

Foucault, Technologies of the Self and National Identity

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Abstract

This paper is a part of a doctoral thesis which explores national identity construction by school children in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Lower secondary school level (6-8 grades, 11-14 years) is the site where research takes place. The study is designed to examine the relationship between school children's construction of national identity and their educational experience. An investigative critical case study in a secondary school in the TRNC is undertaken to explore such a relationship with a particular aim at revealing what sense of self this age-group of school children in Northern Cyprus have, how they place themselves in the immediate community and broader social and geo-political space and what factors contribute to the process of the construction of their national identification. The focus of the paper is on theoretical framing for inquiry, which is based on Foucault's program of investigation of how human beings are made subjects. The reading of Foucault which determines the focus of inquiry in this study conceptualizes Foucault's historic-critical analyses of the constitution of the subject in terms of interrelated domains of structure and agency: human beings are shaped by anonymous structures, networks of knowledge, as well as institutional and other social structures, and human beings have capacity to modify existing constraints and their own behavior. I use Foucault's theorizing on the constitution of the subject, and particularly Foucault's concept of *technologies*, to study how the process of national identity construction is revealed through the interplay of 'technologies of' (structural environment of the school children) and 'technologies of the self' (children's individual behaviour in the context of schooling).

Introduction

Foucault's historical analyses of the different ways humans develop knowledge about themselves resulted in a body of scholarship which suggests that there is a complex interplay of constraint, choice and action. Foucault engaged in critical-historical investigations of the subject production not just in theory but always in relation to a set of practices. In this spirit, the current study undertakes the examination of the national identity construction in relation to a specific historical and cultural context of a lower secondary school in the TRNC.

The argument I intend to make in this paper is that Foucault's conception of the process of the subject production as interplay of various 'technologies' which 'human beings use to understand themselves' (Foucault 1988a: 18) and Foucault's endeavor to show both specific nature of those technologies and their constant interaction enable us to frame the process of national identity construction in terms of interplay of structure and agency.

Presentation of Foucault's theorizing on the constitution of the subject and an argument for the utility of Foucault's analytic tools in the investigation of a national identity construction in the context of schooling will proceed in the following order: section one will trace Foucault's long-term interest in 'the subject'; section two will introduce Foucault's concepts of 'technologies'; and section three will discuss application of Foucault's theorizing on the constitution of the subject, and of Foucault's analytic tools, to the examination of the process of national identity construction in the context of schooling.

I. The Subject

The subject occupies a key position in Foucault's work, which spans a period of more than twenty-five years. Despite his constant interest in the subject theme, Foucault did not develop a theory of the subject. In one of his later interviews (1984, published in 1987), Foucault states that he refused to set up a theory of the subject for the reason that 'beginning from the theory of the subject, you come to pose the question of knowing, for example, how such and such a form of knowledge was possible' (Foucault 1987: 121). According to Foucault, setting an *a priori* theory of the subject implies an idea of a universal and timeless subject which attaches people to specific identities - the view of the subject which Foucault consistently opposes in his writing (Foucault 1982, 1987).

Subject is a philosophical category which has received varied conceptions throughout the history of philosophical thought. The manner this philosophical category is treated in Foucault's work can be roughly encapsulated in the following definition: subject is an entity which is capable of choosing how to act within the constraints of the given historical and cultural context. Foucault makes the distinction between *the subject* and *the individual*. The individual is transformed into the subject and the transformations take place as a result of outside events and actions undertaken by the individual; different forms of power relations makes individuals subjects. Foucault himself proposes in his essay *The Subject and Power* (1982) two meanings of the word "subject": 'subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.' (Foucault 1982: 781)

Foucault promotes the idea of a historical subject which is not attached to a fixed identity and which is constantly modified. Stressing the point that the subject is not a substance but a form, Foucault notes that this form is not always identical to itself. The form changes and it is precisely the historical constitution of these different forms of subject and their relation to 'games of truth' that interest Foucault (Foucault 1987: 121). Foucault's term 'games' refers to 'an ensemble of rules for the production of the truth...it is an ensemble of procedures which lead to a certain result, which can be considered in function of its principles and its rules of procedures, as valid or not, as winner or loser' (Foucault 1987: 127). By 'games of truth', Foucault means 'games of truth which take on the form of science or which refer to a scientific model, or games of truth like those that can be found in institutions or practices of control' (Foucault 1987: 112). In various writings, Foucault reiterates the point that his main interest is the relationship which exists between the constitution of the subject and 'games of truth' (Foucault 1982; 1987; 1988b).

