

Re-visiting the old to unlock the new? A Gramscian critique of the neo-Gramscians

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Abstract

Since Robert Cox's early interventions in the 1980s, the work of Gramsci has been openly applied to the arena of International Politics, often transported within the wider concepts of 'World Order' and 'Transnational Class' formation. Whilst this has produced a great deal of commendable scholarly work, it has equally produced a growing number of criticism, who have voiced concerns over the viability and feasibility of applying Gramsci's key concepts to the realm of the International. Rather than revisiting these charges, we argue that one of the main problems associated with the 'neo-Gramscian' readings within International Relations (IR) is that it has tended to develop an ontology of its own, and has neglected a wider textual engagement with Gramsci's own work. Following on from recent work, we believe that if Gramsci's potential as an international theorist is to be realised, then we need to move away from existing developments within the neo-Gramscian discourse and towards a re-evaluation of Gramsci's own work on hegemony and civil consent. In addition, such a re-evaluation would open up new avenues of empirical research, which neo-Gramscians have longed called for, but have often been slow to develop.

Such has been the influx of ‘neo-Gramscian’ material within the area of International Studies (particularly in the disciplines of International Relations (IR) and the sub-discipline International Political Economy (IPE)) that it has almost acquired the status of a paradigm in recent years. Whilst debates continue over the validity of the application of Gramsci (Femia, 2005; Germain and Kenny, 1998), over the manner in which it is applied (Ayers, 2008; Worth, 2008; Robinson, 2005), and on its compatibility with Marxist rigour (Bieler *et. al* 2006; Morton, 2006), the ‘neo-Gramscian’ approach is one that has been employed to demonstrate how power and consent are maintained in international politics. Central to this has been the legacy of Robert Cox and his work on ‘World Order’, that goes far to explain how hegemony is maintained at an international level through a combination of production, ‘transnational social forces’ and through the inspiration of leading states (Cox, 1987; 1996).

This paper argues that the manner in which Gramsci is used in the vast majority of explanatory accounts in IR employs a specific form of ontological understanding about the nature of Gramsci’s theoretical application that often appear to be rooted in a Coxian interpretation of Gramsci, rather the more complex – and indeed often contradictory models that Gramsci himself was dealing with in Prison. In addressing these concerns, it argues that the ‘neo-Gramscian’ approach needs to move beyond the constraints that have shaped them to date and re-examine the nature of core Gramscian concepts that they have applied to the international arena. This is particularly the case with *hegemony*, which is examined and explained in a specific manner that tends to utilise its traditional understanding as a form of state dominance in IR, rather than build upon the complexities illustrated in readings of hegemony from other academic fields (Mouffe, 1979; Hall, 1996). Following recent arguments (Worth, 2008; 2009a/b; Pasha, 2008), we believe that a re-examination of these complexities is necessary in order to expand upon many of the current applications, that often (at least in terms of empirical analysis) do not fully realise the ontological scope and potential that Gramscian theory might give to wider aspects of global politics.

Neo-Gramscian theory in IR/IPE

The neo-Gramscian ‘approach’ within Global Politics is commonly seen to have dated back to Cox’s two interventions in the journal *Millennium* in the early 1980s (Cox, 1981; 1983). Here, Cox sought to introduce the Gramscian concept of hegemony to explain how power and influence is asserted at the international level. This was more explicitly developed in the later 1983 piece (entitled ‘Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations’), which he called for a methodological rethink in the way in which hegemony was understood. The concept of hegemony in International Politics has long since been associated with dominance and leadership, whereby a dominant state (or ‘hegemon’) asserts its power over others in either an international or a regional dynamic. Such observations within IPE led to the school of thought known as ‘hegemonic stability theory’ – a conviction that international economic stability could only be achieved through the leadership or dominance of one state (Kindleberger, 1981). By the late 1970s, it was argued that the decline of the US had left a void that had yet to be filled by the following decade (Keohane, 1984). Cox’s turn to Gramsci was the result of one of the many responses to the claim that the US was in hegemonic decline. For Cox, hegemony at the international level was merely a way in which a state maintains its passive influence over the overall international system so that it establishes a form of ‘world order’ (Cox, 1983). In this way, hegemony is not used in the traditional Gramscian manner in the way in which it is within a state – the complex process that civil society organises itself through the relationship between dominant and subaltern classes and through the management of socio-cultural agents by organic and traditional intellectuals – but is reproduced more as a state that provides a brand of intellectual/moral inspiration and leadership within a specific world order (Robinson, 2005).

