

Foucault on Resistance: Some Clarifications

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Abstract

Edward Said's reading of Foucault essentializes the Frenchman's notion of resistance to a kind of fatalism that Foucault's writings cannot be reduced to. In two famous essays – "Traveling Theory" and "Foucault and the Imagination of Power" – Said criticizes Foucault's analysis of power relations conceptualized in the 1970s. According to Said, when Foucault says power is omnipresent he actually means that power is omnipotent; that is to say, almost impossible to oppose. Foucault's notion of resistance, according to Said, is too docile and incapable of altering the "unequal" interlocution between power and resistance. The Arab-American intellectual even argues that Foucault did not take resistance seriously and made it appear as a dependent function of power. However, this paper intends to offer a substantively different interpretation of Foucault's power/resistance theory. This paper argues that as a thinker who opposed domination and authority, Foucault has no reason to perceive power to be all conquering. He has pointed at the vulnerability of power, indexing how resistance movements force power to change. To accuse that Foucault was reluctant to take resistance seriously is surely to essentialize the author's work. It is important to note the gradual transformation and the paradoxical nature of Foucault's works when one sets to critique his idices.

Edward Said and Michael Foucault

Some of the flagrant misunderstandings in the domain of cultural theory in the '80s have occurred out of the conviction that a postmodern or a post-structuralist kind of intervention has little to offer in terms of ethically construed dissidence, that the works of Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard invariably succumb to fatalism or irrationalism and can do little to address the real political problems of our time. Before focusing on the tendency that can be called postcolonial excess, let us remember an anecdote associated with Foucault. In fall 1977, a small group of demonstrators positioned near the Santé prison were suddenly approached by some forty policemen. The group was really small, containing twenty or so people trying to form a human chain to protest the extradition of a German lawyer who had sought asylum in France. The group of demonstrators, which included Foucault and his companion Défert, was manhandled and mercilessly beaten up by the charging policemen. It left many injured. Foucault too, like others, was a victim of this excessive force. Despite his stubborn refusal to see a physician, Foucault was ultimately persuaded by Défert to consult a doctor who found out that he had a broken rib. Nevertheless, only a day after this incident, he was on the barricades again, demonstrating and chanting slogans, risking further injury. In the life of this dissident intellectual, these are just two of the many incidents which kept bringing him into confrontations with police and authority¹.

Despite his involvement in street protests, Foucault, however, remained unusually reticent in expressing his view about dissidence and opposition in his writings. For him, "constraint" and "discipline" in scholarly endeavors were ways of cleansing the "transcendental narcissism" within academic practices (Posnock 1989, p. 147). Surprisingly, his austerity in expressing dissidence² through writings induced many counter-Foucauldian readings in the early 80s – Edward Said was preeminent among those who critiqued him – and led many critics to assume that Foucault was a fatalist who never took resistance seriously. This intellectual backlash in the 80s³, symptomized by Said, Couzens Hoy and Habermas, also contributed significantly to the belief that the Foucauldian position is "largely with, rather than against, power" (Said 2004, p. 53). Such critiques, however, blanket the fact that Foucault can also be read and understood in terms of dissidence and resistance to authority/power. This paper intends to offer a substantively different reading of Foucault's theory of power-relations from the ones discussed above and disputes their claims about Foucault. Placing Said's (mis)reading of Foucault's resistance at the center, this paper contends that Said's reading of Foucault is a reductive one as he evaluates Foucault's works in isolation, ignoring a substantial part of the Foucault corpus. Foucault, this paper

argues, can neither be read as a hermenute of power nor can his opposition to systemic violence and totalitarian authority be reduced to the "quietism" (Said 2004, p. 53) Said has accused Foucault of.

