'Smarten up the Parents': whose agendas are we serving? Governing Parents and Children through the Smart Population Foundation Initiative in Australia

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ABSTRACT This article critiques the Smart Population Foundation Initiative (SPFI), which was established to 'bring parenting information and the science of child development to Australian parents and carers' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006) and to satisfy the need for a credible and easily accessible source of information for parents. The article draws on the notion of modern governance developed by Rose and analyses the Initiative as a deeply political project. It looks at the Initiative from a critical distance created by the context of governmentality. The authors argue that the discourses produced by the Initiative constitute a particular notion of parent as 'smart' (lifelong learner, responsible and informed). These discourses govern parents through 'ethopolitics' to take up a certain art of parenting as their supposed free choice. Through standardising and sanctioning a particular way of acting as a parent, the SPFI translates governmental objectives into parents' own values and practices. As a result, the discourse the SPFI constitutes about parenting effectively 'shuts down' multiple understandings of being a 'good' parent. Hence, parents' conscious formation of their parenting practices are inhibited and with that, the ethical debates around this contentious issue are silenced.

Introduction

This article looks at how discourses utilised by the Smart Population Foundation Initiative (SPFI) (Smart Population Foundation, 2006) govern parents to take up the subject position of 'smart' parent constituted by the Initiative in order to improve the welfare of the Australian population. The article utilises the understanding of governing as a way of securing the well-being of the population through developing 'the quality of the population and the strength of the nation' (Donzelot, 1979, p. 7). This notion of governing focuses on the state 'as an amalgamation or circulation of diverse ideas or discursive linguistic "texts" that govern and construct identities, conduct, and the ways in which reality is experienced' (Bloch et al, 2003a, p. 7). The notion of government carried out directly through certain policies or welfare service provisions in order to achieve set outcomes is not the topic of this article.

This article contributes to the existing literature examining recent changes in welfare state provisions or institutions related to the care and education of children and education for the family. These studies conceptualise change as aligned with shifts in ways of thinking about government (e.g. Hultqvist, 1998; Dahlberg et al, 1999; Woodrow & Brennan, 1999; Grieshaber, 2000; Soto, 2000; Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Bloch et al, 2003b; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Press & Woodrow, 2005). Common in this work is the focus on the ways discourses constitute and reconstitute the family, parent and the child and their care and education. The family, parent and

the child are positioned in a grid of power relations and historically produced discourses and as objects and subjects of knowledge, practice and political intervention. This article contributes to the understandings of how, in Australia during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the domestic sphere of child rearing constitutes a site for the government of parents through the utilisation of certain initiatives, such as the Smart Population Foundation Initiative (Smart Population Foundation, 2006).

Background

The Howard Coalition Government identified early childhood as a national priority area in 2003, in its third term of government (Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing, 2003). This agenda spreads over actions on 'early child and maternal health; early learning and care; and child-friendly communities' (Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing, 2003, p. 1). The creation of a national framework for early childhood, on the one hand contributes to a strong economic agenda. It increases efficiency and reduces spending by overseeing and coordinating the various sectors engaged in 'child work', pre-empts future overspending on welfare and produces a skilled workforce. On the other hand, it further devolves decision making and responsibility to parents, teachers, child experts and the local community and promotes the process that 'hollows out' government (Lingard, 2000, p. 29). This way, instead of direct government control, which should be minimised according to neo-liberal ideology, governing is carried out indirectly through projects of social improvements (Burchell, 1996; Rose, 1996a; Hay, 2003). An example of this is the SPFI, whereby the government of parents happens indirectly by the distribution of certain expert knowledges and practices to mobilise parents to act in certain ways and with that serve the public welfare (Donzelot, 1979).

Early childhood recently gained prominence in Australia for several reasons. The Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing (2003) identified early childhood as a significant phase of life. The Task Force draws on Nobel Laureate Professor Heckman's findings by linking the potential high future economic and social costs of the government to those children who have 'poorer' early childhood experiences (Heckman, 1999). According to the Task Force, this issue has been brought to the fore by many contributing factors: firstly, the social problem of an ageing population and the associated increased cost to government; secondly, debates about the competence, quality and life skills of the next generation (such as literacy and numeracy), and hence the capacity of the population to be internationally competitive; thirdly, the realisation that families are finding it hard to balance work and family life; and fourthly, that families are experiencing major changes in their social and economic environment, for instance, higher rates of divorce have resulted in an increased number of single-parent families who live in poverty.

The aim of the Government's early childhood strategy is to provide a 'good start' in life for all Australian children, which at the moment 'is not possible for some' (Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing, 2003, p. 3). The latter, as identified by the Task Force, include Indigenous children, 'children in foster care or other out-of-home care settings', children from diverse cultural backgrounds, and children in family conflict and/or poverty or whose parents are in the criminal justice system (Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing, 2003, p. 3).

