

**A NEW GAZE TO BIOPOWER: UNDERSTANDING THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC AND THE QUESTION OF LIBERTIES IN AUSTRIA
FROM A FOUCAULDIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT

The Foucauldian conception of biopower addresses technology of power that manages populations. The roots of biopower can be traced back to the foundation of the modern nation state in the West and the rise of capitalism. It manages populations through different disciplinary institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, and psychiatry clinics. These institutions encode the human behavior and disciplines the body over the mind. Covid-19 pandemic has also been one the indicators to perceive this disciplinary mechanism. In this context, limitation of the civil liberties has been an apparatus to manage the population which was fed by fear and the feeling of responsibility. Austria, in this case, stands as a significant example as it has been the strictest Western country in terms of restrictions during the times of Covid-19, especially with the mandatory vaccination declaration. This paper will look at the question of civil liberties during the times of Covid-19 pandemic from a Foucauldian perspective. It reflects Austria as an instance by discourse analysis.

Key Words: Biopower, Civil liberties, Covid-19, public health

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my supervisor Zoltan Miklosi, PhD. He has been very supportive, encouraging and kind throughout the whole process. Also, I would like to address my special thanks to my parents, İsmail Aydoğın and Asuman Aydoğın, for standing by no matter what, and always supporting me in any sense.

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Introduction

Pandemics, throughout the ages, have been one of the milestones that shaped the structure of societies. For instance, the Black Death in the middle century and now, Covid-19 pandemic stand as significant examples as they reflect witnessing devastating diseases and how states would handle in different ages. In this paper, I look at the question of liberties during the times of Covid-19 from a Foucauldian perspective of biopower and I use Austria as an instance to discuss it by discourse analysis. Foucault argues that the emergence of biopower was risen with foundation of the modern nation state and capitalism. Biopower is a form of power that manages populations through different disciplinary institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, and psychiatry clinics. The very reason behind these disciplinary institutions is to encode the human behavior. It is a power over the bodies through the mind. This power deals with the total, not the individual. In this sense, I consider, Covid-19 pandemic has been a significant indicator to understand the notion of managing populations. The biggest part of the pandemic has been about managing the populations under an extreme condition through different disciplinary mechanisms that disciplines the body. So that, lock-downs, vaccination policies, compulsory mask rules, social distancing and QR codes are reflections of power that disciplines the body and administers populations by optimizing them. In this sense, understanding Covid-19 pandemic is a new way to understand the concept of biopower, not only in normal conditions, but also in extreme circumstances, such as pandemics.

I suggest that the concept of biopower cannot be used to explain the previous pandemics such as the Black Death. Although Foucault's himself traces the origins of biopower back to eighteenth century, I intend to examine the black plague in the middle-ages. Therefore, I will be able to understand the differences between the ages in terms of managing a disease and organize population. In this context, I argue the impact fear for the both cases of the Black Death and Covid-19 pandemic. The Black Death reflects the fear of God as the disease was considered to be God's punishment. Whereas, the Covid-19 pandemics represents a fear of un-

known that shaped with the information or knowledge given to us. Thus, I believe that introducing a historical background under the light of the Black Death will also allow to understand how states would manage populations and extreme conditions before the emergence of the modern nation state.

When it comes to the question of civil liberties, I think they are also a very apparatus of these disciplinary institutions. The concept of liberty has a positive meaning that prevents oppressive restrictions by a certain authority or a power. The disciplinary power does not only emerge from repressive or explicit situations. It also comes from allowing or freeing certain acts under certain conditions which is as effective to administer populations. However, the civil liberties also have a fragile structure as they can be bend, re-shaped or limited by a certain authority when they are violated. The Corona case, as an extreme circumstance, shows this fragile structure of the notion of liberties and states' control over them to manage populations. This could be studied under moral obligations and ethics but this paper does not follow this kind of a normative path. Rather, it seeks to understand how the state's power to manage populations function under an extreme case and how civil liberties maintain under that functioning. In what ways, under what claims limitation of civil liberties are used to maintain populations. According to Foucault, the main problem with the Western political philosophy is that it constantly devotes abstractions and builds ideal imaginary models to overcome the problem of political power and a just society. He argues that instead of these abstract utopian models, the main task should be understanding how the concepts actually developed throughout the history and now operate within our societies (Rabinow, 6, 1984). This idea of Foucault on the Western political philosophy will be the core of this paper. It will aim to understand the concept of liberties in Western societies, such as Austria, which claim and label itself to be the advocator of civil liberties under a pa. To be able to do this, besides following a Foucauldian perspective, this paper will also use his theory of biopower. Thus, Austria as a Western society,

and as a country with strict pandemic restitutions such as, constant lock-downs and mandatory vaccination policies, stands as a significant example to understand the connection between biopower and functioning of liberties during Covid-19 pandemic. The idea of civil liberties is usually associated with the Western idea. However, the Covid-19 pandemic shows how fragile this concept could be to manage the populations over the instance of Austria.

The methodology of this paper will be discourse analysis in terms of Covid-19 regulations and restrictions in Austria. The reason why is that a discourse analysis on Covid-19 will help to evaluate and reflect the functioning of liberties in a Western country under extreme circumstances; and this will also help to understand the operation of the biopower. It will capture a timeline between the March 2020, the beginning the cases of coronavirus in Austria, to February, 2022, declaration of mandatory vaccination. To be able to this, I will look at speeches and claims of the government and the opposition by newspapers that highlight the regulations and restrictions. The paper I will look at are The Kronen Zeitung which is a right-wing populist paper; Die Presse which is a liberal one. In this way, I will also be able to look at how different newspapers with different perspectives reflect the speeches and the decisions of the parliament. Thus, I will examine concepts such as public health, liberty, and mandatory vaccination.