When Said published "Foucault and the Imagination of Power"⁴ in a critical anthology on the French intellectual in 1986, Foucault was already dead but his influence in the US was growing. Said's departure from Foucault in this volume, no doubt, is an interesting story in itself. The Edward Said of *Orientalism*, who gratefully acknowledged his debt to Foucault in the first chapter of the book, perhaps signaled his move away from the French intellectual in the last chapter when he tried to talk about a "a non-coercive, non-manipulative view of society"⁵. But it was not until the early 80s that Said started critiquing Foucault frontally on the ground that the Frenchman's analysis of power and resistance was inadequate. As a result, Said's second major work, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, published in 1983, marked, quite unexpectedly, a major turn away from Foucault. In this book, Said proclaims in his characteristically eloquent manner that Foucault lacks real political urgency and points out with a certain degree of authority that it is difficult to expect a rigorous political intervention from him because he "believed that ultimately little resistance was possible to the controls of a disciplinary or carceral society" (Said 2004, p. 53). Two famous essays by Said – "Traveling Theory" and "Foucault and the Imagination of Power" – offer analytical discussions on the inadequacy of Foucault's theory of power relations. In these essays, Said concludes that despite his repeated emphasis on the role of resistance in the power game, the French mandarin was, indeed, a "scribe or power" (Said 2004, p. 53).

Said's brilliant essay "Traveling Theory" first came out in *Raritan Quarterly* (1982) and was later included in *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983). Said's study in "Traveling Theory" zeroes in on Lukács theory of reification and Foucault occupies very little space in this long essay. Nevertheless, Said introduces Foucault's power-relations theory in his discussion, arguing that the Frenchman's move from specific to general analysis of power has impelled him to adopt a deterministic "Spinozist" conception of power. His other essay on power-relations, "Foucault and the Imagination of Power" is perhaps a more powerful assertion against the French mandarin's pessimistic analysis of the pervasiveness of power. According to Said, Foucault's analysis of power stems from an over vaporization of power's capability to pervade the society. If power is omnipresent, argues Said, it is also omnipotent. In that case, any social change taking place in that condition must be a result of two colluding powers where none is morally

superior. Thus, Said concludes in this essay that, instead of theorizing how power can be resisted, Foucault becomes obsessed with detailing how power can be attained and optimized. According to Said, Foucault rationalizes power by deciding to remain silent about its illegitimate use. Said then reminds Foucault about the danger of obliterating the role of resistance by suggesting that: "history does not get made without work, intention, resistance, effort, or conflict, and that none of these things is silently absorbable into micronetworks of power" (Said 2000, p. 215). Foucault failed to understand the success and importance of unified resistances, Said implies in this essay, because he could not bring himself to conceptualize power relations from the perspective of resistance.

Let us first look at the arguments Said put together in "Traveling Theory". While discussing the phenomenon of the peregrination of theory, Said writes that as theories travel, they ossify and lose some of their revolutionary forces because of commodification, integration and resistance. Citing the example of the Hungarian Marxist George Lukács' theory of "reification", Said argues that the revolutionary force of Lukács's theory was lost because of the systemic and cultural degradation in new historical and social conditions. Since theories emerge as responses to specific social or historical needs, deterritorialized theories end up being domesticated and institutionalized; they lose the capability to emit the same force or energy they once imparted. This essay, which Said revised two years later, also includes comments on Foucault's theory of power relations. Criticizing Foucault's move from a specific to a general philosophy of power, Said argues that such a shift weakened his earlier position and allowed him to get trapped in "generalization". When Foucault claims "power is everywhere" he actually dismisses the possibility that there are things that are not absorbable in the networks of power. Hence, Foucault exaggerates the dominance of power; it is as though everything is absorbed in the micronetworks of power and situations that produce condition of dominance remain unaltered. Thus, according to Said, Foucault's theory of power becomes ridden with a "theoretical overtotalization (that is) superficially more difficult to resist" (Said 2000, p. 216).

Said expresses his admiration for Foucault's earlier works but gives vent to his displeasure at Foucault's efforts to theorize resistance in his later works. According to Said, Foucault gives only nominal importance to resistance in *History of Sexuality*; resistance's inability to exist as a separate entity in Foucault's theorization turns it into only a "rebound", only "a dependant function of power". Said blames Foucault for imprisoning "himself and others" in a "Spinozist conception" (Said 1986, p. 151) of power and reminds readers that

history does not get made without unified resistances. According to the Arab-American intellectual, the weight of revolutions and resistance movements on history is immense, and the force of this weight compels a change in society. In other words, resistance is the key element in the game of historical progress as it is not only capable of escaping the potent grip of power but also able to get rid of the omnipotent authority which controls it. Said writes:

