

## Contemporary Biopower And Biosociality

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**Abstract:** An analysis on the contemporary biopower brings significant mutations in the area health and health managing technologies. Instead of approaching this as merely medical technologies or technologies of health, it became the technology of life. Health became one of the key ethical values by the second half of twenty-first century. In the contemporary ethical regimes, health was understood as an imperative, for the self and for others. Through contemporary forms of biomedical subjectification medicines took a long role in shaping subjectivities. The paper focus on the notion of Biosociality, which make us what kind of people we have become.

**Key Words:** Biosociality, Biopolitics, Biomedicine, Biological Citizenship

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Date of Submission: 30-05-2018

Date of acceptance: 17-06-2018

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### I. INTRODUCTION

In the *History of Sexuality, An Introduction* Foucault describes biopower as a power which takes hold of human life. In his work, *Society Must be Defended*, too he traces the shift from classical, sovereign power to two modern forms of power namely discipline and biopower. It was a shift from a right of death to a power over life. The right of life and death was seen as basic attribute of sovereignty. It was a sort of power which deduces. Its only power over life is to seize, or to end, or to enslave life. According to Taylor, Sovereign power or the right over life is merely the right of subtraction not of regulation or control. Biopower was taken by Foucault as an analytical tool to clarify a specific set of practices and techniques that modify human life as a biological phenomenon.

In contrast to sovereign power, which takes life or let live, is the biopower, in which power fosters life. Power would no longer be dealing with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death but with living beings and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them. It was thus taking charge of life more than the threat of death that gave power its access even to the body. Biopower is able to access the body because it functions through norms rather than laws, because it is internalized by the subjects rather than exercised from above, through acts or threats of violence and also it is dispersed throughout the society rather than located in a single individual or government body.

There are two levels of biopower. At one level, it works through disciplinary institution such as schools, workshops, prison, psychiatry hospitals etc which target on individuals. The second level is the state. It attributes the norms to the whole population and understand and regulate the problem of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing and migration. Disciplinary power works through institutions while biopower works through the state. In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault notes that the power over life or the biopower, evolved in two basic forms. These two levels are not antithetical, but are linked together with a cluster of relations. The first is to be centered on the body as a machine. The second focused on the species body. Or the first is an anatomo-politics of the human body and the second is the biopolitics of the population. One centred on the individual body, which is supposed to make body more useful and docile. The second technology targeted not the body, but life itself. It gathered mass effects of the population and tried to predict and control the events happening in those living masses.

The anatomo-politics of the human body is formed by its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, its usefulness and docility, its integration into the systems of efficient and economic control. The species formed the body associated with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological process such as propagation, birth and mortality, health, life expectancy and longevity. This supervision was through an entire series of interaction and regulation. Biopower targets both individual body and the species body. These two levels are intertwined because bodies make up population and populations are made up of individual bodies. Disciplinary power is the micro-technology whereas biopower is the macro-technology. The institution through which biopower is exercised is the state.

Body becomes one of the site in which power is enacted and resisted. The individual in Foucault's account is considered to be an effect rather than an essence. Foucault argues that individual is not seen as a sort of elementary nucleus on which power is enacted. Instead it is one of the prime effects of power where bodies, gestures, discourses, desires came to be identified and constituted as individuals. So rather than seeing

individuals as stable entities, he analyses the discursive process through which bodies are formed. Foucault remarks that body is an inscribed surface of events. It means that political events and decisions have material effects upon the body. Bodies are always subject to change and can never be seen as natural, but something which are always already socially constructed.

### Biopolitics

Foucault explored a new domain of political life or the politics of body or biopolitics. Biopolitics is a technology of power that consists in techniques, practices and procedures that are aimed at organizing, regulating and governing the phenomenon of life in the context of population. Life here must be understood as a process comprising of forces, energy and by which an organism persist in being, grows and reproduces. Biopower entails multiple life related phenomena that affect the way human life develops and can be modified through intervention. Biopower should be understood as a name to designate the general and abstract forces which can be reduced through biopolitics, ie, strategies to affect on all the things that depend in the biological. Biopolitics thus refer to the specific set of means, including technique and knowledge by which one aims to produce the biological in specific form. The composition of biopolitics is always dependent on particular political rationalization and technologies according to which one aims to rationalize the phenomena to a living population. *In Society must be Defended*, Foucault argues,

After the anatomo-politics of the human body established in the course of the eighteenth century, we have, at the end of that century, the emergence of something that is no longer an anatomo-politics of the human body, but what I would call a "biopolitics" of human race (243).

Biopolitics deals with the population, and is meant to follow events that occur within a population during a period of time. This new technology of power develop new functions, which are not disciplinary. Those new features are forecasts, statistical estimates and measures in general, which will have nothing to do with modification, but will only intervene at the level of generality. The mortality rate has to be modified or lowered and life expectancy has to be increased and the birth rate has to be stimulated. Security mechanisms have to be installed around the random element inherent in a population of living beings so as to optimize a state of life (*Foucault*).

