

# REVISITING THE CONCEPT OF POWER IN THE LIGHT OF THE COMPLEXITY PARADIGM<sup>1</sup>

## REVISITANDO O CONCEITO DE PODER À LUZ DA TEORIA DA COMPLEXIDADE

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### Abstract

This paper aims to revisit the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the power construct, which is seen as a key element in Politics. The paper consists of a review of the thoughts of Max Weber, Hannah Arendt, and Michel Foucault, supported by a theoretical framework of philosophy and political science, with the complexity paradigm as its epistemological basis. First, the three authors were analysed separately, after which the dynamics between them were investigated. To achieve the goal of this paper, the analysis was divided into six sections: an introduction, a methodological discussion from the perspective of military science, the methodology, the three perspectives on power, an analysis, and a conclusion. With our analysis, we attempted to answer the following questions: What is power? Who holds it? By what means is it exercised? We concluded that the object of study is clearly a complex one due to its volatile and relational nuances, which directly affect political and military dynamics and phenomena.

**Keywords:** Power, Military Science, Complexity, Strength, Consensus.

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## **Resumo**

O presente artigo propõe-se a revisitar os fundamentos teóricos e conceituais do constructo poder, entendendo-o como elemento fundamental na Política. Partindo-se de referencial teórico da filosofia e ciência política, e tendo por base epistemológica o paradigma da complexidade, apresentou-se uma revisão dos pensamentos de Max Weber, Hannah Arendt e Michel Foucault, analisando-os, num primeiro momento, individualmente, para, após, identificar as dinâmicas entre si. Para atingir o objetivo proposto, a análise foi dividida em seis seções: introdução, discussão metodológica à luz das ciências militares, metodologia, as três perspectivas do poder selecionadas, discussão da teoria e conclusão. Ao longo da análise, procuraram-se respostas para as seguintes questões: o que é poder? Quem o detém? Por que meios é exercido? No final, ficou evidenciado o caráter complexo do objeto de estudo, e as suas matizes voláteis e relacionais que impactam diretamente as dinâmicas e os fenômenos políticos e militares.

**Palavras-chave:** Poder, Ciências Militares, Complexidade, Força, Consenso.

## **Introduction**

Because it has multiple meanings and nuances, the term *power* is, without a doubt, a true “conceptual kaleidoscope”. The range of possibilities is so vast that it is often conflated with humanity itself, coexisting with mythology and science and piquing the interest and curiosity of many. It permeates social dynamics and, in some cases, as in Politics, Military Science, and Strategy, it is the origin of the forces at play in the complex dynamics of States. Studying and analysing it allow us to better understand past political events, the evolution of Peace and War phenomena, and the asymmetries and volatilities of the political system in the 21st century.

From antiquity to the present day, many have sought to understand, define, and exercise it according to their own logic and within their own historical-cultural reality. Some associate it with war; others, with the combination of wills; some, with the sole purview of the State; others, with various actors, sometimes seeing it as potential, that is, as a simple innate ability, others as action itself, dynamic and objective.

Thus, to talk about *power*, multiple sources must be taken into account, and the characteristics and peculiarities of the different correlations of forces in each theory must be analysed. In a world where diversity is the norm, *power* is extremely important, and so is analysing it correctly for each particular context.

This research aims to revisit the conceptual and philosophical foundations of the *power* construct, supported by a traditional theoretical framework of philosophy and political science. It will include a review of the thoughts of Max Weber, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault, framed by the paradigm of complexity, wherein the authors will be analysed individually, after which the dynamics at play between the three theories will be identified.

The paper is divided into six parts. The above introduction precedes a brief epistemological discussion, with complexity as the paradigm of analysis. Afterwards, the methodology adopted will be described, followed by the examination proper of the three authors' views about power. Then, the theoretical framework will be discussed and the similarities and differences in the concepts under analysis will be identified. The paper will conclude with final reflections about the literature review.

### **1. Complexity: a new paradigm in military science**

An epistemological basis is the fundamental grounds upon which any given scientific knowledge is constructed. It is a validating theory, as well as a set of beliefs that guide practices, and its correct identification is vital, as those beliefs directly affect, even if subjectively, the investigative process (Bachelard, 1973; Creswell, 2013).

However, despite its multiple possible interpretations, the reality it analyses is singular. Different people interpret it differently, combining different perceptions, pointing to a plurality inherent to the system: there is only one world, but several perspectives of analysis. Therefore, knowledge comes from a specific "path" that one takes, through which people seek to describe, explain, interrelate, and even predict the phenomena they analyse.

Kuhn (1970) stresses the dynamic character of the process of knowledge acquisition and its prevalence on the logical structure used in scientific research, rejecting the notion that scientific development is a simple matter of accumulation. The author introduces the concept of paradigm, reinforcing the idea that freedom is essential in the search for knowledge, and that each scientific field is free to find solutions to its problems through its own epistemological assumptions, specific jargon, and common experiments. According to the author, there is no single research paradigm model in human and social sciences.

Extant beliefs, which exist prior to the investigation proper, become assumptions that will enable the scientific process to advance. The choice of a particular paradigm, of a specific epistemological view, corresponds to a particular way of seeing the world and of practising science, and that choice is crucial because helps researchers define their problems and the nature of acceptable solutions.

