

Governing Humans and ‘Things’: Power and Rule in Norway during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

In this text, I analyse the mentalities and technologies of power employed by the Norwegian government as it attempts to control the Covid-19 pandemic. Utilizing governmentality studies and a Foucauldian discourse analysis, I find life itself to be given primacy within a biopolitical problem space where the government seeks to contain the spread of Covid-19. The government primarily rationalizes its exercises of power in a liberal manner while employing a complex set of liberal and coercive technologies. These powers are exercised towards both the human population, which serves as an object of administration, and Covid-19, which serves as an object of domination. While focusing upon the government’s rationalizations and technologies of power, I also analyse Covid-19’s role. In other words, I handle the government’s governance within a complex actor-network.

Keywords: Covid-19, governmentality, Foucault, biopolitics, actor-network

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Introduction

This text investigates how the Norwegian government seeks to handle the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on the timespan between 12th March and 30th April 2020. For this purpose, I utilize a Foucauldian discourse analysis and governmentality studies. Government is understood as a problematizing activity (Gordon, 1991:35; Miller & Rose, 2008: 61). Prior to governing, problems must be identified – and these problems do not pre-exist their problematization (Foucault, 1985:172; Miller & Rose, 2008: 14). Even so, problems are not mere social constructions, but answers to real phenomena (Foucault, 1985:115). This is especially true regarding non-human entities such as Covid-19, which are not merely ‘problems’ to be solved, but entities possessing agency (see Bennett, 2004; Latour, 2005; Barad 2008). Bruno Latour (2005:70) recommends granting ‘objects’ agency, because they play roles as entities acting in networks, or actor-networks, as humans and non-humans act upon one another in complex networks of relations. Agency is thus not the manifestation of the human subject’s consciousness; rather, it disseminates in degrees throughout networks consisting of humans and non-humans (Bennet, 2007:134). While non-human agency must be accounted for, I do not, as for instance Jane Bennet (2004: 360), seek to blur the human/non-human distinction or grant non-humans ‘life’ or ‘will’ per se. I seek merely to include non-humans as participants in actor-networks.

However, while we must take materiality into account, we must simultaneously avoid the problem with materialist scholars such as Bennet (2004), which somewhat neglects the importance of culture and discourse (Lemke, 2015:15). Rather, following Latour’s (1993:6) understanding of actor-networks as “simultaneously real, like nature [and] narrated, like discourse”, so the Covid-19 pandemic is understood as a real phenomenon and a complex actor-network we narrate and perceive discursively. As both the discursive and the non-discursive must be accounted for in order to avoid reductionism, I investigate a) the discursive field, which entails i) the creation of a problem space, ii) the ordering of the entities within this problem space and iii) the means, ends and mentalities of governance articulated within this problem space, b) the technologies of governance, which includes i) discursive and ii) non-discursive technologies of power, and c), the role of Covid-19 within this power-network, which entails analysing this actor as i) an object of domination which the government seeks to

control and ii) a subject exercising power upon both the government and the population more generally.

Investigating the politics of the pandemic is important not just because pandemics cause instability and crises, but also because pandemics unveil social features ordinarily opaque (Dingwall et al., 2013:167). What technologies and rationalities of governance underpin situations when the day-to-day activities governed through liberal ‘laissez-faire’ approaches (see Gordon, 1991; Rose, 1998; Foucault, 2008a) are challenged? I find the Norwegian government to employ a complex mixture of liberal and authoritarian powers to achieve its main objective – administrating life. Interestingly, these powers are employed towards humans as they inhabit intermediary positions between the government and the pathogen. Furthermore, while governmentality scholars are criticized for neglecting the importance of the state, as they dismiss claims that the state is a centre of power (Kerr, 1999:190; Dean & Villadsen, 2012:29-31), the politics of the pandemic reveals that the state remains *the* chief instrument and apparatus of power. The government shows remarkable potential for structuring the field of possible action for individuals and organizations alike. I will now offer some reflections on Covid-19.

Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic is the primary event of 2020 – potentially being a ‘once-in-a-century pandemic’ (Gates, 2020) while seemingly leading to the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression (Gopinath, 2020). Before covering the socio-political aspects of the pandemic, I will cover its pathogenic agency (for similar reflections, see Dingwall et al., 2013; Linde-Ozola, 2020). Covid-19 attacks the body on several fronts. It can cause, among other things, strokes, seizures, a loss of smell, heart and blood vessel infections, kidney damage, and potentially death (Wadman et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). Covid-19 morphed from being an animal-pathogen to infecting humans (Zhang et al., 2020) – probably due to various human-animal interactions at the Chinese markets of Wuhan (Woodward, 2020). Viruses’ inability to remain within a singular host makes them spread through interaction between actually and potentially infected beings. These interactions can be mediated, such as when a healthy subject touches a doorknob previously touched by an infected subject, or direct, such as when infected and healthy subjects shake hands. The virus’ agency lets it move between and

within bodies, which it affects in various ways, as well as to morph and change its abilities in order to survive within different types of hosts. Covid-19 and similar pathogens' flexibility, mobility and general ability to influence human conduct reveal their agency. We will now cover the socio-political aspects of the pandemic.

Despite some initial hesitation and confusion, most autocratic and democratic states embraced authoritarian approaches to contain the pandemic (Cheibub et al., 2020). These approaches seem to somewhat mirror the Chinese governance of the pandemic. This approach entails centralized, effective action and authoritarian measures such as surveillance and lockdowns to suppress the virus (He et al., 2020: 1). Globally, several billion people ended up being locked down (Cheibub et al., 2020: 2), causing the economic recession of the pandemic (Gopinath, 2020). Governments across the globe thus embrace authoritarian measures (Cheibub et al., 2020; Žižek, 2020) – proving the state's potency as it can still disarm the market and restructure society, despite claims that the current economic system is unstoppable and autonomous vis-à-vis the state (for similar reflections, see Bourdieu, 1998).

The Norwegian government jumped on this 'authoritarian bandwagon' on 12th March 2020, implementing the strictest emergency measures seen in Norway since the Second World War (Christensen & Lægreid, 2020; Gjerde, 2020). Nonetheless, the Norwegian approach is relatively mild, belonging to a small minority of democracies limiting their authoritarian interventions (Cheibub et al., 2020: 8-13). Nevertheless, several draconian policies were employed to administer the population's health, such as a) closing down public and private institutions b) banning larger public events, including political and religious meetings, c) forbidding overnight stays at holiday cottages outside individuals' municipality of residence, d) imposing quarantining and isolation for individuals infected by Covid-19 and e) closing the borders.

By the end of April, the crisis was claimed to be under control (Røsvik et al., 2020) – as the Norwegian government appears quite successful versus the virus (Christensen & Lægreid, 2020). Therefore, restrictions were being eased (Lovdata, 2020). For this reason, I do not analyse governance after 30th April. Now, we will discuss power.

Power

Following Michel Foucault (1980: 119), power is perceived not as a substance, but as a network which exists only relationally – in action (ibid: 98; Deleuze, 1988: 27). It is the multiplicity of forces and strategies operating within and between social relations (Deleuze, 1988: 70). Power is everything which in some manner affects the actions of people (Rose, 1998: 152), structuring practices, processes, structures and subjectivities. Power is therefore not purely repressive; rather, it both produces and represses (Foucault, 1980: 119, 1990: 73, 1991: 194). Phenomena such as ‘truth’, knowledge and subjectivities are all produced and/or repressed with and through power (ibid) – which is immanent to all social relations (Foucault, 1980: 94).

As power structures all practices and thus society itself, so societal changes relate to changes to power. New forms of power tend not to replace, but to subjugate and redirect old forms of power for new purposes (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983: 153). These powers enter complex and contradictory combinations (Dean, 2007: 201). We can speak of power-networks where various forms of power are employed to solve emerging problems. While critics find Foucault to present a functionalist theory where power “undergo[es] a process of perfection” (Kerr, 1999: 181), it may be more useful to see Foucault’s functionalism as relative. Power functions within problem spaces, which are the discursive frameworks constituted and utilized by actors for identifying and testing solutions to problems (Collier, 2009). Changing social structures lead to new or modified problematizations and, as a result, new or modified problem spaces where new power-networks emerge to solve new issues in an effective manner, which old networks are unlikely to handle as every power-network emerges in a specific social context underpinned by specific problematizations.

As a concrete example, we can briefly cover Foucault’s accounts of the changing power-networks emerging with the rise of modernity. Foucault (1990: 136) finds the “old power of the sovereign” with its “right over life and death”, which allows powerholders to seize anything – life included – to be dysfunctional within the modern socio-political context, due to the specific ways the new market economy and demographic changes demand new forms of rule vis-à-vis the feudal order (Foucault, 1991: 80). Sovereignty is largely replaced by a) discipline, which replaces the sovereign’s discontinuous shows of force, enabled juridically, with an autonomous, anonymous and continuous effort to control, improve and modify individual beings with

a focus upon their individual bodies (Foucault, 1991: 208-219, 2008b: 21-41) and b) biopolitics, which entails life itself becoming an object of administration (Foucault, 1990: 138) - through the knowledge produced by scientific disciplines such as statistics, demography, epidemiology and biology (Lemke, 2011: 5). Discipline and biopolitics both turn the vitality of human beings into objects of governance (Rose, 2009: 87).

Foucault (1980: 108) acknowledges that sovereignty remains a “general mechanism of power” which through democratization has been displaced from monarchs’ hands to parliaments, and indirectly, to the people (ibid: 105). Nonetheless, Foucault (1990: 50) finds sovereign-juridical powers to become less important with the emergence of biopolitics and discipline. Foucault’s dismissal is so strong that he largely neglects law (Lemke, 2019: 124), yet the Covid-19 pandemic proves law’s importance as an instrument of power.

While Foucault (1991: 301-308) originally found modernity to bring coercive tools turning our societies ‘disciplinary’, he later discards this conclusion as he finds discipline to become archaic in contemporary societies (Foucault, 2007: 93-94). Discipline and other coercive forms of power are devalued as liberal powers - which entail indirect rule through enabling autonomous subjectivities – turn dominant (Gordon, 1991; Foucault, 2008a; Rose & Miller, 2008; Lemke, 2019). Just as the individual is created through power-effects such as discipline (Foucault, 1980: 98, 1991: 194), so freedom is produced through powers seeking to regulate individuals. Power structures the field of action, thereby enabling particular forms of freedom to emerge through technologies such as the market (see Rose, 1998: 98; Foucault, 2008a: 63-67). Biopolitics, on the other hand, remains imperative (see Foucault, 1990; Rose, 2009).

Now, we will discuss governmentality – an important analytical concept as power cannot be exercised without rationalities offering means and ends (Foucault, 1981: 254; Rose, 1998: 70)

Governmentalities and Discourses

Governmentality studies revolve around “empirical mapping of governmental rationalities and techniques” (Rose et al., 2006: 99; see also Dean, 1999: 2; Miller & Rose, 2008: 38). While government entails “structur[ing] the field of possible action” (Dean, 1999: 14) in a manner both reflected and regulated (Lemke, 2002: 54), governmental/political rationalities/mentalities, or *governmentalities*, are “systemic

way[s] of thinking about government” (Dean, 1999: 211). Governmentalities “render reality thinkable” in order to make it “amendable to calculation and programming” (Miller & Rose, 2008: 16) – creating perspectives from which problems can be solved (Gordon 1991: 3; Rose, 1998: 28) while guiding and justifying governmental practices (Lemke, 2019: 161). Government is conducted with technologies, which are socio-material assemblies consisting of persons, techniques, institutions and/or instruments (Rose, 1998: 16, 2009: 44). The relationship between mentalities and technologies of government is complex (Lemke, 2002: 58, 2019: 149-150), as we shall cover in the analysis. As power cannot be exercised without problematizations, strategies, means and ends (Foucault, 1981; Rose, 1998), so ‘it is not possible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationality underpinning them’ (Lemke, 2002: 51).

Governmentality scholars thus investigate governmentalities in order to investigate how and towards what ends power is exercised. To this end, analysts tend to see beyond the traditional divisions between consensus and violence, domination, subjection and subjectification (Lemke, 2002: 52-55) – even if we have to make some reflections on domination versus empowerment in the analysis – while linking power techniques to forms of knowledge and ‘truth’ (Lemke, 2007: 44). Such analytical operations are enabled by the conception of power as both productive and repressive; power represses and produces, empowers and dominates. While such distinctions are somewhat liquid and not mutually exclusive, we can distinguish domination, i.e. powers which restrict individuals’ field of action, from empowerment, powers which increase individuals’ field of action.

Governmentality studies lack “a distinct methodological inventory” (Bröckling et al., 2011: 15; see also Gordon, 1991: 2). Discourse analysis is therefore a useful approach, especially as governmentalities are discursively formulated (Rose, 1998: 70). Discourses are semiotic practices, such as language, ‘form[ing] the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault 1972: 49). Discourse analysis entails investigating how discourses form objects (Dunn & Neumann 2016: 4-9). However, we cannot forget that the relationship between discourses and the nondiscursive objects they refer to is complex (see Foucault, 1972: 41-42; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983: 77). This is even more so as discourses are not merely semiotic creators of meaning. They are also performative, embodying “complex technical and practical association[s]” which offer prescriptions to

act in certain ways (Rose, 1998: 53). The potential of discourses to semiotically create meaning or performatively enable action depends as much upon the real world as upon the words uttered.

Following the Foucauldian approach, I seek neither to interpret semiotics nor map linguistic phenomena per se, but to analyse ‘the regular patterns observed in discourse formations’ (Lemke, 2019: 43). Discursive formations are groups of statements constituting areas of knowledge in particular ways (Foucault, 1972: 116-117), for instance through a ‘liberal’ discursive formation. To analyse discursive formations, one displays regularities and collaborations between texts through analysing series of examples (Bartelson 1995: 8). Such formations can be analysed as ideal types enabling us to map different perspectives (Hansen, 2006: 52). Likewise, we can analyse and classify governmentalities into ideal type discursive formations such as ‘liberal’ or ‘disciplinary’. While governmentalities are not ideal types per se as they have real effects through being performative, enabling power to be employed (Rose et al., 2006: 99), such classifications are ideal as analysts analytically demarcate rationalities of power which enter complex combinations in actual cases as they are not essentially decoupled from one another. We will see this below as the government employs a complex set of powers which we can demarcate according to terms such as ‘liberal’ or ‘sovereign-juridical’. First, the data must be discussed.

Data

I primarily investigate texts shared by the government at ‘regjeringen.no’, the government’s public website. Here, the government shares daily updates from ministers while enabling an ordered literature review where the texts at hand can be easily accessed by other researchers. I demarcated the set of data to be analysed from 12th March 2020 – the date the Government officially granted the crisis primacy – to 30th April 2020 – as the crisis is now considered to be under ‘control’. I seek to map the mentalities of the crisis rather than those emerging in the aftermath or dominating prior to the pandemic. 79 texts were available on Covid-19 under the keyword Korona – the term utilized in the Norwegian public for classifying the virus – within this timespan.

I focus upon texts from the three ministers holding the greatest responsibilities for handling the Covid-19 pandemic in Norway: Prime Minister Erna Solberg, Minister of Health Bent Inge Høie and Minister of Justice and Public Security Monica Mæland.

They are responsible for governing Norway itself, the healthcare of Norway and the juridical system of Norway respectively. Furthermore, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ine Marie Eriksen Sørensen as well as Minister of Finance Jan Tore Sanner – who hold the two key positions in the Norwegian government below the Prime Minister during ‘normal’ times – are included. The former offers an important example regarding foreign policy, whereas the latter is included as he co-authored an important text with Solberg and Høy. These five actors hold key positions within the Norwegian Conservative Party – the major party of the Norwegian Government since the National Elections of 2013.

Discourse analysts are always faced with the challenge of delimiting data (Dunn & Neumann, 2016:92). I seek articulations on how the government constitutes the virus, humanity, its means and ends, and how the various policies are rationalized. I analyse the intertextual link between these key government officials’ discourses – revealing how these texts form formations in the Foucauldian sense through constituting the world in a regulated manner. Texts are excluded if they a) are not articulated by the mentioned ministers or b) fail to rationalize, justify or elaborate on the government’s means/ends or perceptions of the two objects of governance, Covid-19 and the population. 15 texts survived this process of exclusion. They are all analysed and referred to in the analysis.

Moreover, newspaper articles serve as supplementary sources. While I focus upon the key ministers mentioned above, I allow myself to refer to two directors from the Directorate of Health rationalizing the government’s draconian measures. They are referred to as the government rarely rationalized its authoritarian measures to the public. Also, the Directorate played a key role in planning these authoritarian interventions (Gjerde, 2020: 10), making their discourses useful, especially when the government itself largely fails to elaborate on this point. I will now head into the analysis, starting with how the government problematizes Covid-19.

The Primacy of Life

In order to understand the political rationalities at work during the Covid-19 pandemic, we must first investigate how Covid-19 is problematized as problematizations are prior to the employment of force. As we shall see in this section, the Covid-19 pandemic is primarily problematized as a threat to life. This biopolitical problematization supports

Foucault (1990) and Nikolas Rose's (2009) claims that life itself takes primacy as an object of governance in contemporary societies.

Solberg rationalizes the current situation after a biopolitical logic as the government "put life and health first, and together we managed to defeat the virus and control its spread" (Regjeringen, 2020a). Similarly, the objective during the early stages of the crisis was, as Mæland proclaims, "to limit infections [and] deaths, both for those infected by Covid-19 and those with other life-threatening illnesses or injuries" (Regjeringen, 2020b). This biopolitical mentality is also channelled when Solberg finds the closing down of schools, kindergartens, various organizations and businesses coupled with other restrictions to be worth the high economic costs (Regjeringen 2020c). Solberg, Høie and Sanner elaborate on this, writing that while implementing such measures – which are problematized for hitting businesses hard – "is an almost impossible choice to make... we do this because we must... limit the [spread of] infections" (Regjeringen, 2020d). Mæland summarizes this understanding as "the authorities... always have a responsibility to protect the population" (Regjeringen, 2020e). The government problematizes Covid-19 because of its nondiscursive capacities to damage life rather than, for instance, on economic, social or religious grounds.

The government seeks to protect life through tracing the disease, testing individuals and isolating those infected (Regjeringen, 2020f). These means are seen as the solutions to the problem at hand – defeating the virus through reducing its reproduction rate to below 1, i.e. through making each infected subject averagely spread the disease to less than one new subject (Regjeringen, 2020g).

This biopolitical discourse, which emerged after the government's initial hesitations and inaction (Gjerde, 2020), reveals life's primacy as the pandemic is primarily problematized as a threat to life. This contradicts claims that the weak/old are left to die during our present crisis (Žižek, 2020, p. 127). Rather, the entire human population becomes an object of administration, which the government seeks to protect through reducing the virus' reproduction rate. I will now discuss further how the government articulates the two actors at hand.

The Human and the Virus

All government revolves around the question of whom/what to govern (Rose et al., 2006: 84-85). How the government perceives the two generalized entities it seeks to govern, the human population and Covid-19, must therefore be investigated prior to an analysis of the mentalities and technologies of power employed towards these entities. We have already seen that the population serves as an object of administration, yet we must dig deeper into the discursive ordering of this realm. The government channels two discourses which we must analyse in this regard: a *dugnad* (a Norwegian voluntary community-based effort dating back centuries) and a war discourse. The former constitutes a common human position based on communitarian principles, whereas the latter constitutes Covid-19 as an enemy of humanity. We start with the *dugnad* discourse and the construction of unity.

As Solberg proclaims,

our country has an advantage more powerful than any weapon... we trust each other... without this trust between the population and authorities we could never have made the entire Norwegian population participate in this *dugnad* to defeat Covid-19 (Regjeringen, 2020h).

The Norwegian government puts a lot of emphasis on trust and voluntarism – finding the crisis to largely be solved as a *dugnad*. As Solberg says, “I find everyone to willingly contribute to this *dugnad*... we are [all] willing to stretch far to help one another” (Regjeringen, 2020h). Through this discourse of *dugnad*, the government seeks to constitute a common subjectivity based on communitarian ethics. The government seeks to turn the population into a unified entity regardless of socioeconomic, cultural or other social divisions. This strategy appears to have been successful as Norwegian citizens embrace the *dugnad*-spirit (Myhre, 2020; Nilsen & Skarpenes, 2020). However, the communitarian spirit of *dugnad*, which is a collective and ancient social force, depends upon social cohesion and voluntarism. Therefore, it can only be channelled indirectly, always potentially turning against those seeking to manipulate the community for its own ends.

This *dugnad* discourse of inclusion is supplemented by a war discourse of exclusion. This discourse problematizes the pandemic as war and Covid-19 as an enemy. As Solberg, Høie and Sanner write:

A virus has attacked the entire global community. We are conducting a common struggle against an invisible enemy. The more people participate in this *dugnad*, the faster we return to normality as we know it (Regjeringen, 2020d).

Covid-19 is thus problematized as an actor conducting warfare. This war discourse collaborates with the *dugnad* discourse by emphasising the need for unity against humanity's common enemy. This war discourse is reproduced on several occasions. "The government", in the words of Solberg, "has decided on which measures we must take in the coming struggle against the virus" while Covid-19, besides threatening our lives, also "crippled our businesses" (Regjeringen, 2020c) through the ways it wages war. Covid-19 is thus actively struggling against 'us' – which is why, as Mæland expresses, "we must defeat the virus" (Regjeringen, 2020i). The war discourse problematizes how Covid-19 utilizes its agency malevolently, illustrating how the government's objective of administrating the population's health is mirrored in the task of defeating the virus-enemy.

This war discourse is relevant far beyond Norway, being channelled by citizens (Wicke & Bolognesi, 2020) as well as politicians from different political contexts, ranging from the EU (Miner & Psara, 2020) to China (He et al., 2020: 10). Critics problematize this discourse. It is implied that governments utilize it to their advantage and thus the people's disadvantage, for instance through removing socio-political rights (Khrushcheva, 2020; Musu, 2020). Such critique may reveal illiberal agendas and efforts to control citizens through fear, but it may also distort actor-networks and conceal non-human agency behind anthropocentric veils. The war discourse, regardless of intentions, entails anti-anthropocentric production of meaning where the virus is perceived, *correctly*, as an actor. Thus, Covid-19 is the explicit target of the government, something we will revisit throughout the coming discussions. Other critics find the war discourse to give confrontation, obedience and enmity primacy over solidarity (e.g. Sabucedo et al., 2020). Such arguments are contradicted by the war discourse interweaving and collaborating with the *dugnad* discourse. By constituting the pandemic as war and the virus as an enemy, motivation for community, closeness and solidarity is not omitted, but increased. This enables states to recruit individuals and channel their aggregated forces towards the virus.

Furthermore, the war and *dugnad* discourses have ramifications for poststructuralist theories finding group identity to be constituted through exclusion. For

instance, Ernesto Laclau (2005) and Chantal Mouffe (2018) discuss how the ‘universal’ people is created through the exclusion of both elites and lower classes such as the lumpenproletariat. However, non-human entities such as Covid-19 can also be constituted as an ‘other’. The war and *dugnad* discourses serve exclusionary and inclusionary purposes without any human actors being excluded per se. The human/virus division creates a common human identity through the exclusion of the *non*-human actor. We shall now investigate the mentalities and technologies at work – starting with liberal governmentality.

Liberal Governmentality

Liberal governmentality closely relates to the *dugnad* discourse. Both freedom and community centre around voluntary action and ethics, always potentially turning against those seeking to manipulate these social forces through indirect governance. However, the *dugnad*'s communal voluntarism can also exist within collectivist and/or authoritarian regimes. Consequently, we cannot take for granted that the *dugnad* discourse is liberal. Therefore, I will now show how the government employs the *dugnad* discourse as one of several tools to indirectly govern ‘free’ individuals. Rose (2009:98) finds that this liberal governmentality dominates biopolitical problem spaces as individuals rather than populations are targeted when healthcare authorities administer life, as individuals are perceived as potential ‘partners’ to be recruited rather than passive objects of control. Discourses are employed for these ends as they enable governments to “shape and govern the capacities, competencies and wills of subjects” (Miller & Rose, 2008: 214). We shall now see how the Norwegian government embraces such an approach.

On the governmental level, Solberg says that the government seeks the most effective measures while simultaneously seeking to minimize interventions into people’s lives (Regjeringen, 2020j). The biopolitical objective of administering life is combined with a liberal agenda of limiting coercion. This has close ties to the *dugnad* discourse analysed above. As Høie (2020) writes, “the entire society must participate in the *dugnad* against Covid-19. Each and every one of us has an important task.” Such calls for *dugnad* illustrates the government’s two aims. The government seeks to a) interpellate the population as a unified actor, as covered above and b) transform individuals into ‘partners’ participating in the *dugnad* and the struggle. The government

considers this partnership imperative. To quote Mæland, temporary success against Covid-19 was achieved not through coercion; rather “the sum of everybody’s contributions made Norway get away easier than most countries we want to compare ourselves with” (Regjeringen, 2020e; see also Regjeringen, 2020c). Solberg makes similar claims, too (Regjeringen, 2020k).

Such voluntarism is heavily emphasised when leading ministers discuss the government’s measures. For instance, Mæland tells us that we must continue to stay 2 meters apart from one another, frequently wash hands and avoid crowded places – without coercively enforcing this conduct (Regjeringen, 2020l). Likewise, rather than forbidding foreign travel, the foreign department, as Eriksen Søreide notes, “advises against non-necessary travel abroad. [However], the individual him or herself must make such decisions” (Regjeringen, 2020m). Høie makes similar reflections on individuals belonging to ‘risk-groups’ as “we [the government] offer more advice to those belonging to risk-groups” (Løf & Fraser 2020). These articulations all belong to a liberal discourse as individuals are advised and encouraged rather than coerced to conform. This portrays the very essence of liberal governance as the government tries to govern ‘free’ individuals “such that they enact their freedom appropriately” (Rose, 1998:29). ‘Appropriately’ involves weaponizing one’s conduct through the subjection/subjectification as ‘partner’ assisting the government through conforming to these recommendations.

Such indirect control is often supported by referring to experts (Rose, 1998: 79; Miller & Rose, 2008: 27). The government actively refers to experts’ knowledge to emphasise how their strategies are knowledge-based and thus in the interest of the ‘partners’ – as experts have considerable sway over individual identities and conduct (Rose, 1998:155). For instance, when Solberg presented modifications to the measures at hand, she noted that “[they] are based on analyses from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health [henceforward NIPH] and recommendations from the Directorate of Health” (Regjeringen, 2020c; see also Regjeringen, 2020e, 2020n). The government refers to experts in order to implement self-regulation based on the government’s guidelines – seeking to produce autonomous subjects capable of and willing to solve the current crisis with minimum governmental oversight.

We must note that Covid-19 is the primary target of these liberal powers. These powers are employed as the government seeks to indirectly control individuals and

utilize their autonomy against the virus through motivating them to struggle and empowering them with somatic knowledge. The *dugnad* and war discourses are utilized to motivate subjects to embrace the subjectification/subjectation as ‘partners’ in the *dugnad*, while recommendations are utilized to produce the knowledge these ‘partners’ need for their conduct to be successful. Those following these recommendations exercise power over the virus by reducing its potential to spread. As the virus is disarmed if it cannot travel between individuals, so individuals weaken the virus by following healthcare advice which decreases the possibilities of infecting new hosts, i.e. its field of possible action.

However, despite swearing to liberal modes of rule, coercive measures are employed. As Solberg demands, “we must all continue to follow the infection control rules and recommendations from health authorities” (Regjeringen, 2020a) as the government combines liberalism with an authoritarian approach which will now be investigated.

Coercive Forces

A liberal governmentality entails asking whether and how subordinated subjects can be governed as autonomous agents rather than through restricting their fields of possible action (Miller & Rose, 2008: 216). However, the Norwegian government depends upon coercive strategies such as discipline and law, as do liberal governments more generally (Dean, 2007). We shall now investigate how draconian measures are employed alongside the rule through freedom, focusing upon both the practices and rationalities of this coercive governance.

While the government, as Mæland remarks, tends to “trust that the *dugnad*-spirit enables appropriate conduct, making it possible to refrain from rigid regulations”, it openly acknowledges that “some measures are injunctions and prohibitions, laws and regulations, fines and punishments... [which] intervene in [private] life” (Regjeringen, 2020e). While swearing to liberal governmentality, the government nonetheless finds sovereign-judicial power to be imperative – even requesting permission to push through laws and emergency measures without voting on these measures prior to their implementation in parliament (Regjeringen, 2020h). This explains fears that the war discourse will be utilized to challenge democracy by legitimizing autocracy, despite or

perhaps even more so because these illiberal policies are largely demanded by the electorate (Cheibub et al. 2020: 13).

Authoritarian measures are rationalized, as by the Directorate of Health as “necessary both for defending vulnerable groups and for maintaining the necessary capacity for healthcare services” (Røed-Johansen & Aas, 2020) while Solberg, Høie and Sanner state that too weak measures could allow the situation to get out of control (Regjeringen, 2020d). However, why are these measures necessary if partners’ contributions are the key to defeating Covid-19? We are not given an answer. Thus, while the relationship between rationalities and technologies of governance is oftentimes considered ‘intrinsic’ (Miller & Rose, 2008: 15), this link appears to be rather complex. This is so as powers seemingly contradictory are employed within the same power-network. Thus, governmentalities may be more or less articulated. For instance, governing through free individuals’ voluntary actions may be compromised by active calls for coercion. Likewise, dominant and legitimized ideas may be more likely to be articulated. As it is likely that authoritarian policies generally lack legitimacy in Norway and other liberal democracies, so the question of legitimacy could explain this relative silence. Regardless of why, the dominant liberal governmentality seemingly subjugates and conceals the authoritarian rationality underpinning these policies.

As already mentioned, laws were utilized for closing down businesses and schools, forbidding individuals from staying overnight at cabins outside of the communes they reside within, banning public gatherings with more than 50 people, thus imposing several restrictions to social, cultural, religious and political events, closing the borders and quarantining individuals who have a) crossed national borders, b) been in contact with someone diagnosed with the illness or c) symptoms of Covid-19, whereas individuals must isolate if they are diagnosed or have symptoms while already in quarantine (Lovdata, 2020). Breaking these restrictions leads to fines and potentially imprisonment – i.e., sovereign-judicial and disciplinary sanctions. Coercive powers thus restrict the conduct of both individuals and organizations. Even as Norway ‘reopens’, laws demand that organizations follow strict regimes limiting the likelihood of Covid-19 spreading (ibid). Furthermore, quarantining and isolating, which the Norwegian government enables juridically, are old disciplinary techniques for combatting diseases (Foucault, 1991: 195-200). Through these measures, the government seeks to reduce the population’s movements and interactions while

isolating infected subjects. Evidently, these sovereign-juridical and disciplinary measures restrict the field of possible action negatively through minor sanctions for certain actions, such as crossing the border or leaving one's home if one is infected.

However, this repression also has productive/positive effects. Those uninterested in participating in the *dugnad* are repressed, increasing the likelihood that they actually participate or at least refrain from active sabotage. This also guides the general public in the 'proper' direction by more or less removing 'inappropriate' choices. This way, direct repression aids indirect liberal control in structuring the field of possible action, increasing the likelihood that 'free' individuals act according to the recommendations analysed above. Liberal and coercive forces collaborate within this power-network, indicating that the distinction between productive versus repressive and positive versus negative powers is unclear in empirical settings as they interweave outside of ideal-type classifications.

Moreover, we cannot neglect the target of this strategy – Covid-19. Individuals inhabit intermediary positions between the government and Covid-19 as they serve as potential/actual hosts for Covid-19. Therefore, the government's actions must impinge upon individuals in order to affect the virus. The government acts upon the virus through reducing its overall spread, and through affecting infected bodies. For reducing Covid-19's overall spread, these intermediaries are handled both through the liberal discourses seeking to affect subjectivities and conduct, and through these coercive measures. The government reduces the general population's movements through laws, whereas individual bodies actually/potentially infected are handled through quarantining/isolating. These measures are enabled through the biopolitical objective of reducing the spread of the virus. These measures restrict the virus' field of possible action directly due to reduced interaction within the population, while increasing the likelihood that subjects subjectify as 'partners' of the government which participate in the struggle against the virus.

Critics sometimes appear blind to this. For instance, Foucault (1991: 199) problematizes the disciplinary mechanisms of surveillance, isolating and correcting originally employed for dealing with the plague, before discipline spread to new social spheres, such as hospitals or prisons. Similar tendencies can be seen in some Foucauldian coverage of the pandemic (e.g. Brown, 2020; Schubert, 2020). Such critique neglects how disciplinary mechanisms and laws are not essentially dominating.

These powers are employed towards individual bodies which they have real effects upon through restricting *and* increasing their fields of possible action. Generally speaking, power-effects must be investigated prior to claims of domination or empowerment. Clearly, discipline and other authoritarian modes of rule can function as empowering countermeasures nullifying the forces channelled by non-humans such as Covid-19 or the plague. Critique of coercive measures cannot accurately assess their effects if the roles of non-humans within actor-networks are neglected (for similar critique of Foucault, see Rutherford, 1999: 44). However, while we must overcome such ‘anthropocentric limitations’ (Lemke, 2015: 3), we must not forget that Foucault’s notion of ‘government of things’ illustrates that he includes non-human entities as objects of governance (ibid:16; see also Foucault 2007: 96-97).

Before we proceed, three interesting points must be made. First, these coercive measures appear mild compared to Foucault’s (1991, 2008b) analyses of societies not yet dominated by the liberal programme of rule. Liberal governmentality’s domination lets it subjugate authoritarianism, reducing it to a supplement to its rule through freedom while seemingly concealing the mentalities underpinning the authoritarian measures beyond their ‘necessity’. Second, the NIPH’s expert advice was ignored on several occasions – as the NIPH disagreed with some authoritarian measures, such as closing schools or kindergartens (Fjellanger et al., 2020). Expertise is an imperative liberal technology of power. Hence, such rejections of expertise reveal the importance of coercive powers, supporting Mitchell Dean’s (2007) claims that liberalism’s rule through freedom is enabled through, or perhaps in collaboration with, authoritarian governance. Third, discipline appears subjugated by sovereign-judicial forms of power within this power-network. Rather than a continuous gaze targeting and individualizing subjects, the government enforces measures through discontinuous shows of force when its laws are broken. Disciplinary powers are employed to isolate those deemed as threats to life, i.e. those (potentially) hosting Covid-19, yet there is no active surveillance of these individuals. Perhaps the emergence of liberal governmentality altered the disciplinary power-networks discussed by Foucault (1991, 2008b), allowing sovereign-judicial power to subjugate and redirect discipline in a reversal of the early modern period? Such questions ought to be investigated further. I will now discuss how the government utilizes surveillance within a liberal framework.

Liberal Surveillance

The Norwegian contact-tracing app ‘Smittestopp’ (Infection-stop) is an interesting surveillance technology. We shall now cover how this technology of power functions – and how the liberal mentality redirects and displaces it. Solberg presents the goal of the technology as:

Smittestopp helps us reduce the most intervening measures earlier than if we lack autonomous and effective tracing of infections. This way, society can reopen faster and we will get more of our freedom back (Regjeringen, 2020j).

Thus, surveillance is justified as an instrument decreasing rather than increasing coercion. This app surveils individuals’ positions and maps their networks of interaction in order to warn individuals if they interacted with infected subjects, while also assisting the government in tracing paths (potentially) taken by Covid-19. This revolves around one of the government’s key means for achieving victory – tracing the virus. This further simplifies the two other means, testing and isolating. We must note that the Norwegian population is not under forced surveillance. Rather, as Høie remarks, “it is voluntary to install Smittestopp, and I hope as many as possible will participate in stopping the spread of Covid-19 through installing the app” (Regjeringen, 2020o).

This app is controversial, despite citizens voluntarily choosing whether to install it or not. It has caused outrage due to fears of surveillance (Skille & Gundersen 2020). Furthermore, the NPHI, which developed the app, has been fined for failing to disclose that the app maps users’ movements and produces data utilized for scientific purposes, as well as for potential security issues (Datatilsynet, 2020a). Later, this caused the app to be shut down (Datatilsynet, 2020b). Nonetheless, Smittestopp remains a key technology of power within the period analysed. The question is, what kind of surveillance does Smittestopp enable?

Some scholars offer an easy answer, classifying the digital apparatuses of surveillance emerging during the pandemic as signs of Panopticon and the disciplinary society re-emerging (e.g. Couch et al., 2020). This is inaccurate as this technology imposes no state of constant anxiety about being surveilled in order to modify behaviour. Neither is the body targeted – it is mapped. Rather than disciplinary individualizing seeking to directly control targeted subjects’ conduct, Smittestopp and similar apps individualize as individuality is removed from the individual subject and mapped as data enabling a generalized form of control (see Deleuze, 1992).

Individuality remains uninteresting as this technology transforms surveilled subjects into sets of data offering knowledge on Covid-19's potential movement-patterns. Thus, surveillance is displaced from its disciplinary origins, being appropriated and redirected by liberal governmentality. This is seen as the surveillance is voluntary while the surveilled subject is individualized. Hence, while there may be no 'intrinsic' link between technologies and rationalities of governance, governmentalities nonetheless have important effects upon the technologies of power employed within actual power-networks.

This app has a primary power-effect, empowering the government in its search for effective ways of tracing, testing and isolating. This tracing enables the government to more effectively exercise coercive powers over an increased number of infected subjects, showing how liberal powers too can lead to coercion. However, the main objective is not surveilling and thereafter dominating individuals, but as we have seen, individualizing to trace the virus. Through producing knowledge on Covid-19's movement-patterns and increasing the government's coercive efficacy, the government can block the spread of the virus.

As regarding the coercive measures, a huge corpus of literature problematizing medical surveillance tends to exclusively focus upon human-to-human interaction (e.g. Foucault, 1989; Armstrong, 1995; Rich & Miah, 2009). This tendency seemingly characterizes surveillance studies' coverage of Covid-19, too (e.g. Couch et al., 2020; French & Monahan, 2020). Neglecting non-human entities within the field of medical surveillance conceals how this surveillance may empower subjects through increasing the efficacy of countermeasures against illnesses which effectively reduce the individual's autonomy.

This does not mean that surveillance is unproblematic. As, for instance, Foucault (1991) and Gilles Deleuze (1992) illustrate, surveillance functions as a key technology within power-networks resulting in domination. Contemporary regimes of surveillance may well, as does Smittestopp, rely on control through predictive analyses which enable generalized action rather than disciplining individuals (Deleuze, 1992; Lyon, 2014). However, this does not tell us whether these technologies result in more or less domination vis-à-vis past regimes. Surveillance can have different power-effects based on the ends underpinning the usage of surveillance and the form surveillance takes. These power-effects may however be distorted if the roles of non-humans within

power-networks are neglected. I will demonstrate this by further discussing Covid-19's agency.

Covid-19 in the Power-Network

Throughout this paper we have seen how Covid-19 is targeted by various powers, yet we have not fully grasped its role within this power-network. To do so, I will utilize Foucauldian analytical tools to cover how the virus exercises power. Although Foucault potentially neglects how non-humans exercise power (Barad, 2008: 138), his tools remain ideal for such investigations. I will analyse power in terms of war - as forces and counterforces employed in strategic games (Foucault, 1980:90, 1990: 92-93). Foucault later discarded this model as it is insufficient for handling the productive and empowering sides of power (Lemke, 2019: 133-135). Nonetheless, it offers a potent analytical framework for analysing the human-virus relationship and contextualizing the mentalities and technologies of power analysed thus far. We must first note that other beings, such as ants, also wage wars which entail both territorial conquest and enslavement with huge formations of actors participating (Moffett, 2011). War is not an exclusively human phenomenon, but a network of forces involving complex sets of heterogenous actors.

The Covid-19 pandemic can be perceived as a war with micro-, meso- and macro-level effects. Covid-19's actual activities are restricted to the micro-level, where it invades human bodies through lines created by interaction. Taking advantage of these, Covid-19 causes illness by establishing itself within new hosts' bodies through invading cells. Within such cells, the virus replicates. While not necessarily 'conscious', it follows a strategy of invasion. It spreads from human-to-human, and within the human being, from cell-to-cell. However, the virus faces resistance from the immune system., which employs a) cells for killing the cells infected by viruses and b) antibodies which hinders the virus from infecting cells (Laing, n.d.), even if the particular ways the immune system handles Covid-19 remain unclear. Various forces are at work within somatic space – such as lungs, throats or veins. This is also the case within the spatial space the body inhabits, such as bedrooms, hospitals or buses. Measures such as rest or medical technologies such as medicine or respirators fortify the body. Likewise, instruments such as hand sanitizers, surveillance apps, face masks, areas cordoned off and oral and/or written warnings/advice are employed to offer the constituted 'partners'

means to avoid infection as well as to participate in the *dugnad* through increasing the likelihood that individuals embrace this subjectivity. Similar remarks can be made about measures such as home offices and virtual media software replacing face-to-face meetings. These technologies are results of the pandemic and tools employed to halt its spread – functioning within a liberal framework as it serves to indirectly guide individual conduct and affect subjectivities. This actor-network consists of a complex set of interaction between microorganisms, human beings and various discursive and nondiscursive technologies within a biopolitical problem space. Hence, just as how food possesses agency as it influences our “metabolism, cognition and moral sensibility” (Bennett, 2007: 145), so Covid-19’s natural attributes influence our state of being.

However, just like food, the virus’ abilities to affect our lives are affected by the sociocultural contexts it acts within (see Bennet, 2007: 140). Covid-19 first and foremost channels powers above the micro-level indirectly, through problematizations of its agency based on the biopolitical primacy of life. This enables the virus to affect far beyond the individual body. Some meso-level effects, such as overrun hospitals, are caused by aggregations of several micro-struggles within somatic bodies. Others, such as schools and businesses being closed down, are caused by governments seeking to solve the problem of the virus’ agency based on the biopolitical problematization analysed above.

At the macro-level, the population’s overall health is weakened – both due to Covid-19’s aggregated somatic effects and as individuals with other illnesses may be deprioritized as Covid-19 victims take priority. Furthermore, the economy crumbles, masses lose their livelihoods and the state’s economic strength withers. Similarly, we see macro-effects based on the aggregations of micro-practices based on social distancing and voluntary self-isolation. These phenomena are caused by the government and the population adapting to the Covid-19 agency. While Covid-19’s agency could not have achieved such effects without a combination of globalization and current biopolitical agendas, the ‘great lockdown’ nonetheless stands testimony both to the state’s great potential for exercising power *and* to Covid-19’s capabilities. Thus, the liberal and coercive forms of power analysed in this text originate in the biopolitical discourse’s problematization of the powers exercised by Covid-19. Covid-19’s agency is therefore, both directly and indirectly, the origin of the powers channelled by the government. Ignoring Covid-19’s agency cannot but ensure that these origins and the

logic behind these powers remain shrouded in mystery - as if the government's efforts emerged out of thin air rather than through a complex actor-network where Covid-19 plays a key role as both subject and object. I will now conclude my findings.

Conclusion

Utilizing a discursive-materialist approach to governmentality studies, this paper offers theoretical and empirical insights on power in general, and the way power has been asserted by the Norwegian government during the Covid-19 pandemic in particular. Interestingly, Covid-19 reveals the state's impressive political capabilities as ordinarily opaque features of politics are unveiled in the chaos. This is demonstrated by the economic recessions caused by national governments' draconian measures in general, and as this paper reveals, by the heterodox, effective and impressive sets of powers employed by the Norwegian government. This reveals that the state's choices to limit the scope of its activities and interventions hardly stop it from intervening and restructuring the social world, as Pierre Bourdieu (1998) and other critics of the liberal state have lamented all along. This contradicts counter-intuitive claims that Covid-19 reveals the weakness and impotence of the state (e.g. Žižek, 2020: 123-124). The pandemic demonstrates the state's great potential to exercise power, thus revealing that governmentality scholars should increase their focus upon the state and its capabilities to channel and influence power, also when analysing power at the microlevel.

Interestingly, liberal mechanisms of governance remain dominant despite the government's recent authoritarian turn, supporting Foucauldian claims of a liberal governmentality being central in contemporary societies. Fears of emerging authoritarian measures are thus not necessarily empirically grounded. Nonetheless, researchers must investigate the standing of liberalism in Norway and beyond. Further research must investigate whether authoritarian governance becomes institutionalized in the post-pandemic world, or whether such interventions are merely latent parts of liberalism surfacing during times of crisis and disappearing when 'normality' returns. Such research into policies and the exercise of power should eventually not just map power-networks and make comparisons between different countries' Covid-19 responses, but also evaluate their efficacy for solving biopolitical issues. In this way, scholars can offer lessons on how to handle future pandemics.

However, the complex ways liberal and coercive practices interact within the biopolitical problem space of the pandemic reveal that liberal and authoritarian governance is not mutually exclusive. They not only co-exist, but actively collaborate, illustrating the hybridity of power. Significantly, this illustrates that an end has no essential link to its means. For instance, the biopolitical objective of protecting lives from Covid-19 has no intrinsic link to the liberal and coercive powers flowing through this actor-network. This illustrates the importance of mapping the complex relationship between rationalities, means, ends, technologies and practices of governance.

Interestingly, the ways heterogeneous powers converge strongly indicate that power may best be perceived as a spectrum with degrees rather than as binaries. Nonetheless, typological, binary classifications such as ‘coercive/productive’, ‘dominating/empowering’ or ‘liberal/authoritarian’ remain essential to reveal general patterns characterizing social relations, structures and processes. These classifications may however appear arbitrary if analysts fail to note how different actors are differently affected by the same form of power. Multiple actors are affected by the complex interplay of power, and analysts seeking to make claims of domination and empowerment must investigate the different layers of power-effects. For instance, the coercive measures analysed in this text may empower those at risk while dominating those unlikely to be affected by the virus’ somatic capabilities. The virus itself is likewise dominated. Power is thus multidimensional, targeting different actors and affecting them differently.

In closing, the pandemic reveals that conclusions made without reference to Covid-19’s agency and virus-human interactions and relations distort both the politics of the pandemic and its power-effects. This makes clear once and for all that non-human agency cannot be neglected by social scientists. The complexity spawned by actor-networks can be grasped through a materialist-Foucauldian framework taking both non-humans, power and discourses seriously. The post-pandemic world will be the result of a complex actor-network with multiple actors participating. Understanding Covid-19’s agency is in this regard imperative, not just to understand the powers it exercises over us directly as a pathogen, but perhaps first and foremost to enhance our understanding about how the virus’ agency affects social identities, institutions, interactions, relations, structures, practices and processes through altering human beings’ modes of perception and action.

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