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FOUCAULDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY: THE DISCOURSE ON CONTEMPORARY INSTITUTIONS AND MECHANISM OF GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

The anthropology of modern society has increasingly become a significant area of inquiry in contemporary philosophical and social discourse. Through the ideas of Michel Foucault, modern society can be understood as a complex network of power relations, disciplinary mechanisms, and systems of knowledge that shape human behavior and identity. This study critically examines Foucault's anthropological interpretation of modern society, focusing on his concepts of power, discipline, surveillance, discourse, and biopolitics. The paper argues that modern institutions such as schools, prisons, hospitals, religious organizations, and media systems function as instruments for regulating individuals and producing socially acceptable forms of conduct. Using a philosophical and hermeneutic method of analysis, the study explores how Foucault challenges traditional notions of human nature by presenting the individual as a product of historical and social forces. The article further investigates the relevance of Foucauldian thought to contemporary society, especially in relation to digital surveillance, governance, identity formation, and social control. Particular attention is given to the implications of these ideas for African societies, including Nigeria, where institutional power and political structures continue to shape social existence. The study concludes that Foucault's anthropology provides a critical framework for understanding the dynamics of modern society and encourages a rethinking of freedom, ethics, and human agency within contemporary socio-political realities.

Keywords: Anthropology, Modern Society, Power, Surveillance, Biopolitics, Subjectivity.

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Introduction

The emergence of modern society has significantly transformed the understanding of the human person, social institutions, and structures of power. Modernity, characterized by industrialization, technological advancement, globalization, bureaucratic governance, and scientific rationalism, has reshaped social relations and patterns of human existence. Anthropological inquiry, which traditionally focused on the study of culture, human behavior, and social organization, has gradually expanded beyond classical ethnographic concerns to include critical examinations of power, identity, surveillance, and institutional control (Best & Kellner, 2021). Contemporary anthropology increasingly engages with philosophical and social theories that interrogate how modern societies construct knowledge, regulate populations, and shape human subjectivity. The transition from classical anthropology to critical social theory marked an important intellectual shift in the humanities and social sciences. Earlier anthropological traditions often emphasized cultural description and structural analysis, but contemporary approaches now pay greater attention to discourse, ideology, domination, and social regulation (Eriksen, 2020). This shift was influenced by post-structuralist thinkers, particularly Michel Foucault, whose works profoundly transformed the analysis of modern society. Foucault challenged essentialist understandings of human nature by arguing that individuals are socially and historically constituted through systems of power and knowledge (Lorenzini, 2021). His philosophical anthropology examines how institutions such as prisons, schools, hospitals, and religious structures discipline human behavior and produce socially acceptable identities.

Modern society is increasingly confronted with crises relating to identity, social fragmentation, surveillance, and institutional domination. The rapid expansion of technological systems and bureaucratic governance has intensified mechanisms of monitoring and regulation, often reducing individuals to objects of administrative and political control (Lyon, 2021). Contemporary institutions, including governments, educational systems, media organizations, and digital corporations, exercise significant influence over human conduct through subtle forms of discipline and normalization. These realities raise important anthropological and philosophical questions concerning freedom, autonomy, and the nature of the human person in modern society. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Analyze modern society using Foucault's anthropological insights.
- ii. Examine the relationship between power, knowledge, and human behaviour.
- iii. Evaluate Foucauldian concepts in understanding contemporary institutions and mechanisms of governance.

This study contributes to the field of philosophical anthropology by providing a critical interpretation of modern society through Foucauldian thought. It expands scholarly discussions concerning the relationship between power, identity, and institutional structures in contemporary society. The study also contributes to sociology, political philosophy, and cultural studies by examining how social institutions influence human behavior and consciousness through disciplinary mechanisms and systems of surveillance. This study adopts a philosophical and critical method of analysis. The philosophical approach is employed to examine the conceptual foundations of Foucault's anthropology and his understanding of modern society. Critical analysis is used to evaluate the implications of Foucauldian concepts such as power, discourse, discipline, and biopolitics for contemporary social institutions.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

Anthropology: Anthropology is broadly understood as the systematic study of human beings, their cultures, social relations, beliefs, and modes of existence across time and space. Derived from the Greek words *anthropos* (human being) and *logos* (study or discourse), anthropology seeks to understand the nature of humanity in both its biological and socio-cultural dimensions. Traditionally, anthropology has been divided into physical anthropology, cultural anthropology, social anthropology, linguistic anthropology, and archaeological anthropology, each focusing on different aspects of human life and development (Eriksen, 2020). However, contemporary anthropology has expanded beyond descriptive studies of culture to include critical analyses of identity, power, technology, and globalization.