This deep commitment to observe and investigate nature provides answers to some basic questions, such as: What entities are there in the Universe? How do they behave? How do they relate to one another? Epistemological reflection helps scientists know where to look, and why and how to do it. Thus, knowledge emerges from beliefs and truths, which are justified by a rationale (Kuhn, 1970).

This study addresses the notion of complexity, defining it as an epistemic view that emerges as an alternative means of interpretation and helps reduce any analytical imbalances that may arise from the rigidity of positivist empiricism, which is characterised by the dominance of the quantitative approach and the control of variables, under the assumption that there is a natural connection between cause and effect.

According to Guba (1990), there is an identifiable tendency in these paradigms to seek uncontrolled exposure to more real environments, moving away from extreme rigour through quantification, which reinforces the richness of the qualitative approach. Discovery and verification are beginning to play an important role in sequential research processes. Non-linearity overlaps with linearity in the formulation of knowledge because it is acknowledged that the researcher's mechanisms of analysis (both sensitive and cognitive) are fallible. Thus, results based on the greatest possible number of sources (theories, methods, experts, and data) - and on their triangulation - become highly relevant.

How to understand and justify the collapse of the Soviet state, which had enjoyed forty years of hegemony over Eastern Europe, in only a few short months? What is, in fact, the human mind, the brain with its infinite connections that produce sensations, memories, consciousness, and thoughts? How does this mechanism function? Finally, why is there anything other than nothingness? What governs the Universe's inexorable tendency towards disorder and deterioration since the Big Bang?

For Waldrop (1992), what all these questions have in common is the sense of uncertainty in the search for answers, and each question is a complex system in its own right, that is, a combination of multiple agents interacting with each other in different ways, leading the whole to spontaneous self-organisation. In their mutual search for conciliation and consistency, these groups somehow transcend their own essence and acquire collective properties that they would never have had on their own. They are, therefore, adaptive, spontaneous, and have an intrinsic dynamism, which distinguishes them qualitatively from static objects.

The non-linearity of this new paradigm could lead the whole, in fact, to actually prove to be much larger than the sum of its parts. For example, the human brain is able to pick up sounds from different instruments in an orchestra separately. When they are combined, the whole will trigger chain reactions that go well beyond the mere identification of each instrument, producing a range of emotions and reactivating memories.

Therefore, in complexity everything is connected and is extremely susceptible to the slightest variation. Minor disturbances and uncertainties may, in a given environment and circumstances, lead to a high degree of unpredictability and chaos followed by processes of self-organisation. This cycle fosters innovation and adaptability, making systems more flexible and evolved (Prigogine and Stengers, 1997).

A question arises at this point: in the face of such uncertainty, of so many patterns of change and possible networks of connections, how can we predict anything? And if one cannot predict/infer something specifically, can the knowledge acquired under this paradigm be considered science? From the perspective of Newtonian mechanics, the answer would surely be "Absolutely not!" However, Waldrop (1992) stresses that, although forecasts are always welcome, the essence of science lies in enlightenment, which unveils the fundamental mechanisms of nature.

Another important characteristic of complex adaptive systems, according to Holland (1992), is that they have multiple levels of organisation, with agents at one level as the

building blocks for other agents at the next level. Individuals group themselves into neighbourhoods, which in turn come together to form municipalities, and so on, until an intricate social, cultural, and political network exists between States. The author complements and reinforces the concepts used by Prigogine and Stengers, arguing that such systems are constantly revising and reordering themselves according to the evolution of their experience. A practical example of this is when countries revise alliances and agreements, adapting and evolving according to the current conditions and anticipating possible future scenarios.

The realities of the twenty-first century — the perception of phenomena, both domestic and foreign, and how these phenomena interrelate within the global environment — seem to fit this paradigm. Unprecedented technological advances, the emergence of new actors in the international system (both traditional and non-traditional), the weakening of the State (or its strengthening), the increase of transnational crime, the growing social and economic disparities, and the consequences of environmental issues all fit into the post-Cold War scenario, as a direct or indirect result of the globalisation process.

In practice, contemporary social relations between individuals, between States, and between individuals and States fit into the concepts of Complexity Theory, which appears to be a particularly useful tool to study both the international system and intra-state scenarios, which are beginning to be characterised by uncertainty and cyclical volatility.

Military science in general, and especially the S&D studies of the twenty-first century, inspired by Kuhn's thinking and by the conviction that the interaction between variables is non-linear, require a research paradigm<sup>2</sup> that can better account for the inherent complexity of the interaction process between global actors.

In the past, commanders and strategists aimed to preserve order, organisation and coherence in the chaos of the battlefield. Keegan (1976) notes that, by reducing the conduct of war to a set of rules and procedures, military training aimed to bring order to chaos.

Today, automatic and predetermined responses will not succeed in a world marked by uncertainty and dynamism. By incorporating non-linearity rather than attempting to impose and maintain order, current strategies and planning should view all elements of the battlefield as living organisms, which are never in a state of complete equilibrium but are constantly adapting to the operating environment (Bousquet, 2008).

