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Rethinking governmentality

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On 1st February 1978 at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault gave the fourth lecture of his course *Sécurité, Territoire, Population* [Security, Territory, Population]. This lecture, which became known simply as ''Governmentality'', was first published in Italian, and then in English in the journal *Ideology and Consciousness* in 1979. In 1991 it was reprinted in *The Foucault Effect*, a collection which brought together work by Foucault and those inspired by him (Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991). Developing from this single lecture has been a veritable cottage industry of material, across the social sciences, including geography, of 'governmentality studies'.

In late 2004 the full lecture course and the linked course from the following year were published by Seuil/Gallimard as *Sécurité, Territoire, Population: Cours au Collège de France (1977–1978)* and *Naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au Collège de France (1978–1979)* [The Birth of Biopolitics]. The lectures were edited by Michel Senellart, and the publication was timed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of Foucault's death. They are currently being translated into English by Graham Burchell, and we publish an excerpt from the first lecture of the *Security, Territory, Population* course here.

Given the interest of geographers in the notion of governmentality, the publication of the lectures is likely to have a significant impact. The concept of governmentality has produced a range of important studies, including those in a range of disciplines (see, for example, Barry, Osborne, & Rose, 1996; Dean, 1999; Lemke, 1997; Senellart, 1995; Walters & Haahr, 2004; Walters & Larner, 2004) as well as some analyses from within geography (Braun, 2000; Corbridge, Williams, Srivastava, & Veron, 2005; Hannah, 2000; Huxley, 2007; Legg, 2006). It is clear from the ''Governmentality'' lecture in context that it was an overture of where his researches were going, rather than a culmination of analyses already undertaken. The three lectures that precede it stake out a problem, which is then addressed in summary form in the

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"Governmentality" lecture, and then treated in a sustained way in the rest of the 1978 course and that of the following year. Thus both those broadly sympathetic accounts and developments, as well as critiques (such as Dupont & Pearce, 2001), have much to learn from the courses as a whole.

The impact of the newly available lectures will be, it seems to me, in three main areas: space; history; and politics.

First, in the lectures Foucault says a great deal about the organisation and politics of space. The opening lectures of *Sécurité, Territoire, Population* are concerned with what Foucault calls apparatuses [*dispositifs*] of security, of which he gives three examples: town planning; food shortages; and vaccination campaigns. These are intended to illustrate four general traits: the spaces of security; the aleatory – the chancy, the risky, and the contingent; normalisation as mechanism of security; and the relation between technologies of security and population, as the moment of the emergence of the question of population (Foucault, 2004a, 13). Foucault's concern is therefore not with discipline, as his earlier works of the mid-1970s had looked at, but with the spaces of security, of the government of a polity. He is concerned with the way in which sovereignty, discipline and security are each connected to a particular spatial distribution [*répartition*] (2004a, 14). The question of circulation of goods, people and wealth emerges as a particular concern in terms of commerce within and between states, but also for health and hygiene, and surveillance (2004a, 19–20).

Sovereignty, discipline and security thus find their particular mechanisms: territory and the capital; architecture, hierarchy, and distribution; circulation, events and the aleatory (Foucault, 2004a, 22). The claim that discipline requires a particular spatial strategy is well known in Foucault's work, but while discipline operates through the enclosure and circumscription of space, security requires the opening up and release of spaces, to enable circulation and passage. Although circulation and passage will require some regulation, this should be minimal. Discipline seeks to regulate everything while security seeks to regulate as little as possible, but in order to enable: discipline is isolating, working on measures of segmentation, while security seeks to incorporate, and distribute more widely (2004a, 46–47). But Foucault is not simply proposing a linear narrative from a society of sovereignty to a disciplinary society to a society of government. Rather he proposes a triangle of sovereignty–discipline–government (governmental management), whose primary target is population, whose principle form of knowledge is political economy and whose essential mechanism or technical means of operating are apparatuses of security (2004a, 111; 1991, 102). Conceiving of these three 'societies' not on a linear model, but rather as a space of political action allows us to inject historical and geographical specificity into Foucault's narrative. Different places and different times might be closer to one node or another, while recognising that this is a generally useful and transferable model of analysis. Indeed, this is precisely the reason why Foucault suggests that the course title "security, territory, population" is replaced with "history of 'governmentality'" (2004a, 111; 1991, 102). This interest and focus on questions of spatiality is less pronounced in later lectures of this course, and certainly in *Naissance de la biopolitique*, but there is much in those lectures that will be of interest to geographers.

Second, we can now understand the historical background to many of Foucault's claims much better. These courses provide a great deal of context to the single lecture that outlines in schematic form the argument Foucault is making about the emergence of a particular problematic, a mode of governing populations. In these lectures, the treatment of government is as it is exercised in political sovereignty, political rule, rather than the government of the self that is

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Foucault's concern in his last works. In the well-known lecture, Foucault offers three models of governmentality, what he also calls the ''governmentalisation of the state'':

1. The archaic model of the Christian pastoral;
2. The diplomatic military techniques of European states; and
3. The emergent notion of the police (Foucault, 2004a, 111–112; 1991, 104).