The initial usage of Gramsci by Cox was thus applied as a method of critically evaluating claims about the decline of US supremacy in global politics and the concept of hegemony was largely used in conjunction with his largely understanding of ‘world order’. (Leysons, 2008). For Cox, world order accounts for the social configuration and economic character of a given historical era, and whilst that might draw partly upon Gramsci’s own understanding of ‘historical blocs’ (*blocco storico*),¹ they also drew from diverse social theorists and political economy, ranging from Ibn Khaldun, Karl Polanyi and E.H Carr (Cox, 1996). It has been the ‘Coxians’ who followed which have fashioned

this understanding of Gramsci into a specific school and developed certain avenues for its application. This was perhaps best seen originally with the work done by Stephen Gill in giving a more rounded 'Gramscian' edge to the understanding of world order (Gill, 2003), with the 'Amsterdam School', that have forwarded the notion that hegemony is fashioned across borders through the construction of 'transnational classes' (Overbeek, 2000) and more recently by others who have tried, in light of criticism, to ground Gramsci within a more textual framework of Western Marxism (Morton, 2007; Bieler et al, 2006).

Despite distinct differences between these separate positions, each does not depart significantly from the manner in which Cox originally formulated his ideas of how hegemony and historical blocs can be understood at an international level. The development of the idea of 'transnational classes' here is a case in point. For, whilst it attempts to provide an international departure point for Gramscian application, in the manner and spirit of Gramsci's 'international relations precede or follow social relations but its point of departure is national', the results do not greatly differ from more traditional Marxist understandings of class relations. Similarly, if one was to take up Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical development of the theory of hegemony, then one could conclude that the 'Amsterdam's schools' understanding of hegemony seems closer to that professed by the 'Austro-Marxists' than the one developed by Gramsci (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). In general, the 'Amsterdam School' have sought to illustrate through empirical studies how a capitalist class in one particular state forges links with another, creating mutual interests and as such consolidate specific class divisions. Historically, much work is given to the Anglo-American business and banking groups that emerged at the turn of the 20th century and pluralised their Lockean visions of the separation between state and civil society. However its development and hegemonic influence has been more notable since its globalisation has become more prominent through the emergence of neoliberal economics (van der Pijl, 1998). Thus, for those that subscribe to the logic of the transnational capitalist class, international hegemony is processed through the consensual relationship forged between the transnational elites and respective 'national subordinate' classes.

Whilst this has provided a fresh understanding of the articulation of hegemony at the international level, it still suffers from playing down the complexities that were involved in Gramsci's own construction. The obvious deficiency here is the fact that Gramsci's hegemony was always perceived as being the sum of civil society and the state and the lack of a state at the international level makes its plausibility less convincing (Germain and Kenny, 1998). However it also leads to top-down assumptions and generalisations concerning the nature and positioning both of civil society – in terms of the rather un-dialectical manner that neoliberal social forces have gained supremacy over agencies that merely re-enforce its overriding production. In particular, as much of the attention of the 'Amsterdam School' has been geared towards looking the development of a Atlantic-European class alliance, then recent studies have focussed upon the 'new' Europe (see the collections by Bieler and Morton, 2001 and Apeldoorn, Drahokoupil and Horn, 2008). Here, the EU has tended to be seen as an expression of neoliberalism, despite its contested history and its condemnation by neoliberal economists and practitioners for regulatory interference in the economy. As a result, neo-Gramscians have been accused as subjecting such institutional bodies to forms of economic reductionism (Strange, 2006). Such claims add to the shortcomings in the manner in which hegemony is applied as they fail to account for the different civil contracts that have to be negotiated at different geographical levels and through different geographical institutions throughout the EU. Placed across the international or global spectrum, there is a similar concern that hegemony might be merely re-created as a crude form of neoliberalism, dictated by the US, its allies and by international economic institutions.

