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CONTRAST AND HISTORY – MICHEL FOUCAULT AND NEOLIBERALISM

Abstract

The paper is suggesting one possible angle for the re-examination of Foucault's portrayal of the historical role of German neoliberalism in his 1979 lectures entitled *Naissance de la biopolitique*. This particular season has been the object of the increased interest in recent decades for various reasons. One of the reasons is the broader theme of “biopolitics” developed in them (as well as in the two immediately preceding seasons), which was instrumental in subsequent interpretations and applications even before the 1979 lectures became available integrally. Another reason that has fuelled various interpretations and contentions, that are still ongoing as some recent publications attest, has to do with the general setting and tone of Foucault's dealings with neoliberalism. Debates that have ensued have mostly been centred on the question of whether or not Foucault embraced certain neoliberal tenets that he was explaining in these lectures.

But what is usually overlooked in these debates is the question of the historical accuracy of the impression that emerges from the 1979 lectures about the role that German “ordoliberalism” had after WWII. It is in a way surprising considering that Foucault's relationship with the “historians' guild” was strained, interspersed with criticisms and polemics. Some of these critiques are sketchily reproduced here to point at certain repeating weaknesses in Foucault's dealings with the past. Crucial failing seems to be the concept of the “cut” or discontinuity whose consequence was usually such that Foucault was often forcing great contrasts onto the past. The concluding section proposes, although in a preliminary fashion and through a short comparison, that Foucault might have overstated the role that “ordoliberal” ideas had in Germany during the 1950s and 1960s precisely because he might have accepted the view that some of these ideas were not only the motor of economic and social development, but sort of a “third way” solution.

Key words: history, historians, Michel Foucault, neoliberalism, German “ordoliberalism”

The prolonged and in certain respects renewed interest in the works of Michel Foucault might, at least partly, be attributed to the constant and steady flow of new editions that are added to the established canon of works. There are nowadays available newly discovered late intellectual's lectures from the 1950s, buried previously in the archives, or “bootleg”-recordings of lectures and conferences

during the 1970s from universities in Canada and US.¹ Notwithstanding all the issues surrounding Foucault's instructions that reportedly barred posthumous publications (Eribon 1991: 346–347, Foucault 2001a: 90), 2018 witnessed the publication of the fourth volume of *History of Sexuality*. Such industrious flourishing of various new editions defied prognosis by one of his biographers who had stated, some thirty years ago, that the

situation created by Foucault is frustrating one, but it has preempted the emergence of the almost embarrassingly productive postmortem industry that has grown up around Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir as more and more “unknown” manuscripts are disinterred from various cupboards. (Macey, 2019: xviii)²

But the lectures Foucault held at the Collège de France in the late 1970s attracted special interest even before they were published in their entirety, due to the more widely exploited and overarching “bio-politics” problematic. Apart from the regular summaries of the courses held at Collège (Foucault 2001b: 124, Foucault 2001f: 719, Foucault 2001g: 818), scarce sources of information in 1970s and 1980s were certain published lectures, but of limited availability, translated into Italian for instance (Foucault 2001c: 160, Foucault 2001d: 175, Foucault 2001e: 635), and later into English, integral or modified.³ As a concept that was known mostly through such scattered available fragments (interviews or lectures), “biopolitics” emerged as a seemingly promising new conceptual and thematic field, especially under the impact of subsequent applications like those by Giorgio Agamben or Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.⁴ Yet another impulse for sustained engagement with Foucault's late 1970s lectures was the connected concept of “governmentality” and subsequent birth of the so-called governmentality studies.

1. Biopolitics, neoliberalism and historical context

Still, it was only after 2004, when the lectures from the late 1970s were published integrally in French and translated into English by the end of the decade, that they attracted a new type of attention since they provided access to another topic that Foucault dealt with in his lecture hall, especially during 1979, and that is neoliberalism. So, for more than a decade now, Foucault's lectures from the late 1970s have been an object of interest and debate that is still under way as some very recent publications attest. The book by Mitchell Dean and Daniel Zamora (Dean and Zamora 2019)⁵, that recapitulates their positions exposed previously in articles, was published first

1 It is thus interesting, retrospectively looking, to find a remark of one of Foucault's biographers, James Miller, that there was a “flourishing black market in bootleg tape recordings” of Foucault's lectures already in the early 1990s (Miller 2000: 6).

