The More Things Change, the More They…: The Changing Faces of Power 1979-2019

Giulio M. Gallarotti

The summer of 2019 marked the 40th anniversary of the founding of what has become known as the "power group," more formally known as International Political Science Association (IPSA) Research Committee 36.[1] The group celebrated the event with a conference in Moscow, the very location in which the first meeting of the group took place in 1979 under the guidance of the founder David Baldwin (who also attended the anniversary conference). It was an event that brought old and new members together in a spirit of friendship and scholarship. Within the group much had changed, but much had remained the same. Certainly the city was quite different after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The demographics and geography very much mirrored the study of power over the past 40 years. Much was new, or was it? In the proceedings and lively discussions over wonderful Russian cuisine, one dinner being held on a river cruise, it became clear that there were a great many ideas about power that emerged over these four decades. The ideas manifest fundamental categories of research in the social sciences: epistemological, ontological and normative. But the discussion also suggested that the nuances were unfolding within philosophical contexts that were quite familiar. Many questions emerged. Had things really changed in the study of power, or were we actually still caught in a theoretical loop that was recycling since the foundations laid by Plato and Aristotle? Was there indeed a fundamental shift in the theoretical or purported ontological "mean," or simply variations around an unchanging "mean"? Was the lens through which power was understood driven more by a quest for knowledge or for the purpose of creating better systems of governance? Was power pure and unified, or was it composed of many elements? If indeed a mélange of elements, were they independent or interactive? How many faces did power really have? Should we even understand power as having faces? The debates continued well into the evenings, and well past the dessert and coffee. Few iron laws of power emerged from the gathering, and yet many agreed that the sacrosanct boundaries that defined our interests in power were very much alive and well. It is only fitting that in Moscow we witnessed another round of revolution, but in this case with somewhat more moderate radicals.

[1] I am most grateful to David Baldwin and Mark Haugaard for suggestions in revising this article. The members of IPSA RC 36 are infinitely grateful to Alina Vladimirova, Vice Chair of the Group, for her Herculean efforts in organizing the 40th Anniversary Conference in Moscow. She turned what would normally be a logistical nightmare into a memorable event.

Most of these papers were delivered at the conference, with some added later. They represent a broad swatch of thinking about power over the last 40 years, by some of the leading scholars on the subject of political power from differing disciplines in the social sciences. Indeed, we are all grateful to the distinguished contributors of this special issue for sharing with us stimulating ideas about one of the most important subjects in the social sciences. And in their words, we are comforted both by exciting new possibilities, but also by time-honored modes of understanding power.

Change versus Stasis

We can characterize the debate in terms of a scale where, at one end, it is argued that nothing of theoretical substance has changed while, at the other end, it is claimed that the field is radically transformed. Relative to such a scale, Keith Dowding's contribution comes fiercely out of the chute in stating that only the names have changed, but the "single" face or nature of power has not. Essentially the phenomenon or process we have come to know as power is ontologically fixed, and that only the epistemologies of power have changed. In fact, the prevailing arguments over power themselves are epiphenomenal. Scholars have become so enticed by the philosophical glitter of conceptual categories, that they have become obtuse to the immutable process underlying the categories. This immutable process is the stable and unchanging manner in which influence is manifest. Epistemological debates about faces and power-over, -to, -with, are all conceptual variations around a consistent ontological entity. For Dowding power is simple, what is complex is the way it is represented. Drawing on an analogy from physics: power is like energy. It is the engagement of a process by which things are caused. Drawing back to the social sciences, power as a causal process is what an actor or actors can achieve. The dispositional nature of power accounts for why people ascribe so many faces or dimensions to power. In other words, the manifestation of power is highly contextual, and it is the context that accounts for differing interpretations of power. He goes on to suggest that manifestations of power can be audited by decomposing differing contexts, while all along understanding that power is the proximate process of influence. So for example, the tendency to talk of different kinds of power as -to, -over, -with; are simply differing contextual manifestations of power. Decomposing the contexts using the mathematical tool of subscripts, he claims that these contexts are just a menu of differing options by which influence can be wielded. Each is a variation of how and by whom things are achieved. Similarly, Dowding argues that the celebrated faces of power are simply variations of achievement as well. This decomposition well defines the contexts, but what still needs clarification then is the process itself. Of course the term "achieve" is simple and effective, and it sufficiently denotes a simple process of influence, which is the ultimate foundation of what power entails. But to get back to the physics analogy, while we can sometimes get distracted from issues of energy because we are consumed by observing the machine, still energy itself requires great scrutiny, and quite frankly physicists have been debating the nature of energy as far back as the Greek philosophers: how is energy converted, how does it relate to mass, what are the different forms of energy (radiant, thermal,