For us, the main concern over the neo-Gramscians' use of hegemony is in the manner in which it is assumed at the international level. As we stress above, part of this is due to the manner in which that Cox bought Gramsci's concept of hegemony in the first instance, yet the various applications are often reproduced as mere reflections of (neoliberal) capitalist production. Whilst we have no concern with concluding that the character of civil society is determined, as Stuart Hall put it in the first instance, the compromises, struggles and disparities that are shaped through the sum of the relationship between dominant and subaltern classes at every level of civil society are often overlooked (Hall, 1990). Again this does not suggest that there have not been detailed empirical studies that

have shown how neoliberal social forces have succeeded in saturating civil society across the international spectrum, but that these have been done through a Coxian departure point. Our argument is that in order for the ideas of Gramsci to achieve their full potential and benefits to the study of International Politics we need to re-read Gramsci and understand the full implications of the dynamic of hegemony. In addition more emphasis should be given to studies on hegemony that have emerged from other disciplines (quite often from the Arts), where studies are given to how hegemony is articulated through a variety of channels that are often saturated at the cultural level.

At this juncture, it should be acknowledged that many neo-Gramscians have indeed revisited Gramsci in depth in light of the criticisms – particularly those of Germain and Kenny – that have been placed to the interventions of Cox, Gill and the ‘Amsterdam School’. Of particular note here is Adam Morton, whose has produced a number of pieces deconstructing Gramscian theory and demonstrating how Gramscian ‘perspectives’ can be employed in a number of ways at the international level. In examining a wide variety of Gramsci’s own work and in looking at the application of Gramsci outside IR, Morton concludes by re-iterating Hall’s assertion that in order to apply Gramsci you need to ‘think in a Gramscian way’ rather than attempt to reconstruct Gramsci’s legacy to the present (Morton, 2003; 2007). As a result, no one approach or school should lie claim to embody a Gramscian method, but there should instead exist a collection of perspectives, which embody a Gramscian ‘spirit’ (Morton, 2003). This is an honourable suggestion, but there are two distinct problems with it in terms of its development in IR. Firstly, whilst Morton calls for a wide set of different perspectives to counter the claim that a school formation is occurring (Morton, 2001), he then re-enforces this notion by illustrating the richness in the Cox-inspired world order/transnational class ontology (Morton, 2003). He thus offers no concrete development for these constructing perspectives to prosper beside/within the framework that has already been conceived.² Secondly, and more importantly, the central concept of hegemony remains one that is tied to its Coxian starting point. It is still viewed as an illustration of how leading states and/or elite classes forge a specific order and does not pay specific attention to the unique account of how hegemony is formed and fashioned, contested and modified. It is this ‘open’ process that neo-Gramscians need to explore if they are to realise the potential of

constructing contrasting perspectives. By doing this, we believe that it is best to return back to Gramsci's own writings.

Gramsci and 'Conceptions of the World' as the Terrain of Hegemony

Hegemony, according to Gramsci, is both a structural and superstructural project of consensual totality that can fuse contradictory *conceptions of the world* held by the popular masses and mobilise them at the level of consciousness so as to allow the ruling classes to fashion and exert a specific brand of *intellectual and moral leadership* whilst controlling and perpetuating economic production. If *hegemony* is the overarching theme of Gramsci's political thought (Bates 1975), then *contradictory consciousness*, that is, his analysis of particular *conceptions of the world*, is an underlying current within the body of his overall thought. It is upon the terrain of material *contradictory consciousness*, or the specific *conception(s) of the world*, held by individuals and social groups, that popular consent is built towards the perpetuation of the intellectual and moral leadership of the ruling classes and productive forces to exercise hegemony within a given period. A functional *hegemony*, according to Gramsci, organically links *thought* and *practice*—it is a *philosophy of praxis*—that produces and is fuelled by the *consent* of the popular masses throughout the social strata.

If we are to more comprehensively understand world order and global political economy, through Gramscian terms such as “hegemony,” then we would do well to subject every social force and/or state-society complex we analyse to a thorough inquiry into each one's particular *conception of the world*—its contradictions and where it fits in to the overall hegemonic thread organically tied to the intellectual and moral leadership of the ruling classes and the forces of production. Every structure and agent—intellectual and institution—within the facilitation or contestation of globalisation, carries with it/them a particular *conception of the world*, an intellectual and moral compass with which to engage the world. In order to understand the multilayered “nebuleuse” (Cox 2002) of global capitalism and free market hegemony, we must find the relationship between agents and structures of this process to the *conception(s) of the world* of individuals and social forces throughout the multifaceted processes of globalisation.