Gramsci...would certainly appreciate the fineness of Foucault's archaeologies, but would find it odd that they make not even a nominal allowance for the emergent movements, and none for revolutions, counter hegemony, or historical blocks. In human history there is always something beyond the reach of dominating systems, no matter how deeply they saturate society, and this is obviously what makes change possible, limits power in Foucault's sense, and hobbles the theory of that power. (2000, p. 215)

Foucault and power/resistance

Said's repudiation, it seems, comes as a reaction to Foucault's hypothesis of "the omnipresence of power". In *History of Sexuality Volume 1* Foucault gave, in a series of negative descriptions, a general definition of power relations by noting the following:

By power I do not mean "Power" as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule...it seems to me that power must be understood...as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate. (1984, p. 92)

Power relations, Foucault thinks, are the results of inequalities, which constantly engender states of power. And if power is everywhere, it is because there is inequality everywhere. He mentions in the same book that:

[There is an] omnipresence of power: not because it has privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. (1984, p. 93)

Foucault's power relations are both "intentional and nonsubjective". There is no power that is exercised without a series of aims or objectives. But this

exercise of power is not a result of individual choice:

Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective. If in fact they are intelligible, this is not because they are the effect of another instance that 'explains' them, but rather because they are imbued, through and through, with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But this does not mean that it results from the choice or the decision of an individual subject. (1984, p. 95)

After discussing what he claims to be power relations, Foucault proposes to analyze resistance, the other part of his power/resistance dichotomy. "Wherever there is power" says Foucault, "there is resistance" (1984, p. 95). Power and resistance, he maintains, are never in a position of exteriority and, thus, points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. But what has to be stressed here is that Foucault does not seem to believe that there can be any general principle of resistance. He uses the word in plural because like relations of power, resistances are many and can be as dispersed/diverse as power relations usually are. He writes:

These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case....by definition they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. (1984, pp. 95-96)

Though resistance certainly emerges as the less powerful "other" in the power/resistance binary, one should not assume that resistance always ends up, as Said thinks Foucault has suggested, being defeated or absorbed into the micronetworks of power. As Foucault maintains: "this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat" (1984, p. 96).

For Foucault, resistances are not moribund; they are mobile and transitory, capable of producing dynamic cleavages in a society. This dynamic mobility enables resistances to form a dense and interwoven network, equally potent and delocalized as power networks, and provide them with the force and dynamism necessary for revolutions:

Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in

them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities. And it is doubtless that strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes a revolution possible (1984, p. 96).

The substantive logic of Foucault's analysis of power, it needs to be pointed out, developed gradually as a result of his long term research on how modern technocratic society accumulates power from its discourse. From the outset, Foucault was aware that modern power is not unidirectional and his analysis of power in *History of Sexuality* made it obvious to him that, as modern power has the unique capability of creating details and producing knowledge about its object, it cannot be adequately theorized if one seeks to perceive it only as a negative force.

The imagination of power and resistance

It will be interesting to consider, once again, some of Said's arguments in "Foucault and the Imagination of Power", his brief but powerful critique of Foucault's analysis of power. In this insightful study of Foucault's theory of power, Said locates the core weakness of the French intellectual's hermeneutics of power relations and argues that the imagination of power has been weakened due to his apparent failure to theorize resistance and mass revolts. Said begins his essay by appreciating the fineness of Foucault's earlier works where his "admirably un-nostalgic view of history" allowed the French intellectual to keep a balance between "rhetoric" and "civil politics". He then draws a comparison between Foucault and Ibn Khaldun. Both, he contends, are "worldly historians who understand ...the dynamics of secular events, their restless pressure, their ceaseless movement...which does not permit the luxury of easy moral classification" (Said 1986, p. 150). After expressing admiration for Foucault's archeology so candidly, Said then criticizes Foucault's theory of power on four basic grounds: (1) it is "undifferentiated" and thus not ascribable to modern society; (2) it is "profoundly pessimistic" since Foucault failed to take the success of active resistance movements into consideration; (3) it is all pervasive and thus seem "irresistible and unopposable"; (4) Foucault was thinking about power from the "standpoint of its actual realization"; consequently his "imagination of power is largely with rather than against it" (Said 1986, pp. 151-152).