etc)? Perhaps energy is not so simple a term? And hence there may be possibilities for contestation within the idea of the proximate manifestations of influence itself. But this contribution bravely forges possibilities of a more precise scientific understanding of power, and hence effectively opens up avenues for the positivistic study of the process of power.

Moving towards change, Clegg's reflections on the development of his thinking about power posits a basic process by which power manifests itself: which he refers to "circuits of power." Clegg sees a disjuncture between the early agent-centered views of power, so effectively articulated by Dahl, and the perceptions of power that are influenced by the contributions of Foucault. Clegg does not argue for faces, dimensions, or engage with the power-over, -to or –with concepts, although he does not dismiss them either. Rather, for Clegg, power itself is much more ontologically stable than the dimensional scholarship suggests. The "circuits" concept bridges all of the differing categories into one process approach. For Dowding both dimensions and circuit categorizations are mere accounting tools for the differing manifestations of power. For Clegg, however, they are all differing components within one greater underlying dynamic. It is neither uniquely agent-driven nor is it uniquely structural. It bridges the various faces of power within an integrated network that includes all of their workings.

Bindi and Pansardi also claim that the prevailing literature on power-to, power-over and power-with has not interpreted these contexts as a dispute over the real meaning of power, but these contexts have developed into three independent concepts themselves. And indeed much has changed in the thinking about these concepts and how they relate to one another. The trilogy has gone through variations in applications and interpretations. Scholars have increasingly understood power-over and power-with as being subsets of a more general realization of a power-to. But there has been a shift in focus on which of the trilogy is most relevant and this has closely reflected the issues under scrutiny. The growing feminist contributions to power studies have emphasized how the power-over understanding of power relations is a reflection of patriarchal command-type societies. In contrast, more communitarian feminist perspectives foreground power-to and power-with. Similarly, critical approaches to capitalism and racial politics are ripe for looking at power-over in other relational contexts of domination, and proposing alternative ways of thinking that place greater emphasis upon power-to and –with. So, too, study of democracy has looked upon differing manifestations of power-over as defining the nature of political outcomes (are they zero-sum or positive-sum, coercive or concerted?). Much of the disagreement over the trilogy has centered on the definitions and relationship between power-to and power-over. Furthermore, normative concerns have fueled disagreements on the concept of power-over. Finally, with the awakening on social issues in prevailing scholarship, there has been far more attention on the concept of power-with as a counter-hegemonic mechanism. Indeed, with the trilogy, a major driver in changing visions of power has been the context of scholarly attention.

Ledyaev cites both stasis and change in the study of power. He avers that indeed power remains a contested phenomenon, and yet the key categories of analysis have remained the same: authority, hegemony, freedom, democracy, equality, justice, domination, and violence. He notes that much of the evolving study of power has shown a number of differing conceptual tracks, and

that these are driven by three fundamental factors: changing manifestations of power emanating from the dynamics of social change, new methodological paths, and theoretical innovations. He identifies the following trends of change in power analysis over the past decades: the concept has broadened and become more flexible, power has been understood in a more multidimensional manner, some approaches have achieved greater synthesis, and there has been a greater blurring of the borders between power and non-power. He cites a number of emergent issues: the development of the relations within the trilogy (power –to, -over, -with), the growing debate over the agent-structure foundations of power, the pervasive modifications and expansion in thinking about the faces of power, dichotomies between intentionality versus non-intentionality, the duality of potential and actual power, the duality between power as a zero-sum versus a positive-sum phenomenon, and the split involving normative versus neutral evaluations of power dynamics. In some cases, we have seen greater synthesis such as in the tendency to conflate the trilogy as emanating from a power-to umbrella, while in other cases there has been an expanded conceptual menu and greater differentiation in identifying the components of power. He goes on to reason that the attempts to multidemsionalize and synthesize the concept of power have blurred the boundaries between power and non-power. For example, if domination is everywhere, can we then distinguish what constitutes a power dynamic from other phenomena like socialization? Moreover, if we expand the faces to be all encompassing in a Foucaultian manner, can we even distinguish one source of influence from another? Ultimately this expansion in scholarship on power has created more complexity in both the conceptual and empirical development of a greater theory of power.