As stated above, the neo-Gramscians frequently focus on the top-down processes of global free market hegemony, with respect to the *thought* and *practice* of transnational institutions like the Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations, and/or Bilderberg meetings (van der Pijl, 1998, 2001; van Apeldoorn, 2001; Gill, 1993). This, in essence, portrays hegemony, in the Gramscian sense, as a very top-down elitist process. Gramsci's concept of hegemony, however, must be understood as a much more consensual process. Hegemony is something that the majority of the popular and/or subaltern masses *subscribe* to, quite willingly, because hegemony establishes a nexus, between the interests of the ruling classes and the forces of production, within and between the *conception(s) of the world* of the popular and/or subaltern masses. Hegemony thus means that the popular masses have *bought into* the brand of intellectual and moral leadership that the ruling classes have marketed—the popular and/or subaltern masses have thus been co-opted into the system of *thought* and *practice*, or been subsumed into the ideological superstructures attached to the base of production. Today, in the modern democracies, this base of production is global free market capitalism, and individuals are, first and foremost across class strata, *consumers*. The various and variegated *conception(s) of the world*, across the class spectrum, have been channelled towards the ends of production and the status quo represented by the dominant classes. Organic links, or conduits of hegemony, are forged by *intellectuals*, representative of different socio-cultural-economic-class interests upon the observable, dialectical, and interlinked levels of analyses for specific *conception(s) of the world* held by individuals and social groups: *language(s)*, *common sense*, *folklore*, *popular religion*, *philosophy*, and *religion(s) of the intellectuals* (Fulton, 1987; Robinson, A., 2005).

The specific conception of the world, constituted by folklore; common sense; popular religion(s); religion(s) of the intellectuals; philosophy; language, formulates as a material and *contradictory consciousness* (Gramsci 1996, *Q4:45*, pp.194-96; 1971, p333). It must be clarified, however, that these six elements are, in reality, not isolated from one another, but are indeed overlapping and the sum of dialectical activity within and between each other, as well as to the forces of production and the material conditions of life (Fulton 1987). The contradictions of individuals and social groups, or “contradictory consciousness,” is the by-product of this dialectical interaction and the sum of

contradictions between conflicting conceptions of the world held by other individuals and social groups throughout history (Gramsci 1971, p333). When both distilled and re-synthesised, these levels represent the intellectual and psychological terrain of hegemony—the molecular chemistry of ‘hearts and minds’ on which consent is manufactured. Simply put, the social and political hegemony of the ruling classes is built upon the consent granted within the hearts and minds of the ruled. Hearts and minds must be channelled towards furthering the ends of production and the dominant classes, whilst retaining an intellectual and moral character that the masses can understand individually and collectively. To Gramsci the proverbial “hearts and minds” is merely a composite of these elements that, amalgamated, form an active conception of the world.

Securing “hearts and minds” is a result of a successful engagement with the *conceptions of the world* of individuals and social groups and the organic links, built by *intellectuals* and institutions, between the world of production, and the two floors of superstructures: civil and political society (Bates, 1975; Buttigieg, 1995). Gramsci establishes this synthesis of functional ideology, across class lines, on three levels: “feeling,” “knowing,” and “understanding,” or the cognitive levels of the popular masses and those of the intellectuals of the ruling classes—respectively and collectively—as being the foundation of a functioning *hegemony*. The level of reciprocation between these levels of consciousness, throughout the social strata within and between state-society complexes is key to the *hegemony* of the ruling classes and becomes functional in a natural sense when it can successfully avoid “organic centralism,” or having transparent strata within society, demarcated by class, which produces a “caste” of intellectuals (Gramsci 1996, *Q4:33*, pp. 173-74).

According to Gramsci, “only if the relationship between intellectuals and people-masses, between the leaders and the led, between the rulers and the ruled is based on an organic attachment,” will there be an organic understanding within/between state-society complexes—a conscious and unconscious understanding of one’s role, or material *raison d’etre*, within the amalgam of production, government, society and culture (*ibid*). This role is oriented by one’s own, or a social group’s, particular *conception of the world*—bound together by the threads of power and production through the intertwined levels of

language, philosophy, religion(s) of the intellectuals, popular religion(s), common sense, and folklore. This is the complex cognitive and emotional factory of ideological superstructures that produce *hegemony*, and represent the levels of engagement for any particular class/classes attempting to exercise intellectual and moral leadership—with respect to power and production. This is, in other words, a conscious and unconscious engineering of consent for a given social contract at the levels of consciousness and cognition throughout the social strata, which harmoniously and organically binds the “passions” of the popular masses with the intellectual and moral direction of the ruling classes—*thought and action*—or, a *philosophy of praxis*. It is an expression of the dialectical and contradictory nature of class relations—and how these contradictions are welded together in an organic fashion in order to produce *hegemony*.