With this paper, I aim to understand the question of liberties and their functioning in Western societies during a pandemic from a Foucauldian perspective without creating or claiming an abstract ideal order. This reason why I aim this is that I wish to come to conclusion that in the, we are so exposed and internalized to norms and concepts by the power of the politics so that we become numb. Liberty is a concept; it is human made. Throughout the ages, we internalized it and integrated into our lives through the power. However, with Covid-19 we have been experiencing a different system in which what we were used to, exposed and internalized changed; and we got used to this change through political power

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The Concept of Foucauldian Biopower and Its Relation to Liberties during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Foucault, emphasizes that with the Renaissance, new ties arose between the state (established in Europe by the great regional monarchies born out of Europe) and the individuals are a new type of political reflection. From the middle of the sixteenth century a series of studies on the "art of government" started to appear on the scene (Rabinow, 15, 1984). Thus, it might be claimed that there was indeed a political shift. However, this shift was not concerned with the traditional questions capturing the monarch and their ways of ruling. On the contrary, it was a more complex and wider scope. The studies about this political shift directly covered the rule of a household, spirits, children, a province, a monastery, a cult, or a family. Thus, political thought was implicitly extended to encompass almost all human activities, from the smallest movements of "the soul" to the army's greatest military maneuvers. Each activity, in its own way, required reflection on how it could best be accomplished. Foucault says that 'best' means 'most economical', that 'the art of management is the right way to manage the economy, that is, to manage individuals, property and wealth in the family. Caring for the family of the father in state administration. Therefore, Foucault claims, the first great slip, the nature of the state, and later the concerns of the monarch and himself, to a broader and more detailed consideration of how to introduce economy and order from the top of the state (government) is insufficient in all areas of social life. Thus, the society has become a political target (Rabinow, 15, 1984). Foucault sees it as a sign of a major or shift in political thought. It points to a fundamental link between the sovereign and the region for traditional theories of sovereignty. Of course, the sovereign also ruled everyone who lived in that area and controlled its resources. But the fundamental bond that is the source of the sovereign's legitimacy and his connection to a realm. However, with the major shift in the political thought, as it has been stated before, a much more complex relationship between people and objects is given priority. Ultimately, Foucault argues, the things government should be concerned with are people, but their relationships,

connections, intertwining with other things, such as wealth, resources, livelihoods, lands and territories, climate, irrigation, fertility; traditions, habits, ways of doing and thinking, etc. people in their relationships with other things, such as; finally, people, famine, epidemics, death, etc. in dealing with other kinds of things, such as accidents and misfortunes.

In addition to that, it was only a little later, in the seventeenth century, that a wider knowledge of the usability of what was at hand—different "elements, dimensions, and factors of state power"—was named "statistics": the science of the state. The art of government and the empirical knowledge of the sources and conditions of the state - the statistics - together formed the main components of a new political rationality. A rationality that we haven't gotten out of yet, Foucault mentions (Rabinow, 16, 1984). Further, the demographic expansion of the 18th century is linked to historical monetary relations, as Foucault argues. Abundance was in turn linked to the expansion of agricultural production through a series of cyclical processes. Foucault's broadened the links between these long-term changes and certain political processes that have been systematically underestimated by Annales historians. More particularly, Foucault's contribution allowed to explain the economic, demographic, and political patterns of the classical age and their relations to political thought. It reveals that rulers made conscious decisions regarding the so-called unconscious forces analyzed by historians (Rabinow, 16, 1984). According Foucault (1990), the sovereign power in the classical ages was able to show its power through taking life or letting live as a right (136). In addition to that, he claims that (1995) the bodily torture as an example to the public was also a form of punishment reflecting sovereignty and its power the its subjects. The law represents the power of the sovereign. Thus, the violation of the law is also violation or an assault to the sovereign's power. Consequently, those who break the law were not only punished for their violations, but should labeled as the as enemies of the state, who challenge the monarch's authority and existence. Punishment, according to this view, is an act of war to defend the ruler (Foucault, 1995). However, contrary

to the oppressive dominant style of power expressed as the right to end life, new forms of power began to emerge in the 17th and 18th centuries, aimed at managing, optimizing and increasing life. Foucault calls these forms of power, which he argues develop in two main ways, biopower. Historically, the first form was an anatomy-politics of the human body, disciplines whose main target was the body of the individual. The second form focused on the human body as a species and as a biopolitics of population, reproduction, mortality, disease, life expectancy, etc. used regulatory controls to manage life processes (Erlenbusch, 2015). Therefore, according to Foucault, with the promotion of life and the growth and maintenance of population, a central concern of the state, expressed in the art of government, a new regime of power comes into play, and Foucault refers to this regime as "biopower". He highlights that biopower brings life and its mechanisms into the realm of open computation, and makes knowledge a mediator of the transformation of human life. Biopower unites around two poles at the beginning of the classical age. It is a polar human species. For the first time in history, scientific categories (species, population, fertility, etc.) become objects of systematic, sustained political attention and intervention rather than legal ones (Rabinow, 17, 1984). The other pole of biopower is the human body: a concept which is approached not directly through its biological dimension, but as an object to be manipulated and controlled by a new set of operations, procedure combinations of knowledge and power, which Foucault calls "technologies". They constitute the "technology of discipline". Whatever its institutional form, the discipline is the purpose of technology and it has emerged in a multitude of different settings to create a "docile body" that can be subjected, used, transformed and developed, such as workshops, schools, prisons and hospitals. This is done in several ways involved: through the exercises and training of the body, through the standardization of actions over time, and through the control of space. Discipline stems from an organization of individuals in space and requires a certain conservation of space. Once formed, this grid allows for a precise distribution of individuals to be disciplined and

supervised. For instance, in a factory, the procedure simplifies productivity; guarantees regular behavior in a school; reduces the risk of dangerous crowds, stray vagrants, or epidemics in a town. Disciplinary control, therefore, is undoubtedly linked to the rise of capitalism. However, the relationship between economic changes resulting in capital accumulation and political changes resulting in power accumulation has not yet been determined (Rabinow, 17, 1984). Further, Foucault argues that these two typical technologies of biopower depend on each other are interconnected through a range of practices and relationships. For example, to reduce the death rate associated with a disease, states have relied on proper hygiene, healthy eating habits, or disciplinary mechanisms that ensure individuals are immunized (Erlenbusch, 2015). He also points out that the emergence of biopower technologies has not resulted in the disappearance of sovereignty. Foucault says, “We should not see it as a replacement for the sovereign society by a disciplinary society and then a disciplinary society, say, a government society” (Foucault, 2007, p.108). Rather, modern societies rely on the practices of domination, discipline, and biopolitics to work in harmony.