Using complexity as the epistemological basis of this analysis is appropriate to the object of study: the *power* of the state. On the one hand, power is understood both as a construct and a relational element, that is, it depends on the existence of two or more entities in order to exist, requiring a multidisciplinary approach.

What is *power*? Of what does it consist? How does it manifest? When looking for answers to these questions, we must analyse the problem in a non-linear fashion if we wish to capture

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<sup>2</sup> See Ferreira and Migon (2015) and Migon (2013) for further thoughts on complexity as a paradigm of Military Science and Defence Studies and a long list of references on the topic.

how the object of research fits into to the current reality, that is, how it adapts and evolves vis-a-vis the chaos and disorder in the system.

Likewise, when the same questions are asked about the concept of the State, an immense wealth of complex, endogenous, and exogenous interactions that adapt and evolve asymmetrically in the international space/time will emerge.

Therefore, we opted for a paradigm that relies on multiple scholarly views for its cognitive acquisition processes, in an attempt to meet the requirements of the current world view that we are now beginning to glimpse.

## **2. Methodological considerations**

The epistemological vision that guided the present research having been introduced, we will now briefly describe the method used to approach the problem, as well as where (and how) we searched for answers.

This qualitative study aims to interpret and understand *power*, its object of research, with the ultimate goal of explaining it as a prominent phenomenon in Human Sciences and Applied Social Sciences. With that goal in mind, the work mainly consisted of reviewing the literature to identify different perspectives on the topic, which would later be interpreted and understood according to a specific context (Quezada, 1997).

According to Erickson (1976), the advantage of qualitative research lies in how it gives functional relevance to subjective key issues, situating them (and interrelating them) within a broad and abstract social context. There is no single uncontested reality, but only the reality that is described in the course of the research, according to the author's own subjective views and experience. Therefore, the ideas presented here are not singular and irrefutable premises, but only aim to broaden the scope of the discussions on *power*.

Based on the (endogenous and exogenous) dynamics that govern States, thus their effective capacity for action, the concept of *power* emerges as the focal point of the analysis and is the starting point for the definition of the research problem, which is the guiding line of the later stages of the research.

Its complexity is clear, since there is a wide range of perceptions about its nature, assumptions, and interactions. It is a fluid, dynamic phenomenon that raises the following questions: What is *power*? How is it exercised? On what is it based?

In light of this problem, the general goal of this research is to carry out a comparative study of the different views on the object of research. An important methodological question arises at this point: considering the vast array of theories and the many authors who investigated the phenomenon of *power*, which ones should be brought into this fictitious discussion?

First, from among those authors who spoke about *power*, we selected the universe of authors that Philosophy and Political Science consider classics<sup>3</sup>. Afterwards, those who held opposing views were picked to broaden the discussion. This led to the choice of the Max Weber and Hannah Arendt's rival currents of thought, both of which are firmly established and dominate their respective theoretical fields.

The first author aligns himself with Hobbes's pessimism on the basis of "the war of all against all" motto (Hobbes, 1974), which associates power with violence. The latter author, on the other hand, frames her theory within the Kantian optimism of "perpetual peace" in considering that human beings are capable not only of acting but also of working together to "generate" power from consensus.

Foucault closes the list of chosen authors, adding a third dimension to the study. It was believed that a third research "axis" would enrich the discussion, since the binary linearity of opposing ideas would be replaced by a three-dimensional system that would enable a wider range of comparisons and analyses. The French author was included, among other reasons, because of his unique and holistic perspective on the object of research, which is far removed from the traditional association *power* x State (public).

Concerning the selection of works, none of the authors presented their concept of *power* (or exhausted the question) in a specific book. On the contrary, the topic surfaces, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, throughout their vast scientific contributions. Thus, this review highlighted the main aspects of their theories, taken from several publications, without focusing on a specific work.

Finally, a research design was adopted to meet the following specific objectives: (i) to present the main characteristics of the Weberian concept of *power*; (ii) to present the main characteristics of the Arendtian concept of *power*; (iii) to present the main characteristics of Foucauldian concept of *power*; (iv) to analyse and compare the three theories, noting their convergences and divergences.

### 3. Power

#### 3.1 Power in Arendt

A central theme in Hannah Arendt's thinking is the study of *power*, which is generally characterised by its open criticism of Western political tradition. In Arendt, the theme mainly emerges as a result of the questions raised by the experience of totalitarianism<sup>4</sup>, through

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<sup>3</sup> In order to define what constitutes a classic, we selected authors whose work and thinking appear to be timeless and universal; authors whose thoughts may date back to the distant past but remain current and supported by solid, true premises, communicating with the present in creative and unique ways (Max, 1978; Calvino, 2007; Heidegger, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Arendt's experience with concentration camps and other arbitrary realities of Nazi Germany deeply influenced the author's thinking and work. In *Origins of totalitarianism* (1990), the author exposes the emergence of a new modality of control and domination, ruled by the logic of violence, war, and death. Totalitarian regimes change the essence of politics, since they abandon the idea of commonality, the shared actions of the people, highlighting the obvious tension between ethics and politics.

which the author seeks to grasp and understand events that could no longer be explained by mainstream traditional political thought.

According to Arendt (2006), the idea of commonality, of shared action, is crucial for the legitimate exercise of politics, and is one of the *original elements of power*. Public space, therefore, is seen as the true *locus* of participatory democracy, freedom, ethics, and transparency, because it is there that power is exercised, not as an individual quality, but through collective action.

The author argues for the right to areas of free circulation, where people can feel supported by the presence of their peers, and also by the presence of different people. In this environment, the quality of the organisation of common life becomes more valuable than the effectiveness of the State's bureaucratic mechanisms.

For the author, public space, which is the origin and support of power, should not be bureaucratic or fixed without taking into account the common good. On the contrary, it must seek the right balance between freedom and sovereignty. This shows the relevance of a flexible Nation-State, which moves away from the ideal of unlimited and sovereign action by a State who acts as the sole legitimate representative of public initiatives (Arendt, 1970; 2006).

The Greco-Roman tradition is used as a frame of reference in which *power* is linked to consent instead of violence. Both in Greek city-states and in ancient Rome, the idea of *power* was linked to obedience to collective norms. Political action in the public space was legitimised by people's support of the laws, and people, that is, the whole, consented to those laws (Arendt and Kohn, 2008).

By correlating *power* with the common good, Arendt advanced the theory that the former legitimises itself in the continued consent of all members of a community to its "foundational moment". *Power* emerges from the genesis of laws that have been consented to, which serve as a solid foundation for the survival of institutions. For the author, "the extreme form of *power* is 'All against One', the extreme form of violence is 'One against All'" (Arendt, 2001, p.35).

At this point, a deeper examination and conceptual clarification of the differences between *power*, *vigour*, *force*, *violence*, and *authority* is clearly necessary.

*Power*, as mentioned above, comes from the ability to act in concert, and is based on a legal framework established and ratified by the whole community. It can never be exercised by an individual, rather it will emanate from a group, for as long as the reasons that hold that group together endure, that is, power "is born" with the formation of a given community and "dies" with its disappearance, reinforcing the theory that it is strongly linked to a foundational moment. Saying that "someone" is in power implies that that person has been empowered by the community to act on their behalf, for as long as it suits the group, thus, it is not merely a structural phenomenon related to the possession of resources and/or capabilities.

This definition shows that there is a clear distinction between the concepts of *power* and *vigour*. In contrast with the collective essence of *power*, *vigour*, according to the author (Arendt, 2001, p.37), highlights individualism and apolitical reality, and is an attribute linked to a person

or a thing, which they may use in their relationship with other people. What usually happens is that *power* rises against the *vigour* of the stronger, against its individualistic properties.

As for *force*, it is not synonymous with violence, but rather with the energy that comes from physical and social movements, from their impact on a given society, on the *power* of that group. There is, then, a clear difference between *force* and *violence*. The latter is linked to coercion, associated with aggressive action against others, and equated with the act of “killing” and “violating.” It does not refer to coercive acts, but to those who act upon the physical body of an opponent, in the case of social relations.

Finally, the concept of *authority* is the most susceptible to erroneous interpretations due to its seemingly paradoxical bias. If, on the one hand, one cannot speak of persuasion because the term describes a hierarchical relationship, on the other, respect and consensus, not violence, are the basis of the command-obedience relationship (Arendt, 1963; 2002).

In the Arendtian model, the *power-authority* relationship plays a cyclical and crucial role for the exercise of *power*. If we remove hydrogen from water, it will lose its characteristics, ceasing to exist as water. In the same way, *power* can only be exercised through *authority*. But how does this relationship occur?

As above, *power* emerges from the group acting in concert, from collective action, from the interchange of plural and egalitarian opinions, establishing a foundational milestone that will eventually legitimise future actions. That is, the norms and rules are defined and accepted at the initial moment of agreement, and it is through them that authority is recognised and exercised.

On this point, Lafer (2002, p.24) states: “The principle (beginning) of joint action establishes the principles (precepts) that inspire the deeds and events in future actions.” Arendt (1981, pp. 212-213) proposes that *power* can be considered a “fleeting moment”, which alone does not guarantee the continuity of the political community. It is *authority* that leads to the act of obedience being extended over time and to respect for the pre-established norms, hence it is *power* institutionalised (Arendt, 2002).

In short, Arendt’s conceptual construction of *power* attempts to refute the link between *power* x *violence* established by traditional political thinking, offering in its place the *power* x *consensus* relationship: “power and violence are opposites; where one rules absolutely, the other is absent” (Arendt, 2001, p.44). The substitution of *power* for *violence* may lead to victory, but the cost will be high, and it will be “paid” both loser and victor in terms of the latter’s own power (Arendt, 1970). Arendtian *power* is thus related to legitimacy, authority, potency, and the constitution of politics, which originates in the public space.

### 3.2 Power in Weber

Max Weber developed one of the most widely recognised theories about *power*, in which he highlights its multidimensional nature. As a political theorist who represented the classical tradition, Weber understood *power* as a relationship between command and obedience, as

a strategic action by an agent, who seeks to employ, with maximum efficiency, the means available to achieve the desired end: to enforce their will and intentions.

