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Understanding The Political Geography of Power: The Dynamics of Space, Place and Society

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Abstract. Power is an important topic of study in the social sciences. As a concept, power has an intersubjectivity meaning. This paper analyses the various concept of power from the political geography perspective, analyzing the thoughts by four prominent and influential social scientists, Anthony Giddens, Antonio Gramsci, David Beetham, and Michel Foucault. This paper aims to explain how the concept of power has contextualized within the place, space and society's narrative in modern-day of human life. Furthermore, the concepts of power presented by these four selected thinkers have massively influenced the notion and the discourse of the study of power nowadays. This paper argues that instead of having a different context and discourse as well as paradigm, the concepts of power by those thinkers have a similar way of thinking when looking the dynamics of space and place of the society as the basic principle of their analysis.

Keywords: power, structuration, legitimation, knowledge, hegemony

1. Introduction

Social sciences are a broader subject of knowledge. From Politics to Geography, the intersection between these two subjects prominently known as the subject learned by the political geographer. There is a slightly different narrative between politics and political geography in understanding power. Political geography view is more discussing the reciprocal relations among human, spaces and places and put them in one comprehensive narrative. For example, the political geographer understanding of the state cannot be separated from the geographical context (Painter, 1995). This geographical context results in a different assumption and knowledge upon a particular case study of power within a society. Meanwhile, political perspective applies a very formal way of understanding the meaning of power through the formal political process, especially how people interact with the state agents.

In the context of political geography, the important perspective of power is related to how power deal with the dynamic of its people, place, and politics. Indeed, power is always associated with the political studies if we are looking it from the point of view how people interact with government in a formal process of politics. However, the definition of power is not only in the matter of how the interaction between people and government, it is more than that; Power is what Giddens argued as a concept of intersubjectivity that needs a various point of view instead of relies on a single approach to understand them. Power is a concept that socially ubiquitous, a subjective meaning which demands interdisciplinary rather than a single approach. In this sense, political geography approach is relatively more advance and dynamics in understanding 'power' compared to another discipline. This is because its 'traditional' ability to

combine the intersection approach between politics and geography.

This paper endeavours to recap and analyze the concepts of power of these four social thinkers by looking at the similarities ideas and keywords as well as how power interacts with the people, place, and politics. This paper will be organised into six sections, introduction following by research methods. The third section explains the general concept of power, giving a brief explanation of the concept of power from each of the prominent social scientists. The fourth section provides a geographical analysis perspective of the society from two leading thinker Giddens and Gramsci. The fifth section explains how the concept of power deal with space and knowledge, especially how particular social scientists such as Beetham and Foucault discuss on these topics. The final section is a conclusion.

2. Research Method

This is a qualitative study of the concept of power. By definition, qualitative research "properly seeks answers by examining various social settings and the groups or individuals who inhabit these settings" (Lune & Berg, 2016, p. 15). We have used library research to analyze the main concept of power that argued by these four social scientists. The primary source of this research has been taken from the main books written by Gramsci, Giddens, Foucault, and Beetham. Meanwhile, the secondary sources are taken from other relevant readings that assisted us in understanding the broader concept of power. By using thematic analysis, we have drawn the concept of power based on the proposed meaning, definition, and understanding. Further, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) have explained that "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail". In this sense, we have analyzed the concept of power based on the similarity of ideas from those four thinkers.

3. Results and Discussion
3.1. Perspective on Power: a class, politics, and society

There are at least two different approaches to analyse the concept of power. The first is explaining how power is gained and shared; the other is by looking at the period of the studies. From the perspective of how power is gained and shared, there are three different views of elite theory: pluralist, elitist, and Marxist. The pluralist view consistently promotes that power is shared and divided among the elite, believing that power is fragmented. The elitist view is that power is undivided and cannot be shared; it should be robust. Marxist theorists have been classifying the class into two groups: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Pluralists also argue that political institutions such as groups, political parties and classes are needed to ensure that power is equally distributed. Bargaining and coalition are also necessary for a pluralist, and they believe that the larger classes or groups in a society tend to obtain more power. Studies of the elitist view of explaining power have been done by several theorists, such as Dahrendorf (1959), Sklair (1995) and Halperin (1997), each of whom have various distinct perspectives on analyzing the context of power and elite.