2 In that very passage David Macey also commented on the fourth volume of *History of Sexuality* declaring that it was “unlikely to appear in print.”

3 Depending on the occasion, Foucault or later editors would lump together bits from various previous lectures to give a shortened overview of certain subjects (cf. Foucault 2001i: 953).

4 For an overview, see Lemke 2011.

5 Mitchell Dean was one of the proponents of “governmentality studies” as his bibliography testifies.

in French in 2019 and then in English in 2021, while there were various collections that dealt with these issues in recent years, sometimes collecting contributions from those on the opposite sides in these debates (Sawyer and Steinmetz-Jenkins 2019).⁶ The controversy that spans for more than a decade was stirred by the general tone and atmosphere of these lectures. The main question in the controversy and ensuing debate was and remained whether or not lectures on neoliberalism could be taken as a testimony that Foucault embraced some of the assumptions of neoliberal doctrine. Given that neoliberalism is widely debated subject nowadays, it is not surprising that such issue should provoke a whole range of different responses, especially because the affirmative answer opens up the fissure between the image of the *engagé* radical intellectual of the Left provenance and a reality in which Foucault might have – willy-nilly – evolved towards neoliberalism, as Michael Behrent has alluded in many of his articles, one of them stating that Foucault might have become a “Liberal despite himself” (Behrent 2019: 1). The simplest way to probe the range of responses to the 1979 lectures is probably if one compares the apologetic explanation offered by Geoffroy de Lagasnerie (Lagasnerie 2012) with Jan Rehmann’s remark that these lectures offer “empathetic retelling” (Rehmann 2013: 309) of neoliberalism’s own positions.

Behrent is sometimes even credited as the sole begetter of the so-called seduction hypothesis by some commentators (Hansen 2015: 293), although that might be seen as an exaggeration and simplification. Hints at the direction that Behrent’s articles followed in broaching the issue of the intricacies of Foucault’s interest in neoliberalism predate the integral publication of the 1979 lectures. For instance, Alessandro Fontana, one of Foucault’s close collaborators from the 1970s, was of the same persuasion – namely that Foucault was genuinely attracted to neoliberalism – an opinion which Serge Audier, one of the protagonists of the recent debates on neoliberal Foucault, has dismissed as “marginal,” commenting such a “suggestion that Foucault has been converted outright to neoliberalism” is “an excessive and partial conclusion” (Audier 2019: 33; 50). It is worth noting here that Behrent, to his credit, when commenting on today’s debates on a neoliberal Foucault, has indicated the similar interpretations and objections that appeared already during the 1970s and 1980s (Behrent 2019: 2). Also worth mentioning is that the aforementioned Miller already clearly – albeit passingly – alluded to Foucault’s possible sympathies for liberalism and neoliberalism in his biography (Miller 2000: 310–310; 315). It should not be forgotten that Behrent was, as can be seen from Miller’s acknowledgements (Miller 2000: 467), one of Miller’s collaborators during his work on Foucault’s biography, whose first edition appeared in the early 1990s. Therefore, the roots of the controversial question in contemporary interpretations – whether or not Foucault might have succumbed personally to the neoliberalism’s charms – go deeper in time than today’s iteration of debate might suggest at first glance.

What is interesting to note in these debates is the praise for Foucault’s ability to forecast the future. Wendy Brown, for example, finds “extraordinary prescience”

6 Zamora, but also Michael Behrent, might be considered as the commentators who have initiated the revision of the understanding of Foucault’s lectures from the late 1970s, in marked contrast with the prevailing opinion that Foucault’s lectures could serve as a critical tool in the analysis and even overcoming of neoliberalism. An example of the latter approach is the book by Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, see Dardot and Laval 2013.

