

Hegemony and the Unfashionable Problematic of 'Primitive Accumulation'

Robbie Shilliam¹

This article proposes that the neo-Gramscian tradition in IR forbids a direct enquiry into the international dimension of processes of social transformation. Rather, neo-Gramscians deploy the concept of hegemony to the level of world order by implicitly universalising the specific structural qualities of capitalist social relations. This article asserts that the transformation towards capitalist sociality, a process that has been termed "primitive accumulation", has possessed an international dimension. Specifically, when the imperatives foisted by the capital relation were imported into differentially developed socio-political orders to that of the English 'heartland', such different correlations of social forces gave rise to different forms of social transformation. Hegemony was the concept appropriated by Marxists outside of the 'heartland' through which to problematise the constitutive nature of this international dimension. The development of this problematic of primitive accumulation is investigated through the articulations of hegemony offered by Gramsci, Trotsky, and the neo-Gramscians. This article concludes that the neo-Gramscians cannot account for the historical record of, and complexities involved in, the importation of capitalist sociality across the international milieu.

If the recent unilateral turn in US foreign policy has yet to unsettle established theoretical traditions in the discipline of International Relations (IR) as much as the fall of communism, it has nevertheless thrown into sharp relief the limits of existing concepts of power,

1. This article has benefited from the author's sustained intellectual engagement with Justin Rosenberg, and insightful comments from Alex Colas, Samuel Knafo, the Editors, and two anonymous reviewers. A previous draft was presented to the IR Research In Progress seminar series at Sussex University in February, 2003.

leadership and world order.² Recent foreign policy analysis has been replete with talk of the changing relationship between 'soft' and 'hard' power, and a general re-assessment of how 'hegemony' and 'empire' differ as ruling principles has begun.³ The left is alive with the same debate where so far the emphasis seems to have centred upon the explanatory potential of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*.⁴ But critical attention should also turn to perhaps the most influential leftist tradition of thought in IR—the neo-Gramscian school.

The neo-Gramscians, after all, have staked their claim to superior explanatory power upon the concept of hegemony, a theory of leadership wherein power is rendered as a combination of consent and coercion, with consent to the fore.⁵ The concept of hegemony, claim the neo-Gramscians, has the potential to overcome structural determinism by taking practices of ideology and subjectivity as causal in their own right within the construction of world order.⁶ Because of this, hegemony, while not necessarily the philosopher's stone, nevertheless allows IR theory to progress one step further towards an understanding of the agency/structure relation.⁷

2. Michael Cox, 'The Empire's Back in Town: or America's Imperial Temptation', *Millennium* 32, no. 1 (2003): 4-7.

3. See for example, Niall Ferguson's review article, 'Hegemony or Empire?', *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2003): 154-161.

4. Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, 'Retrieving the Imperial: *Empire* and International Relations', *Millennium* 31, no. 1 (2002): 109-127; see also responses by Alex Callinicos, Martin Shaw and Rob Walker, *Millennium* 31, no. 2 (2002); and Simon Bromley, 'Reflections on *Empire*, Imperialism and United States Hegemony', *Historical Materialism* 11, no. 3 (2003): 17-68.

5. Robert Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: an Essay in Method', in *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, ed. Stephen Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 52; and Stephen Gill, 'Global Hegemony and the Structural Power of Capital', *ibid.*, 93. So defined, 'hegemony' has been loosely appropriated so widely across various traditions of thought in IR that it would be counter-productive to document every reference. In this article, therefore, I make reference to a number of prominent neo-Gramscian authors only.

6. Enrico Augelli and Craig N. Murphy, *America's Quest for Supremacy and the Third World* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1988), 4-5; Mark Rupert, *Producing Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 25-29.

7. Mark Rupert, '(Re-)engaging Gramsci: a Response to Germain and Kenny', *Review of International Studies* 24 (1998): 430; Stephen Gill, 'Epistemology, Ontology and the "Italian School"', in *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, 24; Andreas Bieler and Adam D. Morton, 'The Gordian Knot of Agency-Structure in International Relations: a neo-Gramscian Perspective', *European Journal of International Relations* 7, no.1 (2001): 5-35.

Moreover, as a critical tradition, neo-Gramscians seek to contribute to a 'counter-hegemonic' project through building alternative ideologies and political subjectivities to those constituting and upholding dominant structures. Thus the explicit purpose of the analyses produced by neo-Gramscians is to foster a set of prescriptions that might contribute to the transformation of world order.⁸ In short, for the neo-Gramscians, the articulation of the agency/structure relation derived from the concept of hegemony gains its distinctive purchase as a critical praxis of leadership. This praxis has not been unaffected by the current perceived shift in the ruling principles of world order. For while in the 1990s neo-Gramscians tended to assign hegemonic contestation over world order to the issue of globalisation,⁹ the apparent rise of unilateral coercion in US foreign policy and concomitant downgrading of multilateral consensus throws up new challenges to existing praxis.¹⁰ And indeed, there seems to have developed a differentiated set of opinions in neo-Gramscian circles as to the present possibilities of constructing coherent 'counter-hegemonic' projects.¹¹

In this article, I do not intend to directly contribute to the current debate on US 'hegemony'/'empire'—nor do I seek to interrogate the neo-Gramscian tradition directly with regards to the issues raised by this debate. Instead, I propose to use the space opened up by this current uncertainty to re-examine the founding assumptions upon which the neo-Gramscian praxis of hegemony rests. This is an important task because in recent years the neo-Gramscian tradition has perhaps been most successful with regards to offering an alternative critical take to mainstream IR on the construction and contestation of world order. But this article also has a

8. Robert Cox, 'Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium: Prospects for an Alternative World Order', *Review of International Studies* 25 (1999): 3-28; Stephen Gill, 'Towards a Postmodern Prince? The battle in Seattle as a moment in the new politics of globalisation', *Millennium* 29, no.1 (2000): 131-140; and Mark Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2000).

9. For example Stephen Gill, 'Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism', *Millennium* 24, no. 3 (1995): 422.

10. Robert Cox, for one, seems to think that the current conjuncture has brought the contestation over hegemony to a head. See Cox, *The Political Economy of a Plural World* (London: Routledge, 2002), preface and epilogue.

11. Contrast Mark Rupert's worries in 'The Global Justice Movement in a Neo-Imperial Moment' (<http://www.Maxwell.syr.edu/maxpages/faculty/merupert/Neoimperial%20Moment.htm> - accessed January 2004); Craig N. Murphy's agnosticism in 'Conclusion: Pinpointing the Significance of Women's Empowerment, Recognizing Political Opportunities, Anticipating Transnational Coalitions', in *Egalitarian Politics in the Age of Globalization*, ed. C.N. Murphy (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 211; and Stephen Gill's cautious optimism in 'Constitutionalizing Inequality and the Clash of Globalizations', *International Studies Review* 4, no.2 (2002): 64.

wider objective: to delineate, in the course of this critical examination, an alternative problematic with which to consider afresh the historical development of, and current contestations over, world order.

There have, of course, already been critiques of the neo-Gramscian tradition, with Randall Germain and Michael Kenny providing the most notable recent one.¹² Overwhelmingly, such critiques investigate the neo-Gramscian articulation of hegemony through a strategy of focusing on the problems of *contextualising* Gramsci's thought (be it historically, philosophically, politically, or all three).¹³ However, what has not been undertaken in IR (and in social theory in general), is an historical contextualisation of the neo-Gramscian tradition within the wider Marxist tradition in which Gramsci is implicated, and more importantly, a simultaneous contextualisation of this broader tradition within the *international dimension* of social transformation.¹⁴

Through such a contextualisation I intend to show that the neo-Gramscian tradition in IR paradoxically forbids a direct enquiry into the specific (although not necessarily ontologically separate) international dimension of processes of social transformation. This lacuna leads the neo-Gramscians to deploy the concept of hegemony at the level of world order by implicitly universalising what are specific structural qualities of capitalist social relations in their analyses.¹⁵ Such a deployment blurs the historical record of, and complexities involved in, the export/import of

12. Randall Germain and Michael Kenny, 'Engaging Gramsci: International Relations Theory and the Neo-Gramscians', *Review of International Studies* 24 (1998): 3-21. But see also, Peter Burnham, 'Neo-Gramscian Hegemony and the International Order', *Capital and Class* 45 (1991): 73-92; and Chris Boyle, 'Imagining the World Market: IPE and the Tasks of Social Theory', *Millennium* 23, no. 2 (1994): 351-363.

