

# Governing the Social in Neoliberal Times

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# Introduction

*Deborah R. Brock*

## **Moving beyond “Normal”**

Few phenomena are as intriguing as the flow of power in everyday life and how the minutiae of our everyday worlds sustain much broader social forces than we might know. Throughout our many combined years of experience teaching university students, the contributors to *Governing the Social in Neoliberal Times* have been greatly encouraged by the capacity of young people to identify, feel passionate about, and challenge the daily impact of power and privilege. Post-secondary education provides students with the theoretical and methodological tools to help understand, and challenge, the social inequalities that we can clearly see in the world around us. *Governing the Social in Neoliberal Times* invites students to join a community of more established scholarly readers of this volume by offering a lens for discovering the less obvious organization and flows of power that serve to sustain relations of social inequality. This collection reveals how even our efforts to do good, and to secure our own well-being and the well-being of others through, for example, preservation of the natural environment, support for social welfare provisions, and advocating the rights of people with disabilities, First Nations communities, and minoritized sexual communities, are deeply enmeshed in relations of power. Similarly, it reveals how our insecurities and fears about the security of borders, endless war and

its attendant sacrifices, and “dangerous offenders” and “suspect” community members result in our participation in injustices for which we would otherwise not give our consent. This volume engages students and established scholarly readers with an analytic approach that reveals how power harnesses our unexamined assumptions as well as our capacity for action. It connects everyday life to some of the big issues of our day, centring the political character of personal, social, cultural, and economic activity. We engage centrally with the enormously influential ideas and substantial intellectual legacy of Michel Foucault (1926–84), particularly his influence on the development of the governmentality approach to the analysis of power. Our aim is to present accounts of the combined forces of normalization, neoliberalism, and governmental power in a manner that is accessible to undergraduate students and to readers who are new to the area while providing some enlightening case studies to those who are already familiar with this analytic approach.<sup>1</sup>

First, *Governing the Social in Neoliberal Times* addresses an essential element in the taken-for-granted character of everyday power – normalization – and shows how we can make the normal visible and subject it to questioning and investigation. Where societal *norms* are expressions of the attitudes, beliefs, and values in a given social context, *normalization* occurs when ideas, values, beliefs, and actions are taken for granted or assumed to have the status of truth, common sense, or inevitability. Normalization refers to the social processes through which particular values and behaviours come to be considered standard, acceptable, and expected, if not right and good. In other words, when “normal” becomes a verb, we can identify how normal is a *social decision* and process that is rendered invisible and so becomes less likely to be contested. The condition of normality is not simply pre-given as a fact of biology or the result of universal forces and therefore difficult or impossible to change. Following in the footsteps of Michel Foucault (1975), *Governing the Social in Neoliberal Times* considers normalization to be one of the most effective means of governing social life in contemporary Western societies. One objective of this collection is to make the accepted unacceptable by making visible the consequences of power flows behind the constitution of normal in the making of people, ideas, and actions. Understanding normalizing power and its attendant practices

of subjectification in neoliberal societies is the main task of this book. Through the course of our studies, we see how normal is remade, the subjectification of people is produced, and what Foucault (1982) calls “dividing practices” are sustained. Dividing practices create value-laden and hierarchically organized distinctions between people, groups, belief systems, and actions, such that inequalities are made possible.

Second, *Governing the Social in Neoliberal Times* addresses the processes through which a new normal is being made through what Stuart Hall (2011) refers to as a “neoliberal revolution” that is revealed in a new conjuncture of social, economic, and political forces. At a minimum, neoliberalism supports the deregulation of business and the financial sector, the expansion of free trade, and the privatization of public services through their being absorbed by the business sector. In this new reality, the world is understood first and foremost as a marketplace, an understanding that has been naturalized to appear timeless, inevitable, and intrinsic to human nature. This shift can be regarded as neoliberalism’s most significant victory. But, arguably, its greater success lies in capturing our minds and reshaping our very sense of self, severely circumscribing our ability to even begin to question such a world. If you are under the age of forty and were raised in North America, you will have always lived in a time when neoliberalism was in ascendancy, and you will likely not have experienced any other way of organizing social life. Neoliberalism is the new normal.

In this volume, neoliberalism is understood as more than an ideological perspective favouring the notion of the minimal state, competitive individualism, and “free” trade and markets. The authors explore a central component of how neoliberalism works: *how* we are constituted as neoliberal subjects. This includes the making of people as fiscally, organizationally, and even sexually responsible subjects, and as biopolitical subjects of bodily enhancement and optimization (“fit” and “proper” bodies), citizenship, militarism, social responsibility, and so on, who are governed through their capacity for action as well as through constraint. Through a reconfiguration of subjectification, neoliberalism has fundamentally reshaped how the self can be known and what interests it holds. The concept of biopolitics (Foucault 1976), discussed later in this introduction, signals the importance of addressing techniques for the

administration and regulation of populations, indeed for the government of life itself (Lemke 2011), that are crucial to the success of the neoliberal revolution. This book helps the reader develop an understanding of how governance through neoliberalism, or neoliberal governmentality, has come to characterize advanced liberal democracies. Like Randy Lippert and Michelle Brady (2016), however, we are concerned that the concept of neoliberalism has become a catch-all – a term that supposedly explains everything without actually explaining very much. The chapters that follow provide a series of substantive engagements with what happens when neoliberal rationalities come to permeate dominant discourses, social institutions, and everyday life. This does not necessarily make these discourses, institutions, and practices inherently neoliberal, but it does inform how they are configured in a particular time, how they are understood, and to what effect. Our task, ultimately, is to use a governmentality approach to expose and challenge neoliberal ideas and practices and, in so doing, to make some contribution – however small – to building a politics of resistance.

