020 onwards in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, China. Based on the theories of Michel Foucault, this critique aims to show that, in the first instance, the pandemic may be understood in terms of the art of governing human beings at the point of interaction between politics and medicine; secondly, in Foucauldian terminology, such interaction may be referred to as 'noso-politics', that is, a mechanism used to control the body of the population via authoritarian measures exercised in the name of the health of the population; thirdly, such a mechanism exercises its power by invoking a mechanistic truth about the SARS-CoV-2 virus which may be countered by an argument that takes a historical perspective on the virus; fourthly, the pandemic strategy may be opposed by a syndemic approach that takes into account interactions between emerging diseases such as COVID-19 and non-communicable illnesses, as well as the biological and socio-economic conditions that the well-being of the population depends on. In short, by providing a critique of the politics of truth about the pandemic, the virus, and health measures, the article aims to encourage a critical attitude that will challenge both the authorities and the truth they invoke to prevent the pandemic strategy being used as a mechanism for governing, given the predictions of the recurrent emergence of new viruses.

Keywords: SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19, noso-politics, pandemic, evolution, syndemic

INTRODUCTION

> "If you had to entrust your body to someone, taking the risk of its being made better or worse, you would first consider most carefully whether you ought to entrust it or not, and would

> seek the advice of your friends and relations and ponder it for a number of days…"
>
> Plato, *Protagoras*

This article is an addition to the profusion of biopolitical research and analysis which has appeared in the wake of the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019. Throughout 2020 and 2021, it might be said that the production of publications somehow correlated with the background against which discussions progressively adapted to the evolution of the virus and the development of the health measures which were gradually being implemented in a number of countries where science and medical knowledge play a socially relevant role and some of which consider themselves to be liberal, democratic states. A number of publications stand out in the context of these discussions, for example, *Coronavirus and Philosophers* (2020), which was followed by rebuttals in Spanish entitled *Sopa de Wuhan* [*Wuhan Soup*] (2020), and *Coronavirus, Psychoanalysis, and Philosophy* (2021), which selected and compiled the most important articles to date, as well as the responses to certain opinions. In a certain way, research and analyses adjusted in response to the experiences that they reacted to, based on their situation, that is, their biological and social conditions, not only their historical ones.

In general, the analyses devoted to studying the COVID-19 pandemic in biopolitical terms built on work by Foucault, both *The History of Sexuality* (particularly the last chapter, entitled 'Right of Death and Power over Life') and the course he taught at the *Collège de France* entitled *Society Must Be Defended* (specifically his class on the 17th of March 1976), when he identified the characteristic features that ushered in the 'era of "biopower"',[1] that is, the transformation of sovereign power that causes death and allows life into a type of power that causes life and allows death; the change of object that goes from the body of the subject to the body-machine and the body-species; linking the population to statistics and demographics; the emergence of regularization mechanisms or security measures interwoven with disciplinary mechanisms; the conflict with the environment and the effects on the population; the transition from a power of standardisation to one of normalization; and the process of the statisation of the biological. In this way, having identified the poles that constitute biopower as *the anatomo-politics of the human body* and *the bio-politics of the population*, Foucault warns "…this great bipolar technology – anatomic and biological, individualizing and specifying, directed towards the performances of the body with attention to the processes of life – characterized a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through".[2] Based on these transformations, successions and emergences of the different mechanisms of power, Foucault indicates the processes by which the management and administration of life from the 18th century onwards is carried out: increasing or decreasing birth and mortality rates; correlating diseases with epidemics-endemics; analysing the positive-negative factors of the environment – whether natural or artificial; promoting movement in cities; intervening in social medicine; linking resources and the market with the population; prioritising health and

[1] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1978), 140.
[2] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 139.

longevity; encouraging and regulating population growth; establishing savings and pension funds; backing vaccination campaigns; encouraging or limiting migration, and so on. All these processes are framed within the fulfilment of the objective of biopower, which goes hand in hand "with an explosion of numbers and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations...".[3] According to this Foucauldian description of biopower, the sanitary measures aimed at stopping the spread and contagion of the virus imposed during the pandemic were analysed as new ways in which it was possible, in the first instance, to monitor individuals more extensively and more exhaustively;[4] and secondly, to control populations via discourses and technologies of domination.[5]

In the same way, notably, various articles made use of other works by Foucault, such as his *History of Madness* (specifically the first chapter entitled *Stultifera Navis*), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (at the beginning of the section dedicated to panopticism) and the course he taught at the *Collège de France* entitled *Security, Territory, Population* (particularly the classes of the 11th and 25th of January 1978), to somehow attempt an explanation of the pandemic strategy, as a form of government, in light of Foucault's historical analyses of three infectious diseases that plagued Europe: leprosy in the Middle Ages,[6] the plague, from the late Middle Ages to the 17th century,[7] and smallpox during the 18th century.[8] Based on these historical models, it was possible to analyse different situations, for example, that of the city of Perth, Australia, which can, as Foucault pointed out in *Discipline and Punish*, be *perfectly governed* by the establishment of sanitary protocols that would impose a form of COVID-style government extended beyond the threat of contagion.[9] It has even been claimed that the smallpox model better describes the form of government adopted by both European governments and Western societies to combat the pandemic.[10]

Within this context of debate, the present article seeks to analyse the complex problem classified as a pandemic by the WHO in March 2020. The intention here is to provide a critique of the politics of the truth of that classification, as well as the health practices implemented and imposed by an alliance established between politics and medicine. Taking Foucault's theories as its base, the article attempts to show that if the pandemic strategy may be considered to be a means of governing human beings, then what is needed is a critical attitude that not only uncovers the flaws and errors in the strategy but one that

[3] *History of Sexuality,* 140.

[4] See Danielle L. Couch, Priscilla Robinson, and Paul A. Komerasoff, "COVID-19-Extending surveillance and the panopticon," *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 17:4 (2020), 809-814,

[5] See Costas Constantinou, "Responses to COVID-19 as a form of 'biopower'," *International Review of Sociology* 32:1 (2022), 29-39.

[6] Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* (2006).

[7] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (1995).

[8] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the College de France, 1977-1978* (2009).

[9] See Laura Glitsos, "COVID-19 and the 'perfectly governed city'," *Journal for Cultural Research* 25:12 (2021), 1-17.

[10] See Philipp Sarasin, "Understanding the Coronavirus Pandemic with Foucault?," *Genealogy+Critique*. https://doi.org/10.13095/uzh.fsw.fb.254 (accessed November 10, 2023).

can reveal a way in which the subject, by exercising the art of 'not being governed in this way' by this strategy, can question the truth and its effects on power, as well as question the power that invokes a truth, in this specific case, its nature and the effects on humans when infected by this virus. Similarly, when making a critique of pandemic reason, the article follows the same line of enquiry as that proposed by Foucault in 'Omnes et singulatim': *Toward a Critique of Political Reason*, whose assumptions may be listed as follows: 1) That Power, not being a type of substance, is a 'type of relations between individuals'[11] in which the freedom of an individual can be subjugated to power, as well as to the government: 'If an individual can remain free, however little his freedom may be, power can subject him to government'.[12] 2) That the government of human beings by human beings, by not implying instrumental violence, 'involves a certain type of rationality'.[13] 3) If there is a rejection of or potential rebellion to every power relationship, then those who resist or rebel must question 'the form of rationality at stake'[14] to discover how certain power relationships have been rationalized. 4) That the State has long been one of the 'forms of human government'.[15] To summarise, making a critique of pandemic reasoning implies questioning the rationalization of certain power relationships whose purpose has been the government of human beings, at least in the liberal democratic Western states, during the global spread of SARS-CoV-2.

In line with this method of critique and this type of research, the article does not deny that the virus mutated and proliferated throughout the world but rather questions the practices that derived from a truth about the virus, supported by a mechanistic version of both biology and medicine. In simplified terms, we take a mechanistic explanation to be one in which a single explanation of a phenomenon is formulated in such a way that it is presented as a universal or general explanation; in contrast, in our opinion, biological phenomena are historical phenomena, and therefore the explanations should not be universal explanations or generalizations but should be limited to the conditions and context in which the entities, in this case the virus and the infected person, are interacting. Although in many ways this scientific argument was accepted, it should be clarified that in order to exercise the art of not being governed in this way, as Foucault suggested, a subject must not accept a truth simply because an authority is saying it but must possess the necessary reasons for accepting it. Thus, the subject establishes a relationship with himself in correspondence with science, scientific argument and, in any case, with a discourse of truth. Hence, the critique made below describes the truth of the virus in historical terms, since a perspective of this type is necessary for the subject to have a truth available with which he can question both the authority and the imposition of certain measures derived from a mechanistic type of truth. In those countries where no other options were available to citizens, and in general when we talk about impositions and authoritarianism, we are

[11] Michel Foucault, "'Omnes et singulatim': Toward a Critique of Political Reason" [1979], in *Power. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (2001), 324.
[12] Foucault, "'Omnes et singulatim'," 324.
[13] "'Omnes et singulatim'," 324.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 325.

referring exclusively to these contexts and not to those where the measures suggested by the WHO were criticized and rejected from the outset. Nor are we referring to contexts where pandemic measures were adopted in far more democratic ways.[16] It follows that the subject can then exercise the art of not being governed in this way based on another scientific argument that will allow him to question the authority's certainty. Thus, this scientific argument with a historical perspective on the virus would open a window onto a different type of practice that would not, for example, be limited to containing the rate of contagion and mortality through vaccination – which took time to affect the population positively as was seen in 2020 and 2021 – but would require state governments to adopt another way of governing.

Now, if the pandemic strategy can be considered as a way to subdue and dominate individuals via control measures imposed on the population by Western countries governed by liberal democracies, it will be necessary in the first place to analyse the roles played by medicine and politics in designing these measures that are based on the mechanistic truth of the virus (here, we wish to stress that the statements made about the COVID-19 virus were generalized declarations that highlighted the virus's high rate of infectivity, lethality, and mortality, when from the outset the statistics on lethality or mortality showed that other variables were involved, such as chronic disease, age, the person's state of health, etc.), and second, to present the way in which the subject can demand from both medicine and politics an alternative approach in the face of an emerging disease such as COVID-19. It is therefore worthwhile recognising the existence of the interpenetration of medicine and politics, the Foucauldian term being 'noso-politics', and oppose the pandemic strategy (mechanistic vision) with the syndemic strategy (historical vision), as Richard Horton did. In this way, by recognizing the interpenetration and interaction of medicine and politics, as well as the existence of an alternative medical approach to treating diseases, the subject can not only resist the dominant effects of noso-politics but can demand, firstly, change in the medical model in charge of regulating diseases and, secondly, modification of the measures imposed by the policy, as well as improvement in socio-economic conditions and the social infrastructure that the general well-being of the population depends on.

Finally, the analysis presented here makes no attempt to point out the strategic errors of the pandemic model nor those made by the authorities that imposed it. Instead, given the warnings of an increasingly recurrent emergence of viruses – whether due to global warming, zoonotic contagion, or the destruction of the environment – it aims to show a different way for humans to relate to the virosphere and the diseases derived from it. This is achieved via a critical attitude – recognized by Foucault as a general virtue – to scientific knowledge in order to produce resistance against viruses, as well as against the authoritarian measures imposed by contemporary noso-politics.

To do this, the article is divided into the following sections: *1. Not being governed in this way:* taking up the dispute between Giorgio Agamben and Jean-Luc Nancy regarding health control measures at the start of the pandemic. In this section, we seek to make

[16] For a comparative study of the way in which pandemic measures were adopted, see Nico Steytler, *Comparative Federalism and COVID-19: Combating the Pandemic* (2022).

relevant a type of critical attitude capable of opposing the government of the body carried out by politics and medical institutions; *2. Critical attitude and the art of governing*: starting from the relationship that Foucault identified between the art of governing human beings and the critical attitude, the section points out that an interaction between political and medical government took place during the pandemic, imposing authoritarian measures in the name of health. Agamben raised a critical voice against this, denouncing this novel form of the art of governing human beings; *3. Politics and medicine:* going back to Foucault's historical analyses of health policy in the 18th century, the section describes the interpenetration between politics and medicine as noso-politics, in charge of controlling the body of the population in the name of health by means of authoritarian measures; *4. Noso-politics and the virosphere*: given that contemporary noso-politics, understood as the art of government, invoked a mechanistic truth about the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the section presents a scientific discussion of the virus and proposes a historical perspective that makes it possible to problematize the pandemic strategy; finally, *5. Noso-politics, syndemic, critique*: in the same way that Agamben affirmed that the epidemic, or at least, the pandemic, was an invention, the section symmetrically presents the way in which, based on a scientific-medical argument and asserting a critical attitude, Richard Horton stated that COVID-19 was not a pandemic but a syndemic, attempting not to be governed by a medical model that failed to take account of interactions between emerging diseases and non-communicable illnesses, as well as the biological conditions and the socio-economic inequalities of a population. In summary, based on all these theoretical-historical elements, the article aims to provide a critique of pandemic reasoning that allows subjects to see clearly the exercise of power by the contemporary noso-political mechanism, which uses authoritarian measures – whether the state of exception, confinement, quarantine or social distancing – to restrain the bodies of both the individual and the population. Similarly, it aims to promote a critical attitude through which the subject, by establishing a relationship between himself and scientific knowledge, can exercise the art of not being governed in this way and confront an authority.

NOT BEING GOVERNED IN THIS WAY

During the spread of the coronavirus and its numerous mutations, there were also discussions around it that changed opinion about the life-saving measures that various states implemented. Many opinions were considered 'critical', but there were some – conspicuously that of Giorgio Agamben (2020) – which the media deemed scandalous.

Undeniably, it was the scandal that stood out most in the opinions that opposed Agamben's critique of the state of exception and authoritarian health measures for being excessive and worrying, for example, "Faced with the frenetic, irrational and entirely unfounded emergency measures adopted against an alleged epidemic of coronavirus…".[17] These counter-opinions turned the critique into a scandal to the extent that the scandalous facet actually suppressed the critique, while the counter-opinions were shown to suppress

[17] Giorgio Agamben, "The invention of an epidemic," *European Journal of Psychoanalysis.* https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/coronavirus-and-philosophers/ (accessed November 10, 2023).

the scandal. Consequently, what may be noted in this relationship is that critique and scandal cannot go hand in hand, and that there cannot be something like a scandalous critique or a critical scandal, because it would be considered an oxymoron in itself and from the outset. This polarity even became evident in the camps of Agamben's defenders-detractors; of followers who sought, on the one hand, to defend society *from Agamben* and, on the other, to defend Agamben from society.[18]

Here, while there is nothing to add to this debate, it is important to go back to an image that came out of the discussion; the image of two friends who, at a distance and through the medium of writing, meet again not only to assert their opinions but to show the importance of friendship in times of crisis despite their not sharing the same ideas. While opinions were proliferating at the beginning of the pandemic, Jean-Luc Nancy wrote a counter-opinion on February 28, 2020, where he pointed out an oversight, a lack of attention and an error in Agamben's arguments regarding the virus and the illness, which can be considered to be more 'like a diversionary manoeuvre than a political reflection'.[19] After making this comment warning of the scandal, Nancy shared a memory that interweaves friendship with the danger of dying:

> I mentioned that Giorgio is an old friend. And I apologize for bringing up a personal recollection, but I am not abandoning a register of general reflection by doing so. Almost 30 years ago doctors decided I needed a heart transplant. Giorgio was one of the very few who advised me not to listen to them. If I had followed his advice, I would have probably died soon enough. It is possible to make a mistake. Giorgio is nevertheless a spirit of such finesse and kindness that one may define him -without the slightest irony- as exceptional.[20]

Both Nancy's recollection and his commentary on Agamben's argument about a crisis evoke one of the primordial images of philosophy, repeating the story with a very specific difference. The meeting between Agamben and Nancy in written media very subtly recalls the introduction to the dialogue *Protagoras*, in which Plato presents the young Hippocrates waking Socrates because he wants Socrates to go with him to visit the sophist who has arrived at the *polis*, since he not only wishes to give him all his money but also wants to be trained by him. Surprised more by young Hippocrates' passionate wish than by his visit, Socrates asks him the following question:

> Then are you aware what you are now about to do, or is it not clear to you? I asked.
>
> To what do you refer?

[18] For this controversial fact, see Lukas van den Berge, "Biopolitics and the Coronavirus: Foucault, Agamben, Žižek," *Netherlands Journal of Legal Philosophy* 1:49 (2020), 3-6; Tim Christaens, "Must Society be Defended from Agamben," *Critical Legal Thinking*. https://criticallegalthinking.com/2020/03/26/must-society-be-defended-from-agamben/ (accessed November 10, 2023).

[19] Jean-Luc Nancy, "A Viral Exception," in *Coronavirus, Psychoanalysis, and Philosophy,* ed. Fernando Castrillón and Thomas Marchevsky (2021), 30.

[20] Nancy, "A Viral Exception," 30.

> I mean your intention of submitting your soul to the treatment of a man who, as you say, is a sophist; and as to what a sophist really is, I shall be surprised if you can tell me. And yet, if you are ignorant of this, you cannot know to whom you are entrusting your soul, -whether it is to something good or to something evil.[21]

Guided by Socrates' words, the young Hippocrates confirms that he cannot say what a sophist's knowledge is, far less as to whether he can make a disciple an expert.[22] Seen in this way, Socrates asks the following: 'are you aware upon what sort of hazard you are going to stake your soul?'.[23] Taking the soul to be more valuable than the body, Socrates rebukes the young Hippocrates:

> …would you omit to consult first with either your father or your brother or one of us your comrades, -as to whether or no you should entrust your very soul to this newly-arrived foreigner; but choose rather, having heard of him in the evening, as you say, and coming to me at dawn, to make no mention of this question, and take no counsel upon it- whether you ought to entrust yourself to him or not; and are ready to spend your own substance and that of your friends, in the settled conviction that at all costs you must converse with Protagoras, whom you neither know, as you tell me, nor have ever met in argument before, and whom you call 'sophist', in patent ignorance of what this sophist may be to whom you are about to entrust yourself?[24]

If we take this classic scene from philosophy in order to compare it with the memory of Nancy confronting Agamben, it might be said that Agamben had adopted the role of a Socrates who wanted to advise Nancy, in the role of the young Hippocrates, to avoid the risk of entrusting his body, rather than his soul, to the doctor, who might be the contemporary sophist in disguise. The distance between them and historical uniqueness of these cases highlight their specificity since the problem no longer turns on the sage in relation to the soul but on the doctor in relation to the body. However, unlike Socrates, who accompanied the young Hippocrates to engage in dialogue with the sophist, Socrates' opinion actually changing as a result of the conversation,[25] Agamben merely advised Nancy not to listen to the doctor. Perhaps Agamben's opinion would have changed if, as Socrates did with the young Hippocrates, he had accompanied Nancy to the doctor to talk with him.

In this historical comparison, there are two important things that emerge in its uniqueness: *1)* that, just as Socrates warns of the risk of entrusting the care of the soul to a stranger, Agamben anticipates the risk of the doctor taking care of the body; *2)* that the risk no longer comes from the sophists but from the doctors. Consequently, in the case of Agamben-Nancy, it is no longer, as in the case of Socrates-Hippocrates, a question of a government of the soul by the sophist but of a type of government applied to the body by

[21] Plato, "Protagoras," in *Laches, Protagoras, Meno, Euthydemus,* ed. T. E. Page (1952), 103.
[22] Plato, "Protagoras," 105.
[23] "Protagoras,"105.
[24] Ibid., 107.
[25] See "Protagoras," 255-257.

the doctor. Thus, both Nancy's decision to undergo a heart transplant and Agamben's decision to advise him not to – which correspond to the fact that Nancy is in favour of health control measures and Agamben advises against them – pose a problem that might be analysed via what Foucault called a 'critical attitude'.

THE ART OF GOVERNING AND THE CRITICAL ATTITUDE

Between the opposing poles of scandal and critique, one of Agamben's defenders-followers stated the following: 'Let's hope that critical voices like those of Agamben will prevent us from accepting current emergency measures and biopolitical practices and policies as business as usual'.[26] In this hopeful statement, what is evident is the relationship established between prevention and the *critical voice*, at the very least, a critical voice that warns us about accepting this or that measure, this or that practice. This critical voice, seeking to warn, encourages or tries to produce a critical attitude in the listener, at least as seen from the perspective of Foucault, for whom the fact of not accepting this or that measure, this or that practice, implies the art of not being governed in this way. Given that Agamben is a specialist on the work of Foucault, such a connection would not be unexpected.

Now, to analyse the question in terms of critique and the art of not being governed in this way, it is worth setting out what Foucault presented at the French Society of Philosophy on May 27, 1978. Regarding the question: 'what is critique?', Foucault explained that, between Kant and polemical-professional activities, there has existed, in the modern West (15th-16th century), 'a certain manner of thinking, of speaking, likewise of acting, and a certain relation to what exists, to what one knows, to what one does, as well as a relation to society, to culture, to others, and all this one might name the "critical attitude"'.[27] Similarly, he affirmed that this critical attitude is specific to 'modern civilization',[28] just as it exists only as an instrument (as the means for a truth), a subordinate function (to philosophy, science, politics, etc.) and as an imperative 'related to virtue'.[29] In short, Foucault tried to analyse the critical attitude 'as virtue in general'.[30]

According to Foucault's history of the critical attitude, it is worth noting the way in which Christian pastoral care displayed an art of governing human beings based on the idea 'that every individual, whatever his age or his status, from the beginning to the end of his life and down to the very details of his actions, ought to be governed and ought to let himself be governed, that is to say, be directed toward his salvation, by someone to whom he is bound in a total, and at the same time meticulous and detailed, relation of obedience'.[31] The direction towards salvation, as suggested by Foucault, must fulfil a triple relationship with truth: *1)* understood as dogma; *2)* related to a way of knowing; and *3)* linked to a reflective technique 'comprised of general rules, particular kinds of

[26] van den Berge, "Biopolitics and the Coronavirus: Foucault, Agamben, Žižek," 5-6.
[27] Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?" [1978], in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (1996), 382.
[28] Foucault, "What is Critique?," 382.
[29] "What is Critique?," 383.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

knowledge, precepts, methods of examination, of confession, of interviews, and so forth'.[32] Finally, Foucault points out that the direction of consciousness, called *techné technôn* by the Greek church and *ars artium* by the Roman church, 'this was the art of governing men'.[33]

Although this art of governing was restricted to the cloistered existence of the church and to certain spiritual groups, Foucault affirms that there was 'a veritable explosion of the art of governing men',[34] above all from the sixteenth century onwards, with the following characteristics: *1)* the shifting of religious focus and 'an expansion into civil society';[35] *2)* the reduction in various domains: 'how to govern children, how to govern the poor and beggars, how to govern a family, a house, how to govern armies, how to govern various groups, cities, states, how to govern one's own body, how to govern one's own mind'.[36]

If this explosion of the art of governing human beings, which may be categorised as governmentalization, raises the question of *how to govern*, Foucault raises a prior question: 'How not to be governed?',[37] which does not imply the fact of not wanting to be governed and not wanting to be governed at all but rather 'How not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of these principles, in view of such objectives and by the means of such methods, not like that, not for that, not by them'.[38] Foucault thus suggests that it is possible to place the critical attitude in opposition to the explosion of the art of government and governmentalization: 'Against this, and like a counterpoint, as a way of suspecting them, of challenging them, of limiting them, of finding their right measure, of transforming them, of seeking to escape these arts of governing or, in any case, to displace them, as an essential reluctance…'.[39] Thus, after the shifting, reduction and multiplication of the arts of governing, there arose in Europe what Foucault defined as 'the art of not being governed so much',[40] characterized as: *1)* a form of general culture; *2)* a moral and political attitude; and *3)* a way of thinking. It should be noted that between governmentalization and critique there is, as Foucault suggests, a bundle of relationships between power, truth and the subject, given that the first movement is related to the way of 'subjugating individuals in the very reality of a social practice by mechanisms of power that appeal to a truth',[41] while the critical attitude would be the 'movement through which the subject gives itself the right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its discourses of truth'.[42] Lastly, critique, defined by Foucault as voluntary inservitude or

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 383-384.
[35] Ibid., 384.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 386.
[42] Ibid.

reflective indocility, has as its function the 'desubjectification in the game of what one could call, in a word, the politics of truth'.[43]

Based on the above presentation of Foucault's historical analysis of critique, it may be said that (just like the voice of Socrates warning the young Hippocrates of the risk he ran by entrusting his soul to a stranger, a sophist, someone who governs souls) Agamben's critical voice encompasses the critical attitude, understood as the art of 'not being governed in this way'. In consequence, he opposes the state of exception being used, on a regular basis, to govern populations politically and medical authorities being used to govern bodies as biological entities. In this sense, as a correlate of Foucauldian analyses, one may note one more form of shifting and reduction of the art of government carried out during the pandemic. In this way, by raising his critical voice against these forms of government, Agamben pointed out the way in which individuals are subjected via mechanisms of power (the state of exception and medical authorities) that invoke a truth. Regardless of which mechanism of power it was, the truth argument invoked a biological threat with catastrophic consequences. As regards the shifting and reduction in the art of government that Agamben identified, it is necessary to make a clarification with respect to the art of government by means of the medical authorities since they were the ones who noticed the biological threat that would then become a political risk. It will be important to analyse the medical authorities to identify the reason behind the alliance between politics and medicine in the specific case of the pandemic and which, in their interaction, produced the possibility of gradually dictating the state of exception in countries around the world.

POLITICS AND MEDICINE

It is worth noting that if the state of exception was used as a form of government during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was, as Agamben noted, above all for *reasons of public health and safety*.[44] Thus, in some way, the interaction between politics and medicine, between the state of exception and the disease caused by a virus, became evident. Furthermore, in its historical uniqueness, the disease offers a new justification for deciding a state of exception: 'It is almost as if, with terrorism exhausted as a cause for exceptional measures, the invention of an epidemic offered the ideal pretext for scaling them up beyond any limitation'.[45] If we agree with Agamben, perhaps it should be noted that it was not the invention of an epidemic or a pandemic but rather the production of a very specific art of government that led to politics interacting with medicine, to the state of exception of the virus and disease, with the objective of governing human beings, in the dimension of the body of the population and in the dimension of the body of the individual, both with global scope.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Giorgio Agamben, 'The invention of an epidemic," *European Journal of Psychoanalysis*. https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/coronavirus-and-philosophers/ (accessed November 10, 2023).

[45] Ibid.

If this interaction of politics with medicine during the COVID-19 pandemic that Agamben criticizes can be considered an unprecedented event, it can then be analysed in terms of what Foucault called noso-politics. However, it is worth considering the clarification that Foucault made in this regard:

> No doubt there is no society which does not practice some kind of 'noso-politics': the eighteenth century didn't invent this. But it prescribed new rules, and above all transposed the practice onto an explicit, concerted level of analysis such as had been previously unknown. At this point the age is entered not so much of social medicine as of a considered noso-politics.[46]

Thus, the complicity that Agamben denounced between the mechanisms, instruments and institutions of politics and medicine can be recorded during the age of reflective noso-politics that, while the 21st century did not invent it, it did indeed impose new rules throughout the pandemic from its outset, in addition to acquiring a new spatial reach that transcended national borders and territory. In order to indicate the relevance of the new rules of contemporary noso-politics, the main relevant characteristics of eighteenth-century noso-politics that Foucault identified in his analysis *The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century* are as follows: *1)* The organization of noso-politics does not necessarily correspond with the mechanisms of the state, given that 'Health and sickness, as characteristics of a group, a population, are problematized in the eighteenth century through the initiatives of multiple social instances, in relation to which the state itself plays various roles'.[47] In this way, according to Foucault, a collective management of health and disease emerged because health became 'a priority for all, the state of health of a population as a general objective of policy'.[48] Thus, the health and physical well-being of the population became objectives of political power, which sought 'how to raise the level of health of the social body as a whole'.[49] Furthermore, Foucault explained that, unlike state apparatuses, power apparatuses 'take charge of "bodies", not simply so as to exact blood service from them or levy dues, but to help and, if necessary, constrain them to ensure their own good health. The imperative of health: at once the duty of each and the objective of all'.[50] *2)* Society reorganizes itself to function 'as a milieu of physical well-being, health, and optimum longevity'.[51] This operation was the police's responsibility, made up of a set of mechanisms, regulations and institutions 'to ensure order, the properly channelled growth of wealth and the conditions of preservation of health "in general"'.[52] In this way, on the one hand, Foucault identified that in the 18th century, the health and physical well-being of the population became a political objective that could only be fully met through police mechanisms and, on the other, that medicine acquires a sudden importance that would

[46] Michel Foucault, "The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century" [1976], in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Edited by Paul Rabinow (1984), 274.
[47] Foucault, "The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century," 274.
[48] "Politics of Health," 275.
[49] Ibid. 277.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

redefine noso-politics in the following terms: 'The new noso-politics inscribes the specific question of the sickness of the poor within the general problem of the health of populations, and makes the shift from the narrow context of charitable aid to the more general form of a "medical police", imposing its constraints and dispensing its services'.[53]

Foucault adds that the transformation of noso-politics occurred not so much because of the fostering of the *workforce* but because of the 'economico-political effects of the accumulation of men',[54] in accordance with the following elements: *1)* the population appears 'as an object of surveillance, analysis, intervention, modification, etc.',[55] based on demographic growth, the development of the means of production and the emergence of power mechanisms aimed at controlling them; *2)* what Foucault calls a technology of population is configured, based on 'demographic estimates, the calculation of the pyramid of ages, various life expectations and levels of mortality, studies of the reciprocal relations of growth of wealth and growth of population, various measures of incitement to marriage and procreation, the development of forms of education and professional training';[56] *3)* the body, both that of individuals and that of the population, acquires new features, which Foucault identifies by pointing out that bodies are 'more or less utilizable, more or less amenable to profitable investment, those with greater or lesser prospects of survival, death, and illness, and with more or less capacity for being usefully trained';[57] and finally, 4) the biological traits of a population, as Foucault suggests, become the object of economic management, as well as of a mechanism 'which will ensure not only their subjection but the constant increase of their utility'.[58] In summary, eighteenth-century noso-politics would include a mechanism capable of increasing utility, to the extent that it subdues the body of both individuals and populations, based on their biological traits, which are monitored, analysed, mediated and modified by a political technology.

Now, Foucault affirms that there are several factors to eighteenth-century noso-politics, among which it is worth highlighting, at least for the purposes of this analysis, the factor of hygiene and the functioning of medicine as an instance of social control, since it is related to a collective population regime that seeks to achieve the following objectives: 'the disappearance of the great epidemic tempests, the reduction of the death rate and the extension of the average lifespan and life expectation for every age group as its triple objective'.[59] In this way, for Foucault, as a health regime for populations, hygiene 'entails a certain number of authoritarian medical interventions and controls'.[60] In the first place, these are interventions carried out within the urban space, given that it 'constitutes perhaps the most dangerous environment for the population',[61] there being many factors, such as the location of the neighbourhoods, sewage and drainage systems, ventilation of

[53] Ibid., 278.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 278-279.
[57] Ibid. 279.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid. 282.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.

the city, population density, that 'are decisive factors for the mortality and morbidity of the inhabitants'.[62] Moreover, given the need for hygiene, there are spaces, such as prisons or hospitals, which require authoritarian measures as medicine considers them to be sources of disease: 'Thus priority areas of medicalization in the urban environment are isolated and are destined to constitute so many points for the exercise and application of an intensified medical power'.[63] Second, there are measures carried out by doctors who, in the name of hygiene, teach rules that individuals 'must respect for the sake of their own health and that of others: hygiene of food and habitat, exhortations to seek treatment in case of illness'.[64] Throughout the eighteenth century, medicine took on a relevant role in administrative structures, with the doctor participating more and more in the administration of the population, based on health information surveys. Just as 'medico-administrative' knowledge is developed revolving around society's health, illness, living conditions, housing and habits, there also develops a 'politico-medical hold on a population hedged in by a whole series of prescriptions relating not only to disease but to general forms of existence and behaviour (food and drink, sexuality and fecundity, clothing and the layout of living space)'.[65] Foucault asserts that this interpenetration between politics and medicine provides the doctor with a presence in various areas, which notably includes participation in 'the organization of medical societies officially charged with a certain number of administrative responsibilities and qualified to adopt or recommend authoritarian measures'.[66] In the same way, the doctor becomes, on the one hand, a kind of programmer of society – to govern it – and, on the other, an adviser or expert 'if not in the art of governing, at least in that of observing, correcting, and improving the social "body" and maintaining it in a permanent state of health'.[67] Third, there is the incorporation of the hospital into medical technology. Foucault points out that the eighteenth-century reform of the hospital was related, in the first instance, to the role of the family in guaranteeing health; secondly, with the network of medical personnel and, thirdly, to the administrative control of the population. As a result of said reform, Foucault sustains that the hospital had to fulfil certain conditions: 1) when locating the hospital, whether large or small, in the centre of the city or outside, within the urban space, it must operate where its effects can be measured and controlled; 2) as regards the organization of its interior space, in order to provide therapeutic treatment, the hospital 'must function as a "curing machine"',[68] just as it must serve as an essential instrument of medical technology that 'for a certain number of serious cases, makes curing possible'.[69] In short, eighteenth-century noso-politics, which exercised a very specific form of power based on the promotion of hygiene, allowed medicine to impose authoritarian measures and procedures of control over the urban space to reduce the negative factors that directly affected the health of the

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid. 283.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid. 284.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid. 287.
[69] Ibid.

population; the doctor acquired a key role both in the administrative apparatus controlling society, as well as in the political-medical authorities teaching rules to individuals and prescribing general forms of existence and behaviour to a population; and the hospital was established and consolidated as an essential instrument of medical technology, functioning as a healing machine, through 'a concerted therapeutic strategy'.[70]

Based on this account of Foucault's analyses of eighteenth-century noso-politics, it is important to specify that its purpose was not to seek a historical cause which would make it possible to explain the noso-politics implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic but was simply an attempt to show that the alliance established between politics and medicine may be understood as a mechanism whose purpose is to control the body of populations via a whole series of technologies that ensure submission and utility via surveillance, analysis, measures and modifications carried out on this body. Similarly, it attempted to show the way in which medicine and the doctor-as-expert were relevant for politics, even for the art of government, as they suggested, proposed or imposed authoritarian measures that preserved the population's health. Medicine became important for the political strategies that took the population as an object and control of its biological traits as its main objective. Thus, in the alliance established between medicine and politics, it is not so much politics that works from the authoritarian standpoint in decision-making, even if it decides on the state of exception as a last resort (or regularly as a first option), but medicine which, in the first instance, in alignment with the aim of maintaining the health of the population, establishes exceptional authoritarian measures that, in the second instance, will urgently demand certain political strategies, and among these the state of exception stands out as an option for containing and regulating negative phenomena. Noso-politics, as a mechanism that links medicine and politics, makes it possible to clarify the way in which politics, on certain occasions, is subordinated to medicine, and how medicine, in trying to promote the health of the population, subjugates politics, demanding and implementing authoritarian measures. Politics then becomes authoritarian to the extent that medicine demands, requires, proposes or imposes authoritarian measures. Finally, it should be noted that noso-politics became an art of governing that seeks an opportune way to govern both the body politic and the biological body by taking the population as its object. In this object, noso-politics fully realizes its exercise of power. If every art of governing invokes a truth to exercise its peculiar form of government, then it is important to determine the truth that noso-politics invoked during the pandemic.

NOSO-POLITICS AND THE VIROSPHERE

The relations of power that Foucault pointed out functioned during the pandemic by invoking a 'biological truth' based on the results of scientific research into the origin, causes, development and cure of diseases; specifically, this narrative refers to knowledge of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) as the cause of COVID-19, and everything that has been discovered about this virus, meriting an impressive number of publications in the last two

[70] Ibid.

years. In terms of contemporary noso-politics, it is worth asking the following question: what truth was invoked for the various control strategies to be exercised and implemented? All the measures imposed in the name of the health of the population: the social distancing, the mask and the gel, the quarantining, the spread of temporary hospital units, vaccination, and so on, invoked the 'truth of the virus' as a lethal cause or 'the truth of the biological risk caused by the virus'.

This truth about the virus and the effects of infection, in general terms, is based on mechanistic and reductionist explanations of biology, centred around knowledge of DNA and RNA sequences, an attitude that prevailed throughout the 20th century and, in many cases, sought to formulate universal causal explanations. Mechanicism and reductionism are very useful in methodological terms but are generally inappropriate in ontological terms[71] because living phenomena are historical processes, and explanations should, in principle, be historical explanations. In consideration of the above, it is worth asking: what types of noso-political practices could derive from a truth about the virus or a truth about the virus's biological risk from a reading constructed from a different perspective? If we analyse the issue of the pandemic in retrospect, it can be seen that what has happened in recent years was a process of evolution in action, as well as a complex dynamic of biological interactions that elude universal mechanistic explanations and which can be understood by considering the above in at least three different ways: in terms of unpredictability, causal dependency and a third way that integrates unpredictability and causal dependence.[72]

Historical explanation does not stand in opposition to mechanistic procedure; it is built upon it. Thanks to this, we know that the various groups of viruses, including the family of coronaviruses, already existed when our species emerged. However, it was not until 1898[73] that humans realized that there were fragments of infectious agents, capable of reproducing themselves within a cell, and that they were actually genetic material encapsulated in proteins or wrapped in layers of lipids (as in the case of SARS-CoV-2) and that, moreover, it was the case that viruses are constituted by RNA or DNA, that they infect cells and once inside, coupled to the cell's replication and translation system, produce thousands of new copies, and that sometimes mutations occur and these remain in the virus's genomic system.

The first viruses known as coronaviruses were first reported in the 1960s. They were so named because their capsid resembled a crown.[74] From that moment on, knowledge of this type of virus accumulated gradually, but since then it has been known that they cause some types of the common cold and sometimes a more serious illness. At first, few publications came out per year, but the number grew from early 2020 onwards, reaching impressive monthly quantities and knowledge of these viruses grew exponentially.

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[71] Richard Lewontin and Richard Levins, "Chance and Necessity," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 8:1 (1997).

[72] Eric Cyr Desjardins, "Historicity in biology," 2009.

[73] Herve Lecoq, "Discovery of the first virus, the tobacco mosaic virus: 1892 or 1898?," *Comptes rendus de l'Academie des sciences. Serie III, Sciences de la vie* 324:10 (2001).

[74] David Tyrrell and Mark Bynoe, "Cultivation of viruses from a high proportion of patients with colds," *The Lancet* 287:7428 (1966).

The amplification of knowledge of SARS-Cov-2 has provided information about its sequences, its proteins, the way it infects cells, incubation periods and mutation rates, among other specific details. Coronaviruses have been of great interest for medicine, human health, and indeed for animal breeding – such as pig production, as pigs are common reservoirs of some species of coronavirus.[75]

The apparent simplicity of viruses and the research of the last two years have also provided us with a vast amount of knowledge of the complexities of the evolutionary process, about the complexity of interactions in the processes of life; and above all, a clear teaching of the fragility of any biological system, including the human body, clearly reminding us of the character and origin of our animal nature, reinforcing the evidence of our evolutionary proximity to the other animals with whom we share this world.