13. See Adam D. Morton, 'Historicizing Gramsci: Situating Ideas in and Beyond their Context', *Review of International Political Economy* 10, no. 1 (2003): 118-146.

14. Existing critical assessments of Gramsci's thought outside of the IR discipline that do entertain the wider Marxist tradition nevertheless tend *not* to take the international dimension as the focal point of enquiry. See, for example, Perry Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review* 100 (1976); and Jeremy Lester, *The Dialogue of Negation* (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

15. This practice is nascent in Robert Cox's 'internationalizing of the state'; R. Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 253-265; and has matured in more recent ideas of an emerging global state-society complex; see for example, Craig N. Murphy, 'Understanding IR: Understanding Gramsci', *Review of International Studies* 24 (1998): 421-423.

capitalist sociality across the international milieu.¹⁶ Identifying this analytical lacuna, I claim that the normative stance that follows is flawed to the extent that the 'counter-hegemonic' project it prescribes cannot engage with the structural complexities involved in the process of universalising capitalist sociality.

In order to contextualise hegemony in this way, my investigation follows certain key Historical-Materialist tenets. It proceeds with Marx's recognition that there exists a mutually constitutive historical relationship between theory, practice and power.¹⁷ In other words, no concept possesses an essential meaning; rather what must be drawn out is the concept's developmental trajectory in specific historical and socio-political contexts. In light of this, I draw on Marx more particularly in locating the origin of the praxis of hegemony in the problematisation of existing socio-political orders brought about by the impingement of a new form of sociality—the capital relation. In Historical Materialism, the term for this process of social transformation is 'primitive accumulation'.

The substantive claim of this article, the claim through which I foreground this lacuna in the neo-Gramscian tradition and delineate an alternative problematic with which to approach contemporary questions of world order, is that the historical realisation of the process of primitive accumulation has had an international dimension. For when the imperatives imposed by the capital relation travelled from the 'heartland'¹⁸ of English capitalism into differentially developed socio-political orders, these different constellations of social forces gave rise to different forms of social transformation. Hegemony was the concept through which Marxists outside of the 'heartland' attempted to determine the nature of the international dimension implicated in processes of social transformation, specifically how this dimension affected the process of primitive accumulation. It is the development of this problematic, through various articulations of hegemony, which my investigation follows.

16. Kees van der Pijl's work is somewhat of an exception to this tendency. Van der Pijl deploys Gramscian notions to explain the expansion of the capital relation at its geo-political 'frontier'. See Van der Pijl, 'State Socialism and Passive Revolution', in *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, 237-258; and *Transnational Classes and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1998), 78-86. My differences with van der Pijl's position lie within my engagement with Leon Trotsky's theory of 'uneven and combined development' below.

17. Karl Marx and Friedrich. Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus, 1998), 41-43.

18. I take this term from Van der Pijl, *Transnational Classes and International Relations*.

I proceed with a brief outline of Marx's historical sociology of capitalist sociality and its problematisation by Russian Marxists in the early 20th century that resulted in the praxis of hegemony. I then investigate not only Gramsci's praxis, but also the contemporaneous praxis developed by Leon Trotsky: the 'permanent revolution'.

Trotsky's writings have enjoyed little sustained investigation in IR;¹⁹ perhaps in part due to endless partisan debates that have resulted in the tendency to paint anyone engaging with Trotsky's intellectual legacy as a Marxist 'fundamentalist'. Nevertheless, a non-partisan engagement with Trotsky's thought is extremely fruitful and necessary for the purposes of this article. For it is possible to excavate from Trotsky's praxis a theorisation of the *constitutive* nature of the international dimension in processes of social transformation, which, I claim, is not so easy to achieve through Gramsci's. This is because Gramsci's praxis suffers from a tension wherein the constitutive nature of the international dimension is elided in a *comparative* interpretation of differential development; an interpretation ultimately rendered in the question of different revolutionary tasks in the 'West' as opposed to the 'East'.

After the consideration of the relative contributions of the praxes of Gramsci and Trotsky, I then show how the resurrection of Gramsci's thought in the 1960s and 70s held in various ways to his comparative interpretation, thus again bypassing the fundamental question of the international dimension. Finally I draw out the analytical and normative implications of importing this neo-Gramscian tradition into IR through an investigation of Robert Cox's intellectual contribution. I conclude by highlighting the potential of a research programme that critically engages with Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development.

Marxism and the problematic of primitive accumulation

Arguing against classical political-economy Marx claimed that capitalist sociality, rather than being a natural condition of humanity, had, in fact, a specific historical genesis that lay in the violent and conflictual 'process of divorcing the producer from the means of production'. This was the 'primitive' act of accumulation that 'robbed' the mass of producers from

19. One notable exception is Justin Rosenberg in 'Isaac Deutscher and the Lost History of International Relations', *New Left Review*. 215 (1996): 3-15; and 'Globalisation Theory - a Post-Mortem', forthcoming, *International Politics*, 2005. Benno Teschke does employ a concept derived in part from Trotsky, 'geopolitically combined and socially uneven development', in *The Myth of 1648* (London: Verso, 2003). However Teschke's usage seems to be more of an heuristic device; his theoretical base is Robert Brenner's 'social property rights'.

direct access to all productive forces save their own labour power.²⁰ If the results of this 'primitive accumulation' had to be condensed into one phrase, for Marx it would have been the transformation from a *particularistic* to *universalistic* sociality.²¹ Marx believed that prior to capitalism, direct access to the means of production—typified by the peasant mode of existence—tended to result in a division of labour that was constituted through relations of personal dependency. For Marx, the material limitations inherent in the directly personal nature of such sociality could not help but produce only particularistic contestations over the mode of production.²² But when, through primitive accumulation, wage labour became the prevailing method of reproducing social life, an unprecedented concrete basis was developed for universalistic contestations.

For Marx, such universality derived from the creation of 'free' workers in a 'double sense'. Through primitive accumulation, workers were freed positively by no longer directly forming part of an existing means of production (e.g. slavery/serfdom); but at the same time they were 'freed' ironically by no longer possessing direct access to the means of production (e.g. common land).²³ Once reconstituted as commodities—as hands for hire—personal attributes and personal dependencies were purged from the constitution of the new worker. This new sociality of '[individual] independence based on dependence [through exchange relations] mediated by things [the commodity form]'²⁴ re-rendered the division of labour into a universe of atomised, abstracted individuals, all ontologically equal through their mediation as commodities. As such, even the act of appropriation came to be mediated through a universe of social equivalence; and because of this there now existed the concrete means for those whose labour was appropriated to contest the division of labour as a 'class' of objective equals.

To Marx, this capitalist sociality contrasted significantly with the particularism and self-limitation inherent in acts of appropriation that were mediated through the personal relations of dependence of the

20. Karl Marx, *Capital Vol.1* (London: Penguin, 1990), 875.

21. See, for example, Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin, 1973) 156-166.

22. For an anthropological deployment of this argument see Eric Wolf, 'On peasant rebellions', in *Peasants and Peasant Societies*, ed. T. Shanin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 367-374.

23. Marx, *Capital*, 874. See also M. Scott Solomon and Mark Rupert, 'Historical Materialism, Ideology, and the Politics of Globalizing Capitalism', in *Historical Materialism and Globalization*, eds. M. Rupert and H. Smith, (London: Routledge, 2002), 285.

24. Cited in Derek Sayer, *Capitalism and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2001), 62.

'estate'.²⁵ And I would assert that it is this concrete potentiality for universalistic contestation that gives 'class', as a specific form of sociality, its special meaning in Marx's praxis.²⁶ In fact, it is due to this analysis of the movement from the particular to the universal that Marx prescribed to the proletariat their world-historical mission: the transformation of the very basis of power relations. Only through a supercession of capitalist sociality (an abstract egalitarianism) could communism (a substantive egalitarianism) arise. Indeed, as shall be elucidated below, the question of transforming particularistic socialities into a universalistic sociality occupies a central, although often implicit, strategic position in the analyses and prescriptions of subsequent Marxist conceptualisations of hegemony.

Marx asserted that the universalising tendencies of the capital relation would work to produce a world 'in its image'.²⁷ Indeed, the only complete schema that he elucidated was that of a uni-linear, 'stagist' history leading to a complete and successful resolution of primitive accumulation.²⁸ Here, home market after home market would be conquered by the bourgeoisie, concomitantly generalising 'double free' sociality on a world-historical scale. It was, of course, at this point where the concrete conditions would have been laid for the proletariat to embark on the worldwide transformation towards communism. In essence, this schema guided the policies of the Second International after Marx's death, albeit in the guise of evolutionary parliamentary reformism. But this praxis, predicated upon the assumption of an unproblematical process of primitive accumulation, was rudely challenged—theoretically and practically—by events in early 20th century Russia. For at the time of the abortive 1905 Russian Revolution, the prevailing sociality in Russia was still that of peasant production: the bourgeoisie seemed to have excused themselves from their world-historical destiny of replacing the sickle with the hammer.

