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Governing through Biometrics by Btihaj Ajana is a critical theory of biometrics, and the book succeeds well in this and makes a valuable and welcome contribution to the literature. The book attempts to conceptualise identity, citizenship, and community in relation to biometrics, and to do so by leveraging multiple theoretical ways of approaching biometric identity systems at multiple levels of analysis. In an effort to move beyond limited questions of efficacy or accuracy, the book makes the argument that biometric identity systems are technical expressions of politics, in particular a politics of fear, distrust and suspicion. This politics involves the reconfiguration of identity, citizenship and subsequently of community, in terms of risk and security. The effects of the deployment of such technologies in various spheres of life, but especially at the border, are to close-off potential futures through predictive techniques; differentially exclude or include particular types of identities; and deter engagement with the root causes of socio-political problems. The book deploys the concept of biopolitics as a top-level concept for theorising the governing of populations and individuals through biometric identity technologies and rationalities of security and risk, and in doing so adopts an explicitly political study of identity governance.

The structure of the chapters makes logical sense, flowing broadly from biometric identification technologies towards the broadest political implications of these. Chapter one, “Biometrics: The Remediation of Measure”, firstly provides a brief history of biometrics mainly focused upon rebutting the supposed newness of biometric identification, and secondly demonstrates the different ways of using biopolitics (from Foucault, Agamben and Rose) for understanding biometrics. Chapter two, “Homo Carded: Exception and Identity Systems”, builds upon familiar accounts of exception and exclusion through various forms of identity systems and social sorting, and the value of these accounts in understanding function creep. The chapter emphasises the polysemic form of social sorting, in that biometric identity also facilitates the movement of those whose identities carry a “surplus of rights”. The chapter sets up an aporia in biometric identification. The citizen and the immigrant are in one manner rendered functionally identical in terms of the biometric identification technologies to which they are increasingly subjected, but these subjectivities are fundamentally distinguished by the effects of these sorting processes. Chapter three, “Recombinant Identities: Biometrics and Narrative Bioethics”, examines the relations between bodies, information and identity, and the ontology of body as information. Of particular interest is the account of the purging of the narrative dimension of identity by biometric identification practices. The book rightly calls for the defence of the self-attesting dimensions of who somebody is and who they say they are from institutional impositions of identity. Ajana identifies this as one of the key (bio)ethical challenges of biometric technologies. Biometric technologies cannot access this form of identity (ipseity) but are part of processes which impose what Ajana terms “recombinant
identities” upon subjects. The introduction of concepts from narrative ethics here is particularly useful, and raises the stimulating question of the extent to which surveillant and governmental assemblages might be capable of being epistemologically “humble”. Chapter four, “Identity Securitisation and Biometric Citizenship”, approaches biometrics, identity and citizenship through the concept of security, exploring the securitisation of both identity and citizenship. The account touches upon issues of identity theft and responsibilisation of the citizen for the protection of their own identity, but also upon the limits of approaches based upon societal security. The key argument of the chapter is that contemporary citizenship is at the same time a “neoliberal citizenship”, a “biological citizenship” and a “neurotic citizenship”.

The key political theme of the book re-emerges in the main question motivating Chapter five, “Rethinking Community and the Political through Being-with”. This question is how to re-conceive the notion of community avoiding both individualism and assimilation, as well as moving beyond the politics of control? For Ajana, this question is a requisite next step following the identification of the problems of biometric citizenship, and a necessary addition to governmentality theory’s insight into the functional form of biometric governance. This is a very valid move, which ties issues of biometrics more firmly back to larger political questions, but might be of less interest to the reader focused on biometric technology more narrowly. The second half of this chapter, in which Ajana explores the potential of rethinking community and freedom in terms that are not reliant upon essentialist subjects, and then relates this to security and control technologies, is more accessible than the first, which engages with the work of Jean Luc Nancy on the political. The metaphor introduced in this chapter, that security and control technologies promise to cure, but not to heal, is a powerful one.

_Governing through Biometrics_ operates in a very similar terrain to my own work, _Surveillance and Identity_ (Barnard-Wills 2012), particularly in Chapter four, and many of the broad thrusts of the two books are complementary. Without dwelling too much on this link, both books engage with identification practices through theoretical lenses associated with governmentality. In Ajana’s case, governmentality is understood as a general theoretical focus upon who and what can be governed, who can govern, through what mechanisms and for what objectives can governance be conducted, and a methodology of identifying the style of thought through which issues are made thinkable and amenable to government intervention. It is encouraging to see more work in this area, particularly in terms of the securitisation of identity, and the importance of the symbolic and representational dimension of the surveillance politics. For the potential reader, the key difference between the two is the academic approach. Whilst both books have their theoretical and empirical elements, _Governing through Biometrics_ is a theory-driven project, whilst _Surveillance and Identity_ is perhaps more methodologically focused. This can be seen in the ways that the books make their respective arguments as well as their more general structure (the breadth of content mentioned below). _Governing through Biometrics_ avows an “experimental” approach (p.14), however this primarily means experimenting with theoretical approaches, and in practice the empirical material (primarily documents published by the UK Home Office in the context of citizenship, immigration, and biometric identity systems) is leveraged in support of illustrating and further developing theoretical positions. _Governing through Biometrics_ is perhaps more willing than _Surveillance and Identity_ to attribute intent behind actions and rhetorical self-awareness of actions to the governmental actors, an area that governmentality theory (and Surveillance Studies more widely) needs to continue to address. For example, is the redefinition of citizenship in technological terms an intentional policy, or part of a wider process in which the political actors proposing biometric identity technologies are equally entwined?

The influence of critical theory and cultural studies can be seen in the theoretical richness of _Governing through Biometrics_. The book deploys theorists such as Agamben, Bigo, Foucault, Derrida, Nancy, Butler, Giddens, Rose, Balibar, Ricoeur, Schmidt, and many others. In addition to governmentality and biopolitics, the book therefore engages with narrative ethics, exception, bioethics, securitisation theory, and concepts of new media. In addition, the book touches upon the majority of the relevant existing sources that I would consider necessary in this field and provides a good account of them (particular influences
include Irma van der Ploeg in Chapter three, and the work of Jennifer Whitson and Kevin Haggerty on care of the virtual self in Chapter four). The one downside of this breadth of theoretical engagement is that, particularly in earlier chapters, sometimes the theorists make a cameo appearance for a couple of pages. In some places, the addition of these theoretical perspectives in a brief manner does serve to complicate some of the issues being discussed, especially for those theorists with a tendency to repurpose and redefine words with a more finessed theoretical meaning than their commonplace use. In these cases a deeper engagement may have been more satisfying but is a necessary sacrifice given the scope. In addition to being a critical theory of biometric identity, the book also aims to provide an engagement with continental philosophy relevant for bioethicists. This may motivate the engagement with multiple theorists from a range of perspectives. There is certainly an explicit intention to bring together multiple perspectives and implementations of governmentality theory, rather than stick to one particular version. In this the book is successful and laudable. It is certainly worth reading for the audiences of this journal, although perhaps not as an entry-level text. If a reader has some point of contact with one or more of the overlapping subject areas of the book (be that surveillance, identity, biometrics or critical theory), then the book serves well to link that element to the others and explore the implications of this. For readers closely engaged with the intersecting subject material, the book also poses a number of valid questions that stimulate further discussion.

References