



Book Review

Nadesan, Majia. 2008. *Governmentality, Biopower and Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge.

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Majia Nadesan's new book is a welcome addition to the critique of neoliberalism, and will be of interest for those concerned with the rising practices of surveillance and normalization in the name of improving life. It also stands on its own as a successful synthesis of theoretical and empirical works, nicely bridging literatures on governmentality, biopower and political economy. The overriding intent of the text is to explore how governmental rationalities – concerned with altering how people govern themselves – disrupt personhood and social justice. The discussion is structured around genealogies of government, market autonomy, and population. In various ways, each of these practices emerged in response to the question of biopower: how should we govern life? This provides the launching point for the consideration of new spaces of visibility, such as genetic research on 'risky' genes, and the new possibilities for intervention such practices create.

Nadesan begins by discussing the emergence of the state, market and population as new governmental spaces, drawing heavily from Foucault's historical analyses. Although this covers familiar material in governmentality scholarship, the synthesis nonetheless offers fresh insights. For example, the pastoral power of pre-disciplinary society can be seen not only in the welfare state, but also in neoliberalism's logic of philanthropy, illustrating the various ways biopower is taken-up. Nadesan advocates for a Foucauldian theoretical framework that centers the birth of biopower as foundational to the emergence of liberal governance and the free-market economy. As power dispersed into various disciplines, political economic theories of market autonomy prevailed (i.e. the invisible hand), resulting in the separation of social justice from freedom because "neoliberalism rejects the equation between population and wealth" (77). However, welfare has not so much been eliminated as it has been transformed into a neoliberal logic: market innovation, philanthropy and personal 'responsibility' now dominate solutions to social pathologies. This historical backdrop sets the stage for the book's remaining chapters, which consider how populations are governed.

At this stage in the text, Nadesan's previous work on the construction of autism as a social-historical concept shines through in her deft analysis of scientific knowledge and market capitalization. Here, data about the population creates a host of risk measures that have, over time, been used to identify dangerous, mentally ill and diseased individuals. More recently we have seen increasingly subtle forms of difference, like the less-than-optimal (e.g. shyness) and the optimization of lifestyle (e.g. stress), emerge as sites of medical intervention. However, unlike nineteenth century approaches to health and crime, which sought to isolate threats within disciplinary spaces, a new form of surveillance medicine emerged in the twentieth century (see Armstrong 1995). This model expanded health beyond the clinic and into the everyday minutia of life by encouraging citizens to act on themselves through practices of self-government. Alongside the development of this mental hygiene movement, new technologies (e.g. the microscope) were making possible new forms of visibility that eventually placed genetics under the gaze of biopolitical expertise. Nadesan makes a compelling case that the idea of 'gene susceptibility' took hold

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under neoliberalism because of how it provided opportunities for scientific and commercial innovations that helped fuel the economy, while also offering individualistic explanations of behavior compatible with notions of personal responsibility.

For Nadesan this raises two important normative concerns for personhood and freedom. First, it suggests pharmacology, behavioral genetics and cognitive neuroscience may be similar to the eugenics movement because they hold the potential to control populations through biochemical interventions. Second, these industries have become cornerstones of the economy, and officials may therefore be less likely to consider the risks involved in such treatments. Ironically, the main impediment to biological control may be the science itself: attempts to isolate organic causes of behavior have largely failed because biology works through complex interactions with environment and psyche rather than genetic reductionism. For that reason, societies of biological control will likely work by re-defining how we view our selves, our problems and the solutions on offer, as opposed to producing 'super babies' or using drugs to eliminate all pathologies.

In moving away from medicine, the book also considers Agamben's work on the "state of exception" in the post-9/11 American context. Nadesan interprets the state of exception as the ability of experts to deem certain people incapable of self-government, people who 'require' state intervention to protect the nation. The chapter documents America's draconian response to terrorism, focusing on the acceptance of precautionary risk management in creating a boundless expansion of surveillance. However, rather than emphasizing panoptic processes, she again returns to the operation of biopower: "sovereign power over death is justified in the modern era to ensure life" (186). In this sense, the book is a statement about the many ways – ranging from self-government (e.g. drugging depression) to sovereignty (e.g. torture) – that modern governmental rationalities approach the question of how to categorize and maximize life.

This book provides an excellent genealogy of neoliberal governance and biopolitics, but perhaps its greatest strength is that it provokes important questions. Is the marketization of biological research on humans a return to eugenics? How might concerns with social justice be more fully incorporated into the governance debate? How does sovereign power as a politics of life supplement neoliberal and military agendas? Although it is not specifically about surveillance, a central narrative running through the work is that new knowledge and/or technologies create possibilities for intervention. It will therefore be of interest to surveillance scholars, especially those working in health studies. However, at times the book is jargon heavy, making it difficult for readers unfamiliar with a Foucauldian vocabulary and style of argument. While the critiques of biological marketization and post-9/11 America are excellent, they may be less relevant for people in other countries. That being said, the text draws our attention to how new spaces, such as the brain, are being made visible for social control and market capitalization. Ultimately Nadesan wants to work against complacency. She does so by accentuating how the horrors of previous governmental practices look eerily like our current solutions to health and security.

References

Armstrong, D. 1995. The rise of surveillance medicine. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 17(3): 393-404.