(Brown 2015: 50) in Foucault's late 1970s lectures, while Christian Laval regards them as a demonstration of "great foresight" (Laval 2017: 64). Resuming in introductory parts of the 1979 lectures the previous 1978 season, and dealing with liberalism as one of the crucial components in forming of the new logic of the rational governing of the modern, or as he termed it, the "biopolitical" era, Foucault embarked on the presentation of some of the ideas of twentieth-century liberalism or neoliberalism. And he laid the coordinates for his considerations with the alternative of two economic and political creeds, "*laissez-faire*" on the one hand and interventionism (Foucault 2004b: 3; 22; 81) on the other, interpreting that alternative as the great fundamental dilemma of the modern era.

Looking backwards from the perspective of the accomplished triumph of neoliberalism, preceded by its intrusion into important political corridors in the decades predating the great recession of 2008, Foucault might seem as someone who had commented on certain phenomena *avant la lettre*. The individual as a *homo oeconomicus*, "human capital," "self-employment" and family as an enterprise, or enterprise as a family, these are just some of the exemplary items from the neoliberal vocabulary which has reinterpreted reality.

But it is necessary to underplay the historical context and partly untie Foucault from his own times, in order to give much weight to Foucault's "prescience." Analysed only textually and internally, Foucault might seem as someone who was able to predict thirty or forty years of history. On the contrary, if Foucault's dealings with neoliberalism are situated in the context of the late 1970s' social and intellectual tendencies, this impression starts to seem not so solidly founded.

That Parisian intellectual circles underwent a certain ideological turn during 1970s was not news for some commentators, at least those that were clearly critical towards such tendencies. Writing with some temporal distance, George Ross captured the moods of the era with these words

The underlying search, by the mid-1980s, was for the theoretical groundings of a polity where state power would be limited and circumscribed, allowing maximum space for democratic individualism while avoiding the undesirable atomizing aspects of Anglo-Saxon utilitarianism. It was a case of looking for America without Reagan and Adam Smith. To find it, there was first of all an Aron renaissance, which grew even more important following the great liberal's death. Aron once monumentalized, there then followed a massive reexamination of 19th century French liberalism – Constant, Guizot and, above all, Tocqueville. Simultaneously there was busy translation from the English and American – of Karl Popper, Friedrich von Hayek and Hannah Arendt, along with 1950s and 1960s reflections on pluralism and more recent liberal reflections on distributive justice, Rawls in particular. (Ross 1990: 209-210)

That such a turn was underway was obvious already in the late 1970s as is attested by the analysis of the rapprochement between Foucault and the so called "nouveaux philosophes" that Peter Dews offered (Dews 1977), as well as by Perry Anderson's remarks from the early 1980s (Anderson 1983: 32; 57; 75). It is therefore of some

interest that historical context is, more often than not, absent in discussions on Foucault's possible inclination towards neoliberalism, one of the exceptions being Michael Scott Christofferson's book (Christofferson 2004).⁷

2. *The problem of discontinuity and the historian's craft*

Looking laterally at the debates and ensuing secondary literature on Foucault's possible rapprochement with neoliberalism, it is quite interesting to note that Foucault's historical craft with regards to these lectures is seldom questioned, although his record is, to say the least, dubious in this respect. None other than Behrent – the arch-nemesis of Foucault's apologists – was puzzled by Foucault's confusing references to Marx's *Capital* claiming that it is

significant that as meticulous a reader as Foucault would make the mistake of confusing the first and second volumes. Foucault's knowledge was extensive and his scholarship scrupulous (even if historians have quibbled with his interpretations). (Behrent 2019: 14)

This sounds odd if one knows what these "quibbles" comprise, so much so that even as sympathetic a biographer as Macey was forced to admit, as "regular failing on Foucault's part," his "notoriously cavalier attitude to the use of quotations and references" (Macey 2019: 70). Indeed, Foucault's "cavalier attitude" seems quite a generous understatement when one is confronted with examples. More apt in that respect is Miller's remark – regarding Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* – that "Once again, then, the reader is faced with a strange, almost surreal sort of historiography" (Miller 2000: 211).

