

## Criticism on foucauldian power and resistance

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**Abstract:** In this article, Michel Foucault's problematic triangle "power-resistance-productivity" will be discussed critically and how resistance is placed into power relations will substantially be portrayed, interpreting Foucault's dilemmas while locating « power, struggle, productive resistance and politics as forms of social existence » in everyday relations. He positions power on a fixed base, determining it as "always constant". This continuum singularizes forms of social existence - these are margins created by power in a society - and leads to a corollary resistance, however; the meta-analysis of power constitutes an impediment to productive resistance which tries to get itself free from forms of power. Moreover, Foucault doesn't manifest clear definitions in the placement of positive productivity in power relations and in view of reasons above, he displays an unexpected structuralist identity.

**Keywords :** Power, productive resistance, power relations, post-structuralism, struggle.

### Foucault ' un iktidar ve direniş kavramlarına eleştiri

**Özet:** Bu makalede, Michel Foucault'nun sorunsal üçlemesi olan " iktidar-direniş-üretim" kavramları eleştirel bir yaklaşımla incelenecek ve özünde, Foucault' nun direniş kavramını güç ilişkilerine nasıl konumlandığı açıklanarak, toplumsal varoluş biçimleri olan "iktidar, mücadele, üretken direniş ve siyaset" çelişkileri yorumlanacaktır. Foucault, iktidar kavramını "kesintisiz süreklilik" olarak tanımlayarak, bu kavramı durağan bir temele sabitlemektedir. Bu süreklilik toplumsal varoluş biçimlerini- ki bunlar toplumun iktidar tarafından üretilen marjlarıdır - tekleştirilmekte ve doğal sonuç olan direniş kavramını oluşturmaktadır. Ancak; iktidarın bu meta-çözümüne, kendisini iktidardan soyutlamaya çalışan üretici direniş kavramına engel teşkil etmektedir. Foucault, bu noktada direnişin üretici biçiminin güç ilişkilerine olumlu açıdan nasıl konumlandığını belirsiz bırakmış ve yukarıda sıralanan sebeplerle yapısökümcülüğün aksine, beklenmeyen yapısalcı bir kimlik oluşturmuştur.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** İktidar, üretici direniş, güç ilişkileri, yapısökümcülük, mücadele.

### Introduction

This paper tends to draw a number of points from Michel Foucault's analysis based on power and resistance. Foucault leads the reader to misunderstand his over-simplified, meanwhile, over-complexified definitions on 'power'. Excluding the economic determinant as a source of power, Foucault had to define the process more backhandedly. We consider that the historical background and reasons of Foucault's rejecting the principal theory based on economism while defining power processes should be correctly read. To begin with, Foucault proposes the following statement while defining what he means by "power" as clearly as possible: "Where there is power, there is

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resistance and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position exteriority in relation to power”<sup>3</sup>.

“Can we make the syllogistic deduction:

- 1) Where there is power, there is resistance;
- 2) Power is everywhere; therefore, resistance is everywhere?

If power and resistance occupy the same place, are we to conclude that they are inseparable, if not indistinguishable? Is resistance, are resistances, merely a moment in the system Foucault calls ‘power’?”<sup>4</sup>

These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. By definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations”<sup>5</sup> It makes the reader array the following statements as; the concrete operation of resistance remains largely an open question:

- « 1. Power is a relation
2. Freedom is the condition of power
3. Power is distinct from domination »<sup>6</sup>

With regard to what Foucault says; power is nothing more than the relationship of power and domination -that is composed through wars in a period of history. However, the phenomenon of war-by its nature- should be based on the ground of a cause. Foucault had to ground war to a cause to define power. Due to the fact that this would connote the theories he rejected at first (such as economism) and would get him into the danger of antagonism with himself, with a sleight of hand of an illusionist, he preferred to define power not as an institution, but as a strategy and as a process. Thus power has let out from causes and results and it has been placed to spatial trait by perpetuating its reality. Just as motion’s description of its existence in matter, power came to a state of shaping, forming and generating “man” in society. The conceptualization of domination, including all kinds of power relations, is manifested problematic because domination resultant from power stresses resistance but not social transformation. How are expected to position liberation (if there exists or alternatively creating a discourse of liberation), isn’t it resistance or does it embody a social transformation inside?

