

# Fertile contradiction within the womb of modernity essay sample



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Modernity, following the advent of capitalist mode of production, emerges as a fundamental concept changing the way humanity begins to see all aspects of the world from a remarkably different perspective. As the historical materialism argues the mode of production, that is the way people produces objects and lead their life, influences their understanding of the world and causes it to change. Apart from the material conditions that determine the history by affecting the people's ideas, there is one more crucial force driving history.

That force is contradiction prevailing within the nature of everything including the world and being one of the main determinants of the history. The concept of contradiction as a driving force of history is highly evident in capitalism. The contradictory nature of the capitalism echoes the contradiction existing in modernity. The discourse of modernity that promises the wholeness within a society, or generally humanity, contradicts the very discourse of the modernity that assumes the fragmentation of the humanity creating diversity among human beings.

These two contradictory poles of modernity give rise to the new discourses produced by the material conditions of modernity. Another outcome of the politics of modernity is the biopolitics that serves for the control over bodies. Race emerges as a very fertile function of biopolitics in modern era and it becomes the most important basis of the fascist arguments. It is possible to observe how biopolitics works to make human beings understand “ the body” and how it materializes the race, its correlation with race, in Alfonso Cuarón's Children of Men.

Walter Benjamin opens his great essay “ The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” by touching upon the contradictory nature of the capitalism. “ Going back to the basic conditions of capitalist production, he [Marx] presented them in a way which showed what could be expected of capitalism in the future. What could be expected, it emerged, was not only an increasingly harsh exploitation of the proletariat but, ultimately, the creation of conditions which would make it possible for capitalism to abolish itself” (Benjamin 19).

The emphasis here is on the dialectical nature of capitalism, that is to say, it first emerges and develops extraordinarily through a series of justifications and extreme exploitation, and then it dissolves itself through the conditions set up by capitalism itself. What is striking in this assumption is that contradiction drives history and always creates and will create history.

Following this assumption, it is possible to argue that modernity which may be said to operate in relation to capitalism has the same dialectical structure.

How modernity encompasses a contradictory nature is evident in its discourses on wholeness and fragmentation of the humanity. In modernity, human beings are considered to be separate individuals rather than having a collective identity. The emphasis on the individuality and the importance of being an individual in the modern world causes the humanity to break into pieces and brings about diversity. The perception and the reception of the self are also highly fragmented through various means of modernity.

Capitalism creates this fragmented mode of humanity and contributes to it through the lifestyle it dictates. The organizations in various realms of life

such as working life, social, and political life dictated by the operation of capitalism contribute a lot to the fragmentation of the humanity and the individual's own self. In his *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault draws a picture of the modern institutions that serve for the fragmentation. Through this picture, one has the opportunity to observe how these modern institutions like factories, jails, and hospitals, are organized to fragment the individuals. Accordingly, modernity organizes human beings through fragmenting them into separate individuals in a way that would facilitate the operation of capitalism. Furthermore, artwork in the age of mechanical reproduction is another major contributor to this fragmentation, which is most visible at the individual level. The work of art fragments the masses and individuals by means of changing their perception regarding the artwork. The major concept stimulating the fragmentation is the self-alienation both at the level of masses and individuals.

One of the arguments in Benjamin's essay is that the film, as a work of art, addresses unconscious and the masses going to cinema see their 'other' self through the actor and gets alienated at first. This alienation is not used in a negative sense, inversely; it provides the masses, composed of individuals, with an insight of their "reality". On the moment alienation is accomplished, the fragmentation of the individual's self is realized: the other and the self. Fragmentation is not the only mode modernity operates; unification is another concept when modernity is concerned.

In this respect, modernity can be said to fragment and unify the humanity. The promise of wholeness emerges as a counter-argument against the

fragmentation. The discourse of wholeness is profoundly observable within the discourse of fascism because fascism itself supports unification and sets the conditions for it. In the fascist arguments given by Hitler, the main assertion is that modernity breaks German nation apart and the time for German nation to unify comes.

To articulate this as a general fascist argument, modernity sets the members of each nation apart and distorts their national and racial identity, thus it is compulsory for these members of each nation to unify as a whole nation and to gain a national identity. Modernity gives birth to this statement which is composed against the fragmentation created by the modernity itself. At this point, it is highly visible that modernity is inherently contradictory. It creates all the discourses and counter-discourses as well as the produces the political and cultural tools to manage them.

Benjamin in his essay demonstrates how fascism slyly manages the art to unify and organize the masses through the aestheticization of politics. “Fascism attempts to organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property relation which they strive to abolish” (Benjamin 41). At the end of his essay, he claims that fascism transforms the benign nature of alienation he formerly represents. In the hands of fascism, the self-alienation reaches a point where the humanity experiences its own destruction as a great aesthetic pleasure (42).

