Book Review: Biopolitics of Security: A Political Analytic of Finitude

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*Taking its inspiration from Michel Foucault, this volume of essays integrates the analysis of security into the study of modern political and cultural theory. **Ankit Kumar** argues that although the book is dense and written in a language that would connect only to academic audience, this book will appeal to a wide-range of specialists from those in theory and philosophy of security and government, global terror, politics, sociology and human geography.*

Biopolitics of Security: A Political Analytic of Finitude. Michael Dillon. Routledge. January 2015.

Michael Dillon is a professor (emeritus) at the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion (PPR) at Lancaster University, UK. He specialises in the problematisation of politics, security and war. In his career spanning over 20 years, where he has engaged with the philosophical works of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Derrida, Dillon has written extensively on the topics of securitisation, migration, governance, power and politics and global terror.

This book, Dillon notes, rises from two particular interests – "updating Foucault's account of biopolitics to encompass how digitisation and the molecularisation of life has changed the biopolitical mission to 'make live' and 'developing his account of the biopolitics of security' ". Taking from these two specific mission and my own theoretical interests in biopolitics, governmentality and securitisation of energy, two specific chapters of the book = appealed to me – Chapter 2 on Biopolitics of security in twenty-first century and Chapter 3 on Government, economic and biopolitics. I will discuss them in detail in this review.
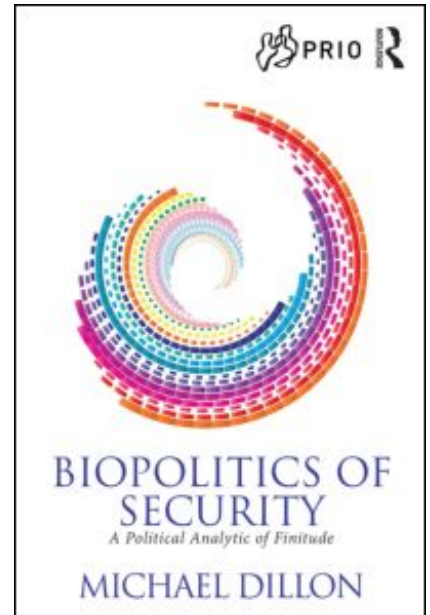
The second chapter aims to extend Foucault's "analytics of biopolitics as a collection of changing *dispositifs de sécurité"* i.e. changing apparatuses of security by looking at "security practices" which target species life in a time when "species life undergoes transformation and change" i.e. focusing on digitisation and the molecularisation of life. For me there are three key arguments in this chapter. Firstly, =biopolitical security practices "are contingent achievements reflecting the partial realisation of designs….there are slippages and breakages, shifts and revisions". "Mutation of the biopolitical order of power relations has continued to follow transformations in the changing order, and ordering of (living) things", says Dillon

The author provides a very interesting example for the changing security practices with reference to the digitisation of life. He argues that the use of supermarket customer loyalty cards like the Sainsbury's Nectar card in the UK and associated benefit programmes are targeted to "biopolitically 'secure(d)' as a 'customer' rather than juridically secure(d) as a subject". Thus, "security is now the range of technologies and power/knowledge epistemologies which regulate freedom as contingency through the principle of economy". This is "now integral to the biopolitics of security of all modern states, to the operation of international political economy and to the very 'social inclusion' of individuals in the local economic life of their communities". After all, as Dillon says, the "global liberal politics governs through freedom, fundamentally understood as contingency, and governing through freedom as contingency requires governing through technologies which seek not merely to command but also to profit from contingency". This very critical point brings a new form of securitisation to the fore – one that, like many other forms, puts freedom at the centre but secures the customers not just for political but also economic ends.
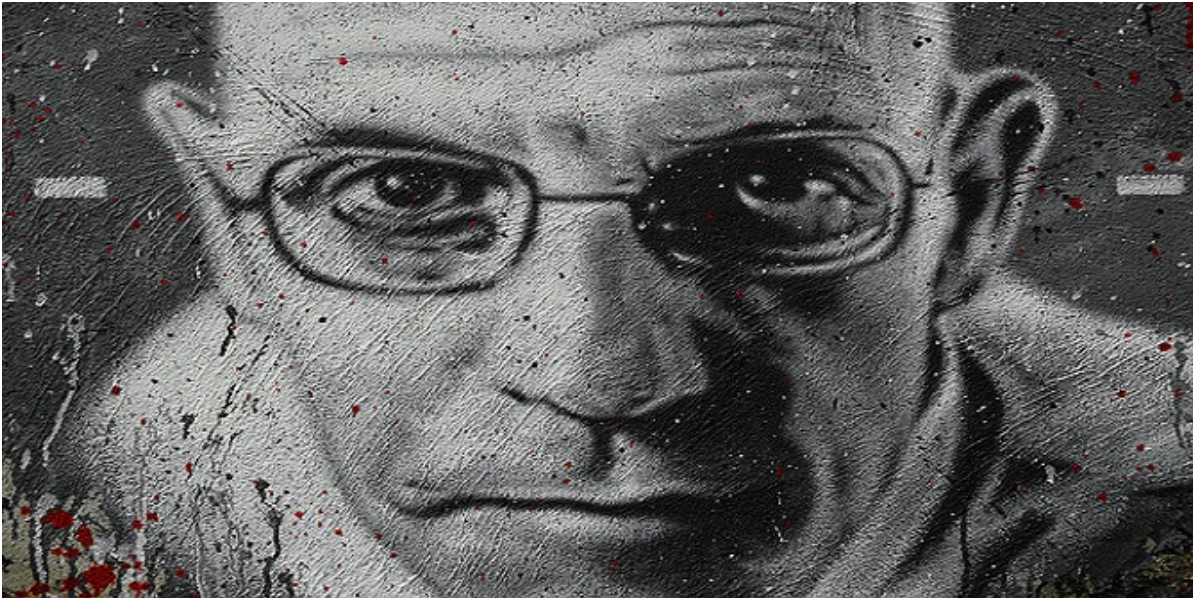
**Michel Foucault. Photo Credit: **