The last two years are just a split second in evolutionary time and minuscule traces in the continuous dynamics of the transformation of life, in this case, wrapped in the complex dynamic of a universe of viruses that evolve just as all species evolve. The concept of evolution referred to here emphasizes diversification, that is, evolution as a synonym of diversification. From this perspective, with mutations and viral variation (viruses also diversify), in addition to knowledge of these similarities and differences, phylogenetic trees may be constructed that depict viral evolution. For instance, in this case, the diversification of SARS-CoV-2 has been very clear over the last three years.[76] In this process, a sequence of variants has arisen (Alpha, Gamma, Beta, Delta, Omicron, among others), each in turn presenting differences among themselves, for example, in their mutation rates.[77] Seen in this way, it becomes possible to think about what is implied by the mutation rate and the number of individuals in a host population, and, moreover, viral diversification can be seen as a constituent element among natural regularities. Diversification is also present in other far more complex dynamics of evolution.

Mutations are changes in the sequences of genetic material, either DNA or RNA. In the case of the coronavirus, this material is a strand of RNA. The RNA strand of SARS-CoV-2 has approximately 30,000 bases. Some fragments of these 30,000 bases code for the various proteins of the virus, while others are responsible for regulation, and yet others take care of this particular virus's sequence repair system. As a result, this makes it less dangerous because unlike other viruses it has a low mutation rate. Certain regions mutate more than others: the mutations of greatest interest have been those that produce the S protein, shaped like a spike and the one that the host cell recognizes, which allows the RNA strand to enter it. Mutations in this region have been useful for trying to understand the origin of SARS-CoV-2 and infer an evolutionary phylogeny from similarities with sequences in other coronaviruses. So far, however, it has not been possible to say with any certainty if SARS-CoV-2 is a version of the coronavirus found in bats and the mutation

[75] Emmie de Wit, Friederike Feldmann, Eva Horne, Cynthia Martellaro, Elaine Haddock, Trenton Bushmaker, Kyle Rosenke, Atsushi Okumura, Rebecca Rosenke, Greg Saturday, Dana Scott and Heinz Feldmann, "Domestic Pig Unlikely Reservoir for MERS-CoV," *Emerg Infect Dis*. 23:6 (2017).

[76] Liangsheng Zhang, Fu-Ming Shen, Fei Chen and Zhenguo Lin, "Origin and Evolution of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus," *Clinical Infectious Diseases* 71:15 (2020).

[77] Yamin Sun, Wenchao Lin, Wei Dong and Jianguo Xu, "Origin and evolutionary analysis of the SARS-CoV-2 Omicron variant," *Journal of Biosafety and Biosecurity* 4:1 (2022).

that gave rise to the spike occurred in bat populations before being passed on to humans, if there is an intermediary species – for example, the pangolin – which has a similar sequence, or if an ancestral form mutated in humans. Mutation rates make it difficult to be certain about a vaccine's efficacy and, similarly, the health of individuals in a host population. Possible variants can even be designed that may be more or less lethal, as well as possible vaccines with greater or lesser efficacy, but this universe of mutations is basically, to borrow a metaphor from Lewontin and Levins,[78] a dice table on which unexpected events arise at each roll.

The various waves of health crises related to the coronavirus that have been experienced during these years[79] have been what, in evolutionary biology, are termed adaptive peaks and landscapes. Viral mutations may lead to states of better adaptation in viruses and increase their infection, lethality and mortality rates. In parallel, the immune system of the host (sometimes on its own and sometimes thanks to vaccines), responds and causes the adaptive peaks of the viruses to fall, becoming zones in evolutionary models that are called valleys, where they will stay until some other mutation or some other conditions – usually external factors –[80] associated with the living conditions of the individuals of a population return them to another adaptive peak.

If there is a continuous evolutionary dynamic of viruses, and the evolutionary processes are neither linear nor mechanical, then what kind of truth should we construct around SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19? This would be merely a relative truth limited to a specific moment and context. If the types of effects depend on a range of factors, then it will be necessary to critically consider the health measures suggested, implemented and imposed by the noso-politics that invoke this truth about the virus. As shown below, it will not be possible to minimize other elements, such as medical infrastructure, human diseases and, in particular, chronic diseases, for example, those of the respiratory system, and living conditions, among many other social components, in order to contain the spread of the virus. It is true that there are viral pandemics and the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has been one such, but it has been reconstructed via mechanistic explanations of viruses, organisms and the interactions between biological and ecological factors. Based on this reconstruction, noso-political strategies were then inferred responding to this 'constructed truth'. Would these noso-political measures have changed substantially if an evolutionary perspective had prevailed in the fields of medicine and biological sciences with historical explanations affording greater weight to evolutionary biology, unpredictability, and historical contingency – instead of the response constructed on a 'narrow' or limited approach, equated, as indicated above, with a mechanistic and reductionist vision of organic nature?

[78] Lewontin et al., "Chance and Necessity," (1997).

[79] Abhishek Dutta, "COVID-19 waves: Variant dynamics and control," *Scientific Reports* 12:1 (2022), 1-9.

[80] Senjuti Saha, Arif Mohammad Tanmoy, Afroza Akter Tanni, Sharmistha Goswami, Syed Muktadir Al Sium, Sudipta Saha, Shuborno Islam, Yogesh Hooda, Apurba Rajib Malaker, Ataul Mustufa Anik, Md Saidul Haq, Tasnim Jabin, Md Mobarok Hossain, Nazifa Tabassum, Hafizur Rahman, Md Jibon Hossain, Mohammad Shahidul Islam and Samir K. Saha, "New waves, new variants, old inequity: a continuing COVID-19 crisis," *BMJ Global Health* 6:8 (2021).

NOSO-POLITICS, SYNDEMIC, CRITIQUE

A complete series of security measures were established from March 11, 2020, based on particular scientific facts about the SARS-CoV-2 virus, supported by the WHO's repeated pandemic argument, gradually reaching world-wide levels. One might say that each state, asserting its sovereignty, took charge of its population in order to safeguard general health. Yet, one might equally assert that the sovereignty of each state was governed and conducted both by the argument and by the regulations and health measures proposed or imposed by the medical authorities. It was therefore no longer a question of analysing the way in which each state governs its population but, rather, the way that states are governed by means of the same power strategy ruling the world's population in the name of health. In brief, the worldwide threat of the SARS-CoV-2 virus evidenced the way that the world population's biological side can be used to control it by means of a noso-political strategy that uses the pandemic as its justification.

The question is then whether there is a way to critique the way of governing the population, not only through the state of exception or control of the body but based on the establishment of the argument and practices that characterized the pandemic? This critique should not be directed towards noting errors in the strategy exclusively but, confronting a future when there are predictions of the frequent emergence of perhaps even more lethal viruses, proposing a way of dealing with these worldwide problems, in addition to promoting a different attitude towards scientific knowledge that will make it possible to be prepared for viruses as well as authoritarian strategies proposed or imposed by noso-politics.

Just as there were critical voices, such as Agamben's, claiming that the COVID-19 epidemic was merely an invention, that it was the condition of possibility for the relationship between medicine and politics to become implacable – either because 'unacceptable limitations on the freedom of individuals' were instated or because it became 'the ideal pretext for unprecedented control of social life'[81] – there were also those who, in other scientific ways, denied the existence of a pandemic. If, based on Agamben's analysis, it is possible to identify the relationship between politics and medicine as forms of government (the state of exception as a paradigm of government and the government of bodies), a relationship for which the Foucauldian term is 'noso-politics', it will be useful to examine another argument showing an alternative way for human beings to relate to a virus and disease; one that is *not* by means of pandemic arguments and practices.

On 26 September 2020, *The Lancet* published an article by Richard Horton entitled *COVID-19 is not a Pandemic*, where he stated that the strategy implemented against the SARS-CoV-2 virus was based on a narrow approach. Horton pointed out that

> All our interventions have focused on cutting lines of viral transmission, thereby controlling the spread of the pathogen. The 'science' that has guided governments has been driven mostly by epidemic modellers and infectious disease specialists,

[81] Giorgio Agamben, "Il diritto e la vita," *Quodlibet*. https://www.quodlibet.it/letture/giorgio-agamben-il-diritto-e-la-vita (accessed November 10, 2023).

> who understandably frame the present health emergency in centuries-old terms of plague.[82]

For Horton, the narrow approach to 'science' loses sight of the fact that during the crisis two types of illness interacted in the population, COVID-19 and a set of non-communicable diseases, which are also related to 'social groups according to patterns of inequality deeply embedded in our societies'.[83] In the same way, disparate socioeconomic conditions '[exacerbate] the adverse effects of each separate disease'.[84] In consequence, Horton affirms that the COVID-19 disease is not a pandemic but a syndemic that requires *a more nuanced approach* 'to protect the health of our communities'.[85]

Agreeing with Merrill Singer, who was the first to conceive the notion of a syndemic, along with Emily Mendenhall and other colleagues, Horton pointed out that a syndemic approach reveals 'biological and social interactions that are important for prognosis, treatment, and health policy'.[86] In this way, the syndemic approach invites us to pay more attention to the relationship between non-communicable diseases and economic inequalities, since these may result in '[increasing] a person's susceptibility to harm and worsen their health outcomes'.[87] Horton therefore warned that in order to contain the disease successfully, what must first be addressed are non-communicable diseases, such as 'hypertension, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases, and cancer'.[88]

In addition to the above, Horton indicated one of the most important consequences if COVID-19 is not approached from the syndemic standpoint, pointing out the social aspect:

> The vulnerability of older citizens; Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities; and key workers who are commonly poorly paid with fewer welfare protections points to a truth so far barely acknowledged—namely, that no matter how effective a treatment or protective a vaccine, the pursuit of a purely biomedical solution to COVID-19 will fail.[89]

This focus on the social aspect, as well as on inequalities and inequities, allows us to see another aspect of the virus and the disease that, at least for Horton, would require governments to establish 'policies and programs to reverse profound disparities'.[90] Consequently, based on the syndemic approach, in principle, public policies and programs must address, disparities, inequalities, and social inequities to confront an emerging disease such as COVID-19. The government should therefore be required not only to devise health campaigns to control a disease but also intervene politically in other ways on the

[82] Richard Horton, "COVID-19 is not a pandemic," *The Lancet* 396:10255 (2020), 874.
[83] Horton, "COVID-19 is not a pandemic," 874.
[84] "COVID-19 is not a pandemic," 874.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

interactions between socioeconomic inequalities and the non-communicable illnesses that affect a population. Finally, Horton points out the importance of treating COVID-19 as a syndemic: 'Approaching COVID-19 as a syndemic will invite a larger vision, one encompassing education, employment, housing, food, and environment. Viewing COVID-19 only as a pandemic excludes such a broader but necessary prospectus'.[91] Taking the syndemic approach as a reference point for confronting an emerging disease such as COVID-19 will thereby entail action requiring governments to establish public policies and programs, first, to reduce socioeconomic inequalities and, second, change the paradigm for the medical intervention on diseases.

It is worth adding two further thoughts to Horton's contributions to clarify the syndemic approach. *1)* Syndemics and ecology: Chris Kenyon suggests that the syndemic approach should include an ecological dimension, given that 'anthropogenic ecosystem degradation has played a crucial role in explaining why the rate of emergence of zoonoses has been increasing over the past 40 years'.[92] Similarly, he adds that if the environmental destruction continues, then the 'emergence of new zoonoses from the estimated 700,000 other unidentified viruses with zoonotic potential' will follow.[93] *2)* The syndemic and context: Emily Mendenhall, clarifying that the syndemic cannot be global because biological and social conditions change as population and context change, affirms that syndemics 'allow us to recognise how political and social factors drive, perpetuate, or worsen the emergence and clustering of diseases'.[94] Mendenhall suggests that it is necessary to identify the political elements that determine health in each context. Based on this criterion, she analyses her context:

> …I believe COVID-19 is syndemic in my country (the USA). This is precisely because pre-existing conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, respiratory disorders, systemic racism, mistrust in science and leadership, and a fragmented healthcare system have driven the spread and interacted with the virus. These synergistic failures have caused more death and devastation [in the U.S.] than [in] many other [countries].[95]

As a result, under a syndemic approach, context matters given that the conditions that affect a population's health, as they worsen it, must be made visible. It is therefore not possible to opt for a single series of measures that can be implemented in different populations and in different contexts unless first these conditions are dealt with, disparate socio-economic conditions are regulated, and the infrastructure of the health system is improved. In short, according to Kenyon and Mendenhall, the syndemic approach proposes, firstly, including an ecological analysis because environmental degradation has negative effects on the health of human beings and, secondly, studying and analysing both the

[91] Ibid.

[92] Chris Kenyon, "Syndemic responses to COVID-19 should include an ecological dimension," *The Lancet* 396:10264 (2020), 1730.

[93] Kenyon, "Syndemic responses to COVID-19," 1730.

[94] Emily Mendenhall, "The COVID-19 syndemic is not global: context matters," *The Lancet* 396:10264 (2020), 1731.

[95] Mendenhall, "The COVID-19 syndemic is not global," 1731.

context and the biological and social conditions that contribute to improving or worsening a population's health.

Based on the above, it may be affirmed that: *1)* Horton criticizes the pandemic power strategy implemented by the WHO and imposed by the various nation states on the world population; *2)* by criticising this power strategy, Horton asserts a critical attitude by other means since he seeks *not to be governed* under a pandemic approach that, by imposing a single model of causal intervention virus-disease-treatment-vaccine, ignores all the biological and social conditions, as well as the interactions between various diseases which can aggravate contagion and the spread of the virus (SARS-CoV-2), as well as mortality from the disease (COVID-19); *3)* Unlike the pandemic approach, the syndemic approach may require state governments, before curing an emerging disease, to develop campaigns and public policies to intervene on pre-existing diseases, as well as improve the socio-economic conditions of a population and the infrastructure of the health system; *4)* the syndemic approach entails heeding ecological factors in order to avoid new viruses and zoonotic diseases – resulting from man-made environmental destruction – emerging in the near future; and *5)* if the pandemic strategy were implemented on a worldwide basis, the syndemic approach would require an analysis of the biological and social context in which a population develops to make the containment of contagion and disease more viable.

CONCLUSION

The sections above have presented a number of points for analysing the pandemic strategy, taking it to be a biased construction and an instrument for testing modern forms of social control, which make it necessary to reflect on the autonomy and freedom of the subject in relation to their rulers and instruments of control that are based on the medical-scientific knowledge of health.

Historical examples from the past and the present, Socrates-Hippocrates, Agamben-Nancy, illustrate the dilemmas that arise when making decisions regarding our body and health. This introduces a problem that can be analysed by applying what Foucault called a 'critical attitude' towards shifting and reducing the art of governing carried out during the pandemic. According to Agamben, these are practices that will subject individuals via a form of government in which politics and medicine interact, the Foucauldian term being noso-politics. Noso-politics invokes a truth about SARS-CoV-2 in addition to the biological risk with catastrophic tendencies. This truth is built on a reduced vision of nature, and is biased in its explanations of the complexities of biological interactions and the historicity of biological phenomena. A model of causal intervention virus-disease-treatment-vaccine based on this vision was imposed, and it ignored all biological and social conditions, as well as the interactions between various illnesses that can aggravate contagion and the spread of the virus (SARS-CoV-2), over and above mortality from the disease (COVID-19).

In contrast to the pandemic approach, according to Horton, before curing an emerging disease, the syndemic approach may require state governments to develop campaigns

and public policies to act on pre-existing diseases, as well as improve the socio-economic characteristics of a population and the infrastructure of the health system. The syndemic approach involves paying due attention to the ecological dimension, to the biological and social context that a population develops in, given that, taken as a whole, it can make containment of contagion and disease more viable.

The medical authorities, which have been at the centre of the art of governing during the pandemic, have served as the object of analysis for other studies that seek to explain the reasons leading to the gradual imposition of the state of exception in countries all over the world. These reasons went beyond the alliance established between politics and medicine and which undoubtedly include other agents and actors that are still to be analysed. These actors include universities and scientific research institutes and, naturally, the role of the pharmaceutical industry should not be forgotten.

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ARTICLE

Foucault Meets Novel Coronavirus: Biosociality, Excesses of Governmentality and the "Will to Live" of the *Pandemicariat*

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ABSTRACT. This essay situates Foucault`s ideas of 'biopower' and 'governmentality' within the Indian context of the Covid emergency, analysing how the excesses of 'biopolitical' and the authoritarian forms of 'governmentality' evoke a radical re-reading of Foucault within Covid-infested India. We argue how pre-existing 'discursive' conditions of biomedical, digital, and neoliberal India facilitated more majoritarian and undemocratic forms of (bio)politics during the Indian experience of the pandemic, exposing the migrant workers in particular to tremendous 'precarity' and turning them into *pandemicariat*. To meet our theoretical ends, we investigate through forging links between Foucauldian theory – consisting of a set of concepts like *biopolitics*, *anatomo-politics*, *governmentality* etc— and ideas like *transmuted biosociality*, *truncated sociality, will to live, pandemicariat* etc. Current conditions of *truncated sociality* render human bodies more 'discursively' available for 'biomedical' and 'biopolitical' interventions, disempowering people's capacity to sustain the more *synthetic* biosocial substances of conviviality. However, following Agamben's early controversial stance for braving the virus, we would like to envisage "life" to be more than "survival" alone. We would also argue that the hard times of the pandemic invoke a new grammar of the "will to live" that was practised by the *pandemicariat* against heavy odds.

Keywords: Foucault; Covid-19 pandemic; Governmentality; Biopolitical; Biosocial; Truncated sociality; *Pandemicariat*.

INTRODUCTION

We begin by pointing out two gapingly anomalous things that happened in India during the last pandemic – the announcement of the national lockdown, with just a *few* hours' notice, and the state-level elections – held in several large provinces *spanning over one whole month* – during the worst hours of the deadliest "second wave". Employing a Foucauldian perspective, these two malignant events can be viewed as glaring cases either of insensible

uses of 'biopower' or of dubious exercises of 'governmental' tools on the part of the authorities. The sudden lockdown made millions of migrant labourers stranded and hopelessly locked-out in the wide open, exposing them completely to the thrall of the contagion. During the election month, the spread of the lethal disease exploded. Interestingly, while adherence to the Covid-19 protocol could be sighted during the poll, the imposition of restrictions on the election campaign was not even nominal. We contend that it is only with the backdrop of a substantial truncation of the normal social relations that such reckless manoeuvring of (human) 'bodies' is possible. Thus, perhaps a backdrop of the desiccation of normal human relations even before the onset of the pandemic allowed the power apparatchik to go scot-free after producing, on the one hand, precarious medical conditions by allowing berserk election campaigning during a pandemic and, on the other, all-round precariousness for a large section of the people – e.g., the migrant workers, whose already existing destitution became hundredfold with the dangerous coupling of the pandemic and the lockdown. We are calling those workers the '*pandemicariat*' in order to indicate their pandemic-induced double burden of wretchedness that added enormous hardship to their already precarious situation. Thus, this article seeks to bring Foucault, as though telescopically, into our current time of the Covid-19 pandemic as seen in the Indian context. We will utilise the idea of *biosociality* to argue that the changed/truncated biosocial condition in contemporary times that had already made individuals keep a 'distance' from each other doubly enabled the 'biopolitical' control of humans during the pandemic and exacerbated the vulnerability of those we call the *pandemicariats* – the migrant workers. The paper further points out that the dark hours of the pandemic could not diminish the life spirit of the *pandemicariat,* which did its best to defy the diktats of a truncated biosociality.

BIOSOCIAL AND BIOPOLITICAL

Paul Rabinow used the concept of 'biosocial' to refer to the formation of a shared biological ground – a newly found genetic condition through which people would form communications between themselves 'in the future'.[1] Then, following Rabinow, "the new genetics will cease to be a biological metaphor for modern society and instead become a circulation network of identity terms and restriction loci, around which and through which a truly new type of autoproduction will emerge, which [Rabinow] calls "biosociality".[2]

We approach the biosocial from the optic of the socialising faculty of human beings, which is not only a futuristic matter but an existential condition of humanity as a social animal. Our argument is borne upon the two varieties of biosocial strategies of the individuals. We may call these two variants *synthetic* and *analytic*. The synthetic variant brings human bodies closer, making their sociality conscious and concrete, physical and mental, and at times creative. In the analytic format, the corporeal bodies often relate to

[1] Bridget Bradley, "From Biosociality to Biosolidarity: The Looping Effects of Finding and Forming Social Networks for Body-Focused Repetitive Behaviours," *Anthropology & Medicine* 28:4 (2021), 543-557.
[2] Paul Rabinow, *Essays on the Anthropology of Reason* (2006), 91-111.

themselves in the abstract space produced by technologies and discourses, while they may wish to distance concretely from one another. Alternatively, they bear with one another's body in the crowded cities or crammed vehicles for a variety of facilities. Taking a cue from Bryan Turner's[3] chapter on 'bodily order', particularly his ideas around the requirements of 'regulation' within city-spaces, we can maintain that our synthetic form of the biosocial is more feasible where population density is not high. This is because people then have a naturally provided choice over the extent to which they associate physically with others. Here the agency of the mind has a crucial role to play in making a decision about socialising while simultaneously remaining conditioned by the openness of the space around them. On the other hand, the analytic strategy consists of the opposite predilections of the human actors that tend to develop when the population density is high and no such choice is naturally available. People are thrust upon one another and forced to stay in dense physical conditions. Sometimes additional space can be squeezed out artificially with the powers of money and administration. But, as we just mentioned, the analytic variant is not the outcome of the rise of the population density (and political-economic power) in itself. It is also affected by the power of a variety of 'discourses', including those of 'social medicine', particularly 'urban medicine', which has, among other 'objectives', urban planning that 'consist[s] ... in analyzing the zones of congestion, disorder and danger within the urban precincts'.[4]

In the context of the city, people do not usually hope to see, in the exposure of their bodies, a chance for the fusion of their convivial minds; but they apprehend the exposed condition as a field of fission with the potential risks of: losing their sense of identity within the anonymous and congested space therein; and contracting dangerous contagions of communicative diseases. The people then, perforce, tend to dissociate themselves from one another – mentally – as well as find themselves fractioned within their respective individual bodies to be addressed by *categories* and *codes*, leading to the production of a host of statistics. This is what we are trying to understand here as the abstract, reductive and *analytic* space of biosociality.

Our biosocial has significant association with one centrally Foucauldian concept – the 'biopolitical'. But, while the biopolitical is occasioned by 'power', the biosocial is generated as a demographic, geographical and sociological phenomenon. However, the biosocial is sometimes affected by the biopolitical itself. For instance, biosocial categories like slums and ghettos are often outcomes of biopolitical events like the influx of political refugees. Moreover, the context of the biopolitical is itself borne upon the extant biosocial setting of human beings. The intensity with which the state forces were involved in the big cities to maintain "social distancing" during the pandemic is one such example.[5]

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[3] Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society* (1996), 103-125.

[4] Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984: Ethics (Volume 1),* ed. Paul Rabinow (1994), 59-66. Foucault cites examples: 'family and birth policy, or delinquency and penal policy'. We may now add here hospital and health policy.

[5] In sum, any interface between society on one side and the human body, or biology, on the other can be considered as the fertile ground to be occupied by biosocial transactions.

At the start of the pandemic, our sociality had already been technologically transformed to make our life so *techno-social* that we collectively expected to wield our biotechnological power over the virus not only with the help of medicinal means but with the assistance from a host of prosthetics, such as face masks or face shields; and sometimes "smart" mobile phones too (or any digital device that is easy to carry within our *body*). Thus, even before the advent of this pandemic, some of those prosthetics did a lot to help us to continue to communicate – at a distance and digitally or in our analytical space of biosociality – while remaining protected from one another's "dirty" physicality. During the pandemic, those prosthetic items aided greatly in making "social distancing" possible. Such a *prostheticised instance of sociality* has altered much of our everyday life now. It is within this techno-social as well as prostheticised condition that we need to look into the contemporary form of analytic biosociality where organic bodies turn into digital bodies (kind of cyborgs) so often, effectively minimising the proportion of biology and concrete sociality within them.

Any instance of existing sociality between organisms of a specific species is always-already biosocial in a *synthetic* manner – sometimes known as the herding together of animals to express the joy of tactile companionship (gregariousness) with one another. However, examining the current human social atmosphere from the *analytic* angle of biosociality would engender different results. 'Individualised'[6] as we are, we often need to carry our *biometric* information, appropriately coded, along with our body to enter into *social* spheres today. This is now one important way the transmutation of biosociality is taking place. Therefore, in these cases, the proportion of biology is not actually decreasing but turning into individualised and codified measures that get fed into ever-novel applications.

Alongside such a nominalised dimension of biosociality that can be viewed after Foucault as an instantiation of 'anatomo-political', there are other and more *totalised* aspects of biosociality too. The excessive rise of the human population, their high concentration in urban conglomerates or dense villages (as we find in some parts of Bengal) and fast and voluminous international traffic of human bodies have all led to making our sociality intensely biosocial by producing overly crowded conditions (as we mentioned before). Under these circumstances, sometimes people are now more at ease with a codified *surrogate sociality* replacing the bodily and personalised sociality as much as possible. The widespread uses of digital signatures, profile pictures or PINs and OTPs to transact contactless business are some of the common instances of disembodied surrogate sociality. However, among such instances of surrogate sociality, certain transmuted forms of veritable *bio*sociality arise where abstracted body statistics of someone are employed as codes instead of the whole and concrete body-being of him/her – e.g., impressions of thumbs, index fingers and images of corneas can pass as one's identity.

It is true that, particularly under the condition of a pandemic, we appear to be less hospitable to other bodies as they are now feared more as *hospices* where germs tend to accumulate. That is why bodies in these pandemic days are considered as more clinical

[6] Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization. Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences* (2002), 1-6.

than socialising entities and in need of being 'disciplined' and 'manipulated' 'biomedically' (i.e., '*anatomo-politically*'), while the movements of 'populations' must be 'observed' and 'controlled' '*biopolitically*'. We think that a particular statement made by Foucault in his 'The Birth of Social Medicine' may compare with what we are proposing here to be the present and abiding association between the biosocial and 'biopolitical'. Let us quote:

> Society's control over individuals was accomplished not only through consciousness ... but also in the body and with the body. For capitalist society, it was biopolitics, the biological ... the corporeal, that mattered more than anything else. The body is a biopolitical reality.[7]

Thus capitalism, as the midwife of modernity, assisted the dynamic biosocial conditions of the growth and movement of the population, particularly in the urban areas, to usher in the biopolitical regimes of today. Such regimes took the body as the prime target for the application of 'power/knowledge' *from without* for various reasons, including 'control' and 'commerce', rather than as a source of pleasure to derive *from within* the conviviality of gregariousness. Under these circumstances, can we not propose that sociality at large can be seen only in a reduced or truncated form today? From here we will ask several questions.

TRUNCATED SOCIALITY AND ITS ENCOUNTER WITH COVID-19

How far has the transmuted and analytic biosociality of our times reduced the richness of social life in the absence of immediate and meaningful social transactions between embodied human beings? How far do the asocial and clinical preventive measures against the Covid-19 pandemic correlate with the truncated sociality that our existence has already become (i.e., even before the advent of the Novel Coronavirus)? The new avatars of biosocial/techno-social transactions take place between strangers facing each other rather compulsively, sometimes mechanically or even ethereally – replacing their real and substantial face-to-face communication. Today we are endowed with the virtue of cultivated indifference that enjoins us to wear *masks* of anonymity while roaming the ubiquitous city-space. Therefore, we already became quite "faceless" before the pandemic. The pandemic has made those masks and *masked sociality* literal. Now we are even learning to adapt with masks to present our *truncated sociality* before others, where we are practising behaving and (mis)recognising other people's behaviour through our masked and *part*-faces.

However, such truncated sociality has its limits, and that is what we would like to argue in this paper. We will do so by critiquing certain forms of practices of

[7] Michel Foucault, "The Birth of Social Medicine," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984: Power (Volume 3)*, ed. James D. Faubion (1994), 134-156.

'governmentality'[8] that, at the zenith of the pandemic (as forewarned by Agamben),[9] has made strategic use of the atmosphere of truncated sociality to often become coercive and full of authoritarian excesses with precariousness preying on some people more than others.

Truncated and depleted sociality is facilitated by our worries about the very single biologically liveable life that we have today – i.e., without any *care* for our "afterlife" or life after *me*. However, this is not something we are imagining on our own capacity but gathering from the health and body related 'discourses' that are simultaneously and constantly 'individualising' us through what Foucault calls 'subjectification'.[10] Under these circumstances, our problematic and modernist technology-assisted biosocial has preempted the organically formed, commonsense idea of the biosocial, which conventionally depended on our living within a community of fellow-beings – dead and alive. Communities of expressive bindings are now being steadily replaced by committees of instrumental connectivity. The former is a celebration of gregariousness as an experience of collective 'ecstasy' or as an end in itself where, a la Durkheim, the community of the dead and living souls is the real object of adoration in the name of the 'sacred' symbolisms.[11] But the latter is based on a cool calculation that (ab)uses everyone (including oneself) as a *means to an end*, riding on the pompous horse of a modern form of rationalistic bureaucratisation.[12] In the crowded metropolitan areas, the unknown faces never get elevated to become full "persons".

Now, since the discursive settings usually generate a plethora of jargons and abstractions, and since in this late-modern age we are increasingly being 'objectified' as the categories of the 'human sciences' that Foucault spoke about in much of his oeuvre,[13] we are becoming greatly adept in familiarising ourselves with 'discourses' used by biomedicine, digital domains etc. The concretely lived and experiential biosocial is steadily getting transmogrified into certain zombie categories that heavily inform the rising forms of analytic and coded biosociality. Our ailing friend or neighbour is quickly turning into someone "diabetic" or "HIV positive". Then our mutual social life gets reoriented to follow the 'regulated' courses affected by those medical categories; and thereby we turn into cases of biomedical data rather than full persons associating with other beings – healthy or ailing. Covid-19 itself occasioned a big moment to make use of similar categories, such as "asymptomatic/symptomatic", "co-morbid" or not, "vaccinated" or yet to be "vaccinated" etc. With the help of these code-like categories, sentient people that erstwhile remained full and carefree members of human communities are pushed over the

[8] Michel Foucault, "The Birth of Biopolitics," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984: Ethics (Volume 1),* ed. Paul Rabinow (1994), 73-79.

[9] Giorgio Agamben, "The Enemy Is Not Outside, It Is within Us," The Book Haven. http://bookhaven.stanford.edu/2020/03/giorgio-agamben-on-coronavirus-the-enemy-is-not-outside-it-is-within-us/ (accessed December 31, 2022)

[10] Paul Rabinow, "Introduction," in *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1984), 11.

[11] Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1961), 258 & passim.

[12] Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation* (1947), 329-341.

[13] Rabinow, "Introduction," 8-10.

discursive fence where medical discourses abound. Every day, novel categories to examine or diagnose or treat people with fresh ideas about the healthy or 'normal' and diseased or 'pathological' are being invented.

Now, with "socialisation of nature" fast becoming *digitisation of society* aided by the algorithms and coding, we cease to be the instantiations of consciously holistic beings anymore. Also, by believing in vain exceptionalism some (or all) people are moving away from creatively associating with many others (classes, ethnicities, species etc.) that together make our earth one home for all. When everyone wants to buy a bigger car, we have traffic jams. They make their very own vehicular spaces appear uncouthly large at the expense of others, leading to traffic congestion. Likewise, the members of the human species and/or some privileged sections thereof are bifurcating themselves more and more from all categories of others and claiming more and more resources that they once collectively shared with others – other species, other races, other classes and so forth. Suppose, one morning, the desperate human species comes to know that doomsday has been announced and a limited number of salvation buses are coming to collect a select few; and the only criteria for being selected would be on the basis of "first come, first served". Most of them would simply lose the priceless "seats" not because they are not fast but simply because they are not fast *enough*! This is the great paradox of competition. It never calculates by adding up and multiplying the possibilities. It always tends to subtract and divide and finally arrives at a devastatingly diminished number as a craved solution, which is perfectly suited to some truncated social atmosphere. Now, it is the vast middle class and affluent people who happen to be the aspirant candidates of our "salvation buses" called vaccines. Often they were quite ready to pay dearly for them. For, in this era of neoliberalism, this is the only game in town to decide who "comes first to be served" (or saved).

But such a one-sided affluence-based competition is hardly a story about the *will to live*. Instead, this may be called the craving for *survival* – the survival of a "bare life" to live it as a poor loner. This cannot befit humanity, as Agamben controversially mentioned in the early days of the pandemic.[14] However, this morbid picture can be contrasted with those images of the Indian migrant labourers turned *pandemicariats*. After being left completely alone to fend for their survival, many of them started walking their epic journey back home. While doing so, they were still carrying their pet animals. We believe that they would never participate in that "game" of beating everyone else or never try to create a gulf of distance from other living beings at every step like most of the prospective middle-class passengers of our "vaccine buses" would do. We may recall here that it is within this middle class that the enigmatic expression "social distancing" became a buzzword during the pandemic.

Dilip Menon[15] has pointed out the deep irony and dissonance that inheres in the wording of 'social distancing'; with society itself being a concept that presupposes human

[14] Giorgio Agamben, 'The Enemy is Not Outside', The Book Haven. https://bookhaven.stanford.edu/2020/03/giorgio-agamben-on-coronavirus-the-enemy-is-not-outside-it-is-within-us/ (accessed December 31, 2022).

[15] Dilip Menon, "Viral Histories: thinking in a pandemic," Thesis Eleven. https://thesiseleven.com/2020/07/28/viral-histories-thinking-in-a-pandemic/ (accessed December 31, 2022).

association, "distance" or dissociation would be its direct opposite. However, that the phrase was a huge success is perhaps a testimony to the truncated sociality as well as transmuted biosociality that is flourishing today.

1. 'Objectification of the Subject', Forms of 'Governmentality' and Contemporary India

During the recent decades of neoliberal exploits, people have already been 'individualised'[16] on account of which an individual finds him/herself completely alone to make certain decisions like "registering online" or "punching ID" etc. Foucault in his own works indicated the growing importance of the relatively more individual-oriented, 'physiological'[17] 'anatomo-politics' within a larger context of 'biopower' in the contemporary times of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is acutely interested to 'extend the rationality of the market' in other 'areas that are not exclusively or primarily economic'.[18] Such 'rationality' prefers to *individualise* people bodily and fills the market with "body products". Such a tendency on its part could possibly be approached with Marxian political economic terms as well as in Foucauldian biopolitical terms; for, at the end of the day, what the neoliberals are interested in is not only their business but *power* too. Right from the time of Hobbes, power cannot ever eschew control over human bodies.[19] Such control may not always be exercised by concrete shows of force in 'a state of war of all against all', in the literal sense of the phrase, but more in anticipatory 'calculations'– as Foucault[20] said in 'Society Must Be Defended'. Likewise, when people stayed away from one another during the pandemic, it was not a case of considering all to be certainly infected and hence dangerous but one of anticipating that the dangerous individuals must be hiding very close. 'Dangerous individual' is an idea that Foucault employed in the context of the 'nineteenth century legal psychiatry'. We contend that our purpose here might not be completely unrelated to Foucault's sense too, for Foucault made his analysis of the bizarrely cruel psychiatric cases in the threatened overall context of 'public hygiene' of densely populated areas where 'insanity' could remain 'invisible until it explodes'[21] – not very unlike our "asymptomatic" Covid-19 patients. Under these circumstances, "why take the risk" would be a ruling motto.

However, to do so in the context of pure exigency of physical contagion, *subjects* should be understood more as *body* than anything else, undermining whatever Cartesian-like preference for mind is still there. Such emergent transformation is taking place in the *already transmuted biosocial condition*. This transmuted form of sociality is now less filled with the pleasures of gathering together which, previously, were not about physical matter alone, despite its close association with gregariousness. It used to quench the subjects'

[16] Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 1-6.
[17] Turner, *The Body and Society* 161.
[18] Foucault, "The Birth of Biopolitics," 79.
[19] *The Body and Society,* 107-109.
[20] Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984: Ethics (Volume 1),* ed. Paul Rabinow (1994), 59-66.
[21] Michel Foucault, "About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual' in the nineteenth Century Legal Psychiatry," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984: Power (Volume 3),* ed. James D Faubion (1994), 176-200.

convivial aspirations too, which involved coming closer (tempera)mentally and spiritually. That our sociality today is increasingly being apperceived as biologically driven has a testimony in our apprehending the approaching individuals more as *vectors* of a disease than *persons* with an illness. This is what we are describing as the biosocial transformation of today which has a correlate with truncated sociality. Besides, the pandemic seems to be as much about our infected bodies as it is surrounded by powered 'discourses' of the body from all sides. Societies of recent decades are increasingly weaving varieties of "discursive" baggage around the human *body*, raising the quantum of the analytic variant of biosociality. Here we may add a few more words about this "analytic" variant, which is distinct from the other more substantive variants and which we prefer to address in this paper as the "synthetic" one.

It is a truism now that people today are being increasingly categorised as "data" – data that are emptying humans more and more of whatever autonomous subjective substances they previously featured. "Dataism" helps to re-configure human subjectivity into abstrusely calculable and objectively derived-at artificial subjectivity. That Amazon or Google knows better than us what our very next preference should be while we are shopping online is not a "lie", and that is a great problem. It is a "truth" already garbed in the thicket of discourses of different varieties of the analytic order. Employing Foucauldian language, this development of subjectivity may perhaps be related to 'modes of subjectification',[22] whereby we can be reduced to operations that are partly held in the servers but partly in ourselves. Now, much of such "analytic order" consists of the discourses that make use of our bio(logical)-data, some of which might have implications for *sociality*. When some heterosexual couples decide to marry and reproduce, not only on the basis of their "hearts" but on that of their genetic make-ups, they are allowing analytic biosociality to affect themselves in a big way. The passionately felt flesh-and-blood biosocial contexts are thus superseded while the cool "blood samples" are being given the front seat. They are providing sociality nevertheless but in the fashion that may be called "test-tube" sociality, which is, as it were, *more* than a metaphor alone. For, artificial insemination and many other reproductive technologies are perfect arenas where this novel kind of sociality is being experimented with now where biology precedes sociality – a phenomenon that appears to oppose the conventional reproductive events. This is, in Rabinow's thinking, 'nature/culture' in the matrix of his 'biosociality'. Thus, Rabinow wrote:

> [I]n biosociality nature will be modeled on culture understood as practice. Nature will be known and remade through technique and will finally become artificial, just as culture becomes natural. Were such a project to be brought to fruition, it would stand as the basis for overcoming the nature/culture split.[23]

Getting back to our pandemic situation, we may now confront this idea with our experiences of being shoved in or out of a "social situation" like the airport/hotel on the basis of our being detected "RTPCR negative" or "positive", respectively. This is where the Cartesian primacy of mind encounters a peculiar juncture; for, it is now the body that is being

[22] Paul Rabinow and Nicholas Rose, "Biopower Today," *Biosocieties* 1 (2006), 197.
[23] Rabinow, "Artificiality and Intelligence," 99.

targeted *first*, but this story of discriminating certain bodies revolves around an intellectual function taking place in an expertise-driven *mindset*.

