

POWER ANALYZED THROUGH THE ECONOMY: A PRIMATE PERSPECTIVE

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This study sought to use primate economies and power to explore the answer to Foucault's question: "can the analysis of power, or the analysis of powers, be in one way or another deduced from the economy?" (13). The information regarding primates and their power dynamics was mainly gathered from Willhoite's *Primates and Political Authority: A Biobehavioural Perspective* which reviews several primatology studies focused on dominance in primate societies. A definitive answer to Foucault's question was beyond the scope of this paper; however, this study sought to utilize primate economies and power to clarify whether Foucault's conceptualization of historical economics-based theories of power, namely the juridical and Marxist conceptions of power, were an all-encompassing way to analyze power. The juridical conception figures power as a commodity that is exchanged amongst economic actors (Foucault 13). The Marxist conception of power sees power as a mechanism which maintains production relations and perpetuates class domination (Foucault 14). I argue that the analysis of primate power cannot be exclusively deduced from the primate economy. More specifically, I argue that primate power cannot be exclusively seen as having a relationship of "functional subordination" with the economy as the Marxist theory of power suggests, nor can power be characterized simply as a type of economy in and of itself as the juridical theory of power suggests (Foucault 14). I argue instead that power can be characterized in both aforementioned ways, however it can also be analyzed through the war-repression schema, as being self-serving, or figured as acting to serve reproductive fitness and other biologically based agendas. As such, primate power must also be analyzed in non-economical ways

to achieve a holistic understanding of primate power. Primate power functions in a way that serves biological agendas and primate power itself does not align with the juridical or Marxist conceptions of power as these relationships do not deal with commodities nor are they furthering productive forces or production relations in the most literal sense of the economy. In the context of this study, primate economies are understood as being the building blocks from which human economies have evolved. Addressi and colleagues' *Are the roots of human economic systems shared with non-human primates?* asserts that non-human primates exhibit a simplistic form of human economies, thus substantiating the connection between primate and human economies assumed throughout this paper (10).

Human economies and power dynamics are quite complicated due to humans' unique cognitive abilities, therefore, applying Foucault's conceptions of economic power analysis to the human context is useful to our overall understanding of the interactions between power and the economy, but may be too difficult to implement properly, at least within the scope of this paper (Addressi et al. 1). The use of primatology in this study attempts to make the analysis of power and the economy more tangible by providing a simpler economy and power structure to think Foucault's concepts to, while also allowing for the tentative extrapolation and application of conclusions to the human context. For the purpose of this paper, I will use the term primate to refer only to non-human primates.

For the remainder of the analysis to be precise, it is crucial to carefully consider what Foucault sees as an economy and how this applies to the primate context. In reference to the juridical and Marxist conceptions of power, Foucault says, "their common feature is what I will call 'economism' in the theory of power" (13).

From this statement I infer that both theories of power contain part of Foucault's definition of the economy within them and can thus be teased out to form an explicit definition of a primate economy. In the juridical conception of power, the commodity is the focus. Specifically, this is a commodity that can be possessed in a way in which it can be "transferred or alienated, either completely or partly" (Foucault 13). Therefore, a commodity that can be possessed and exchanged is a necessary part of the economy as perceived by Foucault.

In the Marxist conception of power, the economy is said to be comprised of relations of production and productive forces. Marx and Engels define a productive force as being everything that goes into producing commodities, including labour, instruments of production, and raw materials (7). Relations of production are social relationships which must be entered into in order to continue production (Marx and Engels 5). Synthesizing the parts, the economy, as figured by Foucault, is based on the commodity which is made possible by productive forces and relations of production that alter the commodity through labour, entered back into the economy, and exchanged. It is clear the primate economy consists of food, other commodities (such as things stolen from humans like hats, sunglasses, etcetera...), and certain productive forces such as hunting, gathering, and building simple tools for hunting. There are many examples of primates exhibiting these behaviours in the wild including the Balinese Uluwatu Temple Macaques. These macaques use gathering as a productive force to attain tourists' dropped items (commodities) and attempt to barter with tourists in order to receive a desirable food reward (another commodity) (Addressi et al. 9). In my working definition of a primate economy, neither sex nor resting places will be considered as part of the primate economy as neither of these can be characterized as a commodity nor as a productive force and thus do not align with the economy as envisioned by Foucault which demands the explicit involvement of commodities or productive forces. Sex and resting places will instead be considered to be purely biological/survival considerations.