Hegemony was the concept appropriated by Russian Marxism in order to make sense of this seeming anomaly in Marx's schema of world development—to 'find' and define a leadership against Tsardom in the

25. See for example, *Grundrisse*, 161-162.

26. Sayer, *Capitalism and Modernity*, 69.

27. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 84. See also Marx, *Capital*, 90-91 (preface).

28. Later in his life, Marx does seem to have tentatively re-visited the validity of this schema in his considerations on the possibilities of establishing communism in Russia. See Baruch Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky* (Oxford University Press, 1978), 585-598; and Teodor. Shanin, ed., *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

absence of a strong bourgeoisie.²⁹ Substantively, the concept revolved around the peasant question; an assessment of the exigencies and potentialities of social transformation out of quasi-feudalism in the face of an unresolved process of primitive accumulation. As such, hegemony, as praxis, was a *substitution* for a missing universalistic sociality, and at the same time, a project to create such a sociality conducive to socialism by somehow skipping over the bourgeois moment of expropriation. To foster a common project and universalistic sociality from differential modes of production that existed contemporaneously in one polity: this was the challenge for leadership that lay behind the Bolshevik slogan of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat and peasant'.

It was, however, the 1917 revolution, which definitively pushed the structural determinism and 'stagist' history of the Second International into deep crisis, since Lenin's political project effectively 'skipped over' what were perceived to be economically determined stages. Hereafter, therefore, the general challenge to Marxist praxis, and the one taken up by Gramsci (initially in his 1918 article, *The Revolution against 'Capital'*),³⁰ was to explain the unique causal nature that the 'superstructure' exhibited (with regards to politics, ideology, subjectivity) in relation to the economic 'base'. Gramsci worked through this meta-theoretical challenge to existing articulations of the agency/structure relation primarily via an engagement with Croce's idealism and Bukharin's determinism.³¹

Before moving on to Gramsci, it might be helpful to draw out the

29. For discussions on the Bolshevik roots of hegemony see Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', 15-17; van der Pijl, 'State Socialism and Passive Revolution', 241-244; and Lester, 'Dialogue of Negation', 33-51. For the difficulties Russian Marxists faced in their appropriation of Marx's *Capital*, see Esther Kingston-Man, 'Deconstructing the Romance of the Bourgeoisie: a Russian Marxist Path not Taken', [*Review of International Political Economy* 10, no. 1 \(2003\): 93-117.](#)

30. Antonio Gramsci, 'The Revolution against "Capital"', in *Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), 36-38. See also Walter Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 45-50; Anne Showstack Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics 2nd Edition* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 28-31; Richard Bellamy and Darrow Schecter, *Gramsci and the Italian State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 20-27; and Lester, *Dialogue of Negation*, 18-19.

31. On this engagement see Leonardo Salamini, *The Sociology of Political Praxis* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 27; Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 122-130; Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics*, 172, 188, 193; Bellamy and Schecter, *Gramsci and the Italian State*, 85-97; Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), 214-236; and Joseph Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 66-101.

main points of this contextualisation so far. The development of Gramsci's praxis of hegemony was embedded foremost within the wider Marxist debate on hegemony.³² However, this debate was engendered itself by the Bolshevik attempt to 'right' the developmental trajectory of Russia; and this 'skewed' trajectory was produced by the problematic development of primitive accumulation: the unresolved transformation of sociality into 'double free' universality. Finally, the Russian Marxists recognized in this deviance from the 'heartland norm' evidence of a constitutive international dimension of social transformation: in its translation across differentially developed socio-political orders, the process of primitive accumulation 'mutated'. Once perceived in analysis, such a phenomenon engendered the need for new prescriptions of social transformation that went beyond the classic assumption of an unproblematic universalisation of capitalist sociality. In short, Marxist derived praxes of hegemony were embedded in the international dimension of social transformation from the very start; indeed, it was this international dimension itself that demanded the construction of a praxis of hegemony.

Gramsci's hegemony

For Gramsci, the Bolshevik 'peasant question' translated into the specifically Italian 'Southern question'.³³ This question had been formulated due to the difficulties of achieving national unification in conditions where the sociality of the North, historically the seat of capitalist development in Italy, contrasted qualitatively with that of a largely archaic peasant South. Gramsci's summation of Southern life was that of a 'great social disintegration'.³⁴ He seems to have dismissed the ability of the Southern peasantry to coherently represent themselves, for they lacked 'autonomous, independent mass organizations'.³⁵ Likewise,

32. Space does not permit an engagement with the debate over whether Gramsci's intellectual roots were Italian or Bolshevik. I simply note here that I find this debate misleading due to its implicit basis in comparative political analysis. I critique this basis in more detail below. For background see Chantal Mouffe and Anne Showstack Sassoon, 'Gramsci in France and Italy – a Review of the Literature', *Economy and Society* 6, no. 1 (1977): 31-68.

33. Gramsci's most explicit and sustained engagement with the Italian 'peasant question' was written immediately prior to his arrest: 'Some Aspects of the Southern question', in *Selections from Political Writings (1921-1926)* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978).

34. Gramsci, 'Some Aspects of the Southern question', 454.

35. *Ibid.*, 456. See also Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998), 75.

Southern intellectuals exhibited no universalistic organisational capacity;³⁶ their command implied 'no aptitude for ordering men and "things" into an organic whole, as per industrial production'.³⁷ Effectively, Gramsci saw in the Southern way of life a particularistic sociality—a division of labour mired in political self-limitation.

However, the proletarian sociality of the Northern industrial milieu had at times exhibited qualitatively different potentialities and, implicitly, Gramsci outlined these in his discussion on the 'relations of political forces'. In the 'first and most elementary . . . economic-corporate' moment of political force, there existed no consciousness of unity and homogeneity beyond the immediate technical position occupied in the division of labour. But more sophisticated relations cohered when various 'corporate' groups realised a shared solidarity of interests and in so doing won 'political-judicial equality with the ruling groups'.³⁸ Once this political-judicial level of equality had been attained, a further sophistication of relations could be achieved when a class realised that the development of their own interests necessitated that other subordinate groups share them too. Then the workers could pose 'all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a "universal" plane and thus [create] the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups'.³⁹

Gramsci's account of the hegemonic potential of the Northern proletariat thus implicitly approximates the conditions of (Marx's rendition of) capitalist sociality. It was, after all, the 'double freedom' of 'political-judicial equality' that provided the means for a universalistic 'leadership' the Southern peasantry, conversely, laboured under an 'odious and bestial'⁴⁰ mode of appropriation with its concomitant 'particularistic and municipalistic' sociality.⁴¹ Schematically, this account did not in principle diverge from Marx's stagist history.

However, this being said, Gramsci also exhibited a certain insecurity with regards to the 'backward' character of Italian political development manifest in the Southern question.⁴² He attributed this 'backwardness' to the historical lack of a 'Jacobin' force—a

36. See for example, Gramsci, 'Some Aspects of the Southern question', 459. See also, Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics*, 143-146.

37. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 212.

38. *Ibid.*, 181.

39. *Ibid.*, 181-182.

40. Gramsci, 'Some Aspects of the Southern question', 445.

41. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 241. See also *ibid.*, 91.

42. Nadia Urbinati, 'From the Periphery of Modernity - Antonio Gramsci's Theory of Subordination and Hegemony', [*Political Theory* 26, no. 3 \(1998\): 370-391.](#)

transformative and mass-embracing political movement that would weld together the distinct social milieus of the North and South into a collective will.⁴³ In fact, through this comparison with Jacobinism, Gramsci was implicitly according a problematical status to primitive accumulation within the Italian unification process. For while he believed the Northern bourgeoisie should have actuated a mass transformation in sociality, this supposedly leading Jacobinist class had equivocated over their world-historical task.⁴⁴ Instead, what had replaced this transformation was only a nominal unification established through a process that Gramsci termed 'passive revolution'.

