

The Most Controversial but Undoubtedly Influential: Michel Foucault and his Concept of Power

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Abstract: A heedful study of Foucault's works shows that power is one of the pivotal themes in his writings. A revolutionary and an opponent of any form of oppression and coercion that threatens one's freedom, Foucault tried through his intellectual production to defy the sovereign type of power that controlled bodies and minds for centuries. For this reason, his model of power is a bottom-up model as it focuses on the dominated and the marginalized rather than the dominant. Moreover, power for Foucault is not a property owned by a certain individual or a group and it is not a tool that the dominant uses to oppress the dominated. Power is rather productive and it encompasses the whole fabric of the social structure. In fact, Foucault tries through his writings on power to produce a self-regulating individual marked by his free will to defy any form of coercion or oppression that threatens his freedom. That's why power for him has an inseparable relationship with resistance as well as knowledge. Accordingly, this study is an attempt to elucidate the factors that influenced Foucault's thought and led gradually to his adoption of this concept of power, its prominent features, as well as the development witnessed by this concept throughout his writings.

Key words:

Power, bio-power, disciplinary power, micro power, power relations, archaeology, genealogy, épistemes, descending individualism, regime of truth, power/knowledge relationship, Panopticon, resistance.

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Twenty years ago Michel Foucault was probably the most vilified and criticized of all the so-called 'postmodern theorists', today he is widely accepted as being one of, if not the, most influential thinkers of our time, and his ideas and theoretical terms have become part of our ways of thinking and understanding the world. (Danaher, Schirato, and Webb 1-2)

Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984) was a French philosopher, an intellectual historian, a social theorist and literary critic. His remarkable works include *Folie et déraison* (1961; Eng. tr., *Madness and Civilization*, 1965); *Naissance de la Clinique* (1963; Eng. tr., *The Birth of the Clinic*, 1967); *Les Mots et Les Choses* (1966; Eng. tr., *The Order of Things*, 1971) *L'Archéologie du Savoir* (1969; Eng. tr., *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 1972); *Surveiller et Punir* (1975; Eng. tr., *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977); and the uncompleted three volumes of *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976 – 1984; Eng. tr., *The History of Sexuality*, 1978 – 1987).

A heedful study of Foucault's works shows that power is one of the pivotal themes in his writings, and this obsession with power urged him to participate in many anti-racist campaigns and human rights movements, and to devote much of his life to protests against unfair trials and all forms of abuses and violations committed globally by governments against human rights. This paper is accordingly devoted to elucidate the factors that influenced Foucault's thought and led gradually to his adoption of this concept of power, as well as the development witnessed by this concept throughout Foucault's writings and its prominent features.

Like his ideas, Foucault was a revolutionary thinker marked by his constant challenge with the long-established disciplines and their absolute facts and truths. He was entirely against such idea of absolute truths of disciplines as it means imposing domination and coercion over individuals depriving them of their freedom; that's why he innovatively developed two techniques, namely "archaeology" and "Genealogy", in an attempt to change the beliefs about these absolute truths. "Archaeology" is a term used by Foucault during the 1960s to examine "the discursive traces and orders left by the past in order to write a 'history of the present'. [It] is about looking at history as a way of understanding the processes that have led to what we are today" (O'Farrell, "Key Concepts"). This archaeological stage in Foucault's critical production includes prominent works as: *The History of Madness* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), and, later, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). Foucault originally borrowed this term from the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) in order to "describe a historical practice of philosophy" (O' Farrell, *Michel Foucault* 64). Like the

archaeologist who excavates historical destinations and searches documents in search of the secrets of the ancient monuments, Foucault was also interested in excavating the history of knowledge in order to discover the assumptions and processes that contributed to the formation of our present.

However, this does not mean that he relates the present to the past. Foucault was in fact interested in how the "history of the present" can provide other substitutes to the practices that control individuals. He, accordingly, rejects the idea of the global history which guides and directs the political actions. Re-examining the way in which people interpret their relationships to the elapsed/ past ages, he observed that what make people relate the past to the present are "two main ideas- the search for origins [...] and the notions of progress and development 'things are getting better, knowledge is increasing'" (Danaher, Schirato, and Webb 14). It was conventionally thought that the past determines the present and may lead consequently to a radical change in the society; an idea largely followed by the Marxists who were interested in how to realize the socialist change through history.

Unlike Marxism, "Foucault doesn't ask us to hope for a complete better form of life, but to imagine a time so different as to make our own time seem arbitrary" (qtd. in Roth 72). He therefore produced in his book *The Order of Things* the notion of periods of history, or what he called '*épistemes*'. Foucault's '*épistemes*' are

periods of history organized around, and explicable in terms of, specific world-views and discourses. They are characterized by institutions, disciplines, knowledge, rules and activities consistent with those world-views. The rise and fall of *épistemes* don't correspond to any notion of natural continuity, development or progress, but is random and contingent. (Danaher, Schirato, and Webb xi)

Foucault's *épisteme* is also "not a form of knowledge '*connaissance*' or type of rationality [...] it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities" (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 191). An *épisteme* is not bound to the certain type of knowledge or influences of certain figures such as leaders and prominent figures in society. It is rather "an 'order of things' which organizes everything, makes some things possible and others impossible, permits us to say some things but makes other things unthinkable" (Danaher, Schirato, and Webb 16).

