

Foucault on population and governance

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In Ancient Roman times, power of the sovereign over his subjects could be exercised in an absolute and unconditional way. The king had the authority to directly expose the life of his subjects in times of war and thus he held an indirect power over them of life and death. During the classical age in the West, this death that was based on the right of the sovereign was not manifested as simply the reverse of the right of the social body to ensure, maintain and develop its life.

Wars that were fought in the name of the sovereign were not fought on behalf of the whole population in the country or territory. No longer is it the juridical existence of a sovereign; at stake is the biological existence of the population. For instance, genocide is an example of how power is situated and exercised at the level of life. So starting from the 17th C, power over life evolved in two basic forms; the first centered on the body as a machine- its disciplining, optimization of its capabilities, increasing its usefulness- all this was ensured by the “ anatomo-politics of the human body”.

The second focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of biological processes- births and mortality, health, life expectancy etc. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a bio politics of population. The bio power was an indispensable element of capitalist development; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic progress.

Post French Revolution, western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species, to have a body, conditions of existence probabilities of

life. For the first time in history, biological existence was reflected in political existence; fact of living was no longer arbitrary that arose from time to time, part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention. (Foucault the great ka basic theory is that through knowledge you control and through power you intervene- knowledge and power go hand in hand.)

Bio power made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life. A consequence of bio power is that growing importance is assumed by the action of the norm, at the expense of the juridical system of law. Law refers to the sword. But a power whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms. Law operated more and more as a norm. A normalizing society is historical outcome of this.

Sex and sexuality became a means of political operations and economic interventions in the 19th century. At the juncture of the ' body' and the ' population', sex became a crucial target of a power organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death. Deployments of power are directly connected to the body- to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations and the pleasures. " The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our ' liberation' is in balance. "