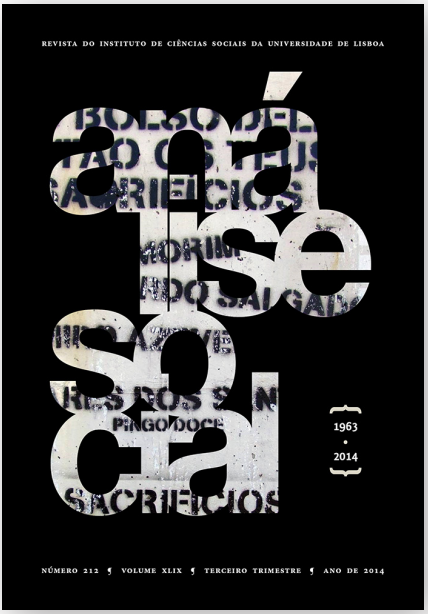

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Análise Social, 212, XLIX (3.º), 2014
ISSN ONLINE 2182-2999

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QUESTIONANDO O SOCIAL

Ao longo das últimas décadas, a obra de Michel Foucault tem interpelado as ciências sociais e humanas de forma muito diversa. Por exemplo, vários conceitos de sua autoria têm convidado a uma renovação dos termos em que debatemos questões como as relações de poder. Entre estes conceitos, destaca-se o de *gouvernamentalité*, assistindo-se mesmo à consolidação de uma área designada como *Governamentality Studies*. Nos trinta anos da morte de Foucault, a *Análise Social* convida um conjunto de investigadores a partilharem connosco uma reflexão sobre o modo como aquele conceito interceta a sua própria agenda de pesquisa.

PATRICK JOYCE

History and Governmentality

As the editors of *Análise Social* put it, "in the last few decades the work of Michel Foucault has permeated the social sciences and humanities in diverse ways". Concepts proposed by Foucault have led to a renewal of the terms in which we debate power relations – as is the case with the idea of *governmentality*.[1] However, like the other elements of Foucault's thought, these concepts are not to be slavishly copied, but applied with other intellectual resources, including those of different historiographical traditions. If properly developed, they can lead to a renewed political history, but cannot do it alone.

The study of the political in history and the social sciences still largely proceeds on the basis of an inadequate understanding of the realities with which it purports to deal. While a new "history of the political" has emerged recently in different places, the emphasis has still been rather narrow regarding the conceptual and the discursive. For instance, German initiatives, such as that of Bielefeld "The political as space for communicative action"[2], are strongly influenced by both Koselleck's conceptual history and Habermas' discursive notion of communicative action. In France, Ronsanvallon's history of the political seeks to differentiate such a history from established "political history" (the study of a differentiated sphere of society, the political as opposed to the economic, for example). The political is understood as a form of life, as it is by Foucault. However, rather than this possibility, his is a self-confessedly "conceptual" and philosophical history. In this regard it has much in common with the strong vein of philosophical approaches to a more enlarged view of the political evident in France (e. g., Claude Lefort, Maurice Gauchet).[3] Despite these new developments, however limited, in Anglo-American scholarship and beyond, the influence of the so-called Cambridge School and Quentin Skinner still remains strong. This has also remained text-based and so offers only limited scope for a new political history. The legacy of Foucault is therefore quite crucial for the development of new ways of doing political history.

1 Foucault (2001).

2 "University of Bielefeld Programme. The Political as Communicative Space in History-emergence and reformulation of the "political". https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/geschichte/forschung/sfb584/SFB-584-Research-Programme.pdf.

3 For example, Ronsanvallon (2013).

First , however, what is governmentality? The concept and its application owe a great deal to a group of British and French scholars working in the social sciences, but with an interest in history. In the words of one of the most influential of these, Nikolas Rose, governmentality concerns "the ways in which those who would exercise rule have posed to themselves the question of the reasons, justifications, means and ends of rule, and the problems, goals or ambitions that should animate it".[4] As a political rationality, governmentality is understood "as a kind of intellectual machinery or apparatus for rendering reality thinkable in such a way that it is amenable to political programming" (political here being understood in the wide sense). Following from this, *technologies* of government are to be analyzed in terms of the "strategies, techniques and procedures through which different authorities seek to enact programmes of government". As Rose continues however, "this is not a matter of the implementation of idealized schemata in the real by an act of will, but of the complex assemblage of diverse forces (legal, architectural, professional, administrative, financial, judgemental), techniques (notation, computation, calculation, examination, evaluation), devices (surveys and charts, systems of training, building forms) that promise to regulate decisions and actions of individuals, groups, organisations in relation to authoritative criteria".