However, this means that the practices of power traditionally ascribed to sovereignty have been altered because they serve a new purpose: once a society operates in a biopower mode, killing can no longer be practiced to defend the sovereign, but can only be justified. if it serves the preservation, defense and liberation of the social body (Erlenbusch, 2015). Therefore, I consider that the concept of biopower, under the definition, conceptualization and analyzing of Foucault’s notion, can easily be linked to regulations and restrictions taken during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Davis ,(2021):

“In some sense, the discussion over the healthy person is a discussion about the formation of the modern citizen. As Michel Foucault and others have noted, the development of a medical system is of course also a system of control. If it works well, it is hidden and undetectable—powered by self-will rather than heavy-handed regulation. And the system has worked very well, until now when the evolution of the word health suddenly

becomes more clearly a way of talking about power and setting one group over another. Enforcement now becomes a matter of medical metrics in a time of necessity” (141).

Staging an encounter between "affect" and "biopower" is to bring together two ways of thinking about the relationship between power and life; where "life" is used to refer to what is what for now over individual bodies and mass populations. On the other hand, life is what transcends any attempt to regulate and control it. It is life made productive by techniques. It is in the tension between these two versions of how power and life are related (Anderson, 28, 2012). According to Raveendran and Bazzul (2021), in the context of the pandemic, at both poles we are witnessing the exercise of biopower by government mandates and the imposition of curfews, and police brutality on populations and notifications that openly demand appropriate health behavior from individuals (997).

The process during the Covid-19 pandemic reflects this relationship between power and life through the idea of training of the body through discipline and also power and knowledge relations, “technologies” of the art of governance for the sake of the common good: public health. The control mechanism of the state on the human body was reflected at a very intense level, which can also be discussed over the effect of biopower on individual’s liberties. Thus, in this sense, I claim that just like every other concept liberty is also a human-made one. It is also very linked to control mechanisms of the state to balance its disciplinary control, as the liberties are also given by the states. Hence, my main argument is that although liberty as in its very definition allows being free from oppression, it is also a form of the state exercising its power. The state can bend, reshape, take or give them. This is a way of exercising power as when you consider that you have something which protects you or frees you from oppression, a greater authority has a control mechanism over it. I consider that Covid-19 is a significant instance to this notion. It shows this control mechanisms of the state over people under the justification of public health, so total good. In addition to that, when we look at the concept of

liberty and its origins, it is mostly Western political philosophy oriented. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the Western countries, such as Austria, did not follow this pattern. Thus, Covid-19 pandemic stands as a unique example to address the changes in the functioning of concepts under extreme circumstances through the gaze of Foucault's biopower.

The question of liberties in Covid-19 pandemic are also discussed within the frame of moral obligations. According to Cameron et al. (2021), "Liberty-restricting measures are a commonly accepted public health tool. Measures such as quarantine have been used for centuries to prevent the spread of disease ... When considering the acceptability of public health measures, liberty-restricting measures are often justified on the basis they are necessary to prevent harm to others" (554). Although this paper does not aim to follow a normative pattern and propose an ideal structure for the concept of liberty, I find it important to examine how this concept has been developed and discussed, even if it is from a normative perspective. Since the concept of liberty has been improved within the frame of Western political philosophy, I consider that it will allow me to conduct a relationship between biopower and liberty under an extreme circumstance, such as a pandemic, and how this long-term framed term can be corrupted by its advocates. As I have stated above, I argue that the concept of liberty is a part of the state's control mechanism as it has a significant power over it. According to Swift (2019): "The difference between effective and formal freedom is the difference between having the power or capacity to act in a certain way and the mere absence of interference. The fact that nobody is preventing you from doing something does not necessarily mean that you can actually do it. Are you free to do it – because nobody is stopping you? Or unfree – because you are not able to do it?" (61). Further, according to Cameron et al., (2021), "Utility at a population level cannot always be given priority. A key objection to a utilitarian approach is the risk that it will result in utilitarian calculations in which people's liberty and well-being will be restricted whenever this would result in a net overall benefit to society. Utilitarianism is strictly impartial

and only concerned with the moral perspective. This may mean that particular groups of individuals are forced to make significant sacrifices in order to achieve marginal social gains or that the burdens of achieving public health aims may continually fall on the same group” (556). I suggest that these questions are also related to the civil liberties during the times of Covid-19 pandemic. The restrictions taken which limit the civil liberties are justified to benefit the population. However, this justification and the limit on the liberties are also a part of population management. In addition to that, one day, you are able to leave the house and have the right to have a say on your own body; however, the other day this situation changes. Thus, you are not free to perform certain thing that you used to be free to do. If this paper had aimed to look at this problem from a normative aspect, the necessity of the restrictions might have been questioned for the sake of common good. However, as this paper aims to follow a Foucauldian perspective that rejects idealizing an abstract order, I tend to discuss the problems that concern of public health develops.

Methodology

The methodology of this paper will be discourse analysis in terms of Covid-19 regulations and restrictions in Austria. The reason why is that a discourse analysis on Covid-19 will help to evaluate and reflect the functioning of liberties in a Western country under extreme circumstances; and this will also help to understand the operation of the biopower. To be able to this, I will look at speeches and claims of the government, on newspapers by the regulations and restrictions to see how they reflect on them. Further I will also look at the reaction of the opposition to understand how different political views perceived the pandemic. This will capture the time frame between the March, 2020, and February, 2022. The papers I will look at are The Kronen Zeitung which is a right-wing populist paper; Die Presse which is a liberal one. In this way, I will also be able to look at how different newspapers with different perspectives reflect the speeches and the decisions of the parliament. In this sense, I assume to find out the liberal paper to be more supportive to the restriction taken against the Coronavirus for the public health, whereas the conservative one to be fonder of supporting individual liberties. Thus, I will examine concepts such as public health, liberty, restrictions, and mandatory vaccination under Coronavirus. In order to do this, I will use Nvivo which is a qualitative data soft-ware program. Therefore, I will be able to examine the frequency of the concepts such as liberty, common good, and mandatory vaccination used in politicians' speeches. By looking at the usage of these concepts in the speeches of politicians will allow me to analyze how they were used with the concept of public health to reinforce its importance. Further, by performing a discourse analysis I will aim to understand the disciplinary control mechanisms of biopower as proposed by Foucault by limiting individual liberties under the name of public health.