Modern Society: Modern society refers to the social, political, economic, and cultural order that emerged primarily after the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. It is characterized by scientific rationality, technological advancement, industrial production, urbanization, secularization, and bureaucratic governance. Modernity transformed traditional forms of social organization by replacing communal and religious structures with systems based on rational administration, capitalism, and state institutions (Giddens & Sutton, 2021). As a result, human relationships and identities became increasingly shaped by institutional and technological processes.

Power and Knowledge

The relationship between power and knowledge occupies a central position in the philosophy of Michel Foucault. Foucault rejects the traditional understanding of power as something possessed exclusively by governments or political elites. Instead, he conceives power as diffuse, relational, and embedded within social practices and institutions. Power operates through networks of relationships that shape behavior, regulate conduct, and define social norms (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer, & Thaning, 2020). Knowledge, in this context, is not neutral or objective but is closely connected to structures of power. Foucault's concept of "power/knowledge" emphasizes that systems of knowledge are produced within social and institutional frameworks that determine what is accepted as truth. Scientific disciplines, educational systems, legal institutions, and medical practices all contribute to the production and circulation of knowledge. These knowledge systems, in turn, reinforce structures of authority and social regulation. For instance, psychiatric institutions define standards of normality and abnormality, while legal systems classify acceptable and deviant behavior (Han, 2022). Through these processes, knowledge becomes an instrument for governing individuals and populations.

Subjectivity and Identity

Subjectivity refers to the ways individuals understand themselves and are constituted as subjects within society. Identity, similarly, concerns the social and psychological processes through which individuals define themselves in relation to culture, institutions, and social expectations. In classical humanist philosophy, identity was often understood as stable, autonomous, and rooted in rational consciousness. However, post-structuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault challenged this assumption by arguing that subjectivity is socially constructed through discourse and power relations.

Foucault's Anthropology of Modern Society

The Human Person as a Social Construct: A major contribution of Michel Foucault to philosophical anthropology lies in his rejection of essentialist conceptions of human nature. Traditional philosophical thought, especially within classical and humanist traditions, often viewed the human person as possessing a fixed and universal essence grounded in reason, morality, or metaphysical identity. Foucault challenges this assumption by arguing that human beings are historically and socially constituted through discourse, institutional practices, and power relations (Lorenzini, 2021). According to him, there is no timeless or universal human nature independent of historical conditions and social structures. Foucault's critique of essentialism is closely related to his understanding of discourse and historical epistemes. He maintains that what societies understand as "human nature" is shaped by dominant systems of knowledge that emerge within specific historical periods. Consequently, human identity is not natural or permanent but constructed through language, cultural practices, institutions, and mechanisms of social regulation (Han, 2022). Modern institutions define what is considered normal, rational, moral, or deviant, thereby shaping how individuals perceive themselves and others. This argument culminates in Foucault's famous "death of man" thesis articulated in *The Order of Things*. Here, Foucault contends that the modern concept of "man" is not an eternal reality but a recent intellectual construction that may eventually disappear as systems of thought change (Foucault, 1970). By declaring the "death of man," Foucault does not deny human existence; rather, he criticizes the Enlightenment belief that human beings are autonomous and self-determining subjects at the center of knowledge. He instead presents the individual as a product of historical discourses and institutional structures. This perspective significantly reshapes anthropological inquiry by emphasizing the social production of identity and subjectivity.

Discipline and the Formation of Modern Individuals

One of Foucault's most influential concepts is disciplinary power, which refers to the subtle mechanisms through which modern institutions regulate human behavior and produce obedient individuals. Unlike traditional forms of sovereign power that relied primarily on force and punishment, disciplinary power operates through surveillance, normalization, training, and routine practices that shape individual conduct (Dean & Villadsen, 2021). Discipline functions not through visible coercion alone but through continuous observation and behavioral conditioning. Foucault argues that modern society is characterized by the emergence of disciplinary institutions such as schools, prisons, hospitals, factories, and military barracks. These institutions organize space, regulate time, and impose routines that encourage conformity and efficiency. Through examinations, classifications, schedules, and surveillance, institutions create what Foucault describes as "docile bodies," individuals who internalize social norms and become useful to the functioning of society (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer, & Thaning, 2020).

