

## INTRODUCTION: SPECIAL ISSUE

### **Foucault and Civil Society**

Miikka Pyykkönen, DocSocSci, Docent, University Lecturer

The theme of this special issue of *Foucault Studies* is “Foucault and Civil Society.” The issue brings together current theoretical and empirical civil society (CS) research inspired by Foucauldian approaches. Although the use of Michel Foucault in CS research is increasing, the Foucauldian CS analysis is still in a relatively minor position both within Foucauldian studies and in CS studies in general. Although there are Foucauldian discussions on CS, they are mainly composed as part of more general analyses and theoretical observations on modern governmentalities—especially in relation to technologies of (neo)liberal government. However, there are some important articles or book chapters focusing particularly on his contributions to CS studies.

One of the most well-known is Graham Burchell’s<sup>1</sup> article on the role of civil society in the interest formation of liberal governmentality. Burchell’s text follows and develops the arguments proposed in *The Birth of Biopolitics*.<sup>2</sup> Since the end of the 1990s, several more or less empirically-based texts have also been published that examine civil society organizations (CSOs) from a governmentality perspective.<sup>3</sup>

Further, there are a number of texts that compare Foucauldian and Habermasian approaches to CS. Many of these tend to see Foucault’s critique of CS as part of the matrix of government as fundamentally opposed to Jürgen Habermas’s more idealistic understanding of CS.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the Foucault-Habermas discussions, there are also a number of writings that observe, often comparatively, the connections between Foucauldian and Gramscian ap-

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Burchell, “‘Peculiar Interests’: Civil Society and Governing ‘The System of Natural Liberty,’” in Graham Burchell et al. (eds.), *The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France 1978 1979*, edited by Arnold I. Davidson, translated by Graham Burchell (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> For instance see: Randy Lippert, “Rationalities and Refugee Resettlement,” *Economy and Society*, vol. 27, no. 4 (1998), 380–406; Ole Jacob Sending and Iver B. Neumann, “Governance to Governmentality: Analyzing NGOs, States, and Power,” *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 3 (2006), 651–672; Miikka Pyykkönen, “Integrating Governmentality: Administrative Expectations for Immigrant Associations in Finland,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2007), 197–224; Kasper Villadsen, “Michel Foucault and the Forces of Civil Society,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, Online First (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Samantha Ashenden and David Owen, “Questions of Criticism: Habermas and Foucault on Civil Society and Resistance” in Samantha Ashenden and David Owen (eds.), *Foucault Contra Habermas: Recasting the Dialogue between Genealogy and Critical Theory* (London, Sage, 1999); Bengt Flyvbjerg, “Habermas and Foucault: Thinkers for Civil Society,” *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 2 (1998), 210–233.

proaches to CS.<sup>5</sup> One of the best known attempts to include Foucault among other political theorists of CS appears in Jean L. Cohen's and Andrew Arato's *Civil Society and Political Theory*.<sup>6</sup> They claim that Foucault's special value lies with his ability to show the place(s) of CS a) in the repertoires of technologies of modern government and b) in the formation of the modern understanding of "juridical" and rights through his genealogical studies.

Some of the recent Foucauldian texts—especially those coming from gender studies—have taken resistance as their point of departure. In addition to some individual aspects of an 'aesthetics of living' or a 'counter-conduct,' authors in this area have taken up a range of different kinds of CS ideas, practices, and actions. CS appears to be the sphere where collective resistance, both according to and against neoliberal practices, takes place and where individual resistance acquires its social significance.<sup>7</sup>