A careful consideration of the juridical conception of power must be undertaken to clarify whether this conception of power is applicable to

the case study. An appropriate starting point to begin this consideration is Foucault's question, "is power modeled on the commodity?" (14). Foucault asserts that for power to be modeled on the commodity, it must be something which can be exchanged, in whole or in part, and it can be surrendered by those who possess it. When a power transition occurs peacefully, power acts as commodity as this power is either surrendered in death to the next of kin, or it is given to the primate next in the social order. An example of a peaceful transition of power is between female Rhesus Macaques who pass their dominance onto their offspring (Cawthon Lang). When power is modeled on the economy it must interact within its own pseudo power economy which has productive forces and relations of production, since Foucault's definition of an economy is centered around the commodity, and, in this case, power is acting as a commodity. It is important to emphasize that power can only act as a commodity when given up willingly, as Foucault's use of the word surrender suggests a choice to give up power. It is of a primate's best interest to have their relative in power, so power is surrendered willingly based on kinship. Power modeled on the commodity not only arises during peaceful transactions of power, but it also functions to maintain the peace necessary for the juridical conception of power to be applicable. For example, dominance hierarchies between male baboons "ensures stability and comparative peacefulness," providing evidence that power in the juridical sense is necessary to the maintenance of peace, and the maintenance of peace is necessary to the functioning of power as a commodity (Willhoite 1114). When primate power is modeled on the economy, this is a good indication that the primate group is at peace. In short, power modeled on the commodity is only possible in peace, but it also functions to maintain the peace itself thus constituting a cyclical relationship between peace and the juridical conception of power. When power does not change hands in an economical way, but is instead taken violently, the juridical conception of power is no longer valid, and peace breaks down. Given the aforementioned evidence, it can be concluded that the juridical conception of power is applicable to an aspect of primate power. However, what happens when power is not modeled on the economy?

Sex plays a fascinating role in this study as it is not only served by power but also plays the role of a productive force when power is acting in the juridical sense, representing an intersection between the juridical and Marxist conceptions of power. Power in the primate dominance hierarchy not only gives a primate better access to food, effectively their economy, but it also generally gives dominant male primates better access to estrous females (Willhoite 1114). In this way, power serves the biologically based agenda of reproductive fitness. In other words, the more powerful a male, the higher “probability that offspring will be fathered by the most dominant male”, thus making him more successful in the purely biological sense (Willhoite 1114). Recall that when power is acting in the juridical sense, power is surrendered willingly to the next of kin. If power allows a primate to have sex, and having more offspring increases your power and influence, then sex is acting as a productive force as it is labour which is in turn producing a commodity (more power). It is in this way that sex interacts within the pseudo power economy. Even though sex is not considered to be part of the primate economy within Foucault’s working definition of an economy, it functions within the pseudo power economy made possible by the Marxist conception of power by acting as a productive force, deepening the consideration of the juridical and the Marxist by making their intersection clear.

Foucault suggests that one way of looking at power is as “a relationship of force” or “that which represses” (15). When talking about the war-repression schema of power, Foucault says, “the pertinent opposition is ... that between the struggle and the submission” (17). The difference between the words surrender, used in the juridical, and submission, used in the war-repression schema, are important as submission indicates the use of force. Considering power in primates as being a relationship of force is troubled by primate power dynamics however, as most research shows that generally dominance hierarchies in primates exist to maintain peace and stability within the group as opposed to dominant primates existing to repress (Willhoite 1114). However, the notion of power as a force does arise during a violent turnover of power which does occasionally happen, especially

when coalitions of male primates attempt to usurp the dominant male (Willhoite 1114). Therefore, in a violent turnover of power, power no longer fits the juridical conception of power and is instead better analyzed through the war-repression schema.