Back to the Future

In contemplating the question of the changing faces of power, Lukes and Baldwin take us backward in order that we may go forward in the study of power. Baldwin locates an unfortunate deviation in the historical trajectory of the conceptual development of power. He cites misinterpretations and the neglect of key concepts in the community-power debates, debates from which the current scholarship on power descends. He underscores the crucial contributions of Robert Dahl as having been especially misunderstood. Baldwin impeaches the derivation of the conceptual trajectory of power studies from the community-power debates, debates that essentially were more invested in the operational and methodological definitions of power than its conceptual development. In essence, scholars have been looking for grass in wheat fields: it is sparse, and hence does not yield much. The community-power literature was more grounded in the study of democracy in small communities. The real conceptual foundations of power in the early literature came more from Dahl's works other than *Who Governs* (1961). Far greater progress in the conceptual development of power could have been made by looking at his greater body of work, much of which was directly concerned with such issues, rather than his magnum opus which was much more empirically applied. Most of the criticism of Dahl, in fact, stems from his critics trying to derive conceptual clarity on power from *Who Governs*. Dahl developed a conceptual narrative of power across a number of works both before and after *Who Governs*. This narrative was focused, precise in its logic, consistent, and substantively rich. Moreover, a

shadow of this conceptual wealth was also evident in his *magnum opus*, but unfortunately it was drowned out by the empirical noise of democratic processes. The thrust of Baldwin's rich revisionist look into reviving and clarifying the scholarly foundations of the modern study of power essentially locates decades of conceptual development within the very earliest contributions to the study of power. It was in actuality there all along. Much of the strides that scholars believed themselves to have made were well sorted out at the very beginning. Scholars were to some extent reinventing the wheel. The moral of the story is fairly clear: take a precise inventory of what has been accomplished before venturing forth to re-accomplish it, and make sure you look in the right places. The downside of not heeding this moral is evident in the past four decades of thinking on power: for Baldwin we have recycled rather than invented.

Lukes is, of course, with his seminal book *Power: A Radical View* (1974), one of the chief architects of the contemporary dimensional or faces vocabulary of power. Yet, while on the change side of the spectrum, Lukes concedes Baldwin's claim that in some ways community power was narrow in its focus (stressing the faces and the issue of domination), but yet in its narrowness, the debates emanating from this tradition have addressed crucial questions that are fertile drivers of research on power today. For Lukes, there was indeed much in Baldwin's white noise on power that was of value in pushing our conceptual understanding of the subject. The debates over domination for example produced new and distinct approaches to understanding how power is exerted in asymmetrical relations. Domination can manifest itself in many ways, and in exploring variants of what domination and non-domination are, scholars have acquired an expanded menu in evaluating such a phenomenon. How does domination relate to freedom? Is it a zero-sum or variable-sum phenomenon? Does it reside in agents or structures? Is domination arbitrary or routinized? In this respect, even a scholarly trajectory that kept attention affixed to questions of domination ended up being conceptually generative. But beyond this, Lukes suggests that in fact the traditional debates on power that Baldwin impeaches missed opportunities for greater scrutiny of key concepts. Continuing with the crucial issue of domination, he notes the insufficient attention to the binary problem of potential versus exercised power underlying domination. Similarly, questions of how domination is legitimated and the extent to which it is immoral have been under-scrutinized in the debates. He goes on to identify the more promising and focused scholarship on these questions that has arisen in the wake of these debates. This contribution raises an interesting question regarding scientific inquiry: are there such things as fruitless debates? Kuhnian scientific revolutions perforce proceed from both successes and failures, failures being crucial springboards to advancements in the scientific cycle of paradigm shifts. Overly broad inquiries can expand the menu of issues and concepts to study, while overly narrow inquiries perform important stress tests for crucial hypotheses. Perhaps the worth of a debate can only be determined *ex post*? But this point could be construed as moot for social scientists because the issues they wrestle with rarely go beyond a contested nature, paradigms are not as clear cut in the natural sciences, and hence scholarly consensus is rare indeed.