## Binary Thinking

Foucault, rejecting Lukacs’ idea of the inner person<sup>7</sup>, may be better understood in this case. If power is a space, a form of existence, it should also be the formative of all other essences as well.

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<sup>3</sup> The History of Sexuality. Trans. Robert Hurley. Vol. Volume I:Introduction. New York: Pantheon Books, 1979.

<sup>4</sup> Deleuze, Foucault. "Points of Encounters Location." Where there is power, there is resistance” (Theory and Criticism, UWO). Comps. Mark Jull and Matt Sang.

<sup>5</sup> The History of Sexuality. Ibid ;95.

<sup>6</sup> Deleuze, Foucault/. "Points of Encounters Location." Where there is power, there is resistance” (Theory and Criticism, UWO). Comps. Mark Jull and Matt Sang.

Herein, an essence of a person or its subjectivity is thoroughly a faulty conceptualization. For, essence as a strategy is created, reformed and varied by the reality of power that reconfigure any of our moment. Thus, subjectivity does not become something which a person gains, but instead is an effect of power and other influences. Following this, the paper needs to recapitulate Foucault's statement; if power is a form of existence- in a continuous fact- it may well be claimed the same for the thing-determined. It is indefinite and mobile. By this new definition; herein, Foucault refuses the essence, subjectivity and determinism of all descriptions.

While describing power, Foucault gives up the idea of perceiving it as an acquisition top to bottom (although he cannot succeed for some). Power should be internalized in every margin of society as a condition of its existence. In a sense, all social bonds and spaces must be determined and formed by the realism of power. In such case, the reticulated power must surround the society, complexify it and keep itself alive as an eternal form.

To him, as the act of power is based on a constant strife and struggle, merely to focus on class struggle would be understood as "not seeing the forest for the trees". In other words, class struggle articulates just one of the countless aspects of power. This very moment, we can question whether Foucault rejects the integrity and singularity of reality and searches it in micro margins. If it is the case, I would personally reject his idea. His theory is the integrated expression of reality; moreover, he deepens power as a single form by analyzing its tactical process; prisons, asylums, family...etc. It is true that he searches power in the margins of society and analyzes through them but by arguing that power, described above all existence, is already "everywhere", he fixes it on a steady base. For him, it is pointless to state power in micro or macro-scales; defining state power in politics or power in a church indicates just a stylistic difference between them. His arguments about the heterogeneity and differing forms of the society, consisting of individuals circulating in the circle of power, may be voidable because an unforeseen macro perspective analysis of power ensues from his conceptualization of power (the analysis of power both in macro and micro-perspectives share a common inflexible conclusion, that is ; power is and will be everywhere)

Following this, Foucault has come through some results following his determination of power as struggle and resistance; politics approves of inter-power inequality and perpetuates it. Seeing that politics is maintaining war by other means, to Foucault, conflict determines the result of this war, not the politics. This specification of him is crucially important. For, he expects to get through the scrape with it. Foucault doesn't regard the forms of power -analyzed through the margins of society- as different from each other and as parts that are consistent in their integrities. On the contrary, he singularizes all forms of power. In that case power that is a form of social existence, has pre-determined codes and, functioning of these acts enable the reader to comprehend the fact of power.

### **On where the resistance is**

Necessarily, the following question ensues from such a high integration: If the codes and operational logic of power are similar or the same, then shouldn't the resistance and struggle against it be shared? If so, his proposition; "the politics intending to change the social structure will

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<sup>7</sup> See Lukacs, Georg. "Studies in Marxist Dialectics." History&Class Consciousness. Part 3. The Mit Press;Cambridge,Massachusetts, 1999.

ultimately reproduce power” doesn’t contradict the present perspective. Foucault tries to respond to these questions with his above-referred determination: Resistance will swing the balance of the war, not politics. In that case, social existence is the whole of struggles. Resistance is the natural consequence of a struggle. In a sense, society is identified with the converted form of two basic facts; struggle and resistance. However, there is not an identification that allows any positive upper skip. That’s why it is not the struggle itself that is determinant, but the will of resistance. Resistance -in that form- is a productive venture. It cannot be guaranteed which of the sides will attack and which of them will defend, both sides may convert to the other, related to the condition of the conflict. So it may be claimed from the perspective of Foucault that power, as much as resistance itself, can be productive. There is still the question of agency derived from Foucault’s notion of power and domination and we question whether he gives any guidance about how or when to resist.

