Meta-Power of the Sacred/Secular and the Politics of Ideological Discourse: A Journey from Global to [g]local

Ms Fiza
Dr. Saleha Nazeer

Abstract

This paper aims to look at the universal theme of sacred/secular in the context of the ideological paradigm shifts of the world in flux. World is structured by discourse and without any iota of doubt we can see the statistics of discourse in the manner that it has been projected into the psyche of people through the Meta-power along with the social construction of power and knowledge. In addition, 'general politics' in this kaleidoscopic world and the 'regimes of truth' as marked by Foucault are the product of scientific discourse and institutions, and are reinforced (and redefined) continuously through the education system, the media, and the flux of political and economic ideologies. In this context, the battle for truth is not for the absolute truth that can be unfolded and accepted, but it has become a battle about the rules according to which the true and false are separated and the ambiguous effects of power are established to the value of truth which in itself becomes the quest of sacred and secular. The discursive practice of Meta-power has disseminated the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of 'episodic' or 'sovereign' acts of domination or coercion. The paper will be integrating the Michel Foucault's discourse analysis with reference to the binary of power/knowledge on one hand, and sacred/secular on the other. Hence, this paper explores the global politics of Meta-power and its operation that how the global becomes [g]local and orchestrates the hierarchical politics of economy and ideology.

Introduction

"[…] will to exercise...control in society and history has also discovered a way to clothe, disguise, rarefy and wrap itself systematically in the language of truth, discipline, rationality, utilitarian value, and knowledge. And this language in its naturalness, authority, professionalism, assertiveness and anti-theoretical directness is....discourse" (Said, 1993, 216).

Discourse is a complex yet flexible term in the course of theoretical paradigm. Edward Said puts it as 'the will' to exercise the power over the various institutions of society. Discourse is about the production of knowledge which is wrapped up in the language and via language, discourse has become practice. The language is the main subject of the discourse as the language is ascribed to the 'facts' that interfere in the process of explication of what is true or false. Over a period of time, there is a sense of susceptibility that has emerged to the criticism of institutions, different things, practices and discourses.

The questions have been arisen out of fragility that has been discovered in the very bedrock of existence. In addition, the perspectives which generate the 'discourses' of life are related or are most familiar to our bodies and behavior in everyday life. But with this contentious and mind boggling sense of instability and discontinuity, the fact of 'theoretical discourse' also unfolds something that has not been remarked previously but something that can be described as precisely the inhibiting effect of global, *totalitarian theories*. Furthermore, these theories do not play the role of 'fashion tools' for researchers and readers of the globe; rather they provide the molding patterns of discourse that transcend the paradigm from global to (g)local.

Research Methodology
During the 1960's, a new set of theoretical paradigm emerges and raises a question to the already existing paradigm of skeptic, empiricist, positivist and prevailing quantitative and qualitative stratification of social research and its values. The present study implies purely qualitative and interpretative methodology with reference to the power construction of Foucault's 'Discourse Analysis'. On a parallel axis, it also reflects upon the reality of truth vis-à-vis post-post-modernism as a defining pattern for the discontinuity and deconstruction of the theoretical world in flux. The interpretative analysis would also focus upon the reality of the world in flux/play as decoded by deconstructionist/postmodernist. The new set of theories includes Structuralism, Feminism, Marxism, Modernism, Post-modernism, Post-post -modernism, Phenomenology and Discourse Analysis. Moreover, critical theories offer new formations which claim to develop new perception, a new way of looking at the text, and to re-read and re-conceptualize the existing knowledge with a novel perspective. The trend of theorizing the text creates ferment for the researchers and provides inspiration for the researchers in the discipline of literary theory, social theory, and critical social theory. In this research, in particular, the theory of Power/Knowledge will be implied to the paradigms of Sacred/Secular in order to explore the ideological discourse.

Research Objectives: Correlation of Theory and ideology
More recently, there are debates on the advancement in critical theory and its application. Since the period of post structuralism to the post-post-modernism, these theories of ideologue have challenged the presuppositions of the main stream social and critical theories. Furthermore, these newly arisen discourses have penetratingly criticizing Structuralism, Marxism and Phenomenology and other critical patterns for participating too resolutely in the grounds and methods of modern rationality and conventional social theory. The debates have emerged among the novel approaches based on postmodern theories with binary opposition of the previous theories. For instance, in the new French theories, the advancement in critical theory of Frankfurt school perpetuates a multi-disciplinary dimension in particular with social theory which produces new perspectives from politics, economy, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, culture and history. It thus overcomes the fragmentation endemic to the established academic disciplines in order to address the issues of broader interest.

