P**roposal: Power (36,000 words)**

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**Introduction (1500 words)**

           What is power? Is power an oppressive force that people exercise over other people? In that case, how can we resist power? Or is power simply a force that enables us to do things? In that case, how can we acquire, maintain and increase power? Providing answers to these questions seems, at first sight, straightforward. However, when taking a closer look at various thinkers and thought traditions who have grappled with these questions, we encounter deep, widespread, and seemingly intractable disagreements over how the term should be understood.

       This book focuses on power as that concept is used in the humanities and social sciences more broadly and in social and political theory, philosophy, critical theory, and progressive social theory (feminism, critical philosophy of race, Marxism, and psychoanalysis) more specifically. I will give a general introduction to each paradigm and discuss two thinkers within each to give the reader a deeper understanding of how different paradigms conceptualize power and the differences between thinkers.

I will emphasize those thinkers for whom the concept of power is a central theme. I will also engage with critiques on the proposed conceptions of power for each thinker (discussing thinkers who dismissed the proposed concepts of power entirely and those who offered more constructive criticisms and highlighted oversights or weaknesses to try to improve upon the original theories). Furthermore, I will provide the reader with a literature list for further reading for each paradigm. Finally, I aim to write it in an accessible and jargon-free language. Hence, an audience with no prior exposure to the paradigms and thinkers can easily follow the complexities of theorizing power.

**Chapter One: Classic Conceptions of Power (Thomas Hobbes and Max Weber, 4500)**

This first section introduces the reader to classic conceptions of power. Specifically, I trace the disagreement between thinkers who define power as an ability or a capacity to act, that is, as a power-to do something, and thinkers who define power as getting someone else to do what you want them to do, that is, as an exercise of power-over others. In the first part of this section, I outline the conception of power that the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes developed in the 17th century. Hobbes provides us with the classic articulations of power understood as power-to have, or as he puts it in The Leviathan, power is a person's "present means…to obtain some future apparent Good" (Hobbes 1985 (1641), 150). In the second part of the section, I outline the conception of power by Max Weber, a 19th-century German Sociologist. He provides us with the classic formulation of power as getting someone else to do what you want them to do, or as Weber puts it, power is "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance" (1978, 53).

**Chapter Two: Marxist Conceptualizations of Power (Karl Marx and Louis Althusser, 4500 words)**

           This chapter outlines Marxist conceptions of power. First, I explain how the 19th Century German philosopher Karl Marx theorizes power as connected to violence in capitalist societies (1837-1867). For Marx, power, which is materialized in the state, functions as an instrument of oppression in the hands of the ruling (bourgeois) class, the owners of the means of material production (machinery, capital, labor). As such, any reforms enacted within the state (such as legal reforms) mainly serve to uphold the ruling class's power. Marx also outlines how ideology, the dominant ideas in a capitalist society, functions in tandem with the state to uphold the ruling class's power. Since the ruling class is also the owner of the means of mental production (e.g., publishing companies), the ruling ideology is in every epoch bourgeois ideology. The working classes are subjected to such ideology, declaring their exploitation natural. At the same time, he envisions the proletariat as the historical force that engages in a class struggle with the ruling class and, through (temporarily) seizing state power and a proletarian revolution, generates universal emancipation.

           The 20th Century French philosopher Louis Althusser further develops Marx's theory of the state and ideology to theorize power (1971). Like Marx, Althusser argues that reforms within capitalism (which he calls defensive class struggles) merely serve to uphold the power of the ruling class and that the working classes and their allies must engage in an offensive class struggle (which includes their temporary seizure of state power) to overthrow capitalism. However, the Repressive State Apparatus (SA) and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) work together to secure the ruling class's power over the working class. The function of the SA, composed of the government and its specialized apparatus (police, courts, prisons, and the military), is the repressive intervention in the class struggle to secure the ruling class's interests. The function of the ISAs, which are composed of the religious, educational, family, political, trade-union, communication, and cultural ISAs, is to hail subjects into being that accept their role in class society as natural (the role of the exploited, and the role of the agents of exploitation and repression). Althusser perceives, in the contradiction within the various ISAs, the possibility of the working classes to contest the ruling class's power over them.

**Chapter Three: The Power to Do Something (Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas, 4500 words)**

           This chapter engages with the 20th Century German political philosopher Hannah Arendt's conception of power (1969). Arendt critiques Marx's conception of power that links power to violence. In contrast to Marx (and Althusser), Arendt conceptualizes power as the opposite of violence. For her, power "corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert." When somebody is "in power," a certain number of people empower this person to act in their name. The moment the people's support disappears, the person's power also disappears. While power and violence are a means by which people rule over other people, power is dependent on the support of the people, while violence is not. Furthermore, violence often appears when a person in power loses the support of the people. Finally, terror (or totalitarian power) comes into being when violence has destroyed all power and remains in complete control.

