The dominant radical rhetoric on AIDS holds that the interests of the gay community are opposed to those of the state. MICHAEL BARTOS thinks such romanticism misplaced. He argues that AIDS policy in Australia is a classic example of good government and its relation to communities.

If you don't much care what your target is, oppositional politics is easy. You can always cover up for an embarrassing lack of a realistic agenda for change by grappling with forces as vast as they are chimeric: the system, imperialism, patriarchy, capitalism. In fact, by overstating the coherence of the power you oppose and avoiding any specification of its effects, the warm inner glow of progressivism can be protected forever from the unsettling currents of tactical engagement with actual social and political circumstances.

The immense tragedy of HIV/AIDS has created new political fields, together with some familiar and well-rehearsed political positions. There have been reactionary responses: taking the epidemiology of HIV as evidence that homosexual sex is unnatural or sinful, or as evidence of the racial inferiority of Africans (or, in the US, all people of colour). There have also been various extreme Left oppositional responses, like the claim that AIDS in Africa is a colonialist myth, or that HIV was developed by the CIA to selectively eliminate undesirable sectors of the population.

More subtle, and more pervasive, is a less extreme oppositionalist argument from the Left: the idea that the politics of HIV/AIDS has been fought out through an essential opposition between the interests of the communities most affected and the power of the state. On one side in this argument are the Third World, gay men, injecting drug users, sex workers, ethnic minorities, and women; on the other side are heterosexual men, scientific medicine, drug companies and mainstream politics. There are just enough grains of truth in this picture for it to maintain its currency, but in important ways it obscures more than it reveals. In particular, it promotes the glib assignment of roles of goodies and baddies in the struggle against HIV/AIDS, making it useless as a means of distinguishing between strategic compromise and co-option.

This distinction is crucial, especially given that the oppositional politics of HIV/AIDS in Australia is currently in crisis. This crisis is marked by the fragmentation of ACTUP, which has largely lost the credibility it had a few years ago. The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power was formed in New York in March 1987, motivated by a perceived lack of urgency in the response of both governments and AIDS service organisations to the AIDS crisis. The hallmarks of ACTUP were confrontationalist direct action, loose non-hierarchical organisational structures, and a sophisticated engagement with the media. ACTUP was able to make political irruptions of extraordinary symbolic power, exemplified by the slogan 'Silence = death'.
I refer to ACTUP’s strengths in the past tense because the movement became very fractured very quickly. In Britain, ACTUP became a target for Trotskyist entrism almost as soon as it was formed. In the US ACTUP appears to have become consumed by issues of race and gender.

In Australia, the high point of ACTUP probably came at the National AIDS Conference in 1990, where ACTUP intervened at a number of points in the Conference, focusing attention on the availability of drug treatments. At the time, the government’s commitment to reforming Australia’s drug approval procedures was in the balance; rearguard actions on the part of the Therapeutic Drugs Administration threatened Australia’s drug approval procedures was in the balance in 1989 of a comprehensive National HIV/AIDS Strategy.

The third and most recent period in HIV/AIDS policy in Australia has seen the increasing institutionalisation of the various elements of the strategy. Among other things this has meant the extension of dedicated HIV/AIDS research funding into social research from its initial focus on virology and subsequently clinical and epidemiological research; the continued development of community-based organisations as an important site for HIV/AIDS education, care and support; and the formal recognition of a partnership between federal and state governments, community-based organisations and affected communities as the basis for policy-making. The main area of new policy since 1989 has been treatment, and especially drug approval processes.

The history of HIV/AIDS in Australia shows that community-based organisations have been active participants in the policy process from the outset. The two groups in Australia which are vastly disproportionately affected by AIDS are gay men and haemophiliacs. From the time that it became clear that HIV could be present in blood products, haemophilia associations have been involved with AIDS issues, although that involvement changed somewhat once the safety of the blood supply could be ensured. Gay men and organisations based in the gay community were involved even before the medical and bureaucratic engagement with HIV began, and continue to be key players in HIV/AIDS policymaking.

