Foucault Studies

REVIEW

Susanne Krasmann and Michael Volkmer (eds.), *Michel Foucaults "Geschichte der Gouvernementalität" in den Sozialwissenschaften. Internationale Beiträge* **(Bielefeld: transcript, 2007), ISBN: 978-3899424881**

Patricia Purtschert, Katrin Meyer and Yves Winter (eds.), *Gouvernementalität und Sicherheit: Zeitdiagnostische Beiträge im Anschluss an Foucault* **(Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), ISBN: 978-3899426311**

Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality defines a complex of heterogeneous practices directed at the conduct of collective bodies and individuals, including their self-conduct. It has resonated strongly in the social sciences, proving very powerful in the analysis of neoliberal forms of government. Although research on governmentality has been carried out since the 1990s,[1] Foucault's lecture series *Sécurité, territoire, population* and *Naissance de la biopolitique* held at the Collège de France in 1977/78 and 1978/79, in which he developed his concept and genealogy of governmentality, have only recently been published in their entirety. The strong German interest in Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality is not least marked by the simultaneous publication of the lectures in French and in German translation in 2004 (the English translation appeared in print 2007/2008[2]). With only archival documents and tape recordings to refer to, Thomas Lemke laid the ground for the German reception of Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality in 1997.[3] His book was followed in 2000 by a volume of studies on contemporary forms of governmentality,[4] which ultimately established the analytical concept of governmentality in the social sciences. Since then, the production of literature on the subject has been prolific.

The two German-language edited volumes under discussion here for English-speaking readers explicitly relate to Michel Foucault's lecture series and explore the possibilities

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[1]   Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[2]   Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[3]   Thomas Lemke, *Eine Kritik der politischen Vernunft: Foucaults Analyse der modernen Gouvernementalität* (Hamburg: Argument, 1997).

[4]   Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, Thomas Lemke (eds.), *Gouvernementalität der Gegenwart: Studien zur Ökonomisierung des Sozialen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2000).

their publication has opened up. Both volumes assemble contributions from the social sciences with a strong focus on political theory and contend that the state has a more important role in governmentality studies for Foucault than has been acknowledged up to now. While Susanne Krasmann and Michael Volkmer have mixed theoretical and empirical studies, the volume by Patricia Purtschert et al. focuses exclusively on articles exploring the heuristic power of Foucault's analytical categories for the diagnosis of contemporary societies.

The volume edited by Susanne Krasmann and Michael Volkmer features international contributions from America, Australia, Great Britain, France and German-speaking countries. It is divided into three parts: Governmentality and State, Governmentality between Sovereignty and Biopower, and Governmentality and Neoliberalism. The editors assess the importance of the publication of Foucault's lectures in two key respects: first, they locate them at a point of reorientation in his historical interests, where Foucault shifted from the analytics of modern power relations to ancient technologies of the self and ethics. The lectures reveal the gradual process of this reorientation, in contrast to the three monographs of *The History of Sexuality* where this shift appears relatively abruptly between the first and the second volume. Second, the editors highlight the extent to which Foucault uses his lectures to comment extensively on questions of contemporary political importance, much more than is common in his other works. Thus, although all of his historical work relates to questions of current political interest, the lectures form a unique contemporary history as Foucault directly addresses forms of neoliberal governmentality.

The key interest of the volume, and one that guides the selection of contributions, is to explore the specific value of the recently published lectures. One section focuses on the systematic modifications in Foucault's theory of power by contextualizing the lectures within the corpus of his work as a whole. This indicates Krasmann's and Volkmer's interest in using the lectures on the history of governmentality to correct misunderstandings or desiderata of the current reception of governmentality, a perspective they advance with two main points. First, the lectures reveal that the distinction between different forms of power is not to be understood as a logic of succession, but rather as an area of conflict between sovereign power, disciplinary power, and biopower. Second, Foucault clearly points out in his lectures that the state has to be understood as a specific complex of practices in itself and has to be taken into account in the analysis because of its specific relevance in the history of power. A further interest of the volume is to continue the analytics of governmentality by working on the analytical categories as well as undertaking material analyses.