We can relate the above to what Foucault said about the specificity of our modern societies today, where we are more and more taking ourselves – the human 'subjects' – as 'objects' too, produced as the outcomes of a set of 'discourses'. With his 'three modes of objectification of the [human] subject' – namely, 'dividing practices', 'scientific classification' and 'subjectification'[24]– we will find that this present pandemic is an exemplary biopolitical occasion where we are trying to 'govern' ourselves by 'objectifying' our being: firstly, by confining ourselves into our homes (i.e., as a 'dividing practice') to make 'surveillance' more effective (and additionally so by making adequate use of the updated digital technology that Foucault did not have opportunity to witness); secondly (as part of the project of 'scientific classification'), by increasing the scope of intrusion of 'power/knowledge' into the very private bodies of ours; bodies being the ideal ground for testing, treating, vaccinating and, of course, observing and by concatenating the fruits of different "disciplines" like medicine, physiology, epidemiology, virology, social medicine, statistics, ICT, mathematical modelling of pandemics etc., along with the necessary help from public administration, law, penology etc.; and, finally, by 'subjectifying' (i.e., the 'subjectification' of) ourselves by 'self-disciplining' our unruly bodies into 'docile' and 'normalising' ones,[25] believing that this is *now* the only way to go about the "care of the (diseased or potentially ailing corporeal) self" during this exceptional time that has turned into a medical emergency. Thus, this assumes the form of a duty of the proper citizens, who are now expected to be knowledgeable enough to keep a safe distance from their neighbours – not only for their selfish desire to save themselves *but also for the sake of others*. So, we are now producers/consumers of the discourses that resonate with the changing nature of the biosocial – from the ideal of togetherness to the virtue of distantiation.

The Foucauldian exercises on 'subjection' and 'modes of subjectification' can sensitise us to look into the fate of the everyday life of Indians who, during the pandemic, indeed experienced a high level of alteration to their daily routines that went along with the change of stance as regards their strategies of biosocial association/dissociation. Perhaps as a result of this transmutation, the national governments and official healthcare systems were seen to deal with Covid-19 without facing substantial resistance from the multitude. One may recall here the natives' resistance to anti-plague measures in the Indian subcontinent during the colonial age.[26] It appears that at the time of the spread of Covid-19, the Indians were already too biosocially fractured to cultivate much collective grievances against the state's stern attempts of instituting "social distance". Perhaps their 'subjectified' bodies are now duplicated as active 'souls' in a fashion even more than those 'bodies of the condemned' that find themselves 'subjected' in the 'prisons' as merely passive and 'docile'. These pandemic-time bodies stayed "imprisoned" within their homes partly on their own accord. Hence, there was no question of the colonial era resistance on their part.

[24] "Introduction," 7-14.

[25] Ibid.

[26] David Arnold, "Touching the Body: Perspectives on the Indian Plague 1896-1900," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), 391-426.

It appears that these bodies remained 'supervised' and 'constrained' and are not completely unlike the imprisoned 'bodies of the condemned'. Thus, the "locked-down" bodies of the "innocents" suffer from the 'effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge'[27] –the 'power/knowledge' of the state and biomedicine working in tandem within a context of a 'political anatomy' producing conformity and at least a mild form of 'docility'.[28]

Despite the above, allegations abound that some states, including the Indian state, have made certain *excesses*, the effects of which were bound not only to 'political anatomy' but to political economy of a coercive state. Even though the pandemic hit us all similarly in our biological capacity, making our condition medically fragile across class and creed, we have never been a unified *us* socially and 'governmentally'. Precariousness at the time of the pandemic, i.e., when the virus completely shattered the states' usual-time governmental practices, arrived very harshly at the door of those who had to struggle the hardest to sustain themselves even before the pandemic. The pandemic-time precarity turned some of them (e.g., the migrant workers) into absolutely hapless "*pandemicariats*". As far as the Indian context is concerned, the longstanding culture of hierarchy and the contemporary majoritarianism (or the extant templates of biopolitics) of this country made the 'governmentalising' of people look even more skewed at the time of the pandemic.

First, using the Indian context, we will now briefly examine certain examples of 'biopower' and 'governmentalising' – namely, Covid zoning, prescriptions and proscriptions for individuals and the announcement of lockdown – that resembled many other countries. Later we will argue that the modalities of 'government' that all might have used to combat the "curse" in some way did vary between the states *but not always with similar agendas*. Such a difference might not have full but at least some association with our proposed terms of distinction between the two forms of biosociality – namely, the *synthetic* and the *analytic*.

During the "first wave" of the pandemic, the pathological social geography of Covid "zoning" in India[29] 'distributed' the whole 'population' over a 'territory' into several categories as a perfecting practice of pandemic-time 'biopolitical' strategy to 'segregate' the *population*. "Green zone" referred to the reassurance of the absence of a single case where many 'public activities' were permitted. "Orange zone" cautioned about 'a few cases' of infection where outside activities were allowed in a limited manner. "Red zone"/"hotspot" warned of a 'sizeable number of cases' where all 'public activity' was denied. When it comes to the pole of 'anatomo-political', the strategy is to target the *individual bodies* instead. Then it obtains the following prescriptions and proscriptions for individuals: "quarantining", "home isolation", "social distancing" and compelling people

[27] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (1995), 29.
[28] Ibid, 30.
[29] Kriti Mehta, "COVID-19 containment plan: what are red, orange and green zone?," Times Now News.Com. https://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/coronavirus-zones-and-their-meanings-covid-19-containment-plan-what-are-red-orange-green-zones/580094 (accessed November 8, 2022).

to practise several dos and don'ts. This 'regulatory' and 'disciplinary' regime of 'biopower' has gone hand in glove with 'governmentality'.

One may hold lockdown as a classic case of governmentalising. As far as we could see, Foucault draws a distinction between 'traditional theories of sovereignty' and 'governmentality' by drawing attention to the former's 'fundamental link' with a 'territory'; while

> the things which the government is ... concerned about are men, but men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, territory with its specific qualities ... to other kinds of things which are customs, habits, ... etc; lastly ... to ... accidents and misfortunes such as famine, *epidemics*, death, etc.[30] (Italics are ours)

But, as Foucault went on writing,

> Machiavelli's prince [or a sovereign ruler bent upon to 'keep his principality', having a 'territory'] ... is by definition *unique* in his principality and occupies a position of *externality* and transcendence ... [However, p]ractices of government are ... multifarious and concern many kinds of people – the head of a family, the superior of a convent ... the teacher ... of a ... pupil – so that there are several forms of government *among which the prince's relation to his state is only one particular mode* ... [W]e find ... a plurality of forms of government and their *immanence* to the state or society ... [T]hese activities distinguish them radically from the transcendent *singularity* of Machiavelli's prince.[31] (Italics are ours)

Now, lockdown is not only a technique but an overall "apparatus" that binds a people to a myriad set of restrictions that are much more than confinement alone. It is detailed and revolves around what is now popularly called "the new normal" – a comprehensive 'technology' to exert comprehensive control over people. Usually, it is maintained not only by the state but by many authorities under the state in the name of "Covid protocol".

Thus, in the above, control operates over people not only from without but also from *within*. The *knowing* subjects are seen to employ 'power' over themselves qua objects by "monitoring" their own movement. Foucault's idea of 'governmentality' has always been very useful to splice together governing others and governing oneself. And, what is exactly required to do – where and when, by whom and to whom and how – all depend upon the specificity of the case or situation concerned. Hence, ideally, it is not expected to look like a fiat from the external point of a "*princely*" 'sovereign' ruler but should be so detailed and followed with so many assistances that it needs an "immanent" form of a duly 'governmentalised' state.

Thereafter we may, partly following Foucault,[32] problematise the practice of governmentality by drawing a distinction between two forms: more authoritarian and more

[30] "Introduction," 15-16.

[31] Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984: Power (Volume 3)*, ed. James D. Faubion (1994), 205 - 206.

[32] Foucault, "Governmentality," 201-222.

democratic. When the head of state tends to act like a "princely sovereign", s/he resembles someone whose relationship to the state is of 'singularity' and 'externality'. But, as a template of practices, today's governmentality considers that the rulers themselves are not external to the "regime". We propose here that by carrying out a host of excesses, the ruler(s) of India today are often acting somewhat like regal autocratic centres of power whose rulings may resemble being (sort-of) *singular* and *external*. Agamben holds that a ruler's acts can be considered 'sovereign exceptions' when s/he represents a position of 'inclusive exclusion' to *decide* to 'declare a state of emergency'.[33] While discussing 'government', Foucault too points out the importance of the 'conscious *decisions'* of the 'administrators'[34] (italics are ours). But Agamben, while discussing Foucault's 'biopower' and 'exploring' the 'roots of modern power', went further to make a claim about 'a number of *decisive* points' where a 'sovereign exception' becomes 'operative',[35] (italics are ours), such as declaring someone as 'homo sacer' to be wronged/killed by anyone – *lawfully* but with no law to protect the victim.

However, pace Foucault, if governmental practices tend to grow more authoritarian as a measure to control medical exigencies, such as what has happened in the aftermath of the pandemic, they probably match with modern biopower's target to extend 'power over life' (instead of 'right of death') and to make arrangements for 'making live' and 'letting die'.[36] However, in that case, one may argue that 'power' requires to be employed evenly over the population without *prejudice*. But, instead of that, when authoritarian practices are geared to a certain prior classification of the population (such as between middle-class and underclass or majority and minority), this has got nothing to do with medical logic, and when certain decisions look not only fateful but arbitrary too, the intent of liberal governmental reason should be suspect. We are afraid that in certain countries the matter was close to such dubious proceedings, and India was, at least partially, included among them. And we assume that in India the symptoms of such illiberal authoritarianism could be seen from pre-pandemic times too. Moreover, whether the clause of 'letting die' does not ever run the risk of slipping into 'making die', as happens to 'homo sacer', we are not very certain about. Looking at the mutual differences between Foucault and Agamben from Rabinow and Rose's article,[37] we may argue that perhaps we are here treading a middle ground between these two key thinkers.

One may venture to compare pre-pandemic measures like the demonetisation of high value currencies with nation-wide lockdown during the pandemic – both of which were announced with stunningly short notice in India. Hence, it may prove to be right to talk about *benign* (or low-key) *governmentalisation* as opposed to such excessively skewed *governmentalisation,* which can become particularly sharp in the transmuted and reductive-analytic biosocial ambience that we have elaborated previously. Our contention is that

[33] Alex Murray, *Giorgio Agamben* (2010), 62-63.
[34] "Introduction," 7.
[35] Murray, *Giorgio Agamben*, 63.
[36] Paul Rabinow, "Right of Death and Power over Life," in *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1984), 258-272; Rabinow and Rose, "Biopower Today," 203.
[37] "Biopower Today," 202-203.

within an overall social spectrum where more communitarian forms of biosocial existence have already been suffering, and sociality has been severely "truncated", such malign forms of authoritarian governance could be practised more efficiently and perhaps more effectively in a country where 'modernity' and its apparatuses were produced under compromised conditions of dependency in a postcolonial state like India.[38]

Benign governmentalisation is quite possible, and it functions in what we ordinarily call welfare states of liberal political economy. This is not to say that their rule is beyond criticism. However, when Agamben in 2020 said that states might now extend their power *for good* by capitalising on their additional power – assumed at the time of pandemic[39] – he may prove to be especially right for states like India and Brazil, where liberal forms of governmentality had already been under duress even before the pandemic.

With this we will go to a long excerpt from Foucault to get back to the matter of the alteration of everyday life at the time of pandemic. Through a comparison with that text, we will observe that in the Indian situation the governmental procedures employed at the time of the pandemic were not *always* coming from the autocratic centres alone. During pandemic times, those procedures indeed resembled authoritarianism, but certain forms of authoritarianism had popular participation and support and were not necessarily prejudiced against any particular section.

> The following, according to an order published at the end of the seventeenth century, were the measures to be taken when the plague appeared in a town.
>
> First ... the *closing* of the town ... a prohibition to leave the town *on pain of death* ... the division of the town into distinct quarters ... Each street is placed under ... a syndic, who keeps it under surveillance ... On the appointed day, everyone is ordered to stay indoors: it is forbidden to leave *on pain of death*. The syndic himself comes to lock the door of each house *from the outside* ... Each family will have made its own provisions; but, for bread and wine ... allowing each person to receive his ration without communicating with the suppliers and other residents ... Only the intendants, syndics and guards will move about the streets ... the "crows" ... can be left to die: these are "people ... who carry the sick, bury the dead, clean and do many vile and abject offices"...
>
> ... The gaze is alert everywhere ... Every day ... the syndic goes into the street for which he is responsible ... Everyone locked up in his cage, everyone at his window ... showing himself when asked ...

[38] Partha Chatterjee, *The Present History of West Bengal. Essays in Political Criticism* (1997), 193-210. However, this is not Chatterjee's argument. We are only borrowing his idea of 'our modernity' to propose our hypothesis.

[39] Giorgio Agamben, "The Enemy is Not Outside," The Book Haven. https://bookhaven.stanford.edu/2020/03/giorgio-agamben-on-coronavirus-the-enemy-is-not-outside-it-is-within-us/ (accessed December 31, 2022).

> This surveillance is based on a system of permanent registration ... [—] deaths, illnesses, complaints, irregularities [are] noted down and transmitted to the intendants and magistrates ... The registration of the pathological must be constantly centralized...
>
> Five or six days after the ... quarantine, the process of purifying the houses ... is begun. ... All the inhabitants are made to leave ... perfume is poured around the room ..." (Italics are ours)[40]

The degree of verisimilitude of the contemporary condition in India with this seventeenth century imagery of Europe varied with similarities and dissimilarities, continuously trying to surpass each other. Yet, sometimes, they are so different! For, the fear of death during the present pandemic was mostly about getting infected and sometimes for losing access to food and essential medical services, while the above passage has, in several places, a phrase like '*on pain of death*', hinting at some possible violation. This is one important difference between what happens when a 'prince'-like despot issues a decree that belongs to an autocratic authoritarian form of 'government' and when the order is released by an apparently liberal and democratic, governmentalised state. But, even today, countries like North Korea, or even China and Russia, responded to the pandemic in a much harsher manner than most of the other countries did. We think that this can be better explained not in terms of the degree of the outbreak but by taking note of the extent of the existing state of centralisation of power in the autocratic hands of some 'sovereign exception'.[41] We are afraid that the recent trend of authoritarianism in India may account for several instances of undemocratic forms of governance employed during the pandemic.

But as far as the everyday fear of death by being infected by Coronavirus is concerned, it appeared that such unkind days as narrated in the above quote were sometimes knocking at our doors. Yet, people hoped to be salvaged with their "will to live" amidst the dead-bodies never meeting their close ones, amidst the suffering patients gasping for air and knowing well that they were just left to die since the oxygen cylinders were in short supply, and so on.

We still remember what happened to many parts of Bengal when some person had been reported as "RTPCR tested positive". Municipalities or similar civic bodies immediately rushed there to sanitise the whole tenement – at least the outside. Then a big placard was hung on the front door of the house, where the infected person and his/her family were locked-in, announcing that a "dangerous individual" was inside. Although, unlike the seventeenth-century story, the lock was *not* applied from outside, as everyone in the vicinity acted like self-appointed moral guards. However, in many cases such 'surveillance' was not necessary, for the family of the infected person knew the "quarantine" rules well enough to lock themselves from within. Sometimes the state, but often other agencies as well as the "good" neighbours too, did well to provide their 'rationing' with all the good intentions but rarely without taking every precaution to prevent getting infected. This peculiar mentality (and sociality) may be understood as emergency-time "govern-

[40] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195-197.
[41] *Giorgio Agamben*, 63.

mentality" with a fair degree of collective '*gaze'* watching from "dispersed centres" but at the behest of a centralised state. We like to distinguish such authority from the autocratic type that decides arbitrarily to twist the governmental practice to gather illiberal excesses.

Now, in the above quote, the watchful readers must have noted the subdued presence of the 'crows' – those who 'carry the sick, bury the dead' and carry out many 'vile and abject' tasks, and who 'could be left to die' without qualm. They, as part of the underclass, remained the worst victims of those pandemics of the old days. In India today, however, apart from the 'vile and abject' menial workers, whose dangerous 'precarity' at the time of a pandemic had been unmistakable, there arose another vast section of the population who turned *pandemicariat* overnight – as though 'left to die' – when the sudden lockdown was announced.

2. "Locked-out" *Pandemicariats:* The Infamous Case of Migrant Workers

The case of the migrant workers during the pandemic deserves a special mention, and we argue that the precarious and insecure state of existence in which they found themselves can perhaps be better understood through the notion of '*pandemicariat'*. The concept of 'precarity' or 'precariat', on which we want to develop the concept of *pandemicariat*, is tied with precarious and fragile conditions of life. After Judith Butler[42] wrote about 'the precarious life', the concept has been further developed and extended by others.[43] Butler writes: "Precarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death."[44] She calls for our ethical responsibility towards those social groups and classes, such as refugees, populations suffering from poverty, starvation etc., whose lives are perilous but not yet lost and, therefore, grievable. Guy Standing developed the concept of 'the precariat' as those social groups living precariously – and without security— because of the changing socio-economic policies pursued by states under the neoliberal hegemony as the *new dangerous class*.[45] Mursed Alam, writing on the stateless Rohingyas, extended the concept to include the Rohingya refugees as the 'nowhere-nation-precariat'.[46] Building on these conceptualisations on precarious life, we want to use the concept of '*pandemicariat'* to designate those social groups and classes who were exposed to multiple forms of vulnerability and fragility because of governmental apathy, un-care, bad decisions, social stigma, and economic loss apart from the Covid-induced general fragility of life. The locked-out migrant workers in India during the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore, can be viewed as classic examples of the *pandemicariats*.

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[42] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), 128-151.

[43] Guy Standing, *The Precariat. The New Dangerous Class* (2011), passim; Simon During, "Choosing Precarity," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Research* 38:1 (2015), 19-38; Mursed Alam, "Violence and perilous trans-borderal journeys: the Rohingyas as the nowhere-nation precariats," in *Violence in South Asia: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Pavan K. Malreddy, Anindya S. Purakayastha and Birte Heidemann (2019), 127-143.

[44] Judith Butler, *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable? (*2009), 25.

[45] Standing, *The Precariat. The New Dangerous Class,* passim.

[46] Alam, "Violence and perilous trans-borderal journeys," 127-143.

We are proposing that this neologism (*pandemicariat*) appears to embody almost all kinds of destitution and exclusion as listed above. The huge number of migrant labourers has been produced by neoliberal expansion, and their locked-out and highly "insecure", "precarious", and "fragile" condition was one direct consequence of a harsh (bio)political measure on the part of a "securitised state" that unabashedly left them "differentially exposed" to Covid-19. The irony is that since the citizens of the state were kept sealed within their home during the lockdown, this deserted section *appeared* to lack any state at all. The general apathy bordering on antipathy toward them was occasioned by their supposed status of potent "vectors" of the deadly disease; hence a "new dangerous class" in the middle-class imagination. Once again, we may recall what Foucault described about the 'dangerous individuals' and how his concept was linked with the issue of 'public hygiene'. However, their 'perilous life was not yet lost', and that is the reason why they decided to return home against the heaviest odds. Without income and proper food, with class bias operating against them in the areas they halted at, with police harassment and the apathy of the government – the migrant workers found themselves in a state of complete rejection and un-care. As there was no transportation arranged for them by the state, they found it wise to make their own ways home – some hired trucks, some journeyed with bicycles and most others, without any other option, decided to return home walking hundreds of kilometres. The images of families of migrant workers on the move with bundles of belongings overhead and holding children were aplenty. There were reports of police harassment at the inter-state borders, or of arrests, or of being hosed down with disinfectant. Such instances of bleaching the migrant workers point to how they were reduced to '*bare life*'[47] – to the persona non grata or to mere threatening bodies that must be gotten rid of. Many perished, tired and exhausted on their journey. On 8 May 2020, fourteen migrant workers, who were completely worn out and sleeping on a railway track on their way to Aurangabad to catch a special train, were crushed by a train.[48]

Although there are no government data on the exact number of job losses, according to Mahesh Vyas of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), 21 million salaried jobs had been lost by September 2020, and as per ILO, there was a 22.6% fall of wages in the informal sector.[49] The loss of jobs and the fall of wages are perhaps common to pandemic stories across the world; what is uniquely Indian is the general indifference towards the plight of the migrant workers – haggard, hungry and desperate to reach home.

[47] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), passim.

[48] Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha and Mursed Alam, "Scattered Chapatis, Mangled Bodies: Semiology for a Nation," *NewsClick*. https://www.newsclick.in/scattered-chapatis-mangled-bodies-semiology-nation (accessed December 31, 2022).

[49] Sujata Gothoskar, "NITI Ayog's proposal to cut food subsidies will Worsen India's Rising Hunger Problem," *The Wire*. https://thewire.in/government/niti-aayogs-proposal-to-cut-food-subsidies-will-worsen-indias-rising-hunger-problem (accessed December 31, 2022.)

CONCLUSION

We would like to refer to the two paradoxes with which we began our essay: election campaigns that ran wild in India at the worst hours of the pandemic and the issue of the locked-out migrant workers who seemed *not* to belong to the so-called mainstream of the pandemic-time population – particularly the middle class – safely ensconced within their home. Pandemic, it appears, rolled out a fresh form of majoritarianism based on class and occupation in a country that had been already suffering from triumphant Hindutva-based majoritarian politics for a decade; so much so that sometimes we wondered whether we should talk less about the behaviour of the political class and more about the passive support that it occasionally received from a sizeable section of the middle class. For example, the middle class more or less toed the line by locking themselves in when the political class demanded it and by voting en masse when their leaders so desired! Interestingly, at the time of the elections, when lockdown was almost completely sidelined, even standard Covid protocols, such as wearing masks, were flouted by the leaders too. Their lead was followed enthusiastically by a great many – cutting across classes – turning 'governmentality' into travesty.

As for the *pandemicariats*, we were often bewildered by their life-affirmative responses even during the darkest hours of Covid-19, i.e., with the images of fellow-feeling, sacrifice and love and care among them; and those spirited actions appeared to be in no need of leaders at all. We saw images of migrant workers walking back home with bundles of belongings overhead and pets, such as dogs and cats, across the lap. Also, there were images of a migrant worker getting down from a lorry with his ailing friend and taking care of him, braving the threat of Covid-19, and of a young girl trying to blow air from her own mouth, in the absence of oxygen cylinders in a hospital, into her infected mother's mouth. These all point towards the defiance of life and its unvanquished will. Maybe such images are only snapshots and some contrary evidence could perhaps be piled up too. But these life-affirming images were circulated widely, attesting to their value as a "truth" that mere statistics cannot always capture. Nonetheless, what is particularly noteworthy is the silent energy they mustered to reach their home while braving dangers from all sides.

Contrary to common sense, this "will to live" of the *pandemicariats* proved to be a hard thing to crush. And one source for that will to live has to be sought in their daily practices of social life that still belong closely to the socialising realm of the *body* that do not choose to see the other bodies as the probable vessels of contagion or a "necessary evil" that must be endured while living in a crowded slum. The living condition of the underclass might be deplorable and require correction badly, but its upside is that they still maintain their gregarious and more communitarian social life. Deprived of all forms of capital, they make their body a resource from which to draw the pleasures of conviviality in their concrete corporeal co-existence.

And, if we now look at the massive Black Lives Matter movement that took place in the USA – a country that witnessed Covid-19 devastatingly – in the very middle of the pandemic, we can reckon with the mighty power of life's defiance. Those gigantic

spiralling processions through the streets and open fields, however, bring us before another interesting paradox. We confront two huge masses of bodies walking under the bare skies of two vast countries – separated by thousands of miles – for the sake of certain other bodies: one (the migrant labourers of India) as the (apparently) passive and *passing* victims of a shameless attempt to save the value of the *truly* 'bare lives' of the frightened locked-in bodies, especially of the middle class; and another (people in the USA standing for Black Lives Matter) as the most vibrant expression of fighting for the value of the friendly, honourable bodies of a wronged section of the population without caring too much for the 'bare life' of *anyone*.

This is how one may search for the *will to live* that sometimes, even somewhat irresponsibly, defied the lockdown rules but at other times thundered on the opportunist political class and their confused middle-class followers. While writing, Foucault scarcely did any advocacy. But, in 'The Subject and Power', Foucault[50] said that under the current forms of subjugation and 'subjectification', it is not enough to resist the state's direct domination. We are sometimes required to de-link from the state and its related institutions, indeed, but we also need to '*refuse'* to become 'individualised' by other 'modes of subjectification' too, and particularly modes that are alluringly construed through expertise. Their path is *analytical,* whereby we tend to lose our *substance*.

Hence, this can be the politics of today against the mighty and incisive 'biopower'. Potentially, such a politics might sometimes look strangely close to resignation, bordering on "passive resistance", as happened with the walking migrant workers. In the aching bodies of those migrant labourers, one could perhaps see, in a flash, such a statement of embodied 'refusal' fuelled on a *will* they had probably found from the spree of their biosocial existence that still believed in "we-feeling" and the union of their bodies instead of division and abstraction.

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ARTICLE

Critical Friendship After the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT. Are critique and the "art of governing" antithetical? The aim of this article is to examine this tension that was laid bare by the Covid-19 pandemic by introducing "critical friendship" as a conceptual framework for a constructive interdisciplinary engagement with science in a post-pandemic era. It does so by drawing on several works and insights: (i) Michel Foucault's notion of "critical attitude" as well as his assessment of philosophy as providing a "diagnosis of the present;" (ii) Bruno Latour and colleagues' idea of a "critical zone" or what I call a horizontal epistemology of critique; (iii) Aristotle's notion of friendship as being necessary for the "common good;" and finally (iv) Jacques Derrida's interpretation of the messianic character of friendship in the constitution of progressive democracies. Whereas critical theory has been described as either "explanatory-diagnostic" or "emancipatory-utopian," a *critical friendship* approach aims to be both diagnostic *and* emancipatory in an age of uncertainty and democratic backsliding.

Keywords: critical theory, interdisciplinarity, epistemology, critique, Covid-19, critical friendship.

INTRODUCTION[1]

> "On the one hand, friendship seems to be essentially foreign or unamenable to the *res publica* and thus could not found a politics. But, on the other hand, as one knows, from Plato to Montaigne, from Aristotle to Kant, from Cicero to Hegel, the great philosophical and canonical discourses on friendship (but my question goes precisely to the philosophical canon in this domain) will have linked friendship explicitly to virtue and to justice, to moral reason and to political reason."[2]

[1] I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their helpful and perceptive comments in the spirit of "critical friendship," as well as Annika Skoglund and David Armstrong for the invitation to contribute to this special issue and, last but not least, a "critical friend," Melissa Franklin, for the many thought-provoking conversations. I would also like to pay tribute to all these interlocuters who have sadly left us during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, some of whom are mentioned in this article: Jean-Luc Nancy (1940-2021), Paul Veyne (1930-2022), Bruno Latour (1947-2022), and Ian Hacking (1936-2023).
[2] Jacques Derrida, "The Politics of Friendship," *Journal of Philosophy* 85:11 (1988), 641-642.

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed an impasse between critique and governance. We witnessed what we could call a 'Pontius Pilate moment' when some social scientists washed their hands of the ways in which the pandemic was being managed by state authorities while warning about the dangers and deploring the pitfalls of such lack of foresight from the heights of their pedestal. Yet, in the face of such tragedy, simply criticizing without partaking in decision-making felt disingenuous. At the same time, some of the concepts that were deployed to understand the excesses of the state and its perversion of power, like the 'state of exception,' the 'surveillance state,' 'sovereign power' or even 'biopower,' fell on deaf ears. How could these concepts help translate critique into policies? After all, what is the point of talking about the participatory nature of civic democracy, if what Michel Foucault calls "critical reason" and the "art of governing" are from the outset antithetical?[3] As the pandemic unfolded, it became clear that we were in dire need for new critical theories and approaches to rethink this "life in ruins" to quote Isabelle Stengers.[4]

This article hence proposes to tether trust in science to the politics of life - both of which were laid bare by the pandemic - through the concept of "critical friendship." By "critical friendship," I do not mean a "pedagogical strategy" as it has been described in the literature on education.[5] Instead, I mean an epistemological approach as well as a motivating principle or ethos of engaging with science and scientists. More specifically, critical friendship is a way of performing a critique of science that is a priori neither suspicious of science nor conflictual and yet is part and parcel of the democratic nature and necessity of such an exercise for the sake of the *res publica*. In this article, I attempt to link this premise to what Jacques Derrida saw as a set of constitutive principles of the polis in the great philosophical and canonical works on friendship: "to virtue and to justice, to moral reason and to political reason" (cited in the epigraph).

To do so, I will try to weave four ideas and vital works that are seldom in conversation and which I think raise some interesting insights about the ways in which trust in science could be salvaged and the politics of life reined in. First, Foucault's notion of "critical attitude" and his assessment of philosophy as being "diagnostic" in nature. Second, a more spatial, physical, or material definition of critical engagement with the sciences, as a *horizontal epistemological space of critical proximity* to the object of investigation. Third, Aristotle's notion of friendship as being necessary for the 'common good' and for the polis and hence deeply political in nature. And, finally, Derrida's interpretation of the messianic character of friendship in the making or constitution of democracies.

The political theorist Seyla BenHabib has characterized critical theory as having two tasks, namely "explanatory-diagnostic" or "emancipatory-utopian."[6] Critical friendship, as I hope to demonstrate, can be both diagnostic *and* emancipatory.

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[3] Michel Foucault, *Qu'est-ce que la critique? ; suivie de, La culture de soi* (2015), 35-36.

[4] Isabelle Stengers, *Making Sense in Common: A Reading of Whitehead in Times of Collapse* [2020] (2023), 175.

[5] Joan Smith et al., "Critical Friendship as a Pedagogical Strategy," in *International Perspectives on Designing Professional Practice Doctorates: Applying the Critical Friends Approach to the EdD and Beyond*, ed. Valerie A. Storey (2016), 233–48; Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick, "Through the Lens of a Critical Friend," *Educational Leadership* 51:2 (1993), 49-51.

[6] Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (1986), 142.

THE CRITICAL NEURO-TURN

In our exploration of the new brain sciences, Nikolas Rose and I proposed a "critical friendship" approach or "ethic" as a way to describe a constructive critical engagement with the sciences at a time of intense polarization within the social sciences vis-à-vis the rising influence of the new brain sciences and more specifically the neurosciences (what has been described as the "neuro-turn").[7] Critical friendship was a way to resolve the tension between a new 'war' that was emerging between two groups of social scientists; one group - call them *The Neuro-Enthusiasts* - embraced the promises of these new neurosciences and the hype that these sciences had generated in the popular and scientific imagination, and the other group - call them *The Neuro-Cynics* - considered such promises to be at best exaggerated and at worst deceitful. It is as if calls and efforts in the 1990s for creating a "fruitful dialogue"[8] between scientists and their critics had failed and new frictions and dissensions were being drawn from the critics themselves.

Our 'critical friendship' approach was the consequence of our respective interactions with various scientists and their ways of thinking and practicing science as well as our own ambivalence with science; having both originally studied and been formed in biology and medicine respectively before moving to sociology, philosophy, and history of science and medicine. In a sense, the approach reflects our own dilemmas with science as an object of study and as praxis; we were, and remain, both attracted to science and wary of its discourse, both interested in its claims and skeptical of its grandiose assertions, both critical of its reductionism and engaged with its method, and both hopeful of the possible productive and emancipatory tools of science and worried of its more perverted uses.

At the same time, it had become necessary to make sense of these inherent tensions. Hence, we provocatively asked in *Neuro*: what if the neurobiology and sociality of the brain were mutually constitutive? After all, the mind is neither entirely socially constructed nor entirely reducible to formulaic concepts. If, out of necessity, the brain and the mind are profoundly and all too humanely dialectical, then critical friendship was our way to express our deep belief in the "possibilities of critical and affirmative dialogue" beyond simplistic stereotypes.[9]

Hence 'critical friendship' was a way to resolve the tension of this new polarization. But I would like to argue in this article that critical friendship is not merely a reaction or an attempt to produce a productive dialogue. Critical friendship is an epistemological starting point; a way of *performing* a critique of contemporary scientific practices and discourses. However, since Rose and I did not flesh out in details what we meant by 'critical friendship'- besides what is generically understood as collaboration, amicability, or

[7] Nikolas S. Rose and Joelle M. Abi-Rached, *Neuro: The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind* (2013), 142. Our approach goes beyond a "critical neuroscience" approach - a stance of informed critique pertaining to neuroscientific methods, research practices, and concepts - since it also includes the 'psy' sciences (psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis). For critical neuroscience, see Suparna Choudhury and Jan Slaby, eds., *Critical Neuroscience: A Handbook of the Social and Cultural Contexts of Neuroscience* (2012).

[8] Keith Ashman and Phillip Barringer, ed., *After the Science Wars: Science and the Study of Science* (2001).

[9] Rose and Abi-Rached, *Neuro*, 236.

goodwill - this article proposes to explicate the concept further and elaborate a broader framework for a constructive ethos - indeed 'ethic' - to approach, investigate, and examine science in an increasingly complex and challenging world.

THE COVID-19 CRISIS

As the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded in early 2020, I reviewed the first few books that were written by some of the prominent thinkers of our time.[10] Some were written in English, others in French. All were written in a hurry and with a sense of urgency. The list is by no means exhaustive, nor were these books definitive in their postmortem assessment of the first few months of the pandemic. But some interesting insights could be gleaned from them about the persistent suspicion of state intervention in times of crisis, about the lack of trust in science and expertise, about the retreat of democracy, about socioeconomic inequities within and across countries, and about the lack of transparency in decision-making. At the same time, one could also make interesting observations of key departures with previous pandemics; the pervasive use of 'big data,' AI and other bio-tracking technologies, new forms of local solidarity (and conversely the erosion of global solidarity), the shifting nature of capitalism ('digital capitalism' gaining more terrain), and a popular push for open and collaborative decision-making in the face of adversity (within and across the artificial divide between the so-called 'Global North' and 'Global South').

But, as I also wrote in this early reflective essay, many concepts and preconceived ideas seem to have been deeply challenged by this new global health crisis. For the late Jean-Luc Nancy (whose last short meditative book on the Covid pandemic appeared before he passed away in 2022), the Covid-19 pandemic had demonstrated how scientific expertise is itself precarious and how a biopolitics based on scientific expertise can be imperfect, sometimes even dangerous to health. This made the concept of biopolitics more "dubious" given that the assumption was one of rationalities of government based on unambiguous expertise, techniques, and technologies.[11] If anything, the Covid-19 pandemic revealed how life and the politics of life were equally ambivalent, complex, and elusive.

Foucault's oft used (and abused) concept of biopolitics is not the only concept to have been criticized in this pandemic. So, too, has the concept of the "state of exception." Introduced originally by Carl Schmitt, the German conservative jurist and Nazi supporter, the concept of the state of exception was used by Georgio Agamben in the context of this public health crisis to refer to the imposition of restrictions on movement and the suspension of daily activities in Italy, the first European country to have been severely hit by the novel coronavirus.[12] But can Italy today, a democratic country, and a European Union member state, be compared to Nazi Germany? Besides, as Fréderic Worms rightly argued, public health emergencies are not necessarily dystopian states of exception and can be

[10] Joelle M. Abi-Rached, "The Covid-19 Caesura and the Post-Pandemic Future," *BioSocieties* 16:1 (2021), 142–56.

[11] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Un trop humain virus* (2020), 18-19 and 81-83.

[12] Abi-Rached, "The Covid-19 Caesura and the Post-Pandemic Future," 143. Also see, Giorgio Agamben, *Where Are We Now?: The Epidemic as Politics* (2021).

justified in democracies as a long as they are temporary as well as convincingly and openly deliberated.[13]

In his acerbic social critique, the prolific Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han likewise (and long before the Covid crisis struck) reached the conclusion that some theories or concepts, notably biopolitics or the idea of "the sovereign power" (both of which were deployed ad nauseam in the context of this pandemic) had become anachronistic for a post-neoliberal age marked by atomization, fragmentation, and a shift away from the "disciplinary society" to one in which the "achievement self" of late capitalism regulates itself in the absence of a centralized surveillance apparatus.[14] Yet, as much as Byung-Chul Han's critique is compelling, it remains unsatisfying. Why should one reject a priori or even a posteriori calls for more open data and more transparency for fear of the eventual exploitation of our personal data and our submission to the imperative of transparency of advanced neoliberal democracies? What if, as the Covid-19 crisis has plainly demonstrated, transparency was vital for decision-making in times of crisis and uncertainty?[15] The difference between a democracy and an authoritarian regime is precisely accountability. In the case of this global sanitary crisis, it was up to democratic governments to demonstrate that virus containment could be managed through democratic and transparent means, and precisely not through a perpetual "state of exception."[16] It was also up to democratic governments to demonstrate that medical and scientific expertise were reliable and not manipulated by big pharmaceutical interests.

Has critique run "out of steam" then, as the late Bruno Latour asked almost two decades ago?[17] What is more, there have been many calls for interdisciplinary engagements before and after Covid-19. But something went amiss in these calls. For one thing, the fact that the French scientific committee was only convened by President Emmanuel Macron just before the first lockdown was declared in March 2020[18] (when it was already too late) or that the United Kingdom's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) committee, when it issued its first guidance in January 2020,[19] had no anthropologists, historians or sociologists, shows how 'advanced democracies' never took interdisciplinarity seriously. It was relegated to the confines of academia, away from politics and policymaking.

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[13] Frédéric Worms, "La grippe aviaire entre soin et politique. Une catastrophe annoncée ?," *Esprit* 3–4 (2008), 28.

[14] See, Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power* [2014] (2017); Byung-Chul Han, *Topology of Violence* [2011] (2018).

[15] See for instance, Ole F. Norheim et al., "Difficult Trade-Offs in Response to COVID-19: The Case for Open and Inclusive Decision Making," *Nature Medicine* 27 (2021), 10–13.

[16] See Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic!: COVID-19 Shakes the World* (2020), 76.

[17] Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30:2 (2004), 225–48.

[18] "Qui compose le conseil scientifique Covid-19, créé pour aider le gouvernement face à la crise ?," *Le Monde*, March 26, 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/sciences/article/2020/03/26/qui-compose-le-conseil-scientifique-covid-19-cree-pour-aider-le-gouvernement-face-a-la-crise_6034505_1650684.html (accessed May 30, 2023).

[19] "Precautionary SAGE 1 Minutes: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response, 22 January 2020," GOV.UK, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/precautionary-sage-minutes-coronavirus-covid-19-response-22-january-2020 (accessed May 30, 2023).