For instance, Dahrendorf (1959, p.36) studies on the raised of class capitalist in industrial society have been Inspired by Karl Marx's model of class conflict; he argued that classes change, such as the development of a "new middle class" in the industrial society. In contemporary capitalism, Sklair (2009) and Halperin (1997) focus their attention on the development of class in the capitalist era. Although Halperin is more focused on the capitalist class in modern Europe, the idea of capitalism seems to be central and essential to analyse the current elite studies in the globalized world.

Elitists believe and ensure that societies are divided into two groups: the elite group and the non-elite group. The elite or ruling

class has the capacity to influence day-to-day politics in society. Elitists also accept that there are several sources of power: for example, religion, tradition, and prosperity. In this context, for instance, the customary leader in a traditional system of society would have more authority than others. In the capitalist society, the authority of person or group are related to the idea how enormous capital belongs to a person or a group of business.

However, Marxist approaches to power are related to the 'war' against the unfair mode of production created by capitalism. For Marxists, the state should play a significant role in maintaining political stability. The Marxist view on power also presumed that the bourgeois class will always restrain the rise and interest of the working class. On the other hand, the Marxist view on power is also against the logics of power domination of the bourgeois class. The Marxist approach tends to obscure power as the concept of less domination by a superior group or class.

Power is an abstract concept, but in a fact that power exists, according to Morriss (2002, p. 37) there are at least three contexts when we talk about power "practical, moral and evaluative". The practical context means that we have to know why we do an action and how to do it. It is important to know your power; it is also important to ensure whether you can do what you want or not.

Morriss (2002, pp. 8-10) argued that power is a "near synonym" with the concept of "influence", but these terms is distinct from each other. Morriss added that power tends to relate to "being able", while influence is derived from the concept of "being affected". Logically, these two phrases contrast with one another as philosophically the term of affected and able in a power are having a different degree of coercion. According to Morriss (2002) power is a concept of "self-internalization", that means power refers "to capacity to do things whilst influence is something (and typically) does not " that means power is related "to the ability to do something or the possesion of control" (Morriss, 2002, p. 12). Furthermore, Morriss

(2002, p. 12) claims that power "is the capacity for doing something or possession of control, and there is no meaning of power comparable to influence". That means power is related to the idea of how to urge someone else do what we want to do either in a democratic or undemocratic procedure. The radicalist, for instance, believes that the concept of power is a social and political movement against the hegemony of capitalism, instead of viewing it in the context of power over personal matters.

Morriss (2002) also points out that the moral context of power refers to three things: blaming, executing, and allocating the responsibility. He adds that there are two ways to understand the moral context of power. First, you are not responsible for doing something that you have not done previously. Second the relationship between power and responsibility means you can avoid responsibility if you cannot demonstrate power. Whilst the evaluative context of power is our capacity to evaluate the social system, when we judge government decisions, when we criticize the lack of wealth redistribution within the country, and even when we condemn the community when something does not meet our expectations.

By understanding various definitions of power, we subsequently understood that power is always closely related to influence and force. For some critical theorists, such as Karl Marx, power is related to a capacity to change society and reduce one class's domination. Although the idea of changing the mode of production in society differs amongst theorists, the idea of center left of Bernstein and Giddens obviously quite distinction with the Marxian theory. For instance, in the context of globalisaton, Marxists claim that globalization is the continuation of capitalism. In contrast, the centre-leftist tends to accomodate the idea of the free market with some minor exceptions.

3.2. Giddens and Gramsci: a geographical perspective on the society

Anthony Giddens is part of the third generation of social democratic thinkers and one of the most prominent. After the end

of the Second World War and the spread of globalization, social democracy has become one of the major political ideologies in the world. Historically, Edward Bernstein was a founder of the social democracy ideal. Nowadays, the idea of social democracy has been transformed over three generations. The first generation was represented by Edward Bernstein and his big idea of Marxist revisionism; the second generation was *the godesberg program* outlined by the Social Democratic Party of Germany in 1959; and lastly there is Giddens himself.