Foucault's feuds with historians' guild have a long and partly documented history. In the late 1980s Allan Megill provided an overview of Foucault's possible impact on the circles of professional historians, employing even the means of bibliometrical measurements to assess its degree (Megill 1987). Duly enumerating many critical reactions and polemical exchanges, his concluding remarks are indicatively different from Behrent's. The last resort that Megill retreated to was to say that even if Foucault's reliability as a historian was questioned time and again, he was the one who was forcing historians to think out of the box

Though he is not *of* the discipline, he is important *to* it, partly because he has called attention to hitherto neglected fields of research, but mostly because he fosters a self-reflection that is needed to counteract the sclerosis, the self-satisfaction, the smugness that constantly threaten. (Megill 1987: 134)

But what Megill has failed to mention in his overview is an episode that was part of the broader questioning of the influence that Foucault's claims in the book *Histoire*

⁷ Christofferson deals with the intellectual ambiance of the late 1970s in France in a book-length format which has served as one of the useful props for contemporary re-examinations of Foucault's positions during the late 1970s. His overview is included in the collection *Critiquer Foucault*, Zamora (ed.) 2014, which was then translated into English as *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, and co-edited by Zamora and Behrent.

de la folie have had. That new round of assessments of that particular book was going on some twenty years after its first publication, and just a few years before Megill's overview. Although Megill mentioned, for instance, the critique by H. C. Erik Midelfort, whose elements were referred to and partly reproduced in Lawrence Stone's contribution in *The New York Review of Books* that prompted Foucault's reply, and a second reply by Stone, he did not mention similar reservations and concerns that were expressed in France at the same time by Marcel Gauchet and Gladys Swain. In both cases, one point of contention was the so-called "grand renferment" that, according to Foucault, supposedly took place in the span of the classical age and Enlightenment, that is, roughly in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. Midelfort expressed his reservations (Midelfort 1980: 254–255), as well as Gauchet and Swain (Ferry; Renault 1988: 165; cf. Macey 2019: 424). Stone, for his part, voiced concerns in a broader frame, but regarding two of the characteristic points in Foucault's analyses: one was the cut in the history of various phenomena and the other was implication that what is seemingly progressive change is in fact illusory advancement since increasing humanity is always in reality only a hidden form of more subtle repression that is part of a "conspiracy of professionals" (Stone 1982). The concluding remarks of Stone's review tellingly remind one of Megill's conclusion, only in reverse. While Stone commended on Foucault's broaching of hitherto disregarded subjects in the historical research and humanities generally, he did point to possible pernicious effects that are the consequence of ungrounded generalizations or "simplistic pessimism that seems unable to distinguish antibiotics or insulin from charms, prayers, or whips" (Stone 1982).

What is also missing in Megill's review is one of the probably most embarrassing details regarding historians' "quibbles."⁸ One possible problem with that detail was just mentioned by Midelfort, but more thoroughly explored by Winifred Barbara Maher and Brendan Maher. It concerns the actual existence of the "stultifera navis," or "Nef des Fous" or "Narrenschiff." It should be borne in mind that Foucault has literally and unequivocally stated that "ships of fools" were unique, unlike other symbolic and artistic devices, in that they were really floating throughout Europe in the late medieval and early modern times as a form of society's treatment of folly (Foucault 1961: 19). Meanwhile, the research conducted by Mahers – and they explored a variety of sources and went so far as to contact not only various maritime museums but "professor Foucault" himself (Maher and Maher 1982: 759) – revealed that there was no evidence to corroborate Foucault's claim, which all pointed back to "stultifera navis" as nothing more than precisely a device used in artistic and literary representations or in carnival processions. Macey has reproduced Foucault's reply to Mahers, which they originally quoted in their article, in which Foucault basically admitted that he had no references that would confirm that "stultifera navis" was an actual practice, and not just an artistic representation or carnivalesque pageant (Maher and Maher 1982: 759; cf. Macey 2019: 432).