Historical Background: The Black Death in the Middle Century

Pandemics have had significant effects on societies within the different periods of history. In order to analyze the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic through a more intense gaze and its relation to the question of liberties under the concept of Foucauldian biopower, I consider that investigating previous pandemics, which had changed the societies dramatically, would allow to provide a more solid ground to understand how states would react to them in terms of precautions and restrictions. Therefore, I will introduce a brief yet to the point historical background to the Black Death in the fourteenth century and the Spanish Flu in the twentieth century. I will try to emphasize how these pandemics were handled by the states and what kind of restrictions were taken. This section is intended to argue the Black Plague. The reason why I intend to highlight the Black Death in the first place is that it stands as one the most devastating instances to pandemics which took hold of Europe and Asia and caused millions of deaths. Further, its date does not go back to what Foucault claims biopower dates back to, which is the sixteenth century. In this sense, I consider that the Black Death is a significant example to understand a devastating pandemic without the effect of biopower and compare it with Covid-19 pandemic in terms of restrictions and the question of liberties.

In the midst of the fourteenth century, the Black Death was the greatest plague that the Europe, and the world, had endured (Cantor, 6, 2001). According to Cantor: “Civilization both in East and West was visited by a destructive plague which devastated nations and caused populations to vanish. It swallowed up many of the good things of civilization and wiped them out in the entire inhabited world” (6, 2001). The pandemic killed approximately fifty percent of the entire population of Europe at that time.

The Black Death epidemic was a severe rift that reshaped the economy, society and culture in Europe. According to Brooke (2020), it led to an intensification of Christian religious belief and practice, manifested in apocalyptic omens with extreme and fearful cults by challenging

the authority of the Church. The intensification of Christian cults also had long-term institutional implications. Due to the death of many clergy, coupled with fears of sending students on journeys which were long and dangerous, and the accidental appearance of wealthy wills, allowed the establishment of new universities and new colleges. The proliferation of new centers appeared to undermine the unity of medieval Christianity and, rather, created an environment for debate. Furthermore, it also laid the groundwork for the rise of more passionate national identities and was one of the paths opening to the Reformation that ultimately questioned and split the authority of Church and Christianity in the 16th century (Brook, 2020). In addition to that, According to Slack (1988):

“It is not surprising, in Christian Europe, that so severe and unpredictable a disease should be accorded a supernatural origin. Plague was a divine scourge, a retribution for the sins of mankind: sometimes for sins in general, more often for the specific misdeed of the time or place of an epidemic. It was God’s punishment for new-fangled women’s fashion, for swearing and drunkenness, for heresy or atheism...depending on which side you were on. Repentance and prayer were therefore universally recognized as the proper and first resource against an epidemic of plague, and these were demonstrated publicly as well as privately, in processions in Catholic countries for most of the periods...” (436).

Therefore, as it was considered to be a punishment from the God, moral and social prejudices which forbid certain social activities were the common response of public to the plague (Slack, 439). In addition to this, the first reaction of the civic government was nonetheless to refuse to consider, or at least ignore the effects of the plague for as long as possible. However, according to Slack (441, 1988), that was just as wishful thinking. “Public acknowledgement of an epidemic meant the spontaneous flight of the richer inhabitants and immediate damage to commerce, when magistrates elsewhere took protective action. For the chief concern of all municipalities was prevent plague arriving in the first place. Bans on the movements of goods and people from infected towns began in 1348 and became ever more sophisticated in the following centuries” (441). Therefore, the Black Death and increasing number of deaths made it clearer that the disease was caused by contagion, rather than being a

result of a religious punishment and also, a need for a decent precaution. The term quarantine was also introduced during those times, for the first time. Quarantines were directly linked to this new empiricism and that became an instinctive social distance between the Europe's middle class and elite households. The first quarantine was established in 1377. In the 1460s, quarantines became routine in the European Mediterranean (Brooke, 2020).

- **Analysis**

When we compare the Black Death in the middle century and the Covid-19 pandemic, we can see different factors did/have had an impact over people by changing their behavior and integrating new terms or habits into their lives. For the case of the Black Death there is not an excessive governmental power. However, there is still a greater power that influences people which is the religion. Such that, the plague is perceived as God's punishment and the measures against it, are taken based on social and moral restrictions and prejudices. Later on, the government had to take measures due to highly increased number of deaths. However, we can also see the measures taken, such as quarantine, also influenced the further centuries. The great plagues in London and Marseille in 1665 and 1721 were the result of disruptions to this quarantine barrier. Therefore, from the end of the 17th century to 1871, the Habsburg Empire established an armed "cord sanitaire" against the possible outbreaks of plague from the Ottoman Empire (Brooke, 2020). Further, even in the twenty-first century quarantine is one of the most crucial and important measures taken during the times of pandemics.

The period of the Black Death cannot be analyzed under the Foucauldian notion of biopower. In the middle century, there is not a notion of a nation state and also the impact of liberalism. Yet, we can still talk about a power that shapes people's reaction to this kind of an extreme circumstance. Religion, in that sense, is the greatest power that influences and shapes people's attitude against the Black Death. In the first place, it is seen as a punishment of the God for the misbehavior of the humankind. This implies to what the Church, the Bible, so that

the dogmas and cults of the Christianity exposed and imposed to people. The Bible was seen as the most significant, or more accurately, the most reliable source of knowledge. Therefore, this internalized knowledge and the power it created shaped people's reaction to the pandemic. So that, the civic government was in denial. However, this relationship between the Biblical knowledge and the power it had on people cannot be explained or/and used as evidence to understand what Foucault proposes for the definition of power in the modern ages. This, I believe is one of the most crucial parts to understand the functioning of biopower in the modern societies. According Foucault's understanding of power: "doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse" (Foucault, 120, 1980). When we compare the medieval ages to modern age in terms of ways of exercising power over the case of the Black Death and Covid-19 pandemic, the modern age appears to be a more collective, systematic and, if it is the right term to use, insidious. I suggest that the restrictions taken during the Covid pandemic reflect how governments use the fear of unknown over people with their mechanism of power and control mechanisms which was also supported by the discourses of politicians. In addition to this, since the Black Death was perceived as God's punishment, the reason behind the fear was different than the Covid-19 pandemic. In its case, people knew that it was an unknown disease that might be very dangerous due to scientific reason. Therefore, I claim that it was much easier to organize masses to stay home and get vaccinated because the fear of unknown is more distressing than fear of punishment.