The differences in time and context imply different ontologies and epistemologies are required for these ideologies. This becomes the basic assumption that power in the context of Giddens relies on the geographical way of thinking. If Bernstein lived in the period of the rises of capitalism and industrialization in Europe, Giddens has been living in the context and period when this ideology must be set against the rises of neoliberalism and globalization. In contrast with Giddens, who tried to find an alternative view for understanding globalization and dealing with the free market, the basic concept of the social democracy of Bernstein is his critiques of the concept of Marxism, famously known as the concept of revisionism.

Giddens (1979, p. 145) claims there are four different concepts related to power: "contradiction, conflict, power itself and domination". Inspired by while at the same time making a critique of the materialist dialectics of Karl Marx, Giddens (1979) reveals that both domination and contradiction are structural concepts: domination is the result of contradiction whilst contradiction and conflict are connective as a result; and contradiction is linked to the power via domination as the consequences of restructured resources in social interaction (Giddens, 1979).

However, Giddens' theory of power is mainly based on the concept of structuration of the society which focuses on the geographical context of history. Giddens believes that structures have a virtual existence in a time and space. Giddens applies to space and time in

order to break away and distinguish his theory on structuration from other theories such as "social development and social change". Theory of structuration of Giddens are the general theory for understanding and conceptualizing society and social development (Kaspersen, 2000, p. 51). In fact, society is constructed and developed as the basis of the nexus among individuals within a community.

Kaspersen (2000, p. 34) argues that Giddens' concept on structuration theory "takes its point of departure in the concept of agent". Giddens has claimed and pointed out that "the agent is knowledgeable". For instance, within the concept of knowledgeable, Kaspersen (2000, p. 35) has explained that to ride the bicycle, we do not need to reveal the process of the "physical and anatomical process involved", and it is a similar process to understanding English: we do not need to be a "linguist theorist" to understand every detail of the "rules of syntax".

The concept of structuration in societies requires the social system binds of time and space, although this concept depends on the types of social action and interaction that take place in society. Furthermore, a borderless society, indeed, has been delivering an opportunity for society to conduct a face-to-face interaction at the same time and space; this is what Giddens calls the time-space distanciation or the social system expansion (Kaspersen, 2000, p.53).

Furthermore, Giddens has mentioned that the theory of power as prior to subjectivity (Haugaard, 1997) means power as the implication of structuration theory, in that Giddens understands that power is not only related to and focused on the idea of having 'resources' but that power is represented in 'action'. Therefore, the existence of power in a society is a given as the result of social construction, despite the possibility of having social engineering in the power construction in a modern society. Giddens explains that power and authority are strongly complementary each other. Giddens' understanding of power relates particularly to the meaning of relations

of autonomy (Giddens, 1977, p. 145).

However, Gramsci has a slightly different point of view of looking at the meaning and context of power compared with Giddens. Hartley (1984) reveals that Gramsci's political thought was inspired and influenced by several social thinkers such as Nietzsche, Croce, and Hegel. Gramsci's thought has focused on various issues of cultural hegemony and political power. The most interesting of Gramsci's political thoughts is his idea of Western Marxism; Gramsci suggested that a new model of Marxism should be based on a synthesis of humanism and reform (Gramsci, 2000; Hartley, 1984).

According to Gramsci's understanding of power of hegemony, the main idea of hegemony is related to power, not domination by force but by consent. This means that, for him, the concept of class needs a combination of coercion and persuasion. Moreover, he added that Gramsci's concept of hegemony is mainly about relations between nations or between state agencies. Gramsci has concluded that political power should be defined as three crucial concepts, between the power and consensus or authority and hegemony.