There is, then, a process peculiar to Weberian thought, in which a given group, originally formed around tradition and subjective feelings (affective or traditional), becomes an organism ruled by the compensatory calculation of actions and by rational objectivity.

Rationalisation and strategic calculation as a means of imposing the will of A on B, that is, to exercise *power* over B, lead to a central concept in Weber's theory: DOMINATION, which is the probability that certain commands will be obeyed by a group of people. Thus, *domination* leads to *power*, manifesting itself in different ways: both by the success of those who are able to make their interests triumph despite resistance; and by their chance of finding others willing to obey what is imposed on them (Weber, 1978).

In Weber (1983), the process of rationalisation leads to a strong State, sovereign in its actions, exercising *power*, which is materialised in *domination*. For that purpose, it relies on robust bureaucratic structures, marked by a solid legal, administrative, and military organisation, and by the monopoly of *power* over those born in a given community, or those who live at the borders of its territory.

The consolidation of state interests — both domestically and abroad — would therefore always take place through violence and conflict. *Force* would be the basis on which the State is maintained, and without it, social structures would be lost to “anarchy.” Although violence is not the only instrument available to the State, it is specific to it, it is its “monopoly”, and it is *through violence*, that *power* is effective within the boundaries of a given space. In Weber, *violence* is “legitimate”, and that legitimacy is not merely an assumption, rather a “belief” of all those who submit to the authority of the Modern State (Weber, 1979).

The central element of Weberian *power* is therefore characterised by the combination of enforced will with resistance, creating conflict. Overcoming resistance provides empirical evidence of actual *power*, which is semantically equivalent (and complementary) to the concept of *conflict*. On this matter, Weber (1978, p. 31) states that “A social relationship will be referred to as ‘conflict’ (Kampf) insofar as action is oriented intentionally to carrying out the actor's own will against the resistance of the other party or parties.” It is through *conflict* that *power* becomes effective, which highlights its relational nature.

One must remember that *conflict* can be peaceful, and not involve the manifestation of any kind of actual physical violence. Conflict can indeed lead to violence, but the two are not necessarily linked. Thus, what characterises *conflict*, that is, the exercise of *power*, is not the means used, but its immanent nature. Traditional political theorists<sup>5</sup> corroborate Weber's thinking, arguing that most *power* relations are based on the anticipation by B of possible negative actions enforced on them, if they oppose the interests and the will of A<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Such as Bachrach and Baratz (1962; 1963) and Dahl (1957).

<sup>6</sup> This refers to Robert Dahl's definition (1957, pp. 202-203): “A has *power* over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.” For the authors, a central element of *power* relationships is calculation, which generates expectations on which actors base their actions.

Another important aspect in the study of *power* in Max Weber is his multidimensional approach. For the author, *power* can be seen as a force that establishes relationships and alliances with other historical forces and values, in an ongoing process, thus creating the multi-spectral conflict present in contemporary society (Weber, 1979).

In his theory of social spheres, the author identifies six different domains (social spheres), which he considers the most rational forms of reality. They are: religion, eroticism, economics, politics, aesthetics, and scientific knowledge.

Each sphere has its own rules, values, and cultural logic, which it uses to shape its reality. If they remained separate, the social result would be normality, and divergences would be rare. However, in practice, although they are autonomous, these domains are not independent but interact with one another, usually in a conflicting manner.

For example, religion and scientific knowledge may clash, as can politics and economics; or eroticism and religion. While violence and *power* circulate within the political sphere, the sphere of religion rejects them, since fraternity and love of one's neighbour are imposed as absolute values.

The attempt to harmonise incongruous spheres and values leads to conflict, which is expressed through tensions between social groups and historical forces, or even through dilemmas that individuals must face. The multidimensionality of the configuration of *power* and the ever-present condition of hostility is evident.

For Weber (1979), the advent of modernity widened the conflict intrinsic to the dynamics of social life. Regardless of individual actions and convictions, conflict and guilt are ever-present.

In practice, the author compares the rationality of the actions of modern politicians with the fraternity advocated in the "Sermon on the Mount." While Christ says to offer one cheek after the other has been struck, and to "share bread" and individual possessions with one's neighbour, political leaders, on the other hand, resort to military force in response to threats against their resources and people.

From Weber's perspective, *power* emerges from the conflict intrinsic to the very dynamics of social life. Men, that is, humanity as a whole, act according to their own interests rather than ideals. In politics, the "ethics of responsibility" wins over the "ethics of conviction," making conflict inevitable. *Conflict*, followed by *domination*, closes the circle on the full and effective exercise of power.

### 3.3 Power in Foucault

In his criticism of modern political theory, the French philosopher Michel Foucault offers a different analysis of the phenomenon of *power*, to which he attributed a more comprehensive and complex nature, extending the theoretical boundaries and discussions on the topic.

Rather than focusing on the fact that some individuals (or groups) possess a *power* that others lack, one should focus on the tools, strategies, and techniques that influence the

phenomenon of submission in contemporary societies. He abandoned belief in the *balance of power* and moved away from the cult of individual autonomy, focusing on the mechanisms that influence the regulation of bodies, conduct, and life (Foucault, 2003; 2010; 2013).

