

# ‘Knowledge-Power’ beyond Foucault

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*The role of an intellectual* is not to tell others what they have to do .... *The work of an intellectual* is not to shape others’ political will; it is, through the analyses that s/he carries out in her/ his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people’s mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to re-examine rules and institutions and on the basis of this re-problematization (in which s/he carries out her/ his specific task as an intellectual) *to participate in the formation of a political will* (in which s/he has her/ his role *as citizen* to play) (e.a.; Foucault in ‘The Concern for Truth’ [1984] 1988: 265)\*.

## Abstract

‘Knowledge-Power beyond Foucault’, focuses on Michel Foucault’s very limited use of this notion, if compared to his use of the notion of ‘power-knowledge’. This difference needs to be understood in terms of his continuously developing progressive thoughtful discursive and methodological *oeuvre*, in that his primary aim throughout around thirty years of his research, was to study how the human sciences have been created to produce the Western subject and Western subjectivities in the Western Human Sciences. Western as well as non-Western subjectivities were ‘subjugated’ to these knowledges. As such, it was the generation of certain forms of knowledge about the human being, which was accompanied by certain power effects, that could be said that constituted combined forms of cause, that produced Western subjectivities, and non-Western subjugated subjectivities in the service of Western knowledge-power formations in Europe’s colonies. As is well-known, this is especially true of Foucault’s work on mental illness, clinical medicine, the human

sciences, delinquency and prisons, governance, war, and sexuality, which was a critique of Western subjectivity formation and forms of institutionalisation. By design, if not by default, these same subjugated subjectivities were inculcated in the colonies of Western Europe, with one major difference: people from the colonies were regarded and treated as not of being on the same level of humanness as the coloniser. Whole Western scientific edifices, especially as they were developed for and implemented in the colonies, mainly around obfuscatory notions of ‘race’, were developed as strategic forms of legitimisation for such discourses and discursive formations.

So, in this essay, I first trace a few samples of Foucault’s actual use of the notion of ‘knowledge-power’, how this notion percolates through his work. I then put some points forward as to how we should put Foucault on his feet again – i.e. if, in the post-colony, we look at knowledge-power as a task of an internationally competitive and courageous African subjectivity formation, having its roots in forms of anti-colonial resistances and pro-active liberatory movements. In this same trajectory, the wide and broad-based impacts of globalisation and neoliberalism, coupled with digital developments, ‘knowledge-power’ should be understood and creatively engaged in the African academy, in conscious knowledge-production, or knowledge-generation ways by subjects who have the optimum well-being of the people of the African continent first and foremost in mind. This is important in the complexities of the African discursive formations, but especially in South Africa, given its seemingly intractable political, and political economy discourses which continue to fail to transformatively engage both the micro-physiologies (level of the individual), meso-physiologies (organization and institutional levels) as well as macro-physiologies (level of citizenship and nation-states) of knowledge-power in the service of the people. Up to now, the world’s postcolonies have mostly failed in this endeavour.

**Keywords:** will to knowledge, knowledge-power, knowledge-*connaissance*, knowledge-*savoir*, general will to truth, contextually-relevant effects of knowledge-power

## Introduction

In Africa’s affirmative ascendant history into openness, and also of South Africa as a free and independent nation, it is centrally important to reflect on

subjectivity. We may look back, to analyse, generate the requisite data, and study past interpretive systems of knowledge, knowledge production and Western subjectivity formation, as problem. This will be a focus on past systems of thought that have generated and produced subjugated subjectivities, or desubjugated networked, cooperative and partnership subjectivities (cf. Foucault 1982:266ff; and also Smit 2019, forthcoming). These are important exercises, because they provide us with knowledge of the constructed past discourses and discursive formations that may continue to have subjugating or desubjugating effects in the present. Some have produced subjugated subjectivities which are often not prepared, and in fact mostly outdated for the modern world economy of digitally-informed networked knowledge production, and challenges related to the maximization of knowledge and knowledge production across a variety of fields, and the maximizing of wealth-generation in previously impoverished regions of the world. They are also ill-equipped, for the internationalising demands of the emerging multi-lateral interactions within the African state, between states on the African continent, and between Africa's states and international states, in the continental and international arenas of competitive knowledge production, trade and monetary exchanges between nation-states. As South Africa, and Africa more generally are playing emergent roles that are slowly busy increasing their international statures on international stages of the ever-expanding larger world knowledge formations, we are confronted with corporate, as well as individual capability and capacity development challenges to produce knowledge systems for generation and cultivation of free, capacitated, innovative and knowledge generating subjectivities, via individually competitive, as well as collectively competitive, and corporately collaborative discursive formations. This includes the upscaling and rapid enhancement of institutional formations' digital information systems and related capacities (cf. Smit & Chetty 2018a; 2018b; and 2018c).

These are facts about current challenges, about which scholars, politicians and social actors mostly agree. It is imperative – maybe even more important seeing that the South African socio-political knowledge-economy is in such dire straits – that we look to the future. Energetic investments in the pre-sent, in ways that are not dissimilar to what we have done in 1994, will have positive dividends in the future. In the current climate of stunted socio-economic growth and recession, it is important to actively foster high capacity and capability knowledge-generating individuals and their respective roles in the emerging multi-layered lateral discursive formations in the global South.

The aims are to formatively, and critically-constructively, engage current conundrums and future challenges in respect of capability and capacity developments, in the present, and so, to constructively confront present and future problems.

In order to address this complex situation, this article wishes to make another small contribution, in so far as it continues some argumentation that resonates with the thought and scholarly practices of Michel Foucault. It will be evident that I am trying to think with Foucault, on some of the points he makes, without falling into the trap of providing a so-called dis-interested epistemological commentary, about which he had many critical things to say<sup>1</sup>. It will also be clear, that in order to follow Foucault through, we also have to break with his trajectory of thought, even though it remains important, especially about tools for, and results of his physiologies of knowledge-power, in decolonial contexts. On this, it is also important to indicate how my trajectory breaks with Foucault's dated perceptions of knowledge-power, and how we can continue his project, but in different ways. The most important aspect, certainly, is to note that whereas Foucault's methodologies for the study of social systems of thought were past-oriented, or focused on the past-historical effects of social systems of thought in the present, through which he made a lasting contribution to the study of the Arts and Humanities – the 'how question of the West European questions on their historical ontologies of the 1970s and 198s –, in both their archaeological and genealogical physiologies, ours intends to be interventive in the present, and future oriented in the African contextual formations of collective advancement and strategic growth.

## **Context and Purpose**

For Foucault, and even though there is much to be gained from his historicised empirical archaeological and genealogical physiologies of madness, health, language, labour, life, crime, delinquency, and sexuality studies, the tools he developed to problematize, analyse and interpret past social systems of thought, go some way in assisting us in generating the requisite knowledge in current paradigms and emerging objects in the postcolony. In this regard, I

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. for instance Foucault's inaugural lecture, 7 days before he started with his first lecture series on the theme of 'The Will to Know' at the Collège de France, 'Discourse on Language' (1970:220ff), on Wednesday 2 December 1970.

have started to indicate that amongst some others, in our discursive formation, some groundwork has been done over the last twenty-five years.

Smit (2017) provides very rudimentary perspectives on the historicized problematization of colonial and colonizing history in Southern Africa, also indicating the tasks for the production of decolonized and desubjugated knowledge(s). In Smit and Chetty (2018a; 2018b; and 2018c) we provide some brief historizable expositions of very basic aspects of this very brief history, and some of the insights we have gained so far as to the still very rudimentary tripartite, subjective capability/ capacity → social systems of thought and action → knowledge-power productions triangle. The triangle, or many triangles, is also to be perceived as forward-reverberating motions, as they continue to gather momentum, and also succeed in broadening and deepening the actually integrated, fluid, components of the future-oriented developing discursive formations in a variety of directions in the Arts and Humanities. This foundational conceptualization is in need of further development, and in this article, I have decided to only focus on the knowledge-power corner of the triangle.

For this purpose, I draw on Foucault's outlining of the methodological tools he generated for conceptualizing this instrument of thought. And as said, I shall not so much dwell on the nature of knowledge-power and knowledge-power effects on the production of past-historical discursive formations in South and Southern Africa, important as these exercises are, but focus on the current and future possibilities on looking at the nature of and effects of knowledge-power that we may invest in in the present. For this though – and this is part of the genius of Foucault's archaeological and genealogical methodologies that he so insightfully developed and skillfully deployed in his researches – is that they also provide tools for thinking and engaging the future, as we engage the critical paradigms of knowledge production in inter-, multi-, and transdisciplinary ways in the Arts and Humanities. They are historically-grounded perspectives, à la Foucault, but grounded not in critical analyses of the past, but critical, analytically-constructive productions, or generations of knowledge for the future, in the present. And, as he indicated for his historical studies of past discursive formations – or futures-past, or past futures –, when we think about and implement tools for knowledge production, it is important to not think these loose and cut-off from power. That is why he has coined the notion of knowledge-power – to think through the complexities of knowledge-power together, in all its complexity and materialities, and effects on bodies – for subjugation, and, in our project, desubjugation or freedom to act construc-

tively. Whereas he has deployed this notion for the study of past-historical knowledge-power systems and their productions and effects of subjectivity, it is incumbent on us to deploy this notion in the interests of knowledge-power productions, with an eye on the discursive formations being generated with future goals, objectives and outcomes, in mind, i.e. how to plan and enact the future history of the present.

In the next section, I shall briefly expound a few of Foucault's seminal concepts, as these relate to his perception of the theme of the will to know, with accompanying perspectives on the deployment of knowledge-power within our African context.

## **Conceptual Framework: The Morphology of the Will to Know**

In his first lecture season at the Collège de France, 9 December 1970 – 17 March 1971, Foucault made his main theme *The Will to Know*. Rather than Nietzsche's helpful *The Will to Power*, or Sartre's, that ideas or knowledge is power and truth that shape reality (Kritzman 1988:xvi), *The Will to Know*, is different. It takes for granted that subjective power to control oneself, as allowed by existing systems and institutions, is not only crucial for the subjective development of ability and capacity, but also the channeling of such capacity and ability, for creative and productive purposes. And, subjective will plays a role, because control and subjective conduct (power) are grounded in the quest of knowledge, the will to knowledge. So, power (as forms of control, forms of influence, the shaping of behavior or conduct with their related social-systemic effects) is brought into the frame of analysis, as part of knowledge-power, or the grounding of all forms of control and influence in forms of knowledge production, as it emanates from this will to know. For greater clarity, and for the thinking of some spectrum, underlying his morphologies of knowledge-power, Foucault then distinguishes between knowledge as *savoir*, and knowledge as *connaissance*<sup>2</sup>. It appears that this innovative distinction that

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<sup>2</sup> In terms of Foucault's *oeuvre*, we may roughly translate knowledge-*savoir* as the art or *tékhnē*, of knowledge production, or knowledge transformation, or the transformative critique of existing knowledge or truth of knowledge; and knowledge-*connaissance*, as familiarity with knowledge production, when you get when you study the disciplines, or institutionalised knowledge, or

Foucault has made between two different forms of knowledge – actual discursive formations that have been and are operational in (and/ or outside academe) – and which French allows him to make, have played a quite formative role in his own thought throughout his career. And, I shall provide some insights into the dynamics this spectrum of thought has played in his thinking and methodologies.

Framing this conceptual distinction, we may draw three related conceptual perspectives from Foucault's 'Course Summary', that was published following the completion of the 1970/ 1971 lecture season. What Foucault has done for his futures-past, or past futures we are doing for the futures-present, or present futures, with regard to discursive formation developments and discourse production. To note too, is that Foucault calls his conceptual framework as it relates to his distinction between knowledge-*savoir* and knowledge-*connaissance*, 'a morphology of the will to know' (Foucault [1970/ 1971] 2013: 224). He says he in fact provides 'an initial *model* of analysis' (e.a.) of the '*theme* of the will to know' (e.a.). Conversely, our challenge is to produce a model for knowledge production in the African postcolony, of the will to know (as both *savoir* and *connaissance* – the art/s of knowledge-power-production, as well as the familiarity with existing knowledge-power-production.)

Significant for our deploying of his concepts, for our futures-present, Foucault says that even though he will employ his morphology or model for his present-historical studies, it may also be 'treated for itself and in its theoretical implications', as a generic 'model'. This then also raises questions concerning the generic theoretical and methodological implications of knowledge-power not only on its past discursive practice deployments – to produce discursive formations, and their ingrained physiologies or discursive

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'knowledge-contents' (*connaissances*) (Foucault [1977] 1991: 79). The latter approach to knowledge though does engage the question of the 'how' of knowledge and truth in the historical present, or, for that matter its futures-present. In its broadest terms, it is a 'form of knowledge (*connaissance*) or type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period' (Foucault [1970] 2011:191). In Foucault's (1972:5) view, it was Aristotle that already cancelled and distanced, the exteriority of the desire to know (*connaître*), from the superiority of school-knowledge-*connaissance*.

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practices –, but also in the present and into the future in the postcolony. But, we shall come back to this matter.

For his ‘morphology of the will to know’, Foucault states that in his study of discursive formations, he is explicitly interested in the analysis of ‘discursive practices’, and that he does *not* work within the domains of ‘formal logic’ nor ‘formal linguistics’. This is often forgotten or missed by some scholars who have attempted to work with notions gleaned from Foucault’s work. The European paradigm initiated by Kocku von Stuckrad (2015), which is based in his form of ‘linguistic analysis’ and ‘textual analysis’, articulated with some of Foucault’s notions, is a case in point. His contribution, is however helpful for past-historical research into past discourses, linguistically and textually conceptualised. The same is true of the excellent theoretical contributions of Teun A. van Dijk’s linguistic work of a generation earlier (cf. esp. 2008), and the work by David Chidester (1996; and 2014) on the comparative religion discursive productions on the Southern African frontiers, and more broadly speaking, under empire<sup>3</sup>.

Different from these approaches, rather, Foucault (2013:74) says, his approach is the study of discursive practices, as they are,

characterized by the separating out of a *field of objects*, the definition of a *legitimate perspective for the subject of knowledge*, and the *fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories*. Each of these thus presupposes an interplay of prescriptions which govern *exclusions* and *choices* (e.a.).

For our purposes, there has been a *field of objects* – or problematizations, or research focuses or topics or thematisations – which have been emerging in the work of some scholars associated with *Alternation*, and of which some have also been published in *Alternation*. Granted that the space, localities, positionings and, in fact social locations of thought and action, of scholars in South Africa as postcolony may differ quite widely, *legitimate subjects of knowledge* – positively and affirmatively presumed – would assume positions that cohere and affirm the emergent fields of objects for study of the postcolony. In South Africa, scholarly positions might then resonate with 1990,

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<sup>3</sup> I do not include Bernstein (1990) here, because he has missed the point, despite his own contributions in his own field. Cf. Bernstein (1990: 115, 118, 141, 143).



or 1994, as decisive breaks in the episteme of apartheid-generated scholarship – even its critique –, and the post-apartheid episteme, including the deconstructive paradigm that we deployed over a large front to implode and displace apartheid scholarship (cf. Smit 1995).

In 1994, scholarship has founded itself on new foundations, within a new socio-systemic episteme, as most eloquently framed by our democratic Constitution, with their earliest critical roots in the earliest confrontations with colonization (cf. Smit 2017). In this regard, for all scholarly, or scientific positionings more inclusively speaking, there is a pre-1994, and a post-1994 episteme. The positionings of 'legitimate subjects of knowledge' have changed. And, on Foucault's third point, *norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories*, there are radically-founded new norms, grounded in norms and values of freedom, non-racialism, equity, social and cultural justice, non-sexism, and the deploying of paradigms for the transformation of inequality. To this, we need to most crucially add the intellectualisation of indigenous knowledge systems, since the humanities' earliest beginnings in Africa, with a foremost grounding in Africa's multiple indigenous languages (cf. Kwa Praah 2017a; and 2017b).

If one looks at both past discursive formations, but also those which have emerged in the postcolony, then there were certainly prescribed focuses in some discourses – by research funders for instance – that impacted certain forms of 'exclusions' with regard to 'objects' for research, as well as subject positions, and norms for concept and theory formation and use. Important though is that the dominant has been the ones which have been developed and deployed for purposes of transformation, for the generating of the requisite decolonising knowledge-power productions that affirmatively resonate with the post-1994 episteme and its objects. And, from the perspective of discursive practices, these also have praxeological effects. How the sciences function and conduct themselves, in their theoretical, empirical, and institutionalised business, but also their broader discursive formations as scholarly communities of practice, according to our post-1994 episteme. It means the practicing of values related to that which have generated the 1994 transformation, and the values and practices, instilled and grounded in the Constitution. As will become clear in due course, this point about the model of the theme of the will to know, or the concept of knowledge-power, as it has its roots in the knowledge-*savoir* that arose since the earliest contacts with colonising Europeans, is not unimportant (cf. Smit 2017).

The generation of the central aspect of knowledge-power – viz. discursive practices –, that are grounded in, and are inspired by the Constitution, provides the methodology for thinking transformative knowledge production, according to fields of new ‘objects’ of study, new legitimate positionings and ‘perspectives’ for the subjects of knowledge-power (think non-dialectical combinations or integrated forms of knowledge-*savoir* and knowledge *connaissance*), according to new ‘norms’ for concept and theory formation. Within this new episteme, the most important that is ‘excluded’, is the past episteme, and its knowledge-power systems, which may still have effects in the present, but which have been historicised and transcended. And, where the disastrous effects of this episteme’s, will to knowledge, are still all too real in its material cartographic effects, the generation of new and emergent knowledge-power systems have slowly started to permanently displace, and eradicate this devastating and dreadful doomed legacy. So, it has opened fields of new ‘objects’, ‘positions’, and ‘choices’, with their new links and networks, for research and research-lead teaching and learning geared towards filling the huge void of Africa-initiated and Africa-focused knowledge-power productions in the global modern episteme<sup>4</sup>.

In the next section, and rather than going into all the complexities of Foucault’s thought in the 1970s and 1980s, as these relate to all the spots in his work where he deploys the notion of knowledge-power, I briefly review three seminal treatments of this topic in his work, where he analyses this complexity of the notion of knowledge-power. For practical purposes, I call them three incidences, which each illuminates aspects of his thinking on these matters<sup>5</sup>. For clarity, I present these in bullet form here.

- *First treatment of knowledge-power*: first lecture of the 1970/ 1971 lecture season, on the theme, *The Will to Know*, which was also his first official lecture, at the Collège de France, on 9 December 1970, in which Foucault explains his distinction between knowledge-*connaiss-*

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<sup>4</sup> For a brief sample of the current condition, cf. Image 6: Academic articles per million capita in 2011. Cf. Graham (2017), in Smit and Chetty (2018:380).

<sup>5</sup> I am aware that there are a number of analyses of Foucault’s positing of an opposition between different forms of knowledge-power, for different contexts in the global north and the global south. My study, is framed by some perceptions deriving from contextually-relevant thought.

*sance* and knowledge-*savoir*.

- *Second treatment of knowledge-power*: first lecture of the 1975/ 1976 lecture season, on the theme, *Society must be Defended*, at the Collège de France, on 7 January 1976, in which Foucault explains his 'grouping together' and 'putting into the same category' 'subjugated knowledges' and technical (scientific) knowledge – his distinction between knowledge-*savoir* and knowledge-*connaissance* – together with how these articulate with his archaeological and genealogical methodologies as articulated with power relations, power over the living, or biopower, or later, governmentality, or biopolitics.
- *Third treatment of knowledge-power*: essay on 'The Subject and Power', first published in Dreyfus and Rabinow's *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (1982), in which Foucault reflects on his study of 'specific rationalities', rather than Enlightenment 'rationalization', as 'transversal struggles', against 'individualization', and 'economic and state violence' and for the assertion of knowledge-*savoirs*, in their forms of articulation with power.

## **Incidences of Knowledge-Power in Foucault's Work – Three Samples**

Already in his first lecture at the Collège de France, on 9 December 1970, Foucault ([1970/ 1971] 2013: 3 and 4) makes the distinction between what he also calls 'knowledge-*connaissance*' and 'knowledge-*savoir*'. And, it appears that he would then continue his archaeological researches, but also add his genealogical researches since 1973/ 1975, according to this distinction – not as they are to be thought of distinctly as binaries, or a before and after, but as integrated forms of critical analytical thought, on how to critically analyse the knowledge-power physiologies of our world<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> It is these two very powerful systems of analytics that Foucault developed over nearly thirty years, that I have tried to put on its feet again, and to use productively, for the productive development and cultivation of constructive Africa-focused discourses and discursive formations, i.e. attempts in giving form and shape to the future rather than the past. For this, the distinctions between knowledge-*connaissance* and knowledge-*savoir* are helpful, mainly

For this first treatment of his distinction between knowledge-*connaissance* and knowledge-*savoir*, we may reference his identification of five subsets of problems in his formulation of the problem of the articulation of knowledge-*connaissance* and knowledge-*savoir*, that he at that stage – at the beginning of his career at the Collège de France –, planned to investigate. The first part (problems 1 and 2) helps us to understand the distinction he makes between the two sets of knowledge-formation; the second part (problems 3 and 4) helps us to say that to use his archaeological method and his later genealogical method for research in the interests of a generalised (western) will to knowledge, in the postcolony, will not be very helpful. In the third part (problem 5), he spells out aspects of his research as these relate to his analytics of the problematics this distinction between knowledge-*connaissance* and knowledge-*savoir* brings about.

I shall then overview these five problematisations below, and also reflect on their relevance in the context of the postcolony.

## ***The First Incidence***

### ***The First Problematisation (Problems 1 and 2)***

But there are ... problems. *To start with*: how was it that the historical study of certain bodies of knowledge (*connaissances*), or [of certain]

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to show how the existing knowledge-*connaissance* of the West in the postcolony has been constructed and influenced by the knowledge-*savoir* of its own diverse, heterogenous and often dissimilar assortments and mixes of time(s) and context(s), with relevance in the Western world, but foreign and strange to the great expectations and hoped-for impacts of the transformative scientific relevance in African contexts. Parallel to these, we have seen a knowledge-*savoir* that has emerged and developed as part of anti-colonial struggles, and has come to impact the existing and emerging knowledge-*connaissance*, our generic knowledge-contents, that has arisen in the academies of the global South, quite formatively, if not yet in its early stages of formation and nascent emergences. Generically this also means that in academe we critically move from the critical *analysis* of our world, to, as it is want to be, a *critically-constructive production* of our world, as these in turn are generated from their roots in the diverse anti-colonial and post-colonial resistances and constructionicities.

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kinds of knowledge (*savoirs*), of certain disciplines, of certain discursive events, led to this question of the will to know? For we have to acknowledge that few historians of science have felt the need to resort to it until now. What makes this notion necessary or indispensable? Inadequacy of the instruments of historical analysis provided by epistemology. *Second problem*: relations between will to know and forms of knowledge - *connaissance*: at the theoretical level; at the historical level.

I suggest that we read Foucault's distinction here, as a parallelism, e.g. '... the historical study of certain bodies of,

knowledge ( <i>connaissances</i> ), or [of certain] kinds of knowledge	
	( <i>savoirs</i> ),
A	B
of certain disciplines, of certain discursive events, ...'.	
A	B

In the parallelism, he relates 'knowledge-*connaissance*' with 'disciplines', theoretical, or academic knowledge, i.e. to institutionalised disciplines; and 'knowledge-*savoir*' with 'discursive events', with events or the contingencies of discourse. As he will be at pains to point out throughout his career, at this very general level of abstraction, he is not allocating values or moral judgments to either side. So, we may take this to function for knowledge-*connaissance* and knowledge-*savoir*, for good or evil, and, in our context, for the knowledge-*connaissance* and knowledge-*savoir* of both the West, and the global South. At the general level of knowledge production, we need to think the knowledge-*savoir*, the events in discourse and knowledge, in their articulation with knowledge-*connaissance*, or not, that have served, power for good or evil. It is about the precise study of the physiology of the articulations – their workings, their 'how' – between these complexes, that is at issue, and not to judge before the fact, whether it is for good or evil. This, then is at the level of the 'general will to know'.

### *The Second Problematisation (Problems 3 and 4)*

*Third major problem*: is it really reasonable to pick out the notion of will as central for an analysis of kinds of knowledge (*savoirs*) which

tries to avoid reference to a founding subject? Is this not another way of once again, reintroducing something like a sovereign subject? *Fourth problem:* if it is a matter of discovering a sort of great assertive (albeit anonymous) will behind the historical phenomena of knowledge, will this not return us to a sort of autonomous and ideal history in which the will to know itself determines the phenomena in which it manifests itself? How would this differ from a *history of thought, consciousness, or culture*? To what extent is it possible to *articulate this will to know on the real processes of struggle and domination* which develop in the history of societies? (e.a.).

We do have Foucault now interrogating the idea of a subjectless, and faceless ‘general will to know’ – at the level of events of discourse – outside, and inside academe. In this extremely radical point, Foucault drives the argument to its roots – to the level, where there are pure events, with no subject, not even a subject that could in a final instance serve as congregating point for the establishing of a ‘founding’ or ‘sovereign’ subject, whether an absolute spirit, class struggle, or an icon for instance. And, he continues, if this perception nevertheless poses the problem of a great, anonymous ‘will behind historical phenomena’ – perceptions of the dialectical movements of history for instance – that determine the anonymous and faceless events in discourse, it will still accommodate a ‘sort of autonomous and ideal history’, which will determine phenomena even in their singularity. And, continuing his thinking of radical perceptions of knowledge-*savoir*, he raises the spectre that if we do ascribe an anonymous will to history, will this not bring us back to the starting point, of denouncing such a will or agency for an ideal society or an ideal world for that matter, in principle. His rhetorical questions that follow, then point to his own approach, of studying the knowledge-power inside the ‘history of thought’, or the history of ‘consciousness’, or the history of ‘culture’ for that matter<sup>7</sup>. At issue then, for this project, is, to research the extent to which ‘this will to know’ are to be articulated on ‘the real processes of struggle and domination which develop in the history of societies’. In his vision, on his microscopic table, he then positions the questions that arise from the physiolo-

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<sup>7</sup> As is obvious, Foucault’s focus is on ‘systems of thought’. He does not enter the dialogue from avenues in the studies of consciousness, nor that of culture, or culture formations, even though these are also implicated in his work.

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gies, the microbial constitution and workings of knowledge-power. Formulated differently, we may say that the question – whether as part of struggles for good or dominations for evil, or vice versa – that confronts us, is not whether there is a ‘general will’ that is operative within history, but the actual inner workings, the microphysiologies of actual struggles and dominations.

The implications of this question about knowledge-power that Foucault already asked in 1970, has resonance with us, in that one might ask to study the question about the importance, and significance of the wide variety of forms of knowledge-*savoir* – in, and outside academe – that have impacted and formed apartheid discourse and ‘the real processes of ... *domination*’ and their discursive formations, the Truth, or Truths that it generated, for which it developed state apparatuses, and through which it controlled vulnerable populations. Given our own objective, the challenge, is on the contrary, to lay the foundations or the potential roots for forming knowledge-*connaissance*, by researching the contingent productive knowledge-*savoirs of the real processes of struggle* for freedom, equity, and social justice of the past, of the past, and to facilitate the real life productions of knowledge-*savoirs* in the futures-present of the global South. What is at issue is precisely those struggles for transformation, or transformational struggles, to – even the nameless, and faceless ones – that might form this general will to knowledge during the time of apartheid on the one hand and in the postcolony on the other. If one needs to study history to understand the problem, that is important. Even more important is to add to collectively and integratively think and chart those streams or threads of knowledge, or consciousness, and their knowledge-power discursive formations deriving from even the most minute or inconspicuous items of knowledge-*savoir* that may serve a general political will that spans the politicised and politicising divides. One might even say that this is the real universal struggle – to constitute a transversal knowledge-*savoir-with-contingent-knowledge-power-integrated* discursive formation, in the interest of continuing their genealogies of the futures-present<sup>8</sup>. And, as it seems to me, the best space from which to do this, is precisely the global South, or the emerging global hubs in West-Europe’s postcolonies of the world.

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<sup>8</sup> For Foucault (1982: 11), transversal struggles are ‘not confined to one country’. Such struggles may ‘develop more easily and to a greater extent in certain countries, but they are not confined to a particular political or economic form of government’.

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*The Third Problematisation (Problem 5, Consisting of Sub-problems, 1 - 4)*

And finally we see what is at stake, I won't say the fifth problem, but the one that runs through all those I have referred to—and I should not even say problem, but open wager that I am not sure of being able to take up, [it being a matter of seeing]:

- whether, through the history of true discourses, we can bring to light the history of a certain will to the true or false, the history of a certain will to posit the interdependent system of truth and falsity;
- whether, second, we can show that this historical, singular, and ever renewed activation of the system of truth and falsity forms the central episode of a certain will to know peculiar to our civilization;
- and finally, whether we can articulate this will to know, which has taken the form of a will to truth, not on a subject or on an anonymous force, but on real systems of domination.
- Then, to sum up all these steps, each of which is very lengthy and complex, we will have put the game of truth back in the network of constraints and dominations. Truth, I should say rather, the system of truth and falsity, will have revealed the face it turned away from us for so long and which is that of its violence.

In this third problematisation, Foucault raises the question of the binary of the distinction between true and false – also as this binary runs through the first four problematisations. So, to precisely study the microphysiologies of knowledge-power as they function in their *savoir*-like contingencies, in respect of the distinctions between true and false, in the general will to know, and in disciplines, and in the nameless and faceless knowledge-*savoir*, and once done, to frame the 'game of truth', the discourses and discursive formations of history, and in our perspective, of the future, about their forms of violence.

From our perspective, that of the futures-present, or present futures, this raises the question of non-violence in the present, as discourse, discursive



formation and technologies and practices with constructive present futures effects.

### ***The Second Incidence***

For the second treatment of knowledge-power, I have selected Foucault's linking and articulation of this complex spectrum, with his archaeological and genealogical methodological approaches. And, it is worth quoting in full. Foucault ([1975/ 1976] 2003:10f) says:

Compared to the attempt to inscribe knowledges in the power hierarchy typical of science, genealogy is, then, *a sort of attempt to desubjugate historical knowledges*, to set them free, or in other words to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse. The project of these disorderly and tattered genealogies is to reactivate local knowledges ... against the scientific hierarchization of knowledge and its intrinsic power-effects. To put it in a nutshell: Archaeology is the method specific to the analysis of local discursivities, and genealogy is the tactic which, once it has described these local discursivities, brings into play the desubjugated knowledges that have been released from them. That just about sums up the overall project.

So, you can see that all the fragments of research, all the interconnected and interrupted things I have been repeating so stubbornly for four or five years now, might be regarded as elements of these genealogies, and that I am not the only one to have been doing this over the last fifteen years. Far from it.