All is change; using the vocabulary of power, or power "for":

Gaventa, Zaaiman and Mupambwa, Haugard, and Hayward are all, to a greater or lesser extent, on the change side of the scale. They argue that perceptions of power have developed and that the new vocabulary of power is both theoretically and empirically useful and more sophisticated. In addition, these authors share a pragmatist turn. They are conscious of the question, what is a vocabulary of power "for"? This pragmatist turn is both empirical and normative. Empirically, the more operationally-inspired approach in the application of power studies return us to a community power context that looks at the power dynamics within actual democracies. Their pragmatist turn takes us to an emergent normative trend in the last several decades of power studies that explores what societies "should do," In others words, what should the vocabulary of power be "for," relative to the normative question of making society more egalitarian.

Haugaard and Gaventa are unapologetically on the change side of the spectrum, contrary to Dowding, arguing that there are indeed dimensions of power, and that power-over, -to and –with are useful conceptual tools. Unlike the previous community-power tradition, the normative applications are more diverse in their attention, extending to other social contexts such as race, gender, and the environment. But the underlying quest for understanding power as a means to some equitable or just end is very much apparent in the scholarly narratives.

Gaventa uses the full new vocabulary of power and bridges the scholar-activist divide on power approaches by building on a transformative vision of power that seeks to explore the intersection of the various strands of power-to, -over, -with, and -within to develop a concept of power-for: a means of addressing asymmetries in power dynamics focusing on the mechanisms through which victimized groups can resist domination. He integrates Lukes' three dimensions of power (visible, hidden, and invisible) along with two other aspects (spaces and levels) in building a holistic strategy for challenging domination. This crystalizes into his well know *power cube* model where leverage can be generated through strategies that tap into a wide and diverse landscape of power sources. Gaventa goes on to demonstrate how groups have navigated these paths of power in order to gain greater influence within environments of skewed power dynamics. An important contribution of the holistic approach is the identification of complex power decompositions. Competition is played out on a variety of playing fields and games, both over time and simultaneously. The playing fields and games being played moreover are not necessarily separated, but overlap and affect one another in a dynamic and reciprocal fashion. In this sense, counter-hegemonic challenges to authority are most effective when conceptualized as network strategies: coordinated actions that build a bulwark of pressure points over a greater swatch of bargaining spaces.

Zaaiman and Mupambwa apply such a transformative vision of power using four dimensions of power to understand how power dynamics played out among groups involved in the building of a housing project in the Khutsong township of South Africa. The narrative takes us back to pluralist chronicles of how differing groups competed in a communal-democratic space. The project itself held important benefits for four main groupings: politicians, local leaders, contractors and community members. The tussle played out across each of the

dimensions of power in a manner that demonstrated just how nested these dimensions of power really are. Elements from the deeper structures of the 3rd and 4th dimensions of power cast a strong shadow on the more direct confrontations in democratic processes in the 1st and 2nd dimensions. But the dimensions were pervasively operational both ways, in a process of feedback that reflected a structuration process in which there was interaction between agents and structures. Ultimately, strongly held norms in these deeper ideational structures (i.e., a right to housing) conditioned outcomes at levels of more direct contestation, and hence the housing project was effectively expedited in a satisfactory fashion for the residents and their activist shepherds. The article makes important contributions in the empirical application of a theory of nested feedback among the faces of power. In this particularly applied iteration of power theory, the authors show that dynamics at deeper levels of power (in this case Lukesian power and Foucaultian systems of subjectification and discipline), if preponderantly salient, carry disproportionate weight in the pluralist battlefield given that contests among agents and bureaucratic processes are embedded in dominant ideas about equity and justice.