In an attempt to make his concept of *épisteme* clearer, Foucault pointed out that there are three major *épistemes* witnessed across the last four centuries: the Renaissance, the Classical, and the Modern. The order of things during the *épisteme* of the Renaissance was related and traced back to God. Everything during this age was seen and interpreted in the light of the divine power. Power during the Renaissance was thus seized and exercised only by kings who enjoyed a sovereign type of power to decide life and death for their subjects based on the pervading belief of divinity. Accordingly, any attempt to challenge such divine authority/power was confronted by torture, especially physical abuse or death.

With the advent of the Classical age and domination of Natural Sciences, this order of things was related to Nature and everything was based on observation, testing, and experimentation. The practice of power to impose sanctions on someone or send him into death became intermingled and associated with principles of the Natural Sciences. As for the Modern age, the source of which order of things can be traced back was Man who developed disciplines as sociology, medicine, criminology, politics, psychology, demography, and psychiatry in order to control and organize modern societies. These disciplines accordingly dominated hospitals, schools, universities, prisons, and the army, and became the criteria upon which people are classified as normal or abnormal, good citizens or deviant ones. These ages or *épistemes* may share some points of sameness, but for Foucault "the sameness is actually an illusion based on misinterpretations" (20).

Foucault's transition from this *Archaeological* method to the *Genealogical* one was initiated by the publication of *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976). This transformation from the *Archaeological* method into the *Genealogical* one does not however mean full separation, as both methods are closely connected. Genealogy can be defined as "a process of analyzing and uncovering the historical relationship between truth, knowledge and power" (xi). Writings belong to this genealogical stage allude a transition in Foucault's thought from the focus on discourse to social practices within the social institutions, especially "schools [...] because they transmit a conservative ideology masked as knowledge. [...] psychiatry [...] because it extends beyond the asylum into schools, prisons, and medicine. Finally, and probably most importantly to Foucault, is the judicial system, since it relies on the fundamental moral distinction of guilt/innocence" (Pickett 455).

This Foucauldian genealogical method was in fact greatly influenced by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844- 1900). Nietzsche's genealogy revolves around investigating the origins of the powerful institutions which are described as universal and eternal throughout history. Both Nietzsche and Foucault represent "another strand in poststructuralist thought which believes that the world is more than a galaxy of texts and that some theories of textuality ignore the fact that discourse is involved in power" (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 178). Nietzsche, followed by Foucault, perceived that the prevailing thought in poststructuralism tends to "reduce political and economic forces, and ideological and social control, to aspects of signifying processes" (178). For Nietzsche, individuals reframe truths to fit their previously determined aims; otherwise this truth is meaningless if it does not meet their interests and aims.

In his book, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche criticized modern morality seeing it as a product of power relations which existed in a specific historical context. He also claimed that "any form of knowledge or truth that emerged in a culture did so [...] not because it was valuable or eternal, but because one group had managed to impose their will over others" (Danaher, Schirato, and Webb 9-10). These Nietzschean ideas became then the starting point from which Foucault developed his concept of power and its relation to knowledge or what is known in Foucault's philosophy as *Power-Knowledge* relationship. It is observed through his writings that

he tends to challenge all societal institutions that misuse such relation to ensure its control over the society and to objectivise the individuals.

Like most of his writings, Foucault's works on power can be described as complicated and representative at the same time. They are complicated because

Foucault urges the critic to complicate the interpretation, to reject the turn to the author's intention as the court of last resort, to look in the text for articulated hierarchies of value and meaning, above all to trace filiations of inter- and extratextuality, to draw connection between the given text and others, between the text and the intellectual and material context. (Poster 278)

For all the aforementioned descriptions, Foucault was classified by some critics as a post-structuralist and sometimes as a post-modernist, but he himself refused all of these labels.

The reader sometimes cannot understand Foucault's ideas due to his insufficient explanation of these ideas, and "sometimes [he] deliberately fails to mention his sources for strategic reasons or simply for his own amusement – to catch the people out" (O' Farrell, *Michel Foucault* 5). It should also be mentioned that Foucault may address a subject matter in a work and then he handles it differently in another work with other renovated technical vocabulary; a matter that caused confusion for the critics as well as readers. Errors of the translation of Foucault's work cannot also be ignored as they inevitably contribute to the ambiguity and difficulty of understanding his ideas. Furthermore, some of the Foucauldian terms have various translations which caused a sense of confusion for the scholars. For example, the French term '*dispositif*' is translated as 'deployment' in *The History of Sexuality* and as 'apparatus' in other places.

Foucault's writings, on the other hand, are representative as their "implications [...] vary considerably depending upon which period of his writings the critic considers primary" (Poster 278). For example, during the 1950s and early 1960s his writings were directed against the allegations that emphasize supremacy of psychology and medicine over other sciences. That opposing trend was known at that time as the anti-psychiatry movement that included, besides Foucault, such prominent figures as R.D. Lading in England and Félix Guattari in France. Foucault criticized those prevailing allegations as he perceived psychiatrists, medicine, and asylums as symbols/representatives of power which tend to exclude abnormal or insane people considering them monsters or dissociable beings. Power practiced by psychiatry, in Foucault's view, increased the patient's misery instead of curing him/her. It focused only on his body separating him from his memory and ethics.

