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Deconstructing Democracy: A Foucauldian Approach to the Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion

Lal Khan

Assistant Professor,
Basirhat College, Basirhat,
Affiliated to West Bengal State University,
Barasat, West Bengal

Abstract

This paper rigorously analyses democracy from a Foucauldian perspective, deconstructing its assertion of universality by revealing the nuanced power dynamics that dictate inclusion and exclusion within its structure. Utilizing Michel Foucault's theories of power/knowledge, discourse, and biopolitics, the study contends that democratic institutions not only ensure participation but also govern, discipline, and normalize citizens, so perpetuating structural inequalities. This analysis of political subjectivity examines how democratic rhetoric facilitates agency while simultaneously imposing exclusionary boundaries, particularly regarding class, gender, race, and citizenship. The paper enhances political theory by reconceptualizing democracy not as an impartial realm of liberty but as a contentious arena where power is perpetually disputed, rejected, and redefined. This Foucauldian perspective enables the rethinking of more inclusive and liberating forms of democratic practice.

Keywords: Democracy, Power, Biopolitics, Inclusion, Exclusion, Political Subjectivity.

Introduction:

In modern political philosophy, democracy is frequently esteemed as the model of political inclusion, participatory legitimacy, and equal rights. However, underlying its normative allure exists a framework of power dynamics that determines who qualifies as a political person, which voices are acknowledged, and the manner in which rights are allocated. This paper aims to analyse these power dynamics via a Foucauldian perspective, contending that democracy is not merely a framework or a collection of formal institutions, but rather a discursive and governing domain shaped by knowledge, power, subjectivity, and exclusion. Michel Foucault's theories on power/knowledge establish the foundational framework for this inquiry. He contests the notion that power is solely located within formal institutions or state sovereignty; rather, power permeates practices, discourses,

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norms, and micro-technologies that generate and govern subjects[i]. Power not only represses but also allows and constrains, generating the "truths," norms, and subjectivities that facilitate inclusion and exclusion. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault delineates how disciplinary mechanisms surveillance, normalization, examination mold bodies and behaviour, so influencing political agency even within democratic societies. A pertinent idea is governmentality, a term coined by Foucault to describe the exercise of modern power not solely through legal frameworks or sovereign directives, but through the administration of populations, the modulation of behaviour, and the regulation of existence itself[ii]. Within this framework, democracy serves as a locus where governance norms, logic, rights, and obligations converge with both inclusionary and exclusionary activities. The inquiry is: which populations are recognized as complete citizens, and who are marginalized or deemed surplus within democratic discourse? Academics have expanded upon and evaluated Foucault's theory in examining the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Tim Christiaens, in Financial Neoliberalism and Exclusion with and beyond Foucault, contends that neoliberal dispositifs not only cultivate entrepreneurial subjects but also create surplus populations that are marginalized from the assurances of inclusion, productivity, and participation. These exclusions are not external to democracy but rather internal integral to its functioning. Christiaens' research highlights how authority might selectively exclude individuals who contest or do not conform to established productivity norms[iii].

Peters and Besley (2014) examine the historical significance of exclusion in the formation of modern institutions and how 'inclusion' arises as a counter-response, frequently accompanied by its own political and power dynamics, in their work on Social Exclusion/Inclusion: Foucault's analytics of exclusion, the political ecology of social inclusion, and the legitimation of inclusive education[iv]. They demonstrate that inclusion is not merely the antithesis of exclusion, but frequently a tactic with distinct normative prerequisites and implications for power dynamics. Other critical theorists similarly contextualize democracy as both empowering and constraining. In "Six Paradoxes of Democracy: The Dialectic of Inclusion and Exclusion," Calloni analyses discussions regarding social citizenship, multiculturalism, and globalization to illustrate the shifting borders of democracy defining who is considered internal or external, citizens or non-citizens despite the formal expansion of inclusion[v]. In Dahl's Procedural Democracy: A Foucauldian Critique, Gordon contends that even optimal models of procedural democracy, as defined by Dahl, are inextricably linked to power dynamics; while procedures may offer formal equality or freedom, the micro-practices of power determine who can genuinely engage and whose freedom or equality is upheld in reality[vi].

