



## POWER IS EVERYWHERE: AN ECOLOGICAL READING ON FOUCAULT'S "NOTION OF POWER"

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### ABSTRACT

The traditional religious ways of spirituality is a process of mutual relationships between God and Man. The ways we think about a subject will influence and reflect the ways we act in relation to that subject. This paper is about Foucault's notion of power in relation with the ecological understanding for a sustainable development. Nature has been a mere instrument, but since the early days has been our reason for being, our philosophy and our source of inspiration.

"Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 93). Foucault's power equality and power inequality have mirror counterpoints within the category of mutualistic power relations. In other words two or more agents acting cooperatively can also be characterized by equal or unequal distribution of power. Power equality within a mutualistic relationship results in the mutual empowerment of all cooperating agents. Hierarchy, as an organizational principle and can also be seen as desirable form of inequality under some circumstances. If we applied these notions of Power in ecological issues, we can understand that each and every living being are interrelated and interdependent. And we human beings are only a strand in the web of life. Hierarchy in environment shows the supremacy of one being over the other will lead to an ultimate destruction. Power is everywhere in our Universe and mutual empowerment leads to a self-realization as Arne Naess's EcosophyT. and it will lead to a sustainable development.

**Key Words:** Power, ecology, Political ecology, ecosophy.

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"Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 93). Nature as a source of inspiration, knowledge, and power fulfill the needs of everything it includes. Environment plays a significant role to balance the sustainability. All living beings and nonliving things including human beings, animals, trees, mountains, rivers, microbes, bacterias, gaseous elements plays a powerful role in maintaining the sustainability. Each and every

element has its own power to maintain the balance and the sustainability of the environment. The fragile human attempts to get power over nature and by nature have a long history may be explained in part by the unstable relationship between humans and nature. The underlying philosophy of nature and power is neither optimism nor pessimism but possibilism.

The act of living and celebrating and conserving life in all its diversity in people and in

nature seems to have been sacrificed to progress and sanctity of life been substituted by the sanctity of science and development. We human beings have the power to evaluate, distinguish, understand and even invent things to improve our living conditions. The death of nature is central to this threat to survival. The Earth is rapidly dying, her soils are dying, waters are dying, forests are dying, air is dying, wet lands and even tropical rain forests – which are the creators of the world's climate, the cradle of the world's vegetational wealth are being bulldozed, burnt, ruined or submerged. With the destruction of forests, water and land, we are losing our life supporting systems. This destruction is taking place in the name of development and progress but there must be something seriously wrong with a concept of progress that threatens survival itself.

Political Ecology has its roots from multidisciplinary studies like political science, anthropology and geography. According to the *Integral Ecology* "Political Ecology is the study of the relationship between political realities and environmental issues" (Hargens 523). The ontology of political ecology can be grounded in the theorizing of Karl Marx and Michel Foucault who argue that the reality of being is situated in the existence of the material world. Foucault's Power equality and Power inequality have mirror counterpoints within the category of mutualistic power relations. In other words two or more agents acting co-operatively can also be characterized by equal or unequal distribution of power.

Power equality within a mutualistic relationship results in the mutual empowerment of all co-operating agents. Hierarchy as an organizational principle and can also be seen as desirable form of inequality under some circumstances. The hierarchy of power within the system is established in order to procure a system designated toward the sustainability of life this ultimately becomes the foundations of Political Ecology.

The shift in ontological conceptions of nature of human existence unfolds in further philosophy by Foucault called Governmentality. Its purpose is to secure the "welfare of the population,

the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health etc" (Foucault 100). The will to govern, and more specifically, the will to prove the welfare of the population, is expansive. In Foucault's definition it is concerned with "men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with... wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with all its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc; men in their relation to... customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, and lastly men in their relation to... accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death etc" (Foucault 93). The constant metabolism or circulation occurs between bodies, commodities, and cities whose relationship speaks to power relations, and is determined by social interaction constructed by capitalism. The constructed realities of Political Ecology advocate an interdependent and interconnected relationship between being and the natural world.

To Foucault, Power is neither an institution nor a structure. "Power comes from below, and there is no binary and root of power relations" (Foucault 93). In an Ecological perspective this notion of power which comes from lower level as the microbes or the least form of each and everything has the power, and these power changes from one to one, but everything has its own roles to fulfill the sustainability of the environment.

Deep Ecology has been perhaps the single most influential philosophy for environmental activism worldwide. Deep Ecology provokes us to think about the need and urgency to become eco-biocentric. Deep Ecology believes in the fundamental interconnectedness of all life forms and natural features. For Foucault "Everything is always inside a power and no one can escape from it" (94). Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance Foucault points out that "Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web..." (94), it can be connected with the interconnectedness and interdependence of web of life in the notion of Deep Ecology. Self-realization of this interconnectedness and interdependence is the root of Ecosophy. The focus of Ecophilosophy is a total comprehensive view of our individual and human perception. "Power is everywhere..." and

“the omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another” (Foucault 94).

Social ecology is a critical theory founded by Green author activist Murray Bookchin. He suggests that the roots of current ecological and social problems can be traced to hierarchal modes of social organization. Social ecology locates the roots of the ecological crisis firmly in relations of hierarchy and domination between people. In social ecology, “the very notion of the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human” (65). Hence, the domination of nature is seen as a product of domination within the society, the domination only reaches crisis proportions under capitalism. William Leiss published *The Domination of Nature* in 1972 in which he argued that it was Francis Bacon who formulated the modern agenda of power over nature through science and technology. He highlighted the role of technology in mastering both the external world of nature and the human being (158-164).