Foucault asks, “is power’s ... purpose essentially to serve the economy?” (14). Primate power serves the economy in some ways, acting to perpetuate class domination as is mentioned in the Marxist conception of power. The power structure in primate groups determines how each primate within this social order will interact with their economy. More specifically, the dominant primates in the group generally have better access to desirable foods, which mainly constitute the primate economy as previously established (Willhoite 1112). In this way, the social order affects how each member interacts with their economy, therefore, power, in this way, serves the economy. Additionally, better access to foodstuffs makes for better nutrition which, in turn, allows the dominant primate to remain healthy and retain its power. In this way primate power perpetuates class domination. On the other hand, it is difficult to say if the purpose of the economy is to serve power. Certainly, the perpetuity of power within a primate power structure can be owed in part to how primates interact with their economy, but whether interaction with the primate economy is the origin of the dominance hierarchy is difficult to determine. Is the primate strong because it had preferential access to the economy and was thus able to become powerful? Or did the primate have better access to the economy and was thus better able to maintain its pre-existing power? Answering these questions for certain is beyond the scope of this paper, however, these questions are still important to consider when linking primate power to the Marxist theory of power as they help to determine whether the relationship between primate power and the primate economy is truly a relationship of one functioning as a subordinate to the other (Foucault 14). Though power does appear to perpetuate class domination and determine how primates interact with their economy, it is not power’s only purpose to serve the economy, as power also serves itself as well as other biological agendas. Therefore, the Marxist conception of power is a key portion of the analysis of power, however,

it does not suffice as the only power analysis tool.

Power in the primate dominance hierarchy also gives better access to sitting places. Desirable sitting places allow dominant primates to survey for predators and protect themselves as well as their group from potential threats showing that power also serves the biological agenda of survival (Willhoite 1115). Therefore, power not only serves the economy, but it also serves the biological agenda of survival.

The juridical and Marxist conceptions of power are certainly legitimate ways to analyze aspects of primate power. Primates treat power as a commodity when it is exchanged peacefully amongst members of a group so, in this way, power is juridical. Furthermore, dominance hierarchies not only determine how a primate interacts with their economy, but also perpetuates pre-existing relationships of domination owing to the dominant individual's better access to resources in the economy. However, the juridical and Marxist theories of power fail to provide a holistic view of primate power, and thus one cannot conclude that the analysis of power can be exclusively deduced from the economy. Instead, primate power should be analyzed through the primate economy, through its biological agendas, through the war-repression schema, and through itself. This is not an all-encompassing list of ways to analyze power by any means, as this was not the goal of this study, however, each additional power analysis tool serves to strengthen my argument that the juridical and Marxist conceptions of power are not sufficient for analyzing primate power and that additional ways of conceptualizing power must be utilized to fully grasp the notion of primate power.

At the beginning of this paper, it was established that, due to the evolutionary link between humans and primates, the conclusions made about primate power could perhaps be extrapolated to humans. Therefore, I suggest, based on the results of this analysis, that it is not sufficient to analyze human power exclusively through the human economy. Additionally, human power dynamics are more complex than primates', giving further evidence that it is probable that the juridical and Marxist alone are not sufficient to properly analyze human power, since they were unable to provide sufficient analysis for the much simpler concept of primate power.

However, I would like to raise some

complications which not only trouble this extrapolation, but also the general field of primatology. First, it is important to note that the main article used in pursuit of my argument focused mainly on Savanna-dwelling Baboons, Chimpanzees, Gorillas, and Rhesus Macaques (Willhoite 1113). Broad generalizations about primates can be made in this instance; however, they will not necessarily be accurate to every species. For example, I noted that dominant males serve to maintain stability and peace within the group, however this is not the function of the dominant silverback Gorilla as there is much less intragroup violence in this species (Willhoite 1115). Therefore, when broadly generalizing about primate power and their economy, one must be critical as to how accurate these generalizations are to the species at hand. Additionally, studies of primates in the wild are limited and primatologists recognize the "incontrovertible gap between experiments and the field", contributing to potentially less accurate conclusions made about primates in primatological studies (Bourgeois-Gironde et al. 7). Furthermore, though humans are related to primates evolutionarily (humans are specifically closest in ancestry to Chimpanzees), we are not the same and thus extrapolations of these conclusions must be done cautiously. Addressi and colleagues express that primates show similar economic tendencies to humans, however these are described as building blocks of human economic behaviour indicating simplicity (2). When extrapolating conclusions based on primates to humans, the question becomes: do we remain close enough to our primate relatives for these conclusions to be relevant? Willhoite and Addressi colleagues' conclusions suggest that indeed extant primates do hold similarities to humans' power-based and economics-based behaviours, however to what extent is not altogether clear.

Despite these complications, the study of primatology is still very important not only to better understand the wildlife around us, but also so we can ascertain more information about our evolutionary past. Willhoite asserts that, "to understand human societies, one needs to discover lineaments of them in subhuman primate societies" (1111). Therefore, this study remains important to the analysis of primate powers and what these can potentially tell us about human power.

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