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**A review on Foucault and discourse dynamics \*<sup>Δ</sup>**

**Foucault ve söylem dinamiklerine ilişkin bir derleme**

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**Abstract**

Foucault's ideas on power and discourse bring us to a world of a dilemma. Postmodernism and poststructuralism are the approaches stick that to Foucault's ideas however he still has a different way of expressing within his understanding and highlighting of power. His life also includes many clues about his views and choices as well. Even his main thoughts are based on power and discourse, while explaining these he mentions many other concepts/ideas such as knowledge and power relation, power over the body (biopower), madness and desire. Foucault closely associates power with discourse. He sees the soul in a prison and sees the discourse as the monitor of power. He believes power is relative in this context. Everything seems to find its way in discourse and the discourse is the thing that stimulates the subject. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the relations and structures underlying the discourse to be able to reveal power relations. The aim of this study is to evaluate Foucault's power and discourse dynamics within the framework of his own life and works and to analyze the discussions on this subject. The research is a review article in this direction.

**Keywords:** Power, Discourse, Biopower, Subject, Genealogy

**Öz**

Foucault'nun iktidar ve söylem üzerindeki fikirleri bizi bir çıkmaza sürüklemektedir. Postmodernizm ve postyapısalcılık Foucault'nun fikirleriyle bağlantılı anlayışlar olsa da iktidara ilişkin düşünce ve vurgularının farklı bir yönü olduğunu söylemek mümkündür. Yaşamı da görüşleri ve seçimlerine ilişkin ipuçları barındırmaktadır. Temel düşünceleri iktidar ve söylem odaklı olsa da Foucault bunları açıklarken bilgi ve iktidar ilişkisi, beden üzerindeki iktidar kontrolü (biyoiktidar), delilik, arzu gibi kavramlardan da söz etmektedir. Foucault iktidarı söylemle yakından ilişkilendirmektedir. Ruhu bir hapisanede görür ve söylemi iktidarın yönlendiricisi olarak açıklar. İktidarın bu bağlamda göreceli olduğunu belirtmektedir. Her şeyin yolunu söylem doğrultusunda bulduğu ve söylemin özneyi hareket ettiren güç olduğu görülmektedir. O halde, iktidar ilişkilerini ortaya çıkarmak için söylemin altında yatan ilişkileri ve yapıları anlamak oldukça önemlidir. Bu çalışmanın da amacı Foucault'nun iktidar ve söylem dinamiklerini kendi yaşamı ve eserleri çerçevesinde değerlendirerek, buna yönelik tartışmaları analiz etmektir. Araştırma, bu doğrultuda bir derleme makalesidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İktidar, Söylem, Biyoiktidar, Özne, Soybilim

<sup>Δ</sup> Yazarlar bu çalışmanın tüm süreçlerinin araştırma ve yayın etiğine uygun olduğunu, etik kurallara ve bilimsel atıf gösterme ilkelerine uyduğunu beyan etmiştir. Aksi bir durumda KAYÜSOSDER Dergisi sorumlu değildir.

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper, the focus is on Foucault's views on power and discourse. It is a review study and the claims by Foucault regarding power and discourse put forward in the light of his life and other studies, ideas in a slight struggle to reveal the main direction of his discussions and **endeavour** to understand his way of conveying his messages. In this way, it is important to see the intellectual atmosphere and the way of living in the background of his life. It would be a good point to refer to the concepts of 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' as a rational step to start.

The modernism movement is an understanding that emerged with the rejection of thoughts and patterns in the Medieval, associated with a new lifestyle, and is based on principles such as positivism, rationality, and universality of knowledge (Yıldırım, 2009). 'Modern' term is used meaning 'now' within the late sixteenth century a parting that period from medieval and ancient times. However, it is a retrospective term since the 1950s and so the dominant version of 'modern' is stuck in nearly between 1890 and 1940 even so still used for a century and half-a-century old times (Williams, 1989). According to Habermas (1981) while modernism is found to improve on the tension between abstract reason and factual subjects, representation and reality, postmodernism tries to change the order of representation into an infinite raw material of nature.

