# The Biopolitics Of Terror

## The Crisis of a Global Liberal Order

In recent times, academics have speculated that the ‘global liberal order’ is in a supposed ‘crisis. In fact, Duncombe and Dunne claim that all major notions are in agreement that the universality of the Global Liberal Order is over. [1] Yet, it might be more fitting to contend that the challenges and struggles within and to the Global Liberal order have been uncovered. As Butler contends, the process of governmentality that once ‘vitalised’ power has sunken into disillusion and into a state where the ‘universal’ and ‘normative’ roots of the Global Liberal order have come to light. [2] [1: Duncombe, C. and Dunne, T. (2018). After liberal world order. International Affairs, 94(1), pp.25.] [2: Butler, J. (2006). Precarious Life. London: Verso, pp.51-52.]

### An ‘exposé’ of American Empire

An empire in the present day is no longer bound by geographical borders, rather it has become decentralised. An empire that employs instruments of biopolitics and biopower, seeks not to rule over borders and boundaries, but rather to rule over humanity by producing constructive liberal individuals. The purpose of control is the regulation of life as a whole.

Foucauldian thought is rather valuable when observing the oscillations in the Western (American-led) system of power post-9/11, as he focuses on the development of modern liberal governmentality, and particularly concentrates on US neo-liberalism. Foucault theorizes neo-liberalism is a biopolitical device of security. Therefore, it becomes necessary to reconsider the role of security as a tool with regard to post-9/11 governmentality. Blain suggests that in order to sufficiently…

The global liberal order has always been concentrated around American hegemony, open markets and multilateralism. The American-led hegemony that it was built on, is now in crisis because its foundations are now in a state of decay. [3] However, Reid contends that it is not that the roots have eroded, but rather traditional imperialism has been substituted by a decentralised mode of empire. [4] It can be suggested that those that perceive American to be the revival of traditional imperialism, are unable to understand the normative functions of biopolitical devices in the organization of global power, and by doing so, exaggerate the agency of the nation-state. [3: Ikenberry, G. (2012). Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp.333.] [4: Reid, J., pp.236-239.]

The George W. Bush administration’s disdain for multilateralism and its hubris towards the September 11 attacks, showed the boundaries of US power and led … American had once dynamically deepened and widened the global liberal order, the politics of the Bush administration, particularly in reaction towards 9/11, heavily undermined the credibility of American as the pivot of the global liberal order. [5] [5: Maull, H. (2019). The Once and Future Liberal Order. [online] IISS. Available at: https://www.iiss.org/publications/survival/2019/survival-global-politics-and-strategy-aprilmay-2019/612-02-maull.]

## The Global Liberal Subject

Following the September 11th attacks, populations in the West have come to the understanding "that they are living the terrifying experience of heteronomous, vulnerable populations overwhelmed by forces they neither control nor understand." [6] Subsequently, these publics have become obsessed with the security of their territories. The enemy of the present day has been fashioned as 'terrorist' and 'footloose' – a new enemy. The events of the September 11th attacks have sensationalized the idea that the enemy transcends all mechanisms of control and is located in a space, which disregards all political logic. [7] [6: Debrix, F. and Barder, A. (2009). Nothing to Fear but Fear: Governmentality and the Biopolitical Production of Terror. International Political Sociology, 3(4), pp.398.] [7: Ibid.]

The re-territorialisation of the state, the risk to state instruments and the reflection of the heightened global disorder can be said to have exacerbated the notion among leaders in the Global North, that the designation of select operations of the nation-state, to its risk-management powers has become imperative. [8] After 9/11, there has been a resurgence in the rhetoric of 'absolute fear', resulting in amplified measures to manage risk through the heightening policing of peoples. [8: Ibid. pp.398.]

If we look at Foucauldian thought, which sustains that power should be conceptualised as in a state of circulation and for that reason, it cannot be localised. In the case of biopower, the object is not the state nor its disciplinary bodies, rather it is the populations of a state, and the aim is the absolute governance of life. Therefore, the goal of risk-management bodies is to concurrently construct normalised internal populaces and alienate external populaces, ultimately reproducing self-surveilling internal populations, who imitate this alienation of an 'enemy'. [9] [9: Ibid., pp.404-405.]

### 'Ban-opticon'

If the existence of a panopticon is accepted, in a Foucauldian sense, then it should be understood that this device is fractured and its implementation has been decentralised. Big claims that counter to the accounts of American neo-imperialism, after 9/11, the panoptic device is targeted towards the surveillance of certain sections of the population, not the population in its entirety. A construction of fear necessitates creating circumstances that prohibit populations from living their everyday lives. Bigo calls this the 'management of ease', and it is has become particularly apparent as a biopolitical dispositif in the Global War on Terror.