Surely, however, Said's verdict on Foucault is not the last word that can be uttered about the work of the French intellectual. Any final view on Foucault's works needs to be laid down carefully, not because he is beyond criticism but certainly because there has been a gradual transformation in his work. As a result,

he has become capable of overcoming many of the theoretical limitations he had been accused of⁶. To be specific, even before Said went on to accuse him of obliterating the role of the individuals from modern history, Foucault had already shifted his attention from the hermeneutics of power to the study of self-governance. He had begun to note how individual subjects acquire freedom through a self-conscious transformation of knowledge. Foucault's initial emphasis on "technologies of domination" where he had been particularly interested in analyzing how institutional power takes control and deploys itself almost everywhere in what he calls "disciplinary society" thus made way for a more intensive understanding of "self-governance" where knowing subjects transform themselves by means of "technologies of the self" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 55). In writings and interviews in the early 80s, at the last phase of his short life, Foucault clarified his positions not only about the confusion regarding the role of the individual but also about resistance, freedom of subjects and the omnipresence of power.

Foucault's power relations theory, therefore, must be analyzed in greater detail, along with the essential paradox that surrounds it. Even when Foucault is saying that power is everywhere, he is not arguing that power is unopposable. Though Said has pointed that the omnipresence of Foucault's power – that it is everywhere and surrounds everything – makes it appear as though it is omnipotent, Foucault himself contends that power is as vulnerable as the force that it is contending with. The vulnerability of power becomes apparent when Foucault discloses that in power relations the roles can be reversed. Thus, as Foucault sees it, power stands out only as a participant in a strategic struggle where it has gained temporary dominance. "Sometimes", says Foucault, "the scene begins with the master and slave, and at the end the slave has become the master" (1997, p. 169). Power, as we see in this case, is not an omnipresent, omnipotent god; it is a vulnerable struggler who can be defeated at any historical moment if resistance attains enough force to topple it. As long as the master can be defeated and power relations can be altered, there is no reason to believe that the oversaturation of power will make resistance impossible.

Where Said has categorically dismissed any claims to Foucault's opposition to power and has emphasized that Foucault's resistance only forms the underside of his power/resistance binary, the French philosopher himself – contrary to what Said has claimed – has gone on to argue that resistance is the dominant contributor in the power/resistance dichotomy. "In power relations", declared Foucault in a 1984 interview, not long before his death, "there is necessarily the possibility of resistance

because if there were no possibility of resistance ... there would be no power at all" (1997, p. 292). The underlying paradox of the power relations theory is that, it can be interpreted from any subjective perspective. But Foucault, it needs to be emphasized, has chosen to align himself with resistance. He says:

If there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would only be a matter of obedience ... So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with resistance. So I think that resistance is the main word, the key word in this dynamic (1997, p.169).

Thus for Foucault resistance emerges as an equally potent challenger to power as well as an ethically superior force. It is quite amazing to note – considering the unidirectional generalizations in *History of Sexuality* – how dexterously Foucault has repositioned the major weaknesses of his earlier works to impeccable equilibrium in his later writings and interviews.

Resistance, subjectivity, revolution

Since Foucault repeatedly refrained from presenting a persuasive roadmap for successful resistance, his critics attended to interpret his restraint on the issue as his incapacity to comprehend the world beyond power. If Foucault was so sure about resistance's capability to limit power, they have asked, why did he not come up with specific strategies of opposition? Foucault's disinclination for celebrating all mass revolts as successful resistance, surely, has its root in the failure of the resistance movements he was associated with. In 1979 Foucault was in Iran to observe, in his words, the victory of "collective will". He interpreted it as "a demand for a new subjectivity" (1997, p.xxiii). The failure of the Iranian revolution, which ousted one oppressive system to see it followed by an even more repressive one, made Foucault rethink the way subjects form effective resistances. For Foucault, the course of the Iranian revolution was proof that even the success of organized resistance may, paradoxically, lead to a tightening of the power grip. Foucault interpreted this event as a failure of governmentality and concluded that we need to think about reconstructing ourselves and forming a new subjectivity (1997, p. xxiii).