Regarding previously mentioned erroneous and confusing references to Marx made by Foucault, Behrent assumed that "there is no reason to use this minor

8 Some of these examples are described, with more details, in the concluding chapter of my forthcoming book. It seems necessary to refer to one's own book, but not – for readers to be advised – as a form of self-advertisement, but to avoid dishonest publishing practices on the author's part.

oversight to challenge Foucault's intellectual honesty or rigor" (Behrent 2019: 14). It is worthwhile to mention here that the same problem, regarding the reliability of various references to Marx made by Foucault, was noted by other commentators as well (Leonelli 2015). But even if one decides to be as benevolent as Behrent obviously is, the problems are broader than various examples with the casual or "cavalier" – as Macey would have it – use of sources to which "stultifera navis" testifies as one, albeit the most striking sample which might cause serious concerns.

What was the constant cause of Foucault's strained relationship with historians has to do with – as the polemic with Stone exemplifies well – the known habit and pattern of Foucault's dealing with history that came to be known as discontinuity,⁹ employed in an exemplary manner in the book *Les mots et les choses* in which two great divides formed the three chronological layers of epistemological fields baptized as "épistémè" (Foucault 1966: 13). One of the notable instances when the problems of that pattern in dealing with history were signalled was in a critical review that Jacques Léonard wrote after Foucault's book *Surveiller et punir* (i. e. *Discipline and Punish*) was published. Macey has provided a framework that suggests that the overall negative tone of Léonard's review had more to do with Maurice Agulhon – another historian and specialist for the XIXth century – and his disagreements and disputes with Foucault that go back in time (Macey 2019: 401–405), than with features of Foucault's approach which he used not only in that book. But things are too complicated to be reduced to some personal and unfinished affairs from the past.

3. Contesting visions of neoliberalism and Germany after WWII

As is well known, from the very first pages of the book *Surveiller et punir* (Foucault 1975: 9; 12), Foucault contrasted two examples which were used to illustrate the difference between the old world of cruel power that preceded modern power as discipline that was supposedly in place by the 1830s or 1840s. One of Léonard's remarks was about sort of the Manichean logic underlying Foucault's portrayal of the birth of a disciplinary society. In Foucault's account it would seem that once discipline was introduced, all indiscipline was wiped out (Léonard 1977: 166).

It is then interesting, although not surprising, to note that the same Manichean logic of discontinuities might be found at work in Foucault's dealings with neoliberalism. The picture that emerges from the 1979 lectures, through remarks in which he presented the situation in West Germany after WWII, could be summarized as follows. In the decades immediately after the German "stunde null," neoliberals, or more precisely "ordoliberal,"¹⁰ found themselves in a blank infrastructural space, sort of a laboratory of life, which provided them with the unique chance to implement some of their ideas. The basic position is captured by Foucault's comments about the situation in the years immediately following WWII:

9 It is beyond the scope of this paper to circumscribe the Bachelardian and Althusserian origins and later Foucault's application of the concept of discontinuity and epistemological "coupure" which Foucault himself, and various commentators, have discussed and explained, cf. Foucault 2001h: 875; Deleuze 1986: 29–30.

10 Serge Audier, who is slightly critical but overall sympathetic towards Foucault, nonetheless admitted, regarding the list of names of German liberals, that "Foucault commits a non-negligible factual error;" see Audier 2019: 39.

The problem posed to Germany in 1945, or more precisely in 1948 if we take those texts and decisions I talked about last week as our reference point, was clearly a very different and opposite problem (...). The problem was: given a state that does not exist, if I can put it like that, and given the task of giving existence to a state, how can you legitimize this state in advance as it were? How can you make it acceptable on the basis of an economic freedom which will both ensure its limitation and enable it to exist at the same time? (Foucault 2008: 102; cf. Foucault 2004: 106)

