

The governmentality of fear: Foucault and the Politics of Security

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During his research of the 1970's, Michel Foucault passed through different phases of thinking: moving from the analysis of the "carceral," psychiatric power and anormality, he began to investigate the enlarged realms of power: the discourse of war in history ("Il faut défendre la société", 1976), governmentality (1977-1978), and the birth of biopolitics (1978-1979). As shown in the most recently published course of 1982-1983 ("Le gouvernement de soi et des autres"), Foucault's concerns during the 1980's were mainly devoted to addressing the political problems raised by his previous studies (exploring, for example, the original role of *parrhesia* in the Greek poleis and its theoretical changes in Plato's philosophy).

In other words, it can be said that Foucault's later research – stressing the role of subjects, *parrhesia*, *gouvernement de soi et des autres* – was, from a certain point of view, an attempt to solve the philosophical-political problem of late modernity: how can we resist power when it doesn't coincide with the State? What is often interpreted as a philosophical change in Foucault's theoretical attitude ("from power to subject") seems to puzzle his interpreters only because it forces them to re-think, at one and the same time, the subject and the nature of contemporary power.

In his 70s research Foucault demonstrated that power is beyond the realm of the State: power literally informs the human and social sciences (from psychiatry to economy), shapes historical discourse, produces practical ideas of man, and spreads governmentality in every human sphere. But what kind of State did Foucault have in mind when he invited us to transcend its role? I would suggest, the national State. The paradoxes and complexities he investigated were in a sense typical of a State that would dramatically change in a few years.

From the beginning of the 90s we have witnessed a general weakening or re-definition of the State prerogatives, the product of what is known as "the effects of globalization": world economy and finance overwhelm the capacity of control and management of any single State. But also in the field of foreign policy, the States – especially European States – have to renounce their traditional or classical space of action. More than to UN or other international organizations, national states must devolve their prerogatives to various networks: special or ad hoc alliances, trans-national

interests and so on. With the rising of “other” kinds of enemies (“rogue states”, terrorist networks or other real and imagined threats) States have to rethink the traditional conception of their military power and in fact depend upon other forms of defense.

Even what could be defined as a really autonomous State in a classical sense, the United States of America, has experienced this dramatic change. I’m not only thinking to the financial and economic, but also the political limitations on its sovereignty. The failure of G.W. Bush’s strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan can be interpreted as the end of an illusion—namely, the US’s capacity to act independently of lesser world powers. Even strategic changes in the military (think only of the new role of corporate warriors), intended to settle problems of recruitment and of the acceptability of war to the public, have led to major controversies and to a worsening of the US/ position – which implies more dependence on world powers.

But here I am interested primarily in the consequences of this state of affairs – in Foucault’s revised terms, something like the “global governmentality” – and their effects on subjects. Think of the “carceral.” Imprisonment is now only one variable in the control of social dangers and enemies. From Guantanamo camp to detentions centers for undocumented aliens, from “on the spot detention” of suspects in police stations to the forced removal of gypsies from urban areas, from “encampment” of entire peoples in the Middle East to the “insulation” of marginal youth in “banlieues” or social Bantustans in Europe – the “carceral” is experiencing innovative forms and cannot be reduced to the “classical” model of prisons. Moreover, we speak today of forms of detention and bodily control that in many cases are managed by transnational entities (for example, European agencies like Frontex and so on)

But the same can be said of soft and “sweet” forms of psychiatric power. With the same world language, the same culture of interpersonal dependence, the same stress on well being, self-empowerment or improving of the individual self, global society is experiencing new forms of social ties: paradoxically, even the last philosophical writings of Michel Foucault are often invoked to legitimize the penetration of psychological *langue de bois* in the social life (philosophical counseling, *souci de soi* and so on).

I think that the proliferation of global forms of the carceral and the diffusion of a psycho-pedagogic society are not at odds: they correspond – in the global governmentality – to the twofold face of power: external and internal. In a sense, when the traditional state is losing its prerogatives (Westphalian, so to speak), these proliferate beyond the geographical boundaries of the states. Any “national” society is able to articulate itself in internal and external dimensions. The war on terrorism is transnational and

the war on illegal immigration begins - according to Blair, Sarkozy and Berlusconi – in the streets of our cities. At the same time, every kind of micro-social help is available for subjects thinking of themselves in terms of legitimate citizens.

What is shaping the global governmentality is not, of course, a global Big Brother or a new kind of Uncle Sam calling the world to a general war against the internal or external “villains.” It is a mix of State practices, cultural tendencies, social entrepreneurship, and business opportunities. Explicit racism can coexist with multiculturalism, in exactly the same way that a migrant with uncertain status can find a job today in a sweatshop or be arrested tomorrow in a street. The managing of uncertainty becomes the scope of different powers: power needs uncertainty to manage it, like cars need fuel. This is particularly clear when “insecurity” is involved.

Fear, according to Hobbes, gave birth to the idea of Leviathan or State (at the end of his life, he recognized that fear marked his life: “And hereupon it was my mother dear/ Did bring forth twins at once, both me and fear”, *Vita carmine expressa*). Expanding the original or Hobbesian relation between power and fear to the contemporary state of affairs, we could think that fear or insecurity – in every form, internal or external – is a general resource for the global governmentality. It fuels the right of global oligarchies to act on “our” behalf, it promotes innovation in the field of controls, it justifies limitation of civil liberties, it mobilizes social energies. Given its lack of definite meanings – in this sense contemporary fear resembles what Heidegger called Angst, the “fear without content” – insecurity can be assumed not as an “error” or evil or social defect, but the real scope of the life in the era of “global governmentality,” something that I would define as the “Dasein-politics” of our time, an idea less rigorous but more encompassing than biopolitics.

In sum, my paper proposes to rethink Foucault, starting from his findings of the 70s, in order to make sense of a situation that he began to understand but at the same time evolved too far from his time. This is another way to celebrate the greatness of the thinker.