In the words of Bookchin:

The notion that man must dominate nature emerges directly from the domination of man by man... But it was not until organic community relation ... dissolved into market relationships that the planet itself was reduced to a resource for exploitation. This centuries-long tendency finds its most exacerbating development in modern capitalism. Owing to its inherently competitive nature, bourgeois society not only pits humans against each other, it also pits the mass of humanity against the natural world. ... The plundering of the human spirit by the market place is paralleled by the plundering of the earth by capital (24-5).

Philip Barker says that, “Foucault’s analysis of Power begins with the unorthodox suggestion that there is an explicit conjunction between the will to knowledge and Power, and the knowledge and power is not the same thing” (28). Power only exists

in circulation as it produces local effects; including the formation of particular knowledge that in turn constitute a range of possible responses. Every specific individual occupies various positions in networks of power: mother, father, brother, sister, lover, friend, teacher, employer, student and so on. In every group power changes from one individual to another individual as the situation demands. Power varies according to the situation or place in which he or she belongs. Likewise in nature every being has its own power and exist only in circulation. Power cannot therefore be permanent oneway exchange; it does not flow down uniformly from the more powerful to the less powerful – it circulates between bodies.

We are all subject of power in the sense that we both simultaneously exercise it even as we experience its effects, and in so doing constitute even such fundamental relations with ourselves as our sense of individuality. The most concentrated aspect of power is thought to be at the zenith of the cultural pyramid, the least concentrated to be found in the base of the period. Power is not predominantly hierarchal but rather takes the form of a net-like series of relations. An ecological reading of this notion of ‘net-like series of relations’ can be considered as interconnectedness and interdependence of living beings. In an ecological pyramid (also called trophic pyramid, energy pyramid or sometimes food pyramid) is a graphical representation designed to show the biomass or bio productivity at each trophic level in a given eco system. Biomass is the amount of living or organic matter present in an organism. Nowhere can we escape from relations of power. On the other hand, always and everywhere we can modify them.

A power relation describes a ‘mode of action’ where one acts on the actions or the possible actions of others. It requires that the other be recognised and sustained as a person who can act, and therefore can interrogate a whole field of responses. Foucault, in his definition of power as “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the processes which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them;...thus

forming a chain or system" (Foucault 92). These relations of domination and subordination and thinking about how such relations can be transformed through individual and collective resistance, and then we would conclude that specific conceptions of power should be evaluated in terms of how well they enable ecologists to fulfill those aims. We have often used a variety of terms to refer to this kind of relation — including 'oppression', 'patriarchy', 'subjection', and so forth — the common thread in these analyses is an understanding of power not only as power-over, but as a specific kind of power-over relation, namely, one that is unjust or illegitimate. Human being actions towards nature are a kind of power over relation.

The conception of power as transformative and empowering is a prominent theme in ecofeminism. Hoagland defines power as "power-from-within" which understands as "the power of ability, of choice and engagement. It is creative; and hence it is an affecting and transforming power but not a controlling power" (Hoagland 118). Similarly, Starhawk claims that is "on the side of the power that emerges from within, that is inherent in us as the power to grow is inherent in the seed" (Starhawk 8). For both Hoagland and Starhawk, power-from-within is a positive, life affirming, and empowering force that stands in stark contrast to power understood as domination, control or imposing one's will on another. The aspect of empowerment is evident in Mary Parker Follett's distinction between power-over and power-with; for Follett, "power-with is a collective ability that is a function of relationships of reciprocity between members of a group" (Follett 451).

Development of modern philosophy in relation to the natural world involves cross cultural studies of world views which emphasize ecocentric values have been referred to as Ecophilosophy. The task of Ecophilosophy is to examine a diversity of perspectives on human nature contexts and interrelationships. It enriches deeper and more harmonious relationships between self, community, place and natural world. Self-realization is the core of Ecosophy. This self-realization is not one detached from environment. As Foucault's notion of

power "Power is everywhere..." (93), in every living being have their own power and the power is always in circular motion. Prejudice, self-contained hatred always forms a sense of separatedness. The sense of separatedness gives rise to all kind of selfish desires, the desire to exploit, overuse and so on. It also vanishes and living their place a feeling of universal attitude, self-realization and benevolence towards our fellow beings. Foucault's concept of power is then synthesized with ecological theory to recognize resource scarcity and biophysical forces as agents (of power) shaping personal and collective identity and proscribing the possibilities for social change. Foucault's thoughts on power developed in the 1960s and 1970s, and, tinged with anthropomorphism and modernism, and therefore lack the contributions of ecological theory. For example, Foucault's work holds the view that power is present in all "contact between persons, or between persons and institutions..." Put differently, Foucault's view, for all its departure from convention, begs the question, "Where do the rules come from?" The beginning of all the laws and rules we derived structured or constitute from Nature. Whatever is pleasant to oneself is pleasant to all creatures and that whatever is painful to oneself is painful to all beings. And also the power which leads a living being having the same in others. In Nature, the power relations may be varied according to the situation demands and the power over Nature will create the wrong equilibrium. So this is advisable that we human beings must have a self-realization that every living and non living thing has power, and there must be mutual empowerment for the sustainable life on the earth. This awareness will lead to save our earth for future generations and let the place to be live and prosper.

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