With the election of the Howard Coalition Government in Australia in 1996, the family became a 'political touchstone' (Hill, 2006). The issue of family values is important to the Commonwealth Government's neo-liberal conservative agenda (Meagher & Wilson, 2006). This agenda endorses small government, Christian morals, and the virtues of free enterprise and self-reliance (Meagher & Wilson, 2006). The program of early childhood fits in well with the promotion of family values, which uphold, for example, the traditional roles of male breadwinner and female homemaker. These values find clear expressions in social policy, government rhetoric and discourses. For example, one of the still expanding areas of social welfare, the Family Tax Benefit system, advantages 'stay-at-home' mothers and discourages women's participation in the workforce (Kelly et al, 2005). This way, government policy reinforces the understanding of woman as first and foremost a mother, primary carer of child/ren, and as a secondary wage earner (Kelly

et al, 2005; Hill, 2006; Meagher & Wilson, 2006). In this framework it is quite openly implied that the children's place is at home and they are the responsibility of the mother.

Government and Governmentality

In one sense, 'government' refers to all endeavours that shape, direct or guide someone's behaviour towards a specific end, 'which is convenient for each of the things that are to be governed' (Foucault, 1979, p. 13). It also has a moral sense that encompasses how to conduct oneself appropriately to one's situation. Thus, government embraces the shaping of someone's behaviour, passion or instinct (Rose, 1999) and conveys principles for the self-formation of its subjects. Government engages both the 'governors' and the 'governed'.

Government exercises special forms of power, to shape conduct, that are different from domination (Rose, 1999). In domination, power is exercised to depress the capacity of the dominated. In contrast, to 'govern humans is not to crush their capacity to act, but to acknowledge it and utilize it for one's own objectives' (Rose, 1999, p. 4). Power, as a network, infuses the lives of humans and the organisations within which they operate and involves subtle direction of conduct (Dean, 1999).

Governmentality deals with ways of thinking about governing the population and individuals. Governing is a rational activity that employs forms of thought, knowledge, expertise, strategies and means of calculation to shape conduct (Dean, 1999). The form of calculation about how to govern is the rationality of government. Rationalities of government define goals and means, actions and the institutional frameworks to achieve them. Rationalities have three forms (Rose & Miller, 1992; Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999). First, political rationalities deliver a 'moral' form, which gives details about the power and duties of authorities, the distribution of tasks between authorities and considers the ideologies to which government should be directed, such as freedom, responsibility, growth or development. For instance, neo-liberalism limits government in order to encourage competition and minimises social welfare in order to increase the self-reliance of citizens. Secondly, governmental rationalities have an 'epistemological' form which describes the nature of objects to be governed, including some accounts of the persons over whom government is to be exercised. For example, parents and children are constituted as lifelong learners by the SPFI with the use of a whole host of scientific knowledge delivered by theories of child development and learning. Thirdly, government rationalities are articulated in 'idioms' by the utilisation of the 'translation mechanism' of language (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 6), which renders reality thinkable and subject to political deliberations. It is through these translations that objects, such as the family or the child, are rendered into a particular conceptual format and made amenable to intervention and regulation (Miller & Rose, 1990). For example, if parenting is translated through the utilisation of economic discourses as an investment, consequently the intervention into parenting should focus on devoting more money and resources into raising children. Thus, by using Rose's (1999) summary about the three forms of political rationality, rationalities are 'morally coloured, grounded upon knowledge, and made thinkable through language' (p. 179).

The Government of Parents in Australia

It is necessary to place this article into a historico-political framework to understand how the government of parents in the present utilises ideas which shifted or were re-invented with the changing rationalities for governing individuals (Rose, 1996a).

At the turn of the twentieth century, Australia's reliance on the British motherland in the establishment of economic, political, religious, educational and cultural formations produced dominant discourses of paternalism, citizenship and motherhood (Ailwood, 2002). Australia kept close ties with the Empire after federation (in 1901) and the British imperialist view of the world remained quite pronounced. Even during the 1960s, Australia was 'the only modern nation whose ruling class still considered themselves immigrants whose primary allegiance lay elsewhere' (Kociumbas, 1997, p. 214).

Policies concerning motherhood and child welfare legislation during the first period of welfare reform at the turn of the twentieth century in Australia show different facets imbued with

discourses of patriarchal capitalism, imperialism and the Empire, and the inherent superiority of the northern white Christian world (Brennan, 1994). State intervention to supervise women's care for their children not only marked a shift in the relationship between the state and the family, but it represented an attempt to increase the birth rate, to lower infant mortality and to provide a population who would maintain the Empire. Maintaining the imperial 'race' was seen as an utmost priority: quality of 'race' for national efficiency, quantity for the imperial army. This way, 'good' mothering was crucial in the survival of the Empire. The child was constructed through these discourses as 'at risk', and the mother, interconnected to this, was constructed as responsible, first towards her children, and second, towards the nation (Ailwood, 2002).

