'Writing a History of the Present': Changing discourses of 'self' and 'other' in South African education policy

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Purpose

The paper applies Foucault's idea of governmentality to an understanding of how subjectivity including notions of self and other have been defined in education policy in South Africa. An account is given of governmentality, understood as the rationality or art of government, as it has developed in relation to western industrialised countries and, in a more specialised literature, as it has been applied to illiberal states such as the apartheid state. The article develops an account of governmentality from the introduction of apartheid until the present day.

Foucault, governmentality and the postcolonial condition

To date there is a very limited literature that has attempted to apply Foucault's ideas about governmentality to an analysis of the apartheid and post-apartheid states in South Africa.

This may possibly be explained by Foucault's own focus on understanding forms of rationality that have underpinned liberal states in western societies. It may not seem immediately apparent to some how a Foucauldian analysis of government could be applied to a clearly illiberal state such as the apartheid state.

Foucault, governmentality and the postcolonial condition

As Edward Said has commented, his [Foucault's] Eurocentricism was almost total....he does not seem interested in the fact that history is not a homogenous French speaking territory....He seems unaware of the extent to which the ideas of discourse and discipline are assertively European and how.....discipline was also used to administer, study and reconstruct - then subsequently to occupy, rule and exploit - almost the whole of the non-European world. (Said quoted in Barrett, 1991: 152).

Foucault, governmentality and the postcolonial condition

Yet, as Robert Young (2001) reminds us, Foucault is of great significance for postcolonial scholarship:

"Whether early or late, so much of Foucault seems to be applicable to the colonial era – his emphasis on forms of authority and exclusion, for example; his analysis of the operations of the technologies of power, of the apparatuses of surveillance, or of governmentality (395)"

Indeed, Young notes that Foucault wrote one of his most influential books, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, whilst living in Tunisia and lecturing at the University of Tunis and was actively involved in anti-colonial activities there.

Foucault, governmentality and the postcolonial condition

Foucault has claimed that central to his work was the objective to 'create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects' (1994: 326). According to Marshall (1990: 17-18) this project amounts to writing a 'history of the present'.

Governmentality

Governmentality can be considered as the *art of government*, ie. a way of thinking about the nature of the practice of government (who can govern, what governing is, what or who is governed)

This way of thinking is often taken for granted and is not open for questioning by its practitioners. It draws on ideas, theories, philosophies, forms of knowledge about governing that are culturally embedded. In contemporary liberal societies, these forms of knowledge are derived from the human sciences, from disciplines such as economics, politics, psychology, sociology and education.

Governmentality

Foucault singles out the emergence of specific doctrines of *reason of the state* in sixteenth-century Europe as the starting point of modern governmentality. This saw the 'daemonic coupling' of the 'citizens and laws' game and the 'pastoral game' in the form of a secular political pastorate which linked knowledge about individuals (individualisation) with a concern with the population as a whole (totalisation).

Liberal governmentality

Liberalism emerged in C19 with the development of the sovereign state and of disciplinary institutions. Fundamentally concerned with

- Laissez faire
- Security of the population
- Optimisation of the health, life and productivity of populations through *bio-power*

Development of the concept of civil society as an expression of the social good

Colonial governmentality

- How relevant is governmentality theory for explaining the form of government under colonialism?

- (A question here is to what extent are liberal states ever 'liberal' to begin with?)

- Colonial government was profoundly illiberal
  - The state was not sovereign for the colonised
  - Bio-political racism was used to justify segregation and unequal treatment

Neo-liberal governmentality

- The 1970s saw the emergence of 'advanced liberal governance' in western societies. According to these authors this form of governance can be understood as a response to economic globalisation and the shift from Fordist to flexible forms of production.

- Break with a notion of society as the field of operation of the government of the state. Critique of the liberal welfare state and indeed of the liberal notion of 'society' itself.

Homo economicus

- Whereas for liberalism *homo economicus* was an untouchable by government, for neo-liberals, *homo economicus* can be modified, i.e. made more entrepreneurial through exposure to a market rationality that has been extended into the social sphere.

- The individual will learn that freedom consists as not simply regarding oneself as an enterprise but becoming an entrepreneur of oneself and of all of the innate and acquired skills, talents and capacities that comprise 'human capital'

Risk

- Neo-liberalism has also involved a modified conception of social risk which shifts the emphasis from collective indemnification to individuals taking responsibility for moderating their burden of risk.

- Dean (1999) also makes an interesting distinction between 'active citizens' (capable of managing their own risk) and 'targeted populations' (disadvantaged groups, the 'at risk', the 'high risk' etc.).

- Faced with the *new market discipline*, governments are increasingly concerned to reform the conduct of individuals to make them more competitive and efficient and must put in place governmental mechanisms that will ensure the security of tax-raising, of national budgets, systems and styles of public management, privatisation plans etc.