### **Marginalize or singularize**

Foucault practices his general analysis on the base using margins of the social structure as a laboratory and comes to some conclusions: Power is a form of social existence, this form cannot be grounded to a permanent or pre-determined factor; thereby social existence, determined by power, cannot have any permanent essence, either. However, it can move in accordance with the mutually positioning of power and resistance. The binary opposites of resistance centers -during the struggle- should also be considered. In short, power as much as resistance, ‘potentially’ embodies productive forms. With this inference, Foucault -regarding his theory based on power - emphasizes “the impossibility” of demolishing power, in return, states that there is already no need for it as the unique productive action of social existence is possible with resistance against that power.

Supposing that power interpenetrates in all interactions, Is it possible to alter oppressive situations? How do we have to act to create the productive resistance? The appeal to specify it doesn’t help us to elucidate the question of how one is to act. His attitude towards the issue is not satisfactory -leaving spaces open to confusion- he relocates the following argument: “What defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions”<sup>8</sup>. Foucault, in one of his interviews, is perhaps being obscure when he claims that "I scarcely use the word power, and if I use it on occasion it is simply as shorthand for the expression I generally use: relations of power...power is always present: I mean a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other" <sup>9</sup> This brings me to the next point: A relation can be called a power relation only when there is freedom that responds within it. A foregone conclusion of the partnership of power and resistance is that; power is a characteristic of all relationships between subjects; domination describes only certain configurations of power, those in which the freedom that is natural to power is limited and resistance. In spite of being aware of the kind of relativism he advocates , we will argue that power relations cannot be reduced simply to binaries, because power is actually formed a decentered multiplicity of social relations, extending far beyond the direct participants in any given power relationship. Determining relations and exposing a productive resistance on it remain as an “insidious” in his theory.

Put more strongly, Foucault rejected the deterministic interpretation of history and its positive transformation, instead; he replaced them with continuous power and continuous resistance by

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<sup>8</sup> The History of Sexuality. Ibid.1979 .

<sup>9</sup> Kel, Mark G. E. The political philosophy of Michel Foucault. Taylor&Francis, 2009.

emphasizing the positive/creative subjectivity. He reinforced the deterministic interpretations related to the self-evaluation of history in a more 'totalitarian' form. Foucault's anti-Hegelianism prevented him seeing the whole picture, that is; "Rather than take the dialectical path which would have allowed him to break out of the vicious cycle of power and resistance by positing resistance as an effect which can outgrow its cause and overturn it, Foucault remains uncomfortably trapped within this cycle."<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

Consequently, Foucault confirmed power with similar tools, rose against it above the margins of society and determined the similar characteristics of the positive transformation of resistance. Even so, he modeled power in a hopeless case, totalizing it with its double: resistance. Later on - ever so he clarified his theory of power in shorter works and interview, still avoided offering any action or program that attempted to replace the current dynamics. Let it be admitted that, at least, he laid bare his thought about future changes such as: "All my analyses are against the ideal of universal necessities in human existence. They show the arbitrariness of institutions and show which space of freedom we can still enjoy and how many changes can still be made".<sup>11</sup> However, the crucial point the paper argues is that he creates a meta-analysis of a decentered power- probably involuntary- that is divided into partial fragments and that exists continuously with notions of governmentality and disciplinary. In spite of containing a continuous resistance that is productive in itself, power creates and reproduces this power in continuous forms, the contradiction here is; advocating a kind of relativism and resistance at the same time. In his meta-analytic context; if power is fixed on a "structuralist base", Foucault poses a problem for being labeled as a post-structuralist regarding his final analysis of his theory on power and resistance.

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