Passive revolution was the mechanism whereby a political force could 'lead' distinctly separate social strata through a process of *transformismo*.⁴⁵ This process created a rule of consensus by individually co-opting the elite of differential social orders and privileging their access to state resources. To order this elite co-option, a *Caesar* would emerge: a political figure entrusted with the task of arbitration over the disparate demands of the artificially welded together ruling strata.⁴⁶ Such a revolution was passive in the sense that it had no Jacobinist quality—it aimed to generate as few ripples as possible on the ocean of mass sociality. Nevertheless, and this is crucial, *Caesarism* was a political attempt to manage 'forces which could [not] in the last analysis fuse and unite'.⁴⁷ For, in essence, the Northern bourgeoisie required the peasant masses to freely enter the industrial milieu; and in order for this to occur, at least some mass migration towards the sociality of 'double freedom' was necessary. But the Southern rural landowners required the peasant masses to be tied to the land, as any such process of primitive accumulation would erode the concrete basis of their own social power.⁴⁸ Passive revolution, therefore, could not help but create waves. As an irresolvable attempt to order and maintain two differential forms of

43. For Gramsci's engagement with Jacobinism see Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 184-185; and Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics*, 126-128.

44. Gramsci believed that bourgeois democracy of the Western European kind had never been manifest in Italy. See, Bellamy and Schecter, *Gramsci and the Italian State*, 155.

45. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 58f and 109. For various exegeses on the terms 'passive revolution' and 'transformismo' see Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 186-198; Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics*, 206-215; Bellamy and Schecter, *Gramsci and the Italian State*, 148-152; Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, 54-56; and Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, 47-49.

46. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 219.

47. *Ibid.*, 222.

48. Gramsci illustrated this process using the activities of the Piedmont *Caesar*, Giolitti. See *ibid.*, 64.

sociality that were unavoidably competing over the national division of labour, passive revolution constituted 'an equilibrium of forces heading towards catastrophe'.⁴⁹

The catastrophic tidal wave that engulfed the proletariat in Italy was fascism.⁵⁰ Indeed, Gramsci stressed that with no mass transformation of the Southern mode of life, its sociality could be further utilised by fascism to sweep away the proletariat's internal solidarity.⁵¹ And such an analysis of a stalled social transformation, via the concept of passive revolution, prompted a specific course of action. For in the historical absence of a leading capitalist bourgeoisie, it was the proletarian vanguard—Gramsci's Communist party—that would have to don the Jacobinist cloak of the 'Modern Prince'.⁵² What the defensive task of this prince necessitated was a homogenisation of the form of sociality that constituted the national division of labour, the formation of a 'national-popular collective will' that would sap the life from fascism's historical roots. In all programmatic seriousness, this meant that the mass of peasantry would have to be raised from the quagmire of their political self-limitation.⁵³

However, so contextualised, did not this hegemonic strategy point inexorably to the destruction of the peasant mode of life? And if this was so, where did this logical end point leave Gramsci's dictatorship of the proletariat *and* the peasantry?⁵⁴ The point is this: no Marxist up until the 1920s had ever dreamt that it would be they who might have to dirty their hands in the blood of peasant expropriation in order to establish universalistic sociality—a 'collective will' conducive to socialism. On the contrary, Marxist revolutionary theory had, up until very recently, started from the assumption that capitalist bourgeois executioners would already have settled the nefarious task of primitive accumulation.

Gramsci never resolved this problem of Marxist hegemonic praxis: how to avoid the *forcible* creation of an emancipatory 'collective will' from existent particularism. For on the one hand such a praxis inevitably

49. *Ibid.*, 219.

50. *Ibid.*, 94-96, 119-120 and 214f. See also Bellamy and Schecter, *Gramsci and the Italian State*, 154-155.

51. Gramsci, 'Some Aspects on the Southern question', 448-449; Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 90-92.

52. See Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 125-133.

53. Thus, 'Any formation of a national-popular collective will is impossible, unless the great mass of peasant farmers bursts *simultaneously* into political life.' *Ibid.*, 132.

54. Gramsci writes, 'only two social forces are essentially national and bearers of the future: the proletariat and the peasants'. Gramsci, 'Some Aspects on the Southern question', 462.

necessitated a Communist-led undertaking of primitive *socialist* accumulation in order to combat passive revolution, a project that was being resolved in Russia with at least as much violence as the enclosures annotated by Marx. But on the other hand, confined to musings in a fascist prison cell, and aware of the ongoing Bolshevik degradation, Gramsci had the perverse luxury of presenting this resolution purely theoretically as non-expropriational praxis—a vague national ‘ethico-political’ struggle.⁵⁵ Thus, it is evident that primitive accumulation constituted the core challenge for Gramsci’s praxis of hegemony. However, what existed as a programmatic challenge became a fundamental conceptual schism when Gramsci turned his attention towards the international dimension of these social transformations.

Analytically, Gramsci does seem to have recognised the *constitutive* nature that such a dimension held in processes of social transformation. His taxonomy of the world of states, for example, consisted of ‘advanced capitalist states’ and ‘peripheral states’ that still displayed ‘intermediate classes’ stretching ‘between the proletariat and capitalism’.⁵⁶ Indeed, the deepening worldwide capitalist crisis would take ‘different forms, on the one hand in the countries of the capitalist periphery, and on the other in the advanced capitalist countries.’⁵⁷ And further, ideology emanating from a ‘highly developed country’ would be disseminated in ‘less developed countries’, ‘impinging on the local interplay of combinations’ and perhaps even producing novel results.⁵⁸

Yet paradoxically, it is precisely this analytical awareness that seems to have led Gramsci to refuse the international dimension any constitutive status in his guide to action. For here, Gramsci prescribed hegemony in *comparative* terminology, as an *inter*-national strategy best adapted to the specifics of differential national conditions. Certainly, his Internationalist perspective deemed it desirable to somehow unify the discrete sets of national revolutions. But the concrete battle over the course of primitive accumulation had to be fought out in an arena

55. On this tension, see Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 207; Bellamy and Schecter, *Gramsci and the Italian State*, 135-136; Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984) 151-152; and Femia, *Gramsci’s Political Thought*, 185-188.

56. Antonio Gramsci, ‘A Study of the Italian Situation’, in *Selections from Political Writings (1921-1926)* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), 409.

57. *Ibid.*, 410.

58. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 182. Indeed, this forms a substantive part of Gramsci’s analysis in *Americanism and Fordism*. See also Buci-Glucksmann’s discussion, which goes somewhat towards highlighting this international dimension, in *Gramsci and the State*, 317-324.

strictly delineated by the national correlation of social forces. In fact, any strategy that rooted these struggles in a non-materially occupied 'international', (specifically Second Internationalism and Trotsky's 'permanent revolution'), was condemned as vacuous, abstract and thus self-defeating.⁵⁹

But overshadowing this national/international issue was the leviathan of the Bolshevik 'worker's state', home of the Comintern—home of the Marxist praxis of hegemony. No wonder then, that in arguably his most influential passage for IR theory, Gramsci conflated his comparative analysis of national specificities into a supra-comparative inter-national paradigm of the 'East' (Russia) versus the 'West'.⁶⁰ In fact, it is this passage that best exemplifies the lacuna of the international dimension in Gramsci's praxis of hegemony. For quite simply, such a supra-comparative approach now lacked even the analytical tools to explain the historical causal relationship *between* the 'East' and 'West': what was the nature of the world-historical process that had produced this differentiation? And what were the normative ramifications of this for an internationalist Marxist praxis?⁶¹

In summary, through his articulation of the relationship between passive revolution and hegemony, Gramsci sought to explicate the domestic impact and problems associated with primitive accumulation. This, I would suggest, is what has given his writings such considerable and sustained purchase. However, Gramsci at best confused and at worst rejected the international dimension of this process of social transformation. Yet this was the very causal dimension that had prompted a radical rethink on Marxist assumptions of progressive leadership in the first place; and it was precisely the causality of this dimension that had thrust the Southern Question into the foreground of Marxist-Italian praxis. Weakened by such a serious lacuna, I would assert that Gramsci's praxis of hegemony broke on the rocks of the national border.

59. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 240-241.

60. 'In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed'. *Ibid.*, 229-238. For discussions related to this dense passage see Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci'; Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 222-228; Bellamy and Schecter, *Gramsci and the Italian State*, 128-130; Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, 237-290; and Lester, *Dialogue of Negation*, 75-82.

61. See also Anderson's critique of the comparative nature of Gramsci's East/West – War of Manoeuvre/War of Position matrix, in 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', 45-47.

Trotsky's permanent revolution

Trotsky's praxis of hegemony, the 'permanent revolution'⁶², is best not assessed on the basis of the fragmented and often mis-informed comments in Gramsci's notebooks.⁶³ It deserves, rather, to be examined and judged according to the degree it managed to resolve the lacuna of the international dimension in Marxist praxes of hegemony. This being said, the logic of the 'permanent revolution' is premised upon Trotsky's most fundamental conceptualisation of world-historical transformation in the capitalist epoch—the theory of 'uneven and combined development'.⁶⁴ And it is here that the centrality of the problematic of primitive accumulation can be gleaned in his praxis of hegemony.

For Trotsky, 'unevenness' was the 'most general law of the historic process':⁶⁵ throughout world history, polities had always varied relationally in the properties and capacities of their social systems. However, Trotsky believed that the capitalist mode of production had realised, for the first time, 'the universality and permanence of man's [sic] development'.⁶⁶ And in this new developmental epoch, the 'self-limiting' nature of non-capitalist socialities stood out sharply and collectively against the new potentialities of the capitalist mode. In this respect, 'backwardness', intrinsic to 'unevenness' for Trotsky, had become for the first time fundamentally *problematical* through a contrast with capitalist sociality.

To Trotsky, Russia represented the quintessence of this problematisation. A 'Tartar' inspired backward mode of production coupled with a geographical proximity to the capitalist-fired furnace of Europe forced the Tsarist state to be constantly under the pressure of its 'external social-historical milieu'.⁶⁷ Faced with a growing qualitative disparity in military forces between industrialising Europe and its own

62. Trotsky developed the praxis of 'permanent revolution' after 1905. For his earliest extrapolation see 'Results and Prospects', in *The Permanent Revolution* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1969), 29-122. However, even in the late 1920s he still unconditionally defended its content in 'The Permanent Revolution', in *ibid.*, 125-275.

63. Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', 64-67.

64. Knei-Paz, *Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*, 165. First addressed in his 1905 publication, 'Results and Prospects', the theory of uneven and combined development was woven into much of Trotsky's later writings—the fundamental propositions, however, remained consistent throughout.

65. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 27.

66. *Ibid.*

67. Trotsky, 'Results and Prospects', 38.

largely peasant army, the Tsarist ruling strata had to act to secure its own survival. However, it was only by borrowing European techniques, with borrowed capital from European banks, that the Tsarist state could hope to maintain its power. Paradoxically then, this 'whip of external necessity'⁶⁸ drove Tsardom into a tutorship with its European enemies.⁶⁹

Yet because Russian industrialisation was predicated purely upon an influx of foreign capital, it enjoyed none of the internally 'evolved' stages documented in Marx's account of the development of capitalist sociality in England: '[s]avages [threw] away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without travelling the road which lay between those two weapons in the past'.⁷⁰ Trotsky alluded to such 'skipping' of historically developed stages and the selective grafting on of their related productive forces as the 'advantage of backwardness'.⁷¹ But this was to become a perverse advantage for the Marxist revolutionary. For the Tsarist ruling strata had attempted to graft on industrialisation, not as part of a strategy to transform the existing quasi-feudal milieu towards capitalist sociality, but instead to defend and prop up its own quasi-feudal political authority.⁷² In fact, the most advanced capitalist productive forces were being utilised for the purposes of sustaining a most 'backward' sociality.⁷³ And through all this 'leap-frogging', the Tsarist state was in actual fact attempting to substitute the accumulation of foreign debt for the process of primitive accumulation.

Nevertheless, of paramount importance for Trotsky was the unavoidable and unintended outcome of this Tsarist developmental policy. For no matter what 'stages' Tsardom attempted to skip, an industrial labour force could still not be forged from the sociality of its quasi-feudal division of labour. And the assimilation of capitalist productive forces, regardless of the political motive, still required 'free' workers able to sell their labour power to the industrialist. Indeed, Trotsky believed that the 1861 formal emancipation of serfs—the first tentative and significantly limited introduction of 'double freedom' to mother Russia—was enacted by the Tsarist state in order to create just such an industrial work force.⁷⁴

68. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 27.

69. 'The West was a still more threatening foe – but at the same time a teacher.' *Ibid.*, 26.

70. *Ibid.*, 27.

71. *Ibid.*, 26. Gramsci also invoked the notion of 'skipping stages' in 'The Revolution against "Capital"', 36.

72. Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, 42.

73. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 26.

74. Knei-Paz, *Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*, 68.

It was due to all these contradictory processes that Trotsky characterised Tsarist developmental policy as a 'peculiar combination of different stages in the historic process'.⁷⁵ And much like Gramsci's passive revolution, this 'combined development' implicitly represented the exigencies of a stalled process of primitive accumulation, 'corrupted' by a 'non-Jacobinist' elite. However, while Gramsci's prescriptions were to be delineated by the national tasks of forging of an 'integral' state, Trotsky's had to be organically rooted in the international dimension. After all, unlike Gramsci, the starting proposition in Trotsky's analysis was that the capitalist world market developed through the prism of already existing 'unevenness', a prism constructed through the international differentiation of socio-political forms. And it was this uneven world milieu that caused the amalgam of the most developed capitalist forces with non-capitalist sociality, giving light to a refracted, combined development. Because of this, the question of hegemony was unavoidably rooted in the international causal effects generated by the whip of capitalist sociality, and could therefore not generally be made sense of separated from this international dimension.⁷⁶ For Trotsky, a manipulation of these already existing effects was the crucial task of hegemony, and this was the strategy of 'permanent revolution'.

In the wake of 1905 Trotsky gave substance to this guide to action in a survey of the correlation of social forces under Tsardom. His first assessment was that in the Russian milieu, where sociality had not yet become universalised and 'purified' into a capital/labour contradiction, and where the peasantry still constituted the bulk of the population, any revolutionary strategy that aimed to be national in substance would have to, at least initially, accomplish 'bourgeois' aims.⁷⁷ In short, the individuation of estate property to individual peasant families would have to be the first revolutionary act. This act, however, would produce a particularistic agrarian sociality of petty-producers, and not a unified national division of labour conducive to socialism in which town and country were organically linked. Therefore, for their own survival, Trotsky prophesied, the proletariat would have to supersede the 'national' revolution with a 'class' revolution and enact a collectivisation of peasant land.⁷⁸

But in enacting such a revolution the vastly outnumbered proletariat would in all probability be swept away in a peasant counter-reaction. And it is at this point that the national tasks of hegemony revealed themselves

75. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 27.

76. See Knei-Paz, *Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*, 148-152.

77. Trotsky, 'Results and Prospects', 69-74.

78. *Ibid.*, 76.

to be unavoidably embedded in the international milieu. For a non-expropriational primitive socialist accumulation could not be instigated solely by a logistically impoverished proletariat without 'outside' aid. And furthermore, coupled to all this was the unavoidable threat of European armed intervention: the new 'workers state' would be a dangerous example for the masses governed by both capitalist and aristocratic political orders alike.⁷⁹ In fact, Trotsky prophesied that without the logistical and moral support of a triumphant Western proletariat there could be no progressive primitive socialist accumulation, no gradual transformation of the peasant milieu through consensual means.⁸⁰

From this brief exegesis, I would assert that the problematic of primitive accumulation—the international dimension of social transformation—occupied a foundational analytical and prescriptive position in Trotsky's thought. Yet paradoxically, this achievement worked to undermine the basis of Trotsky's Marxist-Russian project. For taken to its logical conclusion, his theory would at least point to the possibility that the uneven roots of the 'backward' proletarian revolution might produce a novel, combined resolution to the problematic of primitive accumulation; *neither* 'socialist' (in the classical sense) *nor* 'capitalist' yet by no means a reversion to the *ancien régime*. This proposition would, of course, work to undermine the whole point of a Marxist hegemony: hence Trotsky's necessary faith and indeed political dependence on a revolutionary Europe that would steer Russia clear from this possible trajectory. In fact, with no 'outside' help, Trotsky was adamant that the most that this 'backward' revolution could possibly do by itself would be to place 'collectivism on the order of the day'.⁸¹

Yet here one might venture where Trotsky, and indeed his followers, did not dare, because in effect, with no reddening of Europe, the Russian Revolution did indeed produce a world-historical novelty. The new sociality cemented through Stalin's strictly national resolution to primitive accumulation was no 'overcoming' of 'double freedom';

79. See Trotsky, *ibid.*, 107-115.

80. *Ibid.*, 115. Trotsky was explicit, at least before the civil war, that this 'socialist proletariat' strategy would not entertain the forced expropriation of the peasantry from smallholdings. See *ibid.*, 104.