Hartley (1984) reveals that Gramsci's political thought was inspired and influenced by several social thinkers such as Nietzsche, Croce, and Hegel. Gramsci's political thought focused on numerous issues around cultural hegemony and political power. The most interesting of Gramsci's political ideas is the concept of Western Marxism; Gramsci suggested that a new model of Marxism should be based on a synthesis of humanism and reformation.

Simon (1991) explains that the basic concept of Gramsci's thought is about hegemony; the main idea of hegemony is related to power: not a domination by force but consent. This means that the concept of class in his design needs a combination of coercion and persuasion. Moreover, he added that Gramsci's concept of hegemony is mainly about the relationship between nations or between state agencies. Gramsci concluded that political power should

be defined as two crucial concepts: between power and consensus or authority and hegemony.

The ideas of elite and class in Gramsci are identical with the idea of power-sharing in the point of view of the elitist approach: for instance, the idea of power in the view of Marx and Lenin. Simon (1991, p. 72) claimed that like his 'political mentors' such as Marx and Lenin, Gramsci's idea about power is obviously an elitist view. Gramsci has believed that power is "in the state and under an exclusive control of the capitalist class". Gramsci has also mentioned that class plays a critical role in the concept of power-sharing in society. *Thus*, class is the place where power is a concept in which the interaction between the classes is bonded by the power. In Gramsci's political thought, the class has been producing and empowering power through the logics of domination.

The central themes of power in the view of Gramsci are as follows: coercion, consent and persuasion. Each of the themes is related to the topics of domination. Gramsci has claimed that these three topics are essential for understanding the 'big' idea of hegemony. For instance, Gramsci has explained that "the class and its representatives exercise power over subordinate classes by means of a combination of coercion and persuasion." (Simon, 1991, pp. 21).

Instead of being inspired by Lenin, Gramsci's concept of hegemony is quite distinct; he reveals that hegemony is the idea of the relationship of domination by using a political and ideological leadership. In contrast, Lenin believed that hegemony was a strategy of the working class to obtain support from the majority. Moreover, there are three stages in developing a collective political action or movement in a society: establishing solidarity, having a common interest, and, the last stage, the establishment of hegemony. These three stages are important in order to create hegemony in society.

Furthermore, for this reason, instead of Lenin, the idea of the power from the point of view Gramsci is inspired by Marx. Gramsci

has explained that hegemony can also be seen as the role of the capitalist class in capturing and balancing state power, and he successfully transformed the idea of Lenin to make it more practical in the context of the daily process of the political system (for instance, the idea of power and the role of leadership in capturing state power) and put this idea forward as the primary step of hegemony.

Another important theme in understanding power from the perspective of Gramsci is the existence of power in a civil society. For Gramsci, power exists in civil society, and moreover, the state cannot be fully understood without interpreting the role of civil society. Therefore, the three 'big ideas' and the crucial ideas of Gramsci's political thought are state, power, and civil society. For Gramsci, these three concepts are related and complement each other.

In the context of geographical related to the understanding society, Gramsci explains the role of the intellectual in society. He has mentioned that intellectual plays a significant role in managing society. Basically, Gramsci's idea of power is also related to ideas of power and knowledge. Gramsci has shown that the domination of the capitalist class is due to their better understanding of knowledge rather than that of other groups. In this sense, the approach used by Gramsci, it has indirectly influenced how Foucault construct the relations between power and knowledge. The next section will explain the understanding of power from the perspective of Foucault.

3.3. Space, Knowledge, and Power: Beetham and Foucault

In the context of political geography, this is also a critical discussion to relate the concept of power with three important aspects of political geography. Those aspects are people, place and politics. The previous section has discussed much on the interaction between power and politics, especially the idea of Gramsci and Giddens. This section will focus the discussion on how power has contextualized to the people and place, this is the main idea of power argued by Beetham and Foucault.

If Giddens and Gramsci are attempting to analyze the context and discourse on power related to a dynamic contest between state and society, there is a different sort of paradigm for Foucault with genealogy as the central topic of his political thought, Foucault considers much about the dynamics of space when analyzing the context of power and knowledge (Crampton & Elden, 2007). Instead of Giddens, who reveals that power is mainly about resources and rules, Foucault's idea tends to explain the idea of power from a different perspective, claiming that power domination should be analyzed from numerous points of view especially the role of knowledge in society.

