

A Deconstruction of Michel Foucault's Discourse of Race Struggle and War

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My journey through Michel's Foucault's oeuvre commenced in 1979 and it continues to this day. By far the most relevant of Foucault's ideas to our reality in the Caribbean was presented during the period 1975-1976 during a course of public lectures he gave at the College de France in Paris published as "Society must be defended" in English in 2003. In these public lectures Foucault states: "And the historico-political discourse that appeared at this moment was also a discourse on war, which was understood to be a permanent social relationship, the ineradicable basis of all relations and institutions of power." (Foucault 2003 Pg 49). A discourse appeared in European civilisation that insisted war was "a permanent social relationship". War was then the basis of power relations and constituted "power institutions" within the European social order. Foucault names this discourse the historico-political discourse and its described as follows: "In short this may well be the first exclusively historico-political discourse-as opposed to a philosophico-juridical discourse-to emerge in the West, it is a discourse in which truth functions exclusively as a weapon that is used to win an exclusively partisan victory. It is a somber, critical, discourse, but it is also an intensely mythical discourse; it is a discourse of bitterness...but also of the most insane hope." (Foucault 2003 Pg 57). The discourse is engaged in a battle for hegemony with the philosophico-juridical discourse and they are both entirely different. The historico-political discourse formulates and wields truth as a weapon thereby constituting an entirely different construct of power and power relations. The very nature of the discourse can only result in the embrace of war premised on distinction and separation. The discourse conceptualises a binary social order which is welded to a discourse of right and to which relations of force are linked. The binary basis of the social order then creates those who possess the right and those denied the right which flows from truth-force necessary to create, maintain and defend the rights of the privileged in the war of the social order. This discourse is then the source of European racist, colonial imperialism with the plantation being the devised power institution.. Foucault states: "It is rather, about establishing a right marked by dissymmetry, establishing a truth bound up with a relationship of force, a truth-weapon and a singular right." (Foucault 2003 Pgs 53+54). A discourse of war that cannot be rooted out from the social order being a given to the human social order wrapped in myth driven by right and exerting force creates discourses of eminent domain and manifest destiny as justification for racist, imperial expansion rooted in European law.

Foucault reveals that this discourse conceived of the binary structure of the social order as being driven by race war. Foucault states: "from the seventeenth century onward, that the idea that war is the uninterrupted frame of history takes a specific form: The war that is going on beneath order and peace, the war that undermines our society and divides it in a binary mode is, basically a race war. " (Foucault 2003 Pgs 59+60). What then is this race war? Is it a war between different races as whites vs non-whites or between different groups opposed to each other as a result of the binary structure of the social order premised on war? Foucault states: "The social body is basically articulated around two races. It is this idea that this clash between two races runs through society from top to bottom which we see being formulated as early as the seventeenth century." (Foucault 2003 Pg 60). The binary structure then constitutes two races that are engaged in war with each other and against the social order. This discourse of race war/struggle will influence the discourse of European colonialism, the theory of races, the discourse of class struggle and ultimately the discourse of scientific racism and eugenics. A most illustrious contribution to the evolution of European discourses. Foucault continues on the two races as follows: "In other words, what we see as a polarity, as a binary rift within society, is not a clash between two distinct races. It is the splitting of a single race into a superrace and a subrace." (Foucault 2003 Pg 61). A people of a single race origin is split into superrace and subrace and the war between these two races of the binary difference is the product of the social order. The social order relentlessly constitutes superrace and subrace because it's necessary to and inevitable under a binary structure.