From the beginning of the twentieth century, philanthropic women, such as Lady Gowrie, wife of Australia's Governor-General, played an important role in the establishment, reforming and regulation of institutions in a strong eugenic context, such as the endorsement of the 'proper' family, and the provision of child care or kindergartens. Philanthropic activity was organised at a calculated distance between the developing welfare state and functions of the liberal state, such as the preservation of the privacy of the family (Donzelot, 1979). Philanthropy was 'deliberately depoliticised' (Donzelot, 1979, p. 54) in order to be able to serve the state at a distance. In early liberalism, philanthropy served as an instrument to enable the state to preserve the freedom of the individuals and the market from state intervention while ensuring morality and order. In welfare liberalism, philanthropy instituted public services at sensitive points between private initiative and the state. In neo-liberalism philanthropy was re-invented to maintain the liberty of the citizen and to take over social services devolved from the state. Thus, philanthropic activity is deeply politicised and first and foremost serves the state (Donzelot, 1979).

The constructions of the child 'at risk' and the 'responsible mother' were invigorated with the emergence of 'psy' sciences (Rose, 1989), in particular theories of attachment and developmental psychology (Walkerdine, 1984; Burman, 1994). Two morals emerged gradually, as Rose (1989) argues: '[t]he first was that the capacity to learn, the wish to learn, and the pre-conditions for future intellectual development were inculcated or nurtured in the course of the early domestic life of the child' (p. 184). The second was that working-class families, as a result of their kind of 'cultural lag', were not able to provide these conditions. By the 1960s it was argued that home environment and parental attitudes were extremely significant in defining school attendance and performance (Rose, 1989). Professionals defined responsible mothering along the axis of the realisation of the child's potential. Moreover, the realisation of the child's potential was equated with the desire of the mother and hence techniques were developed to reach this goal in the home (Rose, 1989).

Increasing globalisation, economic restructuring and internationalisation of the Australian economy characterised the late 1970s in a framework created by free market ideology (Lingard, 2000). However, the first part of the decade still maintained strong social welfare provisions, including an increased provision of early education and care services and the introduction of early intervention in education. Social welfare policies were legitimated on the grounds of national importance and for social reasons rather than economic ones. During the 1980s and 1990s the political rationality shifted from the social to a 'putative economic significance' (Lingard, 2000, p. 27) and the state was restructured to a 'managerialist, competitive and performative … apparatus' (Lingard, 2000, p. 29). In 1996, with the election of the Howard Coalition (1996-present), there was a return to a more 'coordinate style' (p. 29) of federalism, with an emphasis on performance [1] and a weakening of equity programs (Lingard, 2000). Federal and state government sectors underwent a strong rationalisation resulting in the devolution of government responsibilities to non-governmental agencies, businesses or persons. In this way, Australia was pushed towards reduced government, steering from a distance (Taylor *et al.*, 1997) and increased privatisation and marketisation of its remaining state-supported operations. The legitimation of the state was re-orientated towards economic discourses and argumentation (Taylor et al, 1997). The leaner state emphasised efficiency and effectiveness and was concerned more about outcomes than inputs (Lingard, 2000).

Neo-liberalism, as the dominant political rationality (Taylor et al, 1997), was expressed in discursive practices such as decentralisation (devolution), the primacy of the private, individual autonomy and responsibility, as well as the emergence of new discourses focusing on personal reflection, local action, flexibility and choice. This political rationality brought in new ways of

thinking and a new language, tactics and programmes for producing a particular type of autonomous and responsible citizen. This citizen has to find his/her own destiny, instead of being under the 'tutelage of the social state' (Rose, 2000, p. 1400). Further, the individual is responsible for his/her family and subsequently the destiny of the society as a whole (Rose, 2000).

Families, parents, schools, individuals, organisations, localities – communities – became important sites for a new politics of conduct through a governing virtue; in short 'ethopolitics' (Rose, 1999, 2000). Through 'ethopolitics' communities are becoming increasingly responsible to resolve issues of health, security and productivity. 'Ethopolitics' governs through two forms (Rose, 2000). Firstly, it governs through the moral self-regulation of the individual according to some fixed standards, which allow conduct to be judged in moral terms (Rose, 1999, 2000). These standards, for example, include quality frameworks and codes of conduct, and in this article, the standards for parenting that the SPFI attempts to lay down. Secondly, it governs through the self-creation of 'one's existence according to a certain art of living' (Rose, 2000, p. 1399), such as the art of being a 'smart' parent. Elements of both forms of governing can be found in political debates and in the discourses of the SPFI.