Foucauldian Power, Knowledge, and Subject Formation:

This section elaborates on the Foucauldian theoretical framework that supports the paper's interpretation of democracy as a domain where inclusion and exclusion are generated, challenged, and institutionalized. Michel Foucault's redefinition of

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power transitions the analysis from viewing power as possession or solely repressive dominance to understanding it as a relational, productive, and distributed phenomena. According to Foucault, power circulates through institutions, practices, discourses, and knowledge; it generates categories of the human, shapes areas of intelligibility, and creates certain forms of political subjectivity. In this context, power and knowledge are mutually constitutive: regimes of truth (scientific, legal, administrative) not only mirror reality but also actively create objects, populations, and the criteria by which individuals may be recognized as legitimate political actors. Two interconnected analytical strategies from Foucault are important to the thesis. The notion of governmentality emphasizes that the "art of governing" in contemporary contexts transcends sovereign decrees, encompassing methods for population management, behavioural regulation, and the administration of life itself[vii]. Governmentality identifies the exercise of power within statistical knowledge, welfare administration, public health, risk management, and other ostensibly technical or neutral rationalities that categorize populations into those deemed governable as full citizens and those subjected to marginalization, surveillance, or neglect. Secondly, the concept of subjectification elucidates the process by which individuals develop their identities in relation to systems of truth and governance practices: subjects are shaped through normative practices, bureaucratic classifications, disciplinary routines, and self-regulatory technologies that render specific forms of political engagement comprehensible while rendering others obscure[viii].

Applying these principles to democracy reconceptualizes inclusion not merely as a legal status (the formal conferral of rights) but as a consequence of various, intersecting mechanisms that render certain individuals recognized as legitimate political subjects while relegating others to the periphery, obscurity, or danger. Democratic institutions inherently encompass dispositifs networks of practices, institutions, and knowledge that function to include, regulate, and exclude. These mechanisms are intentional; they are intertwined with specialized knowledge (social science, criminology, public health), bureaucratic categorizations (citizenship regimes, welfare eligibility), and discursive constructs (norms of legitimate protest, civic virtue) that collectively determine who can assert the rights promised by democracy. Recent academic work has expanded and implemented this Foucauldian framework. Mitchell Dean's research on governmentality elucidates how contemporary governance integrates administrative rationalities, programmatic interventions, and evaluative technology that make populations discernible to authority while regulating behaviour through incentives, measurements, and targets[ix]. Dean's approach elucidates that seemingly impartial policy mechanisms performance indicators, risk assessments, conditional benefits function as tools that categorize individuals into deserving and undeserving groups, thus engendering exclusion even within inclusive policy frameworks. Nikolas Rose explores analogous themes in his examinations of biopolitics and the politics of life: advancements in biomedicine and emerging frameworks of biological

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knowledge reshape political accountability and subjectivity, generating new dimensions of inclusion (who qualifies for care, whose life is esteemed) and exclusion (who is pathologized, whose bodies are subjected to control). Rose illustrates how molecular and administrative knowledge contribute to the formation of contemporary political actors, while concurrently generating socioeconomic stratification that intersects with democratic membership[x].

Foucauldian investigations reveal how discourses of rights, inclusion, and equality may serve as tools of normalization. Scholars focused on Foucault have highlighted that rights discourse does not inherently neutralize power; instead, rights can reshape the parameters of discourse and action, define legitimate claims and establish bureaucratic processes that regulate efforts for inclusion[xi]. This dynamic elucidates why formal extensions of democratic rights universal suffrage, anti-discrimination legislation, social inclusion policies can exist alongside enduring exclusionary practices: laws and rights can establish categories (the "disabled," the "migrant," the "welfare recipient") that are subsequently governed through expertise, surveillance, evaluation, and conditional inclusion. Subject creation serves as an essential link between these structural methodologies and actual political experience. Foucault emphasizes technologies of the self—practices and discourses that compel individuals to engage in self-regulation and adopt specific ethical and political identities (Rabinow, 1984). In democratic settings, civic education, media narratives, electoral practices, and bureaucratic contacts serve as mechanisms to instill several forms of political identity: the responsible voter, the entrepreneurial citizen, and the law-abiding consumer.