Biopower During the Times of Coronavirus and the Question of Civil Liberties: The Instance of Austria

Since the first cases of Covid-19 announced in Austria, different measures and restrictions taken, strengthened and loosened within the time considering the effects of the pandemic. This part is dedicated to understand the notion of Foucauldian perspective of biopower and functioning of civil liberties through the restrictions, measurements and discourses regarding whole population under the name of public health during the times of Covid-19 pandemic by discourse analysis. It will analyze the time frame between the beginning of the Covid-19 cases in Austria in 2020 and the first months of 2022. I consider Austria stands as a significant example to understand the Foucauldian notion of biopower. The reason behind this consideration is that, I believe that emphasizing a Western country, especially to address the question of civil liberties, has a crucial remark. The notion of civil liberties is one of the core features of the very internalized, advertised and appreciated image of the Western idea. However, Covid-19 pandemic reflects how some notions which are accepted as the most intense and firm apparatuses of the Western image, such as civil liberties in this specific case, could be fragile. In addition to that, as I have stated before, this paper does not aim to discuss the necessity or moral obligations to take restrictions against a pandemic concerning the health of populations. This paper aims to understand how the political power shapes, evolves and functions around populations instead of individuals, which brings us to the idea of biopower. Along with many other strict restrictions, which are to be discussed in the following parts, Austria is the first instance to moot mandatory vaccination. I consider this to be one of the most significant aspects to understand the notion of Foucauldian perspective of biopower and the question of liberties under the name of public health. According to the Foucauldian biopower, it deals with every aspect of life on an abstract basis. It concerns with people's health in statistical terms. It is interested in how people live and die, not who lives and dies (Foucault,

1990). It deals with population, not with the individual, through its control mechanisms; or disciplinary and biopolitical power. According to Foucault (1990), the state has societal disciplinary institutions to manage populations. These institutions were mostly formed in the eighteenth century along with the rise of capitalism and modern nation states. The examples to these institutions are schools, hospitals, prisons and psychology clinics. These institutions are the apparatuses to create docile bodies. In these institutions, social practices, norms, the social order and human behavior are encoded. The biopolitics is the power of the state to optimize this disciplinary mechanism (Foucault, 1990). This power deals with the total interests, not individual interests. Within the case of Covid-19, one can see the two forms of biopower; the disciplinary power, and the biopolitical power. Lock-downs, mandatory vaccination, mask rules, social distancing and QR codes are reflections of power that produces “docile bodies” through discipline and administers populations by optimizing them (Foucault, 1990). I believe that this logic also applies to the notion of civil liberties. Liberty has a positive meaning and disciplinary power and biopolitical power does not only emerge from repressive and/or explicit instances such as lock-downs or mandatory vaccination. I consider allowing or freeing an act is as effective as repressing to create “docile bodies” and administering populations. This is indeed the core of the Foucauldian concept of biopower, and in this context, it concerns the perspective of the modern state on how people live and die. I argue that the concept of liberty does not apply to the individual, it applies to the whole population. It gives citizens rights that allow them performing certain acts without oppression. However, if one violates those certain acts with another action which beyond their rights, the liberty is taken or limited. I consider this, as the very basic logic of discipline and administering populations. Hence, the Corona case shows this fragile structure of the notion of liberties and states’ control over them and over populations. In this context, I consider Austria will stand as a solid instance to understand biopower and the question of liberties as a Western country, where civil liberties are

overemphasized, it has been one of the strictest countries in terms of restrictions and measurement taken during the most intense times of Coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, I find it useful to demonstrate a discourse analysis between times of the beginning of the Covid-19 cases in Austria in 2020 and the first months of 2022. Along with the other newspapers, this part will mostly capture the two most read newspapers in Austria; Die Presse and Kronen Zeitung.

- **Fear, Responsibility and Public Health as Apparatuses to Discipline**

The first cases of coronavirus were seen in Austria on 25th of February, 2020. After a very short period of time, right after the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the Corona crisis as pandemic in 11th of March, 2020, strict measures started to be taken in Austria on 13th of March, 2020, along with the many other nations around the world. The first and most effective measure was a strict lock-down. Shorter than a week period of time, all shops excluding the basic supply, restaurants, cafes, and bars were shut down; air traffic was largely suspended; public life brought to a standstill. In addition to that, population was required to work online, if possible; and schools, sports centers and health resorts were also closed. Overall, we can claim that the life we had known and been used to stopped in almost every sphere. However, this immediate reaction against the pandemic was not a specific response of Austria. Almost every state around the world took more or less the same measurements against the Covid-19 pandemic (Pollak, Kowarz, Partheymüller, 2020). As it has been stated above, Austria as a Western country, in this case, is an instance to understand how these restrictions and measurements overlap with the civil liberties over the notion of Foucauldian biopower. The measurements were also taken in the non-Western countries. However, the concept of civil liberties is very much associated with the Western idea, so that it is promoted as a product of it. On the other hand, when we look at the instances such as Austria, we see that the restrictions limiting or almost abolishing the civil liberties were taken within a very short period of time

regarding the whole population. I claim that this shows that how the control mechanisms of the state works. In this context according to Vujić (2020):

“During this highly anxiety-provoking climate of COVID-19, we discover how easy it was, and without any sign of collective revolt, to make...the state of emergency the normal paradigm of government. Indeed, by largely maintaining a collective imagination of the catastrophe, the imperative to fight against the health crisis legitimized the societal rigidification of the usual lifestyles, an "authoritarianization" of the mode of government, an ever- greater restriction of our freedoms, with of course the risk of taking advantage of this health crisis to smuggle many special standards, or even decisions or reforms not very popular. We are in the middle of the nightmare of the population control biopolitics regime under the pretext of epidemics, developed by Michel Foucault. It is an exceptional regime which is exercised on the body and on life, unlike the oldest which applied, according to the legal model, on the subjects” (214).

