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BOOK REVIEW

Michelle Murphy, *The Economization of Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 232 pp., 25 b&w illus., $24.95 pbk., ISBN: 9780822363453

We cohabit this planet with an ever-diversifying array of metrics. While the discerning mind can accept that ''population'' and ''the economy'' are made, not found, understanding the work these figures do requires reckoning with the affective presences they conjure and absences they conceal. In *The Economization of Life*, STS scholar Michelle Murphy issues a provocation to rethink the history of twentieth-century social science, recasting these twin conceptual pillars as distortive prisms. They are also *prisons*, to indulge the malapropism. An arresting polychrome quadriptych of biologist Raymond Pearl's *Drosophila* overcrowding experiments adorns the book's cover. Exercising some clever artistic license, the third jar from the original figure is here retouched to appear cracked open, anticipating Murphy's opening question: ''What would it take to smash the container?'' (p. 1). By unpacking the assumptions that allowed Pearl to stage his infamous logistical growth model of population, laying bare the ''epistemic infrastructures'' it fortified even after it was abandoned by demographers, she invites us to refuse the neutralizing aura of these figures and break from their constraints on thought and action.

Such engaged and engaging scholarship could not arise from within a cotton-sealed jar. Murphy's prior work on radical feminist health activism and the transnational biopolitics of birth control practices provides a point of departure. Historians in recent years, such as Alison Bashford and Matthew Connelly, have seized upon population control debates and initiatives to show how development projects were central to the logics and logistics of international governance in the decolonizing world. Murphy works with the deconstructive tools of economic sociologists and political theorists like Timothy Mitchell to link population policies with economic measurement, showing how calculations like GDP are sustained and haunted by extraeconomic activities that produce no data. Finally, she nods to classic STS scholarship on *infrastructures* amidst a burgeoning revival of interest in the subject, focusing on the epistemologies that tie dispersed initiatives together. Murphy sketches a genealogy of financialized lives culminating in ''in-

vest in a girl'' programs in Bangladesh, cutting through what could otherwise have been a bloated and circuitous policy history with laser-like focus. Above and beyond demonstrating the conjunction between economic and reproductive normativity at the heart of postwar Western liberal institutions, the real ''value added'' here is the sharp conceptual toolkit Murphy develops with urgent and inspired language.

The book is organized into three roughly chronological ''arcs.'' The first charts the growing influence of GDP as an index of national economic modernization and shows how its correlation with a low birth rate yielded sites for intervention. Demographic transition theory, developed by American Warren S. Thompson during the interwar ferment of population thinking, coupled material abundance to attenuated fecundity and mortality. This one-size-fits-all model enriched ties between Western ''experts'' and a new cohort of South Asian social science institutions, which made ''averted births'' a major goal. Murphy argues that it was not the nomothetic validity of the demographic transition model that gave it strength, but rather the instrumentalities it gathered together. This first section engages most directly with the history of the human sciences and ecology, bringing an analytical richness to canonical cases that links them to discussions of NGOs and neoliberalism in the following two sections. Here, Murphy develops the notion of metrics as ''phantasmagrams'': quantitative practices that ''conjure ineffable realms that can take shape as a collective phantasy in excess of [their] representational and logical limits'' (p. 24). We *feel* declining stock prices as we desire commodities—sinews of sensibility that line the organs of a market-driven society. Economic fortunes and reproductive labor are enmeshed in webs of affect, often invisibly so.

The second and third arcs of the book focus on Bangladesh, a country with paradoxically reliable social science data given its limited access to education, electricity, and clean water. Working with historically-informed critiques of development theory, Murphy shows how family planning practices are part of a kind of postcolonial *experimentality*—a framework derived from Foucault's *governmentality*—in which distributed field experiments led by NGOs provide a network of services in place of a central state. Surveys required demographers to perform the legitimacy of their economic worldview in order to stimulate enthusiasm and consent for interventions. A central actor here is the Bangladesh Rehabilitation and Assistance Committee, the world's largest NGO, which promoted the oral rehydration therapy conceived at a prominent field site as an alternative to intravenous rehydration for preventing death from dehydration. This much-celebrated ''appropriate

technology,'' costing five cents a packet and requiring no medical facilities, supported an infrastructure of intervention in which overall life chances could be improved without broader changes to living conditions.

The final arc investigates the relationship between *anticipation* and human capital-motivated approaches as a hallmark of neoliberalism, the third major critical and historical body of literature Murphy engages. ''Invest in a girl'' campaigns market targeted education as a kind of financial instrument with high rates of return, raising GDP by reducing birth rates. Focus on ''investable life'' makes global development practices fungible with everyday forms of economization endemic to Western financial institutions, thereby curtailing their scope. Murphy's call to resist *population* as a term of reproductive justice in favor of ''distributed reproduction'' provides a way to account for the racialized and sexualized histories of policy objects that purport to erase historical differences in the name of national economic unity.

The Economization of Life should be read on its own terms: as a historical provocation to consider how quantitative practices in the social sciences have developed in tandem with concepts that enact Western liberalism as a model space, and thereby a container, for global development. Those seeking an exhaustive, equivocal account of modeling practices in the population sciences should look elsewhere. Those seeking ways to find the human lives lost inside these sciences' dense forests of figures will, however, find this book inspiring. Murphy's incisive reading of graphs and charts should embolden STS scholars and historians of science to pursue broader political narratives using our proven skills in exposing the concealed alternatives and assumptions that make dominant epistemologies appear natural or obvious. The book's open-endedness is a virtue; other spheres of the economization of life are ripe for investigation. Moreover, we can take a cue from Murphy's engagement with literature and look to non-canonical sources, like Begum Roqiah's *Sultana's Dream*, for new fantasies. What kind of world might we see once these *scales*—speculative scuta calcified by calculative infrastructures—fall from our eyes?

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