Given this policy history, how are we best able to understand HIV/AIDS in Australia? Some of the answers to this question have placed HIV/AIDS at the centre of the ‘legitimation’ problems of the modern state, or as the most revealing example of the postmodern focus on people’s identity as ‘subjects’. One frequent refrain has taken the connection between AIDS and sexuality, and homosexuality in particular, as the starting point for arguing an essential opposition between a non-repressed sexuality (‘the other’, or the ‘abject’, or the ‘queer’) and the state. In this account, advances in ameliorating the effects of HIV/AIDS are due to the triumph of the gay community against the entrenched homophobia of the state. Attached to this triumph, however, there lurks the anxiety that gay men have been co-opted, and are unwitting collaborators with the state in increasing the surveillance and regulation of gay sexuality.

For example, Thomas Yingling gives an account of AIDS in America drawing on French postmodernist Jean-Francois Lyotard’s description in *The Postmodern Condition* of the dissolution of ‘grand narratives’ like ‘modernity’ and ‘socialism’ into multiple, incommensurable discourses. He translates Lyotard to AIDS to find:

**'Resorting to generalised anger marked ACTUP's loss of direction'**
The account of AIDS/HIV which sees responses to it principally in terms of homophobia, leaves out far too much of the story.

Whatever its accuracy in the US, this picture of 'incommensurable discourses' is belied by the Australian experience of HIV/AIDS—an experience which has seen a deepening of the relationships between medical researchers, social researchers, clinicians, and patients conceiving of themselves, individually and collectively, as active partners in the management of the disease. While some sections of the medical establishment and the media seem to consider gay male culture perverse, a considerable amount of public funding and research interest has nevertheless gone into even the most arcane aspects of gay men's behaviour—for example, the programs directed towards men who have sex with men at beats.

But the romantic-oppositionist trend also has its Australian exponents. For example, Deborah Lupton in the Australian Journal of Public Health argues that critical social and political analyses are a point of resistance to official discourses on AIDS, and that many of those who have sought such a position are from the ranks of homosexual men who have seen their friends and lovers die, and who are angry about the continued discrimination, stigma, ignorance and sheer apathy to which homosexual men with AIDS have been subjected on the part of government officials, medical practitioners, research scientists and drug companies.

Such general accusations of indifference are neither useful nor accurate. Many medical practitioners, particularly those clinicians and nursing staff who work in HIV/AIDS areas, have given unstinting service to people with HIV/AIDS. Discrimination by health professionals against gay men and people with HIV/AIDS remains a serious problem, but it is by no means universal. Government officials have responded to the needs of the epidemic, including the needs of the gay community. It would be fairer to accuse drug companies of rank profiteering than indifference, since they have actually concentrated overly on gay men and AIDS, with their eyes on the most effective lobby to maximise drug sales of even vaguely promising new treatments.

The picture of indifference, or the account of HIV/AIDS which sees responses to it principally in terms of homophobia, leaves out far too much of the story of HIV/AIDS in Australia. Policy need not be seen as fundamentally deriving from the exercise of power from above. When power is seen as pervasive and productive rather than repressive, the actions of modern government (in the widest sense) can be analysed in their complexity, rather than as simplistic oppositions.

One model for such analysis is Foucault's notion of 'governmentality'. Foucault defined governmentality as the calculation and tactics which enable the exercise of power, "which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security". The concept of governmentality has population at its core. It sees the extension of the reach of government in terms of the creation of new kinds of 'subjects', rather than new modes of subjugation. As Australia's HIV/AIDS policies have developed it has become clearer, following Foucault, that they are consistent with more general trends in the intensification of the government of populations and subjectivities.

The most comprehensive and refined expression to date of Australia's HIV/AIDS policy is the National HIV/AIDS Strategy adopted in 1989. Its set of guiding principles illustrate a variety of governmental techniques: HIV transmission is considered preventable through education to change individual behaviour; not becoming infected and preventing further transmission is explicitly deemed a personal responsibility; and the law is assigned the role of assisting education and public health.

