Security, Life, and Death: Governmentality and Biopower in the Post 9/11 Era

Table of Contents

Preface

This collection is a work of "critical theory." In the traditional sense of this term, it aims at contributing concepts and ideas that illuminate the current structures of social domination and injustice as entry points into ways of understanding and possibly ameliorating them. The idea for the project emerged upon my reflections about the tenth anniversary of the events of September 11, 2001. I thought about how the public response to the events polarized public opinion on matters of patriotism, us versus them, mass media deception and propaganda, the increased militarization of everyday life in minds and "on the ground" in mostly foreign places. I thought about the backlash and critique of such processes and how many who spoke out against the escalation of power were demonized in such venal ways that we were indeed witnessing the normalization of an autocratic society. Critical theory has always maintained that the seeds of totalitarianism were already flourishing in the so-called democratic societies of the Western capitalist world. In the very nature of hierarchical political organization, in the warrior worshipping culture of conflict and violence that makes up so much of the culture industry, and in the refusal to confront basic human rights contradictions that keep global society in a state of permanent regress. I was confronted by the thought that even after ten years things had not toned down. Global politics had not returned to a condition where we could once again begin to speak about global peace, prosperity, and civil society. I came to realize that the response to the events of September 11, 2001 was not a passing phase but something more permanent that would define the history of the era in a way similar to how the Cold War shaped much of the latter half of the twenty first century. With this recognition I realized the importance of ongoing critique—of how the dominant ideologies of power must be questioned and challenged so that we may one day soon begin to embrace a discourse of peace and human rights as the central imperative of our global society.

The essays that make up this volume draw attention to the ways in which humans in privileged positions of power impose their will in shaping societies to preserve the geopolitical system of capital extraction and domination that was firmly established during the Industrial Revolution and continues to impose particular and problematic notions of order on the development of human societies. Contrary to the ideological myths of human progress, each pivotal era or historical shift within the modern age has been characterized by an organized response to some form of real or perceived crisis. Our own epochal crisis of (in)security crystallized with the threat and risks to life that became evident in the official governmental response to the events of September 11, 2001. The post 9/11 era is a time fraught with contradictions, tumult, and dialectical tensions: growing poverty amidst the amassing of great wealth; the continued existence of authoritarian and backward regimes who are confronted by the growing public opposition to the unreasonable restrictions they place on human freedom; growing ecological devastation alongside the spread of a blissfully ignorant globalizing consumerism; the increasing growth of presumably democratizing communications technologies alongside an increasing normalization of information surveillance. All of these are indeed life and death issues that are evident in the new political ontology that is commonly referred to as the post 9/11 era.

The struggle against human domination is waged on numerous fronts that include intellectual and practical forms of social action. Social action is informed by new ways of thinking that furnishes the language, counter-narratives, and cornerstone ideas that highlight the crucial issues at hand. Challenging autocratic political power in a time of crisis also involves challenging the dominant discourses that uphold and legitimize such imposed orders of power. Scholarly analysis does this by furnishing concepts that may

offer opportunities to delegitimize and dismantle the established hegemonic order of thought and their attendant practices. In this context of post 9/11 global hegemony and counter-hegemony, theorizations of power through a Foucauldian conceptual paradigm continue to predominate critical analyses of the current unique geopolitical order.

The critical analytic paradigm developed by Michel Foucault is noteworthy insofar as it has become the benchmark mode of analysis within contemporary critical theory. For all of its benefits and its shortcomings, the Foucauldian paradigm of power analysis seems to have stood the test of time. This durability is likely due to a number of reasons: Foucault's analysis is not only a continuation of a critical sociological tradition established by Nietzsche, Marx, Weber, and the Frankfurt School, it also identifies the underlying rationalities of power that define both the character and the contradictions of the globally insecure economic and political order of the twenty-first century. Foucault identified some of these as the irrational yet ongoing practices of mass punishment, including incarceration and the weaponry of law, the practice of martial governance and security, as the essential modality of government in both war and peacetime, and the repressive regulation of human desire through selective sexuality and moral belief as an authoritative strategy of population control. Foucault's oeuvre thus continues to demonstrate its utility as a mode of critical analysis through a number of the concepts he mobilized, such as biopower, governmentality, discipline, and security. These concepts continue to resonate within social and political thought. They have relevance to the critical examination of the social world because of how they identify specific forms of power in terms of rationalities, orders and institutional arrangements, strategies and counter-strategies of power that constitute some of the more disturbing aspects of social life in the precarious age that is the post 9/11 era. It would be misleading, however, to suggest that everything Foucault said or wrote could be applied directly to the situation of our exact time in unreconstructed form. The central concepts around which this book is based are mobilized by each author in a manner that applies to the material condition each author analyzes.