           I will then turn to the late 20th Century German philosopher Jürgen Habermas' model of power, which has changed within a decade. In the original conception (1987), he theorizes power with what he calls the "discursive situation," in which people agree to non-coercive communication. Here he conceptualizes power as an opposing force, as the imposition of one's will to manipulate or coerce another, which we must avoid because it distorts the discursive situation. In his later formulation (1996), drawing on Hannah Arendt's conception of power to do something, he replaces the discursive situation with the idea of "communicative power," which is a power that allows people to agree through non-coercive communication. So, what Habermas called "power" in his original conception, he now calls "violence." He also conceptualizes communicative power as the legitimizing force behind administrative power and law.

**Chapter Four: Psychoanalytic Conceptions of Power (Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, 4500 words)**

           This chapter introduces the reader to psychoanalytic conceptions of power. I will start with the Austrian physiologist Sigmund Freud, who introduced the field of psychoanalysis in the early 20th Century. We find the concept of power in Freud's writings on two levels. First, it appears in his theorizing of two primary instincts: the love instinct (Eros) and the death instinct (Death) (1916). "Libido" refers to the manifestation of the power of Eros. The aggressive instinct is the primary representative of the death instinct. It manifests in a mutual hostility between people and our fundamental desire to rob, exploit, humiliate, cause pain, torture, and kill other people. Civilization sets up the super-ego in us to control and limit the aggressive instinct. In his discussion on group psychology, we find the second meaning of power (1921). The methods by which (fascist) mass leaders establish their power over their followers put the mental counter-forces (the super-ego) that inhibit the aggressive instinct in people out of action. As a result, the leader can now redirect the followers' aggressive instinct toward targets of hatred.

          I then turn my attention to the 20th Century French psychoanalytic philosopher Jacques Lacan. Lacan aimed at a "return to Freud's psychoanalytic concepts," which he further developed by engaging with Continental philosophy (1953-1974). Lacan locates power within the symbolic domain, which is the domain of language and signifiers (or concepts). Power is a productive force and lies in what he terms the "double function of the signifier," which implies that the signifier wields power over us because it reduces us to not more than the meaning of the signifier. At the same time, the signifier allows us to emerge or speak as a subject. Lacan differentiates the symbolic domain from the imaginary domain, the domain of the ego, where we encounter power as violence. The domain of the Real, the third domain he introduces, lies at the juncture of the symbolic and the imaginary. It tells us that we can never reach reality and that there is a hole in the symbolic order and its signifiers. Hence, the signifier cannot entirely subordinate the subject, and the possibility of envisioning a political subject who contests power emerges.

**Chapter Five: Bio-Power (Michel Foucault and Georgio Agamben, 4500 words)**

        This chapter engages with the concept of bio-power, which the French intellectual historian Michel Foucault originally developed (1977, 1978, and 1980). Foucault offers an analysis of modern (20th century) power that focuses not on the concentration of power in the hands of the sovereign or the state but on the more subtle forms of power. For him, modern power is a mobile set of force relations within a society that emerge from every social interaction and, as a result, permeates the entire social body. However, these forms of power are embodied in the state apparatus and its laws. He calls bio-power the diverse techniques that ensure the subjugation of bodies (disciplinary power) and the control of populations (bio-politics). He challenges previous conceptions of power (mainly Marxist and Freudian) for assuming that power is repressive. For him, modern power is primarily productive in that it produces subjects that are both useful for capitalism and docile so that they no longer resist power. According to Foucault (and similarly to Lacan), modern power subjects individuals, while at the same time, it creates them as subjects by subjecting them to power.

I then turn to the contemporary Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who draws on and further develops Foucault's conception of bio-power concerning totalitarian power (1998). He challenges Foucault's argument that the historical rise of bio-power marked the threshold of modernity. Instead, he argues that in modernity, bio-power, and sovereign power (the state's power and its laws) are integrated. For Agamben, Western politics is founded upon that which it excludes from politics, which is "bare life" that is simultaneously set outside the political domain but nevertheless fully implicated in it. Bare life is a life that is entirely abandoned to sovereign violence and exposed to death. Because the law banishes bare life, it has no recourse for the crimes committed against her. Yet, at the same time, it is fully implicated in the law, and the most innocent gesture can lead to her death. The paradigmatic examples of bar life are for Agamben Jews and Roma, and Sinti during the Holocaust, and refugees in contemporary times.

**Chapter Six: Poststructuralist Feminist Conceptions of Power (Amy Allen and Claudia Leeb, 4500 words)**

           The contemporary American feminist philosopher Amy Allen (2000, 2021) thinks we must theorize the complex relationships between power, subjectivation, and agency. She points out that most feminist thinkers theorize power as a "power over" (someone or something) and think about power as a form of domination. However, this leaves out other forms of power, such as "the power to" do things and the power with (which refers to solidarity) that allows feminists to transform power structures through collective social struggles. Allen differentiates between three forms of power: power over, power to, and power with. She theorizes the first two forms by engaging with Foucault and Judith Butler and the third by engaging with Arendt.

