How Does Racism Provide a Metric for Biopolitics of Security?

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'*What in fact is racism? I t is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under powers control: the break between what must live and what must die'[1].*

The concept of race is now widely understood to be central to Michel Foucault's famous lecture series 'Society Must Be Defended', performed at the College de France 1975-76, in which he provides a genealogy of the modern liberal state through a radical re-telling of history. Foucault begins with a critique of traditional forms of sovereignty, based upon fragile historical claims to power. Foucault then traces the development of a counter-historical discourse which undermines and unmasks the bloody and contingent origin of sovereign rule, and instead claims state power should be understood as a 'race struggle', raging constantly within society. Foucault then goes on to demonstrate how in the late 18th century this discourse mutated into something like an official discourse of the state. Thus the state now sought to enable its citizens to fructify and prosper, by ensuring the biological and racial purity of the population. Hence racism is now understood to function as a mechanism by which the state can establish acceptable social norms and parameters, and punish those that do not fall within them. Thus racism enables the state to continue to exercise its sovereign right to kill, in an era of biopower, as Michael Dillon commented, 'Race is one of the markers which biopolitically adjudicates. It does not only specify life's eligibilities for this or that good it ultimately specifies whether or not a life is to be considered eligible for life as such'[2]. In this essay I will investigate how racism functions as a metric for the biopolitics of security. I will begin by analysing the development of the counter-historical discourse, from its opposition to traditional sovereignty, through to the development of the 'warring nations' thesis, and it's eventual reformulation as a discourse of the state. From here I hope to demonstrate how racism operates as the mechanism through which certain behaviours, characteristics, and traits are classified as acceptable/unacceptable, before finally displaying how this racist discourse has been continually reconfigured throughout the history of the 20th Century, and right up to the present day.

In the first lecture of 'Society Must Be Defended', Foucault declared that 'We have to study power outside the model of Leviathan, outside the field delineated by juridical sovereignty and the institution of the State'[3]. Foucault begins by offering a critique of current concepts of power including the juridical model. Firstly Foucault asserts that the juridical conception of power, developed in the 18th century, is characterised by its 'economism'. In other words juridical theorist conceived power as a right, which could be possessed much like a commodity. Furthermore Foucault claims this form of power operates in a linear downward vector with subjects constituted in relation to a sovereign at the centre, from which all power emanates. As Foucault wrote 'Whether one attributes to it the form of the prince who formulates rights… or of the master who states the law, in any case one schematizes power in a juridical form… A legislative power on one side, and an obedient subject on the other'[4]. Finally Foucault recognises that the juridical system always functions in relation to royal power, either as an instrument with which to justify absolute monarchical power, or as a method of constructing its limits and parameters. Thus from the Middle Ages onward the role of juridical power was to establish and legitimise the power of the sovereign, as demonstrated by Machiavelli in his seminal text *The Prince*. As Machiavelli argues the Prince's relationship to the territory over which he claims dominium is entirely artificial, whether it was forged through conquest, inheritance, or through peaceful compromise, the Prince remains external to it. Consequently the relationship between Prince and principality is a fragile one, constantly under threat from both external and internal enemies, as Foucault comments 'It is threatened

from outside, by [those] who want to take, or re-conquer, his principality, and it is also threatened internally, for there is no a priori or immediate reason for the Prince's subjects to accept his rule'[5]. As such Machiavelli concludes that the objective of government must therefore be to strengthen the fragile link between the Prince and his principality, as such the role of power is always organised around the problem of sovereignty