The Smart Population Foundation Initiative (SPFI)

The SPFI is partly funded under the Howard Government's early childhood agenda and was established by a philanthropist and member of the Australian power elite, Divonne Holmes à Court, to 'bring parenting information and the science of child development to Australian parents and carers on a national level' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). Its mission is to 'promote improved childhood environments in Australia' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). Its mission statement implies that the Initiative's objective is to advance children's lives. However, we argue that this program's first and foremost aim is to govern all parents to adhere to a certain universal art of parenting and to promote a particular childhood that is considered by the SPFI as the 'best' for every child.

The SPFI is important to study for two reasons. It has a well-developed parenting website and will soon commence distributing free parenting DVDs through many public outlets such as post offices, Child Health Centres and local libraries. More importantly, it was selected by the federal government to 'design, build, manage and promote the *Raising Children Network* (RCN) website' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006), a national parenting information website under the *Stronger Families & Communities 'Invest to Grow'* initiative. The RCN is built on the 'collective wisdom of experts and industry bodies from all over Australia' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006) and funded partially by the Australian federal government. The aim of the RCN is to provide an essential parenting guideline for all Australian families to increase the quality and standards of parenting and hence improve all aspects of national well-being. The objective of both Initiatives (SPFI and RCN) is to enhance the physical and social conditions of children in families and to ensure that all Australians are positively contributing to the national economy.

The SPFI is managed by a board of eminent Australians who are representatives of the health, law, finance, business and entertainment sector. One of the board members is Professor Fiona Stanley, a distinguished scientist and who was awarded the prestigious title of 'Australian of the Year' in 2003. Stanley's and other board members' affiliation adds considerable weight to the SPFI and provides scientific and economic legitimisation, credibility and popularity to its goals. Stanley is widely regarded as a person who advocates for children. Her statement in a publication titled *Children of the Lucky Country?* (Stanley et al, 2005) exemplifies the ways the SPFI constitutes parents, children and the need to provide information to enable parents to do their parent work:

> There is an immense social interest in how well parents do their job. We all benefit if parents
> raise children who are socially competent ... capable of and motivated to be independent and
> contributing members of society ... nearly all parents want to do well by their children. Not all
> parents know how, or have the personal and financial resources to do so. It is not charity, but
> self-interest that calls us to assist ... parents are performing an immense social service in having
> and bringing up the next generation. (pp. 180-181)

This statement constitutes the parent as responsible to society to fulfil society's expectations and as having a desire 'to do well'. It personally 'calls [on] us' (the communities where parents belong)

and summons our virtue. It draws on communities as partners in fulfilling the objectives of parenting, to 'assist' in parents' obligations to raise 'independent and contributing members of society'. Thus, it makes both the parents and the respective communities responsible for parenting through 'ethopolitics' (Rose, 2000). The child is constituted as a socially skilled [2], self-governing and 'contributing' future citizen. Parent work is understood as social service. In all these understandings terms like 'society', the demands or 'interests' of society or 'social service' are open to numerous possible interpretations. This way, this statement can be read as delivering a social justice agenda. Understanding this statement as inscribed with the rationality of neo-liberalism provides another reading. The child is constituted as self-reliant, independent, rather than interconnected with others, and responsible and skilled ('capable') to meet the demands of the fast-changing economy and to contribute to the financial prosperity of Australia. Correspondingly, parent work, as a social service, is constituted to enable the child's development toward this kind of future citizenship. Moreover, it is implied that this future for the child is what the parent desires.

The Initiative summarises the desires of parents this way: *'all parents want the best for their children ... to protect and prepare their children for the best possible life'* (Smart Population Foundation, 2006, original emphasis). The notion of 'best' is a contested term in academe. The SPFI defines 'best' by the use of expert knowledges. These knowledges, however, limit the possible positions for both parents and children to the one which is inscribed by the SPFI.

The route towards the fulfilment of desires is set up by 'informed choices' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). In 'neo-liberal' rationality, as Dean (1999) explains, subjects are assisted to practise their freedom through making choices, but only in ways that the state – or as in this case, the SPFI, as inscribed by the political rationality of neo-liberalism – has defined anteriorly. Therefore, individuals are 'not merely "free to choose", but *obliged to be free*, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice' (Rose, 1999, p. 87, original emphasis). The SPFI states: 'Parenting Science enables people to make informed choices about how they want to raise their children' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). 'Smart' parents are first constituted as informed by the SPFI (as outlined under '2.3. Constructing the uninformed parent') and then they are assisted with parenting information to exercise their free choice amongst possible parenting practices endorsed by the SPFI. This way, to choose other practices is not a matter of choice, that is, a matter of being an 'inappropriate' parent. Consequently, parents are obliged to choose between recommended and predetermined ways. Those who have not yet taken up the 'informed parent' subject position are constituted as lacking parenting 'confidence, skills, support and knowledge' to provide the 'best' life for their ('smart') children (Smart Population Foundation, 2006).