The theory has its traces back to the days of Plato when he generated the theory of forms. Later, it was reverted by Aristotle's theory of Mimesis. The Evolution of critical theory continues to develop through the times of Marxism, its Marxist dialects and Marxist capitalism. Hence, theory develops and out shoots in structuralism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, post colonialism, modernism, post modernism and post-post-modernism. The economic instability is basically the beginning of the 'realization' of the importance of theory in research. It is in fact the economic instability that made the researchers see that there are other instabilities too in the society such as emotional instability, cultural instability and feminist instability. To test these instabilities, researchers developed more theories in the field of social sciences, psychoanalysis, power studies and gender studies in particular.

In the absence of any hard and solid truth, we need a model to stand on the grounds and find out the stability through the implication of theoretical paradigms of critical theory. Social theories, Public theories, Cultural theories and Critical theories, are thus forms of social practices which reproduce dominant forms of social activity in systematic patterns. In the course of theoretical discourses, Foucault has given the ideological discourse of power/ knowledge in this global/[g]local world where the power is omnipresent as it comes from everywhere and operates through the mechanism of *meta*-power. To quote Foucault's power/

knowledge concept, he views power in terms of sovereignty and law as perceived by right-wing social scientists. On the other side, Marxists see power in terms of the state apparatus while Foucault gives his own account of interest about power which elaborates that how power is exercised along with its techniques and tactics. With such concerns, the functioning of *Meta* power and the way it has been institutionalized can be observed in the theoretical ideological discourse of Foucault's general functioning of wheels of power/knowledge. He opposes ideology because ideology stands and refers to a Subject which is secondary to the infrastructure of society; it is therefore a material, an economic determinant. In Marxist theory "base determines superstructure," that means, the relations of production establish the ideas. Marx outlines the politics of ideology and its discourse while determining the power wheels of meta power and its underpinning "in every epoch, the ideas are the ideas of the ruling class" (Notes on Foucault). Marx and Marxist thought seeks to unravel that ideological stratum to get down to the truth, which is the conflicting relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The conception of power is explicated by Foucault in *Discipline and Punishment,* that "it produces things; it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, and produces discourse" (Notes on Foucault). The Subject who is capable of knowing this truth is the working class-in-itself. Foucault relates it to the truth and its effects as he is interested in how 'effects of truth' (regime of truth) are produced within discourses – which are neither false nor true. The main stream is of meta power and the semantics of its structure; an odyssey can be made through historical contents allowing for the rediscovery of the ruptured, conflicting and struggling realities, including the order that is imposed by functionalist. This systemized thought was designed to mask the ideological discourse. The knowledge in the binary opposition, as used by Foucault, is unraveling the 'Subjugated knowledge' as well as those blocs of knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systemized the political discourse that happened, initially, in the construction of '*Power*' and later that of '*Knowledge*'.

Discussion and analysis

Disclaimer, of Power
The disclaimer of power is that the 'productivity of power' increased after the 18th century in Europe. A new 'economy of power' emerged. Procedures that allowed effects of power to circulate in a continuous, uninterrupted manner emerged and regulated the system of meta-power around the globe. Closely related to the conception of Power, as presented by Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment*, Discipline is a genre of power, a modality for its exercise. It consists of a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets. It is 'physics' of power, an 'anatomy' of power, and a technology of power. At the historical conjuncture of two processes, the ideological political discourse of meta-power emerged in the course of 18th and 19th centuries in Western Europe: " (a) The increase in national populations, and the increase in the population of institutions which needed to be controlled (such as schools, hospitals, prisons, armies, etc.) (b) The growth in the productive apparatus (the production of commodities, and the "production" of health, education, etc.)" (Notes on Foucault, 4).