What *hegemony* does, argues Gramsci, is to build intellectual and institutional bonds between individuals, social, ethnic and religious groups, *all with unique active conceptions of the world*, in a most organic fashion—enveloping both civil and political society—into one organic state. The key for hegemony to transcend the need for coercion is the ruling class’s level of success in passively fusing common elements from diverse *conceptions of the world* within the state-society complex. Gramsci makes very clear his bewilderment at why it was (at least in his own time) that religiously homogenous states seemed to have so many more political parties than states with very wide religious diversity—which seemed to him to have little more than two.³ All individuals tend “to have a sole organic and systematic world outlook but, since there are many deep-rooted cultural differentiations, society presents a bizarre kaleidoscope of currents that give a religious or political colouring according to historical tradition” (1995, *Q8:131ii*, p115).⁴

According to Gramsci, it is *hegemony*, that binds elements within and between *philosophy, religion of the intellectuals, religion of the people, common sense, language(s) and folklore*—and the use of these cognitive and expressive elements, organically, within and between the individual/social group and the state-society complex controlled by the ruling classes (Fulton 1987). Since Gramsci, in large part, was referring to what he then called, “the modern democracies,” he would clearly mean the proprietors of liberal capitalism. Class, in Gramsci’s analysis, thus never takes a backseat to cultural

forces, such as religion. Gramsci is merely pointing out, in depth, the failures up to his time of socialism in Western Europe and the United States to take root and take control of production because Marxist leadership and authorship (philosophy and practice) was failing to take into account the *conceptions of the world* upon which the hegemony of the ruling classes is built. Gramsci's concepts of *hegemony* and *contradictory consciousness* attempt to explain the 'how' and the 'why' Marxism had failed up to his time to take root as the dominant worldview of the subaltern/popular masses (Gramsci, 1971: 419-420). Bukharin assumed that the subaltern masses would spontaneously reject the philosophy/ideology of the ruling classes—once they gained a sense of class-consciousness. Gramsci, however, argues that such a 'clean-break' from the philosophies of the ruling classes is impossible because the popular masses are actually organically tied to the philosophy and ideologies of the ruling classes—past and present.

The ideas and philosophies of past eras of production are implicit within language, folklore, common sense, and popular religion—those elements found within the conception(s) of the world amongst the popular masses. The Philosophies and religion(s) of intellectuals associated with current forms of production, however, are transmitted through the intellectuals via mediums of class overlap—such as popular religion or civil associations. The parish priest, for example, may be a Jesuit (or Dominican; Franciscan; etc.) and speak Latin within his intellectual circles at the levels of *philosophy* and that particular *religion of intellectuals*, but he speaks the native vernacular and preaches a more universal message that informs *common sense*, *folklore*, and *popular religion* at the level of his parish. Thus he is an intermediary that bridges a gap within a variegated class structure in society. He, and all others who serve an intellectual-function within hegemony—lawyers, teachers, trade union leaders, etc.--, bridges the philosophy of the dominant classes, a religion of the intellectuals, with the common sense of the popular and lower classes through the media of language(s) and popular religion(s). Hegemony is not one end of the class spectrum merely dominating the others, but rather the synthesis these various elements into a "political constellation," led intellectually and morally, by the ruling classes and the forces of production. Philosophies and religions of intellectuals, such as theology; political/economic/social theory; science; etc. all inform the character

and expression of the brand(s) of intellectual and moral leadership exercised by the dominant classes in the functioning of hegemony (Gramsci 1971, pp.187-88).