Any review of Foucault first requires an examination of the ideas of postmodernism and poststructuralism. Only this way, a better understanding of Foucault's thoughts can be achieved. Besides postmodernism is defined as "postmodern" or "rejection of modernism", it criticizes modernism in terms of simplification and rationalization of life and humanity (Memişoğlu, Eser & Adıgüzel, 2011). In general, postmodernist thought has been shaped around two different attitudes: "According to Habermas's understanding, a new conservative reaction, and according to Lyotard, the cultural formation that emerged with the crisis of the capitalist welfare state" (Sallan & Boybeyi, 1994). Postmodernism rejects the idea of universal social science based on the understanding that the different subjective positions of people and societies cannot be measured against each other (Agger, 1991). That is, postmodernism aims to examine individuals' experiences in discourse and context rather than a general social conceptualization.

The postmodernist understanding, which makes itself felt in architecture, painting, literature and many other fields, expresses the society as the society of the information age and reveals that, together with capitalism, the concern for consumption in society precedes principles such as equality, the personal is political, and the media and communication networks constitute a guiding power (Sallan & Boybeyi, 1994). Postmodern identity is quite different from the understanding of identity in modernism. Foucault states that identity is formed within discourses and then adopted; the different identity characteristics of the individual are in interaction with each other (Karaduman, 2010).

Poststructuralism, on the other hand, is defined as a "common platform of thought" where different disciplines come together (Yıldırım, 2015). This approach is also called deconstruction (Balkin, 2004). Poststructuralists rejected the structuralist holistic understanding of society and argued that small-scale organizations within society exist in the nature of society and that there is no single central reality (Say, 2013, p. 345). Like other poststructuralists, Foucault criticizes giving a central power or meaning to the subject and states that knowledge is shaped within a discourse (Say, 2013, p. 340).

It is seen that Foucault emphasizes the rejection of a fixed reality and the existence of discourse above everything in the context of postmodernism and poststructuralism. In particular, the examination of the ideas of power and knowledge, discipline, and biopower is vital in order to analyze the understanding of Foucault in general. However, one of the important factors affecting these thoughts is Foucault's life and preferences. Therefore, it will be useful to talk about his life in order to understand what he wants to tell.

### 1.1. *The life of Michel Foucault*

Michel Foucault was born on October 15, 1926, as the middle of three siblings, in the town of Poitiers, France, in a family that could be accepted as middle-class or wealthy. While his father took over the family profession of a doctor, his mother could not become a doctor despite her desire due to the conditions of the period, but managed the clinic of her husband Paul-André and devoted herself to her children. Foucault started school at the age of four, joining his sister's class. Foucault, whose first educational period was in the shadow of the war; after his education at IV. Henry High School, he studied at Ecole Normale Supérieure. He read philosophers such as Hegel, Marx, Kant, Husserl and Heidegger and was influenced by their thoughts. He received his degree in philosophy in 1948 and psychology the following year. The French philosopher, who was also educated in the field of psychopathology, worked in various mental hospitals for a while. He also taught part-time at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. He defended his doctoral dissertation «Histoire de la folie» at the University of Clermont-Ferrand in 1960. Foucault taught at Uppsala University and served as the representative of French culture in Warsaw and Hamburg. He taught psychology and philosophy at Clermont Ferrand University until 1966, where he met Daniel Defert, who had a very important place for the rest of his life. He worked in Tunisia between 1966-68 and then returned to Paris. After his experience at the University of Vincennes, he became a professor of the History of Thought Systems at the College de France in 1970 and held this position until the end of his life (Macey, 2015).

Foucault, who showed his first rebellion by refusing to continue his family profession, had depressed periods especially at Ecole Normale Supérieure and was on a quest everywhere he went throughout his life. His sexual preferences, on the other hand, have caused some exclusion due to his sensitivity to differences and preferences throughout his life. This overview reveals the fact that Foucault actually finds himself in deadlocks in the power control he speaks of, and that he had to live within the limits of the discourse, the normalization of the discourse or the act of controlling the abnormal in a way that forced him.