These subject orientations prioritize specific capacities for agency voting, petitioning, entrepreneurship while diminishing or rendering invisible alternative kinds of political existence (informal organizing, custodial labour, undocumented survival methods). Judith Butler's discourse on performativity and the defining boundaries of intelligibility underscores this notion: norms dictate which bodies may be recognized as subjects deserving of protection or acknowledgment, while those who exist beyond normative parameters face the peril of exclusion from the realm of political reciprocity[xii]. Consequently, inclusion is invariably dependent on the creation and acknowledgment of specific forms of subjectivity. A Foucauldian perspective does not merely depict political actors as passive byproducts of power. It redefines agency as inherent to power dynamics: where power exists, there also exist opportunities for resistance, contestation, and subversion. The dispersed nature of power indicates that resistance might arise through quotidian actions, counter-narratives, and alternative identities developed beyond conventional frameworks. Examining democracy from this perspective, researchers might identify how marginalized groups formulate counter-narratives, strategically employ bureaucratic jargon, or develop innovative modes of civic engagement that challenge dominant classifications and pursue acknowledgment on their own terms. In this context, secondary literature on social movements and governmental reactions is crucial, as it illustrates the dialectic between efforts to manage populations and activities that resist, modify, or evade governance rationalities.

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Deconstructing Inclusion: The Politics of the "Other"

In democratic philosophy, inclusion is frequently regarded as a normative ideal every individual who qualifies as a citizen or subject within a polity or norm should be encompassed in rights, participation, discourse, and decision-making. The concept of "inclusion" inherently encompasses the corresponding idea of the "Other"—individuals who are excluded, marginalized, silenced, or constituted distinct by discursive, institutional, social, and epistemic practices. Deconstructing inclusion necessitates revealing the politics that shape the Other: the definition of inclusion, the entities defining it, the governing norms, and the processes through which the Other is created, sustained, and occasionally assimilated or obliterated. Michel Foucault's analysis does not openly theorize the "Other" as postcolonial theorists or ethical phenomenologists do; however, his frameworks of power, knowledge, dispositif, and subject formation offer conceptual tools to understand how othering constitutes a process of inclusion. Foucault demonstrates that the discursive and institutional constructs of "normal" versus "abnormal," "legitimate" versus "illegitimate," and "visible" versus "invisible" are intrinsic to democratic systems; they are embedded within these systems via classification, surveillance, disciplinary practices, and the establishment of truth regimes. Individuals who are outside or on the peripheries of these classifications are not simply overlooked; their exclusion is frequently systematic, normalized, and rendered invisible or unreadable within democratic discourses and practices.

Building upon Foucault, postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak examine how the "subaltern"—the Other from colonial, racial, gender, or caste peripheries often lacks the capacity to articulate their voice in political or discursive contexts that are acknowledged. Spivak contends that despite formal inclusion of the subaltern (such as legal rights, quotas, or representation), epistemic and representational frameworks frequently result in their voices being mediated or suppressed by elites, colonial/postcolonial intellectuals, or prevailing discourses[xiii]. The subaltern seldom communicates outside the parameters established by authority, and frequently their expressions are overshadowed or absorbed. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" This indicates that inclusion transcends mere legal or formal entitlements and is profoundly contested in terms of knowledge, representation, and epistemic authority. Emmanuel Levinas presents an alternative viewpoint: he emphasizes the ethical superiority of the Other alterity that defies categorization or uniformity. In Levinas's philosophy, the Other embodies an ethical obligation that precedes both ontology and political-legal identity. The acknowledgment of alterity, represented by the visage of the Other, necessitates a sense of responsibility that cannot be confined to predetermined normative identities. Levinas's emphasis on individuality and ethical irreducibility hampers democratic inclusion, as democratic politics tends to universalize categories, identity groups, and norms, potentially absorbing or neutralizing alterity. Levinas compels focus on individuals designated as Other by the universalizing mechanisms of democracy. Refer to Levinas's "Humanism of the Other" and subsequent study examining the political aspects in "Singularity and

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Community"[xiv]. Zhao contends that Levinas's concepts of uniqueness and community, seen as multiplicity, provide tools for creating ethical democratic environments that embrace diversity and oppose assimilation.

