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Michel Foucault’s *Society Must be Defended* Collège de France lectures on the genealogy of race have had an immense impact on Foucauldian scholarship since their publication in English in 2003. The lectures not only led to a more widespread consideration of the politics of ‘race’ in political theory, but also introduced a new political dimension to race theory. Foucault approached race not as a theory or social construct, but as an apparatus of power indelible to liberal modernity. Foucault’s previous work influenced the critique of the scientific production of racial hierarchies emerging from the eighteenth century onwards (e.g. Schiebinger, 1993), and the *Society Must be Defended* lectures demonstrated how this was critical for the birth of the liberal governmentality. The deposition of autocratic monarchy combined with the discourse of freedom inscribed racism into the mechanisms of the liberal state. The former sovereign right to institute death was replaced by the duty of the state to foster the life of the population. The legitimacy to make distinctions between who must live and who must die moved from the monarch to the democratic state, which did so through the division of the species into a hierarchy of races (Foucault, 2003, p. 254-5).

In the US in particular, political theorists and philosophers have used the *Society Must be Defended* lectures to supplement the insights of *Will to Knowledge* (Foucault, 1980) to create new intersectional genealogies of race and sexuality in modernity (e.g. Feder, 2007; McWhorter, 2009). By contrast, European theorists tend to read *Will to Knowledge* mainly for the last section of the book that discusses race, disregarding the analysis of sexuality in the rest of the book. Arguably, the popularity of post-Foucauldian thinkers like Agamben and Esposito has contributed to this tendency to omit sexuality from the theorization of biopolitics, which often leads to the reduction of biopolitics, the politics of and over life, to thanatopolitics, the politics of and over death. This theoretical bias also has political consequences. For example, it distorts our understanding of the current rise of right-wing politics in Europe today, which I argue cannot be grasped without locating it at the intersection of the racial and sexual biopolitics of a multicultural and postfeminist1 Europe. In this piece, I want to highlight how the biopolitical approach makes it possible to understand both the racial and sexual politics of these current trends.

**Thanatopolitics, Sexuality and the ‘Political’**
At best, the focus on the *Society Must be Defended* lectures has engaged a whole body of scholars to analyse the politics and practices of war, colonialism, border control, and homeland security as fundamentally embedded in biopolitical racial logics (Bigo 2002; Jabri, 2007). Not only has it made race an essential concept amongst scholars not primarily associated with critical race and postcolonial studies, but it has also deepened the analytical status of race in political theory. It is no longer sufficient to theorise the discrimination and oppression suffered by immigrants, ethnic minorities, refugees, and asylum seekers as merely unfortunate effects of prejudicial ignorance and scapegoating. Foucault’s genealogy of race helps us grasp how the exclusionary operations of biopower are designed to uphold and enhance the survival and wellbeing of the population by normalizing, weeding out, or killing threatening others.²

This new focus on race, however, has led to a disproportionate emphasis on thanatopolitics, that is, the murderous underbelly of biopolitics. In the lectures, Foucault identifies two functions of racism. The first is ‘to create caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower’ (Foucault, 2003, p. 255), in other words, to divide and administer death. The second permits the establishment of a ‘positive relation’ (Foucault, 2003, p. 255), which by allowing others to die will not only guarantee the safety of the race, but it ‘will make life in general healthier… and purer’ (Foucault, 2003, p. 255). This second function is where Foucault locates the link between race and sexuality, and it also where biopower’s ‘reason for being and the logic of its exercise’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 138) is found, that is, in the administration of life. Much Foucauldian political theory has focused exclusively on the first function of race, that is, its thanatopolitical function. This has lead to its theoretical detachment from the reproductive and productive politics of population management, at the heart of which is sexuality. This is not only because of the influence of certain readings of Foucault’s work, but also certain disciplinary norms that continue to influence the definition of the ‘political’, even in Foucauldian theory.

