Book Review

Inda, Jonathan Xavier. 2005. (ed) Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, governmentality, and life politics. Blackwell Publishing

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In this write-up, through a reading of some of the pieces collected in a recently published anthology entitled 'Anthropologies of Modernity'[1], I will try to provide an understanding of how Foucault's work has changed some of the ways of looking at government, agency and subjectivity in the current practices of social sciences. Stated this way, the task looks apparently huge but I will try to do some justice to that by limiting myself to a discussion of a particular book I have reviewed in order to delineate the problematic I pose in this opening paragraph. I will try to elaborate a little bit on how Foucault's work can be used to guide us through the 'reality' of what I call Third world regimes of 'rights' and 'development'. The piece grew out of my attempt to write a general review of the book, which is why I have often covered grounds and raised issues which are expected in a book review. In the present version of the write-up, I have not excluded them altogether. Instead, I have now kept them in foot notes with an expectation that interested readers will have a closer look at it, at least some of the chapters I have managed to read through. The main text of the write up however focuses on the particular problematic I intend to delineate. The problematic can be broadly termed as governmentality and its effect.

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Introducing the book, the editor of the collection, Jonathan Inda, makes it a point to incorporate a discussion of modernity which consists not only the West but the world over. The selection thus incorporates discussions of geographic locations often neglected in the echelons of social science discourses on modernity. But this is done so with an ambition of doing anthropology. Inda summarizes the issue when he writes, 'the essays gathered here treat modernity not in abstract terms but tangibly as an ethnographic object. Their aim, in other words, is not to come up with some grand, general account of modernity but to analyze its concrete manifestations.' (Inda 2005: 1)

To orient the readers, the anthology begins with a discussion of Foucault's seminal work entitled *Governmentality*. Following Foucault, Inda notes, '...the term "government" generally refers to the conduct of the conduct-that is, to all those more or less calculated and systematic ways of thinking and acting that aim to shape, regulate, or manage the comportment of others, whether these be workers in a factory, inmates in a prison, wards in a mental hospital, the inhabitants of a territory, or the members of a population.' (Inda 2005: 1) Inda here is delineating the new terrains of 'modern' rule: '"government" designates not just the activities of the state and its institutions but more broadly any rational effort to influence or guide the conduct of human beings through acting upon their hopes, desires, circumstances, or environment'.(Inda 2005: 1) What is being highlighted here is the need to look at 'modern' political power not only in terms of state but also in terms of a 'multiple networks of actors, organizations, and entities involved in exercising authority over the conduct of individuals and populations'(Inda 2005: 1-2). I begin by delving into Inda's very useful contribution on the question of how Foucault's work has had an impact in the social sciences in general. I then take on one or two pieces from the collection as examples to see how far these arguments go along the line of these generalized outline provided by Inda and then finally an attempt is made to see what all this means in regimes of 'rights' and 'development' in the present context of Bangladesh.

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Taking into consideration a wide range of publications and writings on questions of governmentality and subject, Inda rightly points out that Foucault's work on modern government has produced a corpus of political, social, and cultural analysis. He sums up all these writings and inquiries into three closely related analytical themes. *Reason,* the first analytical theme for Inda, involves 'the political reasons or rationalities of government'. (Inda 2005: 7) This domain, designates, according to Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, the changing discursive fields within which the exercise of power is conceptualized, the moral justifications for particular ways of exercising power by diverse authorities, notions of the appropriate forms, objects and limits of politics, and conceptions of proper distribution of tasks among secular, spiritual, military and familial sectors. (1992: 175; cited by Inda: 2005: 7)

Political rationalities then are 'intellectual machineries that render reality thinkable in such a manner as to make it calculable and governable.' (Inda 2005: 7) These concerns have lead scholars to look at the 'epistemological character' of political reason. (p. 8) As such, argues Inda, scholars have become interested in 'how these rationalities both foster and rely upon assorted forms of knowledge and expertise-such as psychology, medicine, sociology, public policy, and criminology. Knowledge of this kind embody specific understanding of the objects of governmental practice-the poor, the vagrant, the economy, civil society, and so forth- and stipulate suitable ways of managing them'. (p. 8) In short governmentality scholars are occupied with the question of how 'government is intertwined with *specific regimes of truth* and the *vocation* of numerous experts and authorities.' (Inda 2005: 8; my emphases)

The second theme involves what Inda calls 'the technics or technologies of government- that is, how government takes on a technological and pragmatic form'. According to Inda, the technological is the domain of practical mechanisms, devices, calculations, procedures, apparatuses, and documents "through which authorities of various sorts have sought to shape, *normalize* and *instrumentalize* the conduct, thought, decisions and aspirations of others in order to achieve the objectives they consider desirable"

(Miller and Rose 1990: 8, cited in Inda 2005: 9; my emphases). Inda reminds us here that particularly important among these tools are what Bruno Latour calls material inscription. These are 'mundane tools' says Inda such as "surveys, reports, statistical methodologies, pamphlets, manuals, architectural plans, written reports, drawings, pictures, numbers, bureaucratic rules and guidelines, charts, graphs, statistics and so forth-that represent event and phenomena as information, data, and knowledge". (Inda 2005: 9) Most importantly the governmentality literature's concern with technologies of government draws attention to importance of technical means in directing the actions of individuals and populations.

The third analytical theme relates to the 'subjects of government-that is, the diverse types of self, persons, actors, agents, or identities that arise from and inform governmental activity'. (Inda 2005: 10) Inda here quotes Mitchel Dean for clarifying the point:

"What forms of person, self and identity are presupposed by different practices of government and what sorts of transformation do these practices seek? What statuses, capacities, attributes, and orientations are assumed of those who exercise authority (from politicians and bureaucrats to professionals and therapists) and those who are to be governed (workers, consumers, pupils and social welfare recipients)? What forms of conduct are expected of them? What duties and rights do they have? How are these capacities and attributes to be fostered? How are these duties enforced and rights ensured? How are certain aspects of conduct problematized? How are they then to be reformed? How are certain individuals and populations made to identify with certain groups, to become virtuous and active citizens, and so on?" (Dean 1999: 32; cited in Inda 2005: 10)

Inda suggests that this emphasis on the subjects of government directs our attention to how governmental practices and programs seek to cultivate particular types of individual and collective identity as well as forms of agency and subjectivity. However, he clarifies, "The idea here is that while governmental practices might

seek to create specific kinds of subjects, it does not mean that they necessarily or completely succeed in doing so. Individuals can and do negotiate the processes to which they are subjected. For governmentality scholars... it is important to look not just at the forms of collective and individual identity promoted by practices of government, but also at how particular agents negotiate these forms- at how they embrace, adapt, or refuse them". (Inda 2005: 10-11)

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Throughout the collection, one can note that there is a persistent attempt by the authors to use Foucault's methodology effectively in the contemporary scenes of our time. One such attempt is a discussion on how state can be conceptualized in the age of globalization. This is an interest more thoroughly pursued by Gupta and Ferguson in this volume and of course in a number of earlier publications. Ferguson and Gupta deal with questions of neo-liberal governmentality in Africa. For the authors, Africa is a case in point where they can propose radically different thoughts on conceptions of state, and how this needs to be addressed in the context of transnational governmentality. Here readers are presented with a contribution which will have deeper implication in our understanding of the 'local' and the 'global' and other conventional images of state and its spatialization.

In the present collection under discussion, Ferguson and Gupta point out that there are two images in popular and academic discourses on the state: verticality and encompassment. According to them, the discussions of the imagination of the state have not attended 'adequately to the ways in which states are *spatialized*.' (Ferguson and Gupta in Inda 2005: 105) Verticality is that central and pervasive idea of state that puts the institution "above" civil society, community and family. Thus we have the idea that 'state planning is inherently "top down" etc, while "the grassroots" contrasts with the state precisely in that it is "below," closer to the ground, more authentic, and more "rooted." The other image is that of encompassment: 'Here the state (conceptually fused with the

nation) is located within an ever-widening series of circles that begins with family and local community and ends with the system of nation-states' and consequently lead up to the international community. (p. 106) These two metaphors, 'work together to produce a taken-for-granted spatial and scalar image of a state that both sits above and contains its localities, regions, and communities. (p. 106)

The authors here point to some of the pitfalls of this fusing of vertical and encompassment. They show us how the 'picturing of state's relation to society through the image of vertical encompassment fuses in a single, powerful image a number of analytically distinct propositions. 'Is the state's encompassing height a matter of superior rank in a political hierarchy? Of spatial scale? Abstraction? Generality of knowledge and interest? Distance from nature?' (p. 107-8)

These questions point to a constructivism with which state is entrenched. However, as is perhaps clear by this time, the authors do not put this issue up because this is 'out' there. On the contrary, with an analysis of this being a product of constructivism, Ferguson and Gupta are eager to show how all this needs to be looked at in the context of globalization. The authors make this claim that state's effort 'to establish their superior spatial claims to authority do not go uncontested' (p. 114) To quote again: 'This is especially true at a time when new forms of transnational connection are increasingly enabling "local" actors to challenge the state's well-established claims to encompassment and vertical superiority in unexpected ways, as a host of worldly and well-connected "grassroots" organizations today demonstrate." (p. 114)

Ferguson and Gupta here talk us through some of the usefulness of the term transnational governmentality, borrowing and somewhat extending Foucault's idea of governmentality, in the context of state's relation with 'a range of contemporary supranational and transnational organizations that significantly overlap their traditional functions...' (p. 114) They point out to Foucault's close attention to 'all the processes by which the conduct of a population

is governed: by institution and agencies, including the state; by discourses, norms, and identities; and by self-regulation, techniques for the disciplining and care of the self'. (p. 114) They are right in pointing out that an extension of Foucault's concept of governmentality to neo-liberalism is deeply suggestive. It may call into question some of the long cherished practices of anthropology where the ethnographers are expected to deeply submerge in a particular location of a 'field' and argue in favor of extending the field to discursive construction and other meditative forms.

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How do we come to terms with these ideas of space then? Sharma and Gupta's introduction (2006) to a reader entitled 'The Anthropology of the State' just gives a glimpse of that terrain. Writing about India's rapidly growing sector, the call center, they come up with the following description:

' .."the floor." the space where hundred of collage-age men and women are sitting on low booths arranged in an open plan office. The space is brightly lit, and it is throbbing with energy. One can feel the adrenalin pumping in this large room; there is a "buzz" ....' And then Gupta is encouraged to listen to one of the conversation: 'A young man is persuading a customer to refinance his mortgage in an accent that is a mix of Midwestern America and Haryanvi Hindi.' (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 1)

Clearly, these descriptions allude to newer terrains of spatialization. Sharma and Gupta, in fact refer to Indian state as a post-liberalization state in the piece asking this very important question: What do outsourcing and call centers have to do with the Indian state...? (Sharma and Gupta: 2006; p. 3) The authors are here keen on their agenda of what they term as ' Rethinking Theories of the State in an Age of Globalization' , making this argument that 'new insights into the state could be obtained by thinking about states as cultural artifact while simultaneously framing them within transnational dynamics'. (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 5-6)

Taking into consideration the implication of transnational-governmentality and other neo-liberal contexts, the question I intend to think through is, how does governmentality work in Bangladesh? To put it in another way, to what degree does state, work or other institutional frameworks allude to criteria of marking into their evaluations of legitimacy? I believe these are useful questions for people wanting to use Foucault's theoretical conjecture in understanding the contemporary 'modern' states. It is even more so now that Bangladesh enters into a period of rule where 'people' are not sure where does the 'rule' come from: from the "top" or "bottom"? Who is at the "top"? Conventional Spatializing practices of state misses a number of important points of the kind of rule we now experience. Is it military? Military-Civil? Asking these questions have become ever more difficult in the context of allusions to different regimens of truth. (Should 'we' not envision for a corruption free society? Who does not know it? etc.) Rhetoric of a failed state or Bangladesh being a 'cocoon of terrorism' needs to be seen in the light of these discourses and neo-liberal policies.

Given the upsurge of various 'civil society' movements on 'good governance', 'citizenship' and 'development', it is perhaps fare to argue that we now check our theoretical repertoire in the light of above debates. One of the analytical advantages of looking at governmentality in this newer theoretical trope is that it breaks away from the traditional notions of spatiality (the fusing of verticality and encompassment in Gupta's terms) which is commonly assumed in the analytical apparatuses of the liberalist and Marxists practices of critiques in Bangladesh and elsewhere. To give an example, the issue of ethnic rights and identity is often seen and evaluated from a nationalist frame of reference. And this is true for both Marxists and Nationalists alike. Both of these frameworks hinges on a very static governmental perspective and reduces the discussion of rights and identity to matters of 'external factors and influences'. In this case, the Marxist explanation, appear to be more sensitive towards 'rights' question only in so far it is matched out and aligned with the broader democratic struggles

of the 'people' concerned. This often leads to a very instrumentalist argument, often equating ethnic politics with 'false' consciousness, raised and used by international organizations. My understanding is that often this analysis does not do justice to the people/ communities concerned who fight for their rights taking clues and support from spaces which are 'external' only if we take the fusing of verticality and encompassment of the state and its accompanied images of spatialization, for granted and natural. Following such a terrain, thus, can be fruitful and opens up possibilities of analyzing human agency with the benefit of new sets of questions.

In closing, I provide an example of such an analysis by Sen. To me, this is an example of an analysis which tries to break the shackles of instrumentalist argument with regard to questions of agency and resistance. The idea of agency is intelligently maneuvered, when the author writes that it is not necessarily 'self-conscious and autonomous'. The paper is about the recent movement in Phulbari against coal mining. Sen's central argument is that the movement, an apt example of human agency, has been largely seen through the lenses of a 'liberal and secular ideological space' and the claim made by pro-movement intellectuals that this is a case of 'people-making-history' is a simplified generalization.

Sen writes, 'The people …were much aware of the power of the nation-state and mining companies. Their invocation of terror and pain in various terms of the loss of land, property, memories and past followed multiple strategies. The dominance and marginalization of the progressively liberal and modernized nation-state have conditioned subjectivities which acted in concordance with the individual and collective memories of displacements'. Settlement history of the area shows that most of the population (except the ethnic nationalities), living in the area migrated from various parts of Bangladesh in the last 30-40 years in search of living and land. A considerable number also gathered after the 1947 partition. The extensive *shal* forests have been destroyed for developing cultivable lands. There are landowners who got ownership through exchange of land and property with

that of the migrating Hindu community members during exodus in the post-1947 period. And then of course there were some, again *Bangali* Muslim landowners gained their landownership by taking opportunities of the exodus in exchange of a small amount of money or, at times no money at all. A considerable number of members of Bangali community snatched the land and property from Santal nationalities by treacherous use of modern law regarding land registration.

According to Sen, it is this complex history of displacements which has acted in shaping the memories of various parties in different ways. So, a simplified assertion of 'people-making-history' does not work for such complex histories of 'various parties' that Sen quotes in the piece. Thus he notes, 'If the exclusion, marginalization and subjectivity of the Santals are taken into account under the growing dominance, hegemony and violence of the Bangali/Bangladeshi nationhood, it will appear that the Santals who have lost their lands to the *Bangalis* have a quite *different* repository of loss, pain and memory'. (My emphases)

Accessing this *repository of loss, pain and memory* is what Pandey looks into in his concept called the 'fragment'. As Pandey notes,

'[W]hat historians might call a 'fragment'--a weaver's diary, a collection of poems by an unknown poet...is of central importance in challenging the state's construction of history, in thinking other histories and marking those contested spaces through which particular unities are sought to be constituted and others broken up. (Pandey 1991: 571)

This foregrounding of the 'fragment' is a response to the state's universalizing and hegemonic sway of narratives or to put it in Chatterjee's (1993) phrase, the 'narrative of the capital' which relegates community (and I would add people and agency) to its prehistory, as a *'natural, prepolitical, primordial* stage in social evolution that must be superseded for the journey of freedom and progress to begin.' (1993:235; emphases mine)

To move forward (not in any inherent progressive sense!) we need to have an analysis of 'people' which is not a monolithic category

as is in the case of 'people-making-history'. I think this is what is implied when Sen (2006) writes, 'The past and its signatures have had a role to play in the formation of subjectivity and memories.' Conceptualizing governmentality and its effect in the light of this delineation helps us to broaden our 'field' and 'location' of analysis. This gives us much leverage in understanding the world we live in today. What is good news though is that anthropology is increasingly coming to terms with these questions and this is surely bringing some change in the conceptual apparatuses of the discipline, including field work, ethnographic methods and the overall conceptualization of the research. It is feeding in new means of conceptualizing a people/ group/ community. (Watanabe and Fischer 2004, Das and Poole 2004)

Endnotes

[1] JONATHAN XAVIER INDA (ed) Anthropologies of Modernity. Foucault, governmentality, and life politics. Blackwell Publishing. 2005.

[2] Also see: Li (2001) for a similar understanding of governmentality and power. In her work on Indonesia's masyarakat adat (literally meaning people who adhere to customary ways) Li notes, 'The fields of force surrounding Indonesia's masyarakat adat are not concentrated in a singular class enemy or in the state apparatus but distributed across various institutional sites'. One such site is the NGOs. She writes: 'NGOs and activist working on environment and development are often concerned with how people live their lives, and are exercising governmental power when they seek to reform them in an 'improving direction'. (Li 2001: 651)

[3] In postcolonial states such as Bangladesh and India, it is difficult to talk about these tools as mundane now that we have the benefit of theoretical arguments taken up by the likes of Chatterjee (1993), Kaviraj and Chakrabarty (2000, 2002). To give an example, I will here just provide a rather powerful quote from one of Chakrabarty's (2002) publications: 'the most fundamental and far-reaching innovation …to Indian society was, …, the modern state ---not a nation-state, for that was what the nationalist movement created, but a modern state nevertheless. One symptom of its modernity was that its techniques of government were very closely tied to technique of

measurement'. He further elaborates: "From surveys of land and crop output to prospecting for minerals, from measuring Indian brains (on behalf of the false science of phrenology) to measuring Indian bodies, diets, and life spans (thus laying the foundations of physical anthropology and modern medicine in India), the British had the length and breadth of India, its history, culture, and society, mapped, and classified, and quantified in detail that was nothing but precise even when it was wrongheaded." (Chakrabarty 2002: 82)

[4] One notable exception to this is of course Peter Redfield. His is a brilliant effort to drag down Foucault to the tropics! The piece discusses a historical form of penal colony encountered in French Guiana and compared it with Foucault's work on prison. Redfield's objective here is to use Foucault in a more productive way in the light of some doubts raised by scholars such as Stoler that Foucault may have been influential but 'the engagement has remained one of applying given principles rather than one of sustained rereading' (P. 51) The essay sheds light on both continuity and modernity of the Panopticon, Jeremy Bentham's "simple idea of Architecture" for a new 'rational prison based on a principle of visibility' by authors comparative discussion of the Panopticon and the Guiana penal colony. Definitely a novel point made by Redfield when we hear so much of Foucault being a historian of discontinuity.

[5] The sub section titled 'Beyond Vertical encompassment: Transnational Governmentality in Africa' in the article under discussion is particularly very useful. In general, the pieces grouped under the chapter head 'Global Governance' mark the beginning of a literature which is now being increasingly labeled as anthropology of state. See: Sharma and Gupta 2006.

[6] For a discussion of how this questioning is productive, see: p. 106

[7] A similar argument can be found in one of Gupta's earlier piece, 'Blurred Boundaries: The discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State' collected in: Sharma and Gupta (2006)

[8] Li discusses this point in the context of Indonesian rights movement. See: Li: 2000, 2001.

[9] See: Sen (2006); Page reference is not given as this is an internet source

[10] I have mostly followed Sen (2006) in writing this passage.

[11] See Pandey 1991 and Chatterjee 1993. Also Dirlik 1999 for a critique of the above positions.

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