Judith Butler's feminist theory of performativity, intelligibility, and normativity enhances the critique of inclusion by emphasizing how specific subjects are rendered unintelligible or excluded by normative frameworks. Butler illustrates how norms delineate the criteria for being considered a "human," "citizen," or "legitimate political actor," resulting in the marginalization and exclusion of people who deviate from these standards from recognition, discourse, or rights. Their political existence may be tenuous due to their lack of complete recognition within dominant normative frameworks. Inclusion necessitates not only legal status but also acknowledgment, clarity, and a platform for discourse. The politics of "inclusion" encompasses more than merely granting rights or participation; it entails the capacity of marginalized groups to assert claims, the mechanisms of nomenclature, the power dynamics inherent in the framing of inclusion, and the necessity for conformity to norms that may obliterate diversity. Democratic environments may allow marginalized groups access to formal institutions (via quotas or representation) while still anticipating that they will communicate, behave, or conduct themselves in accordance with prevailing civic norms. Individuals who fail to conform may be suppressed, branded, or practically excluded. Furthermore, numerous kinds of inclusion impose conditions: inclusion "with qualification," "with discipline," or "with surveillance," necessitating that the Other conform to the stipulations of inclusion rather than being embraced on their own terms. Postcolonial and decolonial critiques reveal that the Other exists not only within democratic societies but is also externalized within global hierarchies: colonial legacies, racial and epistemic hierarchies, and the global neoliberal order generate Others (migrants, refugees, racialized minorities) who are either formally or informally excluded from complete democratic inclusion. These are not trivial curiosities but fundamental to the self-perception of democratic societies (who is included, whose opinions are significant, whose suffering is acknowledged).

Democracy as a Technology of Power:

In the Foucauldian framework, power is not merely coercive or negative; it is generative, diffused, and ingrained in institutions, discourses, and quotidian behaviours. Democracy, frequently characterized as the opposite of domination and exclusion, can also be regarded as a mechanism of power: a collection of practices, rationalities, procedures, forms of knowledge, and institutional frameworks that influence inclusion and exclusion, delineate legitimate political identity, and govern populations. By "technology," I refer to Foucault's concept of technologies of power and apparatuses (dispositifs) that not only repress or exclude but also configure, allow, delimit, and normalize. Democracy, from this viewpoint, is not merely a normative assertion or institutional framework (such as electoral laws and constitutions), but a component of the mechanisms through which

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contemporary governance functions utilizing tactics of security, regulation, discipline, classification, and truth-construction. Michel Foucault's lectures, Security, Territory, Population (1977-78), are essential for this comprehension. In these lectures, Foucault delineates a certain type of power that targets the public, utilizes political economy as its principal form of knowledge, and employs security apparatuses as its technological instruments. He contends that this novel "technology of security" is inextricably linked to liberal governmentality: the principle of "letting be, while simultaneously regulating" (laisser-faire coupled with regulatory procedures) becomes paramount. Democracy is influenced by several rationalities; it encompasses not only majority rule and representation but also risk management, public health assurance, behaviour regulation, welfare organization, and border control. These responsibilities necessitate expertise in statistics, demography, and economics, together with specialized institutions, administrative classifications, and rhetorical legitimations such as "public reason," "security," and "public health."

Democracy as a mechanism of power signifies that electoral procedures, political representation, public engagement, and civic rights are integrated within and influenced by this governing rationale. The concept of the "sovereign people" in liberal democratic theory intersects with governmentality, as individuals are expected to be governed while also governing themselves in alignment with specific norms (economic productivity, legal compliance, risk-awareness, health standards). Researchers have demonstrated how liberal democracy and neoliberal governance mutually reinforce the creation of individuals who internalize the standards of the "responsible citizen" (one who pays taxes, adheres to laws, and participates in sanctioned political activities) while marginalizing those who fail to meet these standards. In these circumstances, the distinction between inclusion and exclusion transitions from formal status to capacity, conduct, recognition, intelligibility, and regulation.
Secondary literature substantiates this perspective. In "Foucauldian Security and the Threat to Democratic Policy-Making," Richard Togman contends that contemporary democratic policy-making is profoundly influenced by security power, one of Foucault's three modalities: sovereign, disciplinary, and security power[xv]. He asserts that security rationalities, including risk assessment, threat management, and statistical norms, permeate democratic decision-making processes, occasionally compromising the democratic principles of equality, deliberation, and justice. Togman's assertion emphasizes that democracy is not merely a venue for countering power (by voting, rights, etc.), but rather a domain where power technologies redefine what constitutes legitimate governance and acceptable citizen conduct.

Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, in their analyses of governmentality, demonstrate that instruments such as audits, performance indicators, classificatory systems, welfare conditionality, and risk metrics are integral to the management of populations by democratic governments. These instruments are integral to democracy, including democratic governance inside surveillance, normalization,

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and administration. In numerous civilizations, democracy evolves into a system where political legitimacy is linked not only to formal involvement but also to the adherence to norms ingrained in these governing technologies. Miller and Rose Ensure that you verify the precise page citations in your version. Moreover, democracy as a mechanism of power is evident in the utilization of discourses around crisis, fear, or emergency to augment or rationalize administrative authority, surveillance, border regulation, migration, and similar measures. The state used terms such as "public health," "national security," and "terrorism" to justify extraordinary actions, yet these exceptions frequently become accepted. In Foucault's Security, Territory, Population, the genealogy of security illustrates how initially exceptional measures evolve into routine, technical, bureaucratic practices that influence daily governance and regulate inclusion and exclusion (determining who is deemed a risk, who requires control, and who is recognized as part of the political population).

A significant implication of perceiving democracy as a mechanism of power is that inclusion is never absolute. Inclusion is linked to adherence to norms, disciplines, and technology. This may manifest in formal forms (vote rights, legal status) as well as informal forms (media legitimacy, popular recognition, moral standards). Individuals who do not conform to these normative standards due to poverty, disability, migrant status, dissent, or alternative lifestyles experience exclusion or conditional inclusion that regulates their conduct or suppresses their claims. In contrast, democratic legitimacy is augmented for individuals who conform to the governing technologies: those who are numerically prominent, own cultural capital, are adept with media, and can embody the anticipated subjectivity of a "responsible citizen." The analysis of democracy as a power technology acknowledges the significance of democratic institutions (elections, rights, deliberation). Instead, it contextualizes them within larger frameworks: it demonstrates how these processes are inherently influenced by power/knowledge dynamics, security rationalities, systems of expert knowledge, and bureaucratic structures. This perspective highlights the conflicts between democratic principles (equitable political representation, inclusivity, justice) and the mechanisms of power as facilitated by technology: creating classifications, categorizing populations, delineating threats and standards, thereby engendering exclusion despite the apparent broadening of inclusion.

Inclusion-Exclusion as a Dynamic Process:

Inclusion and exclusion within democratic systems should not be perceived as static or binary conditions; instead, they function as dynamic, contingent, and relational processes that develop over time and vary among situations. This dynamism occurs due to the instability of inclusion and exclusion limits: democratic norms, institutional frameworks, identity discourses, policy regimes, and power dynamics perpetually influence and redefine these boundaries. The Foucauldian framework effectively encapsulates this processual aspect, as Foucault identifies the development of subjectivities, the functioning of governing

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rationalities, and the implementation of truth regimes within historically contextualized practices and discourses. Michel Foucault's examination of the mechanisms of exclusion in contemporary cultures reveals that exclusion is not a singular event but a foundational logic that underlies the development of knowledge, institutional standards, and individual identities. In The History of Sexuality, Volume I, Foucault contends that contemporary discourse generates "instances of exclusion" (e.g., mad, criminal, homosexual) via classification and prohibition; these exclusionary categories not only delineate those on the periphery but are intricately integrated into the social fabric that dictates inclusion, intelligibility, and legitimacy[xvi]. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault examines the historical emergence of disciplinary institutions (prisons, schools, hospitals) that create normative subjects while excluding those who do not or cannot comply, utilizing surveillance, categorization, and normalization.

Research expanding on Foucault indicates that inclusion-exclusion entails ongoing negotiation. Peters and Besley examine the evolution of inclusion as a policy ideal in "Social Exclusion/Inclusion: Foucault's Analytics of Exclusion, the Political Ecology of Social Inclusion, and the Legitimation of Inclusive Education," tracing its transformation from social solidarity within welfare states to a focus on skill, productivity, and conditionality amid neoliberal shifts[xvii]. They demonstrate that practices and discourses of social inclusion react to crises (economic, political, legitimacy), often resulting in a redefinition of inclusion in more stringent terms, so constricting it through heightened expectations or altered criteria. Peters and Besley expressly suggest that inclusion is a dynamic process, influenced by political pressure, institutional capability, normative changes, and discursive conflicts. Marina Calloni's "Paradoxes of Democracy: The Dialectic of Inclusion and Exclusion" also underscores the historical dynamics of inclusion among welfare democratic regimes. Calloni contends that the broadening of inclusion via citizenship rights, welfare, and social policy frequently engenders new exclusions or redefinitions of deservingness, as policies are amended, political authority transforms, and societal norms progress. The chapter illustrates how political actors react to demographic shifts, migration, globalization, and demands for cultural acknowledgment, resulting in the redefinition of inclusionary boundaries—determining citizenship, access to the welfare system, and cultural recognition[xviii].