To conduct the analyses of the relationships between the constitution of the subject and 'games of truth', Foucault undertakes a series of historic-critical investigations. In his earlier work, Foucault analyzes the ways particular forms of subject become objects of knowledge in scientific inquiry (*The Order of Things*, 1966, published in English 1970) and are constituted by institutional practices (*Madness and Civilization* 1961, published in English 1965; *The Birth of the Clinic* 1963, published in English 1973; and *Discipline and Punish* 1975, published in English

1977). In Foucault's later work (1980-1984) there is movement toward 'a practice of the self' (Foucault 1987: 113), self-formation of the subject, where the subject constitutes him- or herself in an active fashion (*About the Beginning of The Hermeneutics of the Self* 1980, published 1993, 1980, *Technologies of the Self* 1988, *The Care of the Self* 1984 published 1986 and *The Use of Pleasure* 1984, published 1985).

To Foucault, 'these historic-critical investigations are quite specific in the sense that they always bear upon a material, an epoch, a body of determined practices and discourses' (Foucault 1987: 49). Foucault's analyses show that the subject is not natural; it takes on different forms in different historical periods. Subjects take on different characteristics according to the range of cultural constraints that exist in a particular socio-historical context. Those analyses which deal with the self-formation of the subject also indicate that individuals who actively constitute themselves or 'act upon themselves' (Foucault 1988a: 18) are not entirely free to act as they wish; they are constrained by the resources available to them.

Questions guiding Foucault's research on the subject

Foucault offers his own systematization of shifting interests in his work on the subject as 'three modes of objectification of the subject' (Foucault 1982: 777): (1) The first mode of objectification of the subject arises from 'the modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences' (Foucault 1982: 777); (2) The second mode of the objectification of the subject is called by Foucault 'dividing practices': 'The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others (Foucault 1982: 777-778); and (3) The third mode of the objectification of the subject is the investigation of 'the way a human being turns himself into a subject' (Foucault 1982: 778).

The 'three modes' outlined by Foucault are, in fact, stages of evolution in Foucault's scholarship on the subject. There are no sharp lines between the modes and no reversal in Foucault's perspective on the subject as his research on the subject evolves. Various historic-critical investigations into the constitution of the subject are guided by the same family of questions. Foucault refers to his analyses of the constitution of the subject as critical 'historical ontology of ourselves' (Foucault 1984: 49) and states explicitly that such critical historical ontology of ourselves has to answer an 'open series of questions'. Foucault formulates those questions as

follows: 'How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions' (Foucault 1984: 49). An important note from Foucault is that an indefinite number of specific inquiries can be undertaken into the constitution of the subject but all those inquiries will address the same series of questions (Foucault 1984: 49).

Summary of the guiding principles underlying Foucault's research on the subject

Despite Foucault's shifting foci and a wide range of historical and thematic choices, there are several constant elements which underlie all Foucault's inquiries into the subject. Those elements can be summarized as three key points:

1. The subject and its various forms and identities are constructed rather than discovered. Foucault's modes of objectification of the subject through various disciplines and sciences in different historical and contextual settings trace the process of such construction.
2. The subject and its identities are historical and cultural constructions. There is no autonomous transcendent subject which exists outside its context. All Foucault's investigations into the constitution of the subject demonstrate that individuals 'act' within limits imposed on them by their social and historical context.
3. The subject and its identities are not fixed but are constantly modified. Foucault consistently rejects the idea that, in fact, anything is fixed or can be taken at face value in any domain of human culture.

A note should be taken that despite Foucault's insistence that the subject and its identities are not fixed once and for all and are always in-flux, they should not be seen as indeterminate. In his 1980 Berkley interview (Foucault 1988c), Foucault agrees with the point that there is need 'to pin things down, even if in a provisional way' and that human beings have to establish the points of fixity to develop a sense of self. Foucault explains that his insistence not to accept anything as definitive, obvious or immobile 'does not mean that one must live in an indefinite discontinuity'; it means rather that 'one must consider all the points of fixity, of immobilization, as elements in a tactics, in a strategy – as part of an effort to bring things back into their original mobility, their openness to change' (Foucault 1988c: 1).

II. 'Technologies' of the subject

Toward the end of the twenty-odd-year-period of his work on the subject, particularly in his lectures and interviews dating from 1980 to 1984, Foucault formulates his outlook on the constitution of the subject in terms of interplay of various 'technologies' (Dartmouth College lectures 1980, published 1993; University of Vermont seminar 1982, published 1988). As a context for the summary of his own work on the subject, Foucault proposes four major types of technologies, 'each a matrix of practical reason', that 'human beings use to understand themselves': (1) technologies of production, (2) technologies of sign systems, (3) technologies of power and (4) technologies of the self (Foucault 1988a: 17).

According to Foucault, it is the last two technologies that kept his attention: 'technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject', and 'technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and the way of being, so as to transform themselves...' (Foucault 1988a: 18).