This begs the question, are critique and policymaking necessarily antipodal and mutually exclusive? In a newly edited version of his *Discourse on Philosophy* (*Le discours philosophique*) written in 1966 and published in May 2023, Foucault, for one, seems to believe that they are. He argues that philosophy has nothing to offer besides "diagnosing the present."[20] Furthermore, as a "physician of culture" (*médecin de la culture*), the philosopher has the peculiar task of diagnosing without proposing a remedy.[21] We might ask then, what is the point of diagnosis? It consists, Foucault tells us, in providing an "awareness" (*prise de conscience*) of the underlying - hidden and unaccounted for - conditions of possibility of knowledge: "their soil of possibility, the forms which determine them, the limits and horizons which they cannot go beyond, the actions [or practices] that constitute them."[22]

While I do acknowledge the inherent tension between "critiquing/diagnosing" and "governmentality" (as rationales or rationalities underlying the practice of governing a society),[23] between say the 'philosopher' and the 'statesman' (or the 'policymaker'), I believe that it is still possible to reconcile them precisely if the task of diagnosing is to provide a '*prise de conscience.*' And, while at it, why not also provide a '*prise de position*'? Not for the sake of diagnosing the present but out of civic duty; the diagnostician being after all part of 'the commons.' Here, I find it useful to borrow Stengers's line of reasoning on what it means to think in the wake of collapse, in the wake of "living in the ruins," as she put it. For Stengers, it means providing a "middle voice."[24] I suggest it is more than just that - it consists in providing a *critical* middle voice. What form does this *critical middle voice* take is what I address later in this article.

What transpired from the early diagnosticians of the Covid-19 crisis is that a new militant form of democracy was needed, one in which we could no longer afford to be mere consumers and spectators of democracy. Perhaps, this is the conclusion of this article: we need a return to the true meaning of politics in the Greek sense of the word. Citizenship demands active participation in the political process (and not only accountability), and this in turn requires openness and transparency not for the sake of more surveillance or (self)-exploitation (as Byung-Chul Han rightly deplores)[25] but for the sake of better policy and decision-making. I suggest in the following reflections why and how critical friendship can be a mode of thinking in times of collapse to bridge critique and common-sensical governance, which is necessary for any democratic renewal.

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[20] Michel Foucault, *Le discours philosophique*, ed. François Ewald, Orazio Irrera and Daniele Lorenzini (2023), 267. The phrase is by Irrera and Lorenzini; Foucault uses "diagnosis" and "actuality," not "diagnosis of the present" per se.

[21] Ibid., 16.

[22] Ibid., 67 (my translation).

[23] Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, Territoire, Population: Cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (2004).

[24] Stengers, *Making Sense in Common*, 175.

[25] Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* [2010] (2015), 35.

WHAT IS CRITIQUE?

In his 1978 lecture delivered at the French Philosophical Society, Foucault sketched the genealogy of what could be called "critical reason" or, as he put it, "critical attitude" (*une attitude critique*).[26] While he acknowledged that critical reason might have an older history, he pointed to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a period that witnessed an explosion of interest in "the art of governing" (*l'art de gouverner*) in all aspects of society; education, politics, economics and so on.[27] Along with this new interest came a new kind of worry and a new form of resistance and counter-intellectual movement. An earlier movement, which resisted a certain reading of the holy scriptures and of the hegemony of religious reasoning, was to be found, for example, in mysticism. This new way of questioning authority and the doxa more generally came through a second turn or set of attitudes that resisted the ways in which populations had been governed.

Critique in this Foucauldian rendering is hence an attitude or mindset which resists a certain politics of life; a certain way of governing populations. In other words, critique is *what resists power or a regime of truth*. It is also an attitude that resists a certain "politics of truth" (*politique de la verité*).[28] Critical reason hence purports to interrogate the relations between power, truth, and the subject, or the ways in which power is exercised, how it draws on regimes of truth, and how it influences or shapes subjectivity and even the process of subject-making or subjectivation. As Foucault wrote, critical reason interrogates truth on its effects on power and, vice versa, it interrogates power on its discourse on truth.[29]

Foucault seems to insinuate, then, that critique is by definition incompatible with the 'art of governing' or what we could call today, at least in one of its iterations (and for simplicity's sake), policymaking. But are these two tasks incommensurable? Or is there a way to reconcile them? Before addressing this thorny point, one can contest the anachronistic interpretation of critique that Foucault proposes. The German historian Reinhart Koselleck shows how the Greek term "critique" (*κριτικός*) was intimately related to the term "crisis" (*κρίσις*).[30] Both derive from *κρίνω*, "to differentiate, select, judge"; all of which fall today under "criticism."[31] Moreover, the term "crisis" was originally a medical term before gaining this polysemic meaning that came to encompass all aspects of society, from politics to phenomenology.[32] Crisis meant a "turning point of a disease or a critical phase in which life or death was at stake and called for an irrevocable decision."[33] Crisis then referred to a moment of insight and clarity when the symptoms come together and

[26] Foucault, *Qu'est-ce que la critique ?* (2015), 35.
[27] Ibid., 36.
[28] Ibid., 39.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* [1959] (2000), esp. the long footnote 15 on pp. 103-104.
[31] Ibid., 103.
[32] Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 104; Reinhart Koselleck, "Crisis" [1972-97], *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67:2 (2006), 357–400.
[33] Janet Roitman, *Anti-crisis* (2014), 15.

diagnosis becomes possible.[34] This latter definition of 'crisis' as a critical juncture when judgement becomes *possible* seems to be antipodal to Foucault, for whom critique seems to entail, according to Judith Butler, a "suspension of judgement" (though Foucault does not put it this way).[35] Moreover, as per Koselleck, the problematization of the state (what Foucault argues was the defining feature of critique) became prominent only in the eighteenth century, not as a means to critique the state's politics of life (as Foucault alleges) but in the sense of either allowing a decisive judgement to be made or to point to "fundamental changes in constitutions in which the alternatives were the survival or demise of a political entity and its constitutional order."[36] So much for the genealogy of critique.

Foucault's own attitude has been less openly critical in the very meaning he himself gives to critique. He seemed sometimes biased towards a critique of power at the expense of truth. In an interview with *Le Monde* in 1961, for instance, Foucault divulged candidly, if revealingly, his motivation behind his critique of psychiatric practice: "*La bonne conscience des psychiatres m'a déçu*," he told the journalist.[37] His critique of psychiatric power can hence be seen as an inflexible strategic *parti pris* against psychiatrists rather than a genuinely disinterested investigation into regimes of power and truth-making. His romantic bias for madness, well-illustrated in his *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* [1961], was deconstructed by Derrida in a now famous paper and ensuing long-lasting dialogue of the deaf between these two intellectual rivals.[38] What Derrida contested was precisely Foucault's "opportunistic" interpretation of the Cartesian Cogito as necessarily exclusive of forms of madness or unreasonableness, as "confining" and exiling madness.[39] Derrida decried this instrumentalist interpretation to fit a certain "project of history."[40] Derrida also questioned the exclusion of psychiatrists and their "confinement" in Foucault's "archaeology of silence." "Does it suffice to stack the tools of psychiatry neatly, inside a tightly shut workshop, in order to return to innocence and to end all complicity with the rational or political order which keeps madness captive?" asked Derrida.[41] He further added, "The psychiatrist is but the delegate of this order, *one delegate among others* [my emphasis]. Perhaps it does not suffice to imprison or to exile the delegate, or to stifle him; and perhaps it does not suffice to deny oneself the conceptual material of psychiatry in order to exculpate one's own language."[42]

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[34] Edgar Morin, *Sur la crise* (2020), 9-10.

[35] Judith Butler, "What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," Transversal Texts, https://transversal.at/transversal/0806/butler/en (accessed May 29, 2023).

[36] Koselleck, "Crisis," 369.

[37] Jean-Paul Weber, "'La folie n'existe que dans une société', nous déclare Michel Foucault, qui s'est fait son historien," *Le Monde*, July 22, 1961 https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1961/07/22/la-folie-n-existe-que-dans-une-societe-nous-declare-michel-foucault-qui-s-est-fait-son-historien_2266412_1819218.html (accessed May 30, 2023).

[38] Jacques Derrida, "Cogito et histoire de la folie," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 68:4 (1963), 460–94.

[39] Derrida, "Cogito et histoire de la folie," 478.

[40] Judith Revel, "Foucault, Derrida: The Effects of Critique," in *Foucault/Derrida Fifty Years Later: The Futures of Genealogy, Deconstruction, and Politics*, ed. Olivia Custer, Penelope Deutscher, and Samir Haddad (2016), 128.

[41] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* [1967] (1978), 35.

[42] Ibid.

This is where I see critical friendship departing from Foucault and neo-Foucauldians. The main epistemological premise I propose is neither a suspicion towards the motivations and intentions of psychiatrists (and scientists by extension) nor their exclusion or banishment, as if they were a priori perverted, untrustworthy, naïve (captured by the derisive way in which Max Horkheimer speaks of scientists as "savants")[43] and driven by an *idée fixe*, namely the need to reach an objective and purified ideal-type of truth, decontextualized and ahistorical. Not only are psychiatrists and scientists more broadly speaking "delegates among others" worth listening to, but they are also necessary partners and "political friends" in the democratic project. I will come back later to this definition of "political friendship," as Aristotle calls it.[44]

For Didier Fassin (who along with Bernard Harcourt edited a book entitled *A Time for Critique* just before the Covid-19 pandemic began), the question is not *what* is critique (though as I show in this article the question itself is not unproblematic) but *how* is critique.[45] Fassin's argument is that the way in which critique deploys its arsenal is situated in particular contexts and that the context in turn determines the condition of possibility of critique. Stated differently, critique is dialectical, that is, always in *reaction to* a specific configuration of knowledge and power. I agree on this broad depiction of the nature and form of critique. As I wrote earlier, Rose and I felt the need to describe a "critical friendship" approach *in reaction to* what we believed was a counter-productive polarization of the debate around the neurosciences. However, beyond the contingent nature of critique, it also carries a more general assumption about history and time itself. Not only is critique the product of history but it is also itself a reflection *of a certain philosophy of history* or, as Judith Revel puts it, a certain "project of history."[46]

What both Koselleck (who proposed a conservative critique of the Enlightenment) and Foucault (who proposed a postmodern critique of the Enlightenment) fail to consider, however, is another form of critique which is neither reactionary (for the former) nor mere resistance (for the latter). What if the task of critique was nothing more than a way of exposing a problem, an object of study and concern, and rendering it visible, discernable, judgeable? Not "bring into relief the very framework of evaluation itself," as Butler puts it,[47] but *bring into relief the very framework tout court*. What if the critic operates the way a forensic anthropologist studies the corpse of a victim or a crime scene, or the way an archeologist gathers the evidence and tries to reconstruct a certain narrative about a site, indeed a period? Sometimes, the early Foucault, like in his *Discourse on Philosophy*, seems to verge towards a less radical definition of critique; the philosopher's mission being, as mentioned earlier, to provide a critical diagnostic grid, so to speak. This is why Foucault characterizes philosophy as "the discourse of discourses" (*le discours des discours*).[48] It is

[43] Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* [1972] (2002), 134.
[44] Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* [c. 322 BCE], ed. and trans. Brad Inwood and Raphael Woolf (2013), 1241a30.
[45] Didier Fassin, "How Is Critique," in *A Time for Critique*, ed. Didier Fassin and Bernard Harcourt (2019), 13–35.
[46] Revel, "Foucault, Derrida: The Effects of Critique."
[47] Butler, "What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue."
[48] Foucault, *Le discours philosophique*, 254.

itself a historically situated discourse and a discourse on other discourses. This less power-centered definition of critique as exegesis[49] is what Gilles Deleuze would call "perspectivism."[50] As Paul Klee famously put it, a perspectivist endeavors "not to render *the* visible" but "to *render visible*."[51] Critique, accordingly, when detached from polemics can serve to make judgement possible rather than being ex ante judgmental. As we saw earlier, in its original Greek meaning, critique refers to the ability or power *to discern* and judge. Curiously, *diagnosis* (*διάγνωσις*) also means to "discern, distinguish, perceive" (from *διαγιγνώσκειν*).[52] Hence the medical definition of diagnosis as the "determination of the nature of a diseased condition; identification of a disease by careful investigation of its symptoms and history; also, the opinion (formally stated) resulting from such investigation."[53] Critique therefore rejoins diagnosis in this discerning and discriminating task.

If critique in the end consists in diagnosing the here and now (the triad: "*je-ici-present*"), as Foucault seems to have originally thought in his unpublished 1966 manuscript,[54] then could it not be reconciled with a more prescriptive or descriptive but useful engagement with the art of governing? In other words, could it regain its lost therapeutic functions as well? Its ability not to cure the sick necessarily but at the very least participate in the discussion around treatment, that is, in the "management" of the ailing body politic, perhaps even in the prognosis of the malady (to exhaust the medical terminology)? I suggest it can.

HOW CAN CRITIQUE BE PERFORMED?

In contrast to what could be called a "vertical" critical epistemology of an earlier historiography that viewed history in triumphalist, teleological, and whiggish terms as a linear and progressive form of progress towards some kind of unifying "truth", a "horizontal" epistemology does not view science as a continuous series of discoveries and inevitable progress but as a series of ruptures, and "transitions"[55] in modes of thinking, which, though different in kind, are situated on the same ontological plane.

A horizontal epistemology comes in different shapes and mediums; "rhizomes" (Deleuze), "networks" (Latour), "trading-zones" (Galison), "translational platforms" (Rose and Abi-Rached), "problems" (Biagioli), "experiments" (Bachelard, Hacking) etc. [56] All these conceptual variations share many ideas anticipated in Horkheimer's 1937

[49] Ibid., 41.
[50] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* [1988] (1993), 23.
[51] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* [1981] (2003), 56.
[52] *Oxford English Dictionary*, online, s.v. "diagnosis."
[53] Ibid.
[54] *Discours philosophique*, 21.
[55] Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), 58.
[56] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1972] (2004), 3-28; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (2005); Peter Louis Galison, *Image and Logic: A Material Culture of Microphysics* (1997), 781-844; Rose and Abi-Rached, *Neuro*, 241; Mario Biagioli, "Postdisciplinary Liaisons: Science Studies and the Humanities," *Critical Inquiry* 35:4 (2009), 820; Gaston Bachelard, *Le rationalisme appliqué* (1949); Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* (1983).

manifesto "Traditional and Critical Theory." In it, Horkheimer talks about the ways in which science is "socially conditioned," that there is nothing called a pure "objective event," and that "facts" are constructed by continuous "revision, simplification or elimination of contradictions," in other words, that they, too, are "social" in so far as they are part and parcel of "social activity" and cannot be reduced merely to formulas.[57] As Horkheimer further put it, the role of critical theory is to show how an idealist framework that considers theory independent of its social context and material conditions is deeply flawed.

Given the current Covid-19 pandemic, a complex crisis that requires a candid, open, transparent, inclusive, collaborative, and inter-disciplinary approach, one can think of 'crisis' itself as the excuse, pretext or indeed the existential or historical moment that brings together various experts and disciplines to inform policies and decision-making. This is how I ended up collaborating with colleagues from various fields and disciplines (philosophy, political science, law, medicine, public health, history etc.) on a World Health Organization (WHO) technical report on trade-offs and decision-making in times of uncertainty.[58] Not only was this a useful and rewarding exercise on a personal level, but had the WHO called for such an exercise long before the crisis hit, and had governments performed this kind of interdisciplinary conversation on how public health crises ought to be managed in an open, transparent and equitable way long before they felt the need to create impromptu committees and subcommittees when it was already too late, perhaps some of the errors, blind spots, and missteps could have been averted. And perhaps more lives could have been saved.

Social scientists (including myself) who ended up writing about the pandemic, making recommendations, and taking the risk to analyze the pandemic amid so much uncertainty felt the need, indeed the duty, to *translate* critique into useful policy-relevant recommendations or at least share with the larger public our concerns about questionable and unacceptably opaque governmental decisions.[59] While we were not critically useful during the emergency response, we knew from the history of public health something crucial about the behavior of epidemics and above all what to expect from state authorities, institutions, public health interventions and populations in the face of adversity, fear, and uncertainty. Both our belief to make power accountable and our need to partake in the decision-making process stemmed precisely from an ethos that I am calling here post hoc 'critical friendship.' As the anthropologist Janet Roitman argues in her insightful book *Anti-crisis*, crises engender certain types of critiques.[60] In this case, 'critical friendship' can also be

[57] Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, 201, 204, and 209.

[58] Norheim et al., "Difficult Trade-Offs in Response to COVID-19."

[59] I ended up writing other policy recommendations on the Covid-19 crisis in the context of the Middle East and Lebanon, a country that was plagued by many concomitant crises (financial, banking, economic, humanitarian, and sanitary). For example, see Joelle M. Abi-Rached, "The Case for COVID-19 Public Inquiries for the Arab World," Middle East Institute (Washington, DC), December 7, 2021, https://www.mei.edu/publications/case-covid-19-public-inquiries-arab-world (accessed May 30, 2023); Joelle M. Abi-Rached and Ishac Diwan, "The Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Lebanon: A Crisis Within Crises" (June 2020).

[60] Roitman, *Anti-crisis*, 85.

seen as a certain type of performing critique that became more visible during this specific pandemic crisis.

CONCEPTUAL SIEVES

A *horizontal critique*, so to speak, aims to capture a historical configuration of knowledge, power relations, various actors with their discourses and practices in particular societies and particular periods. The aim is to delineate a so-called "conceptual scheme," which William James interestingly defined as a "sort of sieve":

> "… in which we try to gather up the world's contents. Most facts and relations fall through its meshes, being either too subtle or insignificant to be fixed in any conception. But whenever a physical reality is caught and identified as the same with something already conceived, it remains on the sieve, and all the predicates and relations of the conception with which it is identified become its predicates and relations too; it is subjected to the sieve's network, in other words."[61]

Curiously, according to Kosseleck, "crisis" and "critique" share the same root "cri-", which is also found in the French word "crible," i.e., sieve.[62]

While in a *horizontal epistemology* judgment is still possible, it is neither triumphalist nor teleological. Instead of totally rejecting and condemning the past at the expense of the present (what Nietzsche calls a "critical kind of history," ironically),[63] the past is examined for the *sake of* the present.[64] Thus, Alexandre Koyré, for instance, who uses "*types de pensée*" (types of thinking) in lieu of a conceptual scheme,[65] does not restrain himself from judging Aristotelian physics as being "false, of course; and utterly obsolete,"[66] nor does he withhold his view that "we modern" would consider Galilean and Cartesian conceptions of movement as basic.[67] Yet, these are precisely indications that "we" belong to different "types" of thinking, and it is by studying the "*structures"* [my emphasis] and grammar of these mental operations that we come to a better understanding of the philosophical and scientific revolutions of our own time.[68] This was said long before the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in which Thomas Kuhn introduced the concept of "paradigm" to describe what Koyré otherwise called "types of thinking."[69] Likewise for Kuhn, "the Eureka moment ... came when he looked out the window of his Harvard rooms and

[61] William James, *The Principles of Psychology* 1 (1890), 482.
[62] *Critique and Crisis*, 103.
[63] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* [1874] (1980), 19.
[64] Ibid., 23.
[65] Alexandre Koyré, *Études Galiléennes* (1939), 10; Alexandre Koyré, "Galileo and Plato," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4:4 (1943), 406.
[66] Koyré, "Galileo and Plato," 407.
[67] Ibid., 417.
[68] Alexandre Koyré, *Études d'histoire de la pensée philosophique* (1966), 5.
[69] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [1962] (1996), 187.

realized that Aristotelian physics was as wrong as wrong could be, but that it *worked,* that it was coherent."[70]

A horizontal epistemology thus allows the delineation of a conceptual scheme, or shall we say a conceptual sieve, with all its elements, "its predicates," the relations between them, what makes the sieve/paradigm coherent and sustainable, its inner logic, its actors, and the underlying forces and processes at play. To use James' reasoning: the shape of the "sieve" reflects its underlying "network," which in turn determines the shape of the "physical reality."

MATTERS OF CONCERN

In an attempt to bring back steam to critique, given the urgency that the climate crisis imposes, the late Bruno Latour suggested separating the task of problematizing "matters of fact" from "matters of concern."[71] The task of critique, he argued, is not to debunk but "to assemble," not to show the conditions of possibility of a phenomenon (though this is debatable) but to show how it is sustained by what processes and what networks of actors (curiously à la William James).[72] And that, in a sense, it is wrong and counter-productive to debunk well-established 'facts,' which are by definition resistant to critique.

Of course, this latter claim is highly contentious. Certain 'matters of fact' do deserve closer scrutiny. The history of medicine and psychiatry is replete with apposite illustrations. Take homosexuality, for example, which was considered a mental disorder and hence a 'matter of fact' for most of the nineteenth century and until the 1970s, and yet we know from the history of deviance how this way of pathologizing sexuality and behavior is not only highly biased and prejudiced but also far from being an established and objective biological fact.[73] Latour is, nevertheless, right in the sense that it is useless to deploy critique in the face of certain well-established facts, for instance that Covid-19 is caused by a virus and not, say, by the wrath of God. Why? Simply because, according to Latour, the critic should not be "the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naive believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather."[74] This is exactly where 'critical friendship' has a role to play: it is the mindset, the attitude or ethos that aims to create a common epistemological "arena" that invites a reasonable critical approach to science and medicine.

[70] Steven Shapin, *Never Pure: Historical Studies of Science as If It Was Produced by People with Bodies, Situated in Time, Space, Culture, and Society, and Struggling for Credibility and Authority* (2010), 6.
[71] Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,".
[72] Ibid., 246.
[73] Jack Drescher, "Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality," *Behavioral Sciences* 5:4 (2015), 565–75.
[74] Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?," 246.

ZONES OF CRITICAL PROXIMITY

In more recent reflections on the politics of climate change and the Anthropocene, scientists have used notions such as "critical zone observatories" and "critical zones."[75] The former refers to the collaborative engagement vis-à-vis earth-related processes and observations. The latter in the singular form refers to the most superficial layer of life, which is the product of complex geophysical reactions. For Latour and colleagues, the Critical Zone (CZ) designates "the (mostly continental) layers from the top of the canopy to the mother rocks, thus foregrounding the thin, porous, and permeable layer where life has modified the cycles of matter by activating or catalyzing physical and chemical reactions. Those complex biogeochemical reactions generate a kind of skin, a varnish, a biofilm whose reactivity and fragility have become the central topics of multidisciplinary research around the disputed concept of the Anthropocene."[76]

In other words, a critical zone is the area of right proximity to the most primordial form of life, i.e., to its conditions of possibility. I borrow Latour's notion of "critical proximity" (*proximité critique*)[77] and apply it to a broader range of subject matters and objects of investigation. Critical friendship in that sense can offer a *zone of critical proximity* or, to put it the other way around, a critical zone where the critical observers ("us" social scientists) are at the right distance from the object of investigation (science, medicine, technology, the planet, and life itself).

While a horizontal epistemology or zone of critical proximity is useful, it is not enough. It requires some reflexivity or as Anthony Giddens put it a "reflexive appropriation of knowledge."[78] Any epistemology, any theory of knowledge, indeed any sociological analysis or historical inquiry requires some form of introspective critique. An approach that involves diagnosing, exposing, and describing the various layers of a conceptual scheme, and the very conditions of life itself necessarily entails a more flexible and a more open starting point. Such a posture contributes to what Horkheimer calls "the construction of the social present"[79] and the "transformative activity [one might say power or potential] associated with critical thinking."[80]

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[75] Alexandra Arènes, Bruno Latour, and Jérôme Gaillardet, "Giving Depth to the Surface: An Exercise in the Gaia-Graphy of Critical Zones," *The Anthropocene Review* 5:2 (2018), 120–35; Susan L. Brantley et al., "Designing a Network of Critical Zone Observatories to Explore the Living Skin of the Terrestrial Earth," *Earth Surface Dynamics* 5:4 (2017), 841–60; Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, ed., *Critical Zones: The Science and Politics of Landing on Earth* (2020).

[76] Arènes, Latour, and Gaillardet, "Giving Depth to the Surface," 121.

[77] Bruno Latour, *Où suis-je ? Leçons du confinement à l'usage des terrestres* (2021), 41.

[78] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (1991), 37. Also, Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (2004); Pierre Bourdieu, *Science de la science et réflexivité: Cours du Collège de France 2000-2001* (2007).

[79] *Critical Theory*, 211.

[80] Ibid., 232.

WHAT IS FRIENDSHIP?

"Friendship" does not only mean sympathy, amicability, goodwill or a state of mutual trust and support. For Aristotle, friendship, or *philia* (*φιλία*), was the condition of possibility of political reason and political action.[81] It is a virtue. But it is also what "hold cities together."[82] In Aristotelian terms, it is an exchange that leads to a community of living beings or, as Agamben puts it, "an existential sharing."[83] Sharing common interests and a common sense of purpose and fate; in other words, what gleans democracies together. This cooperation requires some aspect of "like-mindedness," which brings communities together by aligning the personal with the political in the good and just governance of the city. It enables "concord" in a state and society, and this is why Aristotle speaks of "political friendship" (*philia politike*).[84] It is in that latter sense that I view friendship as being necessary for the political project of the polis.

According to Aristotle, there is an inextricable link between friendship, community (including the small nucleus of the family), and justice. Man is not only a "political animal," Aristotle reminds us, but he also forms a "household." And it is in the household that "we first see the origins and sources of friendship, political regimes, and justice."[85] But as there are many kinds of justice, so with communities and friendships.[86] Yet they all "border on each other."[87] What Aristotle calls "political friendship" is not a disinterested form of friendship, for the "utility" here is concord, as mentioned above, i.e., the condition of possibility of a "political community" and hence a city or a state. And the finality of this political community is to "advantage the whole of life" based on justice and equality. This dynamic is antipodal to the tyrannical or oligarchical forms of regime, which feed on enmity and hostility.[88]

Friendship for Aristotle allows a renewal of the political, of what makes communities and political regimes hold together. This is what Derrida demonstrates in *Politics of Friendship* (*Politiques de l'amitié*), a long meditation on a line attributed to Aristotle (by way of Montaigne), *o philoi, oudeis philos* ("Oh my friend, there is no friend").[89] Derrida believes that in that space of coexistence, there is the possibility of democratic renewal.[90] Derrida's meditation on the politics of friendship is, in the end, a response to Schmitt's politics of hostility that depends and feeds on the perpetual existence of the "total enemy."[91] In contrast to a politics of hostility, Derrida argues for a politics of hospitality "without reserve,"

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[81] Edouard Thoumire, *Le boisseau de sel: Qu'est-ce que l'amitié politique ?* (2017), 19-48.
[82] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* [340 BCE], ed. and trans. Roger Crisp, (2014), 1155a.
[83] Giorgio Agamben, *L'amitié* (2007), 29 and 40.
[84] Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1241a32.
[85] Ibid., 1242a40-42.
[86] Ibid., 1241b16-17.
[87] Ibid., 1241b17.
[88] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1160a; 1167b.
[89] Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié: Suivi de l'oreille de Heidegger* (2017).
[90] Hubert Faes, "Une amitié sans fraternité ?," *Transversalités* 113:1 (2010), 89.
[91] Christian Ferrié, "La politique de Derrida contre l'hostilité schmittienne," *Les cahiers philosophiques de Strasbourg* 39 (2016), 193.

which is at the heart of the "democratic promise" and of history itself.[92] For without such a messianic promise of unconditional hospitality, there would be no new comers (*arrivants*), no new inhabitants, no new citizens, and so on. This is why Derrida writes that a "hospitality without reserve" is both the condition of possibility and impossibility of any democracy.[93] So, with friendship, it is both necessary and potentially destructive for the democratic project.

WHAT IS "CRITICAL FRIENDSHIP" THEN?

It is not an overstatement, especially in these times of polarization within and across societies, to invite social scientists to engage in more constructive, self-reflective, 'hospitable,' and more productive conversations rather than polarized debates between the sciences and the humanities or even between the sciences. This, too, is an exercise in what Aristotle calls preserving the "common good."[94] As the Covid-19 pandemic has plainly demonstrated, global scientific collaboration is needed more than ever to tackle future pandemics, the ongoing environmental degradation, and the unfolding climate crisis. At the same time, geopolitics and rivalries between global powers are endangering such vital international collaborative efforts.[95] The alternative is strife, enmity, hostility, and a counterproductive and individualistic pursuit of knowledge. Yet for Aristotle, friendship is an essential element for both individual and collective flourishing; that is, for both the good life and the good society.[96] Knowledge, in the end, should also be about praxis. After all, is it not the aim of living together in a city, society, state, or community, a kind of "second life," a more public life, as Hannah Arendt puts it, or the *bios politikos* that Aristotle talks about?[97] And is it not the purpose of that public life to "look out for the common interest" before it is "ruined"?[98]

Friendship entails trust, complicity, and an ability to speak truth no matter what.[99] This is where critical friendship differs in its posture vis-à-vis both truth and power. It is not a form of what could be called 'total friendship,' at the same time it is not a form of 'total critique.' As we saw earlier, 'critical' has various meanings from condemnatory and censorious to a more balanced attitude. In its obsolete meaning, critical means "involving or exercising careful judgement or observation; exact, precise; scrupulous; punctual."[100] This more moderate posture of careful observation and judgement may be related to the original medical usage of the term 'crisis.'

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[92] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* [1993] (1994), 81-82.
[93] Ibid., 82.
[94] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167b.
[95] "Protect Precious Scientific Collaboration from Geopolitics," *Nature* 593:7860 (2021), 477.
[96] John M. Cooper, "Friendship and the Good in Aristotle," *The Philosophical Review* 86:3 (1977), 290–315.
[97] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [1958] (1998), 24.
[98] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167b.
[99] Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, 72.
[100] *Oxford English Dictionary*, online, s.v. "critical."

At the same time, the role of friendship is to enable fierce criticism, expressed with passion, that can still be contained within collegiality. Perhaps an in-between position between critique and friendship is what is captured by 'critical friendship;' the missing *critical middle voice* that does not merely critique from afar but has a say and a stake in the making of the polis. It is to borrow, the way Arendt puts it, a "friendship without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem."[101]

CONCLUSION

As the current Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated, some of the concepts that had marked twentieth century intellectual thought have become inadequate or obsolete for an age of compounded crises and a worrisome decline of democratic commitment across the world. Critical and social theory need to be renewed. How can 'critical friendship' be part of a more "combative form of democracy" or "militant democracy" (to use an older term) that will be necessary in the post-pandemic future?[102] This article argued that a critical friendship attitude or ethos can play a role in the way in which we rethink democracy and examine science, medicine, and technology, especially amid an alarming decline in trust in scientific expertise.[103]

Critical friendship tries to reconcile both a healthy dose of skepticism that is needed for a self-reflexive science and a social science perspective that is genuinely and from its outset open to a serious and meaningful engagement with the sciences (not a priori in confrontation with its 'objectivity,' and 'reality,' nor ex ante suspicious of the motivation and intention of its actors). A horizontal epistemology of critique, or *zone of critical proximity*, as I have called it, is an approach that is more attuned to an epistemology of "co-production of knowledge,"[104] which already characterizes scientific practice and will define its future even more.

Critical friendship is perhaps this critical missing middle voice, which could play a vital role in sustaining and renewing what Aristotle calls a "political community."

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[101] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 243.

[102] Jacques Attali, *L'économie de la vie* (2020); Karl Loewenstein, "Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights, I," *The American Political Science Review* 31:3 (1937), 417–32.

[103] See Thomas M. Nichols, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters* (2017).

[104] Albert V. Norström et al., "Principles for Knowledge Co-Production in Sustainability Research," *Nature Sustainability* 3:3 (2020), 182–90; S. Redman et al., "Co-Production of Knowledge: The Future," *BMJ* 372 (2021), n434.

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ARTICLE

The Covid-19 Pandemic and the Freedom-Security Tension: Calibrating their Fragile Relationship

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ABSTRACT. Grounded in a will to adapt to dangers, and espouse both responsibility and resilience, voluntary measures have largely replaced one of the oldest public health strategies, quarantine. The Covid-19 pandemic, however, elicited a broad sweep of tactics from the archive of public health armoury. On a general level, this review essay addresses the common measures rolled out by various authorities against the pandemic - the lock-downs, reopening process, financial support and vaccination. By relating these measures to 1) the "plague-stricken town", deployed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe by the *Polizeistaat*; 2) the "self-regulation strategy" that emerged with liberal ideas at the end of the eighteenth century; and 3) the "minimum security" programmed by neoliberal governmentality in the second half of the twentieth century, it is suggested that tensions between freedom and security during, and after, the pandemic can be better understood. To end, the essay noticed that the pandemic has enforced tensions in the administration and calibration of individual wishes and collective wellbeing, creating a fragile "freedom-security relationship" and new problem space for self-regulation.

Keywords: Covid-19, Lockdown, Self-regulation, Liberal governmentality, Freedom-security.

INTRODUCTION[1]

The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered analytical focus on state public health interventions around the world, showing how such measures were both swiftly implemented but also countered. Even if many counter actions were covert, in Western countries, overt protests against lockdown and other restrictions on free circulation multiplied during 2020 and 2021. Public health policies such as vaccination and health passes were questioned by active and noisy groups and were rejected in the everyday by people who just did not consider them necessary. We saw a clamour for "individual freedoms" in countries such as

[1] The Author gratefully acknowledges the comments and suggestions on previous drifts of this article by two anonymous reviewers for the *Foucault Studies* journal.

Germany, France, the UK, the USA, and Brazil among others. Protest thus took different forms across the world, creating very diverse stories and propositions about the pandemic of analytical interest.

In Brazil, scholars have particularly exposed the workings of right-wing conspiracy theories, showing how some far-right proponents[2] managed to connect the Covid-19 pandemic to an alleged "global communist conspiracy" originating in China. By telling this story about a communist anti-liberal conspiracy, the far-right was proposing to save the moral values linked to liberal capitalism.[3] This narrative strategy had particular implications during the pandemic as it provoked new tensions between individual wishes and collective wellbeing. The forceful story of the far-right fed the already existing fear that had spread and opened up a debate about what mechanisms would be best suited to balance and calibrate between freedom and security. When addressed through this political polarization between the liberal and communist, the COVID-19 pandemic elicited contemplation amongst the general populace and not only among a few self-proclaimed experts. In effect, the new tensions that emerged constrained the effectiveness of state public health interventions, which was a main concern within the Brazilian academic debate.[4]

The idea of a conspiracy against liberal capitalism has a long history and has served different purposes,[5] feeding criticism in different directions depending on contextual circumstances. In *The Great Transformation*, published in 1944 after The Great Depression, Karl Polanyi warned about conspiracy theories inherited from the liberalism of the 1870s and 1880s: "Unable to adduce evidence of any such concerted effort to thwart the liberal movement, he [sic, the liberal] falls back on the practically irrefutable hypothesis of covert action. This is the myth of the anti-liberal conspiracy which in one form or another is common to all liberal interpretations of the events of the 1870s and 1880s".[6] For Polanyi, these ideas did not allow us to understand the state interventions in the framework of the crisis of liberal capitalism, which had no preference for socialism or nationalism, but sought to

[2] As Cas Mudde explains, the first decades of the twenty-first century have seen a new wave of the far-right in general and the populist radical right in particular around the world. The impact of this wave has been significant due to the far-right rise affecting the behavior and the expectations of different actors, such as the public, parties, and policies while shifting the agenda of the center-right parties with nativist, xenophobic and authoritarian topics. See Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (2019) and Cas Mudde, "The Study of Populist Radical Right Parties: Towards a Fourth Wave," *C-REX Working Paper Series* 1 (February 2016), 1-23.

[3] See 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), 409-425; and Jakub Wondreys and Cas Mudde, "Victims of the Pandemic? European Far-Right Parties and COVID-19," *Nationalities Papers* 50:1 (2020), 86-103.

[4] Jessica Farias and Ronaldo Pilati, "COVID-19 as an undesirable political issue: Conspiracy beliefs and intolerance of uncertainty predict adhesion to prevention measures," *Curr Psychol* 42 (2023), 209-219; Marcus Painter and Tian Qiu, "Political Beliefs affect Compliance with Government Mandates," *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 185 (2021), 1-43; and Gordon Pennycook, Jonathon McPhetres, Bence Bago, and David G. Rand, "Beliefs About COVID-19 in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States: A Novel Test of Political Polarization and Motivated Reasoning," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 48:5 (June 2021), 750-765.

[5] See, for example, Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-wing Populist Discourses Mean* (2015).

[6] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* [1944] (2001), 151.

protect the vital social interests affected by the expanding market mechanism. In 1979, at the lecture entitled *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault noted that during and after The Great Depression, German liberals, American libertarians, and other neoliberal intellectuals formulated and disseminated conceptions that linked government protections with a "new despotism" enforced by the state. According to Foucault, this liberal "state-phobia" clouded the understanding of our present:

> [T]his type of analysis (…) enable[s] one to avoid paying the price of reality and actuality inasmuch as, in the name of this dynamism of the state, something like a kinship or danger, something like the great fantasy of the paranoiac and devouring state can always be found. To that extent, ultimately it hardly matters what one's grasp of reality is or what profile of actuality reality presents.[7]

Today, with the Covid-19 pandemic, we are seeing far-right advances around the world, both in developed and underdeveloped countries. These groups announce a collective conspiracy, and many of them are "state-phobic".[8] They claim to work on behalf of freedom and fill it with values that make existing ways to govern through freedom problematic. This essay attends to this accentuated problem space of "freedom" by returning to the freedom-security relationship discussed by Foucault in the lectures *Security, Territory, Population* (1978) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1979). Using these works to understand the multiple claims to freedom that developed during the Covid-19 pandemic can provide an understanding for why and how novel tensions were created, so visibly, on the surface of everyday political polarization among ordinary people. The concept of governmentality can thus be deployed anew, and a bit differently, to emphasize the engagement of each and all in the question of what way to best govern the population. Both stories about anti-liberal conspiracies as well as academic debate thereof contribute to this "governmentality". Accordingly, in comparison to Foucault's main focus on an "assembly of procedures, tactics, calculations, and reflections that allow exercising power over the population, which holds the political economy as its major form of knowledge, and whose main technical instruments are the apparatuses of security",[9] the governmentality that developed during the pandemic works through other knowledges, tactics and reflections.

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[7] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (2008), 188.

[8] Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism. The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (2019).