At the lower end of the class spectrum, however, the inter-related elements of folklore, vernacular/dialect (language)⁵, common sense, and popular religion still contain residual aspects of former historic blocs of production, which produce contradictions with respect to emergent philosophies, ideas produced within innovations and revolutions in the relations of production—i.e. the philosophy and religion(s) of the intellectuals which inform the direction of their intellectual and moral leadership. Class struggle, laden within these contradictions, is averted and hegemony is produced when the levels of language, folklore, common sense, popular religion(s), religion(s) of the intellectuals, and philosophy are organically linked, throughout the variegated class structures of a socio-political-cultural entity, and channelled towards the ends of the dominant classes of production through a form of consensual subscription to a particular brand of intellectual and moral leadership. Though it may be expressed in different terms, through different strata of the class structure, hegemony is what binds the “political constellation” of the interests of different classes, the philosophy and religion(s) of the intellectuals who consensually exercise intellectual and moral leadership, and is translated through language and mediums like popular religion to the levels of common sense and folklore for the purpose of gaining consent from the led.

It is upon these levels that parties are formed, interests are aggregated, and concessions are made by the dominant classes in order to avoid class struggles. This process can allow factions of the popular masses, even if only superficially, to inform the nature and expression of the intellectual and moral character of hegemony (Gramsci, Q4:49, 1996; 1971: 5-14). Again, *hegemony*, in the Gramscian sense, necessarily involves as much *subscription*, on the part of the popular masses, as it does *domination*, on the part of the dominant classes. Like Marx, Gramsci conceived of ideas as being material forces, and the concept of *hegemony* represents the fusion of ideas with material and social forces at the “intellectual, moral, and political” levels of *thought* and *action*, and thus a successful *hegemony* is a *philosophy of praxis*⁶. Gramsci was not, however, arguing that “ideas were powerful enough to eliminate class struggle, but they were obviously capable of muting it

sufficiently to allow class societies to function,” and thus Gramsci’s concept of *hegemony* is the intellectual and moral leadership of the ruling classes with the consent of the popular and/or subaltern masses, “which is secured by the diffusion and popularisation of the world view of the ruling class” (Bates 1975, pp.351; 353).

Thus, inquiries into the intellectuals and institutions, the *thought* and *practice(s)* of transnational organisations such as the Trilateral Commission and the World Social Forum, in the context of either facilitating or contesting the *thought* and *practice* of neo-liberalism, are useful in that they provide us top-down insight. They do not, however, give us much insight into the processes of *hegemony* from the bottom-up in terms of class structure—i.e. the role the popular masses play in enabling the hegemonic process through accepting and informing the expression of the brand of intellectual and moral leadership espoused and exercised by the dominant classes. The Trilateral Commission and the World Social Forum, in Gramscian terminology, represent institutions of *intellectuals* and therefore engage in the higher levels of the *conception(s) of the world* implicit within a larger *hegemony*. The Trilateral Commission and the World Social Forum engage, albeit towards different ends, in the realm of *philosophy* and function as institutions that serve to perpetuate or contest “neo-liberalism,” a specific *religion of the intellectuals*.

It is argued here that neither the Trilateral Commission nor the World Social Forum engage directly with either the consensus-building or contestation of global free-market hegemony at the levels of *common sense*, *folklore*, or *popular religion* amongst the popular masses/subaltern classes—and certainly don’t use their *language*. Neo-liberalism, in this respect however, is but the *philosophy*, and a *religion of intellectuals*, within the larger *hegemony* of the global free market, which is becoming more implicit within the *conception(s) of the world* held by individuals and social groups—at the more popular levels of *common sense*, *folklore*, and even *popular religion*. The epistemological void is not within understanding the neo-Gramscian understanding of particular social forces operating at the higher levels of the overall hegemony of *free market global capitalism*, but rather in recognising the complexities at *all levels* of the *thought* and *practice* of hegemony, across the class spectrum and fusing together, organically, the

diverse (and contradictory) *conception(s) of the world* of the popular masses towards the ends of production and consent. What is needed is a more objective understanding of the consent of the popular masses, which is won in the realms of *common sense, folklore, and popular religion*. “Neo-liberalism” may indeed be the *philosophy and religion of the intellectuals* of the dominant productive classes, but its intellectuals and institutions, through media such as *language, popular religion, and folklore*, have translated and siphoned a specific brand of intellectual and moral leadership which has culminated in the functional ideology of global consumerist capitalism—as *thought and practice*—within and between the modern liberal democracies.