Schools, for instance, discipline students through timetables, examinations, grading systems, and behavioral monitoring. Prisons regulate inmates through constant surveillance and corrective measures aimed at reforming conduct. Hospitals classify patients according to medical standards and establish systems of observation and treatment that normalize bodily behavior. Similarly, military institutions employ drills, routines, and hierarchical command structures to produce disciplined soldiers capable of obedience and efficiency. In each case, disciplinary power transforms individuals into socially regulated subjects. Contemporary studies suggest that disciplinary mechanisms have expanded beyond physical institutions

into digital and technological environments. Workplaces, online platforms, and surveillance technologies increasingly regulate human behavior through data monitoring and algorithmic systems (Zuboff, 2019). Thus, Foucauldian analysis remains highly relevant in understanding how modern societies shape individual identity and conduct through subtle forms of institutional control.

Surveillance and the Panopticon

The concept of surveillance occupies a central place in Foucault's anthropology of modern society. Foucault draws inspiration from the panopticon, a prison design proposed by Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century. Bentham's panopticon consisted of a circular prison structure with a central observation tower from which guards could monitor inmates without being seen. Since prisoners could never know when they were being watched, they were compelled to regulate their own behavior (Bentham, 1995). Foucault adapts this model as a metaphor for modern systems of social control. In *Discipline and Punish*, he argues that modern society functions as a "panoptic" system in which individuals are subjected to continuous observation through institutional and technological mechanisms (Foucault, 1977). Surveillance becomes a means of maintaining order and discipline by encouraging self-monitoring and conformity. Unlike overt physical punishment, panoptic power operates psychologically by internalizing control within individuals themselves.

Surveillance culture has become increasingly prominent in contemporary society due to the expansion of digital technologies, social media platforms, biometric systems, and state monitoring practices. Governments and corporations collect vast amounts of personal data, track online activities, and influence social behavior through algorithms and predictive systems (Lyon, 2021). Modern surveillance extends beyond prisons into everyday life, affecting communication, consumption, education, healthcare, and political participation. A significant aspect of panopticism is self-regulation and internalized control. Individuals often modify their behavior because they believe they are being observed or evaluated by institutions and society. Social media users, for example, carefully manage their self-presentation to conform to social expectations and digital norms. Foucault's theory demonstrates that modern power functions most effectively when individuals willingly participate in their own regulation. Consequently, surveillance becomes embedded within the social fabric of modern life.

Biopolitics and Population Control

Foucault introduces the concept of biopolitics to describe the ways modern states regulate human life, bodies, and populations. Biopolitics refers to forms of power that focus on managing birth rates, health systems, sexuality, mortality, hygiene, and demographic patterns in order to optimize social productivity and political stability (Esposito, 2022). Unlike sovereign power, which centered on the right to punish or kill, biopolitical power is concerned with fostering, organizing, and administering life itself. Modern governments exercise biopolitical control through healthcare systems, public policies, educational programs, and scientific institutions. Medical institutions monitor diseases, regulate bodily practices, and establish norms of health and normality. Public health campaigns, vaccination programs, reproductive policies, and demographic planning are examples of biopolitical mechanisms aimed at managing populations (Agamben, 2021). Through these systems, states gain authority over biological and social life.

Sexuality occupies a central place in Foucault's analysis of biopolitics. In *The History of Sexuality*, he argues that modern societies do not merely repress sexuality but actively

produce discourses about it through medicine, psychology, religion, and law (Foucault, 1978). These discourses classify sexual behavior, define moral standards, and regulate bodily identities. Sexuality thus becomes an important site through which power operates in shaping human subjectivity. Biopolitics also influences governance by linking political authority to the management of populations. Contemporary issues such as pandemics, migration, reproductive rights, and digital health surveillance demonstrate the continuing relevance of biopolitical analysis. During global health crises, for example, governments implement monitoring systems, movement restrictions, and medical regulations to control populations and protect public health. Foucauldian theory therefore provides important insights into the relationship between governance, human bodies, and institutional power in modern society.

Knowledge, Truth, and Social Control

The relationship between knowledge, truth, and social control forms another central dimension of Foucault's anthropology of modern society. Foucault argues that knowledge is inseparable from power because institutions produce forms of knowledge that sustain systems of domination and regulation. Discourses function as instruments of power by defining what is considered normal, rational, moral, and true within society (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer, & Thaning, 2020). Discourses are systems of language, ideas, practices, and institutional structures that shape social understanding. Through discourse, institutions establish categories of identity and behavior that regulate individuals. Medical discourse, for instance, defines standards of health and illness; legal discourse distinguishes between lawful and criminal conduct; educational discourse determines intellectual competence and social value. These discourses influence how people understand themselves and interact within society (Butler, 2020).