What was peculiar about these ideas, the grounding principle from which everything else is derived, was that their liberalism was sort of overcoming the great binary opposition, the alternative between “*laissez-faire*” and interventionism, since neoliberalism was an interventionist “*laissez-faire*” or liberalism that intervenes (Foucault 2004: 137–138). But what this entails is, in fact, a paradoxical intervention whose goal is not to intervene in a way to counterweight the effects of the competitive forces of the market mechanism:

it is understood that government must not intervene on effects of the market. Nor must neo-liberalism, or neo-liberal government, correct the destructive effects of the market on society, (...). Basically, it has to intervene on society so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society and by intervening in this way its objective will become possible, that is to say, a general regulation of society by the market. (Foucault 2008: 145)

Thus, in a society reconstructed on the basis of generalized competition, measures of social policy should become individualised or privatized (Foucault 2004: 149-150) as opposed to a “socialist social policy” (Foucault 2008: 144). The consequence, introduced without comments or further qualifications, is the following: “This leads us to the conclusion that there is only one true and fundamental social policy: economic growth” (Foucault 2008: 144).

What can be delved from various remarks throughout lectures is quite ambiguous. Although Foucault mentions, in two sentences, that certain measures of ordoliberal social policy were not fully implemented (Foucault 2004: 150), at other places he hints at the exceptionality of priorities in West German economic policy generally, and those were not full employment, but deregulation and the stability of prices (Foucault 2004: 81–83; 201). Still, one important point relevant in the present context is that the implicit moral of the tale about neoliberal goals and measures suggested that “ordoliberalism” was responsible for the success of the German economic miracle after WWII.

It seems then that, looked at in the entirety of Foucault’s lectures from the late 1970s, neoliberalism emerges as a sort of special “third way” – all the more through Foucault’s exploitation of the semantic readjustment of the “intervention” – that struck a successful balance and viable formula of social organization, which is not the welfare state of the other Western countries, nor the really existing socialism of the Eastern bloc. For neoliberals:

the important difference was no longer between this or that constitutional structure. The real problem was between a liberal politics and any other form whatsoever of economic interventionism, whether it takes the relatively mild form of Keynesianism or the drastic form of an autarchic plan like that of Germany. (Foucault 2008: 111)

It is interesting to note, in passing, how part of the quoted sentence is erased in English translation. The original wording says – which is relevant in this context of the vision of “neoliberalism-as-third way” – that the important difference was not between socialism and capitalism: “la différence essentielle n’était pas entre socialisme et capitalisme, la différence essentielle n’était pas non plus entre telle structure constitutionnelle et telle autre” (Foucault 2004: 114).

But if one is to compare the picture that Foucault was drawing with another one, painted by another historian of the craft, certain remarkable differences become visible. As Donald Sassoon claims, there was little difference between the opposing parts of the political spectre with regards to interventionism after WWII:

Public ownership was advocated not only by the SPD, but also in the surprisingly left-wing 1947 Ahlen Programme of the Christian Democratic Union. The CDU became an explicitly pro-capitalist party only a couple of years later. Still unpopular were liberal views, such as those held by Alfred Müller-Armack, the little known author of the formula of the *Soziale Marktwirtschaft* (social market economy), whose suggestive ambiguity led to its eventual hijacking by an ever-increasing number of European political parties. (Sassoon 2014: 159)

Needless to say, *Soziale Marktwirtschaft* was a motive Foucault pointed out in the lectures as crucially important for understanding the German situation (Foucault 2004: 150).¹¹

The other pronounced contrast would suggest that Foucault was making neoliberalism’s impact on Germany’s development during the 1960s seem much more important than it really was. Therefore, it would seem that Foucault was not only overstating the uniqueness of the German situation, which was supposedly marked by a general suspicion towards interventionism, but the role played by neoliberal tenets, personified by Ludwig Erhard for instance, in the overall reconstruction and deriving of legitimacy of the public institutions and State from the market and economic institutions (Foucault 2004: 85–86).