Those opposing ideas against the long-established disciplines brought in a tidal wave of criticism. The historians, for example, claimed that "he didn't get his facts right [;] novelists and literary academics [...] accused him of underestimating the importance of individual genius and inspiration, and Marxists [...] didn't like his 'disregard' for economics" (Danaher, Schirato, and Webb 3). Surprisingly, such comprehensive challenge of Foucault's writings of all disciplines attracted gradually the attention of scholars and intellectuals in all fields, especially during the last two decades, to study and analyze his ideas, especially those on power.

Many of Foucault's writings show his keen interest in the relationship between the individuals and institutions within any society because through this relationship the work of power becomes noticeable. This interest is clearly embodied in works as *The Birth of the Clinic*, *Discipline and Punish*, *The History of Sexuality*, and *Power/Knowledge*. He tried through these works to examine the impact of various institutions in any society on its subjects/individuals and the reaction of these individuals to this impact either by compliance or by resistance. Examining the relationship between the institutions and individuals resulted in Foucault's unique analysis of the concept of power.

It is worth noting that Foucault intentionally chose the word concept not the theory to describe his model of power because "of the danger he sees within *a theory* [... .] Theories are meant to be all sorts of things to legitimize themselves and their conclusions: they are meant to be objective, they are meant to be true, and they are especially meant to deal with a particular section of 'reality'" (Hewett 14; italics added). In contrast, the model of power that Foucault searches for is built upon neither prediction nor control of things as it revolves around listening and understanding of things not to control them. Hypotheses of a theory are also built on determinism in order to be described as objective and true, while Foucault's power is mobile, changeable and not restricted to a certain section of reality as it exists everywhere and pervades all types of interaction within the society. For this reason, Foucault preferred the word concept and not the theory to introduce his model of power.

Like most of his ideas and thoughts, this Foucauldian model of power is considered untraditional or, if it may be said, revolutionary as it "marks a radical departure from previous modes of conceiving power and cannot be easily integrated with previous ideas, as power is diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them" (Gaventa 1). This Foucauldian model is built on some unique characteristics which make it totally different from the *sovereign power* in which previous thoughts and ideas were interested in for a long time. Power before Foucault used to be perceived as a tool that the powerful people (i.e. sovereign subjects as kings and central authority figures) possess and enable them to impose their will on the powerless. It was seen as a relationship between the dominant and dominated, and Marxists used to associate it with oppression and repression.

In contrast, Foucault denounces and rejects such prevailing and familiar views on power. Power for Foucault

must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other

words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (Foucault, *Power/ Knowledge* 98)

Power for Foucault is not a property; it is not such an instrument owned by a certain individual or a group and it is not a tool that the dominant uses to oppress the dominated or to repress his/her desires. In addition, Foucault's power exists everywhere and is not confined to specific places, as he states in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*: "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere"(93). It spreads throughout all forms of interactions and relations within the society: "*these relations of power are multiple [...] have different forms, and can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration,*" in Foucault's words ("Critical Theory/Intellectual Theory" 38; italics added). Power is comprehensive and therefore it includes all types of social actions.

This may interpret Foucault's interest in the various forms of power in everyday relations between the individuals and various institutions within the society: in schools, hospitals, prisons, and asylum "where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (*Power/Knowledge* 39). People who are addressed by these institutions (i.e. students, patients, criminals ... etc.) used to be perceived as objects of the disciplines and rules adopted in these institutions. Accordingly, teachers, doctors, and police officers exercise power over them and have the ability to discipline, diagnose, or classify them as normal or abnormal based on disciplines and rules followed inside their institutions. Foucault refuses this claim that individuals are mere or passive recipients of power. In contrast, subjects or individuals, in Foucault's point of view, are always involved in power relations and perform active roles within this net of power relations. Power is thus a strategy and not a property; it is an action that someone does and therefore it is not confined to a certain place or institution.

This interest in power relations within the disciplinary institutions results in the Foucauldian term of *Micropower* which asserts that power does not only exist in the relationship between the governor and the people, but also exists at the personal level through the relationship between two individuals as represented in the disciplinary institutions between the doctor and the patient in hospitals, the teacher and the student in schools and universities, and so on.

Another unique characteristic of Foucault's concept of power is the idea that power should be analyzed from the bottom-up perspective not from the traditional top-down perspective. Previous analyses of power used to focus on the point of view of those who dominate such as kings, presidents and decision- makers, and this is what is meant by the top-down perspective of power. On the contrary, Foucault's model of power is a bottom-up model where power "is exercised rather than possessed; [...] is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions- an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 26-7). His analysis of power accordingly focuses on the dominated and the marginalized rather than the dominant.