Scientific knowledge occupies a particularly important place in modern systems of authority. Foucault argues that modern societies often legitimize institutional power through claims of scientific objectivity and expertise. Medical professionals, psychologists, criminologists, and bureaucratic administrators exercise authority because their knowledge is regarded as rational and objective. However, Foucauldian analysis reveals that scientific knowledge is deeply connected to institutional interests and mechanisms of social control (Han, 2022). Institutional authority is therefore maintained not only through laws and coercion but also through the production of accepted truths. Schools determine standards of intelligence, hospitals classify mental health conditions, and media institutions shape public opinion through selective narratives. In contemporary digital society, algorithms, artificial intelligence, and data systems increasingly influence what people perceive as truth and reality (Zuboff, 2019). Foucault's anthropology demonstrates that truth is socially produced within networks of power and that knowledge remains a powerful instrument for regulating human existence in modern society.

Foucauldian Anthropology in African Society

Colonialism and Power Structures in Africa: The application of Foucauldian anthropology to African society provides important insights into the historical and contemporary structures of domination, governance, and identity formation on the continent. Colonialism in Africa was not merely an economic or political enterprise; it also functioned as a system of disciplinary power designed to regulate indigenous populations and reshape African social realities according to European colonial interests. Through administrative policies, missionary activities, educational systems, and military structures, colonial powers

established mechanisms of surveillance and control that transformed African societies (Mbembe, 2021). Colonial administration relied heavily on disciplinary systems similar to those analyzed by Michel Foucault in his studies of modern institutions.

Colonial governments introduced census systems, taxation policies, identity registration, and legal frameworks that enabled the monitoring and regulation of African populations. Schools and missionary institutions were used not only for education and evangelization but also for the production of obedient colonial subjects who would internalize European cultural values and political authority (Mamdani, 2020). Colonial prisons and military institutions further reinforced systems of discipline and punishment designed to suppress resistance and maintain imperial control. Knowledge production also played a central role in colonial domination. Colonial anthropology, historiography, and administrative discourse often portrayed African societies as primitive, irrational, or uncivilized in order to justify European intervention and control. Through these discourses, colonial authorities established intellectual systems that marginalized indigenous knowledge and legitimized colonial power (Mudimbe, 2019). Foucauldian analysis reveals that colonialism operated not only through military force but also through the production of “truth” about Africa and Africans. Consequently, colonial power shaped African identity, culture, and governance through interconnected systems of knowledge and institutional authority.

Governance and Social Control in Contemporary Africa: Contemporary African societies continue to reflect many of the disciplinary and bureaucratic structures inherited from colonial rule. Modern African states operate through administrative systems, policing structures, legal institutions, and bureaucratic mechanisms that regulate social life and political participation. In Foucauldian terms, governance in Africa can be understood as a network of power relations that shape citizen behavior through surveillance, institutional control, and political authority (Dean & Villadsen, 2021). Bureaucracy remains one of the dominant features of governance in many African countries. Government institutions regulate social and economic activities through documentation, licensing, identity systems, taxation, and administrative procedures. While bureaucracy is intended to promote order and efficiency, it can also function as a mechanism of exclusion and domination when institutions become instruments of political control. Citizens are often subjected to excessive regulation, surveillance, and institutional dependency, particularly in contexts where democratic accountability is weak (Ake, 2020). Policing and political authority also illustrate Foucauldian ideas concerning disciplinary power in African societies. Security agencies frequently exercise significant control over public life through monitoring, crowd regulation, and enforcement mechanisms. In some African states, policing structures have been criticized for human rights abuses, political intimidation, and the suppression of dissenting voices. These practices demonstrate how institutional power can shape social behavior through fear, discipline, and normalization (Mbembe, 2021).

Corruption further complicates the relationship between governance and institutional power in Africa. Corruption weakens public trust in institutions and often transforms state structures into instruments serving private interests rather than collective welfare. Foucauldian analysis suggests that institutional power is not always centralized but dispersed across networks of political, economic, and social actors who influence governance processes. As a result, corruption becomes embedded within institutional practices and systems of authority, affecting justice, development, and democratic participation across many African societies.