This collection presents the reader with an original set of rigorous research articles that mobilizes Foucauldian concepts in ways that draw attention to a number of pressing issues concerning the organization of governmental power and how this has implications for human life, which, in an age of crisis, remains at risk and oftentimes is expendable. The book is divided into three thematic sections. The first section, Laws, Bodies and Biopower, begins with Scott Vrecko's article "Law, Order, and Postsocial Control: Governing Risky Offenders with Biology-targeting Drugs," which extends upon some of Gilles Deleuze's insights concerning the increase in technological forms of control and suggests that the regimes of social discipline examined by Foucault have not diminished in the current era but have been supplemented by newer "postsocial" technologies. These postsocial controls make use of court authority and pharmaceutical drugs in the institutional attempt to subdue and control deviant subjects, in this case, individuals convicted of drug and alcohol-related offences. Such discursive initiatives on the part of technical experts are examples of the "increasing technologization and biologization of everyday life"—a strategy of power that often denies the role of cultural and social factors in the rehabilitative care of institutionalized subjects. The post 9/11 power structures have also given rise to an increasing level of the institutionalized processing of everyday subjects as potential deviants in the management of security and risk. Tiffany Bergin's chapter "Biopower and the Security of Empire: Crossing Borders in the Twenty-first Century," reminds us of the challenges of air travel and how negotiating international borders in an age of security can be a precarious and potentially hazardous task. The chapter examines the use of "full-body scanners and enhanced pat-downs" as airport security measures as examples of biopolitical and governmental measures in the post 9/11 era. Such security practices exemplify Foucault's idea of

biopower as the "disciplining of bodies," and thus the chapter also reinforces the classic Foucauldian emphasis on the human body as a primary site of social control.Bergin reminds us of the history of security concerns in mass travel and of how the airport remains a unique space in the world of modern empire, where the rights of citizens are increasingly diminished in the efforts to maximize security. Stuart J. Murray and Chris Vanderwees in their chapter "Unborn and Born-again Victims: Governing Life through the Unborn Victims of Violence Act of 2004" also examine the "governing of life"—in this case through a piece of US legislation, the 2004 Unborn Victims of Violence Act, which has power over "the limits and definitions of life itself" and which, under the George W. Bush presidency, "linked abortion directly with the spectre of terrorism." Murray and Vanderwees examine the state appropriation of trauma as an occasion for establishing an imposed moral agenda and offer in resistance an ethic of self care where "individuals are obliged to recognize themselves as subjects" and thus are able to refuse subjection. Majia Holmer Nadesan's article "The Demise of Liberal Biopolitics: Wealth Accumulation and Disposable Populations" explores the disturbing ways in which entire categories of people—"disposable populations"—are rendered invalid in an era characterized by corporate "plutonomy" and disaster management. Where monetization, financialization, and raw capital extraction are the becoming main elements that determine individual self-worth and subjective value, we see how increasing numbers of people and identifiable social groups are left out of the market system and rendered non-persons. The tyranny of social segregation by market forces is laid bare when we consider the state management of disasters and other crises. Nadesan thus also examines how populations are rendered disposable, killable, in the cases of the 2008 financial crisis, the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil "spill," and the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear "accident." Her analysis is framed within the larger context of "liberal biopolitics"—a system whose levels of risk threaten life as a whole.

The second section of the book, Governmentality and State Power, begins with my chapter "Agonal Governmentality in the 2012 Canadian Anti-crime Legislation: Wars Against Crime, Dissent, and Democracy and the Economic Imperatives of the Hypersecurity State." The chapter looks at how the Canadian government has implemented new and sweeping anti-crime legislation that intensifies social control while appealing to public safety and security through a "tough on crime" mentality. I argue that an agonal/warfare mode of governmentality is evident in this piece of public policy, one that is authorized and made possible by a set of ruling rationalities that contribute to the realization of an imminent Canadian economic-carceral complex. These rationalities include economism (the money-making aspect of crime control); the inexorable logic of securitization; "the unprecedented increase in prioritizing numerous forms of public and international policy in terms of risk, threat, security, and warfare"; and, a reliance on the continually popular public mythology "about criminals and the moral demand for tough justice." The new crime control legislation goes against criminological evidence and expert advice, and thus I conclude that it is a governmental instrument more concerned about imposing a special interest type of moral authority on the nation rather than maximizing efforts at public safety, ensuring human freedom, and maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Just as the United States rose to global dominance following victory in the Second World War, many have argued that the events of September 11, 2001 gave occasion for a similar consolidation of American global hegemony. In this respect Andrew Kolin's chapter "Foucault's Concept of Governmentality Applied to the Formation of an American Police State" examines how Foucault's concept of governmentality applies to the formation of a police state in the United States under both Presidents Bush and Obama. Kolin links the history of the United States's practices of excluding and marginalizing targeted social and cultural groups as alien enemies of the state. His