It is worth mentioning that this approach of focusing on the marginalized was followed by Karl Marx when he "looked for the basis of the community and the first cell which produces power in the factory, which represents for him a model for a non- contractual and non-liberal relationship upon which power is built" (Mansour 3; translation mine). Like Marx, Foucault rejects the postulates stated by the social contract theory which was based on the idea that a subject/an individual is the pillar of any social or political system and that the state gains its legitimacy based on a contract between the individuals and the ruler/ the ruling class by which those individuals surrender some of their freedom in exchange for security and protection of their rights. In contrast, Foucault perceives individuals within any society as a product of the disciplinary institutions such as the army, school, university, prison, hospitals, etc.; and therefore those individuals cannot be involved in any social contract.

Indeed Foucault shares Marxists in their considerable concern with the marginalized and their rejection of the social contract theory, but he, however, differs from them in certain points. For example, Foucault's model of power focuses on the marginalized but in disciplinary institutions rather than the factory in which Marx was interested. Also, power for Foucault is not such relation between a governor and subject or between a dominant and dominated; it is rather a network of relations that permeates the fabric of the whole society. Another point of difference between Foucault and Marxists is that Marxists used to associate between power and repression. Foucault refuses this *Repressive Hypothesis* and asserts that power is not repressive or negative but it is productive. According to Foucault, power is productive because "it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth [, and] the individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production" (Foucault, *Foucault Reader* 205).

Power is not such an instrument used in the feudal societies to control and coerce their subjects as it tends to redefine the role of the civil society "from a passive object of government to be acted upon into an entity that is both an object *and* a subject of government." (Sending & Neumann 651; italics original). Foucault moreover justifies his rejection of this Repressive Hypothesis that "if power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it" (*History of Sexuality Volume 1* 36); for this reason "we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'" (*Foucault Reader* 204-5). Power is not such obstacle that defies hopes and ambitions of individuals.

The power that Foucault means and supports is a *Meta-power* which implicates the control of the whole social structures not only subjects/individuals. It exists everywhere and "is gained through discourse [...] *and* there are no absolutely 'true' discourses, only more or less powerful ones" (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 180; italics added). It is produced through various forms of discourse (political, scientific, medical, social, .etc.) and is not based on any absolute truth because it is unstable and changeable. It pervades the whole society (i.e. homes, schools, factories, hospitals, clinics, prisons, army, etc.). It is not an instrument used to coerce people to do things against their will or to repress their wishes and desires. It is not negative; it is rather

productive as it adopts new and creative techniques not to repress or coerce, but to monitor, guide, and help individuals identify and invest positive and creative sides inside themselves.

Another feature of Foucault's power is that it has hidden relations or "hidden transcripts," as Sara Mills describes. In an article entitled, "Power and Sex" Foucault also states that

the relations of power are perhaps among the best hidden things in the social body ... [we need] to investigate what might be most hidden in the relations of power; to anchor them in the economic infrastructures; to trace them not only in their governmental forms but also in the intra-governmental or para-governmental ones; to discover them in their material play. (119)

To make this idea clearer, it can be said that power relation between the powerful and the powerless differ depending on the situation. For example, when the employees behave in the presence of their stiff manager, they behave with great respect. Power relation here is powerful (the manager) - powerless (the employees) relationship, and the behaviours of both are controlled by such relationship. Those powerless (the employees) can make gossip and mock this stiff manager with each other in his absence and this is what Foucault means by 'hidden transcript'. On the other hand, this manager can tell his peer managers in other companies about the difficulties that he encounters to control his employees to achieve an increase in the production. Power relation, therefore, differs when it is between the employees and the manager and it takes another form when every side is with his peer(s). This means that "in order to analyze a power relation, we must analyse the total relations of power, the hidden transcripts as well as the public performance," as Mills asserts (41).

In the same context, Daniel Conway asserts this feature of invisibility of Foucauldian model of power and its capacity for "infinite displacement within a complex network of discursive practices" (201). Power is the axis around which all discourses revolve and "because [it] can be effective only when it remains partially hidden it always shelters itself within a discourse about something else [...] Power is both ubiquitous and capillary in its manifestations, and it announces its presence only as a diversion from its more central concerns" (201). It is something invisible and unconscious that spurs us to discipline our behaviours away from any coercion from external sources.

Besides the aforementioned features of Foucault's concept of power, power and its relations are described by Foucault in his *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* as "both intentional and non-subjective" (94). At the time that Foucault admits that "there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives"; he, however, asserts that this power is not produced through "the choice or decision of an individual subject" (*History of Sexuality Vol. 1* 95). He explicitly believes that an individual is both the subject and the object of such power: "[Individuals] are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising [...] power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation" (*Power/Knowledge* 98).

Foucault further perceives power as a basic element in social discipline and welfare through its relationship with knowledge. He referred to this relationship with an innovative concept called "*Power/Knowledge*" relationship. Foucault was interested in discovering the reasons that make certain ideas, beliefs, knowledge, and discourses classified as facts while others are excluded and classified as false. It was in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) that Foucault first investigated the relationship between power and knowledge, and his investigations led him to assert that "power produces knowledge [...] that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (27).