Media, Religion, and Identity in African Societies: Media and religion play significant roles in shaping identity, social behavior, and public consciousness within African societies. In Foucauldian terms, both institutions function as important sites of discourse through which knowledge, morality, and social norms are produced and circulated. Religious institutions in Africa possess considerable influence over ethical conduct, political attitudes, family structures, and cultural values. Churches, mosques, and traditional religious systems contribute to the formation of social identity by defining acceptable patterns of behavior and moral responsibility (Kalu, 2020). Religion often serves as both a source of liberation and a mechanism of social regulation. Religious leaders and institutions shape public opinion on issues such as sexuality, gender roles, political participation, and morality. Through sermons, doctrines, and moral teachings, religious institutions influence how individuals perceive themselves and their relationship to society. Foucauldian anthropology reveals that these religious discourses contribute to processes of normalization and self-regulation by encouraging individuals to internalize moral expectations and disciplinary practices.

The rise of digital media and communication technologies has also transformed social relations and political engagement in Africa. Social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp increasingly influence political communication, activism, and identity formation. Digital spaces have created opportunities for civic participation, youth mobilization, and resistance against oppressive governance structures. At the same time, governments and political actors utilize digital technologies for surveillance, information control, and political propaganda (Couldry & Mejias, 2021). Digital surveillance has become a growing concern in many African societies. Governments increasingly monitor online communication, regulate digital activism, and employ cyber-security laws to control public discourse. Citizens often modify their online behavior due to fears of state monitoring or political consequences. This reflects Foucault's concept of panopticism, where surveillance encourages self-regulation and conformity even in virtual spaces. Thus, media and religion remain powerful instruments in shaping identity, behavior, and social control within contemporary African societies.

Foucauldian Humanistic Anthropology of Modern Society

Rethinking Freedom and Human Agency: Although Michel Foucault is often criticized for emphasizing domination and social control, his later works reveal an important concern for freedom, resistance, and human agency. While modern institutions shape individuals through disciplinary mechanisms and systems of surveillance, Foucault maintains that power relations are never absolute or completely deterministic. Wherever power exists, possibilities for resistance also emerge (Foucault, 1982). Human beings are therefore not merely passive objects of institutional control but active participants capable of questioning and transforming the conditions that shape their existence.

Foucault's understanding of freedom differs significantly from classical liberal notions that define freedom simply as the absence of external constraint. Instead, he views freedom as the capacity for critical reflection and self-formation within existing social conditions. Freedom involves the ability of individuals to challenge dominant discourses, resist oppressive structures, and redefine their relationship with systems of power (Lorenzini, 2021). This perspective is especially important in modern societies where power operates subtly through normalization, surveillance, and institutional regulation rather than direct coercion alone. Resistance occupies a central place in Foucauldian anthropology because it demonstrates that individuals are capable of contesting structures of domination. Social

movements, intellectual criticism, digital activism, and struggles for human rights all represent forms of resistance against oppressive political and institutional systems. In contemporary society, citizens increasingly challenge authoritarian governance, racial discrimination, gender oppression, and economic inequality through collective action and public discourse (Butler, 2020). Such forms of resistance illustrate the continuing relevance of Foucault's ideas for understanding human agency in modern society.

Foucault also emphasizes ethical self-formation as an important dimension of freedom. Individuals possess the capacity to critically examine their thoughts, behaviors, and identities rather than merely conforming to institutional expectations. Through reflective practices and ethical self-discipline, human beings can cultivate autonomy and moral responsibility. Consequently, Foucauldian anthropology encourages a rethinking of human existence not as passive submission to power but as an ongoing process of self-creation and critical engagement with society.

Ethics and Care of the Self: Foucault's later philosophy marks a significant transition from his earlier focus on disciplinary power toward a deeper exploration of ethics and the "care of the self." In works such as *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, Foucault investigates how individuals in ancient societies cultivated ethical forms of living through self-examination, moderation, and moral discipline (Foucault, 1986). Rather than understanding ethics as obedience to universal moral laws, Foucault presents ethics as a practice of self-transformation through conscious reflection and responsible conduct. The concept of the "care of the self" refers to practices through which individuals actively shape their character, thoughts, and behavior. These practices involve self-knowledge, critical reflection, and the cultivation of moral responsibility. According to Foucault, ethical living requires individuals to examine the social forces and discourses that influence their identities and actions (Hadot, 2020). By doing so, they gain the capacity to resist forms of domination and create meaningful ways of existence.

Self-transformation is therefore central to Foucauldian ethics. Human beings are not fixed entities determined entirely by social structures; rather, they possess the ability to redefine themselves through ethical practice. This process involves questioning dominant norms, challenging oppressive identities, and cultivating values that promote dignity, responsibility, and freedom. In modern society, where consumerism, technological dependency, and surveillance increasingly shape human behavior, Foucauldian ethics provides a framework for reclaiming individual autonomy and moral consciousness. The idea of responsible citizenship also emerges from Foucault's ethical reflections. Citizens are not merely subjects governed by institutions but individuals capable of participating critically in social and political life. Responsible citizenship involves active engagement in democratic processes, respect for human dignity, and commitment to social justice. Contemporary societies require citizens who can critically evaluate political authority, resist injustice, and contribute to the common good through ethical participation (Dean & Villadsen, 2021). Thus, the care of the self becomes closely connected to the care of society.

