Whatever happened to Coercion? A Gramscian Critique of Metagovernance Theory

Political Studies Association
27\textsuperscript{th} March 2013

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Abstract

Drawing on Gramscian influences, metagovernance theory seeks to correct the bias against hierarchies in network-centred analysis. However, a review of three influential metagovernance perspectives illustrates that none adequately recognizes or accounts for the persistence of hierarchy, especially coercion, in the governing system. Metagovernance therefore replicates the network-centric bias against hierarchy. This paper seeks to rectify the bias against hierarchy by developing an alternative theoretical foundation grounded in a re-reading of Gramsci, where coercion is understood as a necessary condition of rule under capitalism. This perspective affords a more encompassing perspective on governance. It distinguishes different forms of hierarchical rule and further recapitulates the relationship between hierarchy, market and network in a way that mitigates analytical bias towards one or other. Nevertheless, a considerable body of research points to a tendency away from networking towards contested hierarchical governance.

Keywords: coercion, Gramsci, hierarchy, Marx, metagovernance, network, state
**Introduction**

For a generation, governance theorists have been preoccupied with the critique of rationalism and structuralism, advancing relational modes of inquiry and focusing especially on networks. However, the rise of network-centred theory has provoked controversy, not least about the nature and role of the state. In Mark Bevir’s and Rod Rhodes’ genealogy, ‘first-wave’ theorists elaborating a de-centred account of the state in a world of networks were quickly contradicted by a ‘second-wave’ bringing the state back as metagovernor.¹ In the hands of exponents such as Jessop,² and Marsh³ metagovernance theory sought to correct the bias against hierarchy, characteristic of what Marsh called the new ‘orthodoxy’ of network governance.

This paper argues that notwithstanding attempts to reinstate the state, metagovernance theory does not adequately account for hierarchy, especially coercion. It therefore genuflects excessively to perspectives it sets out to critique. The paper begins by reviewing three prominent accounts of metagovernance; the post-structuralist view developed by Sørensen and colleagues,⁴ the Gramsci-influenced critical realist approach associated with Jessop and Marsh, and the Foucauldian approaches of Bang⁵ and Graham.⁶ It shows that whereas the former moves towards conflating hierarchy with network and the second confines hierarchy to the shadows, the third sees coercion as pervasive but lacks the conceptual tools to incorporate it into a metagovernance framework.

The second part of the paper develops a theoretical basis for re-incorporating ‘hierarchy’ into governance theory. Drawing on a Marxist reading of Gramsci,⁷ it distinguishes between ‘ensemble’ and ‘dialectical totality’, a contrast embodied in Gramsci’s conception of the ‘historical bloc’. For Gramsci, capitalism is simultaneously ‘totalising’ in two senses; it is compelled to expand, enveloping ever-greater swathes of space-time to
sustain accumulation, and seeks political dominance through the organisation of hegemony. However, the historical bloc is prone to sundering by crisis-tendencies in the capital accumulation process. In this ‘strongly dialectical’ account, social order is precarious and state coercion an enduring condition of social reproduction. The paper shows that in the Marxist-Gramscian account, hierarchy remains indispensable to capitalist rule.

The third part of the paper considers the implications of the preceding discussion for governance theory. It first develops a simple heuristic, elaborating different modes of hierarchy and distinguishing indirect from direct (coercive) kinds; the latter rooted in Gramsci’s distinction between violence, administrative domination and economic compulsion. It argues secondly that direct and indirect hierarchical practices are pervasive, subsisting alongside trust (network) and contract (market) based coordination. Moreover, institutions such as governing networks often combine all three. Following Grote and Davies, it therefore argues against simplistically categorizing institutions as ‘hierