

Omri Tubi “Politics in Knowledge” SSHA 2019 Extended Abstract. Please do not Cite or Circulate.

***Politics in Knowledge: Malaria, State-Formation and the Making of Objects of Government***

Rulers wield state-power over populations and the natural or built environment, many times within clearly demarcated territories (e.g. Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Giddens 1985; Mann 1993; Mukerji 2009, 2010; Scott 1998; Carroll 2006, 2012). Despite considerable preoccupation with the question *what* states govern, the question how certain objects (land, people etc.) *become* “governmentalized” and subjected to political power remain undertheorized. Studies by prominent theorists Michel Foucault (1991) and Charles Tilly (1992) examine broad changes in Europe, suggesting a general shift from emphasizing territories to focusing on populations as the main concern of rulers, making the latter the focus of government. However, because of their broad scope they tell us less about how exactly and concretely this shift occurred or what were the factors that shaped it. Others suggested that actors’ political projects and motivations shape what they focus their political power on (Scott 1998; Loveman 2014). Alternatively, science and technology scholars focused on cases-studies to examine processes of governmentalization. They suggest objects become governmentalized if they become matters of concern for power-holders, making those objects amenable to techno-scientific governmental interventions (Carroll 2012; Alatout 2009).

In this paper I argue that governmentalization occurs when actors introduce new scientific knowledge about an existing problem, knowledge that includes embedded assumptions and ideas about state- and political power, its possibilities and limitations, ways of usage and what is governable or ungovernable. In the case I will present here, it is not only actors’ political agendas or matters of concern that are important but also the politics that are “folded into” scientific knowledge. In other words, not only problematizations or the politics *of* scientific

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knowledge are consequential, but also what I call *politics in knowledge*. I demonstrate this claim by examining Jewish antimalarial operations in Mandatory Palestine, efforts that were part of Jewish state-building helping to facilitate Jewish immigration and settlement in the country (Sufian 2007), focusing on controversies between a Zionist Malaria Research Unit (MRU) and a prominent Jewish malariologist – Hilel Yaffe. Jewish malariologists’ scientific methods encapsulated differing understandings of political power and what they can or cannot govern, in addition to being informed by Zionist politics. These understandings made MRU malariologists focus on the natural environment as the main object of government – what congruent with what Mukerji called logistical power (Mukerji 2009, 2010; Joyce and Mukerji 2017). Yaffe focused on the body through distribution of pharmaceuticals, congruent with Foucault’s (1991, 1997a, 1997b) notion of biopower. The MRU won the scientific controversy and shaped antimalarial operations in Palestine-Israel for years to come (Sufian 2007: 217).