The entente between the CDU/CSU and the FDP was never a happy one. The free democrats succeeded in forcing the authoritarian and right-wing CSU defence minister, Franz-Josef Strauss, out of office in 1962 and obtaining the retirement of Adenauer in 1963. The chosen successor was Ludwig Erhard, the former economics minister, commonly and disputably regarded as the father of the German economic miracle and the chief ideologue of the ‘social

11 Also in the commentary about the introduction of neoliberal ideas in France, see Foucault 2004: 200.

market'. Erhard's economic philosophy was virtually identical to that of the FDP, the party of economic liberalism. Erhard, however, turned out to be the least inspiring of Germany's post-war chancellors. His luck has run out: the economic miracle had come to an end. The causes behind this are complex (...). (Sassoon 2014: 308)

After three years as chancellor, Erhard was succeeded by Kurt Kiesinger, former member of the Nazi Party, who – to prominent intellectuals' public outrage – helped bring SPD to power through the *Grosse Koalition* (Sassoon 2014: 309).

In addition to the main issue of the treatment of neoliberalism, it may be added – in sort of a bracket – that Kiesinger's trajectory points at yet another questionable feature in Foucault's treatment of the degree of discontinuity between West Germany before and after the Nazi period. Certainly, the overall social and legal framework was different after WWII, with a multiparty system and liberal-democratic institutions in West Germany. But at various layers there was also a certain continuity. Not just in regards to a restricted and dubiously thorough denazification which enabled much of the old cadre to remain in the state bureaucracy and judiciary, but on a more mundane and locale level of legal and other infrastructure which could be left in place if it had nothing to do with "ideological" issues.

A crucial point of contention though, relevant for reviewing Foucault's treatment of the historical role of neoliberalism, is in the interpretation of the "social market" concept. As Sassoon contends:

Another stereotype frequently used by the ill-informed was that the German economy was run according to the strictest and most inflexible criteria of sound and austere economic management, and that this meant spending as little public money as possible. In reality, German Christian democracy was popular not only because of economic growth, but also because it was always willing to hand out plenty of public money: lavish pensions (60 per cent of final salary in many cases); large building subsidies; the subsidization of the West Berlin economy; generous compensation paid to those affected by the war (to prevent the growth of a right-wing war veterans' party); state sustenance to uneconomic industries such as textiles, coalmining and shipbuilding; (...). The German 'social market' economy was almost as much 'social' as it was 'market'. (Sassoon 2014: 308)

Finally, and contrary to the abovementioned conclusion which Foucault presented not only as a logical outcome of the neoliberal doctrine, but as a fresh inspiration for a possible new type of policy and government – economic growth as the only true social policy – it is worth remembering that the idea of growth as a surrogate for redistribution could rather be seen as "the great conservative idea of the last generation" (as Sassoon quotes another historian, Charles Maier), and the foundation of a "conservative" consensus (Sassoon 2014: 280).

4. Conclusion

Instead of enlisting further points and differing traits of the historical picture that emerge from Sassoon's account, certain remarks could be advanced in the guise of a conclusion. What should be borne in mind is that all of these are complex questions that touch upon broader historiographical issues and some of the literature about Germany after WWII. These are, therefore, only preliminary remarks intended primarily to demonstrate some possible directions for a re-examination of Foucault's portrayal of the situation in West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s.

The first remark is that Foucault's emphasis on the exceptionality of the situation in West Germany seems to be a consequence of the necessity to maintain the privileged position of neoliberalism – in the overall exposition of its social and economic doctrine – as the original historical “third-way” type solution. To preserve that exceptionality, it became necessary to reproduce the elements which connect economic growth in West Germany with neoliberalism, although it is questionable how much West Germany was an exception to the general Western European climate after WWII that looked favourably at interventionism, whether there was in office Charles de Gaulle's type of conservative republicanism or a leftist British Labour Party. The causes of the economic growth in Germany are much more varied, and plausible explanations could probably be acquired without reduction onto a single factor (the “ordoliberal” doctrine), as Foucault might have been doing in the hope of finding a new type of “governmentality” (or at least that is what his sympathetic commentators claim). Such issues are obviously so broad that their assessment could be attained only through more specialized and focused studies in economic history that will enable detailed comparisons based on the data and structure of other economies (e. g. Japan, France, Great Britain) during the capitalist boom of the thirty years following 1945.