[9] Foucault coined this definition on his lecture of February 1st, 1978, collected in *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978* (2009), 126-145. The first transcriptions of this lecture were published in different languages as "Governmentality". Indeed, this was the title under which the lecture of February 1st appeared in the book by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, *The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality* (1991), 87-104. However, between the 1970s and 1980s, the concept of governmentality was progressively shifted by Foucault from a historical and determinate sense to a general study of the government of self and the government of the conduct of others. In this article, we will use governmentality to signify the reflections and tactics to structure the possible field of action of others. As Thomas Lemke says, "This can take many forms (e.g., ideological manipulation or rational argumentation, moral advice or economic exploitation), but it does not necessarily mean that power is exercised against the interests of the other part of a power relationship (…). Moreover, power relations do not always result in a removal of liberty or options available to individuals. On the contrary, power in the sense that Foucault gives to the term could result in an 'empowerment' or 'responsibilization' of subjects, forcing them to 'free' decisionmaking in fields

The freedom-security relationship is at the core of liberal governmentality, and, at the same time, it is the source of its tensions and crises. As Foucault stressed, liberal governmentality produces and consumes freedom: "The new governmental reason needs freedom therefore, the new art of government consumes freedom. It consumes freedom, which means that it must produce it. It must produce it, it must organize it".[10] Thus, freedom is a practice whose conditions should be organised: "Liberalism is not so much the imperative of freedom as the management and organization of the conditions in which one can be free".[11] There is neither absolute nor isolated freedom but rather freedom linked to governmentality. In fact, the very promotion of freedom entails that the government must deploy a set of limitations and controls to avoid the dangers of freedom. Foucault noticed that the principle of this calculation is called "security", that is, the government measures to protect freedom from its destructive effects. This is the great paradox of liberalism: "The game of freedom and security is at the very heart of this new governmental reason (…) The problems of (…) the economy of power peculiar to liberalism are internally sustained, as it were, by this interplay of freedom and security."[12]

On the basis of these ideas, it is possible to think about the specifics of the freedom-security relationship that developed with some of the measures that have attracted most commentaries – the lock-downs, reopening process, financial support, and vaccination. By relating these measures to Foucault's research on 1) the "plague-stricken town", deployed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe by the *Polizeistaat*, 2) the "self-regulation strategy" that emerged with liberal ideas at the end of the eighteenth century, and 3) the "minimum security" programmed by neoliberal governmentality in the second half of the twentieth century, it is possible to decipher the historical continuity, but also the innovativeness, that emerged from the administration of biologized life. As Foucault stressed, "in the world we have known since the nineteenth century, a series of governmental rationalities overlap, lean on each other, challenge each other, and struggle with each other".[13] These different ways of calculating, rationalizing, and regulating the art of government constitute the object of political debate. Without diagnosing the emergence of a new governmentality, this exploration of how freedom and security were balanced and calibrated in novel ways does show how an increasingly fragile notion of "freedom", to govern through freedom, got established with the pandemic.

A "PLAGUE-STRICKEN TOWN" YESTERDAY AND TODAY

In many countries around the world, the lockdown was the first health policy measure against the Covid-19 spread. This strategy had initially been deployed in China and

of action". Thomas Lemke, "Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique," *Rethinking Marxism* 14:3 (2002), 53. For a discussion on the concept of governmentality and an overview of "governmentality studies", see David Walters, *Governmentality: Critical Encounters* (2012).

[10] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 63.

[11] *Birth of Biopolitics*, 63-64.

[12] *Birth of Biopolitics*, 65.

[13] *Birth of Biopolitics,* 313.

harshly questioned by some Western countries. However, as soon as Covid-19 became a pandemic, several governments resorted to lockdown to save the population. "Despite the criticism of China's approach –said Carlo Caduff–, a crude and extreme version of lockdown became the international norm promoted by experts, officials, and the media across the world".[14] During 2020 and 2021, as the pandemic worsened and restrictions were extended, the lockdown was the target of criticism around the world.[15] This method has been characterised in different ways. According to some politicians, intellectuals and journalists, the state could not deploy a more intelligent response than to lock people down in different countries overwhelmed by the spread of Covid-19: "Instead of activating existing plans and drawing on concepts such as the Pandemic Severity Assessment Framework, countries imposed a massive, untested, and unproven generic lockdown with unforeseeable social, political, and economic repercussions".[16] Furthermore, the lockdown has been characterised as an archaic method from the Middle Ages.[17] On the other hand, some far-right expressions claim that the lockdown leads to a general disciplinarization in the style of the Chinese-communist model.[18] The lockdown has a long and complex history. If we ask where it came from, how it was used, what needs it satisfied and what its objectives were, we could give different answers to these questions.

We will establish that the lockdown should not be understood as an isolated strategy, since it is part of a constellation of reflections, calculations, and tactics of government. First, we will take up Foucault's analysis of the "plague-stricken town" model implemented in Europe, and then we will try to understand it within the framework of disciplinary power developed between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Our aim is not only to know the past of lockdown but also to compare its features with the measures deployed in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the measures that should be deployed when the plague breaks out in a town. These measures were basically two. First, the closing and partitioning of the town's space; and second, the exhaustive and permanent surveillance of this space. Both measures define disciplinary power:

> This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded (…), in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is

[14] Carlo Caduff, "What Went Wrong: Corona and the World after the Full Stop," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 34:4 (July 2020), 3.
[15] Paolo Gerbaudo, "The Pandemic Crowd: Protest in the Time of COVID-19," *Journal of International Affairs* 73:2 (May 2020), 61-76.
[16] Caduff, "What Went Wrong," 13.
[17] For example, University of Pennsylvania Press, "A Silent Embrace of 'The Middle Ages' Under COVID-19," Pennpress.org. https://www.pennpress.org/blog/a-silent-embrace-of-the-middle-ages-under-covid-19/ (accessed June 2, 2022), and John Mulhall, "Milan's medieval response to the plague holds lessons for today," Washingtonpost.com. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/04/27/milans-medieval-response-plague-holds-lessons-today/ (accessed June 2, 2022).
[18] Kalil et al., "Politics of fear in Brazil".

> constantly located, examined and distributed among living beings, the sick and the dead – all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism.[19]

This disciplinary mechanism is based on a centralized system of permanent registration. Each case of illness or death must be reported to the administrative authorities of the town. Every unauthorized movement or every minor infraction and other irregularities must be detected and punished. It is an omnipresent and omniscient power that prescribes a place to each individual: "Against the plague, which is a mixture, discipline brings into play its power, which is one of analysis".[20] The plague-stricken town model was a very different strategy than those implemented against leprosy during the Middle Ages. While the leprosy strategy divides the people into sick and healthy, the disciplinary mechanism includes all people and distributes them through a reticulated space: "The leper was caught up in a practice of rejection, of exile-enclosure (…); those sick of the plague were caught up in a meticulous tactical partitioning in which individual differentiations were the constricting effects of a power that multiplied, articulated and subdivided itself".[21] The disciplinary mechanism is an individualizing power; that is, it separates, analyses, and differentiates the crowd of bodies and forces. Each individual has to be in a certain place, and each place has to have an individualised body. Disciplinary power analyses the confused and massive pluralities; it avoids the diffuse circulations, the uncontrolled movements and the dangerous mixtures of bodies: "Its aim is to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual".[22] In this way, the obedience of people is achieved.

The plague-stricken town model is just one possibility of disciplinary power. It is a response to a specific problem: the plague outbreak in a town. Nevertheless, disciplinary power can be used to control daily life beyond dramatic events such as a pandemic. As Foucault explains, discipline has also been implemented in the school, the hospital, the army, and the prison: "one can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social 'quarantine', to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of 'panopticism'".[23] Moreover, discipline not only works in enclosed spaces: it is a mechanism that is also exercised in open spaces. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the police[24] extended disciplinary power through the social body. The aim of this *Polizeistaat* was to watch human activity in every

[19] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975] (1995), 197.
[20] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 197
[21] *Discipline and Punish*, 198.
[22] *Discipline and Punish*, 148.
[23] *Discipline and Punish*, 216.
[24] Foucault refers to the "police" with the meaning that this word had from the end of the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century in France and Germany. In this period, the words *police* and *Polizei* had a very different meaning than in English-speaking countries: "When people spoke about police at this moment, they spoke about the specific techniques by which a government in the framework of the state was able to govern people as individuals significantly useful for the world". Michel Foucault, "The Political Technology of Individuals" [1982], in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (1988), 154.

detail, in every behaviour, and in every relationship. It was "an attempt at a general disciplinarization, a general regulation of individuals and the territory of the realm in the form of a police based on an essentially urban model".[25] The police were not only used to maintain law and order but also to provide urban supplies, hygiene, health, handicrafts, and commercial activities. This is something more than a "repressive" power; either way, the *Polizeistaat* played a positive role in taking care of a live, active, and productive man.

Disciplinary power must be understood as a response to different problems and needs. It is not an isolated measure but rather a strategy that combines the enclosure of bodies and police surveillance in open spaces. So, how do we understand the lockdown and other health policy measures in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic? Should we understand the "return" to elements of the plague-stricken town but in new ways, overlapping with techniques of modern rule?

Indeed, the measures against Covid-19 are more sophisticated than the surveillance techniques used by the plague-stricken town model. Surveillance techniques today work through open spaces; still, they can be adapted to each individual and their behaviour: "Countries around the world also concentrate on mass-surveillance technologies to monitor SARS-CoV-2. They created apps to download on citizens' smartphones in order to track, detect and isolate people positive for Covid-19".[26] During 2020-2021, in different countries around the world, the lockdown was gradually replaced by a set of measures to control the circulation of people such as social distancing, curfews, household bubbles, indoor capacity limits and strategies to circulate health passes. All these were supported by highly sophisticated surveillance technologies: facial recognition, drones and mobile phone location data, among others.[27] Thus, could we state that the pandemic has triggered a technological change in terms of the exercise of power? We argue that the Covid-19 measures should be analysed beyond these visible aspects. For us, the problem to be considered does not revolve around the question of old methods such as the lockdown or more sophisticated surveillance technologies deployed during the pandemic. Following Foucault's research, we propose to understand these options by analysing an assembly of reflections, calculations and tactics of government; that is, the "self-regulation" that emerged with liberal ideas at the end of the eighteenth century and the "minimum security" programmed by neoliberal governmentality in the second half of the twentieth century. By relating to these strategies, it is suggested that tensions between freedom and security during, and after, the pandemic can be better understood.

[25] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 442.

[26] Anne Wagner, Aleksandra Matulewska, and Sarah Marusek, "Pandemica Panoptica: Biopolitical Management of Viral Spread in the Age of Covid-19," *International Journal of the Semiotics of Law* 35 (2021), 1104.

[27] See Moran Amit, Heli Kimhi, Tarif Bader, Jacob Chen, Elon Glassberg, and Avi Benov, "Mass-surveillance technologies to fight coronavirus spread: the case of Israel," *Nature Medicine* 26 (2020), 1167-1169; and J. J. Sylvia IV, "The Biopolitics of Social Distancing," *Social Media + Society* 6:2 (2020), 1-4.

CALIBRATING THE FREEDOM-SECURITY RELATIONSHIP DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Our first issue is the lockdown. During 2020 and 2021, the implementation of a full lockdown on most social activities was linked to economic contraction on a global scale. A report by the International Monetary Fund stated that "the economic contraction was driven by the adoption of government lockdowns instead of by people voluntarily reducing social interactions for fear of contracting or spreading the virus".[28] Additionally, some investigations showed the impact on the mental health of "new realities of working from home, temporary unemployment, home-schooling of children, and lack of physical contact with other family members, friends, and colleagues",[29] which led to stress, anxiety and a feeling of helplessness in children and adults.[30] Due to its social and economic effects, the lockdown was the target of criticism from some politicians, intellectuals, and journalists. In this context, policymakers and experts scheduled a gradual reopening of activities accompanied by selective policies of testing and isolation, social distancing measures, and other localized and intermittent restrictions. How can we understand these events from the perspective of governmentality? We argue that the lockdown should not be understood as an isolated measure but rather as part of the self-regulation strategy promoted by liberalism. In comparison with the "plague-stricken town" model implemented in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic was a strategy to control the risks of illnesses rather than nullifying them entirely. There are some reasons that illustrate this point. One of them is that, since the outbreak of the pandemic, experts have been discussing "the probable transition to a new phase of SARS-CoV-2 infection in humans as an endemic pathogen, perhaps with intermittent epidemic peaks".[31] That is, the Covid-19 pandemic could be self-regulated and become an endemic disease. However, this prediction depends on a large amount of data and evidence, such as the virus generation time, the duration of infection, the mutations and variants that would develop during the infection, the severity of these variants, the incidence of cultural and geographic factors, and, not less relevant, the eventual immunity achieved after infection or mass vaccination. In short, "many years of data and theory have told us that it is probably naive to make strong predictions about the evolution of virulence in any complex system".[32] At the beginning of the pandemic, due to the lack of data and evidence, several Western countries implemented the lockdown to avoid

[28] International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook: A Long and Difficult Ascent* (2020), 65.

[29] World Health Organization, "#HealthyAtHome - Mental health", WHO.int. https://www.who.int/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/healthyathome/healthyathome---mental-health (accessed June 15, 2022).

[30] Timothy P. Williams and Kristen Pontalti, *Responding to the Mental Health and Psychosocial Impact of Covid-19 on Children and Families (Child Protection Learning Brief #2)* (2020).

[31] Amalio Telenti, Ann Arvin, Lawrence Corey, Davide Corti, Michael S. Diamond, Michael S., Adolfo García-Sastre, Robert, F. Garry, Edward C. Holmes, Phillip S. Pang, and Herbert W. Virgin, "After the pandemic: perspectives on the future trajectory of COVID-19," *Nature* 596 (August 2021), 495.

[32] Telenti et al., "After the Pandemic," 497.

the collapse of the healthcare infrastructure.[33] In terms of the self-regulation strategy, if governments took such a radical measure as stopping the circulation of people, it was to strengthen this infrastructure facing a sudden worsening, acceleration, and increase of infections and deaths, not to nullify the disease. That is to say, governments had to stop the circulation and then let the system gradually self-regulate. But a completely natural or spontaneous solution was not expected. Rather, governments proposed an additional set of measures to "flatten the curve". This leads us to a second issue:

Between 2020 and 2021, the "locked-country approach"[34] was gradually replaced by the strategy of maximizing the good circulation by diminishing the bad. This strategy included social distancing measures, curfews, partial lockdowns in neighbourhoods, cities, and regions, household bubbles, indoor capacity limits, and health passes. Policymakers and experts defined this as the "reopening process". The reopening process sought to open economic activities while avoiding the collapse of the health system. In this sense, several local governments proposed "roadmaps" to safely reopen the economy, get people back to work, rebuild consumer confidence, and ease social restrictions while minimizing the health impacts of Covid-19.[35] Nevertheless, there have been many obstacles to achieving homeostasis between the population variables, mainly between public health and economic recovery. In 2020, the WHO warned that "Countries that rush to lift quarantine restrictions designed to contain the coronavirus pandemic risk even worse economic damage".[36] Furthermore, a paper by the World Bank claimed that the reopening process should be synchronized with respect to the pandemic evolution: "a gradual reopening is associated with a stronger recovery and that the faster lifting of the restrictions might hamper the economic recovery. (…) Starting the reopening process early on –with respect to the pandemic's first peak– is also associated with slower recovery".[37] In fact, governments had to reverse reopening as Covid-19 spread in the UK, France, Germany, Israel, the USA, and Australia, among many other countries. From the perspective of governmentality, the setbacks of the reopening process not only show the difficulties in scheduling government measures in the midst of the pandemic but also –and more deeply– the

[33] "What Went Wrong," 13.

[34] "What Went Wrong," 4-5.

[35] For example, Buenos Aires City Government, "Plan integral y gradual de puesta en marcha de la Ciudad [Comprehensive and gradual start-up plan for the City]," Buenosaires.gob.ar. https://buenosaires.gob.ar/coronavirus/plan-integral (accessed July 25, 2022); Commonwealth of Massachusetts, "Reopening Massachusetts," Mass.gov. https://www.mass.gov/info-details/reopening-massachusetts (accessed July 26, 2022); Mayor of London, "A roadmap to the safe and full reopening of London's economy," London.gov.uk. https://www.london.gov.uk/publications/roadmap-safe-and-full-reopening-londons-economy (accessed July 26, 2022); New York State, "Reopening New York. Implementing CDC Guidance," Governor.ny.gov. https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/NYS_CDCGuidance_Summary.pdf (accessed July 27, 2022); and São Paulo State Government, "Retomada consciente. Plano São Paulo [Conscious resume. São Paulo Plan]," Saopaulo.sp.gov.br. https://www.saopaulo.sp.gov.br/planosp/ (accessed July 27, 2022).

[36] Berkeley Lovelace Jr., "WHO: Countries that rush to lift restrictions risk 'severe and prolonged' damage to economy," CNBC.com. https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/03/who-says-countries-that-rush-to-lift-coronavirus-containment-risk-more-severe-and-prolonged-damage-to-economy.html (accessed July 30, 2022).

[37] Asli Demirgüç-Kunt, Michael Lokshin, and Iván Torre, *Opening-up Trajectories and Economic Recovery: Lessons after the First Wave of the COVID-19* (2020), 3.

dilemmas of a strategy that must keep disease and economic recovery within a socially acceptable balance beyond which the order could be in danger. This is linked to two additional issues, both concerning governmental protections:

The rapid development of vaccines and the mass vaccination campaigns deployed in several countries around the world have created the expectation that the pandemic was coming to an end. While experts agreed that vaccination reduces the burden of the disease, they also noticed that this efficacy might have been compromised due to virus mutations: "Although there is no evidence to date of an ongoing 'antigenic drift' (…), mutations affecting transmission and disease severity can occur. (…) Vaccines for COVID-19 must therefore continue to be optimized as a matter of urgency".[38] The emergence of new variants of coronavirus was mainly linked to the disparities in global access to vaccines.[39] The WHO has warned that the majority of vaccines have been administrated in high and upper-middle-income countries, while the poorest countries are being excluded from the global vaccine distribution.[40] Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the disparities in healthcare access –especially for racial and ethnic minority groups–[41] and income inequality despite governmental support. Therefore, the population is subject to risks that cannot be fully controlled by governments and with which the subjects must learn to live. This delicate situation is linked to an ambivalence of the self-regulation strategy. Foucault notices that the self-regulation strategy divides the phenomena of scarcity or pandemic into two levels: the level of the population and the level of the multiplicity of individuals. The self-regulation strategy achieves results at the first level at the expense of the second level. For scarcity or pandemic to self-regulate, some individuals will have to suffer and even die. In other words, the self-regulation is a collective effect, while the pain and deaths are its individual effects: "The final objective is the population. The population is pertinent as the objective, and individuals, the series of individuals, are no longer pertinent as the objective, but simply as the instrument, relay, or condition for obtaining something at the level of the population".[42] The same political reason has worked during the Covid-19 pandemic: for this pandemic to become endemic, for the economy to recover, or, what is more, to ensure a socially and economically acceptable overall equilibrium, a series of individuals will have "to live dangerously".

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[38] Manish Sadarangani, Arnaud Marchant, and Tobias R. Kollmann, "Immunological mechanisms of vaccine-induced protection against COVID-19 in humans," *Nature Reviews Immunology* 21:8 (2021), 475.

[39] See Alexander Smith, "Covid omicron variant linked to vaccine inequality, experts say," CNBC.com. https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/30/covid-omicron-variant-linked-to-vaccine-inequality-experts-say.html (accessed August 5, 2022); United Nations News, "COVID vaccines: Widening inequality and millions vulnerable," News.un.ag. https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1100192 (accessed August 5, 2022).

[40] In fact, according to a WHO report, by January 2022, these countries had not achieved the target of vaccinating 10% of the population. See World Health Organization, World Bank, Vaccine Alliance, UNICEF, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization, *Accelerating COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment: Removing Obstacles to Increase Coverage Levels and Protect Those at High Risk* (2022), 10-13.

[41] Leo Lopez, Louis H. Hart, and Mitchell H. Katz, "Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Related to COVID-19," *JAMA* 325:8 (2021), 719-720; Daniel R. Morales and Sarah N. Ali, "COVID-19 and disparities affecting ethnic minorities," *The Lancet* 397:10286 (2021), 1684-1685.

[42] *Security, Territory, Population*, 65.

Finally, in several countries around the world, Covid-19 has triggered governmental financial support to mitigate the economic effects of the pandemic and, especially, of the lockdown. The aims of this support were to make it easier for companies to access credit, help people who are earning a low income, provide subsidies to cover part of employee wages, and assist local economies and businesses that have been more impacted by the pandemic, such as tourism, gastronomy, and culture sectors. According to a survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OEDC), "financing support programmes (…) have been successful in preventing widespread bankruptcies or layoffs while programmes are in use and helping to renew market confidence, including a restoration of liquidity to credit markets following a brief period of stress, thereby avoiding wider economic or employment consequences".[43] This governmental support has had some ambivalence. On the one hand, following Foucault's analysis, it is a way of promoting freedom of work, freedom of production, and freedom of consumption in a dangerous situation. Thus, the volume of social protection has increased and, consequently, the economic cost of promoting the conditions of freedom by governments has risen as well. On the other hand, the governmental support against the economic effects of the pandemic differs across countries in their breadth and scope. The OECD stated that these measures were not generally a long-term structural support but rather palliative measures. In many cases, but especially in developing countries, government measures have focused on vulnerable populations without modifying the conditions of vulnerability.

In some aspects, these types of short-term support are linked to the social policies programmed by neoliberal governmentality in the second half of the twentieth century. According to neoliberal rationality, the economy is a game between subjects of interest while the role of the state is to define the rules of this game and ensure their application. The aim of neoliberal social policies is to safeguard players from being excluded from the game: "the function of the social rule, of social regulation, or of social security in the broadest sense of the term, is purely and simply to ensure non-exclusion with regard to an economic game that, apart from this rule, must follow its own course".[44] Social policy must guarantee supplementary resources to those who provisionally fail to reach a sufficient threshold. These people will be covered by a social policy but only for as long as their situation of vulnerability persists. In other words, it is a "minimum security" that seeks to nullify certain risks on the basis of a minimal level of existence. Hence, there is a "floating population" that will receive assistance from the State when it falls below the subsistence threshold due to certain eventualities, such as an economic crisis, a pandemic

[43] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *COVID-19 Government Financing Support Programmes for Businesses 2021 Update* (2021), 18.

[44] *Birth of Biopolitics*, 202. This model of social policy, which Foucault also called "negative tax", was first implemented in German and France in the late seventies. We have found it, at least in part, in the financial support and other measures implemented by the Argentinian and Brazilian governments during the first months of the pandemic. See Osvaldo López Ruiz, Pablo M. Méndez, and Brauner Cruz Junior, "A relação liberdade-governo em tempos de pandemia no Brasil e na Argentina," *Cadernos Gestão Pública e Cidadania* 26:85 (2021), 1-19.

or other natural catastrophe, but will lose this assistance when the risks decrease. However, during the pandemic, in some countries of the world –*e. g.* Argentina and Brazil– the support has been too short-term, in such a way that "the 'choice' facing workers is to either return to a job that puts their life and the life of family members at risk, or to lose their jobs, their income or unemployment support, and their health insurance".[45]

Lockdown, the reopening process, vaccination and financial support: in the framework of the current governmentality, these measures are a possible –and rational– response of a government that must supervise the normal development of the mechanisms of interest and intervene when these are altered. Thus, they are not necessarily despotic measures against freedom but rather measures to save freedom. They form a way of organising the conditions of freedom with the difficulties and tensions that we have seen. These tensions are linked to a governmentality whose aim is to look for the balance of diverse interests among workers, companies, businesses, and the population in general:

> In the principle to which governmental reason must conform, interest is now interests, a complex interplay between individual and collective interests, between social utility and economic profit, between the equilibrium of the market and the regime of public authorities (…). Government, at any rate, government in this new governmental reason, is something that works with interests.[46]

In the end, policymakers and experts expect that the success of the above-mentioned measures will depend on the adherence of the population: "Governments might be sensitive to public perceptions about their efforts to fight the pandemic and to protect the economy. Then, both the timing of lifting the restrictions and the recovery trajectory might depend on the level of public trust in the government".[47] We can see again the fundamental aspect of liberal governmentality: the government must not oppose the subject of interest. It is thought that the mechanism of interests develops naturally and it cannot be countered by any government action. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the interest is absolutely free. As Foucault states, liberal governmentality works with interests; that is, it includes them in its calculations and techniques of government.[48] On the one hand, the government enables the mechanism of interests to work, but, on the other hand, it manages these interests through variables apparently far removed from the population in order to reduce their dangers and other socially negative effects. In this way, the mechanism of interests is promoted and controlled at the same time; through the interests –and without contradicting them– the government can achieve collective results for the population.

In the Covid-19 pandemic context, governments should therefore accept that the lockdowns and other restrictions cannot be imposed against the population's interests. If people wish to work, circulate and trade, the government should manage this reality without

[45] Sylvia, "The Biopolitics of Social Distancing," 3.
[46] *Birth of Biopolitics*, 44.
[47] Demirgüç-Kunt et al., "Opening-up Trajectories," 20–21.
[48] *Security, Territory, Population*, 100-105.

contradicting it. In other words, it is necessary to govern according to the reason of the governed people:

> The rationality of the governed must serve as the regulating principle for the rationality of government. This is what characterizes liberal rationality: how to model government, the art of government, how to found the principle of rationalization of the art of government on the rational behavior of those who are governed.[49]

The easing of Covid-19 restrictions follows this principle. An adjustment between the governmental measures and the reason of governed people is pursued every day at the level of countries, cities and even districts. This adjustment does not work according to a *de jure* limit but rather a *de facto* limit. It is an indefinite adjustment that proceeds by testing the reason of governed people. During 2020 and 2021, several governments faced serious difficulties to obtain the adherence of the population to health policies. Despite the efforts of scientists and policy makers, a lot of people refused to get vaccinated, in part due to the activities of the anti-vaccine groups –especially in the USA and Europe– and also because of vaccine hesitancy.[50] Throughout 2021, protests against health passes were registered in Belgium, France, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria, among other countries.[51] These phenomena show that it is not easy to govern according to the reason of the governed people: maybe because there is not only one rational behaviour –or, even more, because the pandemic unhinges any reason.

The Covid-19 pandemic has hardly been able to be regularized: "The overall uncertainty of these parameters makes it difficult to accurately predict the future post-pandemic equilibrium between SARS-CoV-2 and the human population".[52] This complex scenario suggests more than just a series of scientific and technical challenges. As we indicated in this essay, *the Covid-19 pandemic is not only a public health issue but also provokes great tension in the freedom-security relationship.*

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

As the pandemic arrived, the problem of "how to govern in the best way" crept up to the surface of ordinary people, who became interested in the measures to be implemented, assumedly, by "everyone" assembled into a unity. The freedom-security relationship has since been at the core of the concerns of government and the people governed. In many countries around the world, this has implied an increasing difficulty for "government through freedom". We argued that these tensions are linked to a governmentality that

[49] *Birth of Biopolitics*, 312.

[50] John McAteer, Inci Yildirim, and Ann Chahroudi, "The VACCINES Act: Deciphering Vaccine Hesitancy in the Time of COVID-19," *Clinical Infectious Disease* 71:15 (2022); Samuel Pullan, and Mrinalini Dey, "Vaccine hesitancy and anti-vaccination in the time of COVID-19: A Google Trends analysis," *Vaccine* 39:14 (2021).

[51] BBC News, "Covid: Huge protests across Europe over new restrictions," BBC.com. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59363256 (accessed September 3, 2022).

[52] "After the pandemic," 496.

looks for the balance of diverse interests of the population, including workers, businesses and ordinary people who were concerned about their wellbeing and physical health. This made freedom itself a conflictive issue which surfaced and thrived during the pandemic along with the formal political measurements taken. In effect, the heterogeneity of freedom was accentuated, making it possible to speak of "freedoms" in plural. People increasingly disagreed on what freedom should contain and, above all, the pandemic shifted attention to how the freedom of some could threaten the freedom of others.

This means that there have been multiple and contradictory interests among the population. For example, since the pandemic, we have seen a polarization in different countries, such as Argentina, Brazil or the USA, between those who have demanded the state take formal political measures and protections to guarantee health and those who have demanded freedom to work and produce.[53] In some cases, this polarization was incremented by activities of right-wing people who expressed that freedom is necessarily opposed to formal state government and who told stories about a communist anti-liberal conspiracy. The "state-phobia" of these groups led to new tensions that complicated the formal measures implemented with the aim to flatten the curve of infections and slow down the spread of the virus. Between 2020 and 2021, we witnessed the activities of the anti-vaccine groups, protests against health passes, and resistance to lock-downs. Some of these expressions hoisted moral values that made existing ways to govern through freedom problematic, demanding more formal responses. In turn, these responses opened up further debate about what mechanisms would be best suited for a smoother balancing and calibration of the freedom-security relationship.

The concept of governmentality can help us understand why and how these novel tensions were created on the surface of everyday political polarization among ordinary people. We have shown through this essay that the freedoms depend on formal governmental interventions and government at a distance. Governmentality is constantly organizing and securing the conditions on which individuals are supposed to experience freedom and, furthermore, the conditions on which each subject may freely follow their interest and self-regulate to secure collective wellbeing. During the pandemic and after, this function of governmentality became ambiguous since the polarized debate that arose produced and introduced additional freedoms to the calibration of freedom and security. Thus, the very promotion of freedom's conditions entails that formal government must deploy a set of limitations and controls, which during the Covid-19 pandemic were lockdowns, reopening processes, financial support, and vaccination. This was a way of promoting and increasing freedom of work, freedom of production, freedom of consumption, and so on in a dangerous situation where no one knew the best way to optimize collective wellbeing. More than a communist anti-liberal conspiracy, these formal government measures revealed novel tensions for population management and difficulties for government through freedom and self-regulation.

Calibrating the freedom-security relationship is a task which is difficult as well as never-ending; that is to say, it is a non-static process of the regularization and

[53] López Ruiz et al., "A relação liberdade-governo".

administration of populations. This non-static process includes governmental rationalities that overlap, support, challenge, and fight each other. We have shown how the problem space for government through freedom has been reconfigured in relation to what we can see by looking at the pandemic through the plague-stricken town. From the eighteenth century, grounded in a will to adapt to dangers and espouse both responsibility and resilience, voluntary measures have largely replaced the quarantine as a tactic to promote life. The Covid-19 pandemic, however, elicited and renewed this tactic from the archive of public health armoury. As this essay elicits, the lockdown has a long and complex history. It has satisfied multiple needs and followed different objectives. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the aim of the "plague-stricken town" model was to stop infections and to nullify the disease. During the pandemic, the lockdown was part of a strategy to control the risks of illnesses rather than nullifying them entirely while the freedom-security relationship could be calibrated anew. Additionally, in several countries the lockdown was gradually replaced by a reopening process that included social distancing measures, curfews, household bubbles, indoor capacity limits, and health passes. Furthermore, the lockdown and reopening process were accompanied by the social policies programmed by neoliberal governmentality; basically, a short-term financial support to guarantee a minimum security for a floating population. All these measures were implemented while the vaccination campaigns were being developed with the expectation that Covid-19 would become a post-pandemic endemic disease. Hence, it is possible to decipher the historical continuity, but also the innovativeness, that emerged from the administration of biologized life during the pandemic. This essay highlights that the administration of populations *is a continuous exercise* which has several tensions when it comes to calibrating individual wishes and collective well-being when these two are made increasingly negotiable. For future research, it is important to explore further how freedom and security are balanced and calibrated in novel ways to investigate how an exceptionally fragile relationship between the two has been established since the arrival of the pandemic.

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INTERVIEW

Virus as a figure of geontopower or *how to practice Foucault now*?

A conversation with Elizabeth A. Povinelli

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Elizabeth A. Povinelli, Franz Boas Professor at Columbia University, is a philosopher and anthropologist who has critically engaged with Michel Foucault's ideas as well as scholarship inspired by his works. Povinelli has been dedicated to research on colonialism within liberalism and is also a filmmaker and founding member of The Karrabing Film Collective. The film collective is part of a larger organization of Aboriginal peoples and artists living in the Australian Northern Territory that refuses 'fantasies of sovereignty and property'.[1]

As Povinelli shares with us during the interview, her trajectory was constituted in the middle of the 1980s following her life-changing encounter with the elders in Belyuen in the Australian Northern Territory. In the wake of that encounter, and with urgent issues raised about indigeneity due to changes in Australian law, Povinelli has been working even closer with her Karrabing family. The changes in law both acknowledged Aboriginal peoples' rights to their territory and imposed certain ideas of identity, family and culture, producing an entanglement between rights and government. These efforts to manage differences – cultural, race, gender – are problematized and deciphered in Povinelli's ethnographic work with a focus on how late settler liberalism has been reconfigured with novel expressions of colonialism and imperialism. Now embedded within

[1] Karrabing Indigenous Corporation, Karrabing, https://karrabing.info/mapping, (accessed July 20, 2023)

indigeneity, these problems are continuously under change, leading to new research frontiers inspired by Povinelli's work.

In *Geontologies: Requiem for Late Liberalism*, Povinelli has explored what she analyses as three figures of power (in reference to the four figures of sexuality discussed by Michel Foucault)[2] that have been discernible since the 1960s' political struggles. During this time, new social movements, environmental movements and anti-colonial struggles[3] introduced a whole set of problems that confront different incarnations of liberalism. This moment, which could be understood as leading to increased tensions for governmentality, made other power dynamics apparent. Neither explicable solely with the conceptual tools of biopower nor necropower, Povinelli advances conceptualization of these accentuated power relations through the idea of '*geontopower*':

> The simplest way of sketching the difference between geontopower and biopower is that the former does not operate through the governance of life and the tactics of death but is rather a set of discourse, affects, and tactics used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife.[4]

When late liberalism is analyzed from spaces marked by settler colonialism, it becomes apparent that government through difference is embedded in the geo-ontological distinctions between Life and Nonlife, which authorizes colonial power to deny the status of participants of worlds and forms of life to elements of the territory (such as mountains, rivers or rocks) and to relegate some peoples to the condition of cultural and/or social fossils. The distinction between Life and Nonlife, according to Povinelli, is a very productive one and has been used in colonial spaces to destroy worlds and lives in the name of commodities.

Even though geontopower has long been recognizable from the margins of the Euro-Atlantic world, the discussion about climate change and, most of all, the Anthropocene has made geontopower increasingly visible globally. One of these figures of geontopower is the Virus, which is defined as:

> […] the figure for that which seeks to disrupt the current arrangements of Life and Nonlife by claiming that it is a difference that makes no difference *not because* all is alive, vital, and potent, nor because all is inert, replicative, unmoving, inert, dormant, and endurant. Because the division of Life and Nonlife does not define or contain the Virus, it can use and ignore this division for the sole purpose of diverting the energies of arrangements of existence in order to extend itself. The Virus copies, duplicates, and lies dormant even as it continually adjusts to, experiments with, and tests its circumstances.[5]

Because of the effects of figuring certain events and tactics through the Virus – this Non-life that behaves so it can duplicate and "survive" – Povinelli calls our attention to how it connects to

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[2] When considering Foucault's discussion during the 1975 lectures, it is possible to understand "figure" as that which appears within certain domains (anomalies or sexuality, for example) and as examinable in order to better understand how different systems of power/knowledge come together and lead to new strategic formations. It is neither an abstract idea nor a metaphor but the effect of discursive and non-discursive practices of government at a certain time. Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France 1974-1975* [1999] (2003).

[3] Elizabeth Povinelli, *Geontologies: Requiem for Late Liberalism* (2016).

[4] Povinelli, *Geontologies: Requiem for Late Liberalism*, 17.

[5] Ibid. 36-7.

practices of biosecurity that are invested in closely regulating external and internal frontiers so it always remains possible to recognize the "pathological agent" as soon as possible, preventing it from doing any damage to lives and forms of life protected by biopower.

Having proposed the Virus as a figure of geontopower before the outbreak of what became called the COVID-19 pandemic, Povinelli emphasized the usefulness of her analytical figure for understanding the global effects of Sars-Cov-2 as a biological virus. In an article published in November of 2020, when we were still in the midst of these 're-infected' power relations, she thus clarified how COVID-19 had become:

> a figure of geontology's failure to govern in such a way that the values of capital extraction flow primarily into the white North while the toxicities that are produced along the way remain within the primarily brown and black global South. In other words, the relays between the figure of the Virus and the actual Sars-Cov-2 virus become increasing rapid and ever more important to disentangle.

Here, Povinelli is calling out attention to how the Virus, as a figure of late settler-liberalism, was a mode of rendering visible tactics and practices at work in the margins of the Euro-Atlantic world. Some of those tactics and practices aimed to maintain the very separation between spaces of Life and forms of life valued as important and those that could be explored for their "natural resources", even if this meant (as it often did) extinguishing lives and forms of life. By referring to "geontology's failure", Povinelli seems to suggest that the biological Sars-Cov-2 virus has proved that, in times of climate change, the separation no longer holds, at least not all of the time. That is why a virus confronted parts of the global North with the everyday worries that occupy minds and hearts of people living in the global south: worries about surviving, about conditions of living, getting sick and dying; worries about the very possibility of enduring. During the interview, Povinelli comments on these economies of fatigue; a very operative mode of managing the demands that counter what Rob Nixon has named as slow-violence.[6]

Finally, we would like to highlight two aspects of Povinelli's work that were also brought up during the interview. First, she insists that her reading of Foucault (and other canonical authors) is empirically (and inextricably) connected to the questions raised during interactions with the peoples in Belyuen. The lived experience she has been sharing with them, for almost four decades, brings forth a unique potentiality to re-think power relations.[7] She also comments on this aspect, saying that "In short, geontopower is not a concept first and an application to my friends' worlds second, but a concept that emerges from what late liberal governance looks like from this cramped

[6] Rob Nixon has proposed the concept of slow violence to confront "… conventional assumptions about violence as a highly visible act that is newsworthy because it is event focused, time bound, and body bound" (*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor,* 2011: 3). Thus, the concept aims to render visible the kind of damage that may or may not be associated to a specific event and that unfolds during large periods of time, such as the aftermath of a nuclear bomb or the long-lasting consequences of dam breaks. Ahmann ("It's exhausting to create an event out of nothing": slow violence and the manipulation of time. *Cultural Anthropology* 33:1, 2018) takes the concept to discuss the difficulties of enduring slow violence and organizing against it, referring specifically to the exhaustion of trying to make damage appear as such (in the public sphere or before a legal court); it usually takes a lot of effort to make a case and start the process of responsabilization. Nixon suggests the concept is very pertinent in Anthropocene times as it enlightens "… transnational questions arising from the borderlands between empire, neoliberalism, environmentalism, and social justice" (Nixon, *Slow Violence,* 31).

[7] See also Kevin J. Grove, "Security beyond resilience," *Environment and Planning D: Society & Space* 35:1 (2017).

space".[8] Second, it is important to read her analyses of political consequences as detached from presumed binaries, especially when she is trying to think the Virus as an analytical figure unmarked by moral agency and, therefore, not easily framed in terms of friend-enemy (even if that was the language used by politicians when confronted with the biological virus of Sars-Cov-2). This partly echoes other contemporary authors, such as Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers and Anna Tsing, who have been trying to work with ethics that unfold the ontological and epistemic crises revealed by the Anthropocene. To use Haraway's terms,[9] it is possible to understand Povinelli's attempt to "stay with the problem" and face political dilemmas that appear when thought is embedded in lived experiences of the self and others. This empirical focus differs from how Michel Foucault genealogically traced how things could have been constituted differently. Similarly to Foucault, however, Povinelli does not resort to the pre-existence of conventional binaries, universal *versus* local, good *versus* bad, but rather focuses on the multiple ways in which separations are made between Life and Non-Life (which is not a "natural" one). Beyond Foucault, this perspective opens up for the possible recognition of other, neglected existences and political imaginations of practical importance for communities that wish to take decisions differently. By refusing sovereignty and proprietary thinking as defined by late liberalism, Povinelli shows how other consequences for life and non-life emerge, which highlights potentiality – as yet unknown existences for non-human and more-than-human worlds.