Indeed, much of the literature on race and biopolitics in European political theory is located within certain discussions in critical IR theory. Despite three decades of feminist critique (e.g. Enloe, 1989; Peterson and Runjan, 1993) in IR, the terrain of the ‘political’ is still largely conceptualized through questions of sovereignty and the public/private divide (Youngs, 2004, p. 82-3). The predominant view that state power and violence are the ‘real stuff’ of political scholarship (Penttinen, 2013) is also reproduced in many Foucauldian studies, despite Foucault’s critique of a state-centred view of politics and the auxiliary position of sovereign power in biopolitical modernity.³ This merely reinforces the unspoken view that, despite the centrality of sexuality for Foucault, sexuality/sex/gender are still seen as peripheral questions at best left to feminist scholars.⁴

In this context, it is less surprising that the interest in race in political/IR theory is more disposed to analyse the thanatopolitical metaphysics of exclusion instituted by sovereign power. This is reflected in the popularity of certain post-Foucauldian
frameworks like Giorgio Agamben’s concept of bare life (1998) and Roberto Esposito’s immunisation (2008) (rather than postcolonial or critical race theory, which is rarely cited or employed). Agamben’s framework argues that Western history since antiquity can be understood through the separation of politically recognised life (bios) from bare life (zoe), the form of existence reduced to mere biological existence and therefore can be killed. This mechanism of sovereign exceptions is epitomized in the metaphor of the camp and represents the structuring paradigm of modern politics. This contrasts starkly to Foucault’s approach, where it makes no sense to speak of biopower prior to the invention of life in biology (Foucault, 1994, p. 166), and where biopower is understood as ‘bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 136).

While I do not contest the applicability of the powerful argument regarding the violent exclusion of racialised others from the legal order through sovereign distinctions between forms of life, this conceptual apparatus oversimplifies racial logics and their accompanying governmental techniques. One can lose sight for example of how the governance of global migration flows is tied to productive capitalist attempts to restructure global labour markets (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2003) and it tends to gloss over the relational play of governance, agency, and resistance that characterise border regimes (Ansems de Vries, 2014, Rygiel, 2011). Moreover, the exclusive focus on race elides the sexual politics that transforms bodies into productive and reproductive machines through processes of regulation, discipline, and subjectivation (Foucault, 1980, p. 104; 1991, p. 26). By ignoring the positivity of biopower and its historicity, it is easy to forget how biopolitics is very much about the ‘growth and establishment of bourgeois hegemony’ (Foucault, 1980, 125) as is reflected for example in today’s commodification of both sex and race (Hennessy, 1995; Pitcher, 2014) and the marital normalization of homosexual monogamy (Repo, 2013) in the era of neoliberalism. In the former, race is no longer simply a basis for exclusion, but is transformed and disciplined into a resource for capital accumulation through branding and marketing. In the latter, same-sex love morphs from being a threat to being the basis for an expanded and diversified family norm that ensures the healthy upbringing of children in a time of increasing divorce rates and declining fertility. The disciplinary techniques enacted through racial and sexual discourses are therefore complex, contextual, and constantly shifting.

Yet, because the trope of the camp has been prominent in critiques of the racial politics of Western asylum and immigration regimes (Butler, 2004; Edkins and Pin-Fat, 2005; Vaughan-Williams, 2009), it may also be tempting to apply this framework to analyse the xenophobic and racist strands of current European politics with their calls for states to curtail minority rights and tighten immigration laws. The pivotal place of fascism in Agamben’s work makes it even more appealing. For Agamben, there is no fundamental difference between the operative logic of the liberal democratic state and the fascist state. If fascism is merely the inevitable zenith of liberal modernity, what we are
witnessing today in the rise of European far-right parties and neo-fascist movements is merely the true face of liberalism stripped of its emancipatory pretenses. For Foucault (1980, p. 149), however, it was an intensification of biopolitical control that sought to introduce the eugenic ordering into all aspects of society and politics, the realization of which entailed an intensification of labour exploitation and reproductive regulation (Federici, 2004, p. 66). This suggests that it is worth adopting an approach that is open to account for the diverse aspects of the political rationality of today’s far-right as well.