Martin Saar's article opens the volume with a very precise reading and evaluation of Foucault's lectures in the context of his wider body of work. Saar stresses their unique value: they have no equivalent in the monographs, unlike Foucault's other lectures. Thus, they form an important hinge between Foucault's analytics of power and his interest in ethics, while at the same time they remain fragmentary and lacking resilient connection to his late works. Saar identifies three main topics of the lectures: knowledge,

state, and freedom. He contends that the originality of the lectures is grounded first in their account of the connections between political power and political knowledge; second, in defining the systematic position of the state in the history of modern power; and last, in understanding freedom as a medium and not as an opposite of power. Of all the questions Foucault raises in his lectures, the question of government – understood as a relation between conduct and self-conduct – forms the bridge leading to his late studies.

Thomas Lemke reviews the contribution of Foucault's analytics of government to theories of the state. According to Lemke, their importance is founded on three theoretical innovations: First, Foucault's perspective is nominalist, stressing the significance of political knowledge for the constitution of statehood; second, it uses a broad concept of technology, encompassing the material and the symbolic as well as political technologies and technologies of the self. Third, Foucault conceives of the state as both an effect and an instrument of political strategies. On this basis, Lemke seeks to expand and strengthen materialistic concepts of the state by inserting poststructuralist elements. He identifies the theoretical profile of the analytics of government in three specific shifts: from objects to practices, from functions to strategies, and from institutions to technologies, which are further elaborated. In the Foucauldian analytics of government, the interest moves from the state to practices of government that can be analyzed in terms of processes of subjectivation, technologies of the self, as well as material and symbolic political technologies. Lemke closes with a comparison of governmentality with governance approaches, focusing especially on the latter's normative perspective.

Mitchell Dean[5] starts off with an account of the historical circumstances that rendered the concept of "governing societies" possible. He then characterizes its main features, concluding that this concept rests upon two distinctions: an inner distinction between the state and society, as well as an outer distinction between the state and its other – whether understood as a society of states, the international community, or a state of nature as conceived by Hobbes. Dean's historical and theoretical account is well-informed. However, his dreary and rather general conclusion, "[…] the certainty we must now contest is a form of liberalism so assured it drowns the concepts of state and society in the great tsunami of globalization under the grey skies of global cosmopolitan governance,"[6] sticks out awkwardly, especially in the context of the thorough investigation of the complex and sometimes contradictory elements of contemporary governmentality in the thought of Foucault, an investigation achieved by some of the other contributions to the volume.

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[5]   As Dean's contribution is a translation of the first chapter of his *Governing Societies: Political Perspectives on Domestic and International Rule* (New York: Open University Press, 2007), the English-speaking reader is best advised to refer to this publication.

[6]   Mitchell Dean, *Governing Societies: Political Perspectives on Domestic and International Rule* (New York: Open University Press, 2007), 43.

A global perspective characterizes the article by Anne Caldwell, who focuses on Human Rights Complexes (HRC) as a phenomenon of global governmentality. While the increasing influence of Human Rights is generally seen as a shift from territorial sovereignty to a global orientation towards the common good of humanity, Caldwell maintains that HRC create new forms of sovereign power. Caldwell supplements Foucault with Giorgio Agamben's analyses of the connection between sovereignty and biopolitics in order to describe how new and heterogeneous forms of transnational sovereignty are legitimized relating to "states of exception."

The wish to open and extend the analytical vocabulary of governmentality studies also animates Susanne Krasmann and Sven Opitz, who confront Foucault with the notion of inclusion/exclusion as elaborated by Niklas Luhmann's sociological systems theory. They fear that the analytics of government could remain blind to the phenomena of exclusion since it focuses on power as immanence, leading to an inclusionist paradigm. As systems theory fundamentally conceives of exclusion as inclusion into other contexts, the study of intricate practices of in/exclusion could complement the analytical grid of the triangle sovereignty – discipline/control – governmentality.

Petra Gehring examines the systematic importance of the juridic and a theory of law for Foucault in her precise reading of the two lecture series. She finds questions centering on juridical forms addressed in Foucault's discussion of the complexes of security and normalization, the problem of population, as well as pastoral power in the lecture series *Security*, *Territory*, *Population*. In her analysis of *The Birth of Biopolitics*, she points out that Foucault's notion of "juridic technologies" remains empty; it is not dealt with as an object in its own right, but merely as a foil that remains vague. Gehring draws the conclusion that Foucault only presents fragments of a genealogy of the juridic, which cannot be taken as a contribution to a theory of law.

Kevin Stenson[7] employs Foucault's analytical vocabulary of governmentality in his empirical study of contemporary communal regulation of crime and public security in Britain against the backdrop of the political and spatial turns in criminology.