The interview took place online, January 13th, 2023, during two hours of vivid discussions. Povinelli engaged with our questions, bringing to life her encounters with Michel Foucault's work and re-creating a path for her own intellectual interest over the years. A recurrent theme was how she returned to Michel Foucault's works over time to read the same texts differently depending on accumulating lived experience. As she clarifies, she was not mainly orienting her authorial self in accordance with her reading of Foucault as an anthropologist but in accordance with her own becoming as an anthropologist committed to her Karrabing family. It was by sharing their form of life that she could decode the practices and tactics of settler colonial government to then commit to the endurance of the otherwise, not only in the past but also in the future.

INTERVIEW

Beth, thank you so much for engaging with us. We are very happy that this interview is part of this special issue. Maybe we can start with the question of when and how you first encountered Foucault's work?[10]

I have a visual memory of my first encounter with Foucault. It was the first English translation of *History of Sexuality, Vol 1*, I think,[11] published in 1980. The cover was an image of Adam and Eve eating the apple. But I didn't read it in 1980. I was a freshman at St. John's College, Santa Fe, which prides itself on its "great books" curriculum. There's also a campus in Annapolis, Maryland. But Santa Fe was a perfect place to study the Western canon because of its location at the intersection of multiple forms of colonial struggles -- what

[8] *Geontologies*, 18.
[9] Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016).
[10] All questions presented by interviewers are marked in italic. The footnotes were introduced by the interviewee during the process of editing, unless marked otherwise.
[11] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* [1976] (1980).

we then called Hispanic, Anglo and Native Americans, both Navajo and Hopi, maneuvers within the legacies of the US. It was a complex social and political scene. And I was there right before Santa Fe turned into an open-air art mall.

I didn't read Foucault until I arrived at Yale University in 1986 – I think I probably read it in 1987, I can't really remember. I'd never heard of him.

I ended up at Yale after having spent a year in Australia, at the Belyuen Community, a small Indigenous community just across the Darwin harbor in the Northern Territory of Australia. My earliest conversations with the two generations above me, what would be my parents' and grandparents' generations, reminded me of my own paternal grandparents' discussion of our ancestral village in Carisolo, Trentino, Italy, something I have tackled in *The Inheritance*, but for our discussion here it might be interesting for readers to look at "Relations, Obligations, Divergences".[12] Anyways, these generations of Indigenous men and women were in the midst of this very divisive land claim. They were trying to regain control over their lands but had to do so in the context of the federal *Aboriginal Lands Rights (NT) Act, 1976*, heavily influenced by mid-twentieth century conservative social anthropology.[13] Under this Act, Indigenous claimants must be represented by a lawyer and an anthropologist. At the end of my year there, the older women and men asked me to be their lawyer—a profession I had been running away from for a long time. So, they said, why don't you go and become an anthropologist and help us understand white governance? In other words, they didn't want me to study them, but they wanted me to help study settler power. I didn't know what an anthropologist was. Hell, I didn't know what a discipline was. There were no disciplines at St Johns. The only disciplines I really understood were lawyer, doctor and engineer. I asked my younger brother, who I vaguely thought did anthropology (he is a primatologist), and he explained cultural anthropology. So we applied together to various universities. He and I ended up at Yale.

It was at Yale that I ran into Foucault, but not in Anthropology. I encountered him around 1987 through my queer friends that were in English, Comparative Literature, and this new emergent field called queer studies. The copy of *History of Sexuality* that I read was passed from hand to hand. I still have my copy somewhere. The marginalia in it is multiple-authored. Remember, this was at the cusp of portable computers.

Thank you for sharing this encounter, but we would also like to know how it was to read Foucault at this point?

The graduate network at Yale that was passing around *History of Sexuality, Vol* 1 was mainly focused on the question of sexuality rather than biopolitics per se. Obviously one can't separate the two. Still, many of my friends were wondering how the four figures of biopolitics might inflect the emergent idea of queerness as an antinormative form of

[12] Elisabeth Povinelli, *The Inheritance* (2021); Elisabeth Povinelli, "Relations, Obligations, Divergences," *World Records Journal* 7:4 (n/d).

[13] See especially chapters 4 and 5 in Elisabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterity and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (2002).

sociality and sexuality. I was certainly interested in the same, even if, because of why I was in graduate school, namely to become not merely an anthropologist but a thinker whose job would be to study settler governance, I couldn't help but read *History of Sexuality* through this latter problematic, namely ongoing colonialism. So initially I was as interested in how Foucault represented the difference between the "deployment of alliance" and "the deployment of sexuality", namely, governance through kinship, marriage, and descent and governance through the truth of sexuality and pleasure. On the one hand, at the time, we were witnessing a globalization of queer mobility and of liberal gay and lesbian rights—that is, a globalization of two modes of the liberation of sexuality, to use Foucault's language. One focused more on a constant difference from normativity and the other focused more on identity and inclusion. I was and continue to be aligned in this older queer formation for better or worse. In any case, in the global north of the 1980s and 90s, the deployment of sexuality did seem like what comes *after* alliance, like a modern form of sociality, like a new way of making kin through sexuality rather than sexuality being a result of kinship and descent.

But what was felt as a movement forward, as progress, in the global north was felt differently in other regions.

Now, remember, I had only known everybody in Belyuen, Australia for about two or three years when I first started reading Foucault. Still, it was striking how, if you looked at his argument from a colonial point of view—if one shifted from thinking sexuality/biopolitics from a historical framework to a spatial one—alliance appeared in two different ways. First, the deployment of alliance Foucault was discussing was a deployment of a modern theory of alliance on western forms of premodern sociality. Second, this deployment of a western modern theory of itself was then deployed against colonized peoples. It was as if *everyone* everywhere had only two choices—to be within the deployment of alliance (what I would later call the genealogical society) or sexuality (the autological subject).[14] Why were these the two choices? Who said so? Why? How did this division act differently on the colonized and colonizer? Could we read the body outside domination of sexuality and alliance?

That said, I found it very productive to read *The History of Sexuality* against itself, to come to understand it as an account of the West's understanding of itself, as something formed sui generis rather than, as colonial critics like Aimé Césaire noted during the same period, as a counter-formation to its savage actions elsewhere. This way of reading remained useful when I began tackling his lectures on governance of self and others.[15]

So, if we understood your answer in relation to this question on the problematic part correctly, this reading of Foucault demanded you to rethink some of his ideas but, at the same time, it helped you to see some things?

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[14] Elisabeth Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (2006); Elisabeth Povinelli, "Sexual Savages/Sexual Sovereignty: Australian Colonial Texts and the Postcolonial Politics of Nationalism," *Diacritics* 24:2-3 (1994).

[15] Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France 1982–1983* [2008] (2010).

It's one of those moments when one thinks, "Oh, this is not right, but it's not wrong" because it is very accurate in the way modern western sexual subjects project truth into themselves and onto others. So, my question was not, how do we apply Foucault? But, how do we listen to him in a new way? A way that he himself perhaps couldn't hear. I was hardly the only one. Ann Laura Stoler was asking, "where's race and the history of empire?" I was interested in the deployment of western understandings of alliance into settler colonial spaces. How did Foucault's thinking about alliance reflect how anthropologists like Claude Levi-Strauss, one of the towering *fathers* of structuralism that Foucault sought to topple, think about kinship, marriage and descent? How were these and other western models deployed in colonial spaces?

So you think also that, with anthropology, you were able to be closer to lived experience?

Ah, anthropology. I am often asked about anthropology as if it came first and then came my relations with my Indigenous family Belyuen and in Karrabing. But the reverse is true. One of the disciplinary formations of anthropology has been extraordinarily useful to me, to us, namely, the idea that to know a social region one must dwell within it. This foundational methodology could be radicalized from a way of conducting research to a way of sustaining an obligation to a place, a people. It wasn't *anthropology* that forced me to read Foucault in a certain way. It was my Indigenous colleagues who forced me to think differently about him. Let's put the agency where it belongs. Anthropology wasn't the agency that allowed me to engage Foucault in the way I have. It has been the generations of Belyuen Karrabing who made me understand anthropology, Foucault, and western disciplinarity differently. This issue of agent is really important because it forces us to pay attention to whom we are giving power. A discipline or a social world? William James notes a similar point, if in a different context. Who is likely to come up with the concept we need to alter our world—the philosopher who contemplates from his hermetically sealed study or the persons who live its grinding contradictions? And the question is not, merely, where do concepts emerge? But, who has the energy to materialize them?[16]

I became an anthropologist and continued to return every year to Belyuen and their surrounding lands, at increasing rates over the years, because I found myself obligated to a now deceased group of women and their demands on me, then their children, then their children's children and onwards, until now I have great grandchildren to whom I am obligated. I try to think from where they are, how concepts look and work from their worlds and, of course, how I am entangled in them. Was it because, as I mentioned above, they so reminded me of my father's side of the family from Carisolo? Because their vision of ethical conduct with their human and more than human kin so compelled me? Whatever the reason, I think it is very important to ask: who or what are we doing

[16] Elisabeth Povinelli, "The Will to Be Otherwise/The Effort of Endurance," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111:3 (2012).

academic/critical thinking for? How can we use or deform these epistemological tools to redirect agency and effort?

As I said, I didn't encounter Foucault in Anthropology. They didn't teach him there. I knew about his work because my network ran through English and Comparative Literature. When I got to Yale in 1986, anthropology was embroiled in two controversies, the structuralists and culturalists against the Marxists, and the scientists against the writers. Some faculty in the Yale department were trying to combine culture and political economy, others were excellent linguistic anthropologists. I see I have wandered from your question, but I hope this helps make sense of my relation to the discipline.

Yes, I think it's very good, this in-depth description that you gave us, all these different links between these areas. But we also read an article that analyzes your work, and there they presented your concept of 'embagination'.

Yes, *embagination*. That was a quasi-concept I proposed in my first *e-flux* essay.[17]

And because of that we could understand your more multifaceted view. And that was why we got curious about 'lived experience'.

Well, definitely lived experience, located experience, immanent experience. But always also understanding that locations are eddies where various forces are meeting and contesting to determine what form will emerge. Thus the discipline of anthropology is a force that can be used against itself. I can use it as an alibi. I can say, hey, the discipline claims to situate knowledge in the obligations of lived experience. So that's what I am doing. That is my work, to continue to foster this obligation to my Belyuen/Karrabing relations as a way of producing knowledge about settler liberalism. Which can make for awkward encounters, such as when someone asks me what research project I am working on at the moment. My answer is usually some longwinded account of how what we are doing together at the moment makes me, and us, think about settler liberal governance differently. I have no research agenda other than what we are doing together. But we're getting off topic. I should stick to answering your questions.

You already started to share with us some areas of Foucault's work that were problematic for you. Did you try to overcome these problems or did they inspire you to go in some other directions, or both? You said that they were tools for you in that moment, but how did you use them or dismiss them when you saw their limits?

[17] Elisabeth Povinelli, "Routes/World," *E-flux* 27 (2011), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/27/67991/routes-worlds/ (accessed July 14, 2023).

In my first book, *Labor's Lot,* I would have to look, but I don't think I cite Foucault.[18] I might have, I can't remember. [I have now looked, and I do cite him.[19]] In any case, *Labor's Lot* - and then more specifically in *The Cunning of Recognition*[20] - I examine how the law of liberal cultural recognition inserted a particular imaginary of kinship, alliance, and descent into the mechanism of land claims. This is a point that Yellowknives Dene Glen Coulthard would also later brilliantly elaborate in the settler Canadian context.[21] In other words, I encountered a Foucault who was arguing that "we" don't do alliance, we do scientific sexuality. The two figures of the sovereign and the regicide have given way to the four figures of sexuality—the Malthusian couple, the perverse adult, the masturbating child and the hysterical woman—that posed the problematics of biopower. But the problematic that my Indigenous colleagues faced were different. To paraphrase Foucault, what was the governance of self and others from within a settler framework of cultural recognition? Is it simply another iteration of biopolitics? How could this be when one aspect of this mode of governance is an insistence that Indigenous people become a funhouse reflection of the settler imaginary of its own past? So, Foucault was an inspiration in the sense that his understanding of biopower allowed me to see how the spectral governance of kinship, descent and alliance was projected on others as a demand. "You must appear to us through the spectral readings of our own history."

I think you have also approached some of the other questions we posed in this talk about the way anthropology came into your life, the way Foucault came into your life, and your priorities. The important thing here is the rootedness still in the lived experience of these people in previous generations. So maybe we should continue. What do you think are the connections and differences between an approach and an ethical commitment to the otherwise (in the sense you discuss in "The will to be otherwise"),[22] *through archeology and genealogy (discourses, practices and archives) and an anthropological one, if that's a difference that makes sense to you?*

About the ethical commitment to the otherwise… Yes, Foucault sits in the background to my thinking about the ethical commitment, as do the Stoics from my St. John's days, but also the American pragmatist William James. I try to think with obligation more than with commitment, though. When I say commitment, I hear the occluded first person as subject of the action. "I choose to commit." "I have chosen to commit". I have long ago come to accept or admit – admit is the right word, I think, or I came to understand, after struggling with this idea of choosing one's adventure, that the only true choices are ones made around what one finds one has to do; *I cannot but feel I should, must, ought*. So, why do I continue to be committed? I think the most obvious answer is that I have not been willing

[18] Elisabeth Povinelli, *Labor's Lot: The Power, History, and Culture of Aboriginal Action* (1994).
[19] In the Introduction, I note that "while drawing from Foucault's insight that particular forms of knowledge are an aspect of Western power and dominations, this study also attempts to demonstrate the power of Fourth World knowledge to resist domination", Povinelli, *Labor's Lot*, 13.
[20] Povinelli, *Cunning of Recognition.*
[21] Glen Sean Couthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014).
[22] Povinelli, "The Will to Be Otherwise/ The Effort of Endurance,".

or able, or desired, to direct the effort it would take to redirect my dispositif. I could read this as a Foucauldian point of view, the way he tethered ethics to askesis, and askesis to dispositive/habitus/power. The sheer fact of encountering how you are obligated is not ethics. Nor is it merely a reflection of that fact. Rather, ethics is a direction of effort to maintain and deepen this obligation or redirect it. It is not to recognize who you truly are in a given dominant discourse but to direct energy into that which is in actuality or immanently otherwise to this discourse.

Because settler colonialism is a force of relationality—I am thinking here of Edouard Glissant's work—the otherwise will have multiple actual and possible forms depending on where you sit in relation to it. I was very taken by Luce Irigaray's[23] approach, for instance, to the question of the other woman. If the woman is just the other man, then we must pull into being the other of that other. And yet, I kept thinking about the difference between a western subject pulling into being the otherwise within being and an Indigenous subject's, my Belyuen/Karrabing colleagues', effort to keep a way of being obligatory, palpable, ethically and socially relevant. This struggle to endure is creative, mobile, strategic because it is in a constant relation to ongoing settler maneuvers. It is philosophy as practice, as askesis, as Pierre Hadot would say — the classics philosopher who was influential to Foucault's rethinking of pleasure. Philosophy not as a discipline but as a way of life. Anthropology not as a discipline but as a way of life. But we should never think that what western subjects must do to create another way of life—an otherwise—is the same as what Indigenous subjects must do to keep their way of life. The strategies, analytics, and tactics are different because of, again I am thinking of Glissant here, the sedimentational history of colonialism.

These issues are also central to our Karrabing practice.

You are also bringing other thinkers and putting them in relation to Foucault, and we think that is also what we wanted to do in the Special Issue because sometimes scholarship can have troubles to think beyond Foucault.

Yes. You know, the first time I experienced the real stakes of the finite was when I read the last available writing of William Faulkner. I read a lot when I was a little puppy. I chewed through a whole field of authors. I had a high school teacher who would give me a list and bang: I was off. I remember the effects of realizing there was no more Flannery O'Connor I could read, there was no more Faulkner. I grew up in the South, so I was reading all these crazy white people. I have thoughts about them now, but then it was the sheer fact that they were dead, and so they could not produce anything else unless there's *that* little piece of paper in an archive somewhere… I would feel like this with other authors, certainly James Baldwin. But this is my entry to finitude. So, I get when people are hanging on the word, and then there's no more words to come. That being said… of all people, Foucault? He's the one that gets me to remember that, hello, there is no author. I mean, he was really great with that. All these *guys*, these guys in the big French guy

[23] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* [1974] (1985).

tradition, he was one of the ones who said *there's no author*; *there's no text* – also Bakhtin. Texts are the echoes of echoes of people remembered, forgotten, intentionally excluded.

Listening to what you said, Elizabeth, regarding this commitment to be otherwise, I was thinking about this whole project of decoloniality studies. So, when we think of going beyond Foucault, expanding the horizon for Foucault Studies – I think, in my location of being in the global South, so to speak, I read Foucault from my situated life experience, which is what postcolonial thinkers have been talking about, this argument of a commitment to be otherwise. So, do you find an alignment with postcolonial thinkers? And, talking about going beyond Foucault, I think Dipesh Chakrabarty has been talking about this concept of climate and capital, bringing them together. And also Donna Haraway… you talk about indigenous thinkers, but I find it really productive to bring thinkers like Haraway, who also made the slogan of "make kins, not babies"[24] *and ideas like that; I think this is amazingly radical, and I really find it very productive to think the simultaneity of all these things; Foucault, Haraway and your work on geontologies.*[25] *How would you look at it? Because this whole idea of looking into the problem of the governance of life or the neoliberal forces and otherwise, it comes to this idea of alternative imagination, looking in different corners of the world - and that is the whole idea of being decolonial. So, do you think that it is time for decolonial and Foucauldian studies, and decolonial critical thinking?*

Yes. I hope that my work has helped to do just that – to decolonize critical thinking. I took this task as part of what the older Belyuen men and women were asking me to do when they asked me to help understand the perversions of settler cultural recognition. I can't control how people read my work, but it is intended as a relentless critique of the limits of western critical thought, including authors I hold dear—Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Peirce, James—because of how they embody very specific epistemological sedimentations of colonialism even as they may help us see those sediments. I would say my first three books, *Labor's Lot*, *The Cunning of Recognition*, and *The Empire of Love*, mapped a cartography of the settler politics of recognition—and, of course, my recent *The Inheritance*. Then, starting with *Economies of Abandonment* and continuing through *Between Gaia and Ground*, I foreground more explicitly the limits of western critical thought when viewed from the other side of the colonial relation. I am currently working on a book that examines semiotics in the wake of geontopower.

Perhaps because of my background in philosophy, I have been particularly concerned with how a certain desire for an ontological grounding, independent of the colonial sedimentations that constitute the ground we walk on, eat from, share with the more-than-human, give lie to the distinction between life and nonlife et cetera, continually creeps back into critical work. We cannot begin from nowhere/notime—which is what beginning with universal claims do—to get where we need to go. I love Dipesh's work on the climate

[24] Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6:1 (2015).
[25] *Geontologies.*

of history.[26] Although he doesn't explicitly say so, his argument that climate collapse is happening to all of us but not in the same way sits alongside his argument that "we" are experiencing a crisis of epochal consciousness in such a way that we must add "but we are not experiencing this crisis in the same way". In *Between Gaia and Ground*, I suggest that between the colonized and colonizing worlds of climate change is the relation between those who experience it as part of the ancestral catastrophe of colonialism and those who experience it as a coming catastrophe. I hear Haraway in a similar way. I don't hear her making a universal statement when she says that we all need to make kin not babies, because many peoples have long made kin with what in the west is thought of as the more-than-human world; kin who refuse the geontological division of life and nonlife.

Just trying to connect with your answer to Anindya, I have a note from Economies of Abandonment[27] where you say that, for you, the biopolitical is not a space but a spacing. So, maybe just to get back to your reading of Foucault, could you tell us a bit about that and then we can move to the questions about Covid?

So, *Economies of Abandonment* was trying to say, "I love you guys, but I am fed up. I've been fed up for a long time". You know? You can love someone and just say "Stop it, just look at how the location of your thought affects not only your thought, but your desire, and the deforming force of your desire on others." So, on the one hand is the space from which one's thought emerges. On the other hand is the determination of another space so that *it* can give you what you desire. In terms of this second space, *Economies* was particularly interested in the critical desire for radical forms of *homo sacer*, say, the muselmann. These forms of radical abandonment were figured as the space in which a political otherwise can emerge. And yet there was little critical interest in the, what shall I say?, the reality of these spaces. At least William James had sense enough to not affirm two things at that same time—that the location that can give us the concepts we need are the very spaces that power has so dominated that the effort of endurance—the need to become an obdurate thing—is the first condition. Hope gives way to stubbornness. A space opens for different affects as well as tactics of the otherwise. This space is, of course, related to the space in which the biopolitical emerged, namely, a colonial space in which biopolitics can be seen as a disavowed relationship to ongoing colonialism. Achille Mbembe's essay "Necropolitics"[28] was, of course, crucial to our understanding of this disavowed history. But I think the necropolitical is embedded in geontological governance.

And this is the second kind of *spacing* that interests me—the *bionto* and the *geonto*, a spacing with a long genealogy in Western philosophy but is weaponized during the colonial period to differentiate between dynamic and inert people and things and thereby legitimate the violence of colonial extraction and settlement. So, obviously, when I read Foucault's thinking about the separation of two modes of governance—sovereign power

[26] Dipesh Chakarabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Enquiry* 35:2 (2009).
[27] Elisabeth Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (2011b).
[28] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15:1 (2003).

and biopower—I saw these as operating on one side of geontopower, as geontopower, the terror of the inert, as animating the governance of life and death in sovereign power and biopower. Geontopower makes it appear as if some forms of existing are merely affected by external forces, all the while making them inert both in a discursive and praxis sense. So that's the second kind of spacing. It is a rather long conversation, maybe we could now turn to the questions about the pandemic.

Yes! So, what are your views on the COVID 19 pandemic? Do you think of it from a specific perspective – from a specific ontological or epistemological position?

I approached the pandemic as I approach any socioecology: what is "the pandemic" from where I'm sitting, what does it look like, what is it doing, to whom, and under what conditions of governance? And, how is the governance of this event? What's the source or the conditions of its emergence? Where does it look like an event? Where like an "ongoingness"? Is it signaling a new form of governance or a new angle on how we understand the forms of governance we are within? Will it change the orientation of a coming governance—for whom, what, et cetera? More concretely, given our above discussion, how did the pandemic ripple through the geographies of biopolitics and alliance, the lively and the inert?

We think it would be great if you could briefly present us the three figures of geontopower – the Virus, the Animist and the Desert. Do you think those figures can help our understanding of the COVID 19 pandemic and the reactions to it?

Okay, in *Geontologies* I propose three figures, tactics and strategies that can characterize the western imaginary as geontopower's grip on legal regimes, disciplines, and markets shake – the Virus, the Animist, the Desert. Let me clarify what I mean when I say, "the wake of geontopower." First, I am not arguing that biopower came first, then came geontopower, and, now, as geontopower has revealed itself to be a form of governance rather than a description of nature, a new form of power, say viral power, is emerging. We can trace the roots of the separation of bios and geos, the biontological and geontological, back to the Greek if we wanted. But this division and its political functions have had dispersed deployments and effects. I am interested in how it was weaponized, as I said above, during the initial colonial invasions, the European invasions, of the world. I am interested in how this division was rotated into a hierarchy of human societies, those most "lively' (so Europeans claim that they were a progressive, dynamic civilization) and those grossly "inert" (for instance, settler descriptions of Indigenous people in Australia as stone age people). I want to understand how this division was used to justify the extraction of labor, life, lands, kin and more than human kin. How the West could feel that ripping apart worlds was "progress." It was certainly sovereign power claiming the right to determine who could be slaughtered, but this sovereign power became entangled within the justificatory frameworks of geontopower fairly immediately, say, in the Valladolid debates. As

nationalism began to ground the governance of self in biopower, geontopower dug deeper into the governance of others.

Second, as the crisis of climate collapse grows ever more present to the affluent west, the governance of existence through the separation of Life and Nonlife is not working for those it was designed to work. If, as I am arguing, geontopower is primarily a discursive infrastructure to the general economies of extraction and distribution, if it functions to extract and process materials seen as valuable to liberal capitalism, taking the purified material into their bodies and cites and leaving, or sequestering, the toxic tailings in colonies and racialized spaces, then this system is not working anymore. The geontological toilet is overflowing into lands made pure by turning others into wastelands.

So, when I say "in the wake of geontopower", I am trying to conjure this waste system and what it was designed to do. If we remember these two points, then I think we remember to be very wary of fixes to climate change or to the multiple crises coming; the figure of the virus, and the way Covid was approached, being two of these. And so, my suggested figures of geontopower's wake are not exits but symptoms of western discourse as it tries to reground its legitimacy. I'm paraphrasing Foucault: his four figures and strategies of sexuality weren't exits from biopower: they were the figures and strategies through which western *savoirs* were working out their anxieties, working out the internal logics of their own power.

While I am very cautious around embracing these figures, I know that they can be radically invaded—here I am thinking of the artistic practice of Sarah Rosalena, whose 2018 exhibition titled *the desert, the animist and the virus* portrayed characters located in the depth of the desert who refuse the invasion logics of settler imaginaries of Life and Nonlife.

I think our Karrabing Film Collective[29] made a similar intervention in our 2018 film, *Mermaids, or Aiden in Wonderland.*[30] *Mermaids* is set in a near future toxic world. White people can no longer venture outside without beginning to decompose. But Indigenous people can and do. So, we asked ourselves, what would white people do under these circumstances? The answer – they would take Indigenous children and experiment on them as they tried to extract whatever elements within Indigenous sacred sites were protecting the people who belonged to them.

When Covid hit, people asked me, how did you know the virus was coming? And they asked similar questions about *Mermaids*. How did Karrabing know something like Covid was coming? The answer is that the formation of geontopower is readily apparent in

[29] The Karrabing Film Collective was created in 2007, and it is an intergenerational group, based in the Northern Territory in Australia, that has been using film-making and other media to call attention to and interrogate the experience of Aboriginal peoples. In our conversation, Povinelli refers to the collective as "a group of people who started making films, films that are for the lending of energy to try to keep this other way of being in relation to land and the more than human world going". The movie mentioned by her, "presents a picture of the possible futures that will result from industrial toxicity". Ida Pisani, Prometeo Gallery, http://www.prometeogallery.com/en/artist/elizabeth-povinelli-karrabing-film-collective (accessed June 25, 2023). [Note from the interviewers].

[30] For more information about their work, see Karrabing indigenous corporation, Karrabing, www.karrabing.info, (accessed July 30, 2023). [N.I].

Indigenous worlds. The virus, territorial transformations leading to an unheralded deathscape, is not a coming catastrophe there. It is the ongoing ancestral catastrophe. There one knows that the politics of the virus depends on how you are situated in relation to its governance.

This goes back to points I tried to make in *Empire of Love* and *Economies of Abandonment*. If you are designated the Virus, or self-designate, you will experience the entire infrastructure of power reorienting to exterminating you. You might be "pure potentiality" but, as Foucault also noted in *The Governance of Self and Others* (2010), your ability to survive let alone endure long enough to spread and determine existence would be miraculous. The Otherwise is the virus but the politics of endurance is always only proximate to the virus. As I noted in *Economies of Abandonment*, the politics of late liberal governance and countertactics are always vacillating between camouflage and espionage, and always erupting in foundational moments of decision. Do I want to alter myself slighted to (co)exist? Am I willing to let a new viral form transform existence even when I will cease to exist? Can I get out of the framework of friend and enemy, the logics of colonial bellicose, even as I exit the liberal lie that everything can just coexist within each other. Remember how we were told that we were in a war with Covid. The metaphors of this war got very floral, certainly out of the mouth of the governor of New York, which is where I was for half of the pandemic. Some say we won the war. Some say we have learned how to coexist with the Covid virus. I think that's true if we forget that to coexist we have to remain blind to those who cannot and if we ignore the ways that the virus has hastened a massive disruption of the global system—its markets, its modes of coexistence and conviviality, et cetera.

So, we understood that you see it as very processual. But also, we think you said, Elizabeth, that you experience that one could have one's own relationship to the virus and not subjectify it.

On the one hand, I guess for me the *figure* of the Virus could be helpful to try to understand this particular virus. How does Covid show that viral power is and is not an exit from geontopower? On the other hand, it's helpful for me to use the actual virus as a space for thinking about an ethics of extinguishment as different from a discourse of war. How might the actual virus allow us to develop an ethics of extinguishment outside of the discourse of friend and enemy that has dominated political theory and medical imaginaries. I cannot but help think here with Spinoza as much as my Indigenous colleagues—if everything has the same right to exist, seeks to continue to exist and "understands" its existence within the milieu it helped create and depends on, how can I ethically extinguish it, and/or, what relation should I have to it when I do so? I think Zoe Todd, a Mètis critical theorist and artist, raises these exact questions in "Fish, Kin, and Hope".[31] There she confronts how to reawaken a caring relation with Mètis, say oil sands, that have been weaponized as petroleum byproducts killing other relations in her ancestral creeks and rivers. How to approach relationality outside discourses of enemy and war?

[31] Zoe Todd, "Fish, Kin and Hope: Tending to Water Violations in amiskwaciwâskahikan and Treaty Six Territory," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 43 (2017).

This becomes even harder when we don't feel or see any relation to folks like Trump, Bolsonaro, Putin, Macron, Meloni; to transphobic, misogynist and homophobic evangelicals, to white supremacists. How do I look at them and say, *you know, I'm going to work to make you not exist, to make the conditions of existence such that you're not a possibility in it* without turning them into an enemy, a freak, a virus, a terrorist, any of the terms we use to deny that within their milieu you are the same—and more—that this discourse, these affects, are *from their milieu*? I don't want these affects. Without them I may seem a cold blooded killer. But this is because ethical affects of extinguishment outside a discourse of war are being defined by *a discourse of war*.

In some ways, I am recalling the debate between Habermas and Foucault. Do we need a normative horizon even if this horizon is internally dependent and dynamically related to public reason? Perhaps. But I have been thinking through a conceptualization of "obligation" which would refuse the division of public and moral reason[32] and would understand that the right to exist and the need to extinguish can never be separated. Why have I tried to think/practice this form of ethics? Because it slows me down. Because it opens me to thinking I might need to give way to others if they are to have a way. Who do I want to have a way?

It's a very important answer this one, very interesting. And we have invited you to this interview to learn, in-depth, about your way of thinking. So, we will just ask something more related to what you are saying here. You recognize that a friend-enemy discourse is the dominant political framework, and then you bring Foucault, Spinoza, and others to think, "ok, what are the possibilities?" And that is even another way of thinking. But when one brings it into the dominant friend-enemy discourse, it is difficult not to be trapped there. And you also ask the question, "is it possible then to take this ground and go from here?" – which is quite impressive – that you have thought through this to find a positive way of rooting yourself in 'friend-enemy' even if that would relate to that particular discourse. I would totally just avoid it. I wouldn't go there because I would see myself as being drawn into a way of thinking that I don't want to affirm.

Well, yes, nobody wants to go there, right? But the question is, then, how do you make decisions about getting rid of something? When you're going to get rid of something, you can simply not think about what you're doing – you can just not worry about the ethics of it or the conditions of your action. But if we really want to go back to the theme of this special issue, how to practice Foucault now, that is the question. Perhaps because my white family was and my Karrabing family are hunters…maybe I am in what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro called a predator/prey mentality rather than a friend/enemy mentality. I know that nothing wants to be eaten; everything resists being disturbed from its milieu—fish, rock, tides, animals. And yet we must eat, dwell, et cetera and in doing disturb. So how do you go about killing something, extinguishing something, pulling it up, eating it, uprooting, changing the composition ethically?

I try to take the worse-case scenario for me, Bolsonaro, Meloni, Trump et cetera…

[32] *The Cunning of Recognition.*

Yes, it is, of course, very good to hear your perspective. But, you know, one can also teach them to think of getting rid of themselves. But good luck, of course, in practice… What do you think will be the legacy of the pandemic in terms of, you know, actualities and governance? As an exercise of imagination…

I love that—teach them to get rid of themselves…but, again, just to press the point, they exist as and in relation to the milieu of war, but that doesn't mean I have to, nor does it mean I am a pacifist. On whether we'll see a wild transformation of the governance of self/other, markets, ecologies, I am of two minds. On the one hand, I think we are already seeing this. So, I myself do not think we are still within Late Liberalism. The pandemic heightened the disturbance of global supply chains, the basis of a neoliberal markets. These supply chains were under attack by the likes of Trump before the pandemic, but the pandemic globalized the problem and made it a problem to solve—thus the rhetoric of derisking supply chains. Likewise, the pandemic has seen many people, who have the economic wherewithal to do so, reflect on what shape they want their work to take in relation to what kind of life they want to be living. And, for a moment, we have been witnessing the power of labor to determine wages. We are also seeing, however, the banks raising interest rates to increase unemployment as part of their inflation fight—trying to stifle the power of labor to increase wages. We are seeing bosses trying to push people back to work. We are seeing the flight from cities and a consequent diminution of the sharing economies that emerged in them during the pandemic. And we hear of pandemic fatigue.

Fatigue. For a moment, those who had never experienced the soul-wrecking fatigue of death and possible death did. They didn't like it. No one does. But I do think this rage around pandemic fatigue—the jouissance of consumerism that many engaged in as a remedy – just emphasizes for me that some people have lived their lives and continue to think that their lives should be lived outside the economies of fatigue. The economy of fatigue that is created when every day I worry if I am going to survive. Are my children going to be alive tomorrow, my parents and grandparents? If my grandparents lived long enough for me to know them, if my parents did? This is an economy of fatigue that Karrabing, and many other black brown and Indigenous people know intimately. It is hard to get people to understand this kind of fatigue as a way of life in ongoing racist settler governance. So, while I think there are structural and affective disturbances, I also see various personal, state and market maneuvers that are trying to reentrench the distribution of fatigue that is part and parcel of the long arm of colonialism.

Do you think that the lived experience with and after the COVID 19 pandemic has introduced new aesthetics with consequence to the Virus as a figure of geontopower?

You know, it's super interesting… I am a visitor in spaces of critical artistic practice. I find them really interesting, strange, inspiring. They are very heterotopic, including people

who make things, objects of art, hoping that the art object will inspire a different way of being together. Others are more focused on askesis—focused on producing events that help train people to be progressively together. In this critical space, askesis and aesthetics have gotten into interesting complexly blurred relationships. Askesis as the arts of self and other; aesthetics as artworks oriented towards a progressive politics.

Prior to Covid, Animism was an important topic in these spaces, both those producing objects and those producing events (happenings)—and, also, just to make everything more complicated than it has to be, right before Covid we saw certain progressive art institutions increasingly interested in art collectives rather than individual artists. But, after the last *Documenta*, we are also in the midst of a backlash against not collectives per se but a way of practicing art based from those outside the north; those who see the intersection of askesis and aesthetics as first and foremost as political and ecological exercises meant to interrupt and reverse the organization of geontopower. The nonwestern focused collective as a decolonizing machine is really super interesting. Some are under assault, but this assault is intensifying the spaces of geontopower we were just discussing.

I think these works seem new and shocking to some. But, again, as we've been saying, from the perspective of the ancestral catastrophe of colonialism, they are the perfect weave and warp.

I completely agree. I mean, I have some questions on your idea of Geontologies. I find it interesting in terms of connecting it with the Indian eco-feminist thinker Vandana Shiva's idea of art-democracy. I find it really interesting how it relates to your distinction between the animate and the inanimate, the rock, the planetary... Listening to you and reading your work, I think that we can expand Foucault's idea of biopolitics in the realm of the planetary because it very much involves the question of the planet, and, if not, a colonization of the social and the bio *is very much the colonization of the life or the entire planetary in question.*

Perhaps it not only planetary, because at heart the geontological framework of biopower is a kind of *monetary* practice that doesn't allow itself to be bound to our planet. And all of these, planetary, monetary and solar practices stubbornly continue to reentrench themselves in the grounds of colonialism. Literally. Thus we hear about having to accept that there will be zones of abandonment; places that will need to become unlivable to save life. And yet, where are these zones? In places that colonialism have already wrecked. Likewise, where will we locate the massive earth wrecking lithium and cobalt mines? Primarily in colonized spaces.

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REVIEW ESSAY

Metamorphosis of Biopolitics. A Foucauldian Ecological Perspective and the Challenge of the Pandemic: A Review Essay of Ottavio Marzocca, *Biopolitics for Beginners. Knowledge of Life and Government of People*

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ABSTRACT. This paper is a review essay of Ottavio Marzocca, *Biopolitics for Beginners. Knowledge of Life and Government of People*, Milan/Udine: Mimesis International, 2020. Pp. 457. ISBN: 9788869771781 (paperback). It focuses on Marzocca's investigations into biopolitics, a topic of which the author offers an original ecological reconfiguration. The proposed reflections, which address the recent pandemic crisis of COVID-19, are developed from the work of Foucault but are not limited to this thinker. In fact, they offer an articulate examination of the issue by also taking into broad consideration the thought of authors such as Giorgio Agamben, Antonio Negri, Roberto Esposito, Jacques Donzelot, Robert Castel, Pierre Rosanvallon, Nikolas Rose, Melinda Cooper and Gregory Bateson.

Keywords: Biopolitics, health crisis, ecological perspective, environmental changes, COVID-19, capitalism, neoliberal governmentality.

Our historical era decrees the relevance of analyses on biopolitics. Without running the risk of exaggeration, we can state that the issue of biopolitics has never been more topical than it is today. The present is indeed marked by the emergence of a pandemic – the first of the third millennium – and an unexpected health crisis. Both these events place biopolitics as a central and strategic form of government.

It is precisely in this context, a real testing ground, that the validity, accuracy, and originality of the research produced by Ottavio Marzocca in his latest work, *Biopolitics for Beginners. Knowledge of Life and Government of People*, unfolds. It is a work which introduces elements useful to "beginners" (as the very title of the book suggests, which can be considered “modest or ambitious, ironic or serious” p. 12) and to more discerning readers, as

well. In fact, it may be of interest to both students and scholars with expertise in Political Philosophy, Science, and Political Sociology as it addresses: "issues that have gathered around the theme of biopolitics, starting from the most basic and trying to clarify those more complex" (p. 11). Hence the author's hope to offer "clear references to move on this terrain which – also because of what the pandemic has forced us to think – cannot be abandoned so easily". (pp. 11-12). In fact, it seems clear that Marzocca confronts the materiality of a phasing out and phasing in of two different eras: the pre-COVID-19 and the post-Covid-19. In this regard, the incipit of the work could not be more paradigmatic: "The writing of this book began in one era and ended in another. Considering the month and year (June 2020) in which this text was completed, one can guess the reason" (p. 11). In short, it is a threshold or, put differently, a kind of Gramscian interregnum in which the old is dying and the new cannot be born: a challenge as much for Marzocca as for the reader, who, from the very first pages, cannot help but have the impression of being confronted with an analysis that captures the *Zeitgeist* of a precise political, cultural and philosophical scenario.