**Biopolitics of the Far-right in Europe: Feminist Anti-Racist Critique**

Instead of treating biopower ontologically as a mode of politics, Foucault introduces it as an analytical tool that establishes the link between the invention of the human sciences, the birth of the liberal rationality of government, and the rise of capitalist production. Operating through the dictum to “make” live and “let” die’ (Foucault 2003, p. 241), it is first and foremost an empowering, expansive, and subjectivising force rather than a disempowering, diminishing, and objectifying one. The apparatus of race distinguishes whose lives should be promoted and regulated, and the apparatus of sexuality is deployed to ensure their normalisation and reproduction (Deutscher, 2012; Repo, 2013). As Foucault emphasizes both in the Society Must be Defended lectures and Will to Knowledge, sexuality is ‘a field of vital strategic importance’ (Foucault, 2003, p. 251) because it holds a central position in tying the large macro-level politics of population to the everyday corporeal disciplinary practices through which individuals are persuaded to govern themselves.

In this final part I want to broach the rise of far-right parties in European politics in recent years from the biopolitical angle as a feminist anti-racist analytical framework. I argue that it is equipped with tools for conceptualizing the common strategies of (bio)power underpinning both the racial and sexual logics of the far-right. Since the beginning of the economic crisis in Europe, the discourses of cultural racism have become increasingly prominent through far-right parties such as the Golden Dawn in Greece, the Front National in France, the openly neo-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany, and Jobbik in Hungary. The Golden Dawn and the National Democratic Party have links to neo-fascist, neo-Nazi, or white power movements, and all of them won seats in the elections for the European Parliament in May 2014. While their overt anti-immigration and Islamophobic agendas are seen as central components of their racist and often white supremacist ideologies, their sexist views receive far less attention.

As Cristian Norocel (2013, p. 33) observes, research on the far-right tends to be gender-blind, apart from observations pertaining to the male dominance of party leadership, membership and public support. Motivated as they are to counter the feared loss of as assumed European cultural, biological, and religious homogeneity, they are also concerned by the declining fertility of European women and espouse patriarchal visions of the future. Anti-feminism, the re-domestication of women’s labour, the reassertion
of patriarchal control over reproduction, remilitarisation, and homophobia are commonly found at the core of far-right agendas. Foucault’s analysis of biopolitics makes it possible for political theorists not only to consider the intersectional aspects of race and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1991), but how they are tied to common political strategies centred on the perceived decline of European populations.

One of the most well-known and deadly culminations of far-right logics occurred in July 2011, when Anders Behring Breivik massacred 77 people in Oslo and at the Youth Worker’s League’s summer camp on the island of Utøya in Norway. The ‘manifesto’ he left behind, 2083: A European Declaration of Independence, is representative of much more than his personal views: many parts of the text were copied directly from a Norwegian blogger known as Fjordman8 whose texts on the Islamophobic Gates of Vienna webpages are read widely across Europe. With over 100 pages on feminism and gender issues in his manifesto, often copied from Fjordman, gender is more than just a strand within it (Walton, 2012, p. 5). In the document, Breivik made it clear that he was targeting ‘cultural Marxists’ and ‘feminists’, the ‘suicidal humanists’ (Breivik, 2011, p. 343) whose liberal views he believed had weakened Western civilisation. Too happy to let in cultural others in the name of ‘political correctness’, according to Breivik feminism, ‘the vanguard of PC’ (2011, p. 346) has also made Western women promiscuous, leading to the decline of Western fertility and putting white races in danger of being outbred by (presumably non-white) immigrants (2001, p. 1143). Moreover, he purported that the increase of women’s participation in the labour market and decision-making has emasculated Western men and robbed them of their ability to ‘protect[…] the “tribe”’ (2001, p. 345). ‘If you break down men’s masculinity,’ Breivik argued, ‘their willingness and ability to defend themselves and their families, you destroy the country’ (2001, p. 343). For Breivik, Norway’s multicultural liberal democracy was too ‘impotent’ (2001, p. 792) to understand or respond to the gravity of the eastern Islamic threat to Western European civilisation.

