

Towards an Affirmative Biopolitics: Bureaucracy, Critical Thinking and Prevention

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Summary:

This article seeks to re-examine Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics in relation to genocide, taking its revision and use by Roberto Esposito (who distinguishes between negative and positive biopolitics) as a starting point, and the political views and critical thinking of Hannah Arendt as our framework. To this end, two historical examples of negative biopolitics will be analyzed –Nazism (1933–1945) and Argentina's military dictatorship (1976–1983). These are two cases in which politics takes a turn that transforms the whole political relationship of coexistence in plurality into a friend-enemy relationship that seeks to eliminate the Other biopolitically. In this context, the cases of Adolf Eichmann and Adolfo Scilingo will be especially examined as extreme and paradigmatic examples of a total lack of critical thinking (an anti-political bureaucracy) that enables mass murders (negative biopolitics). In the light of these ideas, I will finally suggest that affirmative biopolitics firmly grounded in critical thinking and collective, political social action can be an effective way to prevent genocidal social engineerings.

In the first section of this article, I will explore the relation between bio-

politics, modernity and genocide. In the second section, I will introduce the role of critical thinking in establishing negative or affirmative biopolitics, in order to get lessons for mass atrocities prevention by strengthening critical thinking in a political and democratic society.

Biopolitics and the Dark Side of Modernity

Biopolitics is a concept that captures the changes in government brought about by modernity. Biopolitics transforms individuals and specific people into a mere mass, into "things to be governed," numbers to be administered statistically with cold calculations. It is an exercise of power that manages populations through acts that "normalize" the biological and social lives of individual subjects. Through this specific mode of managing populations, modern genocides are linked with biopolitical governments and, precisely for this reason, critical thinking acquires a significant role in enabling bureaucrats to become thinking subjects who govern with an awareness of their biopolitical actions.

It is widely acknowledged that the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984) in his lectures at the Collège

de France in mid-1970's popularized and revitalized a rather forgotten analytical concept that was later used in the development of a wide range of contemporary ideas regarding forms of government, gender, war, genocide, etc.¹ Later on, many others took up this concept, redefining it. From Giorgio Agamben and his *Homo Sacer* (Agamben, 1995) to Roberto Esposito's community immunology (Esposito, 2002), and Toni Negri's biopolitical production (Hardt and Negri, 2000). But the origins of the concept can be traced to the beginning of twentieth century.²

To capture the relation between life, politics and the state, the Swedish thinker Rudolf Kjellén coined the term "biopolitics," given "that the Greek word *bíos* designates not only natural physical life, but perhaps, in equally significant measure, cultural life." He continues, "this designation also aims to express the dependence that society exhibits with respect to the laws of life; that dependence, more than any other thing, promotes the state itself to the role of arbiter or, at least, mediator" (Kjellén, 1920, 93). Hence, it is necessary to differentiate between mere politics and biopolitics. From the Greek concept of *polis*, politics designates all activity related to the public sphere, characterized by the rhetorical debate of public and collective affairs. In this original conception political activity differs from –and is probably even opposed to– the administrative and

economic activities that take place in the private sphere of the home (*oikos*). Ancient Greeks also differentiated between life as *bíos* and life as *zoé*. While the latter referred simply to the event of being alive, a quality shared by all living things (animals, men, gods), the former expressed both the physical and political life of the individual or the group (Agamben: 2005). Kjellén unites these concepts into the broader concept of "biopolitics" because he understands that modern politics go beyond the limited, initial concept of politics to include aspects of life that were traditionally considered only as parts of the economic or biological life.

While there have been many authors that used the concept of biopolitics after Kjellén and before Foucault, Foucault was definitely responsible for bringing the concept back into political philosophy by using it to reflect on more specific issues of modern government, such as modern genocides. Through his development of the concept, Foucault takes into account the fact that the modes of governing have been modified and modernized in the last centuries. He asserts that with modernity, specifically the progress in medicine and technology applied to the governmental sphere, both politics and government acquire new shapes. Biological life itself has become an object of policy developed and applied by states for the growth of nations. The different ways of governing a territory have become increasingly complex, resulting in new modes of administering both populations and their biological lives.

Biopolitics is marked by a search for means to improve life conditions and to immunize populations in order to strengthen the state and consequently boost economic performance. In this context, states devote more attention to their population's physical, medical,

1 Many other authors work in this field: Peter Sloterdijk and Thomas Lemke in Germany, Charles Taylor and Timothy Campbell in the United States, Nikolas Rose in England.

2 More precisely, it is possible to identify a great number of authors in Germany and Sweden with a vitalistic and organistic conception of the state –a biopolitical approach–, even though these authors did not use this specific term to identify the concept.



and mental state, as they develop campaigns to protect public hygiene in different countries all over the world along with important programs for collective vaccination (Foucault, 1997). There are increased attempts to intervene in a series of global phenomena, such as mortality, longevity, fertility or birthrate, and there are also attempts to increase, decrease, modify, control and regulate both physical and social “abnormality.” Through modernization and progress, there is a reassertion of what Foucault denominated as normalized societies: disciplined and regulated populations that are trained to manage not only their own lives but the lives of others as well.

Biopolitical governments become strongly interested in studying diseases and epidemics, as well as other random events that occur in a specific population. Thus, through biopolitics the population itself becomes a political and scientific problem to be studied and solved. In the nineteenth century, sociology and demography emerged as essential tools for biopolitics, along with medicine, biology and other disciplines used by governments in power. In this paradigm, medicine is fashioned as a knowledge-power that is applied over both the body and the population. As a consequence medical metaphors gain an outstanding importance for understanding social reality. Never before had citizens’ lives become the object of such important state policies (Foucault). And never before did the search for normalization and standardization acquire such a magnitude.

With biopolitics, as political philosopher Roberto Esposito writes, “life becomes in all senses a government issue, just as government becomes first and foremost the administrator of life” (Esposito, 2002: 196). Through biopolitics medical ailments are conceived of in po-

litical terms, and political “problems” are conceived of in medical terms. Biopolitics studies and intervenes in societies, based on the premise that certain collective “diseases” must be regulated, because in the biopolitical age, death is not regarded as an event that brutally falls upon life, but as a constant potentiality throughout life. Even political issues, like education, criminality, sexual orientation and political ideology, become a population phenomenon that must be standardized, normalized or, using Roberto Esposito’s term, immunized. The idea of immunization becomes especially powerful when thinking about biopolitics’ role in the perpetration of genocide.

Esposito does not think of life in terms of politics, but seeks to think of politics as life itself. As the author states, “Here, the self-contradictory outcome of the entire immunitary paradigm that is activated in order to cope with the threat of the originary community is revealed. The violence of the *communitas* doesn’t disappear at all but is incorporated into the same *dispositif* that ought to do away with it” (Esposito, 2002). That is why the Schmittian enmity (Schmitt, 1996) matches so perfectly with the biopolitical paradigm in an immunologic context: in a biopolitical logic, the process of immunization requires an undesirable part of the social body to be expelled from that body for the sake of the community as a whole. This process happens at several different levels, ranging from the generally acceptable practice of sending murderers to prison in liberal democratic societies to the targeting of specific political, racial or religious groups in pre-genocidal or genocidal societies. In the context of Nazi Germany, for example, this perspective is perfectly summarized by what Rudolf Hess used to say: “Na-

tional Socialism is nothing but biology put into practice.”

If the fundamental task of every modern and technical government is to care for and promote life (making people live longer), then how would it be possible to account for the fact that in modern and biopolitical societies there have been genocides? After all, it was during the twentieth century –a century mostly characterized as a time of modernity and social progress– that some of the most significant processes of extermination and genocide have taken place. Underneath this contradiction lies an essential tension: while modernity is usually optimistically considered as a period of material, social and intellectual progress, the genocides of the last century show the dark side of modernity.

Many contemporary thinkers have studied in this light the relationship between modernity and genocide: Hannah Arendt, Raul Hillberg, Zygmunt Bauman, Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito, among others. Their works highlight the strong relation between modern technology and genocide throughout the last century. For example, the Holocaust and the Katyn Massacre, as well as numerous other cases demonstrate that the use of technology and complex administrations was key to the possibility of accelerated mass killing. Furthermore, some of the most important cases of genocides have occurred not only in wartime, but also in moments of great modern breakthroughs. The Nineteenth century colonial genocides against indigenous in Argentina (1880), for instance, were perpetrated alongside historical moments of modernization, including the achievement of the separation of church and state, the advancement of a liberal and free universal education, and great economic growth that contributed to

a massive increase in immigration to the country. The Armenian Genocide, the Soviet killings, the Nazi Genocide and Mao’s Cultural Revolution all occurred in parallel with social projects that were framed as modernizing forces.

Studying the relationship between modernity and genocide contributes to prevention of mass atrocities because it makes clear the unexceptional nature of 6 genocide within the logic of modernity and modernization. Genocide is not an interruption of the forward progress of modernization, but a tool that has been used to carry it out. Contrary to the idea that genocides occur in the most “barbaric” of circumstances, numerous genocides happened, as previously mentioned, during the most “modern” moments of the societies that carried them out.

The complex relation between modernity and genocide is made clear by the understanding of the concepts of the negative Other, modern racism and other type of radical hostilities. In biopolitical conditions, the state seeks to constitute a purified society; this purified majority, however, can only be constructed alongside the “Other-enemy,” an equally-constructed social category that is deemed detrimental to society as a whole. There is always a negative Other: an identity that works as a negation of the majority identity, when the majority identity seeks to eliminate difference by becoming more hegemonic, by becoming total (Feierstein, 2000). The negative Other, which can be a minority of any kind – ethnic, religious, political, sexual– is essential to genocide. Negative biopolitics seeks to immunize society against this Other, often through its destruction. To this end, death can be carried out in the service of collective life: the more one kills the Other-enemy, the stronger and more immune one will be. In modernity, one

kills in the name of life, and that killing is impossible without a negative Other.

The construction of the negative Other is the result of modern racism and other kind of radical hostilities (political, sexual, religious, national). Modern racism and other radical hostilities make genocides and mass atrocities possible: it is what justifies the right to “take life to live,” death carried out in the service of collective life. These are ideologies that state that death is necessary in order to prevent the collective from degenerating; that there is no possible creative growth before this crucial act of destruction. These radical hostilities are the genocidal alibi.

Radical hostilities play an essential role in making killing possible in a biopolitical context: they allow the “taking of life” to be seen as a means to achieving a normalized collective. Consequently, thanks to radical hostilities the act of killing is seen as immunizing the superior collective with respect to its “inferior” parts, the causes of its social, political, sexual, and racial degeneration. In this vision, genocide becomes a tool of material intervention on the species. Hence, biopolitics, along with racism and social hostility, enables the emergence of genocide in its modern version.

Comparing Nazism and the Soviet regime can further our understanding of how diversely biopolitics can manifest itself in totalitarian settings. While the Soviet regime, Esposito states, had a narrative of history and progress as its justifying and legitimizing goal, the Nazi regime made use of a biological reference for progress. As Foucault says, one of the many reasons why Nazism and Stalinism seem so puzzling to us is because “they greatly used the ideas and mechanisms of our political rationality” (Foucault, 2011).

These cases make it necessary to completely rethink the idea of modernity as progress. These two regimes put forward an extreme reflection of the immunologic vision of modernity, described earlier. Mirroring Roberto Esposito’s research on modernity and genocide, in these cases genocide arises from a society’s need to be biopolitically purified, destroying –and sacrificing– a part of itself. As Esposito states on Nazism, “they identified as sick not the individual but the German people in its totality,” and that is precisely why “their cure required the death of all those who threatened their health with their mere existence.” Without biopolitical techniques there would have been no Nazism.

Biopolitics conceived as the modern government over people transforms the mass of individuals and specific persons to be governed into a mere mass, into “things to be governed”: numbers to be statistically administered with cold calculations. Precisely for this reason, critical thinking acquires a significant role in enabling people to be not simple governed objects but thinking subjects (of law) who are governed (but can also govern).

Towards Affirmative Biopolitics: Criticism, Obedience and Prevention

One of the universal characteristics of modern societies is the promotion of the social division of labor and the social differentiation for collective organization (Habermas, 1984, 143). Consequently, established hierarchies emerge and they inevitably create command/obedience relationships. This reality generates the need for democratic methods of control, transparency, cooperation and critical thinking. In 8 this modern reality, all of us are and will be governed; but, echoing

Foucault, the question is what price we are willing to pay for the benefits of being governed.

The project of the Enlightenment brought about the self-liberation of the subjects of the state by the individuals' assumption of a new identity: the citizen. Being a citizen implies undertaking the task of criticizing the present and participating in the development of the instruments that all citizens employ to shape collective life. This Enlightenment, Kantian self-liberation by means of searching social responsibility towards each other, results especially in one's responsibility to oneself: one is accountable for one's actions and each individual is accountable to the others for what they do to them.

It is in this same train of thought that Roberto Esposito explains his idea of affirmative biopolitics in opposition to simple and dehumanizing negative biopolitics. Esposito points out that there is a negative biopolitics, which turns people into objects to be governed and administered. And negative biopolitics is founded on the principle of "politics over life." The opposite of this reality, affirmative biopolitics, is based on the principle of "politics of life" (Esposito, 2004). In the case of genocide prevention, affirmative biopolitics can be defined as the politics of life, carried out by individuals/subjects with critical awareness, hence the capacity to block the genocidal development of modernity and their thanatopolitical and bureaucratic logic.

Hannah Arendt, a German-Jewish political thinker living in exile in the United States, and a fundamental author for Roberto Esposito (Esposito, 2014), described some tools for democratic life and the prevention of genocidal regimes in her studies about the Second World War, and especially in her book about

Eichmann and the Banality of Evil. Through her study and analysis of Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem, Arendt conceived the idea of "the Banality of Evil." According to Arendt, Eichmann was not an all-powerful demon that carried out Nazi genocide by himself, but quite differently he was just a bureaucrat that did not think about the moral and political consequences of his acts. He simply received (outrageous) orders and executed them. Hence, while obedience is a key element of modern sovereignty and collective life, without critical thinking, it could turn into blind genocide-enabling obedience.

How was this possible? As stated before it is quite accepted that any modern society needs division of labor, bureaucracy and government. It is also clear that by no means every government or bureaucracy is genocidal. But Eichmann and thousands of other bureaucrats of genocide cases show us that many of our institutions and organizations are potentially genocidal.

To illustrate this idea, I present two important cases of modern, hence biopolitical, genocides: the Nazi (1933–1945) and the Argentine (1976–1983) mass murders.³ In particular, I present a short example of how lacking of critical thinking contributes to the perpetration of negative biopolitics.

Nazi Germany is a clear case of biopolitical genocide. The enemies that are identified for destruction belong to every possible expression of autonomy: reli-

3 In this article, I support the interpretation that conceives an Argentine Genocide during the Dictatorship of the Junta in the period 1976-1983. An interpretation of the political genocide in Argentina is available in *Journal of Genocide Research*, Routledge, Salisbury, volume 8, number 2 June 2006, and *Genocide as Social Practice. Reorganizing Society under the Nazis and Argentina's Military Juntas* by Daniel Feierstein (2014).

gious, cultural and ethnic in the case of Judaism; political in the case of communists, liberals, social democrats, etc; and sexual in the case of homosexuals. Within Nazism, negative biopolitics operates by seeking to eliminate different groups that undermine or threaten the supposed integrity of the German people (volk). Nazism tried to homogenize and draw a grid on the social space in order to demarcate and dominate it by means of modern biopolitical government. The biopolitical logic operated through the attempt to “strengthen” the German people by fighting internal “impurities” and “purifying” it through the fight against the internal enemy. The culmination of this logic is identifiable in the 71st telegram from April 1945, in which Adolf Hitler ordered the destruction of the life conditions of the German people. If they were not able to win the war, then the people’s lives “did not deserve to be lived.” As Michel Foucault states: “Nazism carried the game between the sovereign power to kill and the mechanisms of biopower to extremes. But this game is indeed engraved in the operation of every state.” (Foucault, 1997: 235).

The best known case of absence of critical thinking and biopolitical use of death in the Nazi era is Adolf Eichmann, lieutenant colonel in charge of the logistics of mass deportation of Jews to the ghettos. It is a paradigmatic case that inspired Hannah Arendt’s elaboration on the idea of the banality of evil. But there are many other illustrative cases. For example, in the book *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1992), Christopher Browning studied the case of a battalion of 500 young German men from low-income households, even with communist origins in some cases. They had never voted for the Nazi Party nor were

they ideologically antisemites. However, they accepted to take part in the Battalion 101 of the *Ordnungspolizei*, the Nazi regime police, a militarized security force of the SS. As part of the *Ordnungspolizei*, these 500 men were used for exterminating partisans and for ethnic cleansing purposes. They passively accepted the order to “cleanse Jews” from a region in Poland. They were common people able to end other people’s lives by obeying orders. Here, the atrocity in the name of obedience is a failure of access to critical thinking. The lack of critical thought from the passive masses that supported Nazism and, particularly, from those who belonged to state bureaucracy, is key to understanding this phenomenon. The uncritical consent to biopolitical measures is a fact already analyzed by many authors (Foucault, Esposito, Agamben, Arendt). The message is clear in this case: without the uncritical consent of German and occupation bureaucracy, no genocide at a large scale would have been possible. That is why prevention-oriented criticism is so important: it was the bureaucracy that carried out genocide with its cooperation through obedience (Hilberg, 2002 and Bauman, 2001).

In Argentina, after the March 1976 coup, the military seized the state and established the so called National Reorganization Process. The Process was founded upon a binary logic that defined the internal enemy according to the National Security Doctrine following the perceived realities of the Cold War. From a negative biopolitics perspective, political issues were regarded as “collective diseases.” The enemy was “subversion,” considered a social cancer that must be removed. If in Nazi Germany the main concern was “solving the Jewish issue,” in Argentina the main concern was “solving the subversion issue.” And

subversion was such a broad term that anything could fit in: women, students, intellectuals, artists, businessmen, military men. Every single sector of society had its dead and desaparecidos (victims of forced disappearance).

The strategy of the Junta was concealing state terrorism through the involvement of civilians who occupied prominent positions in the military government. Their use of terror paralyzed the opposition of the population, and at the same time succeeded in getting the collaboration of both society and state out of fear, convenience, or mere indifference. The press, the courts and the bureaucracy coexisted with the same terror which dragged thousands of citizens to secret and not so secret prisons. This was the result of the military government using terror and rumor as weapons. By spreading half-truths, it instilled fear into the population. Thus, a new public logic was created: government employees could pretend they were living in “a normal country” while the judges refused to sign habeas corpus. As a consequence the press could disguise the political desaparecidos as mere criminal cases, even though they were victims of political killings who inexplicably appeared in the newspapers’ crime section.

Just as it happened with Nazism, the bureaucratic and social failure that was central to the endurance of the military dictatorship was the absence of a true critical approach that would avoid bureaucracy getting trapped in the logic of reality denial: the cover-up of collective death. The concealment of both repression and the disappearance of persons played an essential role in the politics of evil.

The case of Adolfo Scilingo is particularly interesting to illustrate the absence of critical thinking that makes biopoliti-

cal killing possible. Adolfo Scilingo was a middle-range marine official during the Proceso, who was in charge of the so called “Vuelos de la muerte”: the death flights. In this death flights, prisoners – disappeared people– were drugged into a stupor, loaded into aircrafts, stripped and tied to heavy objects, and finally dropped into the Río de la Plata to drown. According to official estimations, more than 4,500 people were exterminated with the death flights between 1976 and 1983.

In an interview in 1995, Scilingo confessed the crimes and gave details on the method of operation: “It was called a flight (“el vuelo”). It was normal (...). When I first received the order, I went to the basement where the ones I was going to take in the flight were kept. They were informed that they would be transferred to the South; hence they would be given a vaccine. They were given a dose to make them stunned 12 (...) A navy doctor administered the drugs and then retired to the cockpit. The doctors argued it was for the Hippocratic Oath. (...) Then we went to the airport, we entered from the back side, and the subversives were loaded into the plane (...) They were unconscious and naked” (Verbitsky, 1995: 15). Scilingo –who was sentenced to 1084 years in prison by a Spanish court– also states that “nobody questioned anything; there was no option. The country was in complete chaos (...) Most of the army officers conducted at least a flight, we took turns. It was a kind of a communion. Something we had to do. No one liked to do it, it was not something pleasant. But we did it; it had to be done and it was understood as the best way to do it; it was not discussed. It was something supreme that we did for the country. A supreme act. When we received an order, there was nothing else to talk about.

It was automatically obeyed.” (Verbitsky, 1995: 15).

The example of Scilingo and the death flights is an illustrative case of a man working in the service of the state who fails to apply his critical judgment by accepting to “automatically” obey the orders of exterminating thousands of men and women; argentine people that he was supposed to protect. The participation of doctors in the use of drugs to prepare the prisoners for the flights is another example of biopolitical use in favor of death management. It is particularly interesting the mention of the Hippocratic Oath by these doctors who, even when taking part of death flights, remained somehow respectful of their professional ethics that do not allow them to do anything against the protection of life.

Scilingo’s words also helped to unveil the involvement of the Catholic Church in the Argentine genocide. Scilingo reported that the catholic hierarchy approved this method of drugging dissidents and dropping them from planes into the Atlantic Ocean as a Christian form of death. In addition, he would seek counseling from military chaplains at the ESMA Navy Mechanics School, the largest clandestine detention center in Buenos Aires. Henceforth, with the support of the Catholic Church (as well as the other civil society sectors) there was a biopolitical logic of “separating the weed from the cornfield,” as stated by the priests themselves.

The complicity shown by at least part of the society can also be explained by the uncritical acceptance of a logic which pointed to one very vague group, 13 homogenizing everything political, cultural or social –the “subversive” as the dangerous internal enemy. The use of fear in all its forms was the perfect breeding ground that led to the acceptance by part of the population of the conditions which

finally climaxed in the military dictatorship of 1976.

In the cases presented above, individual responsibility of state officials towards some of the members of the community was circumvented and biopolitics played a crucial role in this process. These are cases in which undemocratic governments made a deadly use of their respective state bureaucracies, be them civil or military. These are cases where, at the same time, the administrative bureaucracies took part in the killing and/or disappearance of people, without critically distancing themselves from what they were ordered to do.

Both Adolfo Scilingo and Adolf Eichmann were pieces in larger biopolitical killing machinery, and both failed to think critically. In the Nazi genocide and in Argentina during the Dictatorship of the Junta, mass murders happened with participation of the state and its bureaucratic machinery at different levels, in the context of battles, and civil or external wars. These cases involve modern or developing states which, starting from the biopolitics paradigm, mutate into negative biopolitics or thanatopolitics. They clearly made the shift from politics of life to politics of death. And in both cases, technology applied without critical thought became inhumane.

Here, Arendt’s notions are vital for our theoretical position. The author has a very potent perspective that posits that “politics is based on the fact of human plurality” (Arendt, 2005, 93). According to Arendt, politics is bound to plurality, to freedom; and above all, politics as a form-of-life is an end in itself and not something done to achieve something else, or to obtain something in return. Politics is a miracle, like birth –it is the emergence of something new. There is politics when there is space for critical

thinking, and that is the reason why political action is the exact opposite of a rational bureaucracy prone to automatism.

In this sense, totalitarianism is anti-political because it seeks to destroy plurality as well as the human form-of-life, and to subdue us, treating us as mere 14 “bare life” (Agamben, 2005, 35). In Arendt’s view, individual critical thinking is socialized through the “among men” characteristic of politics.

However, as I pointed out at the beginning following Foulcault’s initial ideas, it is when life fully enters the realm of power that politics needs to assume its immunologic function to avoid becoming thanatopolitics (negative biopolitics). And it is precisely at this point that critical thinking can lead to a better understanding of contemporary politics, guiding men to affirmative biopolitics based on plurality as defined by Arendt.

For all the reasons discussed above it would be harder to carry out a mass extermination in a society where citizens and officials have strongly developed critical thinking that sets the difference between fair and unfair. This is an essential point that emerges from the study of the genocidal practices of the past and that can contribute to the prevention of genocide in the future.

The general lack of critical thinking in what pertains to society also contributed to the actual execution of the different mass murders because society failed to deconstruct the enemies identified by the state. For example, the media were indirect active collaborators in the destruction of stigmatized groups because of the unproblematized acceptance of the categories built by perpetrators. In these societies there is a need for deconstructing stigmatized groups because, after all, under critical analysis all essentialism about the constructed identities of

the victims of genocidal oppression disappears: What was Jewishness in Nazi Germany? What was being a subversive in Argentina?

The acceptance of mass murder as an inexorable doom is a typical trait of uncritical societies that choose to blindly obey without any exception. Moreover, these two cases are examples of how dangerous social engineering is when imposed forcibly from above. Both cases had operating political and social projects which required the annihilation of part of the population as well as the transmission of terror to the survivors so that they would accept the new order.

However, just as there was collaboration and participation by these societies and their respective bureaucratic apparatus, there existed numerous resistance movements too. There were social and political resistance movements that refused to get involved and protected the groups that had been stigmatized by the perpetrators and the political leaders of their time. And there were also leaders, and even structures, that for one reason or another refused to participate in genocide on different levels. The importance of refusing participation in and acceptance of any negative biopolitical measure cannot be stressed enough. There are many examples of men and women who refused to accept negative biopolitical orders and made a difference.

The cases of the Bulgarian and Danish governments, as well as the Spanish embassy in Hungary during WWII are especially well known (Arendt, 2006; Buron and Gauchon, 1979). These governments and/or bureaucracies refused to hand over Jews who were pursued by the Nazi government, and protected the life of potential victims by refusing to obey negative biopolitical orders. Instead of accepting the Nazi orders, they chose



to say “no” and to protect life in different ways. Protection of human life diversity is a basic principle of positive biopolitics. Why didn’t the Danish and Bulgarian governments and the Spanish embassy collaborate with the Nazi government and saved lives instead? Because they considered critically what they were being asked to do, distancing themselves from the order, thinking of themselves as much more than just a mere cog in the great wheel of government. There is always a choice, and the biopolitical lens sheds light and raises awareness on how the technical modernity forces us to be mere technicians in a great machine, but also how modernity itself, through philosophical criticism, allows us to gain a functional perspective on this reality and put criticism at the service of life.

This underlines the need for bureaucratic structures that use modern technologies to be practitioners of humanizing and critical thought, a type of thought that is heir to Philosophy and the enlightened thought. It persists as a presence in our days to make us think about the meaning of our actions. By giving meaning to our social practices, criticism alerts us to their consequences and protects us from automatism. The tendency towards automatism and uncritical modernization of the world enables people like Eichmann or Scilingo to think, for example, that they are public servants and technicians respectful of the order and the law.

It is decisive to understand genocide and mass atrocities as a gradual biopolitical process. This gradualism also suggests that there is room for detection in early stages, before the situation becomes irreversible. In this sense, it is particularly useful to rethink Feierstein’s periodization of the genocidal social process (Feierstein, 2000) from our biopo-

litical point of view. From this perspective, a first stage in the genocidal process is the Negative Otherness: the negative biopolitical stigmatization of a part of the society based on a chosen (and arbitrary) categorization to define the identity of the “other” group. The second stage is physical harassment over the bodies of this segment of the society. The third stage is the isolation, physical and material, of these bodies. The fourth stage entails a systematization of harassment in the isolation state. Finally, the fifth stage is the moment when biopolitical extermination of life becomes systematized against a sector of society. This last stage is irreversible. So, prevention should work over the previous moments, being the earliest, the better. But the useful aspect of this systematization is that it presents identifiable moments to act upon, to design tools for preventive action in response to the signals that each of these moments would bring. Hence, a system of early alerts seems to be crucial and what is more important: possible. Naturally, the sooner we identify a risk, the better. From the first to the last stage, violence increases, from symbolic to material, real violence over bodies.

Also, enforcing democratic institutions and particularly, institutions aimed at developing discrimination prevention policies are crucial initiatives for the long term and the establishment of a cultural anti-negative biopolitics society. These institutions should promote inclusion and contribute to the strengthening of a cultural sense of diversity, as well as condemn any discriminatory practice in any sphere of society: state, schools, work places, public spaces, homes and so on. Also, the promotion of civil society organizations with similar purposes would contribute to enforce a cultural exercise of cooperation with and control

over the public institutions. This means that they will also operate in the civil society sphere, together with bureaucrats, and therefore their awareness will be as much as relevant since they will work as a means of control and legitimacy. In fact, civil society critical thinking is also a crucial need to avoid genocidal practices.

As I previously stated, in a discerning affirmative biopolitical context, political life entails –as opposed to what would happen under a totalitarian regime– experiencing plurality, where critical thinking is one of the tools for social resistance. In a society of this kind, Otherness relations are rationalized as a natural part of the social environment.

In a biopolitical sense, these interventions in order to create awareness imply an immunological practice: immunizing the society against their participation in genocidal practices. This is a biopolitical approach since, as mentioned before, there is no public policy without a biopolitical dimension in the age of biopolitics. Nonetheless, I posit that this is affirmative biopolitics in action.

Biopolitics makes modern genocide possible, without being in itself a synonym of genocide. As Zygmunt Baumann said, the Holocaust was a possibility rooted in modernity, without that meaning that modernity was a synonym of Holocaust (Bauman, 2001). Genocide is biopolitical, but not all biopolitics are equal to genocide.

For biopolitics not to become negative biopolitics –thanatopolitics, the politics of death– it is fundamental that citizens exercise critical thinking. For bureaucrats and politicians, who are citizens in positions of responsibility, this exercise is a necessity. Democratic education towards criticism and dissent is a powerful weapon to stop future state crimes. Critical thinking in a modern bi-

opolitical context is also a precious guarantee against all thanatopolitics when fuelled by political and social action, understood as defined above. Modern genocide is as biopolitical as collective vaccination and birth control. It is precisely there where modernity's tragedy lies: in giving numerous cures but also a new dimension of catastrophe. It is solely up to men to decide which polarity (affirmative or negative) will contemporary biopolitics acquire.

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