

GRAMSCI'S THEORY OF HEGEMONY

Gramsci compares Machiavelli's famous metaphor of a centaur – half man, half beast – with the concept of power as a combination of coercion and consent (Cox 1983). Doing this, Gramsci differs from Marxism which primarily focuses on the coercive practices and capabilities of the state to exploit the proletariat. Gramsci argues that a social class emerges as hegemonic not only by coercing others but rather by establishing consent among subordinate classes.

In order to understand Gramsci and the concept of hegemony, one has to look briefly at the work of Karl Marx. Marxism viewed everything in life as determined by capital. (Williams, R. 1977) The flow of money affects our relations with other people and the world surrounding us. Marx stated that everything around us, our activities and way of life is determined by economic content.

The class struggle was an important part of Marxism. Marxism stated that society can only be understood in terms of a system where the dominant ideas are formulated by the ruling class to secure its control over the working class. (Williams, R. 1977) Due to exploitation, the working class will eventually try and change this situation through revolution producing its own ideas as well as its own industrial and political organization.

Marx's work is highly influenced by economic reasoning. He divides this economic reasoning into two levels, being the base and superstructure. The base is composed by the material production, money, objects, the relations of production and the stage of development of productive forces. (Williams, R. 1977) The superstructure is where we find the political and ideological institutions, our social relations, set of ideas; our cultures, hopes, dreams and spirit. (Williams, R. 1977) Both the base and superstructure are shaped by capital.

While one could say that Marx was primarily concerned with the base and economic issues, Gramsci's work seeks to focus on the superstructure and ideologies. For Gramsci, the class

struggle must always involve ideas and ideologies. (Ransome, P. 1992) Gramsci took the superstructure a step further when he divided it into institutions that were coercive and those that were not. The coercive ones, were basically the public institutions such as the government, police, armed forces and the legal system which he regarded as the state or political society and the non-coercive ones were the others such as the churches, the schools, trade unions, political parties, cultural associations, clubs and family, which he regarded as civil society. (Boggs, C. 1976) So for Gramsci, society was made up of the relations of production as well as the state or political society and civil society.

Here, Gramsci introduced a new concept which he called hegemony. Hegemony is a set of ideas by means of which dominant groups strive to secure the consent of subordinate groups to their leadership. (Ransome, P. 1992) It occurs when dominant classes in society maintain their dominance persuading the other classes of society to accept their moral, political and cultural values. This means that the majority in a population give consent to policies and ideologies implemented by those in power.

Gramsci, particularly in his later work encompassed in the Prison Notebooks (written during the late 1920s and early 1930s while incarcerated in a Fascist prison), develops a complex and variable usage of the term; roughly speaking, Gramsci's "hegemony" refers to a process of moral and intellectual leadership through which dominated or subordinate classes of post-1870 industrial Western European nations consent to their own domination by ruling classes, as opposed to being simply forced or coerced into accepting inferior positions.

Gramsci accepted the analysis of capitalism put forward by Marx and accepted that the struggle between the ruling class and the subordinate working class was the driving force that moved society forward. (Boggs, C. 1976) Gramsci did not agree with the notion put forward by Marx that the ruling class stayed in power solely because they had economic power. He thus introduced his own concept using ideology. Ideology is the shared ideas or beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups. (Boggs, C. 1976) Gramsci felt that ideological power kept the ruling class in power because it allowed them to brainwash and manipulate the rest of society.

Ideology is the cohesive force which binds people together. Ideology, like hegemony must not only express the class interests of the capitalist or working class. Gramsci insists that ideology has a material nature in the social lives of individuals, as ideologies are embedded in communal modes of living and acting. (R. Simon, 1992) This means that ideologies are embodied in the social practices of individuals and in the institutions and organizations within which these social practices take place. Ideology provides people with the rules of practical conduct and moral behavior. Those who monopolize ideological power have authority over others.