Glancing back at his lectures over the five years since his inaugural lectures on *The Will to Know*, the archaeological methodology that Foucault has developed, analyses and unearths precisely, a large number of aspects, of agencies and institutions, concepts, figures, and theories, that have found their beginnings in a wide variety of knowledge-*savoir*. These have been developed and conceptualised to form large discursive formations, with their attendant institutions. As is well known, many of these have been quite irrational, and had quite hilarious origins, but, were developed into some epistemological edifices, and their accompanying institutionalisation, parallel to, and integrated with often a variety

of forms of violent practices and outcomes. By studying them though, in their meticulous beginnings and manifestations, and developments, Foucault developed his archaeological method in thought of tracing networks and articulations, and ideas, as well as even the most bizarre visions and practices, as to how they subjugate and exploit. Thinking radically, he discusses how this methodology can be turned against any form of hierarchized science, which, thought radically, perpetrates forms of violence. Equally though – and this is the point to bring to the fore – is that whereas the archaeological method is deployed in the interest of analysis and describing ‘local discursivities’, genealogy, as the question concerning technologies that impact the present, or, that which constitutes the history of the present, brings into focus, and also into play, ‘the desubjugated knowledges that have been released’ via archaeological studies. If archaeology provides the methodology for a ‘critical analysis of our world’ ... and its violence, then genealogy provides the fragments for discursive developments of forms of non-violent discursive practices, beyond our usually exclusivist categories such as race, class and gender.

In our context, the escalation of inductive empirical social-science research is indicative of the opening up of a space for knowledge-*savoir*, for providing a platform that gives voice to the voiceless, to open up opportunities for the full and equal recognition of the equal humanity of all, and the production of desubjugated knowledge(s) – local knowledge(s). We are living through a period of the exponential increases in empirical social scientific studies – all functioning with the primary tool of involving the people in knowledge production. As Foucault ([1975/ 1976] 2003: 8 – 10f) envisaged, over a large front, the deductive thought of consciousness and culture pegged on the anonymous and faceless will to know, have become unhelpful if not oppressive and exploitative as the continuing historical truth of the present, in many respects. It continues to mis-educate. In its place have emerged a radically thought democratic knowledge-power voice, or rather voices of reason that confront the possibilities and opportunities of the futures-present, or present futures.

If, via processes of knowledge-*savoir* productions, the objective of the previous generation was to achieve ‘freedom in our lifetime’, then ours is that of socio-cultural equity, in all its forms – ‘equity in our lifetime’.

### ***The Third Incidence***

For the third reference to his distinction between knowledge-*savoir*, and know-

ledge-*connaissance*, I return to Foucault's 'The Subject and Power', just reiterating how he describes the knowledge-*savoir* to which we may attach some liberating and freedom-inspired objects, positionings, and norms for concepts and theories with related practices in spaces, from his perspective in 1970 and 1982<sup>9</sup>.

Foucault suggests that knowledge-*savoir* research goes beyond too easy oppositions that may form part of so-called 'anti-authority struggles' to engage transversal concerns, that involve the study of 'power effects', that are most closely impacting people, in the present. In his often near anarchistic context of 1982 France, these he lists as those related to an 'opposition of power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live' (1994:329f). The 'more specific' he reasons, are those that study struggles against forms of governance 'individualization' articulated with 'knowledge, competence, and ... the privileges of knowledge'; and 'an opposition against secrecy, deformation, and mystifying representations imposed on people'. These more specific focuses of study do not question the importance of science per se. They do not 'reject knowledge'. Rather, amongst others, it is how scientific knowledge becomes the property of the privileged few, that is problematized. What is questioned is the way in which knowledge 'circulates' and functions in closed networks, and its 'relations' to power. In short, the regime of knowledge [*savoir*] – *savoir* taken for precisely those events of knowledge that seek to dominate rather than desubjugate – is to be studied precisely in its 'technique', or forms of power (cf. [1975] 2003:9,14,29).

So, for apartheid governance for instance, the real problematic effects of racist power lay in the fact of racialized governance, and how it categorized people, marked each individual by its individualized racism, and imposed 'a law of truth' on each and every individual classified as 'white' and negatively, 'non-white'. This was in fact the individualising effects of racism – the ideology's creation of a space in which a generalized will to know functioned, and where each 'black' person, so classified by apartheid's laws, were to experience an individualised subjugation – and humiliation – every living

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. especially pages 779 - 782 in Foucault (1982), and pp. 329 - 331 in Faubion. Cf. also Smit and Chetty's (2018c) development of his thought on these transversal matters he raised on these pages, in the postcolony, on pages 15 - 16.

moment of their lives. In this framework, Foucault proffers two ‘meanings of the word subject’, viz.,

*subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to (e.a.).*

What we are then witnessing currently, are the manifold forms of non-racialised desubjugation in empirically-founded knowledge productions, in the realization of material and social attempts to create society, and community, and cohesion (*ubuntu*) – or a ‘political will’ –, beyond the racist individualizations and individualisms of apartheid’s generalised knowledge-power effects.

Generally, it can be said that there are *three types of struggles: against forms of domination* (ethnic, social, and religious); *against forms of exploitation that separate individuals from what they produce*; or *against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection [assujettissement], against forms of subjectivity and submission)* (e.a.) (Foucault 1994: 331).

In most contexts, all three these forms of subjugation are mixed to various degrees. Yet, depending on context, Foucault avers, one usually would be the most prominent – either that of the struggle against forms of ethnic/ social/ religious domination; or against forms the exploitation of labour; or against forms of submission to power.

In the final section of this article I reflect on Foucault’s phrase – ‘how could we seek to be slaves?’

### **‘how could we seek to be slaves?’**

Foucault is the Western scholar, who most vigorously subjected the Western episteme to critical, historical inquiry, or, in his parlance, how the Western Human Sciences academy has produced its subject, or ‘subjectivities’, in Europe, and we may add, the colonies. This heading references a quote from Foucault’s extremely rich text, ‘The Subject and Power’ (1982), in which he

attempted to summarise his thought of more than thirty years, and, in this metaphor characterizing the results of his research that focused on the knowledge-power effects of Western knowledge in producing 'slaves'. For brevity's sake, I shall restrict myself here, to three rather pedantic points<sup>10</sup>.