Despite the author's methodological and thematic variety, *power* in Foucault can be analysed under a thread of continuity that can be described as the *principle of the ubiquity of power*. This is a Universalist view that, among other things, points to a striking feature of the construct: relational dynamism.

*Power* is not exercised directly — or immediately — on others, but acts upon their actions, only manifesting after a kinetic process has been triggered. Therefore, we should not speak of *power*, but of *power relationships*, which do not stem from a focal point, the centre, but from a tangled web of ever-changing forces. For the French philosopher, "*power is everywhere*", not because it encompasses everything, but because it comes from "*everywhere*" (Foucault, 1998, p.93; 1982; 2013).

*Power* in Foucault overcomes spatial and temporal boundaries, and can be considered a fundamental principle of social life. For the author, humanity is not progressing towards a rule of law that will eventually replace warfare. On the contrary, it establishes a system of rules based on conflict, moving from "*domination to domination*" (Foucault, 1977, p.151).

Another aspect of the "*power equation*", conflict, is considered by the author to be the "*touchstone*" of social and political interactions in the history of humanity. The distinction between *conflict* and *violence* must be stressed. The first refers to the clash between antagonistic forces or interests, and exists in the field of abstraction. On the other hand, the latter points to real and effective action against a body or object, to bend it, to force it, or to destroy it. For Foucault, full-blown *violence* annuls *conflict*, extinguishing the exercise of *power*.

To better understand the phenomenon of conflict and its role in power relationships, the author proposes the study of *resistance*. It is *necessary* to recognise (fully and continuously) the capacity for action (and reaction) of those over whom *power* is exercised, and the awareness that once that relationship is initiated, *the potential outcomes are numerous and random*.

*Power* is exercised only on free individuals or groups. At the heart of *power* relationships, given the innumerable and complex possibilities of all possible combinations of behaviour, there is a degree of insubordination and obstinacy, motivated by the principles of freedom.

The crucial problem of the study of *power*, therefore, does not lie in voluntary servitude, but in the permanent (and paradoxical) conflict in which the reluctant and uncompromising will of freedom rises up against an established *power relationship*. This relationship would not exist without insubordination, without attempts to escape the influence of that *power* and even, perhaps, to "turn the tables."

By highlighting the importance of conflict to the "DNA" of *power*, Foucault does not, however, exclude consensus. Ultimately, both will be an instrument (cause) and a result

(consequence), confirming the dynamic and complex essence of *power*, which is renewed and adapted regardless of each of these factors.

It is apparent that *power relationships* are intersectional, and that they are not limited to a specific class, or to a specific social group, country, or government. *Resistance* to the effects of *power* — the conflict intrinsic to the process — will always be omnidirectional (Foucault, 1982).

The author goes on to state that *power* incites, seduces, and hinders, always acting kinetically. Exercising it is to carry out a process to obtain specific results, involving not only official political structures but a broad range of potential factors. The one will try to impose limits on the actions of the other, thus, it is not simply a zero-sum game.

From this perspective, it can be said that the exercise of *power* also corresponds to a strategic calculation, always bearing in mind the effectiveness of the instruments used in relation to the possible costs. It is not a *fait accompli*, it is not even an institutional right, but it operates through dynamic processes that can be adapted to each specific situation.

In conclusion, *power* in Foucault reaches its maximum amplitude of action. According to the author, “it seems [...] power is ‘always already there, that one is never ‘outside’ it” (Foucault, 1980, p.141).

It is not a static, isolated thing, but a complex set of relationships, deeply rooted in the social nexus, traversing the state until it meets individual differences and their multiple interests and reactions. Therefore, those relationships must be understood through the lens of the historical evolution of a given society, fully aware of the origins of its strength or weakness.

#### 4. Discussion of the theory

As the above analysis showed, the discussion about the *power* construct unveils multiple angles of interpretation and analysis. From each of the authors, we extracted different theoretical and conceptual models that allow us to understand the phenomenon in the light of complexity.

Arendt, Weber, and Foucault’s analyses each have clear points of convergence and divergence, confirming the idea of *power* as a non-linear combination of factors and subfactors that shape one another in the attempt to find a balance in an environment of uncertainty and situational volatility. But after all, who holds *power*? What is its origin and source?

In Arendt, “consensus” is viewed as the main “epicentre” of *power*. Therefore, it is the GROUP (of individuals, entities, bodies, States, etc.) who effectively holds it.

Domestically, the support of the “people” evidences their great capacity to generate *power*, even in totalitarian countries. The masses, when brought together by discontent against the *status quo*, forge their own socio-political dynamics and, through waves of protest and revolt, are able to influence and change traditional scenarios.

Socio-economic issues such as unemployment, quality of life, public safety, human rights, among others, oppose the traditional aspects of “force” and “vigour”, whether military,

economic, or political, even if they do so indirectly. According to the Arendtian view, the military apparatus and the political repression of totalitarian regimes are not capable of perpetually and legitimately shaping *power* like collective consensus can.

