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BOOK REVIEW

Claudio Colaguori (ed.), *Security, Life and Death: Governmentality and Biopower in the Post 9/11 Era* (Whitby: De Sitter Publications, 2013), \$39.00, ISBN: 978-1-897160-81-7

At first glance the book *Security, Life and Death: Governmentality and Biopower in the Post 9/11 Era* strikes the reader as something quite serious. Aside from the almost ominous title the book, the cover image is of a Chinese-motif Imperial dragon that appears to be consuming its tail set against a black background. Could this image perhaps symbolize the political consciousness of the ten fine research essays in the book whereby the security society is locked in a spiral of self-defeat? The essays that make up the book certainly deal with the larger issue of an imperial form of power that is entangled in the trappings of its own *insecurity*. But what makes this yet-another-book on security in the post 9/11 era unique from the numerous other offerings? This question is clear from the editor's preface where he states that this book is an analysis of the politics of security from a uniquely Foucauldian perspective. Its analyses of security policy are performed through the application of Foucauldian social theoretical concepts to the material conditions of the post 9/11 era rather than abstract ruminations on the theoretical concepts Foucault has furnished in his oeuvre. After all what is the point of discussing social concepts if not to utilize them in a way that performs a "history of the present" as per Foucault's analytic method? The book's editor Claudio Colaguori's preface remarks that the inspiration for the book came after the tenth anniversary of the events of September 11th, 2001 and how normalized forms of disciplinary power were coming to define the era against notions of historical progress based on globalizing human rights and peace. If scholarly and intellectual pursuits are to account for the geo-political shift from liberty to security in an age of troubled human rights, clear and present threats to human security, and perpetual war, then it seems Foucault's concepts are very well suited to the task of such a critical analysis. Clearly Foucault's analysis of power and especially the volumes of his published lectures speak about the martial mode of social life and thus they are directly transposable to the global situation of the post 9/11 era.

This book is a formidable attempt at making sense of *security, life and death* in the post 9/11 era through a Foucauldian lens. The concepts of *governmentality, biopower, security and warfare* are central to the analyses made by the book's eclectic group of contributing scholars. The manner by which such concepts are employed will be of use both to those interested in novel applications of

Foucault's ideas to the present and to those interested in gaining a deeper understanding of how post 9/11 security policies are paradoxically manifest in a geo-political context. While some may see the variety of topics covered as a haphazard collection of disparate themes, this isn't the case if you consider the shared analytic thread that runs through them all; that is, their unique and original attempts to mobilize Foucault's concepts in a way that makes sense for a critical theory of power practices. Critical readers will be pleased that most of the contributing authors explain what is meant by, and how they are using, the main Foucauldian concepts of governmentality and biopower. This is a matter of some importance when a new generation of students interested in Foucault's work are often troubled by conflicting conceptions of his main concepts. I am referring in particular to the troublesome liberalisation of Foucault—in many of my encounters with other young scholars struggling with Foucault I have been told that "Foucault likes institutions"; "Foucault has a distinctly positive conception of power"; Foucault is a postmodernist and doesn't necessarily see repression as a problem," and other such problematic, misguided interpretations of his work.

Thus, what pleases me about this book is the articulation of Foucault's concepts which, in a sense, evokes the struggle over life and death that power systems impose on their subjects. This is clear in the select analyses as well as the critical definitions of the concepts employed. For example, section One of the book opens with Scott Vrecko's chapter and begins with Foucault's concept of discipline as a "logics of social control" (18) and applies these and other related concepts to the "governing of risky offenders with biology-targeting drugs" (17). The paper deals with the punitive practice handed out by courts in the treatment of drug offenders by getting them to comply with taking psychotropic medication as a practice that legal institutions employ to manage and discipline their subjects. Tiffany Bergin's piece entitled "Biopower and the Security of Empire: Crossing Borders in the Twenty-first Century" examines the vexed panoptic space and place of the airport border crossing—one of the hotspot zones of anxiety and control, docility and domination in the post 9/11 era and before. In particular Bergin examines full-body scanners and pat-down procedures as part of a history of travel-related security measures. Here Bergin reminds the reader of Foucault's focus on the *body as the site of power relations* as well as the technological *panopticon* of surveillance that is a normal part of the functioning of the post 9/11 disciplinary society.

Stuart J. Murray and Chris Vanderwees cite an example of American legislation during the George W. Bush administration that sought to govern the life of unborn children. In "Unborn and Born-again Victims: Governing Life through the Unborn Victims of Violence Act of 2004" the reader is presented with an example of biopolitical policy directly in line with Foucault's analysis of power in sovereign decisions over 'who lives and who dies.' In this paper we see how power is tied to moral imperatives that become the ethical basis for governance. The same theme of moral governance appears in Colaguori's piece on anti-crime legislation later on in the book. Foucault scholar Majia Holmer Nadesan's contribution to the book is exemplary in its focus on the rise of a growing category of persons: the disposable populations that have arisen out of botched attempts at disaster management. Population control is clearly another Foucauldian theme in relation to

the realm of the biopolitical that is merged with contemporary concerns with the problematics of neoliberal power systems. Nadesan intertwines the “market mechanisms” of “wealth accumulation,” and the disappearance of labour opportunities within a larger process of biopower—that of “disaster management in the context of three recent catastrophes: the 2008 financial crisis, the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, and the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident” (85).

