//Enfoques//

POWER IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: SEARCHING FOR A NEW THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR POWER ANALYSIS*

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Controversial discussions about the nature of *Power* have characterized the study of Social Sciences, in general, and International Relations (IR) in particular. This seems logic - if we consider politics as a "game", their "participants" tend to develop a range of "skills", which allow them to assume different "roles", influencing thus in the "results". Thus, understanding the mechanisms by which this whole process ("the game") operates is intrinsic to the analysis of the outcomes, what explains why the revision of the concept of power has always been especially popular, including in recent times.

Throughout this series we will review some academic approaches to the concept of power and its implementation in international politics. We will present in this first article the debates on the ontology of power (generally referred as "the faces of power"), and the ways in which this influenced the theoretical divisions in IR.

In a second article we will introduce epistemological approaches, leading to controversies on the mechanisms involved in the activation of power and its dimensions (such as today's mantra "hard vs. soft power"). Finally, we will deal in a third article with some methodological schemes for *Power Analysis* in IR, while indicating areas for possible innovation using cases of the "Arab Spring" as illustrations.

Power, Powerful, Powerless: The Ontological Debate

The first ontological debate around the concept of *power* could be placed in the dispute between those who address it as an *interaction* and those who understand it as a *resource*.

To this end, Weber constitutes our first station. He identifies power in a relationship as the ability to control the behavior of others, even against its will. Weber is focused on the context of that relationship (one's position *vis-à-vis* others), which determines the capacity of *empowerment*.[1] That led him to approach the topic of *legitimacy* by dividing between *power* (*Macht*) and *authority* (*herrschaft,* i.e. legitimate power), issue that will be reminded in next articles.

Against Weber's integral approach came out Dahl with his renowned definition: "*A has power over B, if A gets B do something that B would not otherwise do*",

which installed "officially" the controversy in political sciences on how *power* is operated. According to Dahl, that "something" must be based in a change of behavior produced by an *observable act* - possible to analyze and be measured. His attention was centered on the characteristics of the material resources (their *Base, Means, Amount* and *Scope*) and how they are utilized to get certain effects; however, *power* is still conceptualized as a relationship, since what needs to be clearly discernible is the conflict, the interaction. Non-observable acts, according to Dahl, should be included in a different concept, such as *Influence.2*

The Realist tradition in IR, as well as many scholars in the Liberal tradition, adopted Dahl's definition as a starting point for their analysis on *Power Relationships*, and even went one step forward. They saw the context as secondary, since certain power bases are so critical that do not really depend on circumstances or specific nature of interaction. Consequently, for classical realists as Carr, Morgenthau and Aron, the military force is "that" *observable act* which represents the power of the actors (albeit in most of the cases the economic resources were a prerequisite, as explain Berenskoetter and Williams).3

Against that mainstream idea, some scholars battled in the sixties and seventies by presenting two approaches which became popularly known as *The Second Face of Power* and *The Third Face of Power*. It is important to note that both approaches emerge from this ontological debate on "what is power?", but their main implications would be on the epistemological discussion on "how do we study power relations?", which helped to the development of Critical and Constructivist research programs, as we will see in the next article.

In the first approach, Bachrach and Baratz argue that not always a concrete change in behavior needs to be detected to confirm the existence of a conflict in *Power Relationships*; it could be expressed through the "mobilization of bias", an "unmeasurable element".4 In the second approach, Lukes went beyond that idea and expressed that the mere existence of conflict is not a condition; in other words, the absence of conflict do not necessarily indicate the absence of *Power Relationships.5* Lukes, as a neo-marxist building on Gramsci, introduced the structural sphere of the concept of *Power*. Powerful and powerless agents are characterized in function of their ability to shape the system through culture and education, which will determine the interests of the actors. Foucalt and Bourdieu, with their vision of *Knowledge-as-Power6* and *Symbolic Power7*, respectively, went in the same direction.

More recently, a similar ontological debate could be found in terms of *Power Over-Power To*, presented by Barnett and Duvall. In the first one, they define power as "*the capacity of the actor to determine his own actions*", so the perspective is based on the actor itself; by contrast, in the second one a *Power Relationship* is needed.8 In that sense, the famous article of Nye about *Soft Power*, which would be broadly approached in the following articles, builds also on this issue - power could be understood as "*the ability to get the outcomes one wants*" (in the form of *Power-To*), but also as "*the ability to influence the behaviors of others to get the outcomes one wants.*" (in the form of *Power-Over*)9.

1
Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology.* (California: University of Berkeley, 1978. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich).

2
Robert A. Dahl, "The concept of Power", *Behavioral Science* 2 (3), July 1957, 201-215
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Felix Berenskoetter and Michael .J. Williams. *Power in World Politics*. (NYC: Routledge, 2007), p.6
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Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz. "Two Faces of Power". *The American Political Science Review* 56 No4 (December 1962), 947-952
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Stephen Lukes, "Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds", *Millennium*, 33, No3 (2005), 477-493
6
Michael Foucalt, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77* (Brighton: Havester, 1980)
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Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power* (NYC : Polity Press, 2001)
8
Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, "Power in International Politics," *International Organization* 59, No1, (Winter 2005), p. 46
9
Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power- The Means to Success in World Politics* (NYC: PublicAffairs, 2004), p.2

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