The SPFI strongly utilises eugenic and exclusivist discourses, which enable, constrain or marginalise different social justice agendas. These discourses are delineated and untied in the later sections of this article. Moreover, the Initiative, by using a strong economic discourse, creates significant links between economic agendas of the government and the role of the family in relation to these agendas. The SPFI gathered and translated specific expert knowledges of parenting into an easily understandable format to reach out to all families and to regulate them to conduct themselves in certain ways.

The analysis which follows is divided into two main but interconnected sections. The first section examines the subject position of 'smart' parent and the ways it is produced by the Initiative as the only possible subject position, which enables parents to ensure their children's 'best' future. The second section scrutinises the ways 'smart' parents are governed through 'parenting science' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006) endorsed by the Initiative.

Producing 'Smart Parents'

According to the SPFI smart parents grow and develop 'the country's population in a smart, intelligent way' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006) to become problem solvers and members of the flexible workforce necessary to ensure Australia's competitiveness in the global marketplace. This is essential 'to increase GDP [gross domestic product] to pay the taxes that fund welfare and the health services' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). This section analyses how the SPFI produces the parent as a lifelong learner, responsible and autonomous individual in order to supply the required workforce to the national economy.

Parents, according to the SPFI website, should raise 'human' adults and not 'warm bodies' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006) and thereby guarantee a prosperous future for the nation. The SPFI constructs a dichotomy in relation to the end 'products' of parenting: the desired 'human' versus the 'warm body' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). A 'human' is constituted by the SPFI as a contributing member of society, while a 'warm body' is understood as a less than human creature, a rejected outcome of the parenting process who is welfare dependent or needs intervention through social services. The parent is constructed as needing continuous training to be able to raise 'humans'. Part of this training is the continuous construction and reconstruction of the parent's own practice. This happens through an incessant observation and reflection about the parent's own parenting practices. When a mismatch is discovered between the desired parenting conduct prescribed by experts (or SPFI) and the parent's own, a problem is created which the parent has to overcome. However, 'armed with that [SPFI parenting science], parents can apply their own analysis and reason to issues that arise' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). This way, parenting is constituted as in need of perpetual intervention or support. The parent is constructed as a lifelong learner who needs constant training to know 'proper' parenting and techniques in order to change his/her practices.

The SPFI, along with popular parenting books and the media, portrays and legitimates the same characteristics of 'smart' parents. The parent who does not take up this subject position, the parent who is not a reflexive, problem-solving lifelong learner, is fashioned as one in need of outside support, intervention and remediation. The SPFI single-handedly delivers into the home of parents an understanding of the importance of lifelong learning and the necessary parenting knowledge and skills.

The Initiative uses a political discourse that is inscribed with the logic that some parents threaten the future economic success of Australia by endangering the 'human' child. Those adults who are produced by futile families are merely 'warm bodies'. These descriptors and categorisations are reminiscent of the rhetoric employed by the eugenics movement in another era. Neo-liberalism, as a political rationality, constitutes a contemporary human being expressed in a new ideal: the 'actively responsible self' (Rose, 1996a). This individual interprets its 'reality and destiny as a matter of individual responsibility, it is to find meaning in existence by shaping its life through acts of choice' (Rose, 1996b, p. 151). The SPFI inscribed by this rationality constitutes parents as responsible for raising 'warm bodies' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). Making parents responsible disregards socio-political and economic reasons for being a welfare recipient or in need of health or social services. By making the unfit parent visible and reinforcing its nature as in need of help, the Initiative divides parents between the 'irresponsible', that is, those deemed in need of help to raise humans, and the 'responsible' ones, those considered well able to manage child-raising.

The SPFI argues further that 'all families can benefit from parenting science even those who *appear* to be getting by' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006, emphasis added). Under the 'parenting science' section the Initiative showcases certain scenarios in which even the most experienced and knowledgeable parents' actions might unintentionally result 'in failure' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). This way, it makes parents uncertain in their skills. Building on this insecurity, it appeals to a virtue of parenthood authenticated previously: that all parents should provide the best possible life for their children. Therefore, to be able to think about him/herself as a 'good' parent, who lives up to his/her virtue as a parent, the parent has to obtain 'parenting science' and use support. This is what Rose (1999, 2000) calls governing through 'ethopolitics'. To be a parent who is responsible for the child's future therefore necessarily involves making an active choice between risking unintentional 'failure' or the acquisition of 'parenting science' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006).