It is therefore at the beginning of the lecture following ''Governmentality'' that the true historical analysis promised begins: starting in *Sécurité, Territoire, Population* but continuing in *Naissance de la biopolitique*. Foucault's work covers a wide range of Western European history, particularly concentrating on the 16th to the 20th century, but with discussions from much earlier. Later lecture courses such as the as yet unpublished *Du gouvernement des vivants* [The Government of the Living] from 1980 to 1981 and the recently translated *L'herméneutique du sujet* [The Hermeneutic of the Subject] (Foucault, 2005) move further historically backwards through the early Church Fathers to the ancients. The lecture courses of the 1980s thus serve a dual purpose—both an analysis of earlier models of government, both of souls and the self, and a concentration on techniques of the self more generally. We can thus see the intersection between the analysis of the historical antecedents of governmentality and Foucault's project on the history of sexuality (see Elden, 2005, 2007). This intersection is particularly found in his important analyses of the Christian pastorate, suggesting that pastoral reason, governmental reason, and reason of state [*raison d'État*] need to be understood as different facets of a whole. The early Church Fathers were the focus of the projected fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality*, under the title *Les aveux de la chair* [The Confession of the Flesh].

If space precludes a detailed reading of what Foucault says about the diplomatico-military *dispositif* of European states in their external relations, or the *dispositif* of the police for their internal relations, some key points can be raised. Foucault claims that his object of analysis is the series ''mechanisms of security-population-government and the opening of the field that is called politics'' (Foucault, 2004a, 78). Indeed, although he spends the rest of the course on a detailed examination and explication of this series, particularly the second two terms, he does provide an illuminating digression into how this problem had been implicit in his work before. This is when he returns to his book *The Order of Things* (1970) and suggests that population was important within its three analyses: from analysis of wealth to political economy; from natural history to biology; and from general grammar to historical philology (2004a, 78–81). In each of these the theme of 'man', of the human sciences – of the ''living being, working individual, speaking subject – can be understood from the emergence of population as a correlative of power and as an object of knowledge [*savoir*]''. Foucault contends that the figure of ''man'' – to be understood in a non-gendered and plural sense – is ''nothing other, in the last analysis, than the figure of population'' (2004a, 81).

Third, the courses are likely to be of interest for their considerable contemporary relevance. While analyses in *Sécurité, Territoire, Population* can be useful in looking at a range of 20th century issues, in *Naissance de la biopolitique* Foucault makes such analyses himself. This is beyond the allusions made in interviews and material in other lectures from the Collège de France: these are sustained engagements. Foucault discusses various models of economic reform in the US and West Germany including a nascent form of neo-liberalism (see Lemke, 2001), alongside Nazi political economy and other topics. The concern which

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links *Sécurité, Territoire, Population* with *Naissance de la biopolitique* is how the notion of police develops into a more modern political economy. The issue of bio-politics – first explored in the 1974 lectures given in Rio (Foucault, 2004c; 2000, 134–156; 2007) as well as the last lecture of *Society Must Be Defended* (2003) and the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* (1978) – is tied to the development of measures and statistical techniques. Bio-politics is the means by which the group of living beings understood as a population is measured in order to be governed, tied to the political rationality of liberalism (2004b, 323; 1997, 73; see 2004a, 73). And yet bio-politics itself is barely discussed in the course, as Foucault explains in the summary that the course as delivered actually comprised merely the introduction of the course as planned (2004b, 323; 1997, 73).

If I think those are the areas that will gain most interest, the relevance for me is in two main areas: territory and calculation. What seems striking on reading the lectures is how territory is marginalized in Foucault's story. The mechanisms of security are brought to bear on a population, rather than the sovereign territory or disciplinary space of previous models of political rule. And yet, Foucault forces us to confront the question not of territory itself, but the *qualities* of territory, the attributes amenable, like the characteristics of the population, to statistical analysis and calculative strategies. What Foucault says about calculation in these lectures, while not reaching the theoretical depth of Heidegger's analyses of the subject (see Elden, 2006), are inherently much more practical. Almost in spite of himself, Foucault seems to me to offer an extremely important and productive way to understand the relation between governmental practices and territory, namely how space is rendered subject to mathematical modelling and control, and thought politically (Elden, 2007).

In addition, like the other courses published so far, the lectures help us to understand Foucault's own chronology better, and to understand how the original plan for the *History of Sexuality* mutates into the later work on technologies of the self. Foucault followed lines of thought rather than strict plans, and his digressions are often as revealing as his ordered thoughts. Key themes discussed in Foucault's work throughout his career – the problem of confession, spatial organisation, the relation between power and knowledge, the individual and the population and the text and the world – are all covered here, to varying degrees. Taken as a whole, this piece and those by Mick Dillon and Bob Jessop look at these new lecture courses and balance them with previously published material in an assessment of what they might mean for reassessing the legacy of Foucault's thought, building on his ideas, critiquing them and rethinking governmentality. Although there have been a few discussions of the lectures in French, including some special issues of journals, there has, as yet, been almost no discussion in English. While this will inevitably change as the lectures become better known and more widely available through translation, the current collection aims to be at the forefront of the debate about the importance of these lectures, which are likely to have a significant impact on Foucault studies and political scientists and geographers utilising his ideas. We are therefore grateful to *Political Geography* for providing this forum, and to Palgrave and Graham Burchell for allowing us to publish the excerpt from the *Security, Territory, Population* course.

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