

**ANTONIO GRAMSCI - CONCEPT OF
HEGEMONY**

The term hegemony was first used by Plekhanov and other Russian Marxists in the 1880s to denote the need for the working class to lead an alliance with the peasantry for the overthrow of Tsarism. The working class should develop a national approach, fighting for the liberation of all oppressed classes and groups. This was developed by Lenin. For Lenin, hegemony was a strategy for revolution, a strategy which the working class and its representatives should adopt to win the support of the great majority. Gramsci adds a new dimension to this by extending it to include the practices of a capitalist class or its representatives, both in gaining state power, and in maintaining that power once it has been achieved.

Civil society – Capitalist state rules through force plus consent. **“Political Society”** which is the arena of political institutions and legal constitutional control, is the **realm of force**. **“Civil Society”** which is commonly seen as the “private” or “non-state” sphere is the **realm of consent**. The division is however purely conceptual and the two can overlap in reality.

State = Political Society + Civil Society.

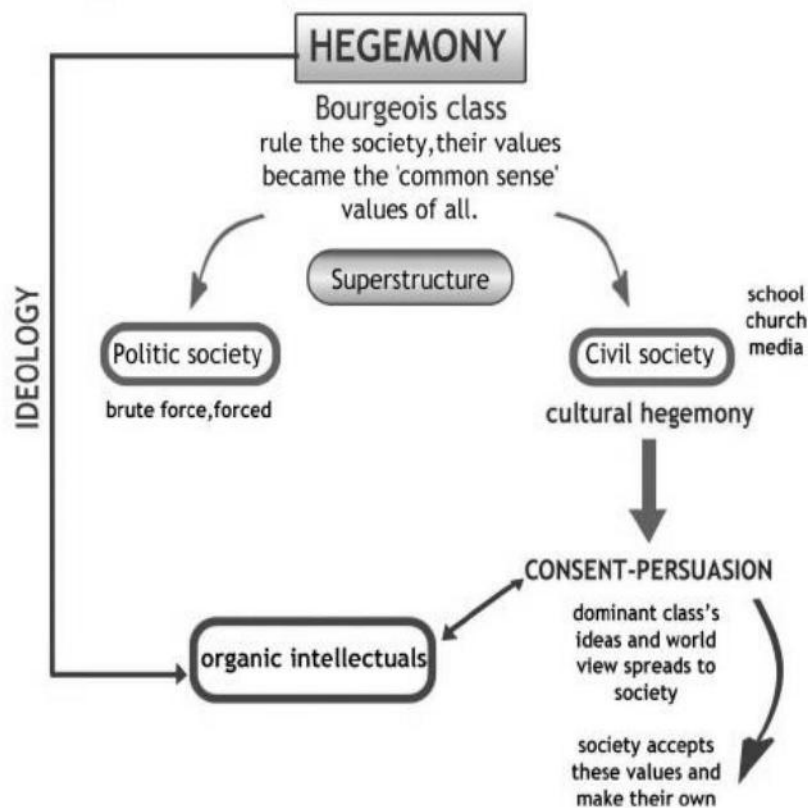
The use of **coercion in the process of domination** is the domain of what he calls ‘political society,’ meaning “the armed forces, police, law courts and prisons, together with all the administrative departments concerning taxation finance, trade, industry, social security, etc.” These are the **“structures of coercion”**.

Consent to domination, the second portion of Gramsci’s formula of power, is developed within civil society. It is an internalized form of domination that differs from the external, “direct domination” achieved through the coercive force of political society. Civil society is the sphere within which the state pursues (and maintains) hegemony, a social order where “a common social-moral language is spoken, in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour”. The structures associated with these are the **“structures of legitimation”**. These structures lend legitimacy to the rule of capitalist class so that even injustice involved in this rule would carry the impression of justice. All the organisations which make up civil society are the result of a complex network of social practices and social relations, including the struggle between the two fundamental classes, capital and labour.

WESTERN THINKERS**Gramsci – Hegemony**

One set of institutions, the apparatuses which make up the state, are separated from all the rest in having a monopoly of coercion. All these social relations and the organisations which embody them (other than the state with its, coercion) are called by Gramsci civil society. The social relations which make up civil society are distinct from the relations of production, and the organisations within civil society are distinct from the apparatuses which make up the state. **Civil society is the sphere of class struggles**

and of popular-democratic struggles. Thus, it is the sphere in which a dominant social group organises consent and hegemony. It is also the sphere where the subordinate social groups may organise their opposition and construct **an alternative hegemony—a counterhegemony.** The concept of civil society as the sphere of class and popular-democratic struggles, and of the contest for hegemony between the two fundamental classes, adds a new dimension to Marxism. It develops very significantly the Marxist

Hegemony

theory of political power and of the revolutionary process. Gramsci says that civil society is ethical or moral society, because it is in civil society that the hegemony of the dominant class has been built up by means of political and ideological struggles.

Gramsci uses the term political society for the coercive relations which are materialised in the various institutions of the state—the armed forces, police, law courts and prisons, together with all the administrative departments concerning taxation finance, trade, industry, social security, etc., which depend in the last resort for their effectiveness on the state's monopoly of coercion. He was of course very well aware that the activities of the state are far more than coercion and that the state apparatuses play a vital part in the organisation of consent; he refers to the 'educative and formative role of the state'. The term 'political society' is not a substitute for the term 'state', but refers only to the coercive relations embodied in the state apparatuses.

Gramsci located civil society in the political superstructure. He underlined the crucial role of civil society as the contributor of the cultural and ideological capital required for the survival of the hegemony of capitalism. Rather than posing it as a problem, as in earlier Marxist conceptions,

Gramsci viewed civil society as the site for problem-solving.

Gramsci tends to equate physical force with the public sphere denoted as "political society" and hegemony with the private sphere which he calls "civil society," yet he cautions that the **separation of public and private is purely methodological**, since both spheres form parts within a totality, an ensemble of social relations that are economic, moral, political, religious, commercial, and artistic. Gramsci believed that the public and the private are complementary spheres of domination, and, indeed, some instances of hegemony in the private sphere are only possible through public protection by the state.

He suggests that "state" should be understood as well as government apparatus, also the private apparatuses of hegemony'. (i.e) State = Political society + Civil society. In other words, hegemony protected by the armour of coercion'. **Gramsci calls this the integral state** as opposed to the state in the ordinary sense, which he sometimes calls 'the state-as-government' (stato-governo) and which he also terms 'political society'.

A hegemonic class exercises power over subordinate classes in civil society in addition to the state power which it exercises through its predominance in the state.

**Transparent
State**

East
State
/ Civil Society
Coercion
Domination
Manoeuvre

**Opaque
State**

West
Civil Society
/ State
Consent
Hegemony
Position

Po

wer is diffused through civil society as well as being embodied in the coercive apparatuses of the state. Thus, Gramsci is proposing a far-reaching modification of the classical Marxist theory of the nature of power.

He uses the term **HISTORIC BLOC** to indicate the way in which a hegemonic class combines the leadership of a block of social forces in civil society with its leadership in the sphere of production.

According to Gramsci, **organic intellectuals are organizers of hegemony** in the sense that they provide ideological leadership to a given class as well as articulating and implementing the hegemonic project of that class through the apparatuses of the state and the public sphere.

He privileged the **role of education in building a counter hegemonic revolutionary** class consciousness and emphasized the importance of the working class proletariat in creating its own insurgent movements. Recognizing the

capacity of all humans to contribute to the intellectual pursuit, he reconceptualized the classically elitist intellectual realm as a fundamental part of everyday life, bringing it into the grasp of the average working-class subject. Because he believed that ideological transformation was imperative before Revolution became possible, he wanted a revolutionary socialist consciousness to be generated organically within the communities that he saw leading the future Revolution. He argues that if the working class is to raise itself from a subaltern class to take over the leadership of the nation, and to acquire the necessary political consciousness through a profound moral and intellectual reform, it must create its own organic intellectuals.

Thus, hegemony is produced and reproduced through a network of institutions, social relations, and ideas which are outside the direct political sphere.

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