At this point, the aestheticizing of the politics by fascism operates and human being's reception of the artwork completely destroyed. Fascism aestheticizes politics in order to 'unify' the reception of the masses,

especially the proletariat, and to hinder the process of their understanding of the reality through self-alienation. This unification tool can be regarded as a confirmation of the modernity's promise of wholeness. Modernity does not only deploy the aestheticizing of politics through fascism to realize the wholeness of humankind, but it creates the concept of race and deploys sexuality as well.

Deployment of sexuality brings about the control over the bodies, hence biopolitics as Foucault maintains in his work *History of Sexuality*. Foucault argues that the concept of power, in modernity, is based upon two schemes. The first one takes the body as the central object and works on the body by means of disciplining it, increasing its usefulness and docility, and integrating it to the systems of economies. The power centralizing the body constitutes the anatomo-politics of the human body as Foucault puts it (Foucault 139). Developing at later stages, the second kind of power emerges as one of the basic productions of modernity.

It mainly focuses on body serving as a template for the biological processes. The subject matters of this power are birth and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy, and propagation. To supervise these biological processes, it put a series of regulatory controls into operation, which means biopolitics of the population. The transformation of the old power symbolizing the sovereignty into the power that is assigned with the administration of the bodies and calculation of life may mark the endeavors of modernity to organize the human life with the aim of making a servant for capitalism and to create a unified human kind.

There has been an immense range of techniques to serve for the administration of bodies and control of populations. Foucault asserts that the bio-power undoubtedly is an essential element for the development of capitalism. "The latter [capitalism] would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes" (Foucault 141). He explicitly shows the relation between the development of biopolitics and that of capitalism.

The adjustment of accumulation of men to that of capital, the joining of growth of human groups to the expansion of productive forces and differential allocation of profit, were made possible in part by exercise of bio-power in its many forms and modes of application" he writes (141). The aim of the power exercised on human bodies is to facilitate the development and operation of capitalism. From Foucault's statements, it can be inferred that modernity, its institutions, and capitalism are all correlated and feeds back each other.

Upon how biopolitics transformed the human being's nature, Foucault changes Aristotle's argument. For Foucault, "modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question" (143). After aestheticizing of the politics, the human body, the biological form, gets politicized for the first time in the history. For the operation of biopolitics, sex has become a remarkably crucial concept. Sex enables both anatomo-politics and biopolitics of the human body as it has been an access to the life of the body and to that of species. ...sex was a whole series of tactics that

combined on varying proportions the objective of disciplining the body and <https://assignbuster.com/fertile-contradiction-within-the-womb-of-modernity-essay-sample/>

that of regulating populations” (Foucault 146). Sex is deployed as a standard to establish a basis both for disciplining and regulating the bodies. To put this in other way, sex is the essential focus of a power operating for the purpose of managing life. Being a much contested term in modernity, race is stimulated by the implementation of the power exercised on human bodies through biopolitics. Foucault writes of racism as a biologizing statist form, which implies the relation between bio-politics and race.

It [racism] was then a whole politics of settlement, family, marriage, education, social hierarchization, and property, accompanied by a long series of permanent interventions at the level of the body, conduct, health, and everyday life, received their color and their justification from the mythical concern with protecting the purity of blood and ensuring the triumph of race (149). Biopolitics, implementing the techniques for the control over the body and populations, gives rise to the concept of race and its maintenance.

These two terms, biopolitics and race, support each other and are supported by the deployment of sexuality. This kind of deployment enables the power to establish dominance over sex that is the main realm of control where these two operate collectively. Nazism constitutes the most concrete example for the operation of both biopolitics and race with the deployment of sexuality. It is the most efficient form where the fantasies of a unified race and disciplined bodies are combined together.

In this respect, it can be argued that Hitler attempts to realize his fantasies of creating a wholly unified and eugenic order of German nation with the politics of sex, which has been cunningly managed by Nazism. The operation



of biopolitics and its relation to race can be observed in Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men*. The film represents the production of racialized subjects and the materialization of race through “structuring visibility” of the race as Zahid Chaudhary argues in his article “Humanity Adrift: Race, Materiality and Allegory in Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men*”.

Infertility that is the main concept of the film functions as a constituent element of the contemporary biopolitics. In addition to infertility, race, in the film, serves as an inseparable part of the biopolitics in which it gains visibility. The process of structuring visibility in the film is realized through a series of scenes where the background becomes the foreground. The scene where Kee, Theo and Miriam are going to Bexhill refugee camp by bus the camera makes them marginal to the frame as it shifts the focus to the bus windows at the scene of a refugee camp.

The lights are turned off and the camera again focuses on the subjects outside the bus. This scene echoes the iconic image in the *Abu Gharib*, which means that formerly being the background *Abu Gharib* becomes the foreground. All the other representations that become the foreground reference a certain history, Chaudhary writes. He asserts that all of these images imply a reality in which the historical referent seems to have disappeared. This is the nihilistic aspect of film's argumentation as it replaces the authentic meaning with the images.

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