## 2. Power and Discourse in Foucault

In Foucault's works, he also focused on the power and the bindingness of power and the effect of discourse in this direction. Discourse can only be understood through the institutions and power that produce it, and it is produced through exclusion or control. The tools of this control are; prohibition, sanity-madness and right-wrong conflict (Demir Güneş, 2013). Discourse can be the tool and goal of power; it is the one that ensures the existence, strengthening or weakening of power (Mavi, 2015). In this idea, which puts forward that the power of discourse is everywhere and in every field, there is the understanding that humanity is a prisoner of discourse or lives in its traps. As long as the discourse creates the strength of power, it seems inevitable to bow down to something. Foucault argues that the effect of the discourse continues even when it is thought that something reverse is done, and there should not be an effort to create a new discourse while moving away from the discourse (Örmeci, 2008). The powerful and complex structure of discourse shapes even the thoughts against it (Foucault: İnanışlar, gelenekler, 2011). Discourse contains meaning and social relations and is not only about what can be said or thought, but also who can speak, when, with what authority (Ball, 1990, p. 2).

Foucault states that “genealogy” should be used, and it is possible to reveal power relations with deconstruction (Foucault: İnanışlar, gelenekler, 2011). According to Foucault's thought, there are three methodological processes: archeology, genealogy and ethics. Genealogy or the genealogical approach can be perceived as a transformation process from Foucault's understanding or method of archeology, and archeology examines discourses, revealing how they have formed and the construction process of social realities (Walshaw, 2007). Archeology can be regarded as describing discursive formations or they are being defined, and explained rather than seeking meaning beyond them (Garrit, 2010). While analyzing the discourse, which is a unity of expressions in the context of common rules (Revel, 2012, p. 114), a meaning beyond these expressions should not be sought and expressions should not be interpreted other than being defined (Garrit, 2010, p. 203). It is significant to see that these three

methods are not excluding each other but genealogy analyzes what archeology does, ethics also covers what genealogy works with. Therefore, it is rational to put forward these three methods under the title of 'Foucauldian Method' (Balci, 2015). Naturally, studying Foucault and his views makes us keep up with this method to clear up our minds.

In his works *The Order of Things* (1970) and *Archeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault indicated how disciplinary knowledge works, knowledge systems are composed of expressions and discursive events, and questioned the understanding that the subject is a fixed entity (Walshaw, 2007, pp. 10-11). There is no authorship relationship between the subject and the expression; the position the subject will take is determined by discourse (Garrity, 2010, p. 202). The idea that the subject is a fiction formed in the discursive context that governs all thoughts and expressions (Walshaw, 2007, p. 11) requires the subject to be examined and analyzed within discourse and expressions. Using discourse analysis, it could be found how social behaviors and practices form individuals and groups (Garrity, 2010, p.202). In a platform where everything is shaped according to discourse, the role of the intellectual will be to make these analyzes and to reveal the hidden power relationship by going deep into what is accepted as true (Örmeci, 2008).

The means of controlling the subject can be seen in places such as prisons, schools, and mental hospitals. Foucault reveals that a prison is a place that reflects the existence of a mechanism that controls and watches without being seen, which he defines with the concept of a "panopticon" (Mavi, 2015). He also found modern social order similar to a prison. In his work "Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison", he stated that power actually aims to control individuals through individualization and aims to dominate (Foucault, 1992; as cited in Yücel Spahiu, 2002). The fact that everyone is registered in one place (school, hospital, army, etc.) facilitates the control. In fact, many different tools are used while controlling the body, and some of them can be listed as education, discipline and work (Mavi, 2015).

The power over the body and power that disciplines the body form the basis of Foucault's "biopolitics" and "biopower" ideas. In order to understand this idea, first of all, the change in the way the body is perceived and the domination trials on it should be examined. With the formation of the industrial society, the importance of the human body increased, and population planning, the emergence of a rush to create an orderly society, started the process of control and normalization over the society (Kalan, 2014). Institutions such as prisons where people are kept under surveillance and hospitals where the insane are rehabilitated have been the most important tools for the realization of these control policies. Foucault, who discussed the applications of this management approach to the body in his book "The History of Sexuality", emphasized that "the power has the right to take first of all" (Mavi, 2015, p. 4). The use of the body and sexuality, which is also a tool of capitalism, and the process of controlling sexuality and population in the context of biopolitics ensure the control of society (Mavi, 2015, p. 5). Foucault indicates that bio-power is a significant invention that fulfills capitalism's wish for the human body to take part in a restrained population and production in a controlled way (Foucault, 2005, p. 17). Biopolitics also refers to the transformative effect of power through discourse (Baştürk, 2012, p. 69).