The need to search for a new identity means resistance to power, refashioning of subjectivity and "care of the self". "Care of the self", Foucault explains, "is a way of limiting and controlling power" (1997, p.288). A person, Foucault believes, who knows how to govern himself and is careful about his

relationships with others is less likely to exercise domination over others. In other words, self-governance allows subjects to acquire freedom for themselves, even from society. In this context, it will be interesting to note Foucault's opinion about the connection between care of the self and the exercise of power. In an interview published in 1984, just before his death, Foucault suggests that the chance of exercising tyrannical power over others increases when the subject fails to govern himself properly. He says:

The risk of dominating others and exercising a tyrannical power over them arises precisely ... when one has not taken care of the self and has become the slave of one's desires. But if you take proper care of yourself, that is, if you know ontologically what you are, if you know what you are capable of, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen of a city, to be the master of a household ... if you know what things you should and should not fear, if you know what you can reasonably hope for and, on the other hand, what things should not matter to you, if you know, finally, that you should be afraid of death – if you know all this, you cannot abuse your power over others (1997, p.288).

Thus, according to Foucault, love for the self and renunciation of certain desires may lead to a love for others. However, Foucault's analysis of care of the self is exclusivist in the sense that it accommodates only the ontological as self forming activity. The role of the epistemological has remained under explored.

Foucault's retreat into the self-knowledge of ancient Greeks and Romans can also be interpreted as a further decenterization of collective resistance. But it is important to note that, his apparent undermining of mass revolts as effective challenge to power needs to be seen from a broader perspective. Foucault has expressed his optimism about the effectiveness of mass disobedience in his earlier writings on the Iranian revolution. In them, he expressed the idea that "revolts belong to history" and are "irreducible" (Foucault 2002, p. 449); if societies persist it is because people are still capable of revolting and of crippling the possibility of power becoming "utterly absolute". Though Foucault's later writings privilege individual resistance over mass revolt, Said's insistence that the French intellectual does not make "even a nominal allowance for emergent movements" can be interpreted as his unwillingness to go over the later writings of Foucault. To conclude that Foucault's analysis of power is "remarkably pessimistic" is to essentialize an intellectual who has declared that he will disagree with anyone who says "it is useless ... to revolt; it is going to be the same thing" (2002, p.452).

Said can thus be criticized for going too far in his opposition to Foucault and his power relations theory. At least in some cases his opposition seems too reductive. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to suggest that Said was entirely incorrect in his judgment about Foucault. One must admire the subtlety of Said's argument, especially when he writes:

The work of Fanon himself, Syed Alatas, Abdullah Laroui, Panikkar, Shariati, Mazouri, novelist like Ngugi and Rushdie – all these as well as the enormously powerful adversarial works of feminists and minority cultures in the West and the Third World, amply recorded the continuing attraction to libertarian struggles ... I must mention that to describe these counter-discursive efforts simply as non-systemic in Wallerstein's phrase is ... to negate precisely the force in them that I am certain Foucault would have understood, the organized and rationalized basis of their protest (1986, p. 153-154).

Said, then, wants Foucault to reveal a specific strategy of resistance and not get mired in an objective analysis of power because he believes that the role of the intellectual "is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant". Like Marx and Fanon, he also believes that the critic must not merely "interpret the world, but ... change it" (Bayoumi & Rubin 2000, p. xii). His life as a Palestinian exile has helped him fashion an "oppositional" and secular form of criticism whose root, on the very essence of their substance, is in the counter discourse of Palestinian *Intifada*. Said's lack of interest in Foucault's later writings, specifically on power and self-governance, is deeply entrenched in the Frenchman's reluctance to oppose power understood only as a system of dominance. In Foucault, Said notices a lack of "political commitment" because the French mandarin "takes a curiously passive view not so much of the uses of power, but how and why power is gained, used and held onto" (Said 2004, p.53). Said has thus repeatedly stressed Foucault's lack of interest in resistance and counter discursive attempts. The Palestinian-American scholar has found Foucault's notion of power relations unacceptable particularly because, for Foucault, everything, even resistance and struggle, takes place within a historically determined condition. Said, who believes that the role of the intellectual is to fight determinism of all kinds, has certainly failed to appreciate what has led Foucault to conclude that power is everywhere in the modern world and has saturated all corners of our lives. Foucault's interventionist reading of modern power and disciplinary society appeals to Said only as far as it is capable of offering an oppositional stance against the state and authority by turning discursive fields into political sites. Foucault's general theory of power, according to Said, has little to offer him because it has failed to demonstrate a will to read power oppositionally. Said contends that:

Foucault's trajectory as a scholar and researcher noted for his interest in sites of political intensity ... moved from what appeared to be insurrectionary scholarship to a kind of scholarship that confronted the power from the position of someone who believed that ultimately little resistance was possible to the controls of disciplinary or carceral society. There is a kind of quietism that emerges at various points of Foucault's career: the sense that everything is historically determined, that ideas of justice, of good and evil, and so forth have no innate significance, because they are constituted by whoever is using them (2004, 53).

Said thus accuses Foucault for succumbing to determinism and for emptying his resistance theory of truly oppositional and emergent qualities. Foucault's initial efforts to remonstrate against the confining and policing elements of modern European societies, complains Said, gets submerged in a more pessimistic view of an all-pervasive, omnipotent power. Said accuses Foucault of withdrawing himself from the study of social injustice and of wiping out the difference between good and bad, ethical and unethical. In other words, Said accuses Foucault of being irrationalist.

Essentializing Foucault

Recently, a few intellectuals from around the world have attempted to defend Foucault from essentialized readings. For example, Robert C. Holub (1985), in his essay "Remembering Foucault", contends that Foucault's works are paradoxical in nature. To simply suggest that Foucault was a champion of anti-humanistic thinking and did not take the sufferings of people into consideration is to overlook the underlying intentions of his works. According to Holub, it will be reductive to consider Foucault as a creator of any sort of system. Foucault's works are fragmentary as well as paradoxical and, thus, are in their very form pitted against totalization (pp. 241-244).

Mario Mossa and Ron Scapp also oppose the idea that Foucault's works are complicit with power. In their essay "The Practical Theorizing of Michael Foucault: Politics and Counter Discourse", Mossa and Scapp contend that "Foucault can serve to encourage radical agency". According to them, Foucault's work "aims at clearing a space in which the formerly voiceless might begin to articulate their desires – to counter the domain of prevailing authoritative discourse" (Mossa & Scapp 1996, p. 88). John Rajchman, on the other hand, claims that Foucault belongs to "the modern ethical tradition initiated by Sartre ... [because his] way of questioning "anthropologism" has led him to a kind of

practical or ethical category whose fundamental category was the category of freedom" (Rajchman 1986, p.88). The contentions of these intellectuals certainly run counter to Said's claim that Foucault was an "irrationalist" and that he was incapable of talking ethics. According to these critics, Foucault is not only oppositional but also radically ethical. No matter how unfashionable, Foucault's ethics is essentially European in tradition and has the ability to make us lean towards a different, and probably slightly utopian, idea of freedom.

These recent defenses of Foucault certainly allow for a better understanding of Foucault's position. That Foucault does not distinguish between good and evil, that he is incapable of talking ethically, can hardly be conceded anymore. Said surely does not see beyond what he has chosen to see. Despite his unperturbed attachment to anticolonial and anti-authoritarian intellectuals like Fanon, C. L. R. James, Gramsci, and Lukács, Said probably forgot that theories are hardly dissociable from life. If throughout his life Foucault remained vocal about the peripherals and marginalized of the society, his writings about these peoples cannot simply be reduced into the textual austerity he had chosen to exhibit. No doubt, in his strict disciplinary austerity Foucault probably seemed to be reticent – amidst the call for political activism – but he was never afraid of taking sides when it was necessary to do so. According to Rajcman, this is what separates Foucault from other intellectuals who find it easy to talk about opposition but choose to remain in the protected domain of the university when it becomes necessary to hit the road. He says: "Foucault was opposite of those who find it natural to talk ethics but difficult to take sides. He was someone who supported many struggles and yet found it next to impossible to speak the language of morality" (Rajchman 1986, p.88). Thus, Foucault's ostracization must not be attributed to an irrational postmodernism but must be viewed as an outcome of a radical essentialization of Foucault, led by critics who demanded an ideological explanation of the things he was describing.