Subordinate groups tend to accept the ideas and values of the dominant group without physical or mental influence because they know no better or there are not other alternatives. (Ransome, P. 1992) From Gramsci's view, the bourgeoisie gained and maintained power due to economic domination and intellectual and moral leadership. One must not assume that this consent is always willing. Those in power may combine physical force or coercion with intellectual, moral and cultural persuasion. (Ransome, P. 1992) The dominant ideology is thus accepted, practiced and spread.

According to Gramsci, hegemony never disappears but is constantly changed. He describes two forms of social control. The first type is coercive control which is achieved through the use of direct force or threat of force. (Simon, R. 1992) The second type is consensual control which arises when individuals voluntarily adopt the worldview of the dominant group. (Simon, R. 1992)

These functions are very much interlinked in the sense that intellectual domination is usually preceded by political domination. Social hegemony and political government are enforced historically in which the dominant group enjoys its position because of its function in the world of production and legally by state coercive power which enforces discipline on groups that do not consent. (Gramsci, A. 1971)

GRAMSCI'S THEORY OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The main value of Gramsci's concept of civil society, which is intertwined with his theory of hegemony. Gramsci stated that in the complex web of relations, the ruling class manifests itself in two ways: domination (political leadership) and moral and intellectual leadership. Thus his conception of integral state embodies a synthesis of political society and civil society or that of coercion and consent.

Gramsci says that within civil society, the dominant group exercises hegemony which is intellectual domination over the subordinate group or consensual control, whereas in political society, domination is exercised through state or juridical government or coercive control. (Gramsci, A. 1971)

In this sense, the state is not only the apparatus of government (coercion), but also the private apparatus of civil society (consent). So, both the concept of political and civil society becomes the aspects of the theory of the integral state (Texier, 1979: 69).

Thus, for Gramsci, civil society is best described not as the sphere of freedom but of hegemony. Hegemony, to be sure, depends on consent (as opposed to coercion), but consent is not the spontaneous outcome of "free choice"; consent is manufactured, albeit through extremely complex mediums, diverse institutions, and constantly changing processes. Gramsci hence arrives at the concept of hegemony through the detailed study of civil society, and, moreover, his descriptions of the complex interactions among individuals and institutions in civil society constitute a concrete, material exposition of the apparatuses and operations of hegemony.

The site of hegemony is civil society; in other words, civil society is the arena wherein the ruling class extends and reinforces its power by non-violent means. Hence, in the prison notebooks, the close scrutiny of civil society and the study of hegemony are virtually one and the same thing, and the former serves to reaffirm the concrete reality of the latter.

Gramsci stated that the church, the unions, the broader civil society's unions with their multiple goals reproduce the ideological dominance of the bourgeois class and extract the consent of the workers to the capitalist manner of production. Thus it seems that in the game of ideological hegemony, the "intellectual and moral hegemony" (Georgiadou, 1996, p. 20)

of the bourgeois class is better expressed via the consent that is extracted by the institutions of civil society.

Gramsci felt that in order to have hegemony, ideologies have to be instilled by certain people or leaders. Gramsci identified intellectuals as leaders in society. He identified two types of intellectuals. The role of the intellectuals was the central idea of Gramsci's thought. According to Gramsci there were two kinds of intellectuals – 'traditional' and 'organic'. "In the first place there are the "traditional" professional intellectuals, literary, scientific and so on, Secondly, there are the "organic" intellectuals, the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental social class. These intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong."

Traditional intellectuals are people that regard themselves as independent of the dominant social group and are regarded as such by the majority of the population. (Gramsci, A. 1971) The organic intellectual grows organically with the ruling class, and is their thinking and organizing element. (Gramsci, A. 1971) They were produced by the educational system to perform a function for the dominant social group in society. It is through this group that the ruling class maintains its hegemony over the rest of society.

Gramsci hence understood the predominant mode of rule as class rule and was interested in explaining the ways in which concrete institutional forms and material relations of production came to prominence. The supremacy of a class and thus the reproduction of its associated mode of production could be obtained by brute domination or coercion. Yet, Gramsci's key observation was that in advanced capitalist societies the perpetuation of class rule was achieved through largely consensual means through intellectual and moral leadership.