           In this Chapter, I also engage with the contemporary Austrian political theorist Claudia Leeb (2017, 2018), who introduced the idea of the moment of the limit of power (which she theorizes via the Lacanian Real and Theodor W. Adorno's notion of non-identity), which is the moment when power cannot entirely subordinate us. Leeb also introduced the concept of a feminist subject-in-outline to hold on to the idea of a "we," central to the collective feminist agency while countering the exclusionary tendencies of such collectivity. The feminist subject-in-outline defines what it stands for (the subject). However, it acknowledges that it cannot fully say what it is and what it stands for (the outline). Therefore, all those whom the collectivity did not consider in the moment of defining it can enter (or exit) the collectivity and transform what it stands for. She theorizes these theoretical concepts with reference to intersectional and decolonial theory.

**Chapter Seven: Intersectional Approaches to Power (Angela Davis and Patricia Hill Collins, 4500 words)**

          Theories of intersectionality highlight the interconnected and cross-cutting relationships between diverse power modes, including (but not limited to) sexism, racism, class oppression, and heterosexism. Intersectional feminism grew out of Black feminism. I first engage with the contemporary US American Marxist feminist philosopher Angela Davis, who outlined an intersectional analysis of race, class, and gender in US American capitalist society (1981). She examines the gendered, racialized, and class-based power over enslaved Black women. While enslaved Black women were forced, like enslaved Black men, to engage in manual labor for their white, bourgeois masters, they were also expected to perform household labor, as were all women. In addition, white men exerted power over enslaved Black women by raping them. She argues that for the women's movement to liberate all women, it must include black women, women of color, and working-class women.

          I then turn my attention to contemporary US American feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, who proposes the term "interlocking systems of oppression" in connection with the concept of intersectionality to theorize power (2002). First, interlocking systems of oppression refer to the macro-level of power, linking systems of oppression such as race, class, and gender. Here she describes the social structures that create social positions. Second, intersectionality describes micro-level processes – how each individual and group occupies a social position within interlocking systems of oppression as described by the metaphor of intersectionality. For Collins, the macro and micro-level of power together shape oppression. Her analysis outlines how structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reinforce classed, gendered, and raced power relations.

**Chapter Eight: The Coloniality of Power (Anibal Quijano and Maria Lugones, 4500 words)**

In this section, I introduce the reader to the contemporary Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, who has inspired the paradigm of decolonial theory. His core argument is that race, racialization, and racial relations are rooted in the structure of colonial capitalism and play a central role in the formation and preservation of capitalism (2000). He theorized the coloniality of power, which is the form of power that emerged with modern colonialism and which is synonymous with domination, exploitation, and conflict. Coloniality is founded on the imposition of the classification of race/ethnicity on the world population. It is at play in the material and subjective spheres and the dimensions of everyday existence at a global scale, which leads to a hierarchical racialization of the world's population. He calls social processes and practices that undo the conditions brought about by the coloniality of power decoloniality.

          I then engage with the contemporary Argentine feminist philosopher Maria Lugones, who combines the insights of intersectionality theory with Quijano's understanding of the coloniality of power and thereby introduces the field of decolonial feminism (2007, 2010). While Quijano argued that racialization is rooted in the structure of colonial capitalism, Lugones argued that gender is a colonial concept and mode of organization of relations of production and ways of knowing. She explains that conceptualizing gender as a colonial concept enables feminists to break out of the ahistorical framework of patriarchy. She links the emergence of the modern gender system to the emergence of global colonial capitalism and rethinks the coloniality of power in the context of gender relations. Lugones coins the notion of a "modern/colonial gender system," which implies an analysis of racialized, capitalist, and gender oppression. She theorizes the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender as" decolonial feminism."

**Market:**

           The book aims at an audience interested in learning more about the concept of power but has had no prior exposure to the paradigms and thinkers I discuss. It could also serve as a high school or college text in introductory courses. Available books on the concept of power are all geared towards primarily a scholarly audience. For example, Steven Luke's Power (1986) brings together the texts of various theorists of power. However, the texts are complicated and not accessible to a general audience (a few of the texts in his book I will discuss in this book, albeit in a more accessible language). As another example, Stewart Clegg's Frameworks of Power (1989) introduces the reader to conceptions of power of thinkers in the history of political thought without paying much attention to contemporary frameworks of power. Guido Pareitti's On the Concept of Power (2022) mainly discusses power as it operates within the field of Political Science and Political Theory and does not introduce the reader to the ways different thought traditions have conceptualized power as I do in this book.

**The Author:**

I am an Associate Professor in political theory at Washington State University's School of Politics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs. Most of my scholarship and teaching has centered around the concept of power. I am the author of the following books: The Politics of Repressed Guilt (2018, Edinburgh University Press), which theorizes totalitarian power; Power and Feminist Agency in Capitalism (2017, Oxford University Press), which theorizes power in capitalist societies and which has received the ASCINA (Austrian Scientists in North America) award for research excellence; Working-Class Women in Elite Academia (2004, Peter Lang Publisher), which theorizes power in academic institutions; and Die Zerstörung des Mythos von der Friedfertigen Frau (1998, Peter Lang Publisher), which theorizes power in discourses on aggression. My current book, Analyzing the Far Right (forthcoming with Columbia University Press), theorizes how far-right leaders and movements establish and maintain power over their followers. In addition, I have numerous journal articles and chapters in edited volumes that engage with and further theorize the concept of power.