A so-called 'ban-opticon' operates not just as a disciplinary body but it also seeks to normalise the marginalisation of certain sections of the population. These populations more often represent individuals who are the 'Others' of society and hence, the ban-opticon is racialised in its agenda. The ban-opticon discloses a 'state of exception' in the governance of the Global War on Terror, as it does not rely on the mobilization of individuals under the observation of a 'watchman', instead it depends on …

A ban-opticon allows us to understand how a body of a collection of practices, work to construct a state of insecurity at a transnational level. The surveillance of everyone is not the aim, rather it is the surveillance of the few, whose activities, through biopolitical dispositifs, become regulated whilst concurrently allowing for the activities of the majority to remain both safeguarded and

normative. Bigo understands this form of surveillance to have infiltrated the management of life of today. [10] [10: Bigo, D. (2008). ‘Globalized (in)Security: the Field and the Ban-opiticon’, in Bigo, D. and Tsoukala, A. (ed.) Terror, Insecurity and Liberty. Routledge. pp.33-36]

## Managing Terror

The blurring of the margins between varying fields of knowledge has facilitated the rise of ‘the field of professionals of the management of unease’ [11]. The processes of policing, especially with regard to surveillance is implemented at a distance and extends beyond the boundaries of the start. The transcendence of these operations has enabled phenomena like the Global War on Terror, the war on drug trafficking and immigration to be placed on the same part of the spectrum. Thereby, legitimizing the use of the same level and type of policing and violence. [12] [11: Ibid., pp.12.] [12: Ibid.]

This is supported by Sheth, who concurs that a new age has facilitated the rise of commerce in the management of terror. However, Sheth does criticise Foucauldian understanding on the power-sovereignty nexus. Sheth claims that Foucault’s work is uneven and the limitations of the role of sovereignty with regard to power, are not made clear. [13] Sheth goes onto say that in both the politics of the US and the international, there has been a flood of sovereign authority which has been allowed to construct racial and ethnic fragmentation under the guise of a ‘war’ on terror. This has allowed for the emergence of classifications like ‘terrorist’, ‘illegal’, ‘immigrant’, which have been assigned racial connotations to allow for the generalization and securitization of a ‘non-Western, non-liberal, Other’. Does Sheth enquire if Foucault’s aspiration to substitute the prominence of sovereignty with an observation of the paths of power, in particular with respect to racial fragmentation, miscalculates the importance of sovereignty in current analysis of power? [14] [13: Sheth, F. (2011). The War on Terror and Ontopolitics: Concerns with Foucault’s Account of Race, Power Sovereignty. Foucault Studies, (12), pp.51-52.] [14: Ibid., pp.51-57]

Sheth advises using ‘ontopolitics’ in an attempt to shift Foucault’s attention back on sovereignty in prompting a new frontier in a racialised war. For instance, a more exhaustive analysis of the settings of preventative policing. The regulatory operations influence a ‘onto-moral continuum’ [15], employed via a self-surveilling current of sovereignty that enables for any and all suspicious beings to be reported to all levels of ‘life management’. The importance of ontopolitics is that as opposed to concerning the ‘taking of life’, it entails the ‘forcing of life’, of populations and most importantly, it operates under a mantle of freedom, as opposed to overt control. [15: Ibid., pp.67-72]

## Self-Regulation

Biopolitics is an instrument of power employed by an outside power whose origins remain obscure. Through biopower, citizens of the West are exposed to instruments of power that ‘educate’ them on a ‘correct’ type of humanity. This is reminiscent of Foucauldian though that fear should be “productive and reproductive of society” [16]. To illustrate, in 2016, Britain launched the ‘See it. Say it. Sorted’ campaign [17], initiated to promote commuters to report any activities that seem ‘suspicious’. The use of language such as ‘sorted’ invokes the normalization of self-surveillance and labels the population almost as ‘pest-control’, in that they are ridding themselves of an inconvenience, even when that inconvenience may regard the well-

being of another individual. This in turn downplays the severity of the campaign and re-packages biopolitics as an everyday norm. These campaigns tend to embolden certain sections of the population (‘liberal’ and ‘Western) and persecute others, constructed as the enemy in the Global War on Terror (‘illiberal’ and ‘Other’). This leads to questions on ‘which populations are being protected” and “which populations are excluded?”. [16: Ibid., pp.400.] [17: Transport Police. (2016). See It Say It Sorted - new national campaign. [online] Available at: https://www.btp.police.uk/latest_news/see_it_say_it_sorted_new_natio.aspx.]

### Liberal Governance and Illiberal Practices

The 9/11 attacks rallied the United States in starting a ‘Global War on Terror’, which significantly, lead to the embracing of illiberal practices by a nation-state supposedly recognized for its liberal traditions. Kant, supposedly the figurehead for liberal internationalism, supported using illiberal practices in the chase for a liberal international system. [18] The Global War on Terror could therefore be seen to be an annexation of what is i…. [18: Singh, R. (2015). ‘Defensive Liberal Wars’: The Global War on Terror and the Return of Illiberalism in American Foreign Policy. Revista de Sociologia e Política, 23(53), pp.102.]