Having established its essential characteristics Foucault then asks how we might avoid conceiving of power relations in jurdico-discursive terms. As Foucault himself wrote 'What we need however is a political philosophy that isn't erected around the problem of sovereignty… We need to cut off the King's head: in political theory that has still to be done'[6]. Hence Foucault claims we must examine power at the extremities, and the local level where it 'transgresses the rules of right that organise and delineate it'[7]. This form of analysis provides a 'sort of autonomous and non-centralized theoretical production'[8], which enables us to study power independent of juridical systems and therefore allows for the revival of what Foucault termed 'subjugated knowledge's'. Foucault claimed that in the previous 20 years the academic community had witnessed a 'returns to knowledge', whereby 'historical contents that had been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations…[as well as] knowledge's that were below the required level of erudition or scientificity'[9], had been resurrected. These disqualified knowledges uncovered the bloodshed, and war at the foundation of modern states, as Foucault commented there is 'blood dried in the codes' in which 'we must hear the rumble of battle'[10]. Thus the insurrection of subjugated knowledges constitutes a counter-historical discourse of war which acts to undermine the official historical claims and achievements of the sovereign over anarchy and violence, and instead unmasks a constant struggle raging beneath the radar of the juridical system. Here Foucault posits the idea that 'rather than analysing [power] in terms of surrender, contract, and alienation…shouldn't we be analyzing it first and foremost in terms of conflict, confrontation, and war?'[11] In contrast to the Hobbesian model of juridical sovereignty which was viewed as deliverance from a pre-modern war of all against all, Foucault suggests 'we are always writing the history of the same war'[12], a continuous war, beneath the surface of peace, which has integrated itself into the fabric of modern political institutions and discourse. Foucault does this by inverting Clauszewitz's famous aphorism to – 'politics is the continuation of war by other means'. The implication of this assertion is that rather than accepting the primacy of liberal ideas such as the contract, or positive law as a rational progression from a premodern anarchy, they should instead be recognised as the residual and contingent outcome of violent conquest, and the victory of a particular history over a multiplicity of possible histories. As Andrew Neil comments 'Foucault pluralizes and politicizes history, wedding multiple histories to warring collective subjectivities in the form of manifold warring sub state 'nations'[13].

This counter discourse, Foucault argues, was articulated in a variety of political projects throughout history, including the rejection by Levellers and Diggers, of the juridical arrangements established following the English Civil War as a legacy of the Norman Conquest, and the aristocratic opposition to Louis XIV in France. In both cases the counter-discourse of war represented the antithesis of sovereign power, revealing its contingent and unjust nature and illustrating 'that laws deceive, that kings wear masks, that power creates illusions, and that historians tell lies'[14]. A perhaps more pivotal consequence of this counter-history however was the reconstitution of the subject of history, from the sovereign to a continuous struggle between races. Foucault's use of the term 'race' was initially not used to indicate a biological division of the human species as we now understand it. Instead it represented what is more commonly understand as 'nations' or 'classes', which were locked in a constant struggle to colonise historical knowledge.

In the penultimate lecture of the series Foucault locates the moment at which the counter-historical discourse of war becomes subsumed into the official discourse of the state. The reformulation of the concept of the 'nation' articulated by Sieyes in his famous text the *Third Estate*, written around the time of the French Revolution, acted to eliminate war as the primary analyser of power relations. Initially under a juridical system the nation could not be conceived of as existing independently to the body of the sovereign. The counter historical discourse 'then establishes relations of war and domination between those nations…And the history written by the nobiliary reaction made those relations the web of historical intelligibility'[15]. However, whereas the counter-discourse of the aristocracy extracted particularistic historical-political claims from the universality of the social body, the political and philosophical developments of the French revolution made possible a form of statist totality, whereby the nation and the state become coextensive. As Foucault wrote 'we have an inversion of the temporal axis of demand. The demand will no longer be articulated in the name of a past right that was established by either a consensus, a victory or an invasion. The demand can now be

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articulated in terms of potentiality, a future'[16]. Thus rather than a states strength being determined by its capacity to exercise domination over other states, its strength is now determined by its ability to govern its populations in order to optimise its capabilities.

This lead Foucault to the conclusion that the purpose of 'Government is the right disposition of things arranged so as to lead to a suitable end'[17]. However crucially when Foucault discuss 'things' he is not referring as Machiavelli might to 'territory', but instead 'men in their relationships, bonds, and complex involvements with things like wealth, resources, means of subsistence, and…[finally] their relationship with things like accidents, misfortunes, famine, epidemics, and death'[18]. Thus what emerges is an understanding of the art of government that is in stark contrast to that proposed by juridical theorist. Whereas previously the objective of government was to ensure obedience to the law, now government aims to conveniently dispose things, through the deployment of administrative mechanisms and tactics, which achieved certain finalities. Foucault develops this idea in the final lecture of the series where he outlines the concept of biopower. In contrast to traditional concepts of power, biopower took the population viewed as an organic dynamical body as its referent object, seeking to regulate the contingent and complex biological processes inherent in such systems. Thus Biopolitics involves the study of life processes including reproduction and birth-death ratios, as well as a number of political problems related with the interactions of man-as-species. Biopolitics seeks to understand and regulate these processes and interactions to ensure the affluence and prosperity of the population. To achieve this 'security mechanisms have to be installed around the random element inherent in a population of living beings so as to optimize a state of life'[19]. Consequently Foucault goes on to argue during the nineteenth century the very nature of sovereign power was radically transformed, from the Hobbesian theory of the sovereign right to kill, to the biopolitical notion that the sovereign has a right to protect the population, or 'make live'. Thus a radical reproblemitisation of security is required, states no longer act to defend there borders but rather act to insure the biological continuity and conformity to social norms of its population. As Foucault argued the counter-historical discourse of race struggle now becomes inverted, 'the State is no longer an instrument that one race uses against another: the State is, and must be, the protector of the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race'[20].