In his essay "The Dynamics of Democratic Exclusion", Charles Taylor analyses how democratic societies, despite their commitment to inclusion, create forces that lead to exclusion[xix]. Taylor observes that as societies broaden their formal enfranchisement and participatory rights, a tension arises: for democratic sovereignty to operate effectively, there must exist a somewhat coherent and shared conception of "people"; this demand for cohesion frequently marginalizes groups perceived as inadequately assimilated, comprehended, or willing to engage according to prevailing norms. Taylor's dynamic is temporal: inclusion now may be challenged tomorrow; formal rights do not eliminate the possibility of exclusion through social, rhetorical, or cultural marginalization. Rudolf Stichweh's

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publication, Individual and Collective Inclusion and Exclusion in Political Systems, enhances comprehension of the dynamic processes of inclusion and exclusion within contemporary political systems[xx]. Stichweh demonstrates that political systems distinguish between individual and collective forms of inclusion and exclusion, and that alterations in political complexity, functional differentiation within systems, and external pressures (such as migration and global interdependence) necessitate modifications in the operationalization of inclusion, including changes in voting rights, representation, policy responsiveness, or supplementary institutions of inclusion. Demands for inclusion by historically marginalized groups instigate institutional change, which may subsequently face resistance or co-optation, resulting in novel kinds of exclusion.

The interaction of speech, institution, and identity is fundamental to the dynamic process of inclusion and exclusion. Discourse delineates the intelligibility of claim-making, the recognition of identities, the articulation of pain, and the legitimacy of demands for inclusion. Institutions formalize norms through legislation, procedures, and policies; identity politics leverage recognition, belonging, and delineation to challenge or validate inclusion. As power moves throughout different areas, the borders of inclusion and exclusion fluctuate. Furthermore, crises (economic downturns, migration surges, pandemics, security threats) frequently expedite reconfiguration: they may intensify exclusions (border policies, emergency powers) even within democracies, or facilitate new inclusions (rights to health, social protection) when compelled by political pressure, social movements, or normative transformations. The Foucauldian perspective facilitates the identification of these disruptions, continuities, and resistances. Consequently, inclusion and exclusion must be regarded as temporally stratified: historical exclusions influence contemporary inclusion assertions; current inclusion practices reflect remnants of past exclusions; prospective scenarios for inclusion or exclusion are envisioned and debated in the present. Furthermore, location and scale dimensions are significant: inclusion in one area (legal, formal citizenship) may correspond with exclusion in others (economic, cultural, social involvement), and what constitutes inclusion at a national level may be exclusionary at subnational levels or across borders. These processes challenge the normative ideal of inclusion, revealing that inclusion is perpetually incomplete and inconsistent.

Implications for Democratic Theory:

A Foucauldian interpretation of democracy recontextualizes fundamental premises in democratic theory by redirecting analytical focus from formal institutions and rights to the micro-practices, knowledge systems, and dispositifs that generate political subjects and population effects. Instead of viewing democracy as a stable framework whose inclusivity increases through legal reforms, the Foucauldian perspective asserts that democratic forms are inherently influenced by power/knowledge dynamics that determine the validity of political claims, the recognition of political subjects, and the criteria for what constitutes a “grievable” or “worthy” concern within a democratic context. This presents four

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interconnected implications for democratic theory: it challenges proceduralist accounts, complicates normative models predicated on universal subjecthood, redefines the relationship between redistribution and recognition, and creates conceptual space for agonistic and ethical approaches that prioritize contestation and precariousness as democratic values.

Initially, Foucauldian analysis critiques proceduralist and formalist views of democracy that presume institutional mechanisms (voting, representation, separation of powers) are adequate to ensure political participation. If power is dispersed and generative functioning through classification, expertise, norms, and administrative practices then formal procedures may establish merely a superficial veneer of equality, while more profound mechanisms of exclusion endure or are perpetuated. Democratic procedures serve as governance mechanisms that both facilitate and restrict political agency: they render individuals as governable entities (voters, taxpayers, welfare recipients) while concurrently excluding those who do not conform to these classifications or who are deemed unintelligible within dominant discourses. This critique corresponds with a developing body of literature that interprets Foucault's work regarding the political implications of governmental technologies in liberal democracies.