I consider that one of the main control mechanisms to govern the Covid-19 pandemic was to promote fear. This is, I claim, one of the most effective ways to perform authority over populations to maintain “docile bodies” under an extreme circumstance such as a pandemic. The most distinguished side of this promotion of fear during the most intense times of Covid-19 was that it was emphasized and legitimized over the protection of health. Therefore, it is possible to claim that the climate of Covid-19 was “anxiety-provoking” by overemphasizing a collective thought of a population catastrophe (Vujić, 2020). For instance, at the very beginning of the pandemic in Austria, the former Chancellor Sebastian Kurz claimed that Austria would experience a “call before the storm”, after declaring obligatory mask rule in supermarkets (Pollak, Kowarz, Partheymüller, 2020). Another statement in the early months of 2021 in which the disease was peaking again was made by the former Chancellor Kurz. He called all citizens to be vaccinated against the coronavirus, stating: "The virus will not disappear, it will remain. It will occupy us for years to come". And he noted: "everyone who has been vaccinated, the pandemic is over. For anyone who has not been vaccinated, the virus is a massive problem." He further continued that an increase in the number of infections, such as recently in southern Europe or the Netherlands, "will also take place here," he predicted. "This pandemic is coming

in waves," unlike the previous ones, however, vaccination as a "game changer" is now available (Die Presse, 2021a). In addition to that Chancellor Karl Nehammer mainly addressed the corona pandemic while he was sworn in as the new head of government today. He stated that it was now necessary to fight them and all their consequences – “immediately and together. Unfortunately, we do not know what the future will bring. We should not raise false expectations, promise nothing that cannot be met later” (REUTERS, 2021). Furthermore, the Mayor of Vienna stated: “The decline in infections should not allow us to relax” (Schneeberger, 2022). Last but not least, Chancellor Nehammer also said that it was difficult to predict when a critical burden on the intensive care units and the hospital beds as a whole can be expected, as this depends on whether older or younger people fall ill (Fuchs, 2021). When we look at these statements, we can see that the emphasize on the pandemic was reflected through an environment of fear and anxiety in politicians’ speeches in different periods. Furthermore, the TV channels and news would constantly show the infection and death rates. I consider that the media has been one of the strongest apparatuses to reinforce this anxiety climate. In the TV news, newspapers, and social media the infection and death rates constantly repeated. For instance, an article in Kronen Zeitung states that men's life expectancy in Austria fell by 0.81 in 2020 with the pandemic. According to the study, the decline in average life expectancy in Austria was minus 0.77 years from 2019 to 2020. (2019: 81.91 years; 2020: 81.14 years). The life expectancy of the Austrians fell by 0.68 in a year (84.20 and 83.52 years), those of the male population by 0.81 in a year (79.54 years or 78.73 years). It claims that in any case, Austria performs worse compared to the averages of the analogue countries (Krone. At., 2022). I claim that this reflection on statistics and government’s not very hopeful claims on the virus spread fear and it can be studied under disciplinary control of biopower. I prefer to address it as an apparatus to discipline the mind to maintain the “docile bodies” in an extreme circumstance. According to Um (2020), this environment of fear is now pathologized. He argues that “State

bureaus ... attempt to manage pandemic populations through technologies of governance including vocabularies, statistics, records, categories, and data” (Um, 5, 2020).

I argue that this environment of fear is way different than what I have discussed in the Black Death. During the times of Black Death, the source of the fear was religion. People thought it was a punishment from the God. However, what they feared was not that punishment, it was the God’s himself. Therefore, they admitted that punishment. Even before understanding that it was not a punishment but a disease, they had restricted their social behaviors in accordance with religious and moral norms and prejudices. With the improvement of technologies and science, today we know that the pandemic has nothing to with a punishment coming from a holy idea. We know more than what people knew in the times of Black Death. However, this knowledge brings not-knowing along with itself. Now, we know that we do not know almost nothing about a new virus spreading the world. This makes it easier to control populations as this not-knowing situation makes us fear and hence, we, somehow, have to rely on what the government announces, at least, at first. Using the media, statistical numbers, and not-very reliving speeches of the government triggers this fear, and creates a greater anxiety and fear-based environment. It is disciplining the mind. Therefore, I claim that fear is one of the most effective apparatuses, over the notion of Foucauldian biopower, to discipline and administer populations by optimizing them.

Another factor that contributes to the control mechanisms of biopower during the Covid-19 pandemic was attaining people responsibility for the sake of the public health. I claim that attaining responsibility as another factor goes hand in hand with the anxiety-provoking climate and the fear factor and makes it easier to demonstrate control over population; as fear also makes people feels responsible. Speeches from the governmental profile also support this argument. Although, public responsibility is highlighted several times in many other

declarations and speeches, the concept of public health does not seem to directly appear in the discourse as much as the responsibility factor. However, this is not really necessary because the discourse itself, already addresses to the whole population. For instance, former Chancellor Kurz stated in his speech while declaring the Covid-19 pandemic case in Austria and measurements against it:

“It's a time that we all stand together, especially to protect elderly people in our country. Standing together means restrictions and deceleration of many people in our country. It means working for other people. And every individual should be aware of that they have a responsibility. As the Republic of Austria, we are a team in which everyone has to make their own contribution for sake of our country, especially in challenging times. We have to minimize our social life for a while. We have to do this in order to protect our elderly people in our country and for the sake of public health” (“Pressestatement 13.03.2020 - Informationen Über Aktuelles Zum Coronavirus.” 03:15–05:21).