Reconstructing Social Institutions: A humanistic anthropology of modern society requires the reconstruction of social institutions in ways that prioritize human dignity, justice, and ethical responsibility. Foucauldian analysis reveals how institutions such as schools, prisons, hospitals, governments, and media organizations often function through mechanisms of surveillance, normalization, and social control. While these institutions are necessary for social organization, they must be reoriented toward the promotion of human flourishing

rather than domination and exclusion. Human-centered governance is essential in addressing the challenges of modern society. Governance should not operate merely through bureaucratic regulation and disciplinary control but through participatory and ethical structures that respect individual rights and collective welfare. Democratic institutions must promote transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in decision-making processes (Mbembe, 2021). Such reforms are particularly important in societies where corruption, authoritarianism, and institutional inefficiency undermine public trust and social development.

Educational institutions also require reconstruction within a humanistic framework. Rather than functioning solely as mechanisms for discipline and conformity, schools and universities should encourage critical thinking, creativity, ethical reasoning, and social responsibility. Education should empower individuals to question oppressive structures and contribute positively to society. Similarly, judicial and security institutions should prioritize justice, fairness, and human rights instead of excessive coercion or abuse of authority. Democratic participation and social justice are central to the reconstruction of modern institutions. Citizens must have meaningful opportunities to participate in political processes, public discourse, and social transformation. Marginalized groups should be included in governance structures to ensure equality and representation. Foucauldian anthropology demonstrates that institutions shape human identity and social existence; therefore, institutional reform is necessary for creating societies grounded in dignity, freedom, and justice. In the context of African societies, particularly Nigeria, reconstructing institutions involves addressing corruption, strengthening democratic accountability, promoting human rights, and improving social welfare systems. It also requires balancing security concerns with the protection of civil liberties in an increasingly digital and surveillance-oriented world. Through ethical governance and responsible citizenship, modern society can move toward a more humanistic understanding of social existence that recognizes both individual autonomy and collective responsibility.

An Evaluation of Foucault's Anthropology

The anthropology of Michel Foucault remains one of the most influential approaches in contemporary social and philosophical thought because of its profound analysis of power, institutions, and human subjectivity. One of the major strengths of Foucauldian analysis lies in its ability to expose the hidden mechanisms of power operating within modern society. Unlike traditional theories that limit power to political authority or state coercion, Foucault demonstrates that power is dispersed throughout social institutions, cultural practices, and systems of knowledge (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer, & Thaning, 2020). This insight enables a deeper understanding of how individuals are shaped through subtle forms of discipline, normalization, and surveillance. Foucault's concept of disciplinary power provides a valuable framework for analyzing institutions such as schools, prisons, hospitals, military structures, and bureaucratic systems. His argument that institutions produce "docile bodies" through observation, classification, and regulation reveals how social order is maintained through psychological and institutional mechanisms rather than force alone (Dean & Villadsen, 2021). This contribution significantly expanded anthropological and sociological discussions concerning the relationship between institutions and human behavior.

Another important strength of Foucauldian anthropology is its relevance to contemporary governance and surveillance systems. In the digital age, governments, corporations, and technological institutions increasingly rely on data collection, biometric monitoring, and algorithmic regulation to shape social behavior. Foucault's analysis of

panopticism and surveillance culture remains highly applicable in understanding modern technologies such as facial recognition systems, online tracking, social media monitoring, and artificial intelligence (Zuboff, 2019). His work anticipated many of the ethical and political concerns associated with digital governance and the erosion of privacy in contemporary society. Foucauldian analysis is also significant because it challenges dominant assumptions concerning truth, knowledge, and objectivity. By demonstrating that knowledge systems are closely linked to structures of power, Foucault encourages critical examination of institutions that claim authority through scientific expertise or political legitimacy. This perspective has influenced fields such as anthropology, sociology, political philosophy, gender studies, media studies, and postcolonial theory. Consequently, his anthropology provides an interdisciplinary framework for understanding the complexities of modern social existence.