So defined, governmentality is given a history by Foucault and those developing his work[5]. The separation of governmentality from sovereignty in the 16th century is held to have seen the emergence of "population" as a principle of rule, with bio-power its expression. A governable "economy" and "society" began to emerge, and these became autonomous in "liberalism", which now ceded governance to an unknowable, and now opaque object of rule, that of the liberal subject. Liberalism fought shy of too much governing, and it confronted itself with realities – individual subjects, markets, civil society, families, and in the case of my own work, cities and states[6], in which these free subjects could be identified and acted upon. These realities were held to have their own internal logics and mechanisms of self-regulation that had to be respected.

Thus approached, social and political and postcolonial historians have deployed governmentality in different ways[7]. The work of Timothy Mitchell has been particularly influential, representing as it does an awareness of what

4 Rose, N. (1996); Miller and Rose (1992); see my discussion of this, Joyce (2010a).

5 Joyce (2003); Dean (1999).

6 As well as Joyce (2003 and 2013). Otter (2008); Prakash (1999); Vernon (2007).

7 Mitchell (2002 e 2011).

could be learned from science studies as well as from Foucault. However, the main emphasis in taking up science studies was that apparent in the work of myself and others, which drew on the various elements that make up what is being called "the new materialism"[8]. These new directions of change took the concept of governmentality a good deal beyond the somewhat formulaic use of the term in its original guise of political sociology. There it suffered also from a tendency to a sort of crypto-functionalism, as if different governmentalities were not always in conflict, and as if they were coherent, prescient, and unified. This failing is also apparent in the original work of Foucault, as well as that of his critic De Certeau, governmental techniques being construed as having a built-in essence expressing an inherent political coherence and logic.

While scholars in several disciplines have used many of Foucault's insights to study extra-institutional formations of power, mainstream political sociologists and historians are only minimally attentive to the cultural and material currents that animate the events and the institutions that are their objects of study. While Foucault has been able to broaden social conceptions of politics by drawing attention to the dispersal of power through bodies and things, it has, however, been hard to reconcile Foucault's work with theories of the state and the study of politics as these have developed in historical writing and much social science, focusing as these have on variations in "centralizing" institutional power and types of political regimes. This has left traditional, and still dominant, approaches to political power no clear way to analyze how political institutions and other political actors gain and exercise forms of knowledge and material power of the sort identified by Foucault.

In developing the work of Foucault alongside the new materialism, I and my recent collaborator Chandra Mukerji begin from the assertion – a variant on Weber's theory– that modern states are themselves impersonal social formations that develop their powers by proliferating tools of impersonal rule from infrastructures to legal archives. Weber focused mainly on the social means of depersonalization of power in his account of Western state formation, but also hinted at the importance of material formations of power when he pointed to the importance of bureaucratic files. However, we do not start with social practices of power that sociologists already understand, but rather with the material forms of governance that social and political theory, and most political history, barely acknowledge, looking at the impersonal techniques of power that states have developed to make them institutionally more powerful. Contrary to many present-centered understandings of technique

8 Bennett and Joyce (2010); Joyce (2010b); Mukerji (2009).

and the technical we are interested in low- and slow-tech as well as high- and fast-tech, not only railways and energy networks, say, but also letters and filing systems; in fact with "technology" at a fundamental level, namely the level of writing and numbering. Only by understanding these impersonal techniques can we understand state-making properly, and so develop the new political history.

We have been working collaboratively in an effort to provide such an analytic frame, extending Foucault's approach to power by studying the material practices of knowledge/power within the French and British states, including the British Raj and Ireland – practices that helped to make them both claim and exercise authority. We do not treat culture as ideas, beliefs, or principles, but more broadly, like Foucault, as forms of life, and we study material practices of state power that shape the forms of life identified with those states. State power, in our view, is not only or even mainly the power of law, social organization, political legitimacy, and ideas. It involves the power of legal documents over people; the arsenals and soldiers formed to enact legitimate power in the name of the state; and among countless other things the built environments that define the history and destiny of nations and states.

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