Sacred/Secular
There is another set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, communication routes, relays, and invests for the power and knowledge relations that establish human bodies and subjugate them into objects of knowledge. This debate of power and knowledge continues to unfold and relates to another Meta narrative which is that of

secular/sacred. Anthropology of secularism and its diverse discourses have been argumented upon by philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, religious scholars and sociologists in the post modern world. Anthropology of secularism akin to anthropology of religion grapples with some issues relevant to the politics of the post modern era. The question is that the doctrine of sacred/secular that governs the public discourse of politics in this epoch, rests upon the principles and the age of Enlightenment. The heart of the matter is that how to draw lines and reconfigure the space for sacred/secular in the discourse of ideological politics? Or, the other way round, the perspective is that we would be left only with the cacophony of the political discourse ruled by power/knowledge. To trace down the historical discourse, we should distinguish two waves of secularization. The wave triggers off in the 19th century Europe and involves in a retreat of religious (sacred) beliefs of symbols and ideas from the public sphere. People lose faith in metaphysical beliefs and a paradigm shift is observed in worship and religious beliefs. They try to shore up their social life with secular view of law. All sacred places of worship (churches) were expelled from the political, ideological and institutions of civil society and they in turn were established with *Meta* power of purely political (secular) discourse to shore up their old values.

In the course of first wave of secularism, since the external form of society remains more or less unaltered, people experienced their societal state apparatuses and social commitments not in the form of submission to God but as a kind of individual commitment, that sacred becomes extension of a purely human love. As Mathew Arnold conveys it in his Poem *Dover Beach* and in lines he expresses:

> The Sea of Faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
> But now I only hear
> Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
> Retreating, to the breath
> Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
> And naked shingles of the world (Scruton, *The sacred and the secular, 2013*, 9).

He further writes about love and truth as a passionate invocation of the individual sphere, "*Ah, love, let us be true, to one another*" (Scruton, *The sacred and the secular, 2013*,9).

Afterwards, there was a second wave of secularization in Europe that went hand in hand with the movements of modernism, fascism, and socialist ideologies at that time. As summarized by C. Wright Mills, "once the world was filled with the sacred – in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm" (Norris, Inglehart, 2014, 2). Sacred refers to the things, ideas, and beliefs that pertain to the spiritual, eternal and changing upper realm of God and on the other side of the picture, all the things pertaining to physical, temporal and realm of the earth are considered to be secular. Has the debate been settled over the waves of secularization or after the defining patterns among secular and sacred? The critique is based on selected anomalies and focuses on the United States and then on others while drawing spectators attention towards the heart of the matter through comparison of systematic evidence across the wide range of rich and poor societies. We need to think beyond the parameters of sacred/secular as commanded by ideological discourse if we are to negotiate and understand broader values in religious vitality, synagogues, mosques, shrines, and temples around the globe.

A journey from global to [g]local

Globalization is a surge which can be termed as a process of change. Anthony McGrew presents his argument about globalization and its phenomenon, operating the large part of audience at universal level and the process that cuts across national boundaries, integrating, and connecting people in a new space - time, presenting the reality and experiences that are more interconnected as viewed by Giddens that "how social has represented across temporal and spatial features. (Hall, 1996, 619). A journey from globalization towards [g]localization takes place when the growth of homogenization expands and erodes the concepts of National identities, the new horizon dawns upon the globe communities, the moment they enter the time and space compression for the reason that places remain same and fixed; places have roots in them. "Yet space can be "crossed" in the blinking of an eye by airplane, satellite or fax. This is what Harvey calls in a book *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies* that "the annihilation of space through time" (Hall, 1996, 621).

Meaning (truth) is a melting clock, *a way forward*

In the epoch of post-structuralism/post-modernism where meaning is fluid and there is no finality in deriving meaning and the most powerful images to describe the state of truth in our age are to be found in the paintings of Salvador Dali particularly that of the Melting Clock. It clearly shows that truth exists in a form which is not permanent and is melting into new forms all the time. This makes research activity looking for a truth/reality that lacks hardness or shape. Even if we find it, we know not what it is and what its real shape is. In the absence of the hard ground of truth, the hard ground is provided by discourse because meaning is slippery.