Reflecting on his lifework in 1982, Foucault admits that he concentrated perhaps too much on the technology of domination and power in his earlier work and that he was more and more turning toward the study of the technology of self, 'the interaction between oneself and others, ... the history of how an individual acts upon himself...' (Foucault 1988a: 18). While expressing his great interest in the ways the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, Foucault does not set the subject free to do just anything. Foucault insists that individual's 'practices [of self] are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group' (Foucault 1987: 122). Foucault also notes that the two types of technologies – technologies of power and technologies of the self – hardly ever function separately; there is constant interaction between the two. Foucault stresses that when one wants to analyze the process of the constitution of the subject, he

has to take into account the interaction between those two types of techniques – techniques of domination and techniques of the self. He has to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have

recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, he has to take into account the points where the technique of the self are integrated into structures of coercion or domination (Foucault 1993: 203).

Foucault's earlier analyses of how the subject is constituted by scientific discourses and institutional practices are the analyses of the technologies of power¹ and domination. Foucault's work on the technologies of the self includes those analyses which focus on isolating the techniques of self-formation, 'specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves' (Foucault 1988a: 18). All Foucault's analyses of the constitution of the subject in various historical contexts are consistent with Foucault's statement that 'the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them' (Foucault 1984: 49).

Foucault's 'technologies of power and domination' and 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1988a) can be conceptualized in terms of structure and agency. Relationship between the two technologies is just another way of describing existing relationship between organized social and institutional practices on the one hand and behavior of individuals on the other.

Anonymous structures, networks of knowledge, social and cultural institutions all embody, as well as produce, structural environment of the subject. All those structures shape people's life and set the rules or procedures to be followed; they 'determine conduct of individuals' (Foucault 1988a: 17). At the same time, the subject is not a passive product of existing power relations who merely follows the models set by the structures. The subject is capable of choosing how to act and what choices to make among the models available in his or her environment. It is the agency of individuals which 'permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and the way of being, so as to transform themselves...' (Foucault 1988a: 18).

¹ As with various other terms employed by Foucault in his writing, the term 'power' has a very specific meaning. Foucault notes, that the word 'power' used alone is always a short cut to the expression 'the relationship of power' (1987: 122). 'Technologies of power and domination' correspond to the relationship between social and economic structures and the relationships between individuals and groups. Those relationships only exist when they are exercised. The relationships of power are productive, i.e. they generate particular types of knowledge and cultural order.

III. Application of Foucault's theorizing on the subject to the investigation of the national identity construction in the context of schooling

Foucault's theorizing on the constitution of the subject which assumes that human behavior must be understood as neither the passive reproduction of dominating structures nor manifestation of free will unattached to existing set of practices is a theoretical orientation for inquiry which frames the investigation of the process of national identity construction by the schoolchildren in a lower secondary school in the TRNC.

The *process* of national identity construction is conceptualized in terms of interplay of Foucault's 'technologies' – (1) technologies of power and domination (structural environment of individuals) and (2) technologies of self-creation that give concrete forms to national identities constructed by individuals within their historical and cultural contexts.

The two types of technologies, which Foucault uses in his work on the subject, have been proposed here to account for the domains of structure and agency. In the context of this study, technologies of power and domination make structural environment of the school children. Technologies of the self are revealed through the activities of the school children in the context of schooling. The points of interaction between the two are 'the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself' and 'the points where the technique of the self are integrated into structures of coercion or domination' (Foucault 1993: 203). These are the points of interaction between structure and agency.

The concepts of 'technologies', which Foucault introduces in his work, account for various domains which get into contact in the process of the national construction in the context of schooling. I propose the notion of 'illustrative scenarios' as an analytic category within the framework of Foucault's interplay of the two technologies. Illustrative scenarios are the points of convergence of structural elements and of individuals' actions within the context of the structural environment of schooling and exemplify the interplay of the two technologies.

Through the concept of 'illustrative scenarios', analysis aimed at investigating the process of national identity construction looks at the instances of social and individual construction of the

national identity occurring in the context of schooling, and the relations and combinations amongst them.

The structural environment of the school children is a formal program of studies prescribed by the centralized national education system in the TRNC, which is a highly regulated industry. Standardized education policies, standardized curriculum, standardized assessment process of the TRNC's national public education all aim at reaching the level of educational production which can meet 'the requirements of the new century' (TRNC Education Policies 2005: 3). The vision and mission of the education system implemented currently in the TRNC are more elaborate and detailed than the isolated quote above may suggest. Since this study is concerned with the area of production of 'national selves', the content of formal structural environment established by the current education system of the TRNC will be limited to the articulation of educational objectives and prescriptions relevant to the area of production of 'national' subjects. Instances of structural environment of the school children in a Lower Secondary School include policy and curriculum documents issued by MOEC, textbooks which are commissioned and approved by MOEC, regulated ornamentation of school premises and of school materials and school activities prescribed by MOEC.