This speech of the former Chancellor shows an emphasize on public responsibility and public health. It refers to the people of Austria as a team. This is a statement that could make people feel that they belong to a process and they have a sharing in it. This does not mean that citizens were not part of this process before Kurz's speech. However, claims on the responsibility fed by fear, especially to protect a specific group shows the power of the discourse to shape people's mindset and maintain a docile population even under an extreme circumstance. Another instance, according to the liberal newspaper Die Presse, the chancellor Kurz relies on personal responsibility and vaccination for. However, the experts on that matter does not find Chancellor's suggestions enough and they insist on stricter 3G controls and more (possibly paid) tests. In addition to that, the experts find Chancellor Kurz's (ÖVP) statements neglecting according to which the government wants to focus more on the personal responsibility of the population in connection with the pandemic (Die Presse, 2021).

- **The Question of Civil Liberties**

The last part of the discourse analysis will highlight the question of liberties under the light of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and measurements. The discourse will again cover Austria as an instance. I find discussing civil liberties under the light of Foucauldian biopower and their functioning during the times of Covid-19 pandemic. Without any doubt what makes Austria a unique instance is the declaration of mandatory vaccination, which will be discussed later under this section.

I claim that the fear and responsibility factor have been used to discipline the population through the discipline of the mind under an extreme circumstance such as pandemic, regardless its necessity or moral obligation. In addition to that, I argue that this fear-based environment and attaining people responsibility to protect a certain part of the population have been used to justify the limitation of civil liberties. According to Flood et al. (888, 2020) the term civil liberties refer to a range of activities that people are free to engage in without government restraint-including things like freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of movement, freedom of religious practice, security and privacy of the person, and so on. The measures taken as a response to Covid-19 limited most of these liberties. For instance, on 25 March, the Red Cross published the Stopp-Corona App, which enables to trace chains of infection and contact people. This regulation can be an example to limitation of right of privacy. Another example is, the former Chancellor stated: “We expected that stronger travel movements in the summer will ensure that the number of new infections will rise again” (“„Krone“-Sommergespräch - Kurz zu Corona: „Auf besorgniserregendem Niveau“”). This statement can also be shown as an example to limitation of freedom of movement. Last but not least, I consider that the mandatory vaccination declaration, although it is suspended, is one of the most significant instances to limitation of liberties for the sake of the public health. I consider that it is a direct violation of people’s choice and preferences over their bodies.

On the other hand, this limitation involves trade-offs between common interests of public good and individual rights and liberties. On the other hand, besides its theoretical and philosophical discussion over populations, limiting civil liberties also have harmed people at the individual level. Flood et al. (2020), argues lock-downs have impacted many people's mental health, increased anxiety levels, depression and even suicide. In addition to that, "sheltering at home" caused higher risk for victims of domestic violence, disrupted economy and inadequate supply of food (888). These information shows us what Foucault argues about the functioning of biopower. It is not interested in who lives and dies; rather it concerns with how people live and die the necessity or moral obligation of this trade-off could be another study's topic. However, I argue that this trade-off, on the other hand, reveals how the concept of civil liberties are also a part of the disciplinary and biopolitical mechanisms. Under normal circumstances, civil liberties are given people to provide them a right to engage within variety of activities without government restraint. I consider that, this is also a disciplinary mechanism; allowing certain acts under certain circumstances and certain laws. On the other hand, violation of these liberties also has consequences. However, I consider these consequences, such as imprisonment, does not directly concern the individual. It concerns with the population and maintaining the order and docile bodies. The imprisonment is to adopt, or completely abolish that individual within population. Therefore, even under normal circumstances we can talk about the effect of biopower over civil liberties. With the covid-19 pandemic this situation has become clearer. The civil liberties were strictly limited and, promoted and justified by the factors of fear and responsibility. I argue that this reflects the power of the state over liberties as they have ability to shape, bend, and rearrange them over the whole population. Therefore, it shows the effect of Foucauldian biopower. In the discourse we can see the examples to this situation. For instance, the former Chancellor Kurz said that: "We are a liberal democracy. There is the right to act unreasonably in accordance with the law. You can eat ten schnitzels a

day or climb the rock face with 140 kilos without the state standing down and securing the rope," Kurz continues, "However, for particularly sensitive places of the meeting such as schools or health facilities, personal responsibility will continue to be linked to special safety standards" ("Pandemie im Wandel - Kurz: „Corona-Krise wird zu individuellem Problem "). I consider that this statement highlights what people can and cannot do to remain social safety, again emphasizing the individual responsibility. It emphasizes Austria being a liberal country and argues that people have the right act as they please in accordance with the law. This brings us to discussion about state's authority over civil liberties by being able to limit and reshape them. It also counts what people can do as he refers as unreasonable acts. However, the statement limits the actions which concerns social involvement, which is a right, by attaining responsibility to people. Another instance about limitations of liberties, and maybe the most dramatic one, is from the Salzburg governor. He stated: "lock-down for the unvaccinated people", after the federal government introduced another general lockdown ("Blog 135 (EN) - Chronology of the Corona Crisis in Austria - Part 6: A"). I consider this statement to be more totalitarian rather than being discussed under the effects of biopower.

The road to the mandatory vaccination regulations was taken step by step. Austria went through four nation-wide lock-downs. After a while, due to increased number of Covid-19 cases, even after the lock-down ended, some other limitations were added to the social life regulations. There was a general vaccination propaganda around the country. I argue that, after a point, vaccination was associated with being free again. To this extent, Chancellor Nehammer recommended that: "If you get vaccinated, the best thing about it is that we can all live in our freedom" (Die Presse, 2021c). I consider that this statement is also another example of disciplinary control over responsibility which also concerns liberties. It conditions freedom with vaccination. The mandatory vaccination was announced in February, 2022, which made Austria the first instance in the world on that matter (The decision is still suspended). The

chancellor stated: “For a long time, it was a consensus in the country that a vaccine mandate is not necessary, but we have to face the reality” (Hirsch and Kotkamp). On the other hand, the mandatory vaccination decision also caused many protests in Austria by those who are against it. Further, the opposition party called this action “corruption and abuse of power” and “continued dehumanization” comparing it with Nazi regime (Kronen Zeitung, 2022)). I argue that this decision can also be discussed under the light of authoritarianism, all by itself, in another study. However, this decision also shows how the state has a say in every aspect and sphere of life, and control power over the mind and the body as the Foucauldian biopower argues.