The massacre therefore was not an act of terror against the undesirable Muslim other, but a purge targeted at the members of the community whose ideological and sexual profiles he regarded as responsible for facilitating the infiltration of the national population by that other: left-wing politicians and intellectuals, the majority9 of which he identifies as women. It was not an act of exclusion as such, but a violent act of discipline to punish women and put them back in their ‘proper’ place, away from making political decisions that weakened white men and empowered Muslim ones. Danger could only be thwarted through the reassertion of white patriarchal masculinity (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2012), reflecting the extent to which cultural racism in Europe is tied to the broader discourse of male woundedness and disempowerment in the so-called post-feminist era (Keskinen, 2013, p. 226). Breivik’s suggestions on how to realise such a society included introducing a ban on abortion, restrictions on the availability of contraceptive pills, curbing sexual education, discouraging women from seeking full-time employment, controlling the images of female sexuality circulated in the media, outsourcing select breeding and care work to surrogacy networks and state
boarding schools, giving men the right to choose their sexual partners, and forging 20-year marriage contacts enough to bear and rear children into adults (2011, p. 1175-9). For Breivik, ‘demography is king’ (2011, p. 1138) and the expulsion of Muslims from European soil went hand in hand with the reimplementation of patriarchy.

Breivik’s is far from representative of the diversity far-right ideologies found across Europe today, but his problematisation of the demographic status of Europe is nonetheless echoed in varying degrees both by grassroots neo-Nazi groups and political parties alike. The point that needs to be made is two-fold. First, by bringing in sexuality, biopolitics scholars in political theory are better equipped to diagnose full complexity of the exclusionary politics of current Islamophobia, xenophobia, and racism. Second, while the intersectional study of sexuality and race is nothing new to feminist theory, combining this with a biopolitical approach has the potential of equipping feminist theorists with a broader analytical perspective that goes beyond the deconstruction of identities. By focusing on rationalities of government and strategies of power, the biopolitical approach provides feminist anti-racist critique with the means to tie the far-right deployment of sex and race to broader historical, economic and political trends, especially pertaining to the material issues of capitalism and demographic governance. Austerity and demographic decline are perhaps the central battlegrounds where these confrontations are taking place, so it is not only desirable but essential that feminist theory challenge the far-right on that ground.

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References


**Endnotes**

1 By postfeminist Europe, I do not mean a Europe after or done with feminism, but a Europe where feminism is assumed to be over and is seen as increasingly irrelevant (Tasker and Negra, 2007, p. 1).

2 Foucault’s analysis has been criticised for example by postcolonial and Black feminist thinkers for neglecting to grasp the importance of colonialism and slavery in the constitution of modernity, prompting the creation of new genealogies supplementing and revising Foucault’s original thesis (e.g. Davis, 1998; Federici, 2004; Stoler, 1995).

3 Political theorists in this tradition do comprehend Foucault’s critique of sovereignty. Numerous articles discuss Foucault’s critique of sovereignty, but paradoxically also unwittingly contribute further to the burgeoning literature on sovereignty and the reproduction of its significance for IR theory (e.g. Barder and Debrix, 2011; De Larrinha and Doucet, 2008; Neal, 2004)

4 In addition to vast number of feminist political scholars (e.g. Luibhéid 2004; Smith, 1994; Ziarek 2008) who address the intersectional biopolitics of race and sex, other exceptions include for example Lobo-Guerrero (forthcoming, 2015), Massad (2007) and Ailio (2011).

5 One text frequently cited, however, is Ann Laura Stoler’s archival research for *Race and the Education of Desire* (1995), which was one of the few texts that shed light on Foucault’s *Society Must be Defended* lectures prior to their publication, and made a contribution that bridged colonial studies with Foucauldian scholarship.

6 The delegitimation of biological racism in the postwar period has led to the emergence of ‘cultural racisms’ that declare the incompatibility of foreign cultures (rather than a eugenic concern for racial purity) and emphasise the threat of social disorder and conflict that would ensure if they mixed (Giroux, 1993; van Dijk, 116).

7 Other political parties that have gained seats either at the national or European level whose ideologies exhibit fascist and racist thinking, and/or whose members often have informal links to neo-fascist, neo-Nazi, or white power movements include Front National (France), The Finns (Finland), Party for Freedom (Netherlands), Austrian Freedom Party (Austria), Lega Nord (Italy), Sweden Democrats (Sweden), Svoboda (Ukraine).

8 Fjordman’s real name is Peder Are Nøstvold Jensen.

9 Breivik (2001, p. 933) wrote that it would be essential to kill women because in his estimation, 60-70% of ‘cultural Marxists’ were women.