Jan-Otmar Hesse evaluates Foucault's discussion of German Ordoliberalism with great insight. Based on a thorough review of contemporary research on Ordoliberalism, Hesse comments on Foucault's interpretation and corrects some misunderstandings in Foucault's reception, drawing the conclusion that his perspective is still very valuable.

Sophia Prinz and Ulf Wuggenig criticize the tendency of governmentality studies to conceive of neoliberalism as a homogeneous entity. They aim for a more differentiated perspective by emphasizing the heterogeneity and inner complexities of the neoliberal paradigm. Prinz and Wuggenig draw on the German reform of the university in

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[7]   As Stenson's contribution is a translation of his article "Sovereignty, Biopolitics and the Local Government of Crime in Britain," *Theoretical Criminology* 9 (3), 2005, 265–287, the English-speaking reader is best advised to refer to this publication.

connection with the Bologna-process to exemplify their points. Their convincing argument demonstrates that neoliberal claims of regulation paradoxically result in top-down-processes, a decrease of individual autonomy, a chastening of the market, as well as an increase in the bureaucratization of the university.

Stefanie Graefe's contribution is concerned with the German discussion on "Patientenverfügung," a document that enables the patient to regulate which medical measures are to be taken if s/he is severely ill and unable to decide for her/himself, and especially under which conditions a medical treatment is to be suspended. Graefe sketches out the ambivalent notion of autonomy and subjectivity guiding the discourse.

Mathieu Potte-Bonneville discusses the notion of "civil society" in light of two contemporary incidents, the French referendum on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE) in 2005 and the presidential election and Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004. Against the backdrop of the Foucauldian discussion on "civil society" at the end of *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Potte-Bonneville concludes that "uncivil sociability" guides political activism.

The focus of the collection edited by Patricia Purtschert, Katrin Meyer and Yves Winter is "the political." From researchers predominantly based in Basel, Berkeley and London, these contributions are analyses of contemporary developments, centering on the notion of security – a key concept in Michel Foucault's lecture series. The editors give an introductory overview on the development of the notion: In the course of *Security, Territory, Population*, "security" is first established as a generalization of the notion of biopower. In the third lecture it is then transformed and taken up by the notion of government, finally being replaced by "governmentality" in the following lecture. Although the importance of the term "security" decreases, the editors stress the specific value of the concept as constituting the population as a complex of individuals in need of protection, as subjects and objects of technologies of security at the same time. "Security" is understood by the editors to encompass militarization and rearmament in connection with biometric surveillance and alleged terrorist threats to society. In the name of security, the relationship between the individual and the state is redefined in various respects. The editors regard security not only as a category that legitimizes the undermining of basic rights, it is also central to the liberal state as a pivotal form for the rationalization of modern power. Accordingly, the editors argue against a decisive rupture in this development marked by the events of 9/11. Instead, their choice of contributions is guided by an interest in the transformation of the comprehension of security, understood as a category that has *always* been central to the liberal state.

All contributions focus on contemporary "societies of security", seen from a twofold perspective: First, Foucault's concept of governmentality is employed as a diagnostic tool for contemporary societies; second, the analysis forms the starting point for a critical reading of Foucault and possible revisions of his conceptualization of sovereignty, disciplinary power, and government. Individual contributions deal with questions like: How is the population constituted as subject and object of technologies of security? Who

is accounted for as being in need of protection, who or what is seen as a threat? What does security mean? How is it distributed, in which way is it related to violence, and which price is to be paid for it?

Susanne Krasmann's article is concerned with forms of torture in the context of security and rule of law. She argues that torture has amounted to a kind of normality in connection with its privatization in the so-called „war on terror," despite the fact that it is constitutionally banned. This "practice of outsourcing" (Krasmann) enables the state to exercise illegal power externally, not revoking but rather bypassing the rule of law by rendering torture invisible.

Yves Winter also deals with the privatization of violence, here in regard to "new wars," understood in the sense of Mary Kaldor and Herfried Münkler. He asserts that the discourse on "new wars" has primarily dealt with the question of historical uniqueness. By contrast, Winter focuses on the privatization, individualization, and economization of violence and the specific logics of risk and security, understanding these processes as part of a neoliberal order of security.