Analysis and Conclusion

This part will, first, argue how limitations on civil liberties can be seen as an indicator to understand the power of the state to manage the large populations. Second, it will also try to examine whether the state's biopower and its effects on civil liberties are linked to any ideological background or not, comparing the reflection of the discourses from different newspapers, *Kronen Zeitung* and *Die Presse*.

Over the instance of Austria, limitations on the civil liberties reveals how the state power over the population functions. First of all, the fear and responsibility factors are the main apparatuses to legitimize and maintain the control over the population. Although the Covid-19 pandemic was a health issue over the body, the state tries to discipline the mind in order to keep the order. The choices of words and statements, such as the “calm before the storm”, “we are a team” - showing death rates, statistics, and infection rates on the TV on a daily basis do not have any effect on the body, but on the mind. However, it is also the control of the body over the mind. This brings us to the very core idea of biopower. The modern nation state does not perform its power through physical punishment nor death. It uses disciplinary institutions such as schools, prisons, or hospitals to manage populations. During the times of Covid-19 pandemic, our homes became one of these institutions. People were required to stay at home. There was no direct or harsh punishment or police force. Instead, many of the social and public spheres were closed. Further, this requirement was also fed by the factors of fear and the feeling of responsibility to protect others. Thus, limitation of the civil liberties took place not by using physical force or punishment, but by disciplinary mechanisms of the state over the mind on the body. I argue that this is a clear example of the control mechanisms of the state to manage large masses. In addition to that, mandatory vaccination is another significant example to it. Before

declaring it, vaccination was required. On the other hand, throughout the normalization process, almost every public and social sphere did not accept unvaccinated people. This indirect influence is the reflection of biopower. Later when it was declared, it shows the state's power on the body. Overall, the Covid-19 pandemic shows us the state power over the populations. It shows that the state has the power over the concepts or spheres that we think it does not, or at least has the minimum. However, it has the power over the civil liberties and over the body through its disciplinary mechanisms. In Covid-19 case, the media and the factors of fear and responsibility were main apparatuses of that mechanism. Although the state does not know the virus under medical terms, it has the ability to learn about the rates, statistics, hospitalization, and contact people. The state has the knowledge, not the people. Therefore, the state has the power.

In the discourses analysis part, I tried to focus on two mainstream newspapers in Austria. Those were the Kronen Zeitung, a conservative paper; and Die Presse, a liberal one. I looked at concepts such as public health, liberties, restrictions, and mandatory vaccination under the Coronavirus case. First of all, the concept of population was the one which helped me the most to follow the discourse and conduct my analysis. In the discourse, the concept of public health was the one which allowed me to find most of my findings. of all, Die Presse allowed me to investigate the discourses more. Under the concept of public health, the discourses that argue the importance of being a community, being a team and also the responsibility factor were highlighted the most. Therefore, the concept of public health helped me the most to analyze the population management. It showed that the discourse mostly emphasized the sense of being a part of a certain community which can also be considered as a disciplinary apparatus. In addition to that, the concept of liberty or freedom revealed that it was mostly used by the opposition to criticize the restrictions. However, by the government it was mostly referred as something to regain if required conditions are met such as vaccination. I

looked at the concept of restrictions in order to understand what kind of measurements were taken in Austria. It was the concept that also provided most of the findings. On the hand, in some of the discourses the restrictions that limit civil liberties were supported by expertise comments. Last but not least, the concept of mandatory vaccination also showed the reaction of the opposition and people to the government on liberties. Further, it highlighted that it was conditioned to go back to normal life, as well. It captured the discourses of the Chancellor or other politicians in a more direct way. On the other hand, Kronen Zeitung did not usually cover the whole speeches. The most distinguishing characteristic between the two papers was that Die Presse supported discourses of politicians which emphasize fear and responsibility factor with expertise comments, such as doctors. However, the Kronen Zeitung did not usually follow that path. It also demonstrated the death and infection rates, and also expertise comment in separated sections, however, the expertise comments were not usually used to support the discourses. Overall, I perceive that as a liberal newspaper Die Presse was usually more effective to reflect and support the decisions of the government on limitations of civil liberties for the sake of the general population. Whereas, Kronen Zeitung usually reflected oppositions attitude towards these decisions by showing their speeches which seemed to be more individual oriented.

In addition to that, the discourses of the opposition and the government also might have a significant place to understand the effect of ideological background on biopower. Foucault argues biopower to be derived from capitalism. Austria, as a modern nation state and Western country, is also a capitalist state. In the instance of Austria, we see that the leftist government took some measurements that limit individual liberties to protect general health. It also used disciplinary mechanisms to ensure that. On the other hand, the opposition argued the government's decisions on the civil liberties, such as mandatory vaccination, in terms of abusing the power and being authoritarian, comparing it to the Nazi regime. However, I do not

consider that ideologies do not have the most critical impact in terms of taking restrictions. The biopower does not refer to the governments. It refers to the states from the beginning of formation of the modern nation state and the rise of capitalism. It is a notion which is above governments and ideologies. It is the system of how the modern nation states function in order to maintain and control large populations. It is the functioning system of the state to manage the population through different disciplinary institutions; a technology of power. The very existence of these disciplinary institutions for the reason to manage populations by having control over the body does not change according to ideologies or governments. The implications might change in accordance with the ideologies within these institutions, however this does not change their existence to control the population. Therefore, I do consider that the impact of ideological backgrounds or government's interpretation during the times of Covid-19 pandemic do not have the most significant impact. Lock-downs, vaccination policies, compulsory masks, and social distancing were not restrictions taken only in Austria. These restrictions were a limitation on civil liberties and took place in almost every country in the world which had different governments and ideological backgrounds. Therefore, implications could have been different, maybe; however, the overall image would be the same.

The Covid-19 pandemic holds a crucial place to understand the system of biopower and the question of liberties in this context. In addition to that, Austria as an instance to Western countries, also stands significant to understand how some concepts, such as civil liberties, are fragile. The Covid-19 pandemic has become one of the themes for the literature to re-think some notions and concepts that we already use in further studies such as, under authoritarianism and utilitarianism.

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