In this sense, Mills (2007, p.50) has argued that:

> "This distinction between two types of power is important in being able to assess which positions of power are negotiable and which are not. One can negotiate local status but your institutional status is not so flexible. Thus, although Foucault's questioning of the notion that one can possess or have power is a useful opposition to very fixed views of power, it nevertheless suggests that everything is up for grabs and sometimes ignores the very real institutional power that certain people do indeed work on and use, even if they do not possess it".

Newnham (2014, p. 256) has claimed that genealogy is a concept that "challenges the idea that progress is inevitable or somehow natural. Instead, genealogy examines the history of struggle between dominant and subjugated knowledge". This means genealogy is the concept of against the established domination of a group of interest to another. Although this concept is slightly similar to the Marxist idea of the working class, Foucault tends to analyze it from the point of view that power as a personal matter rather than class conflict has the most impact on the structure in society.

This idea contradicts numerous political thinkers who have based their ideas of power

through understanding it in terms of class and group contestation. Foucault's idea on power is particularly an idea about how a postmodernist does not define one single meaning when understanding the world and its circumstances; his idea of looking at power contradicts the idea of the power from the perspectives of critical theorists such as Giddens or Beetham.

Another of Foucault's ideas of power concerns the concept of discourse domination. Foucault also discusses much on his writing about the idea of governmentality and knowledge, and the most interesting of Foucault's concepts of power is his claim that power is everywhere and cannot be dominated by one group or class. The concept of governmentality familiarly used by the geographer to analyses the reciprocal relations between the state and people.

Furthermore, Foucault's idea of power also relates to the terms and meaning of knowledge; Foucault maintained the idea of power as the concept of unlimited meaning. Brass (2000, p. 306) claims that "Foucault undermined the entire basis for the traditional distinction between power and knowledge, embodied in the phrase of resistance to the unjust use of power". Therefore, Foucault's idea of power not only relates to what we understand as the power in particular in daily politics, but more than that, Foucault's idea of power is the "system of knowledge", which can be applied, studied and used even in the natural sciences. For Foucault, power exists because of knowledge, and it is distributed in society using state agencies. In order to make it concrete and operative power, it should be legalized and expanded throughout several procedures, instruments, and means (Brass, 2000, p. 306). Foucault's understanding of power is so personal, he claims about the form of power that,

> "Power applies itself to immediate; everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a

law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subject. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by conscience or self knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to (Foucault & Faubion, 2002, p. 331)".

The 'fluid' concept of power should also be exercised using the term *agonism*, this term is coming from Greek, agonism is defined as a concept in political theory that shows there are several positive aspects from conflict (Foucault & Faubion, 2002, p. 344). Foucault and Faubion (2002, p. 344) claim that analysis of power is subject to several points, concerned with "the system of differentiation, the types of objectives, instrumental modes, form of institutionalization and the degree of rationalization". However, discussing the concept of power from a social science perspective leads into a multi-interpretation insight, each of the social scientists with a similar approach to analyze the general idea and narrative of power.

Furthermore, Beetham's idea of power is unique, different to those of other authors, such as Giddens and Gramsci. The uniqueness of power from the perspective of Beetham is that power must be integrated with the concept of legitimation; thus, Beetham always connects the terms of power and legitimation, and as a concept, power needs a legitimation or vice versa. The main obsessions of Beetham regarding power are related to interpretations of several questions such as "what makes power?" and "why does it matter?" It is inherently difficult to find a consistent answer (Beetham, 1991, p. 3).

In this context, power is also cannot be separated with the influence of space and knowledge in society. The different context of space understanding may results in a different

narrative of knowledge, which is also resulted in a different meaning of power. Indeed, the Beetham understanding's on power is likely more politics rather than Foucault who believe that geography is an important part of his analysis as he claimed that "the phrase 'condition of possibility' that Foucault deploys to describe the position of geography in relation to his own work (Harvey, 2007, p.41).