Power in this social order has then to be specific to the order therefore the superrace defines itself and its adversary mythically and through the mechanism of right. Colonial domination summed up potently and accurately. The discourse of race war is then premised upon biologico-social racism which clears the pathway for defining the subrace as non-white primitives demanding right-force of the superrace be exercised upon them. The creation of the plantation mode of production charged with production of a commodity manufactured from an agricultural crop grown on the same plantation and exported to the dominant colonial state premised on African enslaved labour in the Caribbean demanded the creation of a specific variant of the discourse of race war to strategically deal with the power struggles of the social order in favour of the plantation owners and the colonial state: the superrace of the Caribbean. From this social order driven by the discourse of race war the Caribbean oligarchy dominated by minority non-African races was created and survives to this day. A Caribbean discourse of race war will evolve distinctly different from the European discourse of race war this Caribbean discourse impacted the evolution of European discourses of racism especially the discourse of scientific racism. The growth and power exhibited and wielded by the oligarchs of the Caribbean in the era of formal independence from direct colonial rule points to the continued hegemony of an evolved Caribbean discourse of race struggle/war over the social order and of the continuity of power relations fashioned by this discourse. The key then to deconstructing the Caribbean social order is understanding the dynamics of Caribbean oligarchies and their strategy to impact power relations in order to maintain their position of social dominance.

Foucault continues on the discourse of race struggle/war as follows: “It will become the discourse of a centered, centralized, and centralizing power. It will become the discourse of a battle that has to be waged not between races, but by a race that is portrayed as the one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm, and against those who deviate from the norm, against those who pose a threat to the biological heritage.” (Foucault 2003 Pg 61). The master race wields power and demands the right to define and police the norm and by extension the state of normalcy and abnormalcy the binary pair joined at the heads. This master race wields power that is centralised in their hands and constantly seeks to centralise power in their hands. The master race is a biologic entity as such its dominance springs from its genetic code, biological heritage therefore its enemy race cannot share the same genetic code and biological heritage posing the potent threat of miscegenation to the genetic code of the master race emanating from the very existence of the subrace. War waged on the subrace is necessary for the survival of the genetic code of the superrace and by extension power must be centralised and centralising. The evolution of this discourse clearly justifies the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Dachau and the gulag of the Soviet Union. In the Caribbean colonial state in which the superrace is white and the subrace non-white the threat of miscegenation to the superrace is much more potent and the product of miscegenation presents an obstacle to the quest to centralise power in the hands of a racially distinct superrace.

Foucault continues: “we see the appearance of a State racism: a racism that society will direct against itself, against its own elements and its own products. This is the internal racism of permanent purification, and it will become one of the basic dimensions of social normalization.” (Foucault 2003 Pg 62). From its formulation and release in seventeenth century Europe the discourse has evolved whereby by the nineteenth century it is now propagating State racism as the means to normalise a social order where the superrace through the application of truth-force excise those who don't abide by the norm defined by the superrace. Racism is then applied to the social order, to the members of the social order this “internal racism” to ensure hegemony and order. In the century in which enslavement in the European colonies of the Caribbean was abolished the discourse of State racism was applied to these colonies. The post-emancipation history of the colonial Caribbean is a period when intensely

repressive instruments were applied to normalise African Caribbean culture via law, policing and military force as African Caribbean culture abrogated the norm. Culture viewed outside the bounds of the norm was then policed as the colonial oligarchy and the colonial State became relentless in their attempt to normalise the social order. A devotion to duty driven by discourse and worldview. The Caribbean state and social order never evolved to the stage of biopower as in Europe therefore the discourse of race struggle evolved in the twentieth century to embrace the era of formal independence and today neo-liberal globalisation. The Caribbean social order and hegemonic discourse then demand specific analysis given this reality. The political power granted majority races via European democracy premised on universal adult suffrage and general elections resulted in control of the state but this is married to the domination of the economic order by transnational corporations and Caribbean oligarchies composed of minority races that dominate the private sector left vacant by the transnational corporations is the base that generates a variety of complex power relations. Of special interest are the power relations between the oligarchy composed of minority races and the state specifically the politicians and state officials that animate the state. Then there are the strategies utilised by the oligarchs to maintain their genetic code/biological heritage, economic and political power across time in the Caribbean. Foucault cannot answer these questions and he cannot provide the necessary analytic tools as Caribbean reality was never his concern. This task we have failed miserably to shoulder much less to complete. A study of the power relations must involve a study of the racist discourses utilised to serve power thereby maintaining the structure of the social order rooted in colonial domination therefore we must start with an analysis of the oeuvre of Franz Fanon.