Despite its intellectual significance, Foucauldian anthropology has been criticized on several grounds. One major criticism concerns the alleged pessimism and determinism in Foucault's conception of power. Critics argue that Foucault places excessive emphasis on the pervasive nature of power to the extent that individuals appear trapped within systems of domination and surveillance (Habermas, 2020). Since institutions shape identity, behavior, and social consciousness, some scholars contend that Foucault leaves little room for genuine autonomy or liberation. Closely related to this criticism is the argument that Foucault provides a limited account of human freedom and resistance. Although he acknowledges the existence of resistance within power relations, critics maintain that his theory does not sufficiently explain how meaningful social transformation can occur. Human agency often appears weakened because individuals are portrayed primarily as products of discourse and institutional control (Taylor, 2019). Existentialist philosophers, for instance, criticize Foucault for neglecting the inner dimension of human freedom, personal responsibility, and authentic selfhood.

Marxist scholars also criticize Foucault for insufficiently addressing economic structures and class relations. While Foucault focuses on disciplinary institutions and discourse, Marxists argue that capitalism and material economic conditions remain the primary sources of domination in society (Jameson, 2021). According to this perspective, Foucauldian analysis underestimates the role of economic exploitation and class struggle in shaping modern social relations. Marxist critics therefore contend that Foucault's theory fragments power into dispersed networks without adequately identifying the structural inequalities produced by capitalism. Feminist scholars have similarly engaged critically with Foucault's anthropology. Some feminist thinkers appreciate his analysis of the body, sexuality, and social regulation, particularly his insights into how gender identities are constructed through discourse and institutional norms (Butler, 2020). However, other feminists argue that Foucault does not sufficiently address patriarchal domination, gender inequality, and the lived experiences of women. Critics maintain that his abstract understanding of power sometimes overlooks concrete forms of oppression based on gender, race, and social class.

Existential and humanist philosophers further criticize Foucault's rejection of universal human nature and objective moral foundations. By emphasizing the socially constructed nature of identity and truth, Foucault appears to undermine stable ethical standards and universal concepts of human dignity. Critics argue that without a coherent account of human nature or moral values, it becomes difficult to justify resistance against

oppression or advocate for universal human rights (Sartre, 2020). Consequently, some scholars view Foucauldian anthropology as intellectually provocative but ethically ambiguous.

Despite these criticisms, Foucauldian anthropology remains highly relevant to understanding the realities of contemporary society. One area where his ideas continue to be influential is the analysis of globalization and digital control. Globalization has intensified the interconnectedness of political, economic, and technological systems, leading to new forms of governance and surveillance that transcend national boundaries. Digital corporations and state institutions collect massive amounts of personal data, monitor online behavior, and influence social interaction through algorithmic systems (Couldry & Mejias, 2021). Foucault's concepts of surveillance, disciplinary power, and biopolitics provide important tools for understanding these emerging structures of control. The rise of digital technologies has also transformed the regulation of identity and social behavior. Social media platforms shape public opinion, construct social identities, and influence patterns of communication through systems of visibility and algorithmic recommendation. Individuals increasingly regulate their behavior in response to online observation, public scrutiny, and digital expectations. This reflects Foucauldian notions of panopticism, where surveillance encourages self-monitoring and conformity even without direct coercion (Han, 2022).

Identity politics and social regulation further demonstrate the continuing relevance of Foucauldian thought. Contemporary debates concerning race, gender, sexuality, religion, and cultural identity often involve struggles over discourse, representation, and institutional recognition. Foucault's analysis of how identities are socially constructed through systems of knowledge and power remains valuable for examining these issues. His work helps explain how social norms define acceptable identities while marginalizing alternative forms of existence. Foucauldian anthropology is equally relevant to contemporary human rights and resistance movements. Around the world, individuals and social groups continue to resist authoritarian governance, racial discrimination, gender oppression, censorship, and violations of civil liberties. Social movements advocating democracy, justice, and equality challenge institutional structures that restrict freedom and dignity. In African societies, including Nigeria, movements against police brutality, corruption, and political oppression reveal the continuing struggle between institutional power and human agency. Moreover, contemporary concerns regarding public health, migration, national security, and artificial intelligence further demonstrate the significance of Foucauldian concepts such as biopolitics and governance. Governments increasingly regulate populations through health surveillance, biometric identification, and security technologies. These developments illustrate how modern society continues to operate through interconnected systems of power, knowledge, and institutional regulation. The enduring relevance of Foucauldian anthropology lies in its capacity to critically interrogate the structures shaping modern human existence. While his theory may not provide a complete account of freedom or morality, it remains an indispensable framework for analyzing contemporary forms of power, identity, surveillance, and social transformation.