The second remark, regarding the question of Foucault's historical craft, is that such examples from lectures about neoliberalism may be taken as yet another occasion for questioning Foucault's authority as a historian. As the preceding lines have tried to suggest,¹² one of the crucial problems with Foucault's approach to history resides not only in what historians of profession and specialists in diverse areas have repeatedly complained about, i.e. chronological errors or instances of obviously wrong references – or lack thereof – as the “stultifera navis” situation testifies quite vocally, but also, as one critic has starkly remarked, in the overall (post)structuralist effect of the “*attenuation of truth*” (Anderson 1983: 45). Just as in some of the earlier mentioned instances, the problem that these lectures illustrate might be seen as yet another consequence of the methodological cornerstone – discontinuity – which more often than not led Foucault into overstating and forcing clear-cut contrasts onto history, while at the same time downplaying the role of continuity for the sake of maintaining neatness of the argument.

12 First two sections in this article have enumerated different commentaries precisely to point at a variety of interpretations and positions, but the assessment of the content of Foucault's lectures – namely, whether or not his approach is complex analysis or simple embrace of neoliberal tenets – was beside the point and the scope of this article. What was aimed here is just one particular segment, and that is the possibility to re-examine historical accuracy of Foucault's treatment of the role of German neoliberalism after WWII.

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KONTRAST I POVIJEST – MICHEL FOUCAULT I NEOLIBERALIZAM

Sažetak

Članak upućuje na jedan od mogućih rakursa za preispitivanje Foucaultova prikaza povijesne uloge njemačkoga neoliberalizma u predavanjima iz 1979. koja su objavljena pod naslovom *Naissance de la biopolitique*. Ova su predavanja bila predmetom naročita interesa posljednjih desetljeća iz više razloga. Jedan je povezan sa širom tematikom „biopolitike“ koju je Foucault razvijao u svojim predavanjima tijekom navedene godine (kao i u dvjema prethodnim godinama), a koja je doživjela kasnije interpretacije i aplikacije čak i prije no što su predavanja iz 1979. postala dostupna u cijelosti. Još jedan razlog koji je potaknuo raznolike interpretacije i sporenja – koja još uvijek nisu okončana kako pokazuju i neke recentne publikacije – odnosi se na opću postavu i ton Foucaultova bavljenja neoliberalizmom. Rasprave koje su uslijedile većinom su bile usmjerene na pitanje je li Foucault prihvatio neke neoliberalne postavke kojima se bavio u tim predavanjima.

Ono što se često previđalo u raspravama odnosi se na to koliko je povijesno točna slika o ulozu njemačkoga „ordoliberalizma“ nakon Drugoga svjetskog rata, kakva se javlja u Foucaultovim predavanjima, što je u određenoj mjeri iznenađujuće uzme li se u obzir da je Foucaultov odnos s „cehom povjesničara“ bio napet, prošaran kritikama i polemikama. Neke od tih kritika ukratko su reproducirane kako bi se pozornost umjerila na određene slabosti Foucaultova pristupa prošlosti koje su se ponavljale. Krucijalan nedostatak mogao bi se ipak povezati s konceptom „reza“ ili diskontinuiteta čija se posljedica odnosi na to da je Foucault pretjerivao u naglašavanju kontrasta u prošlosti. Zaključni dio rada predlaže, premda tek u obliku preliminarnih naznaka i kratkom komparacijom, da je Foucault vjerojatno previše naglasio ulogu koju su ideje „ordoliberalala“ mogle imati u Njemačkoj tijekom 1950-ih i 1960-ih i to upravo zbog toga što je mogao ne samo prihvatiti viđenje prema kojemu su neke od tih ideje bile zamašnjak ekonomskoga i društvenoga razvoja, nego i određena vrsta rješenja nalik na „treći put“.

Ključne riječi: Michel Foucault, neoliberalizam, njemački „ordoliberalizam“, povijest, povjesničari