What is still missing from the scholarly literature is a systematic collection of Foucault-inspired texts dealing with CS. This special issue makes a small contribution to the closing of this gap. But why do we need Foucauldian CS research? I think the main justification comes from Foucauldian perspectives concerning the operations of modern government. First of all, it helps us to see the correlations between CS and state power. Secondly, as many of the articles of this special issue prove, it helps us to grasp the multidimensionality of power in relation to citizens' own actions. This relates to the third justification: understanding the intertwinement of freedom/resistance and power in neoliberal governmentality. This, somewhat self-reflexive, government(ality) develops—and partly exists—through the "interaction" of government and its "counter-actions." To analyze it, we need tools to observe not only the systematic acts of governance but also the situational, contextual, and temporal linkages between resistance and government.<sup>8</sup> And, lastly, I think that the Foucauldian approach to CS can contribute remarkably to thinking about the citizen-subject in modern governmentality and its descent through successive regimes of power—a problem Foucault considers in his analysis on Ferguson, and which Ashenden engages in her article in this special issue.

What, then, is the reason for the rather small role of Foucauldian frameworks in CS studies? First of all, the most probable reason is that Foucault did not explicitly write about CS before *The Birth of Biopolitics*, and even in this book he pays relatively little attention to it, deal-

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<sup>5</sup> See for instance: Asli Daldal, "Power and Ideology in Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci: A Comparative Analysis," *Review of History and Political Science*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2014), 149–167; Michael Hardt, "The Withering of Civil Society," *Social Text*, no. 45 (1995), 27–44; Miikka Pyykkönen, "Governmentalisation of the Civil Society? Power, Governance and Civil Society in Gramsci's and Foucault's Analytics of Power," in Matthias Freise et al. (eds.), *A Panacea for All Seasons? Civil Society and Governance in Europe* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010), 25–42.

<sup>6</sup> Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (New Baskerville: MIT Press, 1992), 255–298.

<sup>7</sup> See for instance: Amy Allen, "Rethinking Resistance; Feminism and the Politics of Ourselves," *Eurozine* vol. 5, no. 5 (2010); Louisa Cadman, "How (Not) to be Governed: Foucault, Critique, and the Political," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* vol. 28, no. 3 (2010), 539–556; Neera Chandoke, "Putting Civil Society in its Place," *Radical Politics Today*, no. 7 (2009). Available online at:

<http://research.ncl.ac.uk/spaceofdemocracy/word%20docs%20linked%20to/Uploaded%202009/chandhoke/chandhoke.pdf>; Catherine Wilson, "Beyond State Politics: Subjectivities and Techniques of Government in Contemporary Neoliberal Social Movements," in Sam Binkley and Jorge Capetille (eds.), *A Foucault for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Governmentality, Biopolitics and Discipline in the New Millennium* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 30–46.

<sup>8</sup> For instance Cadman, "How (not) to be Governed"; Sam Binkley, "Governmentality, Temporality and Practice: From the Individualization of Risk to the 'Contradictory Movements of the Soul'," *Time & Society*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2009), 86–105.

ing only with Ferguson's thoughts on CS. Another important reason can be found in the traditions of German and Anglo-American CS studies themselves, in which the Hegelian-inspired approaches have been somewhat hegemonic. These approaches have produced two distinct styles of analysis, one of which observes CS as a supplementary force to state power in service production or in strengthening morals or democracy. Perhaps the most well-known representatives of this "stream" are a) the communitarian CS studies, b) those diagnosing the meaning of CS for the positive accumulation of social capital, and c) more or less purely historiographic analyses of the role of CS and CSOs in the nation-state developments of different countries.

The other stream of Hegelian-inspired studies affiliates with the Marxist approach. This approach stems from the theories and perspectives of Habermas and Antonio Gramsci.<sup>9</sup> Many of them examine the reciprocity of state politics and CS actions. Some representatives of this stream also deal with the emancipatory possibilities of CS and resistance to state power manifesting in its sphere. This latter stream comes close to approaches inspired by Alain Touraine<sup>10</sup> which views social struggles as the striving force of social development and CS as a sphere of 'actors.' Generally speaking, one major difference between 'Hegelian' civil society studies and those inspired by Foucault, is in their assumptions concerning the nature of the key entities in question: whereas many Hegelian studies seem to take state, civil society and the citizen-subject for granted, Foucauldian approaches take their deconstruction as starting point. While analyzing their manifestations and connections, Foucauldian studies also point out that they are socio-historical constructions formed in discourses and power practices.