This reformulation of the role of the state creates a fundamental contradiction between the biopolitical need to make life live and the central sovereign right to kill. Foucault then proposes that this central contradiction can be reconciled through the application of the 'race war discourse' or 'state racism'. Foucault describes racism as 'creat[ing] caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower'; he also comments that racism makes the relationship of war 'if you want to live, the other must die'[21] compatible with biopolitics. By creating an external enemy from which society must be defended, the sovereign is able to exercise the ultimate power to kill, in the name of protecting its citizens. As Foucault himself wrote, 'wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who needs to be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of necessity'[22]. Consequently racism as reconceptualised at the end of the 19th century is central to the continued functioning of biopolitics of security in contemporary politics, it provides a metric by which social norms can be measured, and from which deviants and abnormal individuals can be targeted and eliminated. A David Mutimer commented, 'The race war discourse is essential to maintaining the regulatory functions of the normalizing society – it is this discourse that makes possible the continued expression of sovereignty in an era of biopolitics'[23]. This discourse has been continually reformulated throughout the twentieth century; I will now trace its developments to demonstrate how the use of racism enabled the biopolitics of security to function.

Perhaps the most overt expression of the race war discourse in the twentieth century was within the Nazi regime during the Second World War. In this instance the enemy was 'racial' as we commonly understand the term, however this is not always the case and the race war discourse did not simply disappear with the defeat of Nazism. Instead the discourse was recast this time between the competing ideologies of the Cold War. From the US perspective communism represented a grave threat to the American way of life, and needed to be faced and eradicated in order to protect the liberty and freedom of US citizens. This perception was reflected in US propaganda which cast communist as a 'lying, dirty, shrewd, godless, murderous, determined, and … criminal conspiracy'[24]. However with the unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the 'race war' appeared to have been won, as the United States was left without an external enemy; for many it seem that history itself had come to an end[25]. However Foucault draws our attention to the mobility of the race war discourse, as Mutimer wrote 'History cannot end because the end of history exposes the fundamental contradiction at the heart of the contemporary normalizing state'[26]. The most

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recent reformulation of the race war discourse has come with the onset of the war on terror. Following the attacks on 9/11 the Bush administration was quick to establish radical Islam, as a threat not only to American geopolitical concerns, but also to the values and freedoms of US citizens. As was made apparent in the National Security Strategy 2002 which stated, 'In the war against global terrorism, we will never forget that we are ultimately fighting for our democratic values and way of life'[27]. Worryingly this reformulation of the race discourse targeted no only radical Islamist, but *anyone* who failed to support the war on terror, as was encapsulated by George Bush initial mantra, 'either you are with us or you are with the terrorist'[28].

For Foucault 'race' is an extremely malleable category with an almost infinite number of possible applications. Racism does not always take a biological form, instead it acts to create caesuras within the social mass and draw distinctions between the normal/abnormal. As such, racism acts as a metric to determine what can live and what must die, as Michael Dillon commented, 'Race contributes directly to the triangulation of biopolitics with its necropolitics'[29]. This triangulation of life and death has found its most perfect expression to date in the war on terror, a complex congruence of geostrategic and biopolitical concerns. The shadowy nature of the threat does not allow for total victory, terrorism will never be fully eliminated and so there will always be the need for biopolitics and its security measures to defend society. As David Mutimer wrote 'after a series of iterations, race war has found an expression that is in practice, if not in principle, unending; the biological enemy against whom society must be defended cannot be defeated and known to have been defeated'[30].

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