Haugaard and Hayward pick up the gauntlet of evaluating prevailing power dynamics in democracy, and offer their own particular visions of legitimate governance. Haugaard analyses four dimensions of power, with references to how each manifests itself in the democratic process of contestation. While methodologically framed as a conceptual evaluation of the four dimensions of power, the narrative nonetheless demonstrates a strongly egalitarian tone about desirable political practice. Democracy is both legitimate and stable because it spreads opportunities for influence throughout a society, such that access to policy outcomes can be broadly achieved. Even though politics is essentially a battleground, the system enjoys "authority" because competition is played out under procedures that are deemed to be in the interest of all participants. So for example, under conditions of competition involving the first dimension of power (i.e., direct agent-to-agent contestation), winning and losing are only "episodic" and do not invalidate the legitimacy of the procedure by which one group or party win out. Here both the winners and losers actually reinforce what is a positive-sum or "dispositional" process. Similarly, with respect to contestation in a 2nd dimension space (one where political structures mediate agent-to-agent competition), democracy also enjoys a dispersion effect which generates broad legitimation. Like direct contests between agents, such as votes, political structures (e.g., agenda-setting opportunities) also cut across the demographic spectrum such that access to such levers of influence is pervasive across a political system. Within his deeper- 3rd and 4th -dimensions of power (power/knowledge and socialization), democracy develops a strong internalized discipline from the process of social construction. People come to internalize a vison that democracy is an iterated game between adversaries that in the long run yields optimal outcomes with respect to the public interest, but only because all agents have ongoing opportunities to address grievances and seek preferred policies. Norms of equitable treatment and restraints against abuses of power are socialized into participants, thus creating democratic self-discipline.

Hayward, like Zaaiman and Mupambwa, proceeds from a community-democratic empirical springboard by referencing the case of nonpublic space: the building of a town center in the town of Easton, Ohio. This pseudo-town square was designed in a way as to control and

influence who has access and how individuals can comport themselves. Hayward casts a critical eye at such exclusionary spaces in terms of their challenges for democracy. But she moves beyond conventional critics of nonpublic space based on deliberative democracy; the latter citing the importance of public spaces to foster greater ideational connection between citizens as political actors. Hayward modifies this function of public space by positing the importance of publicity for addressing power asymmetries in democracy. Basic problems of collective action place public interests at a disadvantage in any pluralist system, where special interests hold an upper hand in capturing policies. Public spaces hence become an important venue through which to break down these collective-action obstacles for larger groups in the political battlefield. These spaces overcome the anonymity problems of collective action in democracy by enabling the strategizing of group political action through the interfacing of interests among disparate actors. Above and beyond breaking down the impersonal nature of democracy, and hence interfacing collective interests for the purpose of planning strategies, the public arenas offer an *action* space to confront the asymmetries in political power in democracies (e.g., venues for sit ins, protests, and other forms of direct participation). A principal contribution of this article is to call attention to the deficiencies of the political philosophy on democracy with respect to its naiveté about the power dynamics that underlie democratic processes. Implicitly, this is a strong critique of the idea that one-dimensional, or agent-centered, views of power can capture the complexity and nuance of power in situations of complex systemic domination.

Power Goes Global

Another emergent trend in the study of power within the context of its conceptual and empirical development is the geographic expansion of analysis. Indeed, the concepts and empirical studies of power have gone beyond pure political theory and have gone global. While traditional studies in international relations have always been interested in power, they have not approached the subject from the conceptual categories of political-power theory. The more recent studies that do so have brought a far deeper understanding of power relations between states. In this vein, Nye re-articulates his theory of soft power in international relations. The concept of soft power, which Nye coined in 1990 (Nye 1990), is one of the new terms of the power debates within the field of international relations. Building principally upon conventional applications of a 3rd dimension of power, Nye casts power relations among states as unfolding in a far more diverse and complex playing field than dominant Realist traditions in the study of international politics contemplate. He impeaches a traditional "resource-based" vision of power (i.e., where power is determined by the relative balances of military-related resources) and proposes a behavioral vision where the resources merely underlie the actual power dynamics between states. He goes deeper than a 1st dimensional vision that sees outcomes being determined by direct contests between actors employing their material resources to extract desired behaviors. Indeed, power dynamics unfold within ideational structures. Irrespective of the size of a military arsenal or economic power, nations can generate influence in other ways. These are more indirect forms of power where compliance or favorable behaviors are not extracted (as Realists opine), but rather are cultivated by both the actions and characteristics of states. States with soft power will find that their