In "History of Madness", in which it is made obvious that the definition and treatment of insanity vary according to the dominant discourse, it is explained that the insane who are different from the rest of the society, are turned into objects and disciplined through closure because they are out of discourse (Demir Güneş, 2013, p. 62). In fact, it is seen that discourse and power try to keep the body under strict surveillance and control by all means and dominate the body. Akay (2000) emphasizes that there is no need for the institutions in which this control network is made in the modern period, and based on the idea that the soul becomes the prison of the body, which was also put forward by Foucault, modern souls serve the discourse in a way that brings the function of other control tools (as cited in Mavi, 2015, p. 6). Foucault refers to the soul as the "imprisoned environment" and put forwards that the soul draws the boundaries of the body and does this with the influence of power (Kalan, 2014, p. 146).

Foucault's understanding of power is very difficult to analyze. He argues that the power, which he believes is created through discourses, exists at the base of all social relations (Walshaw, 2007, p. 21). Power is the way of acting on the subjects who perform the actions, that is, it is a set of actions over other actions (Foucault, 2005, p. 74). According to Foucault, power is a phenomenon that develops and

transforms throughout history, and power is a relational situation. The strength of power to create reality leaves it with the responsibility of creating a structure that draws the boundaries of people's behavior and establishing norms to abide by (Baştürk, 2012, p. 66). In this context, power places reality in a political identity and within the framework of social norms, in the way of creating "reality". Hence, this makes the nature of reality dependent.

On the other hand, there is a more complex relationship between desire, power, and interest than one might think; those who use or apply power are not always interested in it, and those who are attracted to it are not always its executors. The desire for power creates a one-way relationship between power and interest (Foucault & Deleuze, 1977). Being able to make sense of the functioning of power requires understanding the points it goes through, and for this, local and regional points should be focused on because those important details are included in daily relationships (Walshaw, 2007, p.21). Desire finds meaning in Foucault with the concept of power, and power is like a productive and pervasive root; therefore desire is not necessary for Foucault (Demir, 2014).

According to Foucault, the exercise of power occurs as the direction of behavior and the regulation of possible outcomes. (Foucault, 2005, p.74). Foucault did not see power only as a means of suppression; explained this by the consistent obedience of people to power (Demir, 2014). Gramsci argued that power should be declared through civil society, not by government or a similar authority, and the tool used in this context is "compliance"; which is very similar to Foucault's thought that people are bound to power not only as a tool of suppression but also by the control and surveillance mechanisms of the body, by obedience and harmony (Demir, 2014). The power shows its existence not by the means of using force, but by providing discipline by producing compliance (Mavi, 2015, p. 3).

Although it is explained under the concept of biopolitics that the power keeps the body under control, it is also very important to examine Foucault's idea of sexuality and its effect on feminism in this context. By limiting sexuality to a tool of productivity, capitalism limited sexual intercourse to brothels and similar places (Boyne, 2011, p. 22). In Foucault, on the other hand, sexuality and pleasure are intertwined; in establishing the connection between rule or power and pleasure, Foucault exhibited an understanding that pluralizes it and revealed that it exists everywhere and in every relationship of society (Boyne, 2011, p. 23). Foucault inserts that 'civil society is similar to insanity or sexuality'. Even if they are all temporary and operational figures arising from the power relations or the game between the rest, they are real even if also they did not exist in every period (Foucault, 2015). The relationship between capitalism and the domination of the body and the power behind it created a link between feminism and Foucault (Akgül, 2012, p. 74). Post-modern feminists, who state that the gender roles of women and men are formed as a result of bodily and ideological control mechanisms, assert that the capitalist system is in harmony with masculine behaviors and that the discourses of masculinity and femininity have actually become a means and object of control of the capitalist system (Akgül, 2012, pp. 74-75). These ideas bring Foucault and feminists together in a perspective that sexual identities and bodies are constructed under control. In other words, it is seen that the mission attributed to women and men through consumption culture or in line with social roles actually puts forward the perception that gender is a social formation. In this sense, feminists' and Foucault's understandings of impersonation created through order will overlap.