The relationship between power and knowledge is a complementary relationship as they depend on each other and cannot be separated. The same emphasis on the relationship between power and knowledge was reflected in "Prison Talk" where Foucault continued his claim that "it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (52). The process of producing knowledge is intermingled with the desire for power. That's why the existence of any struggles in power relations between individuals or between institutions is accompanied by the production of knowledge. For example, the corrupted regime of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt resulted in imbalance in power relations between people and authority figures and their corrupted institutions. The outcome of that imbalance was the outbreak of the 25 January Revolution. Information collected about sacrifices of demonstrators became the knowledge or the truth that circulated in numerous books, novels, plays, and artistic production to depict sufferings of the Egyptians under the corrupted regime and their struggle for equality and the better life.

In addition, Foucault denounces the claim that knowledge and truth are produced through ideas of genius and prominent individual thinkers as Einstein and Hegel, for example. He rather asserts that it is the power/knowledge relation that decides what will be known and labeled as truth:

The subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of [the] fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it, and of which it is made up that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge. (*Discipline and Punish* 27-8)

Individual thinkers are perceived by Foucault as the sites where facts and truths are produced, but these facts and truths are mainly produced by power/knowledge.

Foucault moreover claims that power has a role in processing of information and accordingly it influences the produced knowledge which is received and perceived by people as facts. Returning to the example of the Egyptian Revolution to make this idea clearer, it was observed during the Revolution days attempts of the regime to control processing of information that would be displayed on the national television channels. The content of the news reports and scripts of talk show programs was subjected to processes of editing and technical processes to deny the existence of any crowds of demonstrators. Thus, content of these reports and images of empty streets were presented on the television screens to convince people that this is the fact. Another example is the Zionist control of information and news relating to the Palestinian crisis. They always try to falsify the real situation through their control of information presented through the Zionist media. Thus, news reports are edited and any expressions that criticize illegal practices against innocent Palestinian civilians are excluded. The Palestinian demand for their rights is described as terrorism while Israeli massacres against Palestinians are justified as self-defense. As noted through these two examples, the information that audiences get from media and is considered as factual concepts were subjected to power operations through processes of editing and exclusion supervised by the governments either at the national level or the global one.

On the other hand, Foucault believes that even in his/her search for the truth of him/her self, an individual is still subject to the work of power. Even at the moment that this individual realizes this truth, it is also the same moment that he notices that he is still under the practice of power: "If I tell the truth about myself [...] It is in part that I am constituted as a subject across a number of power relations which are exerted over me and which I exert over others" ("Critical Theory/Intellectual Theory" 39). An individual thus plays the role of the subject in his search for the truth about himself and at the same time he is an object of power relations.

Foucault then goes further to illustrate the impact of power/knowledge relation on development of the penal system from a system that was based mainly on violence and body torture to a more organized system which focuses in modern societies not only on the body but also on behaviour and soul. Foucault exemplifies that in details through the incident of the torture and execution of the French soldier Robert- François Damiens, the soldier who was charged for his trial to assassinate King Louis XV. As "the body is central to the exercise of power," this soldier was sentenced to cut his body into pieces in front of the crowd before being executed because of his challenge to the power of the King (Apple ix). Foucault opens *Discipline and Punish* describing the incident as follows:

On 2 March 1757 Damiens the regicide was condemned 'to make the *amende honorable* before the main door of the Church of Paris, where he was to be 'taken and conveyed in a cart, wearing nothing but a shirt, holding a torch of burning wax weighing two pounds'; then, [...] on a scaffold that will be erected there, the

flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand, holding the knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with sulphur, and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away... . (3)

Tearing a body into pieces in such barbaric manner was a symbol of writing the sin he committed on the body and so the body speaks warning anyone who thinks of committing the same crime. The aim thus was to produce docile bodies; an aim that would continue throughout the following centuries in spite of the change done on methods of punishment.

Due to the development witnessed by modern societies, disciplinary practices were also developed and methods of punishment changed as well; and "the object of punishment," as Hewett describes, "was no longer the body," but the soul (17). Foucault was interested in discovering the reason behind such transformation of methods of punishment from the body to the soul and discovered that it was associated with a transformation in knowledge collected about criminals due to the progress witnessed by scientific disciplines. The aim is now not only producing docile bodies but producing civilized behaviours as well. This led Foucault to study psychology, medicine and criminology and he observed their roles as entities of knowledge that determines the norms that distinguish the appropriate behavior from the deviant one resulting in the subjugation of the body, forcing it to behave in a certain manner to be evaluated as normal. In other words, the principles of these disciplines became the criteria upon which people are classified as normal or abnormal, good citizens or perverted ones.

It is the knowledge and data collected about the criminal that decide the penal process. In his article, "The Dangerous Individual" Foucault asks: "can one condemn to death a person one does not know?" (127). The response, of course, will be "no!" because the judicial system should be provided with all information and data relating to the crime and the criminal. According to this knowledge the judge decides the type of sentencing that the criminal deserves. It is the collected data/knowledge that decides the type of penalty and punishment or, in other words, the practice of power. More importantly is that knowledge and collected data about the criminal may make the sentence vary from one criminal to another even if they committed the same crime. For example, a murderer with mental disorders will be punished differently from that who committed his crime with full consciousness and intentionality. The collected data and knowledge about that with mental disorders means that he will be placed in a psychiatric clinic for treatment, while the sentence will be entirely different if the collected information proved he is normal which means that he will be imprisoned or executed also according to the collected data relating to intentionality or unintentionality while committing the crime. As noted, it is power relations that produce knowledge and knowledge then influences the practice of power. The relationship between both is then an inseparable relationship.