Section Two of the book begins with a chapter by Claudio Colaguori with an overly long title: “Agonal Governmentality in the 2012 Canadian Anti-crime Legislation: Wars Against Crime, Dissent, and Democracy and the Economic Imperatives of the Hypersecurity State.” Colaguori’s piece examines a piece of social control legislation that might be best understood by going beyond Foucault’s oft-cited analysis of disciplinary power and instead utilizing Foucault’s less well known model of *agonal* analysis, where he emphasizes the need for a non-economic analysis of power. Foucault offers instead a model of power based on the “clash between forces” of opponents in warfare, where “the schema of war and struggle [is] the basis of civil society.”¹ For Colaguori, who has authored a book on *Agon Culture*,² post 9/11 governmentality occurs not so much as a form of panoptic discipline but rather engages subjects to become actively involved in an “us versus them” struggle for moral imperatives, furthering the project of power over subjects by capitalizing on various forms of insecurity. The subsequent chapter is authored by Andrew Kolin and is of interest to readers unfamiliar with the general concept of the “police state.” Kolin employs Foucault’s concept of governmentality to elaborate a historical examination that links past practices of American state power dealing with “threats” along a trajectory that merges with the present post 9/11 era. Chapter Seven by Jannik Schritt is entitled “Transnational Governmentality of Energy Security after 9/11: Coup d’état, Terrorism, Militarization and Oil in Niger.” Schritt elaborates a direct example of how government policy involving oil production in a post 9/11 context gets influenced by concerns for security through militarization. Schritt employs Foucault’s concept of the *dispositif* to explain how “transnational political rationalities and governance technologies” get realized by various actors in civil society (193). The paper links oil and mining “rights” to discourses of freedom, security, and legitimation illustrating a Foucauldian analysis in a novel way. The final chapter of section Two is by John D. Marquez and is entitled, “The Pre-Occupied: Biopolitics, Race and the Occupy Movements.” This chapter emphasizes the category of “race” as a dimension of population control within the realm of the biopolitical. Marquez also emphasizes how concepts of sovereignty and biopolitics “transcend economic explanations” in helping us to understand “racial expendability” within the context of progressive social movements coming into conflict with the hyper-security state (245).

The Third and final section of the book deals with information security and the technologies of surveillance. It begins with chapter Nine, “Intelligence, the Appareil d’information, and the New *Dispositif* of Security in the Post 9/11 Era” by Lesley Copeland. This chapter examines

¹ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, (New York: Picador, 2003), 28.

² Claudio Colaguori, *Agon Culture: Competition, Conflict and the Problem of Domination*. (Whitby: de Sitter Publications, 2012)

how security in the post 9/11 era rationalizes terror and crime prevention as requiring elaborate mechanisms of surveillance involving people and technologies that make society into a camp (Agamben) where detainment and suspicion is the norm. Legal power in terms of policing risk is examined through conceptual and case study analysis. The Tenth and final chapter by Livy Visano is entitled "Servitude of the Certitude in the 9/11 Hauntology: A Case Study of (In)Securities in Cyber 'Security'." Written before the whistle blowing act enacted by former American National Security Agency Edward Snowden, this chapter emphasizes the ominous nature of security surveillance that is endemic to post 9/11 social order. Visano's chapter speaks to the hubris of power systems by invoking the monster of surveillance and control that Foucault identified as being part of the normal institutional order of control that forms the foundation of modern democratic societies. Visano revisits, in the post 9/11 politics, the Foucauldian themes of discipline, docility, and the celebration of death where "fear creates a contagion of compliance" (315). He examines how legal discourse invoked by social media companies actually extends necropolitics into a system of normalizing control and public servitude.

The book is a remarkable collection because it demonstrates Foucault's concepts as a critical theory of the present order of security and control. This is an important intellectual task in a time when a lot of critical scholarship remains stuck at the abstract conceptual level and forgets that Foucault was analyzing human life and not just philosophical categories. I strongly believe the book will be of great interest to those concerned with how the critical work of Michel Foucault can serve to illuminate the present orders of power, and to those interested in how post 9/11 security policy remains in the precarious position of being simultaneously useful for social regulation and repressive social control. What would be most welcomed is a follow up volume that examines how organized groups around the world are responding to and resisting these forms of discipline and control.

Carlos Torres, PhD
McMaster University
ctbarrozo2@gmail.com