Actually, this is not the first time Marzocca has grappled with the issue of biopolitics. He is undoubtedly one of the scholars who has approached this topic with greatest sophistication. In his works, he has captured the complexity of this theoretical knot and its developments, particularly within the work of Michel Foucault. It is therefore not surprising that the French philosopher is also referred to in this book not only as an author capable of offering a wide range of approaches to think differently about the pandemic but also as the key thinker in reflections on biopolitics and ultimately in the connections between these two cruxes (a correlation that is also developed by Daniele Lorenzini).[1] In fact, it was Foucault who established the link between biopolitics and modernity, investigating biopolitics both starting from the developments of modern medicine and the medicalization of society in the 18th century and in relation to the "hegemony that economic rationality exercises on the ways of governing modern societies" (p. 12). As Marzocca points out, in Foucault's perspective, medicine takes on a political role related to the emergence and transformations of capitalism. At the same time, with reference to COVID-19, we can observe how the mere pursuit of profit has caused enormous difficulties – if not the collapse – of many public health systems (unable to withstand the impact of the pandemic), highlighting the consequences related to the functioning and perpetration of biopolitical or, more precisely, thanatopolitical manoeuvres.

Even more specifically, in the first chapter Marzocca dwells in depth on the analysis of a number of Foucauldian works from the 1970s – not only, as it is easy to guess, "*Society Must Be Defended*" and the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, both from 1976, but also,

[1] See Daniele Lorenzini, "Biopolitics in the Time of Coronavirus," *Critical Inquiry* 47:S2 (2021), S40-S45. Furthermore, consider that Marzocca also developed some aspects of the relationship between pandemic and biopolitics in the following texts: Ottavio Marzocca, "Sorveglianza globale e metropoli pandemica. Attualità e genealogia di un disastro," *Scienze del Territorio* (2020), 18-28; Ottavio Marzocca, "Pandemia, protezione della vita, ecologia: Smarrimenti del biopotere," *Politics. Rivista di Studi Politici* 15:1 (2021), 183-197.

for example, earlier works such as the conferences given in Brazil in 1974, even though the term biopolitics does not explicitly appear in them. Especially in these texts, in fact, Foucault shows how, since the 18th century, a twofold focus has developed: both on the lives of individuals (through disciplines) and on the lives of the population understood as a species (through policies regulating biological processes). In effect, taking charge of life becomes a privileged object of the exercise of power. Therefore, a "set of knowledge, techniques and strategies that give rise to a *bio-politics*, i.e., to the exercise of a power over life, a *bio-power*" (p. 36) is developed.

It should also be considered that, on the basis of the heterogeneous combination of biopolitical forms of government and sovereign power, another phenomenon took shape from the second half of the 19th century that Foucault recognizes as historically determined: "state racism" (of which Nazism is the most extreme and violent example). In this case, the power of life is transformed into the power of death. In fact, it is a specific condition in which some people, deemed dangerous to the collective health and welfare, are killed or left to die in the name of protecting the social body. More generally, it should also be observed that the (political) process of medicalization, not only of the body but also of the soul, as in the case of the "establishment of psychiatry as a specific field of medical knowledge" (p. 56), has probably had positive consequences but certainly also uncontrollable and therefore negative side effects. In fact, one of the issues that runs through all of Marzocca's work, related to a consciously ecological viewpoint – also used in relation to the analysis of the pandemic – is based on questioning the ecosystemic effects of medicalization, as the environment is recognized as external to life itself.

Marzocca also notes that "the biopolitical link between strategies to protect society and attention to the fate of the population as a living species" (p. 65) is also important in courses at the Collège de France *Security, Territory, Population* (1977-1978), *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978-1979), and *On the Government of the Living* (1979-1980). However, what assumes centrality in these works is above all another connection, namely, between biopolitics and "the complex of theories and political practices that the author indicates with the term governmentality" (p. 65). With reference to modern forms of political government, Foucault notes that knowledge and techniques of political administration are developed in order to strengthen the state and the social body. Biopolitics thus becomes one of the forms of expression of governmentality, from which it follows that investigating the dimension of government is crucial for understanding the emergence of biopolitics. At the same time, precisely in this historical context, we also observe the prevalence of security mechanisms over sovereign and disciplinary power and the establishment of a close connection between security and freedom (fostered by the political regime of liberalism). As Marzocca effectively points out, from this "we can deduce not only that (…) the nucleus of modern governmentality is essentially economic, but also that biopolitics is, in a sense, functional and complementary to the economic rationality of this governmentality" (p. 76).

The first chapter of the book therefore helps us to grasp how necessary it is to start precisely from Foucault, and his original, historically situated elaboration of biopolitics,

in order to move in the most diverse directions of philosophical and political debate. In this sense, and precisely in the footsteps of the French thinker, in the second and third chapters, Marzocca devotes some attention to the criticality of those positions that develop a metahistorical analysis of biopolitics. In this regard, an important node of the book's arguments is related to the refutation of the assumptions that have understood Ancient Greek political thought as the promoter or precursor of biopolitics. On the contrary, it is instead necessary to recognize, firstly, that in the classical era "the natural necessities of life were generally excluded from political activities" (p. 86); secondly, that economics has taken on political importance only in modernity, that is, only in this era has economics led to considering life as one of the main goals of politics.

Marzocca's critique addresses in particular the reflections of the Finnish thinker Mika Ojakangas, according to whom one can speak of the origins of biopolitics with reference to both Aristotle and Plato. Drawing on some of Hannah Arendt's analyses, in line with those of Foucault and delving into their insights, Marzocca, on the other hand, shows how, in the case of Aristotle – with particular reference to *The Politics* – "the power exercised in the domestic dimension for the preservation of life was not a political power, but rather a *prepolitical* power" (p. 88). Moreover, even if one recognizes "a biopolitical flavor" (p. 132) in Aristotle's intentions to exclude a large portion of inhabitants from citizenship, one must also consider that such discriminations are aimed at "certain activities rather than specific social figures" (p. 129). With respect to Plato, Marzocca accurately addresses the hypothesis that – especially in *The Republic* but also in the *Statesman* and the *Laws* – it would be possible to find a biopolitical thought with reference to the issues of procreation (and thus eugenics), the family, human nature, education, the role of medicine, and the comparison between the ruler and the shepherd. What is at stake, for Marzocca, is to avoid oversimplification and instead demonstrate that "Plato has as his main aspiration not the constitution of a healthy and strong social organism in terms of physical power and biological integrity, but the formation of a political community in which the conditions of virtue and attention to what is common are actually created and endure" (p. 102).

Giorgio Agamben too – whose theses capture Marzocca's attention because "at the beginning of the pandemic of 2020 he [problematically – author's note] denounced (…) the danger for democracy" in establishing a state of emergency "to face the contagion" (p. 425)[2] – finds the foundation of biopolitics in Ancient Greece. Moreover, together with Antonio Negri and Roberto Esposito, he is one of the main references in the biopolitics debate from the 1990s onwards. The third chapter of the book is devoted to these three authors, who testify to the "vivacity that Italian philosophical research on biopolitics has expressed in recent decades" (p. 143). The interaction between Foucault's and Arendt's analyses leads Agamben to consider the camp (not exclusively that of the Nazi experience) as the biopolitical paradigm of modernity and biopolitics – always destined to turn into thanatopolitics – as "the essential form of the modern exercise of power" (p. 146). More precisely, according to Agamben, the entire Western political thought has a biopolitical

[2] See Giorgio Agamben, *Where Are We Now: The Epidemic as Politics* (2021).

vocation because of the separation between *zoé* (the sphere of natural life) and *bios* (the sphere of political life) – it was not by chance, in this author's opinion, that during the pandemic we can observe the reduction of life to a purely biological state, in connection with the enactment of an unlimited securitarian biopolitics implemented in the name of risks that cannot be effectively determined. In fact, the division between *zoé* and *bios* constitutes "the condition that authorizes politics to make life itself the material to be politically qualified and transformed, that is to say to be bio-politicized" (p. 148). Therefore, one can see how much Agamben's reflections diverge from those of Arendt and, more importantly – for the purposes of Marzocca's analysis – from those of Foucault. In particular, according to Agamben, what prevented Foucault from considering the paradigmatic biopolitical importance of the camp was his failure to recognize that the core of biopower is sovereign power: the former is inscribed in the latter. While for Foucault, in fact, there is a heterogeneity between biopower and sovereignty, for Agamben, on the contrary, these present a structural connection. Fundamentally, for Marzocca, it is thus a matter of observing that Agamben's analyses – which pose theoretical problems that are specifically investigated in the book – lead, on one hand, to the removal of specificities among different political forms and, on the other, to their reduction to a mere exercise of sovereign power. In this way, therefore, reference to Foucauldian genealogical analyses is lost.

Actually, although for different reasons, Negri's analysis also risks losing many of the results of the genealogical research developed by Foucault. For Negri, in fact, in the age of globalization it is necessary, on the one hand, to distinguish between biopower (mechanisms of power exercised over life) and biopolitics (processes of subjectification of the multitude) and, on the other hand, to observe that Foucault "was not able to fully appreciate the ontological importance of production" (p. 167). According to Marzocca, this interpretation is actually marked by the pronounced Marxist imprint of Negri's thought, which views productive power as inherently biopolitical and, consequently, "the immediate productive involvement of life itself; which (...) also constitutes an immediate possibility for labour to produce autonomous and free subjectivities, capable of resisting and avoiding the dominion of capital" (p. 169). In this way, Negri comes to recognize the labor of the multitude – embedded in a biopolitical dimension – as a source of ethical-political practices of subjectification: an operation that would hardly have been accepted by Foucault.

Unlike Agamben and Negri, Esposito seems to follow a more distinctly Foucauldian line in linking biopolitics and biomedical knowledge. In fact, again and while granting several merits to Esposito's analysis, Marzocca notes that things are more complex, and there is a risk of putting life at the center of politics uncritically. For Esposito, it is a matter of making up for Foucault's lack of clarification of the reasons why biopolitics in some cases turns into thanatopolitics in order to reverse this trend. The aim is to outline an affirmative biopolitics that can consider life and politics not as separate spheres but rather in their inextricability. The paradigm used by Esposito to indicate the fluctuations between biopolitics as power that preserves and biopolitics as power that destroys is that of "immunity", which allows us to grasp the essential relationship between life and death in

modern politics. It substantially involves recognizing "the tendency of society to immunize itself in order to protect itself from the dangers of disintegration" (p. 178), as well as considering the issue of immune privilege granted to some individuals and not to others (particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic). In this way, *communitas* is preserved through *immunitas*, which is both its complementary and negative form. Marzocca also points out that, although the immunization paradigm leads to a focus on the problem of the "genetic calculations" inherent in contemporary biopower (a topic to which the book's author devotes special attention, particularly in chapter five), nevertheless it very often proves insufficient. It is not, in fact, simply a matter of overturning the thanatopolitical inclinations of biopolitics but of problematizing the political use of genetics as a form of governing individuals that determines their *ethos* – an element that, in the wake of Foucault's later studies, needs to be recovered. It is precisely in this "ethical" (in the Foucauldian sense of the term) dimension that biopolitics must be contextualized.

Indeed, the fourth and fifth chapters analyze the main forms of biopolitics and government of our *ethos* or, more precisely, the biopolitical character of some of the main forms of government that have developed since the 19th century. What emerges is, on one hand and again, "the privileged relationship that the various forms of biopolitics have with the economic rationality that essentially permeates the ways of governing modern society" and, on the other, the fact "that *ethos* is one of the main stakes of the economic and biopolitical government of this society" (p. 18). The thread from which Marzocca's reflections branch out is always Foucault's work, especially from what he developed in *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*: according to the French philosopher, in modernity the family becomes a central element in the application of government strategies aimed at governing the population, that is, the biopolitical object *par excellence*.

Drawing on Jacques Donzelot's analyses, Marzocca describes the development, in the 19th century, of a morality compatible with the free market. In this context, philanthropic organizations play an important role, largely inspired by the theories of Thomas R. Malthus (very different from Marx's theories on surplus population) and, in particular, the need in liberal societies to encourage workers to save and be chaste in order to counter the biopolitical problem of population growth, ward off welfarism, improve economic and moral well-being, and, in short, counter the risks of the new industrial society. In this way, we observe both the formation of an economic *ethos* and the moralization of people's lives.

The issue of security and the issue of rights (particularly the right to property, as Robert Castel shows) become a central node of the liberal state, which recognizes the (isolated) individual as a privileged interlocutor and becomes the promoter and guarantor not only of civil security but, indeed, also of social security (precisely from the protection of private property). It is no coincidence, therefore, that the first forms of insurance were devised in the 19th century and, in the 20th century, the first social security systems, which – as Pierre Rosanvallon shows – marked the transition from the protective (liberal) state to the welfare state. In this way, a new, specific relationship between contemporary society and life develops, centered on the concept of risk and the need to govern the uncertainty of existence – an early example of which can be found in the Bismarckian state: "a system with a

certain degree of organic state insurance against illness, accidents, old age and invalidity" (p. 230) which shows how the social (a historical "invention") has become a specific form of government.

In Marzocca's elaborate reconstruction, he also underlines how the welfare state has not achieved what it promised in terms of social justice. From a biopolitical point of view, it has led to a radicalization of the processes of medicalization of individuals, resulting in the creation of public health services and, at the same time, private medical care systems that maintain an inextricable relationship with the market economy. It is therefore understood, the author notes, that this determines "a profound inequality of possibilities of accessing the "right to health" by figures with too little economic resources to be able to adequately contribute to the financing of the welfare state and therefore to fully benefit from its protection" (p. 242). In short, since its creation, the welfare state seems destined to its own crisis due to the inherent contradictions in its functioning.

It is therefore from this perspective that Marzocca analyzes neoliberal critiques of the welfare state and, in particular, the latter's emphasis on the wage labor model, which presupposes specific ways of life and forms of *ethos*. Conversely, neoliberal forms of government, which replaced the welfare state from the end of the 1970s, have been based on minimizing the "state intervention on the economy (…) assigning it, rather, the role of guarantor of competition and the proper functioning of the free market" (p. 253). More generally, especially the more advanced countries, dominated by the capitalist economy, have begun to find the demand for socialization of health costs unacceptable (as we have already pointed out, this condition that has come down to our present, leading to great difficulties in the management of the pandemic emergency due to the weakness of public health systems). Along these lines, between the mid-Seventies and mid-Eighties, the process of medicalization assumes "the characteristics of a biomedicalization intended as an approach to life problems dominated by investigation and intervention techniques on biogenetic material" (p. 269). The fifth chapter is devoted to these issues and an analysis of the biopolitical implications inherent in the process of the molecularization of contemporary medicine.

Firstly, Marzocca investigates the reflections of Nikolas Rose, who observes that "the historical normalizing, eugenic and racist tendencies of biopolitics are clearly reduced by the current overcoming of traditional biological determinism" (p. 272). In fact, while the racist and eugenic exercise of biopower by states was based on the connection between the individual body and the collective body of the population, with molecular medicine practiced in advanced liberal societies, it is the very idea of the unitariness of the body that is challenged. The molecularization of medicine "progressively reduces the supremacy of the national and state dimension over that individual" (p. 283) and, consequently, also the thanatopolitical effects of biopower. Marzocca responds to these analyses, which aim to emphasize the beneficial effects of molecular biology – which, moreover, according to Rose, produces new forms of subjectification and responsibility –, by pointing out how risky it is to minimize the discriminatory forms of contemporary biopower. Indeed, these continue to be visible in the geopolitical context of globalization, if only because of the

important role that the idea of nation still plays in biopolitical strategies. Moreover, the increasing individualization implicit in contemporary medicine leads to the "privatization of scientific, political and economic attention to life" (p. 289).
Thus, in Rose there is a renunciation of critique toward contemporary biopolitical trends and, in fact, an acceptance of biocapitalism, a position to which Marzocca opposes the theses developed by Melinda Cooper. The latter points out that, with the rise of neoliberalism as the main form of government from Reagan's America onwards, biotechnology research was strategically initiated to heal the economic crisis in the United States. In this way, we see an inextricable link between neoliberalism and the creation of bioeconomic capitalism, which involves continuous financial investments in experimentation and the commercialization of attention to life. It can also be noted that, according to Cooper, the main characteristics of the bioeconomy are delirium and megalomania: "it aspires to overcome the very limits of life just as this has been done so far on our planet, trying to produce it in ever new forms" (p. 300).

It is not difficult to understand Marzocca's proclivity for Cooper's analysis. Indeed, as already explained, one of the fundamental assumptions of his work, also employed in the analysis of SARS-COV2, is to take an ecological view. In particular, considering both the decisive role that ecological factors may play in pandemic emergencies, and the fact that the "COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the extreme limit that the crisis has reached in the relations of our societies with the world (…) that is, as an alteration of man's ecosystemic relations with animals, in particularly with wild ones" (p. 30), Marzocca's analyses aim to place biopolitics in the sphere of inquiry that connects ecology and economics. Chapter six is devoted to this. It opens with the observation that the concept of milieu, associated with that of biopower and used by Foucault in *Security, Territory, Population* to denote the space in which population government takes place, is similar to the notion of "environment that we use today to refer to the ecosystem contexts affected by the ecological crisis" (p. 324). The milieu/environment needs to be kept salubrious and is thus protected through public hygiene policies. However – as Marzocca notes – the separation remaining between population and environment considers the latter as an external element and therefore secondary to the former. More precisely: the natural environment must be available to ensure the success of biopolitical interventions on the population, understood as an economic resource. This is an externality that, in fact, has not been overcome, even following the development of natural sciences since the 19th century, which have emphasized the inextricable relationship between physical contexts and living species. For a long time, in fact, the consequences of environmental exploitation were not considered; there was no agreement between government strategies and expressions of scientific ecology (such as botanical geography, evolutionary theory, population ecology and ecosystem ecology, whose genesis and development Marzocca traces). And yet, on the other hand, as Marzocca notes, in our capitalist society even ecological knowledge "tends to frame the environmental question in both economic and biopolitical terms" (p. 338). With the exercise of liberal and especially neoliberal governmentality, ecological knowledge looks at

the environment in terms of economic rationalization and nature in terms of natural capital, with little influence on the economic and biopolitical government of society.

The fact that the need to place limits on natural resources has not found adequate space, even since (starting from the 1970s-80s) the ecological crisis has become a global problem, is very serious. Obviously, this is not meant to speak of indifference towards environmental degradation and the fate of life (indeed Marzocca identifies and describes various attempts and approaches deployed by economic and political powers), yet, very often, the focus is on the ecologically correct behavior of individuals to solve environmental problems. The guiding paradigm of neoliberal governmentality, which has influenced the *ethos* of the modern individual, remains that of productivity at all costs, and even ecological and political strategies end up being treated in financial terms, following the prevailing logic of the market.

In this regard, Marzocca shows how Gregory Bateson's ecology of mind recognizes the centrality of transformations of *ethos* (both individual and social) in relation to the ecological question. In fact, this theory – an alternative to traditional scientific ecology – is based on the assumption of the inextricable relationship – understood as a mental relationship – between life and the environment. It, moreover, attributes "extreme importance to behavioral processes and their interactions, similarities and differences with biological and ecosystem processes" (p. 376). This is an important passage because it is precisely Bateson's reflections that, according to Marzocca, allow for the recovery of the importance of the Foucauldian analysis of *ethos* (of each and every one), which in turn underscores the relationship between self-knowledge and knowledge of the world and focuses on the political aspects of environmental issues. Interestingly, Foucault recognizes that, above all, cynical philosophy proposes an *etho-poiesis*, that is, a dimension in which the construction of *ethos* is possible, which in reality, Marzocca keenly intuits, consists of an *eco-poiesis*, which indicates "a relationship with the world as a context of dwelling" (p. 379).

Thus, one can see how, based on these analyses, Marzocca proposes an original ecological reconfiguration of the discourse on biopolitics. It is also from these reflections that, in the last chapter – written during the COVID-19 outbreak and precisely because of this emergence (see p. 391) – the author contextualizes the investigation of pandemics, noting that the central role of ecological factors in the outbreak and spread of epidemics is only occasionally acknowledged. Indeed, there is a tendency to downplay the importance of environmental changes, produced by contemporary society, in causing phenomena such as interspecific transmissions, which refer directly back to the concept of zoonoses, "that is to say the idea that some pathogens that animals carry, under certain conditions, can transfer to human organisms" (p. 394) and cause epidemic processes. For Marzocca, it is fundamentally a question of defining the dangers of the pandemic in ecosystemic terms, where our globalized societies produce the alienation of humans from the world and, at the same time, an alteration of nature, a reduction in biodiversity and processes of intense anthropization of the environment.

The question underlying Marzocca's analysis, which can be read in relation to the theses proposed from a biopolitical and ecological perspective by Miguel Vatter[3] and Andreas Malm[4], is basically: "What forms does biopolitics take today in the face of the problem of pandemics?" (p. 403). In this regard, we should consider, on the one hand, the fact that the preferred dimension for dealing with a pandemic is planetary and, on the other hand, the general unpreparedness of nation states in dealing with the risk of infectious diseases. From here, the main tool employed to tackle the problem of pandemics is that of global surveillance (also through the use of algorithmic technologies). However, this policy is often in danger of underestimating the (negative) condition of public health systems in many countries, which to date are suffering the effects of years of privatization of medicine and health services. As Marzocca in fact observes: "The SARS-COV2 pandemic has clearly revealed the widespread health vulnerability that the previous forty years of neoliberal policies has created in many countries" (p. 417). It is therefore not surprising that, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the inefficiency of the global surveillance tools adopted by world organizations was observed, and this condition led many societies to take "a step back in the history of biopolitics" (p. 423). In this respect, it is again possible to refer to Foucault in order to address anti-pandemic biopolitics that aim to normalize ungovernable situations. Indeed, it should be noted that in the COVID-19 pandemic, the inoculation and vaccination approach, typical of security mechanisms, had to be integrated with the quarantine model, typical of disciplinary systems developed in the 17th century (analyzed in *Discipline and Punish* and in *Security, Territory, Population*).

Ultimately, we can conclude with Marzocca's words, recognizing that Foucault provided "sufficient tools to allow us to approach the first real pandemic of the 21st century with some hope of understanding (…) the last and most surprising metamorphosis of biopolitics" (p. 441). It is barely worth adding that, thanks to the use of Foucauldian tools, it is precisely Marzocca's book that allows us to historically connect and delve into the most surprising metamorphosis of biopolitics.

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[3] See Miguel Vatter, "One health and one home: On the biopolitics of Covid-19," in *Coronavirus, Psychoanalysis, and Philosophy*, ed. Fernando Castrillon and Thomas Marchevsky (2021), 79-82.

[4] See Andreas Malm, *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century* (2020).

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BOOK REVIEW

Jussi Backman and Antonio Cimino (ed.), *Biopolitics and Ancient Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 240. ISBN: 978-0-19-284710-2.

I.

The term biopolitics appears in Foucault's manuscripts in the 1970s in his attempt to describe techniques of power that traversed and infiltrated modern medical institutions. Foucault claims that the development in the second half of the eighteenth century of what was called medizinische Polizei, public hygiene, and social medicine should be re-inserted in the general framework of a 'biopolitics'. Foucault develops the idea of biopolitics as a set of techniques and forms of knowledge aimed at phenomena relating to a mass of living and co-existing beings that constituted a population; such phenomena included the population's health, hygiene, birth and mortality rates, as well as the quality of the gene pool. The broader framework in which Foucault conceives biopolitics is a theme developed since the seventeenth century: the management of state forces. In the context of 19th and 20th century statecraft and political economy, a central purpose of biopolitics is, according to Foucault, to create vital and productive, yet responsible, subjects to increase the power, prosperity and happiness of the state and its population.

In nuce, this is Foucault's approach to biopolitics, although it must be admitted that his reflections on this term have a somewhat sketchy and rather ambiguous character (see Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer and Thaning, 2016: 310-321). Paradoxically, this may to some extent account for the peculiar agenda-setting influence his reflections have exercised: A host of influential thinkers have been able to use Foucault's thoughts on biopolitics as a stepping-stone, while they have also been forced to move beyond these preliminary and probing remarks in so far as they wanted to develop an investigation of biopolitics that could stand on its own.

II.

The political theorist Mika Ojakangas is one of the latest of these thinkers. His book *On the Greek Origins of Biopolitics* from 2016 is a comprehensive attempt to pursue a path

which Foucault never took. Ojakangas investigates the roots of modern biopolitics in the political thought of Classical Greek Antiquity. As for Aristotle, Ojakangas claims that his political philosophy is decisively biopolitical, and in terms of evidence, he points to passages such as the following from Aristotle's *Politics*, which discusses the preconditions for the best constitution: "As to the necessary things for the state to be considered there first comes the question of population, its quantity and its natural quality" (Pol. 7.1326a5–7). In his contribution to a new anthology edited by Jussi Backman and Antonio Cimino, *Biopolitics and Ancient Thought*, Ojakangas goes so far as to claim that in Plato's works, such as the *Republic*, the *Statesman* and the *Laws,* we find a species of what Foucault termed biopolitical state racism. For Foucault, state racism is predicated on the institution of the modern state and on the availability of the objectifying human and social sciences as well as the technological measures afforded by the application of the modern natural sciences. Although this comprehensive institutional and epistemic context is of course completely absent in Classical Antiquity, Ojakangas' interpretation assumes that Plato's dialogues can be read as if they were works of political theory in a modern sense. Resolutely pursuing this approach, Ojakangas distils an ideological core of biopolitics in Plato's works, advocating the improvement of "the welfare of the population in terms of its physical and mental health, morality, and intelligence" (Backman and Cimino 2022, 39). Conversely, he finds a Platonic commitment to state racism in so far as Plato's works advocate the elimination of the physically, mentally and morally deformed through a purge of the city-state. For Plato, this drastic measure is necessary not only to improve the sound human stock and liberate them from the burden of taking care of the deformed but also because the inherent weaknesses are contagious: "[…] without a thorough purge, the rest of the population will degenerate too" (Backman and Cimino 2022, 54). A significant upshot of Ojakangas' interpretation is his distinction between ethnic racism (antibarbarism), also found in Greek Antiquity, and the kind of racism introduced by Plato, based on medico-political principles of psychosomatic health that recommends the killing of members of one's own community if they are physically or morally deficient.

A problem with Ojakangas' account, however, is that it portrays Platonic justice as if it was only the mere result of inherited traits combined with the behavioristic inculcation of norms and capacities through upbringing and educations: "[…] Plato is a determinist: for him the combination of heredity and environment (from the physical environment to the political organization of the city-state) determines the character and the conduct of man. It is not good or bad will but the combination of inborn nature (physis), nurture (trophē), and education (paideia) that renders a man good or corrupts him" (Backman and Cimino 2022, 44 n.7). Within his interpretative framework, there is no room for what Socrates takes to be the core of his philosophical project, according to Plato's *Phaedo* (Phd., 98b-100c). Here Socrates recounts how his philosophical identity was formed when he rejected the reductive approach of the natural philosophers and instead took his refuge to logoi,

arguments in reasoned discourse, as the appropriate medium in which to search for the causes, or better, reasons, for actions and judgements. Only by investigating central conceptions in terms of which we justify thoughts and actions, ultimately ideas such as the beautiful, the just or the good, can we make sense of our own agency, according to the Platonic Socrates. Socrates illustrates this with his own decision to stay in prison and accept his sentence rather than taking the opportunity to flee, which was explicitly offered to him by his friends. Solely by taking recourse to logoi is it possible to even address the question of whether this was the right decision or not. Ultimately, the Socratic project is a form of care for the self through the practice of giving and asking for reasons, as he emphasizes in the *Apology*, and the ultimate purpose of this care for the self is to preserve and cultivate our self-understanding as persons with agency.

This Socratic project also animates the dialogue about justice in the *Republic*. After all, how can we discern that our soul has a just constitution? As soon as we ask this decisive question, we are thrown back on the Socratic practice of investigating what justice is by giving and asking for reasons. It is within this practice that we can learn whether we are in fact guided by the motivation to care for the whole of the community, the aspiration to attain recognition from others, or simply asserting our immediate interests and desires. If one were to follow Ojakangas' account, it would, in other words, be completely accidental that the giving and asking for reasons is the structuring principle of all of Plato's dialogues. Towards the end of the *Republic*, Socrates suggests that the important thing to take from the entire conversation is not whether Kallipolis – the ideal city-state they have created in words – can be realized but that his interlocutors, Glaukon and Adeimantos, strive to attain and maintain a just constitution in their soul by continuing to examine these matters in mutual dialogue. It is this Socratic perspective which disappears completely from view in Ojakangas' reading of Plato as a biopolitical theorist. Plato's thought is here reduced to a deterministic natural philosophy which is unable to account for choices and deliberation, and which Socrates' identity is therefore predicated on rejecting.

III.

The other contributions to the volume *Biopolitics and Ancient Thought* elaborate and evaluate the idea that modern biopolitics can be traced back to the political thought of Greek antiquity. I will concentrate on a couple of articles that connect directly with Ojakangas' project. Although she has critical reservations, Sara Brill acknowledges the legitimacy of Ojakangas' line of inquiry. Regarding Aristotle, she writes: "Aristoteles' emphasis on engineering the bodily as well as the physical character of citizens recommends comparison with contemporary theories of biopolitics" (Cimono and Backman, 2016: 16). Adriel Trott is more skeptical as to the biopolitical character of Aristotle's thought. A fundamental issue indirectly raised by her contribution concerns the understanding of Aristotelian

definition of the human being as a zoῐ̂on politikon (political animal). Ojakangas glosses this term in the following way: "zoῐ̂on politikon is not a legal subject, let alone a political animal in the modern sense of the 'political', but a definition of human being as an animal to whom it is natural to live in an organized community seeking for common good, just like it is natural for bees and ants to live in such a community" (Ojakangas 2016, 7). This gloss, however, is potentially seriously misleading. On an Aristotelian conception, it is distortive to focus merely on the generic likeness between the sociability of humans and ants rather than on the specific kind of sociability that is characteristic of us, and which Aristotle thinks must be understood in light of our nature as animals with logos, i.e., animals with a capacity for reason that can be expressed in discourse. It is the shared perception of justice as it is realized in the pursuit of virtue that is the foundation of human political life (Pol. 1.2.1253a15–17), and this perception is made possible by the possession of logos (Pol. 1.2.1253a13–15). The upshot is that the specificity of Aristotle's politics is determined by a conception of human nature as mediated with logos. This whole dimension disappears in Ojakangas' analysis, and it threatens to reduce the categories of Aristotelian political philosophy, such as law and constitution, to inculcated behavioral norms, similar to what is found in Ojakangas' interpretation of Plato. Trott emphasizes this last point: "While the social norm works through the disciplinary power circulating through everyone in the community, aiming to produce a kind of normalized behavior, Aristotle's law works to institute the deliberations of the citizens regarding what should constitute their goals as a community and how they should achieve it, which is to say, the law puts their deliberations into action" (Backman and Cimino, 112). Ojakangas' account lacks an acknowledgement of this deliberative perspective, and he is even willing to conceive Aristotle as "a representative of sociological naturalism" (Ojakangas, 2016: 55).

Trott compellingly argues that Aristotle can in fact supply us with a model of politics that avoids making the biological body the center and ground of political life, as is the case in Ojakangas' interpretation. In the second part of her reconstruction, however, she also contends that Aristotle's model can avoid saddling politics with the aim of transcending, and therefore continuously excluding, our biological nature (Backman and Cimino, 108). In addressing this legitimate worry, she seemed to me dangerously close to the dubious idea that politics can be grounded in a teleological concept of nature which we cannot affirm in light of modern natural science. The contemporary philosopher John McDowell has introduced the concept of second nature, and his aim is precisely to countenance the idea that logos is part of our nature, namely the 'second nature' that we are introduced to when we are initiated into language and culture (McDowell, 1996). The concept of second nature is thus an attempt to avoid a dualistic picture which portrays us as creatures that could fundamentally transgress nature. Second nature remains nature; the concept allows the natural to include "more than the biological without excluding the biological as beyond the concern of justice and collective consideration" (Backman and

Cimino 2022, 122). McDowell's suggestion thus seems to speak to Trott's concern to avoid dualism but without falling into an untenable metaphysics undermined by modern natural science. I was left wondering how Trott's interpretation of Aristotle's concept of nature – and perhaps also Brill's reflections on the concept of zōē – think they manage to steer between the Scylla of dualism and the Charybdis of metaphysical naturalism.

IV.

Of course, a political community may prioritize the striving towards certain moral or aesthetic ideals without thereby disputing the ontological status of the human being as a biological creature. This possibility of an analysis of politics without ontological pretensions brings me to the discussion of Agamben's approach to Ancient biopolitics. Several contributions criticize Agamben's biopolitical reflections. Especially Cimino convincingly delineates severe methodological and conceptual difficulties with Agamben's approach to Ancient biopolitics as they relate to his tripartite distinction between natural life, bare life and political life. Cimino's severe critique should be seen in connection with the host of commentators who have challenged Agamben's idea that a sharp opposition between bios and zōē structures Aristotle's political philosophy. In my view, these criticisms challenge researchers' investigations to leave the sweeping claims about Western politics behind in favor of a more modest use of Agamben's work.

A modest interpretation would thus reject the validity of Agamben's analytic framework, which Cimino has convincingly shown to be confusing and misleading. Instead, a modest approach might begin with the following question: How has the Western tradition of thought conceived the conditions for human beings to be acknowledged as members of a political community? One way to pursue this question would be to inquire into the minimal requirements human beings must be acknowledged to actualize to count as members of a political community. This would constitute 'the work of political justification', i.e., the capacities humans must actualize to justify their political existence. For Aristotle, the work human beings need to perform to be members of the political community is at the same time the work that human beings must realize to live a flourishing human life. Any life that cannot perform the work of political justification cannot perform the work of human justification either, according to his view. One form of political power, however, is the ability to deny individuals or groups of human beings the very possibility to engage in the work of political justification. Such individuals or groups are separated from the work of political justification, and in so far as their political justification is also their human justification, we could say that they were 'human beings without work', or even that they were reduced to 'bare life'. They are human beings cut off from the possibility of becoming what they are supposed to be because they are judged to be fundamentally deficient specimens. In the processes that determine this fundamental status of

inclusion and exclusion, reference is at times made to biological features, and to this extent the processes could be said to be of a biopolitical nature. In a political community, individuals or groups excluded from the work of political justification, if they co-existed with the acknowledged members of the community, would be in an ambiguous state. They would be categorically excluded from the government of the community, but precisely in virtue of this status they might still fulfill important political functions for the community. They might perform the role of communal scapegoats, or they could have a pedagogic function of deterrence, making vivid what lies beyond the margin of the struggle for political recognition. Such excluded groups could also perform valuable labor for the community as slaves. These would all be roles that could be performed in virtue of their exclusion as ways of being included as excluded. In cases where the role of the excluded was sufficiently important for the political community, the exclusion might even be described as a condition of possibility for political life itself.

From this perspective, we can perhaps after all make sense of passages such as the following from *The Use of Bodies*. Here Agamben aims to recapitulate his analysis of Aristotle's conception of slavery:

"The slave […] is the human being without work who renders possible the realization of the work of the human being, [it is] that living being who, though being human, is excluded – and through this exclusion, included – in humanity, so that human beings can have a human life, which is to say a political life" (Agamben 2015, 23).

V.

In short, I think Cimino has added further reasons to be skeptical of Agamben's self-conception, according to which he provides the categorial framework to capture the ontology of Western politics as such. A modest interpretation would instead conceive Agamben's reflections upon biopolitics as inspiration for investigating a specific, albeit fundamental dimension of both Ancient and modern political thought and practice: The problems of political and human justification and their interconnection. This modest approach might develop into a normative reflection on how governmental practice should properly respond to the problem of political and human justification and in this way engage in conversation with other positions within normative political philosophy. The modest approach might also be developed into an empirical and historically informed analysis of how contemporary forms of governmental theory and practice implicitly or explicitly address the problems of political and human justification. Agamben's thought would in either case be reduced to a point of departure rather than a totalizing framework for understanding the nature of Western politics.

Agamben's latest writings on the pandemic, however, have demonstrated his unwillingness to take a modest approach, let alone develop it into either a normative argument

or an empirical analysis that clearly delimits its aims and assumptions. Instead he remains content with bluntly applying the extreme scenario of fascist biopolitics to the case of the coronavirus. His latest intervention not only expresses a rejection of all forms of public health interventions as profoundly illegitimate without any empirical analysis or normative argument. His pandemic writings also, now more clearly than in earlier hyperbolic intimations, express a will to reduce, again without analysis or argument, any state backed partial suspension of civil liberties, regardless of its justification, to a new version of fascist biopolitics.

As for Foucault, Ojakangas convincingly demonstrates that the choice to avoid classical Greek political philosophy in a genealogy of modern biopolitical thought can be questioned. Despite the severe distortions in Ojakangas' interpretation mentioned above, he succeeds in singling out distinctly biopolitical elements in Plato's and Aristotle's thought. What Ojakangas overlooks, however, is the analytical value of the trajectory which Foucault did take when he turned to the relations between political economy and biopolitics, especially in his investigations of liberalism and neoliberalism. In the mid-seventies, Foucault developed his reflections from their attachment to a conception of disciplinary power and instead began to focus on the problems of security and population as it appeared in the works of political economy as well as political and economic thought more broadly. It is true that the lectures from 1979, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, disappoints the reader who hopes for a direct conceptual and historical development of biopolitics; the concept is barely mentioned in the lectures. Foucault instead devoted his time to reflections on liberal and neoliberal governmentality, with its characteristic focus on facilitating the optimization of economic processes through market-veridiction, and the governmental stimulation of an entrepreneurial and opportunistic form of subjectivity. Foucault's reflections culminate in the now famous analyses of human capital theory and neoliberal economic sociology within the Chicago School of Law and Economics. Still, even if the term 'biopolitics' is absent, the lectures can be read as Foucault's proposal for a framework for analyses of contemporary liberal biopolitics.