Conclusion

This study has examined the anthropology of modern society through the ideas of Michel Foucault, with particular attention to the relationship between power, knowledge, institutions, and human subjectivity. The study revealed that modern society is fundamentally structured through complex networks of power relations that shape human behavior, identity, and social existence. Unlike traditional understandings of power as merely political or coercive, Foucault demonstrates that power operates subtly through

institutions, discourses, and systems of knowledge that regulate individuals and populations. The study further established that modern institutions such as schools, prisons, hospitals, military organizations, religious structures, and bureaucratic systems function as mechanisms of discipline and regulation. Through surveillance, normalization, examinations, and administrative procedures, these institutions produce socially acceptable forms of conduct and create what Foucault describes as “docile bodies.” The analysis of disciplinary power, panopticism, and biopolitics showed how modern governance increasingly depends on observation, regulation, and the management of human life rather than overt force alone. Another major finding of the study is the continuing relevance of Foucauldian anthropology in understanding contemporary society. In an age characterized by globalization, digital technologies, social media, biometric surveillance, and algorithmic governance, Foucauldian concepts remain valuable for analyzing modern systems of control and identity formation.

The study also demonstrated the applicability of Foucault’s ideas to African societies, particularly Nigeria, where colonial legacies, institutional power, governance challenges, and surveillance practices continue to influence socio-political realities. Although Foucault’s anthropology has been criticized for its alleged pessimism and limited account of human freedom, the study showed that his later emphasis on ethics, resistance, and the “care of the self” provides important possibilities for rethinking human agency and social transformation. Consequently, Foucauldian anthropology offers a critical framework for understanding both the mechanisms of domination and the possibilities for ethical self-formation within modern society.

This study contributes significantly to the advancement of philosophical anthropology by providing a critical analysis of modern society through Foucauldian thought. It expands anthropological discussions beyond traditional cultural analysis by emphasizing the importance of discourse, institutional power, surveillance, and subjectivity in shaping human existence. The study demonstrates that anthropology must engage critically with the political and institutional structures that define contemporary social life. The research also contributes to critical social theory by examining the interconnectedness of power, knowledge, and governance in modern society. Through the application of Foucauldian concepts such as disciplinary power, panopticism, and biopolitics, the study provides deeper insights into the operation of modern institutions and systems of social control. It highlights the relevance of critical theory in addressing contemporary issues such as digital surveillance, identity politics, institutional domination, and the regulation of populations.

Furthermore, the study contributes to African socio-political discourse by applying Foucauldian anthropology to the realities of colonialism, governance, religion, media, and institutional authority within African societies. The analysis of Nigeria particularly demonstrates how Foucauldian concepts can illuminate contemporary debates concerning corruption, state power, policing, democratic participation, and social regulation. In this regard, the study bridges Western critical theory with African socio-political realities and enriches contemporary scholarship on governance and modernity in Africa. Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for promoting a more humanistic and ethically responsible modern society.

First, there is a need for the promotion of ethical governance in contemporary societies. Governments and public institutions should prioritize transparency, accountability, justice, and respect for human rights in their exercise of authority. Political power should be directed toward the welfare of citizens rather than domination or excessive control. Democratic institutions must encourage citizen participation, public dialogue, and

institutional responsibility in order to strengthen social trust and political stability. Second, the protection of privacy and human dignity should become a major priority in the digital age. The increasing expansion of surveillance technologies, biometric systems, artificial intelligence, and data collection mechanisms poses significant threats to individual freedom and autonomy. Governments, corporations, and technological institutions must establish ethical regulations that safeguard personal privacy, protect civil liberties, and prevent the abuse of surveillance systems. Third, societies should cultivate critical awareness concerning systems of surveillance and institutional power. Citizens need to develop the intellectual and ethical capacity to critically examine how media, technology, political institutions, and social discourses influence human behavior and identity. Educational institutions should promote critical thinking, ethical reflection, and civic consciousness in order to empower individuals against manipulation and institutional domination.

Finally, there is a need for the humanization of social institutions. Schools, prisons, hospitals, security agencies, and judicial institutions should not function merely as instruments of discipline and control but as structures that promote dignity, justice, compassion, and human development. Institutional reforms should focus on the protection of human rights, social inclusion, and the creation of environments that encourage ethical responsibility and collective well-being. In conclusion, the anthropology of Michel Foucault remains an indispensable framework for understanding the complexities of modern society. His critical insights into power, discourse, surveillance, and institutional regulation continue to provide valuable tools for analyzing contemporary social realities and for envisioning more ethical and humane forms of social existence.

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