The Foucauldian perspective confuses normative assertions that assume a universal, entirely rational, and equally empowered democratic individual. Democratic theory that depends on an abstract notion of "people" frequently overlooks the historical construction of subjectivities shaped by disciplinary institutions, biopolitical regimes, and self-pedagogy that enable certain individuals to engage on legitimate terms while marginalizing or devaluing others' capacity to do so. This necessitates a reevaluation of political subjecthood: citizenship transcends mere legal status, embodying a lived and performative state upheld by rhetorical acknowledgment and institutional visibility. The discourse on recognition and redistribution articulates this notion using varied terminology—Fraser's assertion that justice necessitates both economic redistribution and cultural recognition aligns with the Foucauldian perspective that material and discursive frameworks collaboratively generate inclusion and exclusion. However, Foucauldian analysis provides the instruments to demonstrate how expertise, classification, and administrative rationality create the categories Fraser examines.

Third, Foucauldian insights advance democratic philosophy towards frameworks that rigorously consider contestation, plurality, and fragility. If power generates both domination and the potential for resistance, then the vitality of democracy can be assessed not only by the equity of its processes but also by the ability of marginalized groups to articulate their identities, challenge classification systems, and create alternative subjectivities and counter-narratives. This aligns with agonistic theories (Mouffe) and the ethics of precariousness (Butler): Agonistic pluralism posits that valid political existence necessitates environments where contestation is normalized rather than repressed, while Butler's focus on grievability underscores the ethical implications of recognizing which lives merit

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democratic safeguarding. In conjunction with Foucauldian governmentality studies, these viewpoints propose that democratic theorists ought to prioritize practices that enhance the conditions of intelligibility and mourning specifically, the fundamental framework through which claims can be articulated and acknowledged rather than solely focusing on the enhancement of electoral or legal systems.

Ultimately, although the Foucauldian criticism may appear to be skeptical regarding the emancipatory potential of democracy, it is not solely negative. Foucauldian analysis elucidates the micro-mechanisms of exclusion, thereby creating opportunities for targeted intervention: it facilitates the identification of specific classificatory technologies, expert discourses, and institutional routines that require reform or rejection; it theorizes how counter-practices such as narrative reframing, strategic applications of administrative categories, and innovative civic technologies can generate alternative forms of inclusion that are less disciplinary and more empowering. A Foucauldian democratic theory is simultaneously diagnostic and generative: it diagnoses the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion while generating strategies to reconfigure practices, ensuring that inclusion transcends mere assimilation of Others into established norms and instead involves a transformation of those norms themselves. The dual action of critical exposure and creative imagination is the primary normative conclusion for modern democratic thought.

Conclusion:

The Foucauldian analysis of democracy demonstrates that the contemporary democratic initiative, rather than being a neutral or solely liberating entity, is intricately involved in the creation and regulation of power dynamics. Democracy, by its methods of representation, inclusion, and participation, operates as a power technology that regulates individuals, delineates legitimate citizenship, and builds the "Other" as a governance object. This viewpoint challenges the liberal conception of democracy as an inherently inclusive and equal institution, prompting us to acknowledge its contingent and discriminatory nature. Foucault contends that power functions not alone through repression but also through the creation of subjectivities, knowledge frameworks, and norms that delineate the parameters of political community. Inclusion and exclusion are not aberrations but rather co-constitutive processes, one facilitating and legitimizing the other. A Foucauldian perspective urges us to reconsider democracy beyond its institutional appearance, highlighting its microphysics—how it disciplines, categorizes, and generates governable populations. This deconstruction aims not to reject democracy but to elucidate its intricacies, so facilitating critical interventions that interrogate who is permitted to articulate, whose lives warrant mourning, and whose voices are marginalized[xxi]. Recognizing the contradictory character of democracy the dual promise of equality and its continual reinforcement of difference allows for the potential of a more reflective, contentious, and inclusive democratic practice. This activity must stay attentive to its own exclusions,

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adhering to Foucault's advocacy for a "permanent critique" that opposes the closure of political discourse and maintains the possibility for alternative modes of existence, engagement, and community[xxii].

Endnotes:

[i] Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Pantheon Books. 1977.

[ii] Foucault, M. Governmentality. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality (pp. 87–104). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1991.

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