This association between power and knowledge, moreover, results in the emergence of a new Foucauldian term, namely the "regime of truth," the term used by Foucault to refer to

the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (*The Foucault Reader* 72-3)

Foucault's 'regime of truth' is grounded on the idea that true statements and information are circulated in books and the educational systems, while false statements are excluded and are not permitted to be circulated. For this reason, "[e]ach society has its regime of truth," in Foucault's words (73). These 'regimes of truth' are produced by the institutions within any society and are reinforced and regularly updated by media, schools, and universities which define what is rational and what is irrational. The 'regime of truth' can thus be described as "the strategic field within which truth is produced and becomes a tactical element in the functioning of a certain number of power relations" (O'Farrell, 'What is Regime of Truth?'). It can be said that *Truth* and *Knowledge* for Foucault are not opponents of the workings of power; they are rather involved within it.

This Foucauldian interest in Power/knowledge relationship resulted later in his writing of *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* which is considered "[t]he first work in which Foucault lays out a comprehensive account of the operations of power and knowledge, and the method by which he hopes to investigate them" (Hewett 6). Genealogy was the method or the technique that Foucault developed to investigate the historical operations and influences of power on knowledge and norms, or what he terms as Power/Knowledge relationship, within any society and through his investigations he produced a new type of power, namely *Bio-power*. The term *bio-power* refers to the "technologies that were developed at the same time as, and out of, the human sciences, and which were used for analyzing, controlling, regulating and defining the human body and its behavior" (Danaher, Schirato, and Webb 64).

Foucault exemplifies this type of bio-power when he criticized the Repressive Hypothesis based on the historical claim that sexuality was not repressed during the Seventeenth Century public life as it was during the Victorian Era or the Nineteenth Century where discussion of sexual issues was forbidden in public life and restricted only to certain places like asylums. As a result of his genealogical investigations, Foucault found that sexuality was not totally repressed but it was managed and controlled by the government and appeared with another new notion called population. The government during the Victorian Era found that it was a must to know the characteristics of their people regarding their numbers, age, health, rates of birth and rates of fertility due to the significant impact of these characteristics on the State Affairs during war and peace. Based on these collected statistical data on population, the government decided the required developmental projects in all fields. So "the purpose [during the Victorian Era] was not to destroy or suppress sexuality, but to focus upon and isolate it in an attempt to know it, and then manage it" (Hewett 7). These collected statistical data thus play an essential role in power relations and contribute to the formation of knowledge structure within the society. The citizens, in turn, develop the quality of their life and treat the problems relating to their health and their behaviours so as to "not only become objects of a specific scientific discipline, but subjects who

manage themselves in new ways, or rather, in *normal* ways as a result of new productions of knowledge" (8).

An example from one of the overpopulated countries in the Arab world, Egypt, can be given to make the concept of bio-power clearer. There is an agency in Egypt called the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) send some of its officials formally and regularly to collect data on the population, including information about ages, rates of pregnancy, rates of birth, number of the family members, number of employed and unemployed within each family, income, etc. Then CAPMAS's officials analyze these collected data and determine the size of economic, health, and social problems resulting from overpopulation. The government accordingly decides the type of the developments that shall be encouraged to solve the problems that have been identified through the collected data. Awareness programs and ads through various types of media are prepared concerning the danger of overpopulation and its negative impact on the national income as well as health standards and developments. The information and ideas presented through these awareness programs and pamphlets will become as true statements that will be circulated within the society through books, magazines, and the educational system. Individuals in turn will start to regulate and control the rates of birth and manage their life style according to the knowledge they received from the media and awareness programs. 'Bio-power' is then the tool that government uses to regulate population and control human bodies in accordance with the accepted norms. The citizens, in turn, perform the role of the object and the subject in these power relations; and this is the real aim of Foucauldian concept of power.

Another important type of power, or to say the second pillar beside biopower, is *disciplinary power*. Foucault's *disciplinary power* tends to regulate people's behaviours within any society. However, power for Foucault "is not discipline, rather discipline is simply one way in which power can be exercised" (O'Farrell, "Key Concepts"). A relevant Foucauldian concept is *Descending Individualism* which is used to affirm how people in modern societies are monitored and individualized according to their position in the social scale. The lower they are in the social scale, the more they are monitored and individualized. For example, students are monitored by their teachers, prisoners by guards, patients by doctors, and children by parents. Foucault therefore calls the institutions which control their subjects' bodies and minds as *disciplinary institutions*, including schools, prisons, hospitals, and workhouse; and he also used the term "disciplinary society", not "disciplined society", to refer to the origins of these disciplinary institutions within any society. They are called *disciplinary* as they tend to shape people's bodies and minds according to a particular set of disciplines and rules.