At the international level, Arendt's thinking about "consensus", which shapes and gives legitimacy to the *power* of a State, is reinforced by the theory of "structural network *power*" (Kim, 2010). According to the latter author, this is a new focus of the discussions on the construction of *power*, one which is directly related to the capacity of a given State to gain prominence in the international structure because of its connections and the networks to which it belongs.

Countries with greater centrality, that is, those with the largest number of connections in the international system would essentially be the most powerful, either because they are able to influence other agents or because they control a greater amount of the resources available in the network. For example, countries that participate more in multilateral organisations and have a high attraction capacity (soft power) would therefore be the ones with greater centrality, those who hold the most *power*.

In Weber, instead of the Arendtian "consensus", power is demonstrated by the *domination* exercised in an environment of conflict. The "source of *power*" is not collective but singular and unidirectional, and does not serve the interests of the group but only the will and rational calculations of its actor.

Both in the domestic and international spheres, strategic rationality leads to an accumulation of capabilities and to the structural (re)ordering required to set up the appropriate means of coercion. How to explain the intervention (military or otherwise) of certain States, or groups of States, in the internal affairs of third parties? Why do some actors opt for the demonstration or imposition of force instead of cooperation and dialogue? How to understand the censorship and domestic controls enforced by certain governments? What are the interests of certain States in strategically located areas or areas rich in raw materials?

Endogenously, the "power of the people" will be limited by the bureaucratic rigour of the strong State. Exogenously, the accumulation of force *stricto sensu*, that is, the *vigour* of the agent will prevail. The Weberian view of power thus explicitly reveals the thinking of the *French Raison d'État*<sup>7</sup>, in which the ends justify the means, thus, accumulating/developing the capabilities required for A's interests to prevail in the conflict with B is of the utmost importance.

Whereas Arendt, inspired by the Kantian *categorical imperative*<sup>8</sup>, bases her thinking on the freedom and ethics of the public space, Weberian thinking is structured according to

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<sup>7</sup> Reason of the State: a concept created by Richelieu, which replaced the moral and universal values of the Middle Ages, according to which any means are valid to promote the welfare of the State (Bobbio, 1986; Kissinger 1994; Blanchard, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> The theory developed by Emmanuel Kant, according to which there is a general and unique moral obligation which explains and rules all others. It is an unconditional duty or obligation, regardless of one's personal will or desires (Kant, 1997).

Hobbes' pessimistic views, which see every man as enemy to every man, constantly pushing through conflict and chaos to survive and gain recognition in the *natural world*.

In Weber, the authority of A over B (or C, or D, or both, etc.), that is, the legitimation of A's *power*, does not emerge from an agreement between the parties (Arendtian vision), but from the ability to coerce through the means available to them, and to assert their interests according to a strategic and rational analysis.

On the other hand, Foucault highlights the omnipresent nature of *power*. Its genesis is not merely the collective consensus, nor the individual capabilities of A or B. It is in everything, emerging as a result of a dynamic and random process of interaction of various forces and wills. In the French author's theory, the analysed construct reaches its maximum relational bias.

In comparison to the concepts of modern physics, *power*, according to Foucault, roughly corresponds to the theories about energy. According to Einstein's Theory of Relativity, an immobile body which is not subjected to any force already has intrinsic energy simply because it has mass. The energy-mass ratio changes as the velocity changes, and according to the famous formula<sup>9</sup>  $E = MC^2$  (Einstein and Minkowski, 1983), the higher the velocity, the greater the energy released.

Each actor has their own characteristics and abilities, a kind of "potential" or latent *power* that will be made explicit as the dynamics between agents progress. Like energy, *power* is present in all things, and each response to a given action leads to a new scenario, therefore, new factors, subfactors, and variables are made explicit, interacting with one another and with the environment in a cyclical fashion, which is extremely susceptible to variations. In Foucault, *potential power* is transformed into *effective power* as the relationships of a given system expand.

This dynamism results in a striking feature of *power* relationships as Foucault views them: they are highly unpredictable. This is a complex phenomenon in which an intricate network of agents reacts in different ways to various interactive stimuli, developing uncertain and unstable behaviours within a specific space-time frame. In Foucault, *power* relationships occur in all directions. State, society, the economy, politics, the military, culture, the environment, etc., everything is related in an adaptive, endless sequence of resultant forces.

If unpredictability is absolute in Foucault, it is relative in Arendt and Weber. If, on the one hand, the way the variables interact to obtain the Arendtian consensus or the Weberian conflict/domination occurs in an uncertain and random fashion, on the other, both (consensus and conflict/domination) are essential assumptions for the exercise of *power* in their respective theories, which makes them somewhat predictable.

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<sup>9</sup> In 1905, Einstein published his article on Special Relativity Theory, in which he set down the famous equation,  $E = mc^2$ , where E is relativistic energy, M is mass, and C is the speed of light (Einstein, A. and Minkowski, 1983. *O Princípio da Relatividade*. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian).

Finally, Foucault's thinking meets Arendt's in their criticism of the sole and supreme action of the State and the rigid limits of the Weberian state bureaucracy. Both reinforce the current framework of depletion of the established model of the Nation-State, arguing for the exercise of *power* through areas of free-circulation, in a more flexible version of the traditional concept of sovereignty.