Constructing the Uninformed Parent

Parents are produced by the SPFI as responsible subjects who exercise 'informed choices' inscribed by the SPFI (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). The ones refusing to take up this position because their cultural, religious or personal beliefs dictate different standards; or who are unable to take up this position, due to lack of time, language ability and so on, are constructed as

irresponsible or ignorant/uninformed. The term 'informed' is understood as built upon expert knowledges and practices produced by specialists in child development and parent education. Matching this understanding of the 'uninformed' parent, the SPFI sets out to inform parents and positions its own 'parenting science' as what parents need in a one-stop-shop format (Smart Population Foundation, 2006):

> Most Australian parents wished that, even in the face of perceived information overload, they had one reliable source for information about raising their children, one that they can depend on to answer their questions without judging them, give them some insight or provide links to support.

The SPFI makes its 'parenting science' easily accessible through the Internet and the distribution of a free DVD, called *Raising Humans*. This DVD covers basic parenting information compiled by the SPFI and is available to families via hospitals' maternity boards, Child Health Centres, post offices and other locations. This way, parenting knowledge is made accessible to all parents and deemed to be inclusive by utilising a simple and practical language.

The Initiative openly draws on parents' convenience; moreover, it uses it to legitimate its intrusion into the private lives of the family. Offering 'parenting science' accessible from home frees individuals to turn to experts elsewhere and creates a new form of privacy (Donzelot, 1979). The Initiative, with its expert knowledge, comes to the home and delivers universal child-rearing knowledges and 'proper' practices. This way, parents are governed at a distance in their homes and in their privacy (Rose, 1996a).

The Initiative produces the binary subject positions of the 'lifelong-learner' or 'in-need-of-intervention'; the 'responsible' or 'irresponsible'; and the 'informed' or 'un-informed' parent; and governs parents to exercise their presumably free choices by taking up the first sides of these positions. 'Smart' parents are constructed through these positions as 'lifelong learners, responsible and informed' individuals' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). In contrast, 'inappropriate' parents are constructed as still being 'responsible'; however, they are responsible for the creation of social problems in a causal manner. Hence, this section examined how the SPFI constructed these subject positions for parents. The next section analyses in what ways the SPFI governs parents to take up these positions.

Governing through Parenting

In order to govern through particular knowledges and practices – in this case through the parenting science of SPFI – certain patterns of conduct need to be inscribed and identified as parenting, and specific criteria need to be produced to construct 'inappropriate' parenting ready to be intervened upon (Rose, 1996b). This section outlines how certain conducts of parenting are translated through economic discourses as needing regulation; how discourses recaptured from earlier usage, such as eugenics or imperialist discourses, legitimate and fortify this intervention; and how and through which particular forms of science parenting is translated to be amenable to government 'at a distance'.

Before one can manage parenting, it is necessary to conceptualise a set of processes and relations about what parenting is. However, this conceptualisation takes place in line with political rationalities, as Miller & Rose (1990) explain: '[l]anguage here serves as a *translation mechanism* between the general and the particular, establishing a kind of identity and mutuality between political rationalities and regulatory aspirations' (1990, p. 6, original emphasis). Therefore, the phenomena to be managed – 'improper parenting' – must be translated into information through developmental and parenting theories, research, reports, statistics and so on. This way, language establishes networks, shared vocabularies, theories and explanations among professionals, parents and the rationality of the state. Through this inscription, parenting becomes amenable to intervention and regulation according to political rationalities.

Governing through Economic Discourses

The language of the SPFI strongly draws on economic discourses, such as efficiency, effectiveness and outcomes. It claims that 'Australia's future rests with its children' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006) and places this claim into a simple economic equation. The SPFI suggests that birth rates will not rise considerably and the low fertility rate will cause economic problems in the near future. Therefore, the Initiative proposes to help by making up the missing numbers (quantity), and through quality by enabling young people to be better prepared 'so they enter the workforce, stay in the workforce and make a greater contribution while there' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006).

The Initiative conspicuously translates the economy to parenting. It turns 'inappropriate' parenting into economic activity, whereby a lack of investment is measured in statistics such as the cost of 'repeated years at school, the cost of welfare, amount of contact with the police, the costs of suicide, self-harm, abusive or neglectful relationships and neglectful parenting' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). The social consequences and extent of 'inappropriate' parenting, thus are measured and interpreted into figures representing costs to governments and thereby taxpayers, who presumably want their tax dollars invested more productively.

Through the discourse of investment, which is translated into capital investment in children by the SPFI, the child is constituted as a trading entity. Therefore, investing in children brings financial return for Australian taxpayers. This process is interpreted by the SPFI as 'more bang for the buck' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). Intervention and investment in intervention are legitimated on the ground of cost cutting, which comes 'from savings on future costs such as health care, unemployment and crime' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006) at a governmental level. The often quoted statistic of spending $1 in early childhood saves $7 later on is featured throughout the SPFI website (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). Moreover, using an economic discourse for the translation of parenting turns parenting into a financial investment. This idea is just one step away from turning parents into informed consumers in the best interest of the children's welfare.