Epistemologically, the way forward for those applying Gramsci’s concept of *hegemony* to world order and global political economy is to ground our inquiries into the political-economic practices of specific social forces with thorough analyses on their specific *conception(s) of the world*. *Hegemony* is the overarching theme to Gramsci’s overall political thought, but, as well, *conception(s) of the world* and *contradictory consciousness* is the underlying terrain upon which Gramsci argues *hegemony* is produced. To take *hegemony* as a blanket explanation for the dissemination of global capitalism is limited, at best, without dealing with the specific entities which constitute what Cox refers to as the “nebuleuse” of structures and agents involved in the fashioning, functioning, and dissemination of global capitalism (Cox, 2002). Forging consensus in this “patterned disorder” for the intellectual and moral leadership of the ruling classes of global capitalism takes place along the intertwined, yet contradictory, and variegated terrain of *language, folklore, common sense, popular religion, philosophy, and religion(s) of the intellectuals*.

Thus *hegemony* is like a patchwork quilt of consensual power, with production and the intellectual and moral leadership of the ruling classes as the main threads which bind together myriad, often contradictory, *conception(s) of the world* held by individuals and social groups amongst the popular masses. We are, in essence, arguing that *hegemony* must be better understood through a bottom-up analysis of subscription (or rejection) by specific social forces within the context of globalisation, rather than solely relying on the sort of top-down analysis espoused by the Amsterdam School, which essentially argues

that *hegemony* is a much more top-down process carried out by a transnational capitalist class. Identifying and categorising transnational elites and elitist institutions of global capitalism, within a Gramscian conceptual framework of *hegemony*, is a worthwhile pursuit. It is also equally worthwhile, however, to steer our efforts towards global superstructures, engaging with the popular masses, active in the fashioning and dissemination of hegemony—at the levels of *common sense*, *popular religion*, and *folklore*.

Hegemony and Global Politics

If we have argued that the processes of hegemony contain such a multitude of social agencies that result from different levels of class struggle, how then can we re-formulate this configuration within the study of IR/IPE so that we move to a position that goes beyond the concepts of world order and transnational classes (Worth, 2009)? Again, there have been some that have written within the International spectrum who we can look at for openings. Morton's work, and in particular his work on Latin America, draws us to the attention of the relevance of folklore and mythological in contemporary studies on Gramsci, whilst Augelli and Murphy provided one of the classical empirical studies of how religion was used through-out the developing world in order to cement US supremacy during the cold war (Morton, 2007; Augelli and Murphy, 1988).

However, in terms of how hegemony might be internationally organised in a manner that accounts for the complexities demonstrated above, the interventions of Robinson and Rupert (2000) are perhaps ones that serve our purpose of moving beyond *neo*-Gramscian accounts. Robinson has urged us to imagine the 'global' in terms of how we would the 'state' and believes the contemporary form of globalisation is constructed as a transnational capitalist state (Robinson, 2005). By adopting such a structure, one can point to and envisage how the various hegemonic practices are assumed at contrasting hierarchical levels. This, however still does not allow us to express necessary divisions that occur with separate state formulations. Rupert's study on globalisation perhaps offers more here. He interprets globalisation as an open terrain, whereby certain social groups construct competing and contrasting narratives of 'common-sense', which can compliment but can also contest its productive base (Rupert, 2000). What is appealing

about Rupert's work is that whilst empirically his own studies are confined to that of American civil society, his interpretation of globalisation allows for a greater scope of study through a variety of differing mediums that potentially allows us to open up new areas of study.

Rupert's appropriation of the 'open terrain' is heavily influenced by Stuart Hall and his understanding of the construction of hegemony. For hegemony is constructed in a more loosely bounded manner where a multiple set of cultural, social and economic agents serve to both consolidate and contest avenues on common-sense upon an open terrain, but all are nevertheless shaped and influence by to use the Laclauian phrase the 'hegemonic centre' (Hall, 1988). Hall's area of study and interest was not globalisation, but on the phenomenon of Thatcherism in Britain in the 1980s, where argued how a combination of populist ideas were being constructed and contested within the arena of civil society. Yet Hall's main achievements were in the areas of cultural and media studies, as well as in studies on race and ethnicity and here he was most successful in demonstrating how bottom-up forms of *common sense*, *folklore*, *language* (through media) and popular culture are formulated towards a greater hegemonic project. The relevance of Hall's and subsequently Rupert's observations here is that they both account for certain movement within a hegemonic order where socio-cultural agencies differ and fragment in character in order to compromise a certain form of 'common-sense'. This is especially evident upon the global stage, or above the nation-state, where a hegemonic order, (which as Cox may point out may be enhanced by certain global institutions) is challenged through different social and cultural formats, dependent upon the historical cultural norms and practices of a particular region (or state).