It has been 11 years since the publication of the French edition of *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979* and 7 years since its translation appeared in English. It was this publication that introduced Foucauldian perspectives into the field of CS research. The articles of this special issue are powerfully influenced by these lectures, but also draw from Foucault's other works on governmentality and biopolitics—two of them theoretically and three by using empirical case analyses to test the usability of Foucault's ideas in current CS practices.

In his introductory article, *Miikka Pyykkönen* examines Foucault's<sup>11</sup> central conclusions on the roles of CS in the writings of classic liberal and neoliberal thinkers. Pyykkönen tries to bring two perspectives to Foucault's discussions: First, he observes CS as part of liberal governmentality through the ideas of Ferguson and others—Smith, Locke, and Hayek. Second, he tries to elaborate on the emancipatory side of CS by bringing in Foucault's ideas on resistance or counter-conduct introduced in his other writings. In the second article, *Samantha Ashenden* makes her eye-opening contribution to the discussion on *The Birth of Biopolitics*. She argues that Foucault's analysis of CS and liberal governmentality lacks one critical notion—civic re-

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<sup>9</sup> Craig Calhoun, "Civil Society and the Public Sphere," in Michael Edwards (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society; Oxford Handbooks in Politics & International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press), 311–323; Hagai Katz, "Gramsci, Hegemony, and Global Civil Society Networks," *Voluntas*, no. 17 (2006), 333–348; Arun Patnaik, "The Contemporary Significance of Gramsci's Critique of Civil society," *WorkingUSA – The Journal of Labor and Society*, vol. 15, no. 4 (2012), 577–588.

<sup>10</sup> Alain Touraine, *Return of the Actor: Social theory in postindustrial society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

publicanism. By re-reading Ferguson and some other key thinkers of classical liberalism and through a re-reading of *The Birth of Biopolitics*, she argues the need to improve on Foucault's analysis in order to more comprehensively understand CS and citizenship in liberal governmentality.

*Anna Selmeczi's* article starts the set of empirically based articles in this issue. She shows how popular mobilization had been largely delegitimized, and the emancipatory politics of ungovernability recast as antidemocratic and its ungovernable subjects regarded as racial others in the South African popular protest during the last years of the apartheid system. Selmeczi utilizes Foucault's ideas on the parallel between the liberal efforts to resolve the potentially conflicting principles of governing the economic subject and the subject of rights within the realm of CS. Along similar lines, *Pelle Åberg* analyzes CSOs operating in the field of family policy in contemporary Russia. His analysis shows how the civic initiative attempts to empower fathers in "daddy schools" and how it alters demographic discourses while approaching societal goals similar to the ones used by the state in its biopolitical strategies. In the last article, *Riikka Perälä* challenges mainstream approaches which idealistically consider CS as a site of societal change or resistance, as well as some Foucauldian investigations which in turn are pessimistic and overlook the emancipatory aspects of CS. By using participatory drug care as a case example, she offers examples in which CSOs act both as a counterbalance and an addition to state institutions.

This special issue would not have seen daylight without the help of dedicated colleagues with high expertise. First of all, I want to thank the contributors to the issue who eagerly addressed my editorial comments and rigorously responded to the revision requests. I would also like to thank Sam Binkley and Jeppe Groot and the other editors at *Foucault Studies* who helped me with this special issue in their highly respected, inspiring, and sophisticated journal. Thanks also to the blind reviewers who did a careful job to improve the articles submitted for this issue.

Miikka Pyykkönen  
University of Jyväskylä, Finland  
[miikka.pyykkonen@ju.fi](mailto:miikka.pyykkonen@ju.fi)