chapter serves as an excellent introduction to readers unfamiliar with the details of anti-security initiatives in the United States following 9/11 and gives a detailed overview of how the authoritarian use of governmental power arose alongside the crushing of certain forms of political dissent. Jannik Schritt's chapter "Transnational Governmentality of Energy Security after 9/11: Coup d'état, Terrorism, Militarization, and Oil in Niger" looks at how the priorities of a post 9/11 US foreign policy have shaped politics, militarization, and control of oil in Niger, a resource-rich country where the majority of the population lives in poverty. Schritt develops his analysis with observations from his own fieldwork in Niger along with Foucault's concept of the *dispositif*, which refers generally to the conglomeration of institutions, laws, and administrative activities, as well as the political and moral discourses that support them, that create a coordinated field of power to deal with an emergency. What ensues is a coordinated response to the socially constructed "emergency" of "energy security" where Niger becomes the precarious playing field of "transnational governmentality" by economic superpowers the United States and China. In this context, Nigeriens struggle to make sense of their situation in the midst of Western misinformation and the reality of local events. As softer forms of hegemonic control over the Nigerien population fail, more coercive forms of control are utilized. John D. Márquez's chapter "The Pre-Occupied: Biopolitics, Race, and the 'Occupy' Movements" examines the emergence of a "post-racial" discourse relating to recent and current social movements with respect to the under-examined dimensions of "race" that is inherent in the origins of those movements. For example, the origins of the movements in London are rooted in acts of police racism—a fact that is overlooked by many and an omission that poses risks for large movements insofar as they become "white people's movements" and further initiate the sorts of social division that they are a reaction against. Márquez also indicates that the sorts of economic and social crises that have given rise to recent popular movements are reflective of a deepening impact on marginalized groups, "making them arguably more susceptible to police terror and mass incarceration than they were in the mid to late twentieth century." Márquez extends his analysis of racialization as exclusion through Foucault's concept of biopower and the notion of "expendability"— a trend of power that processes subjects as Others in the project of power named "neoliberal governmentality."

The third section of the book, Communications Technologies and Information Security, begins with Lesley Copeland's chapter "Intelligence, the *Appareil d'information*, and the New *Dispositif* of Security in the Post 9/11 Era," and reminds us of the pre-eminent and problematic role played by information and intelligence gathering in the war on terror. Copeland uses Foucault's concept of the *appareil d'information* to analyze how predictability and prevention of security risks have created new levels of public suspicion in a scenario where members of the public can be both informants and suspects. With specific case examples, Copeland examines security practices from a brief history of internment in Canada to the tangled webs woven by state agents where suspects can be terrorized in the frenzy of suspicion that often devastates lives as a consequence of aggressive intelligence gathering in the post 9/11 era. Livy Visano's chapter "Servitude of the Certitude in the 9/11 Hauntology: A Case Study of (In)Securities in Cyber 'Security'" is a sober reminder of the vast system of social control and the real threats to public security that exist in the post 9/11 world. From the role of information technologies as an element of "carceral networks" of control to the creation of a cultural common sense that ensures consent to rule through panic and fear, to the production of militarized subjects and racist mentalities, the haunted ontology of the post 9/11 era conceals its gruesomeness in a cloak of "happy certitude" and unending patriotic fervour. Visano's chapter examines the construction of culture and consciousness as under-theorized aspect of power systems that often escape a Foucauldian analysis that privileges discourse over ideology, bodies over consciousness, and political power over

cultural power. As Visano states, "the dominant culture has ignored genuine security threats…fear has assumed a decisive importance both for the subjugation of consciousness to forms of reification and the militarization of will."

I want to thank with a warm heart all of the authors who agreed to contribute their very fine and insightful research articles to this volume. Such collaborations are often an occasion for solidarity and affirmation for those who work in the difficult and oftentimes troubling field of critical social theory where at times it seems the weight of the world is on the conscience of the critical thinker whose unpleasant task is to unravel the hypocrisies and horrors of the disordered world and to reveal them coldly in the form of scholarly knowledge. I also want to especially thank our copy editor Joanne Muzak for her painstaking editing of the often dense and challenging articles, and my publisher de Sitter Publications for having the courage to release such an important collection of critical pieces.

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