Foucault states that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the discourse emerged in Europe. Foucault defines biopolitics as: "Biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem." (Foucault 2003 Pg 245). Man is more than body as man is now conceptualised as a species therefore power has to devise strategies to control this body/species making it a political problem. Man the species must be regularised whilst man the body has to be disciplined preferably by herself/himself. Biopolitics then conjured up the power of regularisation. But there is a limit to the power of regularisation and that is the inability of power to control death therefore the power of regularisation has to be making live and letting die and ignoring death. In a state constituted by the discourse of biopower how can it kill being so transfixed on life and making live? Foucault answers this question as follows: "It is, I think, at this point racism intervenes. I am certainly not saying that racism was invented at this time. It had already been in existence for a very long time. But I think it functioned elsewhere. It is indeed the emergence of this biopower that inscribes it in the mechanisms of the State. It is at this moment that racism is inscribed as the basic mechanism for power, as it is exercised in modern States. As a result, the modern state can scarcely function without becoming involved with racism at some point, within certain limits and subject to certain conditions." (Foucault 2003 Pg 254). Biopolitics banished the discourse of race struggle and war from the power relations of the social order of European states. Where then did this discourse of race war enjoy hegemony in what space of the European state? Foucault does not say. The nineteenth century in Europe ushered in the era of industrial capitalist European imperialism and the new European scramble for colonies. European capitalist imperialism was premised on power struggles and war driven by the discourse of race struggle/war that culminated in the First World War. The discourse was then active and hegemonic in a specific European space the central issue was then its embrace by biopolitics as it became necessary for the State premised on biopolitics to take life as an instrument of biopolitics. The discourse of race struggle was then adopted and redefined by the discourse of biopolitics to serve strategic ends and to complete the tasks at hand. Racism was installed and inscribed within the mechanisms of power of the

modern state constituted by biopolitics. Foucault can then insist that this modern European state must dance with racism to be functional. Foucault does not elucidate on the reality that by the nineteenth century racism in Europe carried two main discursive lines: the original discourse of superrace and subrace which divides a homogeneous European population into binary opposites and the discourse of the superrace and subrace premised upon the white, European superrace who through eminent domain and manifest destiny must dominate the non-white subraces of the world. The point at which biopolitics embraced the discourse of race struggle in Europe scientific racism was formulated and unleashed as a subservient discourse within biopolitics. The legacy of this embrace is poignantly experienced in the USA and Europe to this day.

The Caribbean state obviously is yet to embrace biopolitics as it continues to rely on the inherited discourse of race struggle the primary legacy of colonial domination. The discourse has evolved in response to the changing nature of power relations but the fundamental premise of what is the Caribbean social order remains a demographic majority race that is a threat to the powered minority races that comprise the Caribbean oligarchy. The signal problem is to persuade the politicians of the majority race to preserve the dominant social and economic positions of the oligarchy in exchange for rewards and to defuse the ever present threat posed by the masses of the majority race as visualised by the oligarchy. The other prime directive of the Caribbean oligarchy is to maintain their genetic identity across time thereby ensuring wealth is retained by bloodline that have not become miscegenated. To accomplish this imperative selective breeding of humans must be practiced and those who engage in miscegenation be punished. The power relations of the Caribbean social order are then complex but the structure of the social order is comparatively very simple and easily deconstructed. In fact its structure is simply an evolved version of the order constituted to serve colonial domination. The most complex of Caribbean social orders are those where another black race was imported by the colonial overlords such as Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. In the power relations of these nations black on black racism potently impacts the political order and by extension power relations in the social order. To deconstruct the social order of the Caribbean the primary focus must be on the power, nature and composition of the oligarchies of the Caribbean. The focus on power must encompass the power relations within the oligarchy and between the oligarchs and groups of the social order especially those between the oligarchs and the black politicians of the Caribbean. In the Caribbean states of Jamaica, Haiti and Barbados the oligarchs are visible, vocal and wield their power in the eyes of the public. In other Caribbean states they strive to mask the power they wield in the social order as in Trinidad and Tobago.