Through the concept of biopolitics, Foucault pointed out that life and living beings enter into a new domain of political and economic strategies. Biopolitics refers to the way in which power tends to transform itself in between the end of eighteenth and in the beginning of nineteenth century. It deals with the management of health, hygiene, nutrition, birth, sexuality and every state of affairs of the population concerning the state and thus takes the form of politics. What Foucault meant by population is a set of living, coexistent beings who share particular biological traits. Biopolitics thus introduced a new government-population which carry a political economic relationship ie, it refers to a dynamic of forces that establishes a new relationship between ontology and politics. It encompasses the power which includes a whole range of relations between the forces which acts throughout the social body. These new power relations are not simply projected upon the individuals, but it works through a multiplicity of disciplinary relations. Biopolitics thus becomes a strategic co-ordination of all power relations to bring out a surplus of power from living beings. The biopolitical function of coordination and determination concede that biopower from the moment it begins, it targets a power which does not comes from outside. According to Foucault, biopower is always born of something other than itself.

Biopower stands above society, transcendent, as a sovereign authority and imposes its order. Biopolitical production, in contrast, is immanent to society and creates social relationships and forms through collaborative forms of labor (*Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* 121).

The new political rationality of bio-power was thus connected with empirical human sciences. The administrators were not only concerned with individuals, but the population as a whole. In the modern state, the human beings were considered as a resource. The interests of the individuals were contributed for the strength of the state. The lives, deaths, activities, work, miseries and joys of individuals were important and they became politically useful. Thus individual became the object of political and scientific concern with regard to his social life. By 19<sup>th</sup> century, the two poles of Biopower, ie, control of the body and the control of the species was brought together with the preoccupation of sex. Sex became the construction through which power linked the vitality of the body together with that of the species (Dreyfus 140).

According to Foucault, life has become the focus of an infinite amount of both micro and macro management strategies, which optimize health and thereby prolong life (1994e, 341). It is through particular disciplines that individuals are subject to both surveillance and modification strategies. As Foucault argued, the one thing that has become paramount in the modern age is life itself which can be managed and promoted through certain technological developments, both anatomo-political and bio-political strategies throughout the population. Foucault himself claimed that medical power is at the heart of a society of normalization (1989, 197). Medicines created new modalities of power and institutions and new discourses take hold of human life

by shaping, organizing and extending it to a new level. The questions concerning disease and health were not only pertained to bioethics, but it entered into a new form by governing human life with all its capacities.

### Biosociality

By the second half of twentieth century, medicines took an active role in shaping subjectivities and thereby maximize and enhance vitality. Rabinow coined the term 'biosociality' to characterize new forms of collective identification that took shape in the age of genomics( *The Politics of Life* 23). He extended the concept with respect to Foucault's biopolitics. According to Rabinow, we are confronted with a new understanding of social relationships through biological categories. He writes,

In the future this new genetics will cease to be a metaphor for modern society and will become instead a circulation network of identity terms and restriction loci around which and through which a truly new type of autoproduction will emerge, which I call "biosociality". If sociobiology is culture constructed on the basis of a metaphor of nature, then in biosociality, nature will be modeled on culture understood as practice (*From Sociobiology to Biosociality* 241).

The concept of biosociality stands in contrast to the concept of socio-biology to capture a "new" kind of social interaction as a consequence of developments within genetics etc. (Gibbons & Novas 2008, Rabinow 2008). Within the social and cultural sciences much attention has been dedicated to understand how the reclassification of many diseases shapes individual, as well as collective, identity formation and to explore the implications of genetic knowledge for how individuals understand themselves or relate to others. Moreover, another objective was to explore how these "new" identities might, through patient organizations create new relationships between scientific experts and lay-people by bringing forward new ways of knowledge production within the medical sciences.

### Contemporary Biopower

Contemporary biopower marks a beginning of a new era in molecular medicine. Increasing knowledge of genetic variation has changed the prevailing paradigms of human health and identity. The configuration of knowledge, power and subjectivity leads to a new ethopolitics, where we are coming to understand individual and collective human identities with respect to health. A new kind of biosocial associations and communities define their citizenship in terms of their rights to life and health and thus become active biological citizens. Contemporary biomedicine, by rendering the body visible, intelligible, calculable and manipulable at the molecular level, generated novel relations between life and commerce. New health technologies created new social citizenships and reshaped the potentialities embodied in human life itself. The social citizens having their own biological trait, gradually started to develop novel relations with medical specialists, clinics, and with the medical knowledge that cured their illness. Thus the body which involved in this process became a target for medical practices. The role of state was to engage in the measures for preserving and managing the collective health of the population, and to make health and life more safety. Thus Biosociality entered into a new domain where the biological citizenship was enacted by means of demands upon state authorities.

## IV. CONCLUSION

While citizenship created biological dimension, new kinds of biological citizens, with new subjectivities, politics and new ethics was formed through contemporary developments in biomedicine. We cannot say that by twentieth century biomedicine has simply changed our relation to health and illness. But it has helped to make us the kinds of people we have become. The individuals took the novel conception of 'biological citizenship' and they try to reorganize the relations between individuals and their biomedical authorities.

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IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Sabina S." Contemporary Biopower And Biosociality." IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). vol. 23 no. 06, 2018, pp. 46-49.