Today, transnational phenomena (terrorism, organised crime, displaced persons and refugees, the environment, and the media) challenge the classical notion of borders and point to a multiplicity of actors who are capable of influencing the analysis of State *power* in complex ways.

In Foucault, the "result" of power relationships is, in practice, a kind of synthesis of the vision of each of the authors under discussion. For example, it will depend on the public perception of a given political unit (or internationally) because it is based on consensus, and thus is a collective phenomenon. This excludes the mere ownership of wealth or goods from the conception of *power* because those things have no influence on the exercise of *power* without the common will of society.

However, if, on the one hand, *power* is supported by consensus, it is also true that conflict and divergent views may prevail. At that point, the value of military and economic capabilities increases since one of the conflicting parties may yield (or submit to) the interests of the more "powerful" party through imposition or deterrence.

The views of the three authors analysed, in spite of natural divergences that are the result of distinct and anachronistic personal experiences, have a common line of thinking, from which we extracted the following premises: *power*, *stricto* or *lato sensu*, is undoubtedly a complex phenomenon; its full exercise implies the combination of will and the freedom to act; it is a relational phenomenon; and, finally, it will always include the State in its composition and/or exercise.

## **Final reflections**

*Power* is one of the essential elements of Politics. It is the catalyst for countless actions and reactions, ultimately shaping both the national and the international system, and it is always marked by unpredictability and chaos. Its sources are numerous, and its configuration, which is characterised by spontaneous adaptability, is extremely susceptible to the slightest variations in the environment.

It is a diffuse, complex, and often controversial concept, one which has had different nuances throughout the course of History. Understanding it implies knowing the intricate dynamics of social relationships that ultimately shape the collective (of people, of States, etc.). Therefore, its polysemy requires a paradigm shift wherein specific theories are abandoned in favour of a more holistic analysis of the construct.

This line of thinking, as well as the importance of clarifying the concept of *power* in the

context of Political and Military Science, led to the present study, which aimed to broaden the discussion about the topic in an attempt to answer the following questions: What is *power*? Who holds it? By what means is it exercised? To do so, we analysed and compared the ideas of Max Weber, Hanna Arendt, and Michel Foucault, with complexity as our epistemological basis.

In Arendt, consensus emerges as the key element inasmuch as it is responsible for the genesis of authority and crucial to the establishment of *power* and its continuity over time. The author argues that the public space plays a prominent role as the only true foundational *locus* of *power*. Thus, the principle of joint action overcomes individual vigour, and the attraction capacity of a given actor outweighs that of coercion.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Weber emphasises the link between power, conflict, and coercion. Here, unlike Arendt's Kantian idealism, the singular triumphs over the plural, with rationalisation and strategic calculation playing a prominent role in the "salvation" of the individual in the midst of a belligerent environment. The conflict intrinsic to the very nature of (endogenous or exogenous) systems is the means by which *power* will reveal itself in full, and reinforcing the structural capabilities required to impose one's will is of the utmost importance.

Foucault advances a third line of thinking, which constitutes a more comprehensive vision according to which *power* has an *omnipresent* and dynamic nature. According to the author, it is a relational element, one which does not exist per se, but rather as a result of the interaction of multiple forces in a given space-time universe. It stems from the State, but also from individuals. It resides in the public sphere, but also reacts to the private sphere. The Foucauldian view converges with Weber's by ratifying conflict and rational calculation as common elements of the multiple relationships of *power*. On the other hand, it considers that its source transcends the State's omnipotence, and that it also resides in the process of synthesis of the collective will, like in Arendt.

The theories analysed allowed us to form a clear picture of what appears to be the essence of the construct of *power*, regardless of author or current of thought. The uncertainty arising from its kineticism and its causal non-linearity make it an undoubtedly complex phenomenon whose sources and consequences will always be under constant, self-regulatory change. Therefore, freedom of action is a basic requirement for the *exercise of power*, and is to *power* what oxygen is to fire. Hence, another crucial aspect for understanding the object of this research is its relational bias, according to which *power* is made explicit through the interaction of two or more actors under a broad spectrum of intervening variables. Finally, all authors view the State as an ever-present element, either playing an indispensable role, or a subsidiary one.

As we glimpse the evolution of the political scene of the present century, a highly complex picture emerges in which old and traditional issues are aligned with new perspectives and contexts. Political and military strategists were surprised by the Russian actions in Ukraine

and Syria and concerned by the impact of the phenomenon of refugees and displaced persons across the globe, as well as by the amplification and exacerbation of ethnic and religious issues in the global environment, by the growing terrorist threat, by transnational crime, and by environmental issues that reinforce the uncertainty and insecurity of present and future contexts.

The national and international perception of this framework requires greater sensitivity on the part of the academia and the “agents of the State”, who should reassess the aspects that best represent the current composition of *power*. Thus, understanding it according to a broad vision, free from the bonds of theoretical and conceptual loyalties, is vital if we are to achieve a better grasp of the present and a less uncertain vision of the future.

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