Central to the strategy is the principle that public health objectives will be most effectively realised if the co-operation of people with HIV is maintained. The government of populations has been progressively extended from 19th century environmental conceptions of health and welfare (through urban planning, sewage and so on) to 20th century concerns such as self-esteem and happy families. Coercive interventions in particular populations would not run counter to this trend. The administration of the population of people with HIV as part of the whole population entails the right of people with HIV to community participation and services without discrimination.

The only discordant principle in the National HIV/AIDS Strategy is that the community as a whole has the right to appropriate protection against infection. This principle is less concerned with the techniques governing individuals' subjectivity than with earlier, simpler conceptions of the protection of the population against disease conceived of as an external threat. The discourse of rights in relation to protection from disease has
uncomfortable implications for humane government.

The mark of good government implicit in the National HIV/AIDS Strategy is the extent to which individual needs and desires can be administered in conformity with the goal of the common good. The exercise of various techniques of calculation over the field of population is characteristic of Australian HIV/AIDS policy, with the result that one of the main issues for its politics is how particular populations are conceived of and deployed. The idea of population is a relatively recent one in Western political thought, but it has become central to the practices of modern government.

HIV/AIDS policies in Australia have in part been directed towards the conventional array of populations. Specific education and support initiatives have targeted women, people of non-English speaking background, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The selection of these populations is not the result of a particular epidemiological warrant; rather, it is because these are always the populations to which public health and welfare initiatives are directed. Equally, the perceived need for programs for prisoners and sex workers derives more from the long association between the criminal classes and prostitutes and public health controls (especially in the case of sexually transmitted diseases) than it does from the actual prevalence of HIV.

The population which has been relatively novel as a target of governmental health and welfare intervention is gay men. Gay men have been targeted because in industrialised countries is where HIV infection has been concentrated (and to a greater extent in Australia than anywhere else). As a governmental strategy, targeting has depended on the concept of risk. The initial identification of AIDS depended upon statistical assessments of risk of disease, and the concept of risk group continues to underpin programs aimed at prevention of further transmission. The focus on 'risk groups' rather than 'risk activities' has been criticised for tending to marginalise risk group members and condemn them to their fate. But it has proved impossible to do without the idea of the 'risk group', and more recently even its critics have acknowledged the need for the concept to counter any reduction in the emphasis on gay men as a policy target and as funding recipients.

The idea of targeting programs to risk groups has been combined with another powerful governmental dynamic: the progressive replacement of external regulation by self-regulation. As British sociologists Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose have noted, the various kinds of expertise involved in the government of social and personal life shape conduct 'not through compulsion but through the power of truth, the potency of rationality and the alluring promises of effectivity'. The shaping of conduct through the power of norms and self-regulation has become the orthodoxy of the new public health and the World Health Organisation. Community development has thus been seen as a key strategy for achieving improved health outcomes. This is the rationale behind the support for gay community-based organisations as leaders in the fight against further HIV transmission, and as leaders in the provision of community-based care.

Community-based strategies for health intervention are a response both to modern government's focus on the administration of populations and to the tendency for internalised self-regulation to displace external control. But there is some tension between these two dynamics. To date in Australia the gay community and the gay population have coincided for the purposes of policy, but that situation will not necessarily persist.

When HIV/AIDS emerged in Australia the gay community constituted the only possible route of access to the gay male population as a whole. The administrative or conceptual structures which might have allowed some other access to this population did not exist. At present, federal government researchers (including the National Centre in HIV Social Research), the Australian National Council on AIDS, health bureaucrats, and community based organisations are all engaged in the 'invention' of a new population—the population of men who have sex with men. This population has been invented because of doubts whether the idea of the 'gay community' is robust enough to bear the full weight of public health policy in relation to HIV/AIDS.

It is still an open question whether the invention of this new population will result in a divergence of strategies between those directed at the community of gay men and those directed at the population. If there is such a divergence, then it is arguable that the effectiveness of HIV/AIDS policies will be reduced. The most reasonable conclusion seems to be that government seems to work better when the focus on population works hand in hand with moves to greater self-regulation—in other words, when the techniques of government are combined with increasing support for community activism.

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