Individual and collective actions of the school children attending Lower Secondary School level (6-8 grades of the compulsory Basic Education structure of the TRNC) are, in Foucault's terms, 'technologies of the self' or instances of how individuals, in this case school children, 'act upon themselves' (Foucault 1993: 203). In line with Foucault's insistence that individuals' behaviour is never isolated from the patterns individuals find in their structural environment, school children's actions within the established structural context of schooling cannot be viewed as isolated instances of personal choice or whimsical circumstances; actions of individuals are constrained by the resources available to them and are largely determined by the socio-historical contexts of individuals. Located within such framework, 'Illustrative scenarios' view the group and individual behaviours of the school children in the context of their structural environment. A selective list of 'Illustrative scenarios', i.e. the points of convergence of structural elements and of individuals' actions within the context of the structural environment of schooling, exemplify the interplay of structure and agency.

The notion of technologies is very useful in isolating those techniques which shape specific structural environment of a lower secondary school in the TRNC and techniques which allow individuals to act upon themselves and modify the circumstances of their structural environment of schooling. Through his notion of 'technologies' and his insistence on constant interplay of the two types of technologies – 'technologies of domination' and 'technologies of the self' – Foucault recognizes the necessity to view an individual or agent in the context of individual's structural environment. To Foucault, one type of technology hardly ever exists without another.

Application of Foucault's approach to viewing the process of the constitution of the subject as interplay of different types of technologies, allows us to avoid dichotomy between the individual and his/her structural environment but, rather, view individual behaviour in the context of that structural environment.

Afterwards

Any inquiry into the process of social reality requires capturing what systematic series of actions make a process. Whether the prominence is given to agency, to activity, or to structures which enable, shape and constraint activity, determines the emphases leading any investigation of a social process.

In this paper, I discussed the possibility for approaching a social process of national identity construction in the context of schooling, which is grounded in Foucault's view of human activity as neither the passive reproduction of dominating structures nor manifestation of free will unattached to existing set of practices. Foucault's approach to analyzing social processes as interplay of agency and structure and his concepts of 'technologies' provide the framework within which to organize the content of the investigation of the national identity construction and to frame discussion within the context of the research.

A note should be taken, however, that Foucault did not establish a definitive path of analysis. Having insisted that his work was a constantly evolving experience and refusing to offer method or a methodological template, Foucault suggested using his work merely as an adaptable set of tools:

I would like my books to be a kind of tool box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area... I would like [my work] to

be useful to an educator, a warden, a magistrate, a conscientious objector. I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers.

(quoted in O'Farrell 2005: 50 from Foucault 1974 *Prisons et asiles dans le mécanisme du pouvoir*.(pp. 523-4) *In Dits et écrits: 1954-1988. Vols I-IV*. D. Defert, F. Ewald & J. Lagrange (eds.). Paris: Gallimard)

Allowing great flexibility and adaptability of his tools to a range of specific set of practices, Foucault wants readers to draw their own conclusions, but, before all else, to read his work as 'an experience that changed them, that prevented them from always being the same or from having the same relation with things, with others, that they had before reading it' (Faubion 1994: 245-246).

Reading Foucault's work has definitely changed me and I find analytical tools, which Foucault offers, useful in framing my investigation of the national identity construction in the context of schooling. I suggest that Foucault's conceptualization of the process of transformation of the individual to the subject as interplay of the two technologies – technologies of domination and technologies of the self – opens up analytic possibilities applicable to the fields of inquiry well outside the context of this particular study and beyond the themes Foucault rendered in his own analyses.

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A look at how technology is informing identity politics and the toxic return of misogyny online. I have never witnessed the kind of marketing of the self as I have observed in recent years with how language has been hijacked through a cultural revival of misogyny on the left which uses technology as its mask. This is, in fact, one of the most pressing social issues of our day as the totalitarian harbingers of language "awokeness" are the largely angry young men who insult and harass women online for merely thinking differently and expressing these ideas. I use Foucault's theorizing on the constitution of the subject, and particularly Foucault's concept of technologies, to study how the process of national identity construction is revealed through the interplay of "technologies of (structural environment of the school children) and "technologies of the self" (children's individual behaviour in the context of schooling). BERA presentation 6 September 2011. 2. Introduction Foucault's historical analyses of the different ways humans develop knowledge about themselves resulted in a body of scholarship which suggests that there is a complex interplay of constraint, choice and action. Foucault engaged in critical-historical investigations of the subject production not just in theory but always in relation to a set of practices.