It is different with Beetham even they are both in the similar root of thinking, Beetham's idea of power and legitimation has likely been a revision of the 'big' idea of legitimacy of Weber with more disscusion on political rather than sociological or geographical context. Even Beetham's concept of power and legitimation is inspired by Weber's concept of power and rationality. Still, there is a difference between them when analyzing the power in the context of politics.

Furthermore, influenced by Weber's idea of rational (authority) and traditional (custom, blood ties, etc.) power, Beetham's theories on power have focused on the idea of legitimation. In his view, the idea of power is related to legitimacy. This idea comes from the theory of power in the organizational mainstream that focuses on separation or division of labour based on authority. The question is, 'what is legitimacy?' Various answers can be demanded to this question.

Beetham (1991, p. 19) adds that to be a fully legitimate power, there are three requirements: "conformity to established rules; the justifiability of the rules by reference to shared belief; the express consent of the subordinate" (Table 1). The keywords of the concept, therefore, are conformity, belief, and consent. For instance, Beetham believes that power can be more legitimate if there are an election and equal agreement among the ordinate and subordinate members.

Beetham's basic argument for the legitimacy of power is that the power should be based on the established rules, and the established rules should fulfill three criteria: resources, activities and positions. In this sense, it is a clear argument that Beetham is also considering the context of place and space as part of his analysis. Furthermore, in the Beetham's perspective, the rules are given for the "property, position or social function", by definition "rules form the basic component of social life" (Beetham, 1991, pp. 64-65). In this general sense depends upon certain preconditions: the presence of personal capacities or power; such as health, strength, knowledge and skill; the possession of material resources; and space or scope, in the sense of freedom from control, obstruction or subservience to the puposes of others. Therefore, power and freedom are closely related, but not identical, concepts.

Beetham (1991) also claims that there are two sources of rules: "first is external to the society such as divine command, natural law and scientific doctrine and internal such as tradition (e.g., elders/cultural leader) and the concept of representatives in a modern democratic society". In addition, he also mentions that the substance of rules is obviously the principle of differentiation between dominant and subordinate and the common interest that complements the ordinate and subordinate (Beetham, 1991, p.72)

Table 1. Beetham's Three Characteristics of Legitimacy.

Criteria of Legitimacy	Form of Non-legitimate Power
Conformity to rules (legal validity)	Illegitimacy (breach of rules)
Justifiability of rules in terms of shared belief	Legitimacy deficit (discrepancy between rules and supporting beliefs, absence of shared beliefs)
Legitimation through expressed consent	Delegitimation (withdrawal of consent)

Source: (Beetham, 1991, p.20)

4. Conclusion

This paper has endeavoured to make an advanced analysis of how different contexts of place and space, as well as paradigms of the concept of power, could be better understood by using a geographical approach. This paper has, therefore, attempted to produce a new narrative in understanding the concept of power and scraps the limitations of social science approaches, which tends to limit their perspectives.

Indeed, the concepts of power presented by each of the social scientists, as discussed above, have a different notion and point of view, especially about how the levels of knowledge, experience, and context of space and place have influenced those social thinkers. For example, the context of Gramsci delivering his idea of power is different than for Giddens. Gramsci was living in an era where socialism is still becoming an important key of social construction, whereas Giddens is living in a situation where neoliberalism and open society, as well as the impact of industry and environmental damage, are becoming the main issues for the world. As a result, as we can see, Gramsci is looking at the power concept using a hard power approach; the central issue of Gramsci's power is related to the undeniable relationship and contest between the state and society.

Further, Foucault defines power using a more geographical approach, knowledge is an important aspect to understand his concept of power. Foucault's genealogy is more a personal matter than the ideas of power of Gramsci and Beetham, which tend to understand power as the medium of contest and conflict between the state and society, especially in Gramsci's ideas. In this sense, we could claim that the idea of power offered by Giddens and Foucault is more considered the role of place and space as well as geographical context compared to the concept of power by Beetham and Gramsci.

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