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# Expanding the Discussion of Foucault in Brazil

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One of the main reasons I wrote my new book, *Foucault in Brazil: Dictatorship, Resistance, and Solidarity*, was to generate conversations in the Anglophone world about Michel Foucault's intellectual and political experiences in Brazil. It seemed to me that this topic had not garnered enough attention in the Anglophone world, especially when compared to the growing literature on Foucault in the United States, Iran, Tunisia, and Poland. I feel immensely grateful to have Corey McCall and Lynne Huffer as interlocutors. Their commentaries not only reflect a careful reading of my book but also creatively push the conversation about Foucault and his many experiences in Brazil in new directions.

McCall nicely encapsulates many of the core ideas in my book. He concisely identifies the main political challenge that Foucault faced in Brazil. Foucault needed to engage Brazilians in a way that did not expose them to the danger of political repression, but he also needed to pursue this task in a way that did not appear to legitimize the dictatorship. As I argue, Foucault dealt with this challenge through a combination of coded critiques and gestures as well as by deferring to the political inclinations of the Brazilians around him. As long as those Brazilians remained silent about the dictatorship, Foucault steered clear of any explicit references to the dictatorship in his public presentations. Once the Brazilians around him began to break their silence, he followed suit, inaugurating a sequence of political activities that led to his surveillance by the security services and his near expulsion from Brazil.

McCall also draws out what made Foucault's experiences in Brazil different from his extensively studied experiences in Iran in 1978. Whereas Foucault was in Iran to write journalistic reports about political events in the country for a European readership (primarily in France and Italy), Foucault was in Brazil to present his ongoing research to Brazilian audiences. He was there to give lectures and talks to Brazilians mainly on university campuses throughout the country. The effects of his contributions were profound. The

concerns and ideas in Foucault's presentations served to inspire groundbreaking explorations of the emergence of articulations of power-knowledge in Brazil. *Danação da norma: Medicina social e constituição da psiquiatria no Brasil*, by Roberto Machado, Angela Loureiro, Rogerio Luz, and Katia Muricy as well as *Ordem médica e norma familiar* by Jurandir Freire Costa stand out as now classic studies that channeled Foucault's insights from his lectures in Brazil to explore the emergence of social medicine, psychiatry, and constitution of the bourgeois family through hygienic interventions in nineteenth-century Brazil. These books appeared long before Foucault's lectures from Brazil were even available in French, much less in English. A unique world of Foucault-inspired research with points of reference that were different from elsewhere thus emerged in Brazil. Given Foucault's intellectual stature, it seems inevitable that a world of Foucault-inspired research would have emerged in Brazil without his visits to the country, but his presence there certainly did a lot to accelerate the process of "translating" his ideas in the Brazilian context. Sadly, however, researchers of Foucault outside Brazil have been largely unaware of the studies inspired by his lectures in the country. Translations of these studies in other languages would go a long way in rectifying this situation.

McCall identifies a potential connection in his discussion of the authoritarian security state that I did not explicitly develop in my book. He speculates that Foucault's experiences in Brazil may well have been one of the sources of Foucault's articulation of the concept of governmentality in the late 1970s, even though Foucault stopped visiting Brazil prior to elaborating this concept. I could not agree more. Foucault's experience of witnessing the dictatorship's invocations of care for the Brazilian population through the terrorization of elements within the population deemed to be communist may well have served as a source of inspiration of his exploration of care and security as aspects of governmentality. But what is clear is that many components of Foucault's account of governmentality were *already* present in his lectures in Brazil. After all, it was in his lectures on social medicine in Rio de Janeiro in 1974 that Foucault publicly introduced the concept of biopolitics, highlighted the overall importance of population as an object of social medicine, and discussed the Beveridge plan in Great Britain. That plan would figure as a crucial and recurring historical reference in his account of the birth of neoliberal governmentality.

Finally, McCall is right to suggest that my book sets out to demonstrate how Foucault's relationship with Marxism needs to be considered against the backdrop of his experiences in Brazil. Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that Foucault's experiences and contributions in Brazil constitute an *obligatory* point of passage for any research seriously considering his relationship with Marxism. It was in his lectures in Brazil that Foucault spoke of the constitution of the body itself as labor-power. It was in these lectures that he sought to understand the socialization of medicine in the West through the lens of class

struggle. It was also in Brazil that he turned to volume one of Karl Marx's *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* as a source of inspiration for an analysis of productive relations of power. The latter move was politically remarkable in the context of a violently anti-Marxist dictatorship. Foucault owed a debt to Marx and that debt was manifest in his lectures in Brazil. His intellectual contributions there show in an especially perspicuous manner that he was anything but an anti-Marxist.