With regard to Foucault's 'The Subject and Power', *firstly*, the problem to research, and for which Foucault says he developed two distinct, but integrated methodological systems in thought, is historical, viz.: How the West, and by implication, the subjects of the colonized world, have been 'trapped in [the] ... history' (p. 780) of diverse 'types' of rationality of 'the West'. Given this history, the current problem, is that this is still very much prevalent in the academe of the global South, as well as in the academies of the former colonies. So, the challenge is to precisely 'analyse', critique, and replace these rationalities, with self, and socially, affirmative African subjectivities of self and other.

*Secondly*, the question of resistance. *In nuce*, Foucault argues that the future of the Human Sciences academe, should be founded on the history of 'resistance' of these Western rationalities, and, in our context, the history of both the resistances and struggles against colonizing hegemonies, including the internal colonizing rationalities of apartheid, and, importantly, the resistances in the postcolonies. The current opportunity, in this, is to study and rationalize these equally rational, and, importantly, specific, empirically-founded, rationalities of resistance and struggles, and so continue Africa's historically upward ascendancy into academic and epistemic openness and freedom. As such, it engenders and supports a concerted effort in the multiplication of a transversal production of African rationalities, focused on the 'Genealogies of Freedom', and which promote, in my view, 'who we are' individually, and socially (cf. Smit & Chetty 2018b; and 2018c).

*Thirdly*, the *agōn* (conflict, struggle or contest) of power. It will be counter-productive if we should use Foucault's notion of 'struggle' (the *agōn*), in the jostling for positions of power/ knowledge among the new, and emerging decolonising rationalities, in the sense of paradigm 'combats'. Rather, our opportunity, is to see initiatives in the *agōn* of decolonising African know-

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<sup>10</sup> I have used some reflections on this text, and Foucault's *oeuvre*, to argue for a broad-based African Constructivist Discursive approach to the study of the African Arts and Humanities – including in its emerging digital form (cf. Smit & Chetty 2018a; 2018b; 2018c) –, founded in *ubuntu*.

ledge-power production, as what I would like to call, ‘contests for practices of freedom’ – knowledge-power-productions of freedom.

## Conclusion

Reading from our postcolonial context in South Africa, one of the most significant notions that I have found relevant from Foucault’s writings is the distinction between subjugation and desubjugation. Read at a general level of abstraction, the level of a general will to know, whether for good or evil, for true or false, we can say that institutions of learning generate knowledge-power systems of thought with knowledge-power effects. Not identifying whether for good or ill, good or evil, or even in a subject-object schema, it is reasonable, in terms of Foucault’s schema of the spectrum of knowledge-power, to say that it is possible to think of systems of knowledge-power thought, including their physiologies, that have desubjugating freedom effects.

There are arts of research, teaching and learning, or research-lead teaching and learning, that have desubjugating effects of freedom.

In this article I have attempted to illuminate some of such aspects that may assist in precisely engaging in research, that may have freedom-effecting experiences of knowledge-power. For this, the notion of desubjugation, and how it is articulated with eventful fragments of knowledge-*savoir*, that are generated through genealogies of the past, may be helpful. On this, Foucault (1983: 194ff) for instance says,

Compared to the attempt to inscribe knowledges in the power-hierarchy typical of science, genealogy is, then, a sort of attempt to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free.

Further, and parallel to the analysis in this article, which, as pointed to as at least part of one aspect of the ‘models’ in Foucault’s lifelong researches, one’s study of the history of systems of thought, may be concerned with the futures past, or past-futures of the Western world in the postcolonies. This, obviously also includes the knowledge(s) that have been generated in postcolonial and decolonising thought praxes. Similarly, taking the cues from Foucault, if we intend going beyond his presence-of-the-past-in-the-present-oriented thinking, and deploy his methodological physiologies of analysis constructively, we need to ask about the nature of knowledge-power in our own focus on the

futures-presents, or presence-of-the-future-in-the-present-future-oriented thinking of our current endeavours. If following this trajectory is an option, it is also desirable to think how desubjugatory arts of knowledge-power generation may be deployed in non-violent ways, using non-violent means, towards non-violent ends, as these derive from forms of a non-violent desire, but also the conscious will to know, in the interests of freedom, rather than slavery. Strategically, this also suggests the courage to join forms and spaces of knowledge-power advancements among the vulnerable, defenceless, and unarmed, even amidst the most dire of systems of the most devastating impacts and effects of power-knowledge, as so many points of resistance at various points in global power-networks. 'Points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network' (Foucault [1978] 1984:95). We may conversely assert 'Points of knowledge-power production are present everywhere in the knowledge-power networks'. There are a 'multiplicity', or a 'plurality' of points of knowledge-power production in the knowledge-power networks. And, if the notion of power-knowledge was most useful to Foucault in his 1970s and early 1980s West-European and American contexts, for his own, and his generations' mentality of resistance and critique, his underdeveloped notion of knowledge-power, may yet prove more useful to us in the new, Africa.

And, too, as captured in Foucault's, 'model', or 'theme' of 'the will to know', the distinction between knowledge-*savoir* and knowledge-*connaissance*, in a knowledge-power spectrum may yet be proven useful.

\* Note: I have added gender neutral language in five spots, in quotations from Foucault.

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