On modern racism Foucault states: “We are dealing with a mechanism that allows biopower to work. So racism is bound up with the workings of a state that is obliged to use race, the elimination of races and the purification of the race, to exercise its sovereign power. The juxtaposition of-or the way biopower functions through-the old sovereign power of life and death implies the workings, the introduction and activation, of racism.” (Foucault 2003 Pg 258). “the most murderous states are also, of necessity, the most racist.” (Foucault 2003 Pg 258). Biopower/biopolitics by itself cannot ensure sustainable hegemony over the social order by the powered it is then incomplete and lacking in a key component. This is the component of the old sovereign power wielded by the absolute monarchies of Europe: the right to let live and the right to kill. Biopower combined with the discourse of race struggle and war to acquire this absolute power thereby completing its arsenal of instruments and mechanisms of power necessary to accomplish its task. Without the discourse of racism biopower cannot accomplish its design objectives hence its incomplete and unfinished in its construction. This combination of the discourses of biopower/biopolitics and race struggle and war constitutes the formulation of the discourse of the state of exception in its unique nineteenth century variation setting it on its evolutionary path to today. A tension between both discourses within mechanisms of power

derived from the combination exists and given the nature of the power relations one discourse can be overdetermined placing the other in a trailing position. This seen in the evolution of power relations in the US and the creation of the Nazi German state in Europe. Foucault posits that racism provides a specific operational terrain upon which biopower exercises its sovereign power of let live and kill. This is a biological relationship not a relationship premised on war which enables a discourse to operate that rationalises the acts of biopower as the permanent removal of the threat of an inferior race and the abnormal all biological threats to the superrace thereby rendering the species stronger. The normalising order of biopolitics/biopower is then when combined with racism becomes a normalising evolutionary social order as the policing of the norm is necessary to the progressive evolution of the social order, the species and the superrace (Foucault 2003 Pgs 255+256). Failure to police the norm by any means necessary is then a grave threat to the evolution of the species and any threat to the species demands state of exception. But biopolitics changes tact to respond to the ever changing nature of power relations and those branded abnormal and assaulted over time with a battery of normalising measures can then be brought in from the cold reserved for the abnormal by biopolitics but what has yet to be explained is the persistence of anti-Black racism in the European combined, “hybrid” discourse of biopower/race struggle across time. Why isn't this threat to the species now embraced by biopower and defused? What is apparent since 2001 is when faced with an external threat posed by a non-white race the discourse reverts to the archives of the discourse of race war and embraces past experiences of imperial adventures to deal with the perceived threat today. And those non-whites within the boundaries of these states are the internal enemy that pose a far more potent threat which must be dealt via a state of exception. It is a worldview that can only see forests and never discern the different types of trees in the forest note the fixation with Iran when the potent enemy is Sunni Salafi-Jihadis. They all look alike!

Michel Foucault in the series of public lectures given in the period 1975-1976 has provided insights into the nature of the European and North American states that are of crucial importance to dismantle Caribbean social orders to enable analysis. But this specific knowledge of Foucault can only provide insights into the dynamics of European states and sign posts to the weary engaged in dearticulating Caribbean social orders. What it does present is the discursive agenda of the European colonials in the Caribbean whilst being incapable of matching the European colonial agenda to the power relations on the ground in the Caribbean and the choices made strategically in response to power relations. This is the task we must do for ourselves and have failed miserably to grapple with this task. It is noteworthy that after the public lectures despite promises made to do so Foucault does not return to this body of knowledge in his public lectures and his published works. The reason for silencing this body of knowledge in his oeuvre I am yet to uncover. This body of knowledge silenced by Foucault is not only of importance to understanding Caribbean states and social orders it is also of signal importance in understanding the discourse of North Atlantic globalisation that is simply a mask for the imperial order of the discourse of biopower/race struggle.

References

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