In summary, by translating and inscribing parenting with the use of economic discourses, the government of parents is legitimated on financial grounds. The translation simplifies the complex task of parenting together with the ethical dilemmas of intervention into a mathematical equation: intervention now equals more savings later.

Governing through 'Traditional' Discourses

The neo-liberal and conservative ideology of recent government in Australia includes a right-wing moral agenda that emphasises self-reliance, the male wage-earner family as the unit of society, the importance of marital stability for children's well-being, Christian beliefs, and the value of earned income rather than government benefits (Hill, 2006; Meagher & Wilson, 2006). In its core it is traditionalist.

The Australian political system is immature, argues Jamrozik (2001), because it has not come to grips with its 'colonial inheritance', which sees the area of social welfare as an 'unfortunate necessity, that can be alleviated by private charity' (p. 268). Drawing on Jamrozik's argument, this article argues that the Initiative uses a discourse which has its roots in the turn of the twentieth century (these earlier discourses were delineated in a previous section). In addition to that, there is a re-invigorated reliance on and governmental support for philanthropy to solve social problems in Australia similar to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The Initiative recaptures these discourses and practices. First, there is a particular reliance on philanthropy in the organisation and provision of resources in the name of saving children from certain 'risks', such as failure in school, criminal behaviour or being welfare recipient (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). The philanthropic nature of this organisation disguises the SPFI's political nature and its power to govern family life.

Second, the SPFI constructs a subhuman variation of persons as 'warm bodies' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006); hence it re-invents eugenist discourse. Those individuals who presumably need intervention are produced as members of this category by the Initiative. The SPFI strives for a 'qualitative' improvement of the population – creating 'humans' from 'warm bodies' –

in order to maintain or increase national efficiency or well-being, which is alarmingly similar to early twentieth-century ideas of the eugenics movement.

The SPFI produces 'smart' parenting as desirable while excluding other ways as 'inappropriate' parenting and, as a result, marginalises social justice agendas including gender, cultural, racial, religious and ethnic equality; hence its discourse is exclusivist. Moreover, it legitimises White, middle-class ideals of child rearing through the utilisation of dominant popularised [3] versions of scientific knowledges of parenting. At the same time it excludes other cultural knowledge or ways of parenting.

Parenting Science – endorsing values of dominant culture

The family is an instrument in the government of parents and children. Rose (1989) outlines how the private sphere of the family is linked with the objectives of the government of childhood and parenthood. He claims that, since the eighteenth century, all social ills were connected to the incorrect practices of the care of the children within families. This focus, however, later shifted from the prevention of social maladjustment of children to the maximisation of their potential through the management and regulation of the early parenting practices of the mother.

The regulation of mothering happened through acting upon the mothers' wishes, desires and aspirations. 'Psy' sciences had a central role in defining norms of development and behaviours, both for the mother and the child, and the visualisation [4] and understanding of the nature of childhood. This knowledge then spread to professionals working with children as well as to the population in the form of popular sciences and created ideals of children's conduct and development. The observed discrepancy between the ideal and actual conduct of children generated in parents a reliance upon professional knowledge. In this way, parents are governed through expert knowledges and practices.

Following this model, the SPFI lays down parenting standards employing expert knowledges which are now taken for granted. These 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1980) are worshipped as 'sacred cows' despite the enormous number of critiques that have emerged in a number of disciplines, including developmental psychology (Burman, 1994; Burman et al, 1996), early childhood education (Cannella, 1997, 1999), and sociology (James & Prout, 1997).

The SPFI presents research results as accurate and up-to-the-minute, leading the reader to believe that these results are incontrovertible. The SPFI's discourse is based on a seemingly objective science and lends itself to grand generalisations. Moreover, there is no acknowledgement of competing discourses, how these discourses are applicable to local context or different ways of imagining parenting. The SPFI maintains the assumptions that everyone is the same: 'we are all human and that's why there can be universal content for a national parenting program' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). This statement further supports the idea that generalisations can be made about human nature, parenting and social settings.

Exercising power through 'ethopolitics' (Rose, 1999, 2000), the SPFI sets up universal standards for parenting in the fashion of codes of conduct in relation to the provision of a 'proper' childhood as grounds upon which parenting can be morally evaluated. Early childhood discourses or patterns of discourses based on empirical science universalise the notion of childhood (Hendrick, 2000). The importance of normative development, forms of 'good' parenting enabling a 'proper' childhood, modern compulsory schooling and active citizenship are attached to the construction of this universal notion of childhood. Scientists and psychologists for over a century have argued from a positivistic stance that progress can be made in human development by finding universal truths about childhood and best practices of parenting. The universal truths of parenting are widely promoted in spite of the large body of literature providing evidence that a universal notion of childhood and best practices of parenting further marginalise those whom it intended to help (Lubeck, 1994; Cannella, 1997).