According to Foucault, who stated that discourse and power are so powerful, it is more logical to make efforts to shake up the discourse instead of struggling with it; it is important to reveal the power relations underlying relations and structures by making analyzes (Örmeci, 2008). There is an understanding that there are many elements that control the body and mind regarding power and its control, whose influence we feel everywhere, and that people are policing themselves because they are internalized by individuals (Afary & Anderson, 2012, p. 43). Foucault also mentions that the modern world has attempted to implement a less visible punishment system and that this system functions to make individuals obedient and internalized (Afary & Anderson, 2012, p. 43).

It is seen that Foucault fulfilled important duties regarding education, gave philosophy and psychology courses in many institutions, and held alternative meetings with students. However, examining the reflection of his thoughts on education requires a search beyond these. When the state of

being a subject is examined in the context of the classroom, Foucault's thought puts forward that the situations that determine the student's being a subject will determine whether she/he is strong or weak and if these include not only becoming an object of discourse in the classroom but also being active in the context of practices that give a certain autonomy and opportunities, possibilities, that makes him/her strong (Walshaw, 2007, pp. 74-76). The educational environment in which the individual is located creates the identity of the person through the dominant discourse and this can be considered valid for both the student and the teacher (Walshaw, 2007). For example, it is observed that mathematics teaching in primary education includes normalization and supervision processes, and in line with this, everything is spoken and unspoken is related to teacher knowledge and teachers' subjectivity (Walshaw, 2007, p. 127). While the normalization process takes place similar to one in the society, those who reject it are marginalized (Walshaw, 2007). Foucault sees exams as a discipline tool of power; he states that exams bring individualization on paper and follow a path towards making the individual exist for knowledge through classification and distribution (Mavi, 2015, p. 10). Besides, the successful child of this modern exam world tends to see being tested at every opportunity as natural and inevitable; this is another dimension of the internalization of the practices of power and knowledge (Ball, 1990, p.40).

### **3. Conclusion**

Foucault's life contains very crucial clues about his personality and thoughts. His shy but at the same time ambitious and competitive personality, his sometimes extreme depression, and his sexual preferences are the main factors that made him an important philosopher. The war-time crisis in which he spent his childhood, his choices in school life, and his depression in the effort of self-knowledge can be considered as experiences that enable Foucault to see the power of discourse and the restrictiveness of power more intensely. The feeling of being rejected or feeling excluded from being different enabled Foucault to better understand the will of the capitalist order and the power to control the undesirable and useless.

To conclude and evaluate what Foucault tells us could help us to understand to see the indications within social life. The implications of bio-power can be clearly seen when the current formations in today's media and social networks are examined. The human body has become both a tool of power and a phenomenon that it keeps under control. People, on the other hand, have adopted a control mechanism that sets limits for themselves by internalizing the existence of power. Foucault's thoughts on madness lead us into confusion as to who the real madman is. However, this confusion actually leads us to the conclusion that the insane is unwanted and useless, isolated or kept apart from "normal" in a controlled way. Foucault also associated knowledge with power and stated that knowledge can be a tool and also a goal of power. Knowledge is shaped by discourse, so context is important in evaluating knowledge.

In general, it is seen that Foucault talks about the social life that develops around the discourse and is transformed into a network with power relations. Although the objects and examples that Foucault uses to explain the dominance of power and discourse are quite explanatory, it is very difficult to analyze Foucault in real terms. Maybe this situation unveils the author-reader relationship that he stated and leaves us alone with our own meanings in every text we read.

### **4. Ethical issues**

In this study, all the rules within "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" were obeyed. None of the actions specified under the heading "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", which is the second part of the directive, have been taken.

I declare that this research is one of the studies that do not require ethical committee approval.

## 5. Conflict of Interest

The author of the study declares that there are no material or other conflicts of interest in this study that may affect the results or interpretations.

## 6. Author Contribution

The study has been designed and written by the author.

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