The governmental approach to the pandemic confirms this reading. No doubt, the economistic presuppositions of neoliberal governmentality, not least the idea that the state, far from minimizing itself, should maximize its attempt to govern relentlessly and comprehensively for the market, was initially challenged when the pandemic broke out, giving way to a Hobbesian approach that more or less ruthlessly used the powers of the state to secure its subjects. To some degree, the characteristic Hobbesian questions of basic social order and trust in state power to secure this order were perceived to be at stake in the initial phases of the pandemic. Still, as the months went on, more and more economic advisors within and outside state institutions, as well more and more pundits and politicians, began to suggest a more 'balanced' approach which would take more fully into account the costs of lockdown. At some point, the conclusions of economically informed

political expertise began to sound like that of the libertarian critics of lockdown and mask mandates: "let Covid rip". The economistic approach did not use such vulgar slogans and argued for this conclusion by way of characteristic cost-benefit analyses and by emphasizing the danger of undermining vital economic processes in society rather than by focusing upon the principled unacceptability of lockdown and mask mandates due to alleged infringements upon rights and freedoms. In so far as an alliance between rights-oriented libertarians and economic utility-oriented neoliberals existed, it was always fragile, and it symptomatically broke down in several countries when state backed vaccine mandates were introduced. Faced with requirements of vaccination or testing in order to go to work, university or school, the libertarian right wing, in some cases, resorted to frivolous comparisons between the vaccine policies and fascist forms of biopolitics. Here they could find embarrassing support in Agamben's writings on the pandemic. It is worth noticing, however, that we can acknowledge Agamben's embarrassment while at the same time insisting that the pandemic has shown the continued relevance of his basic questions concerning political and human justification within the economistic horizon of neoliberal biopolitics which Foucault brought into analytic focus.

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BOOK REVIEW

Post-pandemic South Asian Governmentalities and Foucault: State Power and Ordinary Citizens

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As the post-COVID world order necessitates a radical overhaul of the ways in which we understand the very notions of "health", "care" and "security", one must revisit Michel Foucault and his works in these shifting times to rethink biopolitics as a category viz-a-viz contemporary globalectics. Keeping that in mind, while reviewing two very interesting books by and on Foucault – *South Asian Governmentalities: Michel Foucault and the Question of Postcolonial Orderings* and *Archives of Infamy: Foucault on State Power in the Lives of Ordinary Citizens* – the article attempts to highlight certain core Foucauldian concerns in different domains of human existence that the books deal with.

As we know, in the matters of formation, proliferation and canonization of discourses/knowledge, there is a massive disproportion between the Global North and the Global South, and the former enjoys a monopoly over the rest of the world in this regard. Therefore, it is high time that we analyse and evaluate works of iconic thinkers such as Michel Foucault in the context of the Global South in order to understand if they can be deployed to decolonize discourses. To that effect, the two books have been chosen due to the crucial scholarly contributions they can potentially make to South Asian discourse formation. Whereas the first book addresses South Asian governmentalities in a very straightforward manner, the theoretical concerns of the second book, as the review will explore, can also be creatively utilised in order to understand the workings of South-Asian nation-states and their govern/mentalities.

As I will deal with two different books (which are nonetheless discursively connected), the conceptual scheme of the article is broadly divided into two parts. Firstly, I will attempt to engage with the book *South Asian Governmentalities: Michel Foucault and the*

Question of Postcolonial Orderings, which will then be followed by the discussion on *Archives of Infamy: Foucault on State Power in the Lives of Ordinary Citizens*.

The first book, *South Asian Governmentalities: Michel Foucault and the Question of Postcolonial Orderings*, is specifically chosen because it categorically helps the readers navigate their way in order to re-contextualize the vast possibilities of Foucault studies in the non-European contexts of South Asia. The book sheds great light on important Foucauldian notions such as the manufacturing and management of the category of "population"; the manipulation of the notions of "health" and "care"; the maintenance of "surveillance" and encashing the notion of "(in)security", and so on. It further enables readers to understand if and how colonial and post-colonial forms of raison d'Etat in South Asia have differed from each other and in what ways. However, while helping us understand the landscape of South Asian governmentalities, the book does not directly engage in identifying the citizens' sub/conscious tendencies to voluntarily attract governmental forces into their lives and the broader ramifications of this. But in the wake of debates around the controversial Aadhaar programme (UIDAI) (Varun HK 2018), the Pegasus controversy (Dhillon 2021), and many government-mandated protocols during the pandemic, such as the mandatory installation of the Aarogya Setu App (Clarance 2020) in nation-states like India, we are compelled to contemplate anew on how to deal with such massive scale of governmental interventions into our Being.

Here, the second book, *Archives of Infamy: Foucault on State Power in the Lives of Ordinary Citizens*, comes to our rescue. It flags up some crucial modalities and consequences of attracting state intervention in the intimate domains of human existence. In a post-pandemic world, this is a concern that a lot of us share, especially when right-wing ideologies in current times seem to be causing a fascist(ic) turn in even the self-proclaimed big democracies. Consequently, post-COVID, the world is literally suffering from the excess penetration into its last bastion of privacy by the forces of governmentality in the name of shielding its citizens from the virus. Alarmingly, such a set of interferences ranges from curbing our movements through accessing our biological samples to mandatorily datafying our most personal physical-pathological records. In such times, locating the aspirations of invoking the state's attention is both challenging and required as they might provide important insights into contemporary readers as to why and how (not) to engage with the omniscient-omnipresent states and their super-nosy surveillance regimes.

That said, South Asia has become a hotbed for testing Foucauldian ideas, particularly after the pandemic. In developing countries like India, for example, nation-states are considered largely benevolent and pro-poor. One of the popular/populist mantras of the ruling dispensation in India has been "sabka saath, sabka vikas", which roughly means "collective effort and inclusive growth"; and one of the poll slogans of the same regime was "Modi hai to mumkin hai", meaning "With Modi, it is possible", referring to the collective trust that the nation should have in its prime minister. However, during the handling of

Covid-19 by the government, hundreds and thousands of migrant workers in India were left unfed and unsafe on the streets (Pandey 2020). Therefore, such instances make the Indian subcontinent a very intriguing case study for social scientists to explore how nation-states continue to govern such diverse populations despite disappointing large sections of their most vulnerable citizens during emergencies like the Pandemic.

Stephen Legg and Deana Heath, *South Asian Governmentalities: Michel Foucault and the Question of Postcolonial Orderings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. 269. ISBN: 978-1-108-44985-4 (Paperback).

The first book, titled *South Asian Governmentalities: Michel Foucault and the Question of Postcolonial Orderings* (SAG henceforth), is primarily concerned with the analysis of both governmentality(ies) in the South Asian context, largely in the classic Foucauldian sense, as a sort of power, and its evolution over time, as well as the governmentalization of the category of the "state" (Legg and Heath 2018, 1). According to the book's frank admission, it wants to assemble a group of South Asian scholars and underscore their "global efforts to test and apply Foucault's research to new places and periods" (ibid., 2). In that sense, it champions and contributes to the Foucauldian turn in South Asian studies by scholars globally. However, the book does not limit itself to analysing the intellectual genealogy of the concept of governmentality. It attempts to insightfully look into the praxialisation of governmentality in practice in South Asia (ibid.).

Most of the chapters of the book try to de/re-territorialise a European Foucault from the postcolonial perspective and critique the relevance and applicability of his works in regard to non-European contexts. While doing so, they analyse "how "European" governmentalities were always a product of colonial and imperial entanglements" (ibid.). In that sense, the book also heralds, if we may call it, a South Asian turn in the Foucauldian study as well. However, the book is self-aware and, at times, even auto-critical of its post/colonial gaze in regard to completely non-European contexts in a post-Foucault era.

Referring to the 16th century European genealogy of governmentality, the book in its introductory chapter informs us about its much earlier antecedents where governmentality camouflaged itself in apparatuses that yoked together forces of sovereign, disciplinary and governmental power which otherwise targeted different goals (ibid., 1). Cutting across and functioning through institutions (for example, family or school), discourses (for example, medicine or criminal justice), and procedures and surveys (for example, in the name of surveys and statistics), governmentality aimed at maintaining "a healthy and productive population" (ibid.).

The critiqued empire, the critiquing empire: Insights from the colony

Post-introduction, the next article is "Governmentality in the East", penned by one of the most renowned postcolonial thinkers from the global South, Partha Chatterjee, which is

also, interestingly, clubbed under the rubric of "Introductions". In search of a genealogy of the Foucauldian concept of governmentality in the non-European context, Chatterjee tries to analyse how the vocabulary for a modern colonial government was evolving in South Asia and "involving a very strategic combination of two discursive tactics –sovereign power and liberal governmentality" (ibid., 38). In the process, he argues, although the colonial regime did not find potent ground to flourish during the 19th century, it geared itself up from the late 19th century, owing its consolidation to an emergent and robust participation of the Indian middle class, which compelled the British imperial power to rethink its approach to the issue of sovereignty in the colonies (ibid.).

Chatterjee traces how in order to ensure the legitimacy and security of the East India Company in India around the late 18th century, the British colonial establishment developed the idea of "population" in the colony (ibid., 40-41). This was followed by a massive enterprise of knowledge production in terms of Indian society, religions, culture, legal practices, caste, etc. that strengthened the colonial power (ibid., 41). For example, the 1881 census archived demographic classes, trends in population graph, morbidity, occupations, migration, etc. (ibid.). According to Chatterjee, this was all accompanied by the idea of "surveillance" as well as "a mode of colonial knowledge that was also prompted by immediate concerns of state security" (ibid., 41-42). Interestingly, a post-pandemic counterpart of such a statist tendency of managing populations on the basis of accumulated information about them can be found in the way nation-states immediately closed their borders to tourist and refugee flows from certain geopolitical territories based on their visa details in the name of ensuring immunity from the virus.

Also, Chatterjee shows how the Indian population never really warmed up to the colonial pastoral impulse of care since the former preferred their religio-cultural and community life/worlds to the colonial interventions into the same (ibid., 47). But Chatterjee makes us curious towards the strategic entente that the pastoral and political projects of governmentality were going to forge in the upcoming postcolonial career of India. This is especially interesting to note in the context of post-Covid-19 India, where in the name of care, precautionary mechanisms coercively collected huge chunks of personal data from the individual.

Our attention is drawn towards a new dimension of politics, namely, the complicated infusion of "the ethical idea of citizenship" and "the governmental idea of population" (ibid., 47-48). Chatterjee explains that despite attempts by the Congress to champion the liberal ideals of universal and equal citizenship, the fact that colonial governmental classification of the population divided the citizenry in terms of various identitarian markers, such as religion, caste, ethnicity, and language, proved to be a real challenge that the sovereign authority of the new postcolonial state had to deal with (ibid., 48).

Surprisingly, during the Covid 19 paranoia, this chasm too exposed itself in the form of xenophobic, casteist and particularly Islamophobic fake reporting on who should be

blamed for the circulation of the virus. Proliferation of the terms like "#CoronaJihad" (Perrigo 2020) stigmatising the Muslim community as particularly responsible for the spread of corona is symptomatic of a wider postcolonial failure.

Indrani Chatterjee also explores the issue of the politics of care. She specifically investigates "the intertwining of pastoral power with political power" (Legg and Heath 2018, 58). She explores it while analysing a generation of dissent in the colonial Indian context (ibid., 59). Referring to iconic Bengali spiritual-thinker figures such as Ramkrishna Paramhamsa and Narendranath Datta, she studies notions of "seva" and "karma" across communities and sects that had an anti-colonial context which focused on the idea of the other more than the notion of the self (ibid., 59-60). However, highlighting anti-caste, feminist critiques, she is quick to point out that the aforementioned notions in the postcolonial Indian context have been exploited by upper caste, male-centric politics. One cannot miss the urgency of such an argument in contemporary India, especially when organizations like Rashrtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) politicizes "seva" as one of their critical modes of propagating saffronization or Hindutva and thus consolidates religious divides (Bhattacharjee 2021). Those interested in exploring the Hindutva politics and/or the Muslim question in contemporary India may find this chapter pretty intriguing.

The politics of giving is further investigated in the next chapter by Prathama Banerjee. She starts off by provocatively introducing the notion of "developmentality" as a third concept deconstructing the binary between sovereignty and governmentality in order to analyse the operation of power in the modern South Asian context (Legg and Heath 2018, 82). By bringing in radical anti-caste thinker Ambedkar, who was a staunch 4critic of Hinduism's constitution of caste-based "samaj", she argues that the history of governmentality in India could be supplemented "by a longer history of dispersed sovereignty in India, in which caste and community rule could render state rule inefficacious, especially with regard to untouchability and sexuality" (ibid., 84-85). She shows how the postcolonial regime in India "deployed both the older colonial rationalities of enumeration, classification, pacification and representation and new strategies of redistribution, planning and development" (ibid., 86).

Afterwards, Stephen Legg in his chapter sheds light on the philosopher Foucault's idea of "parrhesia" (fearless speech or speaking truth to power). He studies the Foucauldian notions of truth that were "situated within governmentalities that attempted to conduct conduct through crafting modes of subjectivity" (ibid., 107). In the process, he critiques Foucault's use of East as a metaphor for state tyranny, though it was "swiftly democratised and its tyranny disabled" (ibid., 112). Legg calls out the fact that Foucault's knowledge about the Orient, especially the Indian Vedic texts, was limited (ibid., 113). He further lays bare Foucault's obsession with the spatio-temporal category called "modern Europe" which was *his* Europe (emphasis added by the reviewer) (ibid., 115). Legg shows how Foucault's formulation of "our civilisation" (ibid., 114) was sort of normativized in

his writings (psyche too?) and that, in turn, compels the readers to wonder as to who are foreigners or outsiders to this category of "us" (ibid., 115). He also critiques Foucault's limitation regarding non-European, non-Christian epistemologies, cultures and faith-systems.

Moreover, Legg brings out the two important intersectional aspects between South Asian governmentalities scholarship and the Foucauldian governmentality lectures: one, repenting or protesting bodies within political truth regimes; and the other, the issue of the masses or the subalterns (ibid., 116). Legg argues that Foucault's idea of a philosopher-parrhesiast – who becomes the agent of truth not only by teaching, advising or proclaiming it but through his life – reminds us of Gandhi, the Father of the Nation in India, due to the latter's ascetic practices (ibid., 117).

Talking about the nature of a parrhesiast as potentially both a resistor (who speaks truth to power) and a pro-statist one, Legg talks about Foucauldian "regimes of truth", e.g., nationalist truth-force (satyagraha/discipline) and colonial truth-force (torture/interrogation) (ibid., 118-119). Legg's enquiry into the Foucauldian notions of 'truth acts" within "truth regimes" seems quite fascinating in the context of studying the postcolonial censorship/punitive regimes of nation-states and their crude interrogation mechanism. For example, the notorious censoring mechanisms like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act (UAPA) of India can be a case in point that is often resorted to in order to apparently stifle anti-state dissident voices. Readers may also find Legg's insinuations helpful in the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic when multiple groups came up with different truth-claims involving different conspiracy theories regarding the genesis, mutation and proliferation of the virus.

Just like regimes of truth, regimes (and logic) of market viz-a-viz law too can be rethought following Foucault. Therefore, Ritu Birla "gesture(s) here towards a genealogy from colonial liberalism to contemporary neoliberalism to outline an approach to law as economy (as distinct from the analysis of law and economy)" (ibid., 135). To that effect, Birla channels her analytical thrust to understand the Foucauldian notion of liberal governmentality, which perceives civil society as containing and, hence, managing the ideal points, such as "economic men" (ibid.). Drawing on Foucault and Marx, she argues that "the "natural" free market could only be animated through active and masterful governance" (ibid., 136). In her own words, she "highlight(s) the production of the market as site for the social, and the concomitant legal coding of culture; the agency and instrumentality of the legal subject; law's temporal politics and the limits of law itself" (ibid., 139-140). Through the phrase "market governance", she argued that "colonial legislation and jurisprudence installed "the market" as abstract model for all social relations and as terrain for the making of modern subjects" (ibid., 140). While thinking about such a nuanced relationship between the market and the modern subject, one may refer to Zizek's passionate appeal in his book, literally titled *Pandemic* (2020). Zizek argues, "co-ordination of

production and distribution will have to take place outside the coordinates of the market" (Zizek 2020,12).

Subject, matter and the widened scope of the politics of discipline(-ing): Governing the non-human and the sub-human

When it comes to analysing the (de)construction of the selfhood and the subject, Jonathan Saha widens the scope of the book by bringing in the formation of the non-human subject-body. He explores animal subjectivity as a process of materialisation (Legg and Heath 2018, 160). By highlighting the Empire's infliction of bodily pain on animals, elephants in particular, he focused on the coupling of the "spectacle of sovereign power with the deployment of disciplinary technique" (ibid., 161). The Empire also achieved the imperial desire to create fear in subjugated human animals by means of taming and domesticating them through physical pain (ibid.). Saha enquires how this process of "docile subjugated animal" is achieved by delving deep into Foucault's engagement with the Christian notion of animal subjectivity that asks if animals have souls (ibid.). He shows how, because the bodies of the elephants in Burma mattered to the empire, their souls had to be materialised (ibid., 164). Therefore, Saha argues that the "biopolitical arrangements of colonial rule" did not even spare non-humans, just like their colonised human counterparts (ibid., 171). Using the Foucauldian theories of constructing bodies within spaces, Saha extends the argument to the non-human elephant world in the "more-than human space" of the camp in the teak industry of Burma in South Asia, where the elephants' bodies were not only used in that labour-intensive enterprise but were rendered subjects as they were docile, disciplinable and reformable bodies (ibid., 169-170). In this particular context, one may find eerie resonance of Saha's chapter with the division and marking of territories into red, green and orange zones during the Pandemic, and consequently, spatialization and disciplining of the movements of the pathologised/medicalised bodies of human-animals in accordance with the Covid guideline manuals prepared by the state.

The analytical force of the book also brilliantly attempts to rethink the questions of matter and materiality when Sarah Hodges locates the problematics of plastic at the intersection of environment and caste (ibid., 179). She shows "how the history of state and civil society preoccupation with the matter of plastic has been both produced by and productive of a sociality of plastic" (ibid., 185). She argues that the anti-plastic sentiment gained momentum to a great extent because there was a specific deployment of particular ideological symbology that was well-aligned with the ideological disposition of the Hindu right (ibid.). It also highlights the "saffronisation of Indian environmentalism across civil society and state spaces…" (ibid., 196).

She flags up the fact that under the camouflage of environmental conservation, "the sociality of the waste worker as a certain category of person was overdetermined by the materiality of the objects handled by these workers" (ibid., 189). Again, she points out

how it was naively presumed that this inclusion of plastic into waste economy and the introduction of formalised and uniformed waste-workers to deal with plastic would forge a language of dignity for the workers concerned and "uplift" them (ibid., 187). But she rightly calls out such hollow claims of upward social mobility that do not confront the caste system of Indian society itself (ibid., 189). She also brilliantly pinpointed the fact that such measures may well prove to be counter-productive when it comes to informal, un-uniformed plastic waste-workers by shedding hyper-visibility on them and thus restricting their entry to casteist middle-class Indian neighbourhoods (ibid.).

As readers who have witnessed the panic around Covid-19, we realise that such haphazard (uni)formalisation of a selective group of waste workers is more problematic in the post-Covid scenario, where our collective paranoia about the spread of the virus and the consequent mistrust of fellow citizens do not even spare well-uniformed health workers. In this context, we may refer to multiple incidents of landowners and owners of Hostels/paying guest facilities asking health workers, nurses and even doctors to vacate their accommodations in the fear that they might carry the virus within the landowner's "safe/sanitized" intimate space. If this is the scenario with the apparently uniformed/sanitized, we can pretty well imagine the attitudinal apathy of the masses towards the apparently un-uniformed/unsanitised. Again, in this regard, readers interested in Race studies and Dalit scholarship may also explore further the Brahminical notions of purity and pollution viz-a-viz the continuation of casteist practices that are deep-rooted in Indian society.

Srila Roy in her chapter explores "the self as an important site of politicization especially given the extent to which neoliberal governmentality operates through our selves" (ibid., 201). Drawing on the concept of neoliberal development initiatives like microfinance that produce subjectivities of homo economicus, she depicts how, through such discourses of entrepreneurism and privatization, proliferation of processes of self-fashioning of subjects as governable are emerging (ibid., 202). For example, subjectivities of subaltern women have been reshaped as new subalterns within the global circuits of capital (ibid.). However, deconstructing the binary between the categories of ethics and politics, and shedding off the fixation with a sort of naïve "feminist melancholia", Roy argues that "final Foucault's" notion of ethics had to offer space for resistance within such circuits of power of capitalism, neoliberalism and development (ibid., 209). The site of such resistance happens to be the very same site for the workings of neoliberal power as well: the self (ibid.).

To readers, such attention to the self-fashioning tendency of the self may seem very important; particularly in the wake of the post-pandemic politics of medical-political interference with the human body under the garb of fighting against Corona. We may refer to the phenomenon of statist attempts at disrupting the anti-NRC and anti-CAA (National Register of Citizens, or NRC, and Citizenship Amendment Act, or CAA, are the latest

citizenship legislative developments of the Indian government) protest sites and later the Indian farmers' protest sites too under the garb of Covid protocols. However, the fact that so many of the Indian protesters wanted to abide by the Covid guidelines on the one hand and, on the other, still chose to resiliently continue their ideological battle against the state's controversial legislative moves in the middle of a pandemic merits attention.

Deana Heath, in the next chapter, unearths the fact that the body as a site of penal repression (by both state and non-state actors) was a reality in colonial India (ibid., 225). Drawing upon the scholarships of Foucault, Ann Stoler, Agamben and Mbembe, Heath exposes 19th century colonial government's torture regime in India that reduced Indians to bare lives and argues that such necropolitical regimes of torture had the monopoly over both subjective and objective violence in the smooth operation of colonial rule (ibid., 239). Scholars studying censorship, violence and state oppression viz-a-viz postcolonial resistance movements may find these formulations on such colonial penal regimes utilisable.

Again, for the readers from the Indian subcontinent, a postcolonial déjà vu moment for this can be found in the treatment of the migrant labourers by the Indian state during the pandemic. Due to the haphazard imposition of an unplanned lockdown by the government, the dalit-ised working-class, precariat population suffered the most and were left on the streets to return home barefoot and unfed. Many of them were forced to stay at home without basic amenities as well, and all of this was happening apparently to ensure halting the spread of the virus. One cannot but ask who indeed was the government worried about; whose bodies were at risk; and, which demographics were thought and targeted to be potentially the greatest carriers of the virus?

In the final section, Garry Kearns poetically points out different thematics cutting across all the chapters and shows some threads of inter-connectedness among them. One such dominant theme is the notion of subjectivation that is treated differently by different post-colonial Foucault scholars in the book (ibid., 247). The book wraps up with Kearns' apt observations on how scholars of/on South Asia used diverse entry points in order to illustrate the fact that different forms of interpellation, coercion, care (/lack of it) and resistance have contributed to the making of different forms of subjectivation over time and space.

Nancy Luxon, *Archives of Infamy: Foucault on State Power in the Lives of Ordinary Citizens*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. Pp. 371. ISBN: 978-1-5179-0111-0 (Paperback).

In an era where high-tech surveillance and different forms of censorship on citizens are proliferating globally, dedicating a book that does the necessary scaffolding to bring to the fore a "historical and interpretive framework" (Luxon 2019, viii) to understand Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault's classic text *Disorderly Families* deserves sustained critical

attention. The book contains what are famously called *letters de cachet de famille*. Mostly penned by whom we may call the subaltern class, according to the editor of the book, Nancy Luxon, these "were letters addressed to the king, letters that invoked his absolute power to intervene in problems of marital and family life by imprisoning family members on charges of theft, debauchery, drunkenness, infidelity, and other violations of civil order" (ibid., vii). Commenting upon its relevance, Luxon very aptly hinted in the preface that such a bouquet of letters from 18th century France might trigger global 21st century readers who are dealing with issues of "contemporary racialized policing, a gender subordination that is alternately intimate and violent, or the sexual division of labor that tears through households" (ibid.). Therefore, the philosophical-political significance of archiving such a "discourse of family" (ibid.) following their "epistolary trace" (viii) is both crucial and challenging; especially because "the letters challenge their readers to identify ordinary intimate injustices that belie the failures of public order and justice to coincide" (ibid.).

The architecture of this book is divided into two parts. The first part of the book contains materials dealing with the *Disorderly Families* project and also includes "Lives of Infamous Men" by Foucault (ibid.). It also has the rare radio broadcast of Foucault moderated by Roger Chartier where Foucault talks about the letters quite frankly (ibid.). The second part is concerned with the classic "clash between philosophers and historians on how to interpret historical events, but especially a French Revolution that has become a touchstone for both fields" (ibid.). It is fascinating to realise that Foucault remained equidistant both from the "canonical texts of philosophers" and the "fetish events of historians" while dealing with this problem (ibid.). Instead, he zoomed in on the "discourses that murmured behind official events and ideology" (ibid.).

Luxon clarifies, "A precursor to the public life", a sort of prototype of public sphere and public opinion, the letters are entry-points into the diverse thought-geographies of 18th century France (ibid., ix). They chronicle the history of daily lives, the mundane, and the everyday (ibid.). These letters are born out of the "ordinary lives in disorder", lives that "sought justice in their most intimate affairs (ibid., x). On a cautionary note, in that sense, the letters might be just as unsettling to 21st century readers who might be familiar with the predatory nature of the multiple forms of what Althusser called repressive state apparatuses (ibid.). In such times, locating the aspirations of these letters is quite challenging as they voiced the aspirations for state intervention so as to install justice and order (ibid., x). The letters are "poem-lives" (ibid., 2), stories "from below" (ibid.), written by "bad subjects" (ibid., 1). They possess "complicated political agency" (ibid., 4) whose nature is both jurisdictional (what is to be done) and veridictional (what is to be known) (ibid., 7). Through these letters, lives at the margins of power talked back to state power. Written by a sort of "self-managing population" (ibid., 8) seeking policing, the letters problematized "the notorious account of disciplinary power found in *Disciple and Punish*

(1978)" (ibid.). Readers may perceive the emergence of such letters as symptomatic of not only the emergence of civil order and the public sphere but of the feminist and queer attempts of claiming such public spheres by gendered and sexual minorities and by the urban precariats, as Guy Standing would call them.

Archiving the ordinary, debating the in/famous

In chapter one, titled "Lives of Infamous Men", we see Foucault begin almost on a passionate and poetic note by frankly admitting that this was not a book of history but "an anthology of existences" (ibid., 67). He went after these stories as he found their appeal lied in their un-heroic portrayal of the quotidian, the mundane, the daily snippets of life-worlds. While theorising on the letters, Foucault curiously referred to the "pardoning mechanism" of the Christian West and its ritual of confession that, explained Foucault, urged one to speak only in order to ensure an act of concealment of what is thoroughly enunciated (ibid., 76). The enunciation does "not leave any other trace behind it but repentance and acts of contrition" (ibid.). However, from the end of the 17th century, this started being replaced by a recording mechanism whose sole aim was to document (ibid.). Thus, Foucault argues, a new "mise-en-scene is born" (ibid.).

The book then, surprisingly, breaks the monotony of scholarly articles and takes us to a radio broadcasting room. We get to know all about a transcribed form of a roundtable interview where both Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, along with Andre Bejin and Michelle Perrot, indulge in very frank discussion with Roger Chartier as moderator. They enlighten the audience about their own perception and reception of and motivations behind engaging with the letters de cachet, which readers may find very refreshing because of the candid nature of the discussion. Such a roundtable strikes a very dramatic and cordial note as the letters are read during the live-broadcasting in the presence of those who have unearthed and analysed them so intimately. As themes of their radio discussion, they touch upon various aspects of the book *Disorderly Families,* for example, the exclusivity of such an unconventional process of justice seeking by the ordinary people; the multi-layered nature of their plaints; and finally, the location of imprisonment within the long history of the judicial punishment regime .

Talking about the anatomy of the letters in chapter three, entitled "Review of Disorderly Families", Jean-Philippe Guinle quickly ruminates on the larger significance of them. He argues that more than the immediate family drama that the letters apparently petition about, they actually reflect on the "relationship of individuals to a political power that would normally not have been very concerned with them" (ibid., 128). He problematizes, on the one hand, the invoking of royal intervention "upon request" into the intimate spheres of people; on the other hand, he mulls over the power conferred upon the *pater familias* in the name of law (ibid., 129). Feminist scholars and scholars wanting to

explore different forms of unholy entente shared between the forces of patriarchy and fascism would find this final question posed by Guinle particularly thought provoking.

Addressing the tendency of the masses to invoke the royal injunctions further, Michael Heurteaux shows that just like in the 18th century, the culture of passing information to the authority enjoyed popularity in 20th century France as well. Ranging from wronged spouses and disgruntled employees to post-terrorist attack activities such as overzealous citizens informing on each other, the informant culture seems to be quite intact. What is interesting is that such a human tendency, spanning across times and cultures to tell on each other probably (but not necessarily) in the hope of getting noticed or being applauded by the authority, invites further exploration by the scholars of human behavioural psychology.

Both Guinle and Heurteaux point towards the dangers of flirting with statist powers that enjoy a monopoly over violence and the right to annihilate. In contemporary times, readers may find resonances of this danger within majoritarian and racist regimes globally where racial hate crimes and xenophobic violence against minorities are rampant and carried out with impunity and even, in many cases, with the help of executive forces and the judiciary. Thematically speaking, the reader may find that the same anxiety is voiced once again in chapter ten, which is entitled "Parisian Homosexuals Create a Lifestyle, 1700-1750: The Police Archives", authored by Michel Rey. Rey deals with the police archives of 18th century Paris viz-a-viz male sexuality. He sheds light on the landscape of non-normative, especially homosexual desire among men. He investigates a provocative question: "how did people make love in the 18th century" in relation to pervasive policing? (ibid., 253). He focuses on how during 18th century France homosexual men used to group on the basis of their minoritised identity in terms of sexual desire (ibid., 261).

Understanding the phenomenon of the letters: Discourses, publics and events

After establishing his reasons and passion behind prioritizing the choice of certain letters such as *Letters de Cachet* as subjects of great discourses in the first two chapters of the book, Foucault reappears for the third time in the book with the chapter titled "The Order of Things". Here Foucault analyses the production process of a discourse itself. For him, "discourse analysis …does not seek to unveil the universality of a meaning, it brings to light the play of imposed rarity, with a fundamental power to affirm" (ibid., 169). He illustrates four principles regulating his analysis of discourse: Principle of reversal (the source and apparently enabling factors of a discourse to be understood in negative terms); Principle of discontinuity (resisting the urge to presuppose the existence of a discourse beneath or beyond the rarefying systems); Principle of specificity (resisting the urge to "decipher" the "legible face" of the world to hunt down discourses whose coming into being is nothing short of violence that we do to things); and Rule of exteriority (where he

cautioned us against the linear progression from discourse to things more internal and concealed) (ibid., 161-162).

If discourses are important, so are the very spaces where they thrive and evolve. One such conceptual space is the idea of the public sphere, which Roger Chartier focuses on in the chapter entitled "The Public Sphere and Public Opinion". Referring to Kant's tricky use of phrases like "public use of reason" and "private use of reason", he argues how, for Kant, written words with an autonomous space for debating merited to be "universal" (ibid., 181). By virtue of such written words, we got a tribunal, argues Chartier, where authors and readers as stakeholders were to participate in democratic deliberations (ibid., 187-88). However, having been familiar with the works of scholars dealing with the problems of race, caste, religion and other axes of human identities and their intersectionalities, we as disillusioned readers understand how difficult it is to claim such spaces for deliberation, particularly in a society that advantages certain identitarian categories more than the rest.

In "Return of the Event", Pierre Nora begins by philosophising on the notion of "contemporary". Nora calls out the mass media's assault on both history and the event (ibid., 200). He peels off the very anatomy of the modern avatar of "event" sans historian in an era of live broadcasting (ibid., 203). For him, this event without historian is a result of "the affective engagement of the masses" (ibid.). He argues that with all its sophisticated technology, "modernity exudes the event, whereas traditional societies had a tendency to rarefy it" (ibid., 205).

As Nora deals with the crucial philosophisation of the notion of the "event", Arlette Farge further deepens the theorisation on the very definition of event viz-a-viz history. She argues, "the event was always that which seemed to seize time in an intense contraction, giving the course of history a new tonality" (ibid., 216). An event for her is "a slice of time and action" (ibid.) that the historian makes sense of while understanding how the "event-moment" (ibid., 218) is being perceived within the broad spectrum of temporality ranging from the past and future (ibid., 216). Events can be, argues Farge, "inaudible" and "unintelligible" (ibid., 217), and they may not always be high-intensity phenomena. They may not be grand in stature and still be reflective of the landscape of multiple forms of identities within a given society (ibid., 219). She further advocates that the very constitutionality of an event is located within the realm of emotions and the diverse affects it is capable of producing – a formation that the phallocentric field of knowledge and history has a hard time grasping (ibid., 220). For Farge, an event is constituted by "silences", "utterances", "emotions", "low intensities" and "the ordinary course of things", and the historian should search for patterns to have a grasp over the event (ibid., 223).

In a sense, for readers, this chapter throws a great deal of conceptual clarity on how to understand the event-moment of the letters de cachet. Also, such theorisations on the notion of an event by both Nora and Farge can open up innovative avenues for the

Pandemic-hit readers to rethink the very process of the Pandemic into becoming a global event.

As the analysis of the concept of event makes us critically rethink the notion of temporality enmeshed within such theorisations, the aspect of spatiality too is treated with great care in the book. In this context, Stuart Elden draws our analytical gaze on the notion of spatiality of the letters de cachet. He perceives the "spaces of so called disorder" with a view "from below" (ibid., 227). For him, the fluidity of the spaces of conjugality, marriage, and wider households is important as they "spill out raucously into the street" by demanding the sovereign's attention and, later, the historian's (ibid.). For Elden, these letters problematize the intricate nature of the public and the private. Such fluid spaces which opened onto each other were the thought geographies for Foucault and Farge. Neither they nor the letters were interested in "larger-scale territorial organization of France" in the book (ibid., 240).

In the chapter titled "Sovereign Address", Elizabeth Wingrove uses the letters by Genevieve Gravelle to the King as an entry point to enquire the valence of letter writing as a means of political contestation. She showcases attempts by the 18th century corresponding public at "self-initiating action" in order for them to claim sovereign position (ibid., 286). They did so as "in the age of epistolary absolutism, the poetic practices of letter writers inculcated a sovereign disposition, an appropriation of the power of address through which their speech acts might become political events" (ibid.).

Deconstructing the letter-events from the queer-feminist perspectives

Amidst multiple points of view, the book offers a fresh and much needed feminist perspective on the phenomenon of the letters in the form of the chapter "Gender, Agency, and the Circulation of Power" by the editor Nancy Luxon herself, a critical concern that was underexplored by Foucault and championed by Farge (ibid., 297). Luxon argues that the letters gave rise to a political imaginary where both the authors and readers felt affectively invested into the everyday theatrics of the citizens (ibid., 296). Luxon further advocates that these letters enabled the genesis of a "sexual contract" which is symptomatic of the emergence of civil society and political order (ibid.). The letters cashed in on the affective-aesthetic response of shock or trauma that Foucault called "mise-en-scene" or a "dramaturgy of the real" (ibid.). The letters, according to Luxon, showcase a conflicted play between individual contestation and the naturalising force of the institution called family (ibid., 297).

Focusing on the gendered dynamic of these letters, Luxon, therefore, explores the paradoxical role of women in the entire process: women as trespassers located on the criss-crossing of home, politics of the street, and legal contract; and the developing market economies (ibid.). For Luxon, the letters achieved their psychological resonance and social abstraction as they involved different social-political stakeholders (such as the letter

writers themselves, public scriveners, neighbours, witnesses, police, etc.), and thus triggered the mobilisation of a civil society at its nascent state (ibid., 298). Luxon investigates the circulation of the letters at such a historical moment where, through these epistolary weapons, women were bargaining with hetero-patriarchal practices while largely operating within it in order to seek "intimate justice" (ibid.). Such attempts may provide critical insights to feminist thinkers to understand justice-seeking in a post-#MeToo era.

Luxon perceives "the household as a switch point of power" (ibid., 299). Within such a circuit of power, women attempted to (re)negotiate their "role in networks of sociability and labour" (ibid.). In a Foucauldian sense, thus, we can say that women emerged as political-legal subjects beyond the binary of agency and domination since they were acknowledged as both plaints and objects of plaints to the sovereign authority (ibid., 307). However, Luxon clarified that for her the task was not to "bring women back in" to history but investigate "the mechanisms of formal exclusion and the encasing practices that resist within and against these larger structures" (ibid., 330).

Finally, following a solid feminist intervention which authors like Guinle, Farge, Rey, and Luxon so far built up in their individual chapters, the book further revisits the discourse of the letters through the much needed queer lens. In doing so, Lynne Huffer treats the letters just the way Foucault perceived them, that is, as "poem-lives", and explores how they "bear witness to the queer affinities" (ibid., 341). What is outstanding in Huffer's intervention is that she presents us with a radical "archival moment" that is ready to explore the relation between Foucault and Freud; or between Freudian psychoanalysis and Foucauldian genealogies (ibid., 342). Huffer does so using the queer-poetic eye of Eve Kosofsky in order to explore the Freudo-Foucauldian affinities (ibid., 345). While doing so, Huffer reads the letters as contact points between different modalities of power (ibid., 342). She explores Foucault's paranoia about Freud's exclusion of the mad from the cogito through "the violence of a return" (ibid., 343). However, Huffer argues that "Foucault is Freud in his return to the archive …Foucault risks repeating what he called the sovereign violence of a Freudian return" (ibid., 347). But Foucault resisted this "movement of re-familiarisation" by entering the archive as a poet, clarifies Huffer (ibid.). According to Huffer, such an entry point necessitates a queer-poetic/aesthetic genealogy into the rearrangement of the archive of the letters (ibid., 354).

Letters de Cachet, no doubt, archive the infamy and the radical at once. Resorting to such a unique mode of justice seeking, appealing to the powers which are much greater than the ones writing it, is something which is reflective of the seduction of power and the urge to be recognised by such power, at once. However, in the 21st century, we may feel an additional sense of responsibility while comprehending these letter-events, and that is to remind ourselves of the unimaginably massive data economy and (self-)surveillance culture we have been made a part of, especially post-pandemic, and over which the state has an absolute monopoly. Therefore, the rules of any sort of interaction with the state, and

the consequent forging or actualisation of any power dynamic with/in it, nowadays, ask for more caution and contemplation. It is more so because having been sandwiched between the sovereignty of the virus and the statist regimes of caution and care/seva, individual privacy, by now, has been rendered a complete myth.

Finally, to be precise, when the world was suffering from the deadly fever of Covid-19, we witnessed a more morbid design at hand in the form of how nation-states treated its citizens, especially the most subalternised ones. Focusing particularly on South Asia, therefore, we discussed how the pandemic unmasked (pun intended) the façade of "caring" governments and exposed the unsettling antipathy in the hearts of the nation-states towards their most precarious citizens. But still, surprisingly, such nation-states somehow managed to contain any dissident voices and even convinced a large citizenry to keep cheering for them. Against such a backdrop, these two books, hopefully, can equip us better with critical, politico-philosophical understanding to critique the South Asian governmentalities. When read together, contemporary readers may discover their interconnectedness in the sense that whereas the first book on South Asian governmentalities focuses on the cunningly complex ways of operation of power regimes, the other one deconstructs the very charismatic appeal of such regimes and its surprising ramifications in the lives of ordinary citizens. As a result, to sum up on an optimistic note, readers may end up discovering for themselves the art of how not to be governed or, at least, not excessively.

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