Being interested in the structures and the work of power within these disciplinary institutions, Foucault embodies his ideas through one of the disciplinary models, namely 'Panopticon', in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and in one of his interviews titled "The Eye of Power" (1980). Panopticon is "an architectural device described by the eighteenth-century philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, as a way of arranging people in such a way that, for example, in prison, it is possible to see all of the inmates without the observer being seen, and without any of the prisoners having access to one another" (Mills 45). Panopticon is designed to enable a watchman to monitor/

observe (-opticon) all (pan-) inmates of an institution without telling them that they are being monitored.

Panopticon is considered an important mechanism for Foucault as it is deeply rooted on automatization and disindividualization of power: "Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 202). Adopting this design of Panopticon in various disciplinary institutions within the society (i.e. schools, prisons, factories, ... etc.) ensures maximum degree of surveillance which results in "a new form of internalized disciplinary practice[...] as one is forced to act as if one constantly being surveyed even when one is not. Thus, this form of spatial arrangement entails a particular form of power relation and restrictions of behaviours" (Mills 45). For example, prisoners follow rules of the prison although the prison guard may be absent. Foucault justifies this behaviour that the individual within the Panopticon

"who is subjected to a field of visibility and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (*Discipline and Punish* 202-3).

The individual thus plays the role of the observer and that of the observed as he internalizes the behavioural code of the prison guard (the role of the observer) and will be committed to the rules (the role of the observed) as if he is still being monitored by the prison guard. Accordingly, any institution can function on its own regardless the individuals who operate it: "Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine: in the absence of the director, his family, his friends, his visitors, even his servants" (202). In fact, both 'disciplinary power' and 'bio-power' produce a "discursive practice" that determines what is normal, acceptable, abnormal, or deviant "in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired ones" (Foucault, *Foucault Reader* 337; Rose 52).

It can be said then that power tends to form people's behaviours and thoughts through different institutions to produce at the end a self-regulating subject. Once the subject's behaviour and thought are formulated by the disciplinary technologies of power represented by different institutions within the society, the subject will behave in accordance with the principles set by the state. However, this Foucauldian claim of power does not prevent resistance. The subject has a free will to discuss norms and social restrictions within his society, and to challenge power/authority. However, challenging power here does not mean he will get an "absolute truth", but he yearns through this challenge/resistance to "detach the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" (Foucault, *Foucault Reader* 75).

In fact, Foucault's perspectives on power/resistance relationship went through various stages of development. This relationship was firstly depicted by Foucault as an adverse relationship. For him, resistance was considered an uncongenial component within power relations, and always represented a threat to power. For this reason, Foucault's power is invisible in order not to

induce resistance. In his *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault accordingly described resistance as a "counter-power" as it always seeks equality and lacks hierarchy, opposing power which is based on hierarchy and inequality" (219). Foucault later contradicts himself and asserts that neither power nor resistance has such negative relationship all the time. Power is not negative and resistance is not always a "counter-power". Resistance sometimes uses mechanisms of power. Foucault's writings exemplify that

they (his writings) use the techniques of formal discourse, such as arguments, footnotes, and historical data, to undermine the previous narratives within that discourse. Yet Foucault, even while engaged in this project of demolition, also seeks to build a 'strategic knowledge' with his writings, thereby opening more possible sites for resistance. (Pickett 459)

As the relationship between power and knowledge is inseparable, the relationship between power and resistance can be described in the same way based on this Foucauldian model of power. Foucault firmly confirms in his *History of Sexuality Vol.1* that "where there is power there is resistance" (95). This Foucauldian claim means that wherever power is exercised, there should be an individual to resist. Relating the exercise of power to resistance implies an explicit challenge against the traditional perspectives, like that of the Marxists, on power which used to reduce it to "a master-slave relation or an oppressor-victim relationship" (Mills 40). If early Marxists associated power with oppression, Foucault associates it with resistance. Individuals, in Foucault's point of view, are not passive recipients of power because they perform power and have the ability to resist it, and if they are deprived of such ability, this means there are no power relationships as "*the existence of these relationships depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations*" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol 1*, 95; italics added).

Power relationships cannot be separated thus from these points of resistance as these points pervade the whole network of power. In his "Resistance-Existential and Linguistic", M. Enani thinks of the relationship between *Power* and *Resistance* "in concrete terms: [as he] thought of the Newtonian principle of action and reaction, and the law of inertia in mechanics which makes one action conditional on another"(3). Since there is power, there should be resistance otherwise power cannot be described as productive, and any discourse then has to include both of power and resistance:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or rose up against it. ... We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart. (Foucault, *HS Vol. 1*: 100- 1)

In the same context, Foucault was completely against restrictions and controls imposed on the body and its history throughout the past three centuries. That is why resistance of those restrictions was also a central idea in his *Discipline and Punish*. Adopting genealogy, Foucault attempts to recapture histories of the struggle done against all forms of subjugation practiced upon the body. He provokes the individuals with shared experiences of subjugation to revolt collectively, not in the name of Marxism or any universal theory, but in the name of the body and its denied rights and history. Foucault himself shared in early 1970s in prison revolts that "have been about the body" (*Discipline and Punish* 30). The prison is the place where the body is objectified by power through penal practices such as coercive segregation. Foucault accordingly contends that revolts have to be as forceful as these practices. Wherever the subjects are silenced in prisons, asylums, or factories, they have to defy and resist all subjugating and intolerable practices. Resistance thus is considered "the milestone in [the] process of liberation" from any restrictions and any forms of coercion (Abd Al-Salam 12).