For us, therefore, the departure for studying global politics from a Gramscian point of view uses the essential observations first captured by Cox alongside those by Rupert and Hall. Yet Hall's understanding of how hegemony is construction in contemporary society fundamentally differs from that used by Cox, Gill and the Amsterdam School and they're respective understanding of world order and transnational classes. Rather than interpreting international politics as one that understanding hegemony as structural forms of class struggles that appear at the national and the international level, and are driven

primarily by the legacy of one specific state-complex, norms and orders are shaped at different inter-connected levels, which, if we take it further, can be relevant to its respective sphere. For example, certain hegemonic relationships may be more cultural than political and may be shaped at the local or national level, whilst other may be more concrete and institutional and shaped at the global or international level. Each, as Rupert reminds us, are constructed around the basic economic principles in which an overall order is ideologically situated: in the case of the contemporary world, that of neoliberal globalisation (Rupert, 2000, 1-15).

Such a dynamic allows us to move beyond the levels of analysis associated with neo-Gramscians so that future areas of research into the nature of hegemony in IR can be developed. As we argue here, Gramsci's hegemonic outline of *language, folklore, common sense, popular religion(s), religion(s) of the intellectuals, and philosophy* need to be historicised in a manner that are relevant to current debates in globalisation. Whilst Rupert has shown as a route into the hegemonic complexities of globalisation, more work needs to be produced on examining how the various compositional agents are composed, through what mediums and how these differ at each level. It is this empirical dynamic that needs to be explored, as opposed to debates over the structural governing viability over the use of international hegemony, or the question on whether the Gramscian mantle can adequately be historicised. More research is needed in the socio-cultural products of the struggle between intellectuals and the subaltern masses in the light of neoliberal globalisation. The diversities of this should reflect contemporary reconstructions of language and folklore (particular through the rise of consumerism and 'globalised' cultural practices), religion (its political economy, its role and its rise as a transnational agent) and the essence of philosophy (the overriding structural consequence of spatial politics) in order for this to be maximised.

Some of these have already a strong legacy to draw from. From Cultural Studies and Sociology the legacy of Stuart Hall resulted in the construction of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Turner, 1996), whilst the legacy on social movements has led to a number of prominent studies regarding the contesting nature of identity (Hetheringham, 1998; Scott, 1990). In terms of religion, Simms has used

Gramsci in attempting to ascertain and contextualise the historical political/cultural activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as to historicise the role of religion in the *hegemony* built by the late Ghanaian leader, Kwame Nkrumah (2002; 2003). Finocchiaro (2005) addresses Gramsci's take on the role of religion and the consciousness with regard to the *conceptions* of the popular masses during the First World War. These all provide helpful departure points for conceptualising the various roles of *common sense* and *popular religion* with regard to *hegemony* or opposition to hegemony.

These studies from other disciplines provide focal points for students within the realm of global studies (both IR and IPE) to build upon these traditions from an 'internationalist' or 'globalist' perspective. Such developments would significantly build on the neo-Gramscian work done to date and provide greater avenues for understanding the working relationship of hegemony within an international context.

¹ Unlike the official translations, Cox, who was familiar with Italian and read Gramsci both in Italian and in English, used the term 'historic bloc'. Interestingly, due to this intervention, this term has been favoured by the neo-Gramscians, despite not being used outside of the discipline.

² Morton, along with Andreas Bieler have called for greater collaborative work with 'open Marxists', arguing that a larger body of historical materialism between competing strands of Marxism needs to be fashioned in order to forge a wider body of critique (see Bieler *et. al*, 2006).

³ He asserts that "this might be explained by noting that both the Party and Religion are forms of world outlook and that religious unity is apparent just as political unity is; religious unity hides a real multiplicity of conceptions of the world that find their expression in the parties, since there exists a religious 'indifferentism,' just as political unity hides a multiplicity of tendencies that find their expression in religious sects and so on" (Gramsci 1995, 115).

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⁵ See Ives (2005) on the role of Language in the fashioning and functioning of hegemony.

⁶ A term Gramsci also attributes to the aspired evolution of the Communist Party.

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