Comparing "bio-preparedness," i.e., practices of biosecurity in connection with the threat of bioterrorism, in France, Great Britain and Germany, Filippa Lentzos and Nikolas Rose find different logics in the conceptualization of threats and their defense. These can be identified as "contingency planning" (F), "resilience" (GB) and "protection" (D), which structure the different measures to be taken to obtain biosecurity. Pointing out that the distinction between these European logics is not sharp, Lentzos and Rose also reveal differences in comparison with American conceptualizations and measures. While the article is mainly to be understood as an outline followed by more thorough studies (sketched out by the authors), it also provides the following valuable insight: in spite of global tendencies, the analysis of different rationalities of government still cannot ignore the dimension of the nation state.

Katharina Pühl undertakes an overdue extension of the concept of governmentality to an analysis of gender. She shows that neoliberal processes of (de)regulation of social security from welfare to competition fail to change asymmetric gender relations because the alleged gender-neutral economization of security results in discrimination against women in connection with the reorganization of wage labor.

In her case study, Katherine Lemons analyzes governmental social security in postcolonial India, pursuing the significance of religion in relation to the increased flexibility of the judiciary and family law. Her contribution foregrounds the relationship between neoliberalism and religion, opening up the discourse of this often neglected category for further investigation.

Katrin Meyer and Patricia Purtschert take a close look at the mechanisms of Swiss "migration management," a term meant to encompass all technologies of government that claim to govern processes of migration in the best possible way for all concerned. It

can be shown, though, that the measures taken are part of a biopolitical *dispositif*, in which laws are not broken or suspended, but rather employed in flexible tactics oscillating between, on the one hand, flexible liberal law and basic rights directed towards individual interests; and on the other, the fixed, legalist practice of the nation state which promises security for the population.

Dominique Grisard analyzes the anti-terrorist discourse on security in Switzerland in the 1970s, underlining the specific value of the Foucauldian perspective. She points out that a classical notion of the state does not sufficiently describe the intersection of public administration, civil movements, the economy, and media coverage that constituted this specific discourse on security. Thus, the problematization of terrorism can be identified as the interconnection between nationalizing, subjectivating, and economic rationalities.

Sven Opitz starts off with a critical reflection on the usage of the notion of security in the context of governmentality studies, first comparing modern sovereignty with governmental logic and then Foucault's conceptualization of security with the theory of securitization established by the Copenhagen School. Opitz argues that Foucault uses sovereign power only as a foil in his analysis of contemporary forms of power. In contrast, Opitz suggests that by examining processes of securitization, the decentral rearticulation of sovereign power could be rendered visible. This would open up the analytical perspective on a unique rationality: "illiberal governmentality."

Alex Demirović argues that security has to be understood as an effect of liberal government. He contests a conceptualization of security within contexts of repression, an authoritative state, or a state of exception. Instead, security should be understood as an effect of liberal governmentality, consisting of technologies for the establishment of averages, statistical norms, and expectation levels organizing and coordinating freedom.

Both volumes offer valuable contributions to the research on governmentality. Their main virtue lies in the way their attention to Foucault's recently published lecture series *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics* leads the authors to surpass a simple concentration on analyses of the redistribution of risks in neoliberal economies. One of the central shifts triggered by the reception of Foucault's lectures is an understanding of the state as a specific category in the analysis of government, and as a correlate of governmental practices, without reducing political explanations to the state.

As is true for every edited volume, the contributions vary in quality. With few exceptions, the more theoretical studies offer very precise readings and valuable insights, indicating a high level of acquaintance with Foucault's body of work, and can well be recommended for reading. The best of the empirical studies produce a reflexive usage of Foucault's analytical vocabulary, showing that thorough empirical analyses based on his concepts are still required. Generally, one gets the impression that the specific relevance of "pastoral" power has been underestimated in these contributions. That conceptualization is central to Foucault's genealogy of modern forms of government and provides a specific link to his late work as it would have been basic to the fourth,

unpublished volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Attention to pastoral power in governmentality studies might prove to be a substantial field for further exploration.

The final remark is not so much directed at the two edited volumes themselves, but rather at the body of research using the concept of governmentality in general. Michel Foucault's heuristic vocabulary aside, we might recall that the most vital and fundamental feature of his thought is a specific analytical attitude, characterized by a high degree of sensitivity towards the complexities of its subject matter, and a skeptical perspective open to the contingent, the ambiguous, and sometimes the contradictory. The greatest threat to studies of governmentality thus seems to be a quite different critical stance, which makes use of the concept of governmentality as a ready-made unit in itself, reducing Foucault's analytical attitude to a mere analytical reflex.

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