Indeed, Foucault's development as an intellectual, like that of Said's, can hardly be charted by any normative yardstick which fails to delve deep into the oppositional nature of his work. To conclude that Foucault is too coy to voice his opposition against power is to overlook his underlying ethical concern and not to notice that his work is pitted firmly against the totalizing will of the power he described with such preciseness.

Foucault's failure, to conclude, does not lie in his reluctance to map out what constitute effective resistance. Nor does it entirely dwell, as Said has suggested, in his unwillingness to admit the success of "counter-discursive

attempts". His support for revolts and mass movements is adequately documented in the pages of his biographies. In 1979, a year after the Iranian Revolution, Foucault published a statement in *Le Monde* in which he asked [is it] "Useless to Revolt?" Revolts, he tells his readers, belong to history because "the impulse by which a single individual, a group, a minority or an entire people says, "I will no longer obey" and throws the risk of their life in the face of an authority ... seems ... something irreducible" (2002, p. 449). However, the core weakness of Foucault's power relations theory lies, as Lukes has suggested, in his failure to acknowledge that like all other historico-cultural phenomena, power is also value dependant (Cited in Hoy 1986, p.124). The kind of power that Foucault chose to analyze may as well fall short of precisely pointing out that the exercise of power vary from one historico-cultural condition to another, even within Europe, and strategic resistance to this power may not be the same everywhere.

A discussion on Foucault and Said must not, however, end without emphasizing that both were extraordinary thinkers whose contributions go far beyond what one usually associates them with. It is easier to put ourselves in solidarity with Edward Said not only because as a "cultural critic" he has always attempted to oppose and contend hegemony of western epistemic hierarchy, but also for the fact that as a Palestinian he has decided to confront, even at the cost of his personal security, the dogma and scathing politics of "imperial America" and its ally Israel. To talk about Said's limitations without acknowledging his enormous contribution to the field of critical thinking as well as of active resistance will be reductive. However, it would be equally reductive to dismiss Foucault's claims to oppositional intellectualism just because he has proposed to provide a general analysis of power. Intellectuals of our time must understand that there is an unassailable isolation in intellectual distance, in accepting that philosophy remains in a vacuum and in isolation from the people it talks about. Both Foucault and Said have adequately exhibited their passion for oppositional thinking. To deny any of them the spirit of this great oppositional tradition is to lead ourselves towards a derelict and slavish radicalization of theory.

Notes

¹Participating in demonstrations and street protests was a regular affair in the life of the "Professor Militant". Growing up in the post world war era, Foucault and many other intellectuals found it obligatory to make their voices heard, sometimes through violence, in the increasingly politicized post '68 France. See Macey 1994, pp. 394-396.

²Foucault has always expressed his dislike for any authoritative intervention, even from an intellectual. In his opinion, "people should build their own ethics" and intellectuals should not "provide ethical principles or practical advice at the same moment, in the same book and the same analysis". Though many people have interpreted his position an anti-intellectual one, it is important to note that he is not against intellectual intervention altogether. He is against mixing up theory with personal interpretation of events. See Foucault 1997, p. 132.

³*Foucault: A Critical Reader*, where Said, Couzens Hoy, and Habermas contributed polemical essays on Foucault, was written out of the need to "confront the issues provoked by the work of Michael Foucault". The aim of this book, according to its editor, is to combat "misunderstanding of Foucault's sometimes difficult texts" and to ask "questions about the validity of his ideas and the coherence of his position". See Hoy 1986, p. 1.

⁴"Foucault and the Imagination of Power" was first published in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*; however, it was later included in *Reflections on Exile*, a collection of Said's essays published in 2001.

⁵Said himself has talked about his move from pessimism to optimism in an interview taken in 1985. He says, "Orientalism is in some ways a negative book, but at the end I do try to talk about a non-coercive, non-manipulative view of the society". From his emphasis it becomes clear that Said counter-balances his pessimistic Foucauldian Power/knowledge nexus by introducing the Gramscian quasi-Marxist proposition of hegemony and resistance.

⁶In an interview taken in 1982 by Stephen Riggins, Foucault elaborates the idea that it is important to renew one's ideas. He mentioned that he works because he wants to see himself transformed. See Foucault 1997, p 131.

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