81. Trotsky, 'Results and Prospects', 80; John Molyneux points out that the longevity of the Soviet experience is at odds with Trotsky's belief that 'socialism in one country' could not survive. See Molyneux, *Leon Trotsky's Theory of Revolution* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), ch. 4; But Michael Cox asserts that while mistaken in the short term, Trotsky's assessment was vindicated after 1989. See Michael Cox, 'Trotsky's Misinterpreters and the Collapse of Stalinism' in *The Ideas of Leon Trotsky*, eds. M. Cox and H. Tickin (London: Porcupine Press, 1995).

how could it be when there had not yet existed in Russia a generalised 'independence based upon dependence mediated by things'? Rather, what had been substituted for the emancipatory potential agency emanating from an individualised universe of social equivalence, was the agency of Bolshevik party organisation. In effect, 'democratic centralism' fostered an alternative collectivist sociality of independence based upon dependence mediated by the party.

Nevertheless, even though the Bolshevik praxis of hegemony had in time produced a novel response to the problematic of primitive accumulation, by not establishing 'double free' sociality it had never provided the conditions in which the 'dialectic' of the capital relation could be progressively resolved (at least, according to Marxist theory). And in a world milieu increasingly dominated by the exigencies of 'double freedom'—both in terms of the efficiency of surplus extraction and criteria for legitimate governance—it is of no surprise, in hindsight, that such pressures were to fracture this Bolshevik substitution project barely 70 years later. Yet such failure should not suppress the fact that this 'backward' revolution was successful in placing the issue of collectivism on the *world-historical* 'order of the day': throughout the rest of the 20th century, and across continents, various adaptations of Bolshevik central planning were utilised in political projects that attempted to tackle the contradictory and un-controllable exigencies of the capitalist world market.

Neo-Gramscian hegemony

So contextualised, I would assert that hegemony is *itself* historically implicated in the subsequent political responses to the world-wide impingement of capitalist sociality. For in the 20th century the Marxist intellectual was faced with a paradox: the tendency towards proletarian revolution had developed in national milieus wherein capitalist sociality, and its potentially progressive (dialectical) quality, had not yet been cemented. In fact, in these conditions, it was often the agency of the Marxist party that substituted *itself* for the missing agency of a generalised and universalistic sociality of 'double freedom'.

Ironically, it was in order to construct an alternative praxis to just such authoritarian results of Bolshevik substitutionism that the European left resurrected the concept of hegemony in the 1960s and 70s.⁸² Gramsci now became the perceived antidote to Marxist-Leninism⁸³,

82. See for example, Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, 190.

83. Geoff Eley, 'Reading Gramsci in English: Observations on the Reception of Antonio Gramsci in the English-Speaking World', *European History Quarterly* 14 (1984): 443; and Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 3-5.

the theoretical companion to the anti-bureaucratic anti-vanguardist struggles of Eastern Europe,⁸⁴ and one important component of the Eurocommunist praxis of building a 'collective will' by non-coercive means.⁸⁵ Deployed in this effort to build an anti-Bolshevik, yet socialist, praxis of hegemony, Gramsci's discussion on the different tasks of revolution in the East and the West was singled out for special consideration. The 'Western' 'war of position', as opposed to the 'Eastern' 'war of manoeuvre', was championed as the correct strategy for building 'counter-hegemony' in advanced capitalist states. And through this overwhelmingly *comparative*-political contextualisation, Gramsci was duly canonised as the 'theoretician of revolution in the West'.⁸⁶

Even so, some did object to the narrowing of Gramsci's import to the specificities of the 'West'. Rather, they proposed that there existed a general contribution to social theory in Gramsci's work in the realm of the agency/structure relation with respect to his resolution of base/superstructure (the historic bloc) and the causal relation between politics, ideology and subjectivity.⁸⁷ Yet, as discussed above, the roots of this 'general contribution' lie concretely within the international dimension of social transformation manifest in the 1917 revolution. But paradoxically, this neo-Gramscian claim was proffered precisely in order to separate the concept of hegemony from its Bolshevik roots. Therefore, this separation worked implicitly to eliminate the international dimension from the neo-Gramscian re-conceptualisation of hegemony. In fact, even those who proposed that Gramsci produced a general transitional theory of pre-bourgeois to bourgeois society⁸⁸ effected, implicitly, the same elimination. Again, such a claim obfuscated the very challenge to Marxist theories of *universal* social transformation that the praxis of hegemony was initially developed to resolve.

84. Lester, *Dialogue of Negation*, 115-116.

85. Chantal Mouffe, 'Introduction: Gramsci Today' in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, ed. C. Mouffe (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 13-15.

86. Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, 251; Mouffe, 'Introduction: Gramsci Today', 4-5.

87. See Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, 251-253; and her conceptual centrepiece, the 'apparatus of philosophical hegemony', *ibid.*, 10, 389-397; Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics*, 113-119, 198-204; and Chantal Mouffe, 'Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci' in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, ed. C. Mouffe (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979). For an overview of this usage see Mouffe, 'Introduction: Gramsci Today'.

88. For example, Eric Hobsbawm, 'Gramsci and Marxist Political Theory' in *Approaches to Gramsci*, ed. A. Showstack Sassoon (London: Writers and Readers, 1982), 30-31.

Of course, with this international dimension foreclosed, the concept of hegemony had to be embedded in a particular form of 'state-society complex'.⁸⁹ And in all cases, the neo-Gramscian emphasis of transformative struggles over the state now centred upon the 'war of position'—the building of a 'collective will' by consensual means through ideological contestations in the realm of civil society. Such a guide to action was perceived as the antidote to the results of Bolshevism, and eminently amenable to educating and moulding subjectivities captured in the cultural dialectic of the advanced capitalist 'state-society' complex.⁹⁰ Indeed, for many Anglophone leftists, attributing this hegemonic project to the ruling class helped to explain the cultural passivity of the working class under Thatcherism.⁹¹ As such, the assumed sociality writ large, upon which neo-Gramscian praxes of hegemony were developed, and the ground upon which the neo-Gramscian articulation of the agency/structure relation was founded, was that of capitalist 'double freedom'.

In short, then, the crucial tension existing in Gramsci's praxis of hegemony—the *constitutive* versus *comparative* status of international relations—was obfuscated in the neo-Gramscian turn. This tension was relaxed whenever the unique analytical power of Gramsci's hegemony was rendered either as general theory, general social transformation, or specifically Western social transformation. In eliminating the international dimension of social transformation, the neo-Gramscians implicitly and necessarily eliminated the problematic of primitive accumulation from the substance of hegemonic praxis. But, once again, was it not precisely this problematic of social transformation that hegemony had been developed to resolve?

However, it should be said at this point that neo-Gramscians did not necessarily turn hegemony towards objects of enquiry foreign to Gramsci. Indeed, he had also turned his attention to the hegemonic constitution of power in the age of Western mass politics, although even this was never undertaken in separation from his inquiry into Fascism

89. Incidentally, what neo-Gramscians often lauded in Gramsci's method was the attention to the *specificity* of state-society complexes. See for example Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain* (London: Verso, 1981), 132-134.

90. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 41, 244; Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, 1; and David Forgacs, 'Gramsci and Marxism in Britain', *New Left Review* 176 (1989): 77.

91. See *ibid.*, 70.; and Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal* (London: Verso, 1990).

and the Southern question.⁹² But the crucial point is this: if, as formal disciplines, cultural studies or political theory did not need to directly address this tension surrounding the status of the 'international' in the conceptualisation of hegemony, it should have deserved immediate foregrounding when the neo-Gramscian tradition was deployed in IR to explain the construction and dialectical nature of world order. And with this in mind, I now turn to an investigation of Robert Cox's 'posthegemony'. The purpose here is not to assess the degree to which Cox can be judged a 'true' neo-Gramscian,⁹³ rather it is to assess the ramifications for developing an explicitly international (and subsequently global) praxis of hegemony on the foundations of the neo-Gramscian tradition.⁹⁴

Cox's posthegemony

As Roger Tooze notes⁹⁵, Cox's 1983 article, *Gramsci, hegemony and international relations: an essay in method*,⁹⁶ is the 'main route' through which the neo-Gramscian conceptualisation of hegemony has been introduced into IR. In this article, Cox acknowledges Gramsci's historical debt to Bolshevism with regards to the grounding of hegemony in the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. Yet Cox also identifies the 'second strand' of hegemonic conceptualisation present in Gramsci: the Machiavellian '...image of power as a centaur:

92. Adamson asserts that Gramsci's articulation of hegemony as indicative of a successful consensual political system was indebted to his prior articulation of hegemony in the Southern question. See Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 170-171. The neo-Gramscians should also be asked: is Gramsci's 'West' an adequate category for encapsulating the corporate turn in mass politics? Does this use of the 'West' owe too much to the Marxist theory of 'monopoly capitalism'? Did not the 'West' itself exhibit a socio-political differentiation with regards to resolutions to the process of primitive accumulation? See, for example, note 55 above and Gramsci's typology of the international milieu wherein even France is not accorded a straightforward 'capitalist' statehood.