The SPFI website declares a commitment to universal truths about parenting by stating that there are ten '[f]undamentals that apply to all families regardless of culture' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006); however, it fails to articulate what these fundamental principles are. When one attempts to open the link titled 'Ten Universal Truths', there is no supporting page. We conclude

then, that the SPFI identifies a need to legitimate its agenda by drawing on a set of universally agreed principles, but it is unable to articulate those.

Lubeck (1994) and Canella (1999) argue that child development research endorses beliefs that some cultural practices are preferable or true while others, if not deficient, are certainly less desirable. They claim that developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) has been used to rectify social ills and that DAP has the effect of maintaining the status quo. Endorsing such practices means that only certain childhoods and parenting practices are desirable and that differing practices of parenting legitimate the regulation of parenting.

Examples of child rearing knowledges and best practices can be found throughout the Initiative's text:

- the need for one primary carer (mostly the mother) in a child's life;
- the window of opportunity to learn where most of these opportunities close after five years of age, hence the particular importance of the role of the family and the enrichment of early childhood experiences;
- the analogy of brain science, which draws a parallel between the computer and the human brain. The SPFI utilises the idiom of 'hard-wiring children's brains', which constructs parenting 'errors' as causing 'permanent damage';
- the crucial importance of the first five years to facilitate the love of learning with regard to ensuring continuous motivation for a lifetime of learning;
- the idea and efficiency of early intervention, that the lack of 'proper' early parenting can be compensated through early learning in particular institutions;
- to counterweigh for their time away from children, parents can use the efficient practice of 'quality time'.

In spite of the wide utilisation of these knowledges in parenting today, the Initiative sets out as its objective to further popularise and standardise them among all parents. Translating this knowledge into an even more simplistic language leads to further generalisations and makes multiple interpretations impossible.

Conclusion

It is widely argued that there is a need for easily accessible and credible information on parenting backed with scientific research. The Smart Population Foundation Initiative (2006) has been established to fulfil this particular need nationwide. The SPFI delivers a seemingly objective parenting science to parents' doorsteps with the intention of helping parents in their work and to provide the best possible environment for children in their homes. An organisation and program that fulfils a great need and aims to help children and parents, such as the SPFI, is highly resistant to critique.

Placing the discourses of SPFI and the practices it promotes into the context generated by an analysis of governmentalities allows one to see this initiative from a different perspective. In this context, the taken-for-granted understandings about being a 'good' parent and the practices endorsed as 'doing good parenting' can be re-thought as a subject position produced for the government of parents' conduct. This way, the critical distance created opens up possible ways to expose the SPFI to critique even if it is operating with the best of intentions.

This article argues that the SPFI has an important role in laying down national standards for parenting. By establishing these standards or codes of conduct, it aids the government of parents through 'ethopolitics' (Rose, 1999). On the one hand, it produces the subject position of 'smart' parent and a virtue of parenting. This subject position constitutes the parent as 'responsible' – for their children and for the future of the nation as well – 'lifelong-learner' and 'informed'. The virtue of parenting the SPFI supports is: 'to prepare children for the best possible life' (Smart Population Foundation, 2006). The SPFI suggests that parents are only able to fulfil the virtue of parenting if they take up the subject position of 'smart' parent.

On the other hand, the SPFI lays down a 'Parenting Science' based on research and sanctions this knowledge as universally applicable to all parents. With the utilisation of economic, traditionalist, eugenic and exclusivist discourses the SPFI translates governmental aims into the objectives of parenting and aligns those with parents' desires. This way, the SPFI constitutes the

parent as 'smart' and through 'ethopolitics' it governs them to exercise their freedom and choose to apply certain knowledge and practices standardised by the Initiative; in other words, to take up a certain art of being a parent.

Although the SPFI satisfies the need for parenting information, it is important to critique it, because it appropriates a particular understanding of 'good' parent, that is, the 'smart' parent, and also sets down a universal standard for 'best' parenting practice. Thus, it seeks to 'inculcate a fixed and uncontestable code of conduct' (Rose, 1999, p. 193). As a result, it shuts down dialogue over and multiple interpretations of parenting. The very existence of one right way, as Delpit (1988) argues, can silence those who have other opinions and quiet social justice issues.

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Notes

[1] It is suggestive of the inherent performativity of the postmodern era (Lyotard, 1984).

[2] Competence is understood as the possession of certain sets of skills by the SPFI.

[3] Popularised version of sciences, which are simplified and have lost most of their original context, intention and meaning. The interest is on the work's 'power effect' to persuade.

[4] Visualisation happens through the construction and measurement of certain characteristics of children, such as intelligence.

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