The United States has managed to lucratively securitise groups such as Al-Qaeda which has ‘demanded’ the employment of illiberal practices to counter an ‘illiberal’ threat. For instance, through the framing of certain in individuals and identities as a ‘threat’, it has allowed for the ‘othering’ of certain regions of the world, notably the Middle East. These societies are fabricated as being ‘oppressive’ and ‘illiberal’ and the ideal candidates for military intervention. This has allowed for governments, such as the Bush administration to construct and be constructed as ‘policemen of the world’ and the champions of liberalism. In paradox, this has been executed through the use of illiberal exercises that have uncovered the illiberal foundations of the United States and the Global Liberal Order.

## Post-9/11 and ‘moral’ intervention

American intervention post-9/11 marked a change in the policy of a state that throughout its history, had only intervened in wars out of a choice, not a need. However, following the campaign on a ‘global’ war on terror, America was supposedly upholding its ‘right’ to survive against illiberal practices that threatened its main principles. What spurred American on in its illiberal practice was not the tangible threats of terror, but rather the intangible threats it posed to its ontological being and a ‘liberal’ way of life. [19] [19: Ibid., pp.104-108.]

### State of exception or acceptance?

Indeed, the Global War on Terror has sanctioned an extension of biopolitical dispositifs of management, indefinite detentions and regulation. The distinction between liberal and authoritarian governments has become vague. [20] A state of exception through which governments function, does not work outside of the law, instead it operates simultaneously both in and outside of the law. As a consequence, the power bestowed to the state, in this state of exception has been accepted by the populace as daily procedure. This state of exception is threatening to become an unending state, as the Global War on Terror, does not seem to have any sense of finality. Rather it is continued to be employed by states in order to consolidate the position of the state via biopolitical devices. [20: Newman, S., & Levine, M. (2006). War, Politics

and Race: Reflections on Violence in the 'War on Terror'. Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory, (110), pp.24.]

## The Biopolitics of indefinite detention.

This section will examine the practice of indefinite detention as a biopolitical device and explore Guantanamo Bay as the junction at which politics and war conflict. Guantanamo Bay can be seen as an extra-judicial space, which confirms the aforementioned ‘state of exception’, as these arenas surface from an artificial state of regulation. Prisoners are deliberately classified as ‘illegal fighters’, as opposed to ‘Prisoners of War’, thereby, preventing them from accessing any rights. By transcending judicial, Guantanamo preoccupies a space consisting of violence and state exceptionalism. Judith Butler states that the indefinite detention of the prisoners suggests the indefinite period of the Global War on Terror, itself, and consequently, the permanency of a state of exception. [21] [21: Ibid., pp.27-31.]

## On Identity: Constructing an enemy

The Global War on Terror aims to secure the populace of the ‘Global North’ and to securitize those of the ‘Global South’, as populations who are ‘at risk’ and ‘risky’ correspondingly. In pursuing a ‘Global War on Terror’, the ‘Terror’ of which has become synonymous with Islam and Muslims, there has been a lot of rhetoric that has become normalized by state engineers, such as the George W. Bush presidency, to push for an administrative global order, in which even the slightest trace of ‘Islam’ is adequate to justify the use of correctional devices.

The identity of Western populations and the ‘non-Western Other’ have throughout the Global War on Terror been compared in discourse, common knowledge and the media. The juxtaposition of these identities has normalised the biopolitical dispositifs of the War on Terror. For example, Assem El-Khairy notes that contemporary strategies of power oscillate between state authority and biopower, but fundamentally the body remains the site for violence. For instance, Kathryn Bigelow’s ‘The Hurt Locker’ (2008), dismisses the discussions around the American invasion of Iraq, rather it chooses to concentrate on the everyday struggles faced by American military personnel. The film depicts Iraq as a hostile land and consequently portrays the locals as ‘alien’ in contrast to the ‘brave’ American soldiers. This cinematic portrayal is but one of many contributions to the ‘alien Other’ narrative constructed in the Global War on Terror, and the identities of these populations are not just alienated but they are manipulated to become identities that necessitate securitization. [22] [22: Assem El-Khairy, O. (2010). Snowflakes on a Scarred Knuckle: The Biopolitics of the ‘War on Terror’ through Steve McQueen’s Hunger and Kathryn Bigelow’s The Hurt Locker. Millennium: Journal of International Studies, 39(1), pp.189.]

Additionally, the Global War on Terror has become the backdrop against which a range of fears have been distorted, regardless of whether these fears originate from non-state terrorism or Iraq. In this regard, the connection between ‘terror’ and ‘Iraq’ has become standardised, thereby, validating the American invasion of Iraq as one of necessity in the view of the American population. [23] It can be argued to some extent, it provided a renewed purpose for America post-Cold War and the construction of a new enemy, which coincidentally happened to be the non-Western ‘Other’. [23: Solomon, T. (2009). Social Logics and Normalisation in the War on Terror. Millennium: Journal of International Studies, 38(2), pp.272-276.]