relations with other states can be far more favorable than their material resources would suggest. They will find greater conformity with and respect for their foreign policy objectives and domestic goals. In other words, the outer world will more closely interface with their national interests. This comes from actions and characteristics that generate "attraction." The attraction created disposes foreign nations to comport themselves in a more favorable manner toward soft-power states. Hence, the influence of latter states is enhanced. Such soft power resources are quite diverse, but can be said as a general rule to be comprised of national characteristics and actions that are perceived by another as admirable, and hence perceived as endearing. Venerated cultural or religious standing, celebrated domestic political institutions and practices, and foreign policies that respect well-regarded international norms of justice and fair play are all principal components of a soft power lexicon. The major contribution of soft power to study of international politics is to reveal a heretofore hidden face of power.

Gallarotti fundamentally agrees with Nye about the importance and neglected nature of soft power in the study of international politics. But he moves beyond the mere identification of a source of deeper power in the international system. He argues that the debate over the nature of power has more fundamentally been influenced by epistemologies. Competing epistemologies (Realists versus Neoliberals and Constructivists) have created a bifurcated conceptual space that has cast power as emanating from softer elements on one side (the latter two schools) to harder elements (i.e., principally military resources) on the other (Realists). Scholars have thus been guilty of positing a homogeneous nature of power at each end of the theoretical binary. He goes on to argue that structural changes in the global system have indeed created a softer world: i.e., they have increased the relative utility of soft power *vis a vis* hard power. But he also argues that there is a certain constancy or stability in the sources of state influence throughout history, and that has carried through to the present. Indeed, the true face of power has always been more "calicoed" than homogeneous in color. The epistemological binary has unfortunately pushed visions of power away from an ontological mean where the true nature of influence in international politics rests. A principal contribution of the article is to establish the foundations for a synthetic theory ("Cosmopolitan") of power that integrates what many consider incompatible theories of power.

Finally, Belmonte and Cerny underscore the changing landscape of power in the global system. With the advent of a new "heterarchic" world order in which non-state actors have grown in power *vis a vis* states, the structure of power in the world system has become defined by a heterogeneous group of players, all vying to promote their own particularistic interests. In other words, the playing field of global powers is no longer state-centric, but now features a number of new players. In this new playing field, states no longer have a monopoly over the levers of influence in foreign and domestic policies. The new globalized space they occupy gives non-state actors far greater agency in influencing state actions as well as in circumventing state sanctions and control. Their argument supports both Nye and Gallarotti in suggesting that the traditional harder sources of state capacity are increasingly being compromised by this more "feudal" configuration of power.

Gallarotti, Nye, and Belmonte and Cerny suggest not only that our language of power has changed because of greater theoretical sophistication, but also because the world-out-there is changing. Sovereign states were the main actors in a comparatively short (approximately two hundred year) modern drama. Going back to the pre-modern feudal world and moving forward to the emerging drama of the present and beyond, the world of international politics is made up shifting ontological categories of social actors and, therefore, our epistemological-conceptual vocabulary has to change to mirror this.

Overall, when we think about the debates over the changing nature of power , is it that our paradigms have changed relative to an immutable reality? Or is it that we, the observing social scientists, have changed in response to the shifting tides of history? In his conclusion to *The Order of Things*, Foucault wagered that man, as a universal measure of things, will be erased by the tides of change; like figures drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea (Foucault 1970: 387). To use this image, are the waves that sweep away the figures drawn in the sand new paradigms? Or, is this erasure the movement of the tide of history, which results in a changing social reality? In other words, is the change just relative to the mind of the observer? Or, is it that both observer and observed change in tandem?

References:

Dahl, R.A., 1961. *Who Governs?* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Foucault, M. 1970. *The Order of Things*. London: Routledge.

Lukes, S. 1974. *Power: A Radical View*. London: Macmillan.

Nye, J.S. 1990. “Soft power.” *Foreign Policy*, 80:53-71.