93. See Cox's reply to his critics in 'Reflections and Transitions', in *The Political Economy of a Plural World*, 29.

94. This critique can therefore be classified as one investigating the trajectory of Cox's thought. See Michael Schechter, 'Critiques of Coxian Theory', in *ibid.*, 2.

95. Roger Tooze, 'Understanding the Global Political Economy: Applying Gramsci', *Millennium* 19, no. 2 (1990): 276.

96. Robert Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: an Essay in Method', in *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, ed. Stephen Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 49-66.

half man, half beast - a necessary combination of consent and coercion.⁹⁷ Crucially, Cox believes that it is the generic quality of this Machiavellian strand that frees Gramsci's hegemony from ties to 'historically specific social classes' and therefore allows it to be used as a tool for understanding 'relations of world order.'⁹⁸ Hegemonic world order is then typified by the generally consensual (although latently coercive) nature of the Pax Britannica and Pax Americana.⁹⁹

What is notable in this initial engagement is that in granting hegemony explanatory power at the level of world order, Cox deems it necessary to first evacuate the historical specificity of the correlation of social forces in Gramsci's hegemony. Because of this, Cox's analysis of world order, in keeping with the neo-Gramscian tradition, implicitly evacuates the problematic of primitive accumulation from the constitution of hegemonic praxis.

This being said, Cox's wider intellectual investigations do seem to engage with 'historically specific social classes': in fact, his magnum opus, *Production, Power, and World Order*¹⁰⁰ attempts to historically explicate the concrete development and transformation of world order through the conduit of 'modes of social relations of production'. Here, Cox outlines twelve such 'modes',¹⁰¹ but what is significant is that he conceptualises them as 'monads', each with their own 'self-contained structures' and 'developmental potential'.¹⁰² However, I would assert that, contextualised in the world-historical viewpoint presented above, this collection represents 'snap-shots' of the problematical processes and (attempted) resolutions to primitive accumulation. For in actuality, all of

97. Ibid., 52. There is a neo-Gramscian tendency to place in almost binary opposition the Machiavellian and Russian-Marxist strands of hegemony evident in Gramsci's writings. Whilst being unable to develop this point further here, I would assert that even if Machiavelli and Marx had written in different political and temporal milieus, both were employed in 19th and 20th century Italy and Russia to meet the specifically modern challenge of forming a universalistic sociality. To the extent that this challenge required an answer to the peasant question, and that at the most general level this question was shared in Russia and Italy, the attempt to cleave once more, through comparative analysis, the Machiavellian and Russian-Marxist 'strands' of hegemony in Gramsci is unwise.

98. Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations', 52.

99. Ibid., 60.

100. Robert Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

101. Ibid., 32. The full list is subsistence, peasant-lord, primitive labour market, household, self-employment, enterprise labour market, bipartism, enterprise corporatism, tripartism, state corporatism, communal and central planning.

102. Ibid., x. Cox does caution against an uncritical *descriptive* usage of these modes. Ibid. 32-34.

Cox's modes have developed and (in some cases) regressed not as monads, but in 'geo-political' and temporal relation to each other through the exigencies of the expansion and intensification of capitalist sociality. This being said, I would assert that here again Cox's analytical framework refuses the problematic of primitive accumulation as a dynamic causal factor of 'world order'.

Because of this refusal, the specific nature of capitalist sociality—and the challenge it poses to existing socio-political orders—becomes submerged in Cox's narrative of modern world history.¹⁰³ And this is the crucial point: instead of a problematic of qualitative transformation, what becomes signal in *Production, Power, and World Order*, is a certain *positional* problematic of social forces. As monads, the modes of social relations that constitute Cox's core superstructures seem to be either 'hierarchically' ordered, 'pyramidically' shaped, or generated through inclusion/exclusion.¹⁰⁴ No surprise then, that Cox articulates 'class' itself as a 'way in which people are *positioned* in the production process [my emphasis]'.¹⁰⁵ The outcome of this is that, with regards to hegemony, even though Cox is aware that class formation requires a 'common identity and capacity for common action'¹⁰⁶, he does not seem to realise that such a potential for universalistic sociality is not historically given. Thus, whereas for Gramsci (as for Trotsky) it is the manufacturing of the universalistic 'glue' of class that in one way or another provides the key problematic for analyses of social transformation and the fundamental task of hegemony, for Cox the glue simply waits to be applied. In this sense, Cox's neo-Gramscian analysis of world order takes capitalist sociality to be unproblematically writ large.

With this in mind, I now wish to turn to subsequent writings in order to investigate the more explicit normative stance developed by Cox.¹⁰⁷ In these writings Cox presents the forging of world hegemony in terms of the ideological 'naturalising' of one specific form of intersubjectivity into an

103. Hannes Lacher makes a similar point in 'Making Sense of the International System', in *Historical Materialism and Globalization*, eds. M. Rupert and H. Smith (London: Routledge, 2000), 150.

104. Cox, *Production, Power and World Order*, 81-82.

105. Ibid. 148, 353. This tendency towards a positional conceptualisation of class and the division of labour is identifiable in Cox's later writings too. See Robert Cox, 'Power and Knowledge – Towards a New Ontology of World Order', in *The Political Economy of a Plural World*, 84.

106. Cox, *Production, Power and World Order*, 356.

107. Here I shall be focusing on certain aspects of the following articles: 'Structural issues of global governance: implications for Europe', in *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, 259-289; 'Towards a posthegemonic conceptualisation of world order: reflections on the relevancy of Ibn Khaldun', in *Approaches to World Order*, eds. R. Cox and T. Sinclair

apparently universalistic 'civilisation'.¹⁰⁸ Specifically, it is the historic bloc of the capitalist state-society complex that is writ large in the era of globalisation to become the dominant business civilization against which 'counter-hegemonic' projects have to be developed.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, what is now conceptualised as 'emancipatory' is a movement beyond the establishment of another ideological—yet not substantive—universality towards a supra-intersubjectivity: a mutual recognition of distinct traditions of civilisation that allow for world order to be constructed as multi-civilisational.¹¹⁰ This praxis of 'posthegemony' attempts to create a universalism founded upon the principle of plurality and so its construction has an essentially dialogical nature. As such, its forging becomes a task of the organic intellectual: the resurrecting and promotion of 'the spirit of association' in (global) civil society.¹¹¹

However, this prescription holds one crucial assumption about the structure of world order: that there exists, or is generally available, a shared sociality which allows individual units to dialogue as political equals, regardless of the distribution and constitution of social power between them. And does this pluralistic sociality not concord to a universe of politically like units engendered through 'double freedom'—a universe of social equivalence? In other words, is not the social basis of this posthegemony, historically 'revealed', none other than the universalistic sociality through which capitalist appropriation is mediated? While Cox might transpose the 'double free' unit to a civilisational level, I would still maintain that supra-intersubjectivity is posited upon the assumption of a generalised abstract egalitarianism, wherein the concrete differentials in agency existent between 'intersubjectivities' must be removed from the posthegemonic mediation of social power. Moreover, Stephen Gill's hegemonic guide to action in the guise of the 'post-modern prince' seems to share a similar assumption. His 'democratic collective action' in 'multiple and capillary

(Cambridge University Press, 1996); 'Civil society at the turn of the millennium'; and 'Thinking about Civilizations', *Review of International Studies* 26, Special Issue (2000): 217-234.

108. See Cox, 'Structural issues of global governance', 264-265.

109. Cox, 'Thinking about Civilizations', 224-225. Gill's notion of 'market civilization' shares a certain conceptual similarity: see 'Globalisation, Market Civilisation'.

110. Cox, 'Towards a posthegemonic conceptualisation of world order', 151-152; Cox, 'Thinking about Civilizations', 230-231.