I also go a step further, one that I suspect could easily unsettle the sensibilities of those accustomed to referring to Foucault as an anticommunist as a matter of common sense. I try to show that Foucault's relationship to communism itself is more complicated than what we are told in the conventional narrative. According to this narrative, Foucault's experiences of encounters with Stalinism in the French Communist Party from 1950 to 1953 left him with an enduring and visceral hatred of anything that falls under the name of communism. This narrative succumbs to a vulgar and facile conflation of the French Communist Party with communism tout court. Part of what I found fascinating about Foucault's experiences in Brazil is that his political activities in the country were effectively in support of Brazilian communists. In 1975, he protested waves of political repression that targeted the students and professors around him who belonged to the Brazilian Communist Party. Foucault cancelled his course on sexuality at the University of São Paulo in reaction to the torture and assassination of a journalist and Brazilian Communist Party member, Vladimir Herzog in São Paulo. Of course, Foucault did not share the same political agenda as Brazilian communists but he also did not let his hostility toward the French Communist Party get in the way of activities in support of these communists in a climate of severe anticommunist political repression. Foucault's political experiences in Brazil suggest that there were subtleties in his relationship to communisms and communists that are not adequately captured by his well-known hostility to the French Communist Party and warrant greater attention.

Huffer engages in an incredibly rich and subtle exploration of the politics of speech and silence by putting my book in a dialogue with critiques that I do not address in the book. These critiques emanate from scholars as diverse as Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak, Angela Davis, Alexander Weheliye, Brady Heiner, and Catherine Malabou. They charge Foucault with complicity with forms of oppression because he had nothing to say about these forms. Some of the critiques go further and charge Foucault with the outright theft of the speech of the other. For Huffer, these critiques succumb to a moral binary "between a courageous speech on the side of the oppressed versus silence as complicity with oppression." Huffer very effectively mobilizes the discussion in my book against this moral binary.

Though I do not discuss the authors above in my book, I do target the commonplace idea of silence as complicity with oppression. This idea was

popular at the time of the Brazilian dictatorship and it remains popular today in the context of other political struggles. My goal in rescuing silence from political disqualification was not to denigrate speech. It was to attune us to the strategic possibilities of silence. Foucault's initial silence about the Brazilian dictatorship served to protect the Brazilians around him, many of whom had already experienced persecution by the dictatorship. It also served to allow for a more propitious moment of political struggle against the dictatorship. Indeed, as Huffer eloquently points out, silence among the persecuted in Brazil served as a "collective counter-practice" to the forced extraction of speech through military police inquiries and torture. Huffer focuses on a remarkable passage from *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction* to stress that silence is not the absolute limit of speech. Silence and speech function together. They weave into one another through networks of power relations. In the same passage, Foucault reminds us that there are many silences. In the context of Brazil, there was the silence that the dictatorship imposed through censorship and there was the silence of those opposed to the dictatorship.

In the latter, coded speech was possible. Huffer makes the brilliant point that the preference of the Brazilian translators of "Truth and Juridical Forms" to translate *enquête* as *inquérito* (inquiry) rather than as *investigação* (investigation) as advertised in the original title for the lecture series, served to highlight the notorious practice of the *inquérito policial militar* (military police inquiry). As I point out in my book, one of Foucault's interlocutors in Rio de Janeiro in 1973, the psychoanalyst Hélio Pellegrino, picked up on the resonances between Foucault's discussion in the lectures of Oedipus's inquiry and the military police inquiries in Brazil. However, Huffer here cautions us against a repressive notion of the code, one in which the code serves as a symbol for a hidden meaning to be deciphered. She opts instead for a notion of the code as proliferative. The code, as Huffer writes, proliferates "a counter-discourse beyond the constraints of its original context." The code is thus a "tactical intervention" in "a field where speech and silences are distributed." This proliferative notion of the code allows us to reimagine the possibilities of political struggles beyond the moral binarism of speech and silence that continues to inform many of these struggles today and continues to nourish critiques of Foucault.

McCall and Huffer have been generous enough to critically engage my new book with a great deal of attention to its fine details. Their contributions not only widen the conversations about Foucault in Brazil but also amplify the parameters of more general discussions of Foucault and political struggle.