Discourse replaces meaning – and this is another reality in the post-modern global/[g]local world. The images encourage superficiality rather than substance, cynicism than belief, the thirst for constant change rather than security of stable traditions, the desires of the moment rather than the truths of history. Here is the reference to Derridian discourse of deconstruction; Derridian stance is to deconstruct the ancient binary opposition and to bring out the *difference* in the theory of meaning where centre cannot be held and thus the slash between binaries creates the *difference* in the meaning that is called flux. It can, thus, be stated that everything that does make sense is meaning. In the postmodern terms the meaning is explicated as such that:

> "There is no clear or appropriate answer to that. Basically, if post-modernism exists, it must be the characteristic of a universe where there are no more definitions possible. It is a game of definitions which matters…they have been deconstructed, destroyed…it has all been done. The extreme limit of these possibilities has been reached…all that are left are the pieces" (Baudrillard 1993).

Conclusion

Discourse, ideology, theory or model is, no doubt, a way towards truth; it is a path to a destination that is truth but in the absence of a destination, the way becomes the destination. The theory has become the truth in our era. Theory is actually the way to the destination that is meaning in this Post-structuralist/Post-modernist or, the other way round; we can say Derridian/Baudrillardian ways. In this epoque, the meaning is absent and therefore the way replaces the destination, i.e. the theory has replaced meaning. The theoretical model of Foucault's Power/Knowledge resonates with the structural imperatives of Post-structural/ Post-Modernist struggle in the quest of truth in this age. Eventually, the precept parameters of sacred/secular on one hand and global/[g]local on the other hand open up new windows of

broader vision for the spectators and researchers across the globe. This line of thought is relatable to the Yeats's Poem, *Easter 1916:*

> Being certain that they and I
> But lived where motley is worn
> All changed, changed utterly
> A terrible beauty is born. (Yeats)

This study was initiated with an aim to reach the truth but as we have seen in the above mentioned arguments that truth does not exist in the contemporary world ; so all the traces of reality are removed and we are left with the theory alone. But the picture is not as dismal as it appears: At present, the truth is that truth does not exist yet we are testing the theories and developing the new ones. Today's researcher is not aiming at truth/reality or meaning but at the maximum elimination of non-reality or non truth. One day, it is hoped to find a true discourse through which one can make his way towards the truth/reality. In a nutshell, this quest is reflected in the words of the painter of sunflowers, Vincent Van Gogh: "As practice makes perfect, I cannot but make progress; each drawing one makes, each study one paints, is a step forward" (Gogh 1883).

References

- A Review of Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity. Stanford:* Stanford University Press, 2003. Print
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso, 1983. Print.
- ———, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism*: Southeast Asia and the World. London: Verso, 1998. Print.
- Baudillard, Jean. *Post Modernism and Mass culture*: http://www.sociology.org.uk/pcpmod.pdf
- Beauvoir, Simone De. *"The Mother." French Feminism* Reader. Ed. Kelly Oliver. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000. Print.
- Foucault, M. (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London: Tavistock. Print
- Foucault, M. (1997) *Ethics,* New York: New Press. Print
- Glynos, J. and Howarth, D. (2007) *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, Abingdon: Routledge. Print.
- Gordon, Colin, ed. *Power/Knowledge*, New York. Pantheon Books. 1997. Web
- Hall, Stuart. *An Introduction to the Modern Societies.* Blackwell Publishers. Unites States. 1996. Print
- Gogh, Vincent van. *Letter to Theo van Gogh*. Written c. 29-15 Oct-Nov 1883 in Drenthe. Translated by Mrs. Johanna van Gogh-Bonger, edited by Robert Harrison, number 339. retrieved from URL: http://webexhibits.org/vangogh/letter/13/339.html.
- *Notes on Michel Foucault*, 1926-1984, Dicourse , Discipline and Punishment. *Retrieved from the website of* Koç University : home.ku.edu.tr/~dyukseker/**notes**-on-**foucault**.doc
- Norris, Pippa., Inglehart, Ronald. *Sacred and Secular, Religion and Politics worldwide.* Cambridge Press, London 2014, Print.
- *Post Modernism and Mass Culture*. Retrieved from http://www.sociology.org.uk/pcpmod.pdf
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism* 1993. New York: Vintage, 1994. Print.
- ———, Orientalism. 1978. New Delhi: Penguin, 2001. Print.
- Scruton, Roger. *The Sacred and the Secular.* London: Oxford Press, 2014. Print
- Yeats, Willam Butler. *Easter 1916* https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/easter-1916