Global governmentality

- The Washington consensus can be seen to reflect neo-liberal concerns at a global scale
- But with the post-Washington consensus are we seeing a return to more liberal concerns with security and the welfare of populations?
- In fact I argue that in SA as elsewhere neo-liberalism is harnessed to a number of sometimes conflicting rationalities for government including liberal and even more radical ones

Governmentality and education policy

Rose and Miller, 1992; Harris, 1999) have made a helpful distinction between *political rationalities* (ways of thinking about the dimensions and practices of government); *programmes of government* (which use theories and particular ways of thinking about and doing things to translate political rationalities into actual measures that affect populations); and, *technologies of government* (the techniques, procedures and strategies that are used to put political rationalities and programmes into effect). Education policy can usefully be seen as acting at the interface between programmes and technologies of government.

Schooling and governmentality

- Schooling is a key disciplinary institution.
- Under colonialism linked to the exercise of pastoral power of the colonisers
- Implicated in dividing practices required for the economy
- Linked to citizenship within a sovereign state
- An institution through which bio-power can be exercised.
- A key theme of modern governmentality theory is to understand the way that education is implicated in the use of each of these different kinds of power in different combinations at different times and for different population groups.

Governmentality under apartheid

Under the tutelage of influential anthropologists such as Eiselen, young academics from 'poor white' backgrounds developed *volkekunde* at the universities of Stellenbosch and Pretoria during the 1950s and 1960s. These 'organic intellectuals' of Afrikaner nationalism sought to counter the liberal claims of the South African Institute for Race Relations (SAIRR) concerning racial equality with their own culturally and biologically essentialist view of difference. Scientific racism did play a role, however, as part of the general ether out of which apartheid was conceived and legitimated.

Governmentality under apartheid

- The apartheid state exemplified most aspects of a modern liberal state as far as whites were concerned and, after the introduction of tri-cameralism in 1983, as far as Indians and Coloureds were concerned as well (although the juridical rights extended to these groups still operated within the framework of institutional segregation). The form of sovereignty for these groups was underpinned by a guarantee of security.

- Key apartheid legislation including GAA, bantustans and segregated schooling were part of a bio-political imperative to preserve the welfare of whites

- Africans were subject to forms of pastoral power in the bantustans and on the farms

Governmantality under apartheid

- Education was a major part of apartheid dividing practices

- Christian National Education reinforced the pastoral power of whites over balcks

- Fundamental pedagogics provided a 'scientific' way of legitimising segregated schooling

Governmentality and the organic crisis of apartheid

- Organic crisis precipitated by economic crisis induced by oil shock and growing political unrest

- Response of the state in the late 1970s was in terms of 'total strategy'

- What is interesting from a Foucauldian perspective is that this saw an attempt to extend limited aspects of a liberal welfare state to Blacks

Governmentality and the organic crisis of apartheid

One aspect of total strategy was the adoption of a new *South African Plan for the Human Sciences* (HSRC, 1980) by which reform initiatives could be given a 'scientific basis'. This signalled a new 'open' approach towards the social sciences on the part of Afrikaner intellectuals which now involved taking cognisance of methodologies from the English-speaking social sciences canon - a move finally institutionalised by the merging of the English-speaking National Institute for Personnel Research (NIPR) and the Afrikaner-dominated Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 1985. In disciplinary terms this involved a convergence between a hermeneutical, continental tradition associated with Afrikaner social scientific research, and a positivist approach associated with the British and American traditions. The creation of the HSRC made possible the more detailed knowledge of, and hence control over, the population through the greater use of statistics and other forms of empirical research. It allowed for the 'normalisation' of the black population

Education in the organic crisis

Education can be seen to reflect the changes in governmental rationality that have been described above. To begin with, in the wake of the 1976 Soweto uprisings, the government established the de Lange Committee of enquiry into educational provision in South Africa. This was interpreted at the time as the educational component of 'total strategy'

It argued for education of 'equal quality' although still segregated

Devoid of any overt references to CNE principles, the de Lange report was written in the 'technicist' language of the pragmatic bureaucrat

Neo-liberal governmentality in South Africa

- Identifiable 'new right' emerged in the 1980s in the context of the organic crisis

- Began to propose free market solutions to SAs crisis

- Apartheid seen as irrational in relation to the needs of the market

- Neo-liberalism evident in the decentralisation of risk

Neo-liberal governmentality in South Africa

- In South Africa as in many low income countries the 'at risk' group is much larger than in western industrialsied countries

- Maintaining the security and legitimacy of the state means paying attention to more liberal concerns

- Neo-liberal rationalities of government have co-existed with liberal and more radical rationalities for government within the ANC

Neo-liberalism and education

- There are elements of neo-liberal, liberal and illiberal aspects in the emerging education system.