Another key argument Dillon makes is that "the move from *gentium* to *espèce* effects a transformation in the very understanding of what it is to be a living being, and correspondingly, of the governmental regulation of such a living being". Here, *gentium* refers to "the juridico-political and cultural notion of peoples belonging together in the respect of law and custom" and *espèce* to "the biological notion of species in which principle of belonging together is furnished by shared biological properties". This means a change in the target of power and a change in the "mechanisms by means of which power operates and circulates". Thus, the "changing biopolitical security mechanisms of biopolitical economy of security are characteristically concerned with…life in general, and populations in particular".

Thirdly, coming to the molecularisation of life under the section "recombinant biopolitics", Dillon makes his third key argument. "Foucault's original exploration of biopolitics' *dispositifs de sécurité* identified the eventlessness of the species as one of the base analytical categories" i.e. the biological notion of the species remaining the same. However, this has been transformed by molecularity and "the biopolitics of securing pluripotent life is concerned less with subjecting it to safety measures than with commanding its infinitely regenerable design". Therefore, as Dillon says, "When science becomes less a matter of representation than of experimentation and design so also do its recombinant biopolitical security practices". This is critical in pointing our focus towards the recombinant forms of mutating biopolitical security practices that become necessary for new forms of subjects. However, how the biopolitical practices mutate needs to be understood in empirical senses, something of which the book falls short.

Contingencies, mutations, recombinations and regenerations, are the focus of the third chapter (Government, Economy and Biopolitics). The chapter continues to "extend Foucault's project – of investigating the changing historical character of the biopolitical rationalities and governing technologies of biopower – by addressing how these became both radically more intensive and extensive". This is based on a theoretical gap in Foucault's arguments. Foucault argues that "modern forms of power relations revolve around the properties of things they seek to direct". With concern to humans, their biological properties thus become the "object of governance". However, this happened as "the promise of eternal life lots its force as a generative principle of formation for the Church's governmental power" leading to the "material conditions of life, understood as finite life" becoming the target of governmental influence. Thus, the key "issue is the reconfiguration of the whole ensemble that follows from a prioritization and refiguration of the one over the other: the onset and pursuit, as it were, of a different principle of differentiation in which calculations to infinity positivistically instrumentalise what had previously been divinized".

A key point to note here is that, the problem of government for Foucault, Dillon explains, relates to " 'governing' a

household, a family, a religious order, a province, children and souls as well as a state" i.e. there exist diverse practices of government because both the 'governing' and the 'governed' are diverse. Out of these practices, the three modes of government – self, family and state – are correlated. They "arose within the context of society and state, so there was the related problem of their relationship in their very diversity".

The move toward the material conditions of life and the ensemble of self, family and society takes us to the argument that "what 'governs' in the early modern emergence of the problematic of government is 'economy' meaning not just "territory and property" but more importantly the "complex of men and things". From here, Dillon argues, there is a shift and in the twentieth century "the economy is what is to be governed" and again in the twenty-first century, "it is now the economy that largely governs". However, "since economy was already installed at the heart of government… the development of economy of government" and "the government of economy" become complimentary processes.

A key technic of this new form of government was "political arithmetic" – "once a mechanism for sovereigns and colonisers it was soon to become the science of statistics, available to progressives and reformers as well". This is because "the constitution of a knowledge of government of economy and statistics is absolutely inseparable from the wider sense of what we now call political economy". Finally, what connects the two chapters for me is the larger argument of Foucault that "we should not see things as the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a society of discipline and then of a society of discipline by a society, say, of government. In fact we have a triangle: sovereignty, discipline, and governmental management, which has population as its main target and apparatuses of security as its essential mechanism".

Although the book is dense and written in a language that would connect only to academic audience, I would recommend it to people interested in theory and philosophy of security and government, global terror, politics, sociology and human geography.

Ankit Kumar is a doctoral researcher at the Department of Geography, Durham University and Durham Energy Institute. His PhD research tries to understand the politics of energy access in India by connecting the themes of energy and development. Beyond the PhD his wider research interests revolve around the questions related to energy, climate change, development, governance and politics. Before starting his PhD research Ankit spent about 4 years working on renewable energy and carbon finance project development. He blogs at www.ideatingenergy.com and tweets at @ideatingenergy.