111. Cox, 'Civil society at the turn of the millennium', 16; Cox, 'Thinking about Civilizations', 219-223. Here Cox's praxis starts to share similarities with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's 'radical democracy'; see *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).

form' invokes a similar assumption of a sociality write large to that of Cox: such action is enabled by a 'transnational sense of a shared community of fate', one conducive to the 'spirit of association'.¹¹²

But before drawing out the implications of such prescriptions, I must all too briefly highlight Mark Rupert's work; for here exists a sustained neo-Gramscian engagement with Marx's belief in the historical specificity of capitalist sociality and its concomitant mode of 'social self-understanding'.¹¹³ Rupert's work, therefore, cannot be directly held to the same critique as Cox's. Nevertheless, Rupert shares the neo-Gramscian assumption that Gramsci produced a theory of transformation *out of* capitalist social relations,¹¹⁴ and not a praxis of *primitive socialist accumulation*—a transformation into but at the same time beyond capitalist sociality, with all the accompanying problems of 'organic' leadership. And by implicitly assuming, in this way, a resolution to primitive accumulation—i.e. a worldwide generalisation of 'double free' sociality—what becomes the 'counter-hegemonic' task for Rupert is an ideological engagement with the contradiction of capitalist sociality.¹¹⁵ Counter-hegemony is, in other words, a dialogical reasoning over 'common sense'; a convincing of the world's masses that the abstractedness of 'double freedom' does not resolve to concrete freedom and democratic self-determination.¹¹⁶ True, Rupert is perceptive enough to highlight qualitative differences in forms of sociality, such as race and gender. But at the same time he asserts that commonality exists in the fact that all social beings occupy positions in the capitalist world division of labour. The *positional* logic of class appears once again, and a (post-)universalistic project is redeemed in the form of a dialogical resolution, a 'negotiation of difference'.¹¹⁷

Thus Cox's posthegemony, Gill's postmodern prince, and Rupert's counter-hegemonic struggle over 'common sense' are all prescriptions developed from the assumption of a successful completion of the process

112. Gill, 'Towards a Postmodern Prince?', 140; S. Gill, 'Constitutionalizing Inequality', 64.

113. M. Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2; and Rupert, *Producing Hegemony*, 16-38.

114. See for example, 'Alienation, capitalism and the inter-state system', 76-77; 'Historical materialism, ideology', 292-293; and *Ideologies of Globalization*, 10-15.

115. See *ibid.*; and Scott Solomon and Rupert, 'Historical Materialism, Ideology'.

116. Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization*, 5, 155.

117. This logic is evident in Solomon and Rupert, 'Historical Materialism, Ideology', 297-298; Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization*, 92; and Mark Rupert, 'Class, Gender and the Politics of Neoliberal Globalization in the USA', in *Egalitarian Politics in the Age of Globalization*, 34.

of primitive accumulation on a world-historical scale, or at least, that its universalisation is unproblematical. It is precisely this assumption that provides the space in which to proclaim that 'progressive' universalistic sociality can be non-coercively fostered via a project of pluralism. But to foster a world-wide 'collective will' from existing socialities ill equipped for this task, while at the same time managing to avoid a coercive transformation of said socialities: this is the epochal problem of leftist praxis that is implicitly obfuscated and rendered unfashionable. And this is the most serious implication for critical praxes of hegemony which analytically conflate capitalist sociality with that which constitutes world order, albeit implicitly: the resulting guide to action ignores the constitutive nature of the international dimension in processes of social transformation through which world order has been developed in the modern epoch. The crucial point, then, is not that the (radical) pluralism of Cox et al. simply mistakes the abstract homogeneity of capitalist social relations for substantive homogeneity.¹¹⁸ Rather, such praxes are silent on the problematical nature of the world-historical construction of capitalist sociality itself.

Conclusion

How, then, should one conceptualise the historical development of world-order in the modern epoch? If a world capitalist market does not necessarily equate to a world of capitalist sociality, how to theorise 'world order'? More precisely, how might one concretise the agency/structure relation in a way that captures the international dimension of social transformation discussed above and from which to critically assess current prescriptions of, and possibilities for, 'counter-hegemony'?

Notwithstanding its lacuna with regards to the international dimension of social transformation, I would suggest that Gramsci's concept of passive revolution, divested from neo-Gramscian assumptions, holds considerable analytical purchase with regards to the nature of 20th century contestations over world order.¹¹⁹ But this being said, I would assert that Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development holds the potential to actually resolve this lacuna, and such can provide a new perspective on the contested production of world

118. This is Ellen Meiksins Wood's critique of Laclau and Mouffe; see 'The Uses and Abuses of "Civil Society"', in *Socialist Register*, eds. R. Milliband, L. Panitch and J. Saville (London: Merlin Press, 1990), 74-80.

119. For more explicit thoughts on the purchase of the concept of passive revolution for historical-sociology in IR, see Adam D. Morton, 'The Age of Absolutism: Capitalism, the Modern States-System and International Relations' (paper presented at the Annual BISA conference, December 2003).

order. To recap, it is not simply that the creation of a capitalist world market upsets 'old' political orders and forms of sociality. But through the processes of combined development emanating from existent socio-political unevenness, tendencies towards unprecedented socio-political forms have been generated, rather than simply a world in capital's image.¹²⁰ As Justin Rosenberg suggests, the expansion and intensification of capitalist sociality has thrown up '*within its own movement*' the contending, combined forms of sociality and political order that have, throughout the 20th century and beyond, been its opposing force.¹²¹

And is not the historical dialectic of modern world order remarkable for the myriad of novel responses that have drastically impacted the worldwide breadth and depth of the capital relation, not least of all in the capitalist 'heartland' itself? Communism (including central planning), the corporative state, fascism, ethnic nationalism (and the often concomitant gender casting of woman as 'keeper' of the nation), political Islam: I would conjecture that all these eminently novel socialities are precisely combined developmental (and usually unstable) attempts to resolve the challenge of primitive accumulation. They are, in short, substitution projects for the agency of 'double freedom'. Indeed, being *themselves causal*, these political projects have intimately shaped the contemporary tides of modern world history in the continuing contested production of world order. Dare it be asked: what long-term process of social transformation is the current 'war on terror' embedded in? What would it mean, analytically and prescriptively, to approach the wider current disturbance over ruling principles of world order as a response to, and even a continuation of, combined development?

But here, the analytical task is perhaps less formidable than the prescriptive. For if one does not assume that there exists a world-wide sociality conducive to the building of a 'collective will' based upon the negotiation of difference, to what extent can, for example, the 'anti-globalisation' movement be judged to have escaped the contradictions immanent to Gramsci's praxis, and disastrously played out in Trotsky's? In fact, on what grounds might one state that this contemporary 'counter-hegemonic' movement escapes the defining dilemma of all modern 'emancipatory' projects; that dilemma which 'corrupts' emancipation and blurs the line between 'progressive' and 'reactionary'

120. Contrast this to the popular conceptualisation of Trotsky's theory, represented here by Fred Halliday: 'the combination consists in the subjugation of the parts to the workings of the world market .. the unevenness consists in the vast differences of wealth and power'. Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 320.

121. Rosenberg, *Isaac Deutscher*, 13.

agency: the *forcing* of a collective will out of differential (and usually particularistic) socialities?¹²²

For neo-Gramscians in IR to claim that they have, at least in principle, superseded this dilemma is only possible because they have reproduced the conceptual separation of the historical 'Eastern' results of hegemony from 'Western' praxis. But as I have demonstrated, such a comparative move forecloses the international dimension from the historical analysis of social transformation by rendering primitive accumulation unproblematic. This unproblematic rendering can be gleaned, for example, in Stephen Gill's assumption that the transformative nature of primitive accumulation is *encapsulated* in the globalisation of 'possessive individualism'.¹²³ But while the capital relation no doubt poses the problem of the possessive individual to existing political orders (and with ever more intensity), I have asserted here that primitive accumulation has nevertheless proceeded as an open-ended process of social transformation, one often mutating in its journey across differentially developed socio-political formations. And it is this combined developmental character of world-historical development that provides not just the historical foundation of, but at the same time the deepest challenge to, leftist praxes of hegemony. The resolution to this challenge, which is now more urgent than ever, certainly cannot be found in early 20th century Marxism. But the challenge remains invisible unless the problematic of primitive accumulation becomes fashionable once again.

*Robbie Shilliam is a D.Phil. Candidate in the IR Department
at the University of Sussex*

122. Louise Amoore and Paul Langley suggest that Global Civil Society has, necessarily, a boundedness; thus its constitution does not escape the power relation of inclusion/exclusion. See 'Ambiguities of Global Civil Society', *Review of International Studies* 30, no.1 (2004): 107.

123. See Isabella Bakker & Stephen Gill, 'Global Political Economy and Social Reproduction', in *Power, Production and Social Reproduction*, eds. I. Bakker and S. Gill (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), 13-14. This is also where I diverge from van der Pijl's assessment of passive revolution, which analytically posits an *unproblematical* 'molecular' transformation towards capitalist sociality.