As Power is "ubiquitous and all-encompassing," resistance and revolution should be also total and comprehensive as "the generality of the struggle specifically derives from the system of power itself, from all the forms in which power is exercised and applied" (Pickett 445; *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* 232). Any revolution has to include all institutions in the society (schools, prisons, asylums, factories ... etc.). However, it should be noted here that if Foucault believes that the revolutionary action has to be general and total, he also rejects the idea that the whole society has to participate in developing the plans for a revolution. He finds that "such an ideal [...] arises from a utopian dream" (456).

For the strangeness of the aforementioned Foucauldian ideas on power, many scholars have become preoccupied with analyzing Foucault's power and its relationship with knowledge and resistance. The result was multiple critical views that vary between support and opposition. Although it is not confined to politics and can be considered as a social phenomenon, Foucault's power has been criticized for being elusive and insufficient for initiating practical actions. According to Michel Power, "Foucault's conception of power within Power-knowledge [...] has troubled many commentators. Like discourse, the idea of power as all pervasive, permeating, and 'unowned' threatens to make the concept empty" (49).

Another opposing critique has been advocated by Dianna Taylor who states that "Foucault's critique encompasses traditional moral systems, he denies himself recourse to concepts such as 'freedom' and 'justice', and therefore lacks the ability to generate positive alternatives" (2-3). Likewise, Michael S. Roth criticizes Foucault's perception of freedom describing it as "a curious, even primitive kind of freedom, insofar as it is radically individualist"; it is based on the individual's capacity to construct himself and this process of "self-fashioning [...] takes place through revolt against our determinations, and we are always already determined" (72). Roth sees in this individualist type of Foucault's freedom clear negligence of the importance of solidarity to cause any change and any freedom within the community, asserting that "Foucault did advocate change, and he knew that change was impossible without some kind of solidarity" (73).

However, with all such controversies over Foucault's ideas he is still described by some critics and readers as "a man of great mental energy and verbal fluency [who] dealt with a wide range of sociological themes, from the treatment of madness to the distribution of power in society" (Weightman 384). If his ideas were perceived as strange, this might be justified by the fact that he "was not a systematic thinker. He referred to himself as 'an experimenter' as opposed to a 'theorist'" (Taylor 1). He did not like stereotypes and constant or undeveloped relations in life as he believed that

The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think you would have the courage to write it? What is true for writing and for a love relationship is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end. (Foucault, "Truth, Power, Self" 9)

According to Conway, "throughout his career, [Foucault] sought to account for the emergence within modernity of the self-constituting subject, a being contingently endowed with a historically circumscribed complement of powers and potentialities" (201). Individuals are the structure of any community and when this structure is well-constructed it will cause the required change and freedom that any community seeks. For this reason, Foucault urges individuals to change their traditional way of thinking or, in other words, "to learn to think otherwise" and therefore they will be "better able to resist the specific forms of power in [their] present" (Roth 74). Another critic, Mark Poster, sees that "Foucauldian readings are sensitive to the political impact of the text and the political unconscious behind the text, informing its statements and shaping its lines of enunciation" (278). Through his writings, Foucault wants people to liberate themselves from any restrictions that determine and control their being in the world. Freedom for him is an expression of one's ability to resist any practices that control him. "The idea that truth gives us no choice, that truth necessarily forces us to accept it and build up our conduct in accordance to it, is an extremely dangerous ethico-political *trap* that Foucault help[s] us to unmask and overcome" (O'Farrell, "What is Regime of Truth?").

To sum up, the aforementioned diversity of critical views on Foucault's thought can be described as an outcome of his complicated and ambiguous character as well as his constant challenge of the long-established disciplines and intellectual system within the society. Foucault's life was like a long journey of exploration beyond the accepted knowledge within the society and how it is influenced by power, and the result of such exploration was his unique ideas on power/knowledge relationship and the techniques used by modern and contemporary societies to objectivise their subjects. Foucault's model of power can be described as "an ongoing social game that determines not only what things are, but also who and what we are, i.e. 'Subjectification'" not objectivisation of individuals" (Dahlager 223).

The relationship between individuals and the State in Foucault's point of view is not a relationship between powerless and powerful. An individual is not a passive recipient of power; he has a role, he performs, and has the ability to resist such power. This does not also mean that Foucault denies existence of restrictions and limits imposed by various institutions within the

society, but he asserts that those individuals have the ability to resist such power which exists in all forms of daily interactions between the individuals and the institutions. This means that power relations are not permanent or stable as they can be changed at any time. Foucault's model of power focuses on resistance rather than the oppressive and repressive practice of power.

This unique analysis of power structure has in fact inspired many activists against racism and injustice across the world; a fact that made his influence on modern and contemporary societies undeniable regardless the diversity of opinions on his ideas between supporters and opponents. Admitting his philosophical and intellectual contributions, Foucault was listed in 2007 as the most cited scholar in humanities according to *ISI Web of Science*. That is to say that Foucault was controversial but, undoubtedly, influential.

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