Third, then, *Governing the Social in Neoliberal Times* takes a governmentality approach to analyzing power in neoliberal societies. The notion of governmentality was introduced by Michel Foucault (1991) as a means to explore how governance is accomplished through practices that extend well beyond the juridical functions of the state to penetrate the minds and hearts of those who are governed, thus shaping their conduct. As we discuss at some length, it is an approach to power relations that is much more nuanced than a social control approach, relying on the interchange between power and knowledge in a dynamic and mutually constitutive relation that shapes what can be known and how we can know it. The governmentality approach to analysis considers the ways in which contemporary Western societies are characterized by conditions of “regulated freedom” and investigates the “programmes, strategies and techniques” (Miller and Rose 2008a, 1) of government processes that transcend state institutions. These distinctive characteristics of the governmentality approach are explored later in this introduction and throughout subsequent chapters. Governmentality scholars have built their approach by using the rough descriptions of governmental power provided by Foucault, applying and extending his ideas about “the art

of government” (Foucault 1991, 87; Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke 2011, 4) in research that considers everything from our most personal and intimate experiences to the organization of neoliberal societies. The disciplinary scope of the field of governmentality includes, *inter alia*, criminology and socio-legal studies, sociology, anthropology, health, medicine, brain sciences, psychology, psychiatry, social work, education, geography, cultural and media studies, critical management studies, postcolonial theory, global politics and security, and gender and sexuality studies.

We begin with the organization of neoliberal societies, go on to introduce Foucault’s approach to power, and then discuss the governmentality approach. We then look at neoliberal governmentality as it relates to the chapters in this book and to the conditions in which people are constituted as subjects as well as the means through which they are subjectified.

### **An Overview of Economic Neoliberalism**

Neoliberalism is now firmly entrenched as a descriptor of the social, cultural, political, and (particularly) economic changes of recent times, much in the same way as Keynesianism, named for British economist John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946), expresses real political and economic conditions and processes while immediately bringing to mind the historical conditions under which they developed. During the 1970s, a number of faculty at the Chicago School of Economics, principal among them Milton Friedman, played a pivotal role in promoting a neoliberal approach to economics and politics in North America and Britain – an approach in which the primacy of the market was absolute. This approach has been called “market imperialism” (Davies 2015) or “market fundamentalism” (Raddon 2012), and it secured the Chicago School’s place as the most influential school of economics in the United States, enabling it to affect domestic policy as well as foreign policy interventions. Prior to their being implemented in the US, Friedman advised Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet (1973–90) on how to implement neoliberal economic policies in his totalitarian regime. This was supported by the US

State Department, following the American government's participation in the overthrow of Chile's democratically elected socialist government under the leadership of Salvador Allende (see, for example, Winn 2004).

Domestically, Friedman urged the end of the Keynesian macroeconomic approach, a planned, mixed economy comprised of both private and public investments that was significant to lifting the American and Canadian economies out of the Great Depression of the 1930s and that fuelled post-Second World War economic growth. Friedman was the main architect of the monetarist policies that replaced Keynesianism by the late 1970s, whereby governments eliminated the gold standard and turned to controlling the supply of money as a principle means of intervening in a nation's economic activity (Raddon 2012). Friedman's colleague Gary Becker later combined neoclassical economics and psychology to extend this neoliberal approach to areas of social life, including the role of education, the organization of families, and the causes and treatment of crime (Davies 2014a, 2014b).

The disastrous failure of neoliberalism as an economic project (meant to benefit society as a whole rather than just the few) has been revealed again and again since 2008, with the beginning of an economic crisis – a crisis that endures in the repeated peril of global financial markets. The curious thing is that most North Americans appear to know that neoliberalism is deeply flawed and corrupt, whether this knowledge is derived from watching *The Wolf of Wall Street* or from an awareness of public protests such as the Occupy movement. Indeed, key slogans of the Occupy movement, such as the reference to “the one percent” (those who hold most of the wealth in capitalist economies), clearly struck a chord and quickly entered into popular discourse. The accuracy of the slogan itself is supported by research. In January 2015, Oxfam, a non-governmental development organization, released a report finding that sixty-two people owned as much wealth as half the world's population (3.6 billion people) and that the wealth gap has increased dramatically since the financial

crisis of 2008 (Oxfam 2016). These global economic dynamics suggest that one of the consequences of the neoliberal revolution is the expansion of neocolonialism. Neocolonialism is exercised not through direct political rule but, rather, through indirect control over the economies of other nations, and it can occur in the context of formally democratic nations (see, for example, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995).

Repeated economic crises, reoccurring since 2008, provide clear evidence of the limitations of the neoliberal approach to the growth of economies, primarily due to the ways in which the deregulation of financial markets through neoliberal policies has accelerated individual interests (be it those of financial speculators or stockholders, or our personal interest in growing our pension funds), superseding concern for the sustainability of national economies and citizen welfare. The scale of the 2008 financial crisis demanded that national governments employ Keynesian-style intervention in the form of corporate takeovers, stimulus packages, and so on to protect national economies from insolvency. This has been a financial disaster of global proportions and it has not yet ended. Given the extent of the crises, why has resistance to neoliberal logics and practices been so limited and so ineffective? One reason is the ascendancy of marketization, which includes the extension of the logic of markets to non-market activities, blinkering alternative visions of economic and social life.

The market is a means of organizing the exchange of goods, services, and ideas or information between people, sometimes through barter but more commonly through a shared unit of exchange – in other words, money. Markets are not the purview of capitalism alone; they are characteristic of any type of society in which people can offer something in exchange for something that someone else has. How the value of goods, services, and information is established, and how trade is organized, differentiates one type of market from another. In capitalist societies, a guiding logic of the market is that of supply and demand. Markets are understood as self-regulating forces best left to function independently so as to make economies efficient and to maximize the generation of economic wealth. The idea that an invisible hand regulates the capitalist marketplace was first developed by Adam Smith (1723–90) in his 1776 treatise on the birth of capitalism, *The Wealth of Nations* (1999). As

per this key principle of classical economics, the capitalist marketplace is seen as akin to a natural force that can be facilitated and directed by groups of individuals and governments but not controlled. Philip Mirowski argues that this belief in a natural cause is no longer upheld. Instead, the proponents of neoliberalism (who are not confined to the capitalist class but can also be found in influential economic institutions, independent think tanks, universities, and, of course, governments) recognize that they must intervene extensively in order to make a neoliberal economy function at all (Mirowski 2014).

But marketization is much more than what markets do. Financial markets now surpass in influence what nations actually produce in goods and services, and negotiate in trade. There is no need to employ people or to build or grow anything, nor is there any perceived need to pay taxes on accrued wealth. The machinations of financial markets are what cause the value of a nation's currency to swing so wildly overnight as speculators invest in, and then sell, national currencies. Financial institutions may also invest heavily in the debts of people, businesses, and nations, the most infamous example being the mass availability of subprime mortgages in the US, creating precisely the kind of economic scenario that was the financial collapse of 2008. Mary Beth Raddon (2012) explains that financialization is an economic and cultural shift that occurred throughout the latter decades of the twentieth century, involving an expansion of the scale of financial markets and institutions (including investment, insurance, pensions, savings, and debt) beyond that of other economic sectors. Financialization also requires compulsory "financial literacy" as more and more of us become borrowers and investors rather than savers, and as financial activity and decision making assume growing importance in our everyday lives. Financial literacy is a sign of our financial fitness – our ability to sustain our own financial well-being through our participation in prescribed forms of financial culture, such as negotiating mortgages, paying off our credit cards, and investing in retirement funds. In other words, people are morally responsabilized to become economic agents who "think like investors" (Raddon 2012) regardless of their economic class position or their ability to put money into a registered retirement savings plan (RRSP), which Canadians are encouraged to do even when they have trouble putting food on the table.

At this point, readers under forty may be wondering what is so problematic about financial literacy. After all, it has a commonsensical and practical appeal (see, for example, the website at Financial Consumer Agency of Canada 2015). Should we not all have a compelling interest in managing, if not growing, our money? Surely we are not being “fooled” into desiring financial security and, in fact, wish to actively pursue the knowledge and skills that might make it possible. Indeed, financial literacy has a normative logic that makes perfect sense in these times, underpinning the success of the discourse, particularly when it claims to enhance our financial freedom. Financial literacy makes increasing sense to many of us because we have been repeatedly warned that, in the near future, we will not be able to depend on the state should we lose our jobs, suffer ill health, or simply grow old.

However, neoliberal normative logic is much more far-reaching than the simple acquisition of practical financial skills. According to David Harvey (2005), through its “financialization of everything,” neoliberalism has further departed from the classical economics first proposed by Adam Smith. Market logics have been extended to virtually every sphere of social life and human activity, remaking all of us not simply into financial entrepreneurs but into entrepreneurs of the self. We are each responsible for managing, improving, and promoting our own “human capital,” a term developed by Gary Becker (1964), much as if we were business owners.

State political institutions and processes have played a decisive role in initiating and encouraging neoliberal policies and practices by implementing austerity programs, promoting competition among financial markets, and promoting neoliberalism as a “global normative logic” (Dardot and Laval 2014, 1). Neoliberal states are not simply doing capital’s bidding, they are also shoring up political power and influence, both domestically and internationally. In implementing neoliberal rationalities, states share in the production of norms that emphasize competitiveness, entrepreneurship, and the like, and dismantle their own role in health, welfare, and education. Compounding this retreat, the neoliberal state’s “unconditional defence of the financial system” makes it party to “new forms of subjection of the wage-earning class to the mass indebtedness that characterizes the functioning of contemporary

capitalism” (Dardot and Laval 2014, 15). As a result, Canadians now have the highest rate of household debt among the G7 populations, at 171 percent of disposable income (Isfield 2016). The Canadian state has contributed to this economic situation by transferring expenses, and debts that were previously the responsibility of governments onto individual households (Raddon 2012). However, when we utilize the governmentality approach, we find that states are not straightforwardly the source of governmental power. Rather, state institutions, policies, and practices are themselves produced through the exercise of neoliberalism, which is arguably now the dominant means by which power works in contemporary Western societies.

In *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, Foucault (2008) is remarkably prescient in anticipating the course of neoliberal development that would occur well after his death in 1984, although the rightward shift of governments in Britain and the United States in the late 1970s did provide a context for the development of his ideas (Ciccarelli 2008). His study of “economic liberalism” suggests that this was the principle means by which modern power was taking shape (Binkley and Capetillo 2010) and that a particular type of political reason differentiated it from earlier forms of liberalism, which had limited the marketplace to the economic sphere.

A notable contribution building on Foucault’s lectures on liberalism is Wendy Brown’s (2015b) exploration of neoliberalism as politics: a governing rationality (a form of reason) that, for its critics, presents an enormous threat to democratic institutions and practices. According to Brown, these democratic institutions include basic principles of justice, the definition of citizenship, political practice spanning cultures of political participation and practices of rule, and the ability to imagine and articulate democratic visions. They are clearly imperfect institutions, marred by exclusion and social inequality, but they do keep open the possibility of political engagement, organizing, and struggle. The concept of democracy is itself ideologically laden and highly contested, but Brown locates her argument in the context of its core meaning: the people rule. In *Dissent Magazine*, Brown concludes: “Thus, today, the meaning of democracy is pretty much reduced to personal liberty. Such liberty is not nothing, but it could not be further from the idea of rule

by and for the people” (Shenk 2015). Neoliberalism, then, is a form of reason that actively undoes democracy.

Brown (2015b, 31) is among many theorists, including Foucault (2008), who have observed that neoliberalism’s governing rationality has reconfigured social life as a marketplace and people as mere market actors, but her reasoning is worth noting:

To speak of the relentless and ubiquitous economization of all features of life by neoliberalism is thus not to claim that neoliberalism literally marketizes all spheres, even as such marketization is certainly one important effect of neoliberalism. Rather, the point is that neoliberal rationality disseminates the *model of the market* to all domains and activities – even where money is not an issue – and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*.<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis in original)

This model reconfigures institutions and activities that are not focused on generating wealth, ranging from the corporatization of public universities to techniques for individual improvement. All are submitted to and governed by “market metrics” and “market techniques and practices,” such that people are recast as human capital and “must constantly tend to their own present and future value” (Brown 2015a). Political, social, and cultural life are now dominated by capital in a manner unprecedented in the history of capitalism. Liberalism itself has been transformed as market values have expanded far beyond the economy, penetrating civic, familial, political, religious, intimate, and ethical life, and, in the process, reshaped our understanding of what people are and do.

What are the implications of neoliberal penetration for, in the words of Ian Hacking (2006), “making up people”? Or, as Wendy Brown (2015b) asks, “How does the distinctive form of reason that is neoliberalism become a governing rationality saturating practices of ordinary institutions and discourses of everyday life?” Most obviously, neoliberalism interpellates us as subjects who are fundamentally individualistic, competitive, self-serving, and even greedy – assumed survival qualities characterizing the fittest. This could, of course, be a classical liberal

description of “economic man.”<sup>3</sup> What, then, differentiates this classical liberal conceptualization from a neoliberal one?

Foremost, the way in which we reconceptualize ourselves as market actors need not be directly related to our economic activity. Representing ourselves on Facebook or on dating sites, building our resumés, working out at the gym, doing yoga, reading self-help books, recycling for the preservation of the planet, and doing good work through voluntarism are all examples of how we have become more than economic subjects. As we “invest” in and enhance our value through our time, labour, and (yes) money, and aim for others to invest in us too, we transform ourselves into human capital, as Brown suggests. As is subsequently explored, neoliberalism is more than a governing rationality: it is a supreme exercise of what Foucault (1978) refers to as biopower. This is because of the ways in which it both intervenes in and directs the lives of the population and disciplines the body of the individual, producing new forms of subjectivity and subjectification to neoliberal rule. Literally, bodies are optimized through diet, exercise, and surgical enhancement; or, as Kelly Fritsch reveals in [Chapter 1](#), worth as a human being is proven through overcoming the “limits” of disability. Conversely, economic discourse has adapted certain discourses of the optimized body, such as the need for individuals and economies to pursue “financial fitness” and to be “lean and mean.” The language of freedom, choice, and empowerment articulated through practices of agency (the presumed capacity for human agency has never been so pronounced), enterprise, and performance permeate everyday utterance. Neoliberalism works through our desires and our fears in our pursuit of being better, more successful people. Ultimately, we are a new kind of person in a new kind of society.

### **A Story of Power**

The story of neoliberalism is, therefore, a story of power and subjectification. To make sense of how this happens it is necessary, first, to make power relations visible by exploring the forms that they take and, second, to understand the mobility of power in everyday life. Foucault’s approach to power was unique and has inspired countless debates and studies, to the extent that no study of the social dimensions of power would be complete without engaging with his work. I say “approach”

because Foucault insisted that he had not actually developed a new theory of anything. He considered his investigation to be a work-in-progress – producing partial, contingent, historically contextualized critiques that unsettled existing truisms. His approach provides a tool kit – a method of investigation – rather than an entirely new social theory. Those familiar with Foucault’s original publications addressing topics that include the human sciences (1966), the organization of knowledge (1969), the history of prisons (1975), madness and psychiatric power (1961, 1963), and sexuality (1976, 1984a, 1984b), as well as the series of lectures published after his death, know why his work provides a rich landscape for investigation and a source of inspiration for new developments in scholarship. What his work does not do is try to replace one set of claims to truth with another.

Foucault’s approach to contemporary power is heterogeneous: power is not merely one thing or one mode of expression. As such, his approach is a radical departure from the conventional definition of power, which holds that power is something that individuals, groups, and institutions possess and hold over others, providing them with the capacity (through threat or force) to bend the will and compel the actions of other individuals, groups, and institutions. It is similarly distant from the Marxist approach to power, which typically informs studies in political economy, whereby power is equated with social control and analyzed through the lens of the economic and class domination characteristic of a capitalist system.<sup>4</sup> In Foucault’s approach power is omnipresent: it is a phenomenon that we cannot escape. We can, however, develop strategies of resistance to specific expressions and exercises of power, keeping in mind that the forms that power takes and the context for struggle are always shifting, requiring new analysis and action. To make sense of Foucault’s innovative approach to power flows and relations we need to situate it within its historical context. Foucault’s closest approximation to more typical views of power is his notion of sovereign power, first exercised by “right” by monarchical authorities to prohibit dissent, punish the non-compliant, and repress their subjects. Power, therefore, was enacted primarily through the threat of punishment and “the right to *take* life or *let* live” (Foucault 1978, 136; emphasis in original). The exercise of the power of the sovereign required spectacles of control such as public

executions to command obedience as well as the strict imposition of limits on daily life (Foucault 1975).

The scientific revolution set the conditions for the Enlightenment (also known as the Age of Reason), marking an enormous shift in ideas in Western Europe over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At its core was the principle that people could intervene in and shape history through the use of logic and reason, and through scientific experimentation. God alone did not decide how life carried on, although “He” may have delivered the final verdict, and even though sovereigns continued for some time to exercise their authority, claiming this right to be God-given. As Foucault (2007b, 42) explains in his lecture “What Is Critique?,” “a veritable explosion of the art of governing men” began from the fifteenth century on, first through the gradual displacement of religion by the development of secularism and civil society, and second, through

the proliferation of this art of governing into a variety of areas – how to govern children, how to govern the poor and the beggars, how to govern the family, a house, how to govern armies, different groups, cities, States and also how to govern one’s body and mind. How to govern was, I believe, one of the fundamental questions about what was happening in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is a fundamental question which was answered by the multiplication of all the arts of governing – the art of pedagogy, the art of politics, the art of economics, if you will – and of all the institutions of government, in the wider sense the term government had at the time. (44)

The French Revolution (1789–99) ruptured the legitimacy of inherited, monarchical rule, opening the way for the formation of democratic societies governed by nation-states (the political apparatus claiming authority over citizens and territory). Absolute and arbitrary authority gradually gave way to liberal notions of the primacy of the individual and the advancement of individual rights within the context of democratic institutions and the rule of law. However, the broad conceptualization of government just described continued to influence Foucault’s analytic approach, despite the trend to narrow the definition of government to a

political meaning describing the affairs of states. Foucault's formulation of government transcended political institutions to encompass the complex managerial and administrative apparatus both within and beyond the state – an apparatus whose purpose was to govern populations. It also necessarily addressed the reasoning, or rationalities, for governing populations as well as how these governing rationalities changed over time (Oksala 2008). Foucault named this new way of conceptualizing power “governmentality,” a concept that links practices of governing with modes of thought (rationalities) about governing and that embraces a spectrum of activities, including the government “of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself” (cited in Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde 2006, 83).

Through the emergence of these arts of governing, the exercise of power shifted beyond the rule of the sovereign to encompass a proliferation of mechanisms for the discipline of individual bodies (referred to by Foucault as disciplinary power), followed by the constitution of populations as objects of regulation – as biopolitical. Power's emphasis now was “to *foster* life, or *disallow* it to the point of death” (Foucault 1978, 138; emphasis in original). Biopolitics was characterized by a focus on the management of life, principally by administering to peoples' health through disease control; detailed record-keeping of births, illnesses, deaths, and so on; and new statistical methods that allowed for patterns within populations to be identified, understood, and addressed. Individual conduct, direction given to families and to children, household management, and requirements of the body and the soul were areas of particular interest. These changes were integral to what Foucault named the disciplinary society, emergent in Western Europe between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Foucault developed the concept of the disciplinary society to describe how people and populations were adapted to an emerging social and economic order through new techniques of surveillance and correction in a way that made the new order possible. Nascent nineteenth-century disciplinary institutions included the introduction of education and prison systems, asylums for the containment of the “mad,” an expansion of the industrial factory system, and workhouses to address scores of people who now lacked a means of economic survival as a new economic order – capitalism – unmercifully

came into being. New forms of knowledge in the natural and social sciences introduced micro-techniques of power – of observation, assessment, categorization, and action. The idea of the norm was widely applied such that normalizing power began to take precedence over the juridical powers of the state (Foucault 1978). The outcome was the disciplining of bodies so that they came to be understood as particular types of people (including the healthy, the normal, the average, the deviant, the criminal, and the mentally ill), determining what it meant to be a sexual being, a man or a woman, a racialized person, and so on. All were now part of a population to be studied, managed, and administered. We can say that types of people were indeed constituted through these processes and, typically, as with the homosexual and the heterosexual, co-constituted in relation to one another. The same can be said about the constitution of the idea of populations based on perceived shared characteristics, to which were attributed some social significance or other.

Foucault refers to the combined forces of disciplinary power and biopolitics as the exercise of biopower, employing this concept to explain how power was now being mobilized according to a growing interest in the management of the population, co-extensive with the disciplining of actual bodies. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault (1978) charts the development of biopower from its incipient beginnings in the seventeenth century to its bifurcation in two distinct directions by the late eighteenth century. The first direction focused on the performances of the body, or “the body as a machine ... the anatomo-politics of the human body,” and the second on the species body as the basis of life and its biological processes (e.g., reproduction, morbidity, and mortality), bringing attention to how the species body was regulated through “a biopolitics of the population” (139). Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (2006, 197) have given shape to Foucault’s imprecise use of the concept of biopolitics, applying it to “embrace all the specific strategies and contestations over problematizations of collective human vitality, morbidity and mortality; over the forms of knowledge, regimes of authority and practices of intervention that are desirable, legitimate and efficacious.” Relatedly, Thomas Lemke clarifies that, in Foucault’s usage, “population” is not understood as a legal or political phenomenon but as one informed by its biological processes, such as birth, morbidity, and mortality rates, to which Foucault

refers as a “social body” (cited in Lemke 2011, 36). Knowing this, we can better understand why Foucault (1978, 145) believed that sex, combining the pleasures and dangers of the body with the reproduction of the species, “was at the pivot of the two axes [of biopower] along which developed the entire political technology of life” for the management of living beings. We can also better understand how the modern idea of race came into being, shifting by the eighteenth century from a means of categorizing people with shared cultural characteristics to a means of categorizing people sharing certain anatomical features such as skin colour and other characteristics believed to be rooted in biology (Stoler 2002, 1995; Taylor 2011). The invention of the modern idea of race, then, was co-extensive with the emergence of modern racism as a biopolitical force for the management, if not control, of living beings.

Notwithstanding our earlier discussion of governance as a practice that transcends the state, as states supplanted sovereign power they took a particular interest in these techniques, or technologies, of power, extending their reach beyond the regulation of legal subjects to the management of the population through an investment in life. The emergence of biopower marked “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” through a growing interest in public health, birthrates, migration patterns, housing, and so on (Foucault 1978, 140). The exercise of biopower was made possible through emerging fields of expertise and new forms of expert knowledge directed towards the understanding and correction of bodies and populations in biology, medicine, epidemiology, statistical sciences and demography, labour processes, and so on. Together with the later development of the psy disciplines and social sciences, new modes of subjectivity and subjectification were created, implicating and reshaping not only the targets of biopower but also those responsible for its exercise, as ideas such as normality and its deviations came into being. Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose (2008a, 5) speak of “the little engineers of the human soul” (including psychiatrists, social workers, town planners, accountants, factory managers, etc.), who deployed their “mundane knowledges, techniques and procedures,” as important figures in this process.

Foucault’s insights clearly opened the way for a nuanced and intricate approach to contemporary power flows and relations, one that embraces

the way we are governed, govern ourselves, and govern others (Dean 1999). His work is an innovative approach to analyzing practices of power that normalize, discipline, correct, exclude, and divide, revealing how we are enmeshed in governmental power even though we are not aware of it because we have already embraced it as part of the order of ideas, things, and activities.

While I hope that this introduction is providing readers with a starting point for understanding some of Foucault's key ideas, it is important to know that his engagements with these ideas were varied and inconsistent as he developed his oeuvre over the course of his life. This oeuvre includes not only books and scholarly articles but also publications of talks and lectures, many of which were edited and printed following his death and which he never intended for publication. His investigations of governmental power, for example, were scattered and partial, and it was left to subsequent scholars to pick up the threads and to create governmentality studies. Among these, the work of Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, as well as Nikolas Rose's prolific sole-authored publications (see Rose 1996, 1999, and 2007), are particularly important for contributors to this volume, and they are cited in these pages frequently. In *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life* (2008), Miller and Rose bring together revised versions of their most influential co-authored work, whose main objective is to develop an analytics of governmentality that accounts for processes of subject formation and the emergence of new forms of subjectivity. In particular, their work demonstrates how to undertake empirical research in the social sciences that seeks to analyze "programmes, strategies, and techniques" of government emerging in "liberal" societies that champion the privacy of the individual over the reach of the state but that nonetheless shape the lives of individuals and make it possible for states "to govern at all" (Miller and Rose 2008a, 1, 6). The art of governing requires thought, of course, in making and ordering knowledge about things and people, finding ways of representing how phenomena should be known, and having the ability to make claims to truthful knowledge. These comprise the rationalities and programs of government. The art of government must also develop strategies of intervention, the techniques by which individuals and populations are subject to investigation, such as the use

of statistical measures; techniques of audit, calculation, and classification; and a seemingly inexhaustible list of mundane forms of investigation and assessment (Miller and Rose 2008c, 82). This intervention is not a straightforward process: it manifests itself in the form of “assemblages of persons, techniques, institutions, instruments for the conducting of conduct” that make it possible not only for “government at a distance” (16) but also for us to analyze “power and politics without necessary recourse to the state as the necessary locus, origin, or outcome” (20) of the programs, strategies, and techniques under investigation. In other words, it is possible for researchers to understand and map out the actual foci and practices of governing personal, social, and economic life (e.g., categorizing people, promoting literacy and citizenship, treating illness, reorganizing workspaces) and to explore how “non-state modes of exercise of power are one of the defining features of our present” (20).

These are messy processes. In his rejection of universal reasoning, Foucault suggests that there is no master plan, or planners, of social control, whatever the governing logics might be. The programs/rationalities, strategies, and techniques/technologies of governance are not necessarily planned in relation to one another, may embrace fundamentally flawed reasoning, may contradict one another, and so on. Moreover, the outcomes are not guaranteed (Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke 2011). We can, however, note a number of shared starting points (though this is a far from exhaustive list) for undertaking governmentality research.

Most generally, the art of government is a common interest that is shared by all governmentality researchers, regardless of their area of study (Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke 2011). Another shared interest is “the relationships between power, truth and the subject” (Foucault 2007b, 57). One of the most remarkable features of governmental power is that it is exercised not through coercion but through the production of knowledge and its claims, the assertion of “truths,” the making of meaning, and the shaping of conduct. Foremost, the relation of governmental power to knowledge and truth claims is inseparable; that ideas become known (become knowledge) indicates that power relations are already operative due to the conditions under which knowledge is produced. Simultaneously, power flows most effectively through knowledge and its claims to accurately represent the reality that it not merely presupposes

but actively constructs. In this context, the meaning is not that “knowledge is power” because knowledge is not formulated here as a source of strength held by individuals. Again, Miller and Rose (2008a, 6) are particularly instructive in leading investigations into how the production of knowledge and truth happens, how “regimes of authority” take shape, and how “practices of subjectification,” which they describe as “a mode of action on actions” (8), create our very sense of our selves. For example, you may be aware that the *Oxford Dictionary*’s 2016 “Word of the Year” was “post-truth” – “An adjective defined as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’” (*Oxford Dictionaries Online* 2016). How did post-truth develop and gain such resonance that it could be awarded this distinction? What are the multiplicity of sources involved in its making? What are its effects on political practice, and on us? It is not sufficient to simply say that post-truth is an ideological tool of those in power; we must uncover its history as a discourse for the production of knowledge, even if that knowledge is comprised of “alternative facts” (Swaine 2017).

Next, governmentality scholars share an understanding that governmental power is not a top-down force wielded by the powerful but that it comes from everywhere because it exists everywhere, as Foucault (1978, 93) so famously remarked in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*:

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere ... [it] is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities ... power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength that we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.

By analogy, we can think about the circulation of blood through the body, with no beginning or end point, in order to imagine power’s mobility. By shifting the lens beyond government as a practice of the state to conceptualize power without a centre, governmentality researchers can employ a relational understanding of power. When undertaking empirical work in the social sciences, it is helpful to think about gov-

ernmental power as characterized by relationships in that it depends on connecting ideas, people, groups, institutions, and so on in assemblages of forms, meanings, and actions.

The shift from questions of why to questions of how is crucial for the development of a governmentality approach to power. This is because “how” questions do not search for causes (why something happened as it did) and, instead, emphasize tracing social processes through detailed investigations. How, for example, are subjects constituted, both in relation to themselves and to others? What kinds of subjects are being produced through modes of subjectification? *Governing the Social in Neoliberal Times* introduces a number of human subjects who are produced through neoliberal logics, including the entrepreneurial subject, the risky subject, the ethical subject, the flexible subject, the resilient subject, the multicultural subject, and, of course, the worthy versus the unworthy subject. To repeat an important proviso, these kinds of subjects can and do exist independent of neoliberalism. Our task is to understand how neoliberal logics reconfigure these subjects in particular ways such that new kinds of people are produced and subjectification is achieved. Similarly, Lippert and Brady (2016) remind us that many of the technologies/techniques of government (e.g., the promotion of literacy, multiculturalism, and domestic security) that governmentality scholars research are clearly not specific to neoliberalism; however, we need to be aware of how they have been adapted to neoliberal programs/rationalities.

### Neoliberal Governmentality

The governmentality approach suggests that governmental power works most effectively through its ability to produce new meanings and possibilities, and to create positive incentives for self-governance. In contrast, when power is a negative and repressive force, it can be much more readily identified and potentially resisted. In this, the governmentality approach offers considerable insights into the formation of neoliberal societies. An investigation of neoliberal governmentality shows that, while neoliberalism can be a destructive force in relation to regulations (such as those restricting the flow of finance capital), institutions (such as unions), and rights (for example, to clean water), it is simultaneously a *productive*

force because it creates subjectivities with positive associations, such as the empowered, creative, or entrepreneurial individual, and new ways of living, lending it considerable appeal. Understanding this emphasis on positive and productive power is crucial because neoliberal governmentality would not have meaning without the idea of freedom. Governmental power works most effectively through what Nikolas Rose (1999) refers to as “the powers of freedom,” whereby the willing participation of individuals and populations contributes to the possibility of “governing at a distance” (Miller and Rose 2008a, 33). Nonetheless, to be “free” is not an absolute state of being; these freedoms are “regulated freedoms” in that certain norms and expectations are always already in place (Miller and Rose 2008a, 9; Rose 1999). For example, the discourse of financial freedom obviously depends on the idea of freedom as a state that people are a priori free to achieve. So, too, do contemporary discourses of choice, empowerment, and agency that were initiated by second-wave feminism but that, in neoliberal times, have been transformed into a discourse of competitive individualism, wherein the onus of achievement resides with the individual at the expense of a politics of transformation through collective social change (Cruikshank 1999; Budgeon 2015). One could say that we are compelled to be free and, in this freedom, are required to continually reinvent ourselves through the endless requisites of caring for our bodies, building our self-esteem, pursuing happiness, being entrepreneurial life-long learners, advancing our career prospects, being engaged in active citizenship, seeking a notion of normality that is prescribed for us, and so on. Further examples emerge when analyzing disability rights (Fritsch, [Chapter 1](#)), queer loving (Lenon, [Chapter 2](#)), environmentalism (Van Lier, [Chapter 6](#)), and the marketing of lululemon products (Lozanski and Lavrence, [Chapter 7](#)). Neoliberal rationalities assume that the “we” and “us,” all of whom are affected by their proliferation, are fundamentally free individual actors who are capable of, and responsible for, being certain kinds of people capable of directing our own futures. Moreover, the tricky thing about neoliberal economic governance is that it appears to assume the existence of equality of opportunity while in no way promoting equality of outcomes. Thus the reproduction of systemic social inequalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and citizenship are abetted and deepened.

While seeking our freedom we are compelled to assess and avoid risks, ensure our own bodily and financial security, and prevent our own undoing. Neoliberal governmentality, then, embraces a contradiction between security and freedom, and it makes subjection a condition of that freedom (Ciccarelli 2008) as it newly problematizes risk, insecurity, and the need for precaution (Miller and Rose 2008a, 2008d) in personal, economic, and political affairs. This contradiction may be seen in the chapters addressing specialized peace bonds (Doerkson, [Chapter 8](#)), risk and insecurity (Oliver and Boyle, [Chapter 9](#)), war and sacrifice (Baggiarini, [Chapter 10](#)), and conditions and experiences of migration (Moffette, [Chapter 11](#); Masoumi, [Chapter 12](#)). It is also important to consider how individuals and groups might harness the requisites of neoliberalism for their own benefit. There are examples of this in the chapters on disability (Fritsch, [Chapter 1](#)), queer loving (Lenon, [Chapter 2](#)), and Indigenous self-determination (Huizenga and Coombe, [Chapter 4](#)).

To pose a well-used question: Whither, then, the state? The state has been lost neither within the pre-eminence that Foucault attributes to governmental power nor within a neoliberal governmentality whose rationalities and technologies often rely on the state's institutional nexus. Political governance through the state obviously carries on in the exercise of law, policing, and social, economic, and foreign policy, and the extensive administrative apparatus that sustains the institution. Moreover, the state has a privileged interest in the management and administration of its citizens, and in the production of healthy, resourceful, educated, and lawful citizens. The outcome can indeed be the domination of a person, group, institution, or idea over others, but domination, like the state, is understood, in the governmentality approach, as an end effect of power, not the exercise of it. This being the case, even institutions having the force of sovereign power (which clearly has not disappeared), such as the legal and policing systems, maintain their legitimacy because they are also practices of governance and are reproduced more effectively through the normalization of governmental power than through their ability to exercise social control. Within the larger dynamic of governmentality, the state itself can be thought about as "a particular form that government has taken" (Miller and Rose 2008b, 27). Foucault suggested as much in his 1978 lecture later published as "Governmentality" (Foucault 1991,

103), in which he ponders: “Maybe, after all, the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythicized abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think. Maybe what is really important for our modernity – that is, for our present – is not so much the étatisation of society, as the ‘governmentalization’ of the state.” However, as nation-states swing dangerously to the right through the rise of authoritarian populist movements, we would do well to remember that sovereign power has not disappeared, that it is not a spent force. It has merely been eclipsed – for now. We return to a consideration of national and global politics in the conclusion to this book.

### Conclusion

Our main task in *Governing the Social in Neoliberal Times* is to investigate specific practices of neoliberal governmentality so that we can make sense of the profound social, political, and economic changes that have occurred in the West over the last forty years. What programs, strategies, and techniques emerged in the late twentieth century, situating neoliberalism in the ascendancy and motivating Western states to withdraw from much of the administration of public welfare while simultaneously implementing economic policies that have facilitated the rapid accumulation of capital for a small, privileged class of people (Miller and Rose 2008a, 1)? Specific to this volume, how have both collective and individual interests in romantic love (Lenon in [Chapter 2](#)), being “well” (Lozanski and Lavrence in [Chapter 7](#)), optimizing performance (Atkinson in [Chapter 5](#)), and doing “good” (Van Lier in [Chapter 6](#)) been massaged into willing participation in neoliberal agendas, even when they might otherwise be opposed? How have intensified insecurities and fears mobilized consent to securitization domestically (Oliver and Boyle, [Chapter 9](#)) and internationally (Baggiarini, [Chapter 10](#))? How has our subjectification produced claims about and by people who are the target of various classifications, such as disabled but empowered actors (Fritsch, [Chapter 1](#)), multicultural citizens (Chen, [Chapter 3](#)), First Nations peoples who are due reparation (Huizenga and Coombe, [Chapter 4](#)), migrants in a world in which the movement of people across borders in pursuit of basic survival is unprecedented (Moffette, [Chapter 11](#)), or refugees deserving of protection (Masoumi, [Chapter 12](#))?

One of the most compelling features of these chapters is their concentration on the local and the particular to illustrate the intricacies of everyday life, including becoming literate (Atkinson, [Chapter 5](#)), purchasing a hybrid car (Van Lier, [Chapter 6](#)) or yoga clothing (Lozanski and Lavrence, [Chapter 7](#)), feeling patriotic (Baggiarini, [Chapter 10](#)), or recognizing the sources of our fears (Doerkson, [Chapter 8](#)). The authors show how our lives are saturated with and interconnected to a simultaneously intimate and widespread web of power relations. Through studies like these, it is possible to grasp how governance happens, how we are constituted as neoliberal subjects, and the means of our subjectification. Ultimately, the goal of our research is to identify and refuse to accept the unacceptable, and we hope that readers will be motivated to think about how effective resistance strategies can be fostered.

*Governing the Social in Neoliberal Times* makes no claims about forging new directions in theory and politics: we hope for more modest accomplishments. We offer an accessible introduction to Foucault's most innovative ideas about the constitution of subjects and subjectification in neoliberal times, and, through case studies in a range of fields, we provide examples of how these ideas can be applied. Arguably, these studies offer the chance of a deeper engagement with what neoliberalism is and does in practice than many readers might otherwise encounter. For example, rather than contesting the political economy approach to neoliberal capitalism, which is construed largely through an analysis of economic and market activities, the governmentality approach reveals how political economy provides a necessary but not sufficient mechanism for revealing how deeply and pervasively the logic of the Western variant of neoliberal capitalism resides in all of our lives, social institutions, and normative logics. We are not simply passive subjects of subjectification: we are also critical thinkers. As such, we must be aware of ever-shifting relations of power and be willing and able to grapple with our own agency and capacity to be part of the process of resistance and social change.

## Notes

- 1 Foucault's writings have had an enormous influence on subsequent social theory across a broad array of disciplines, yet his ideas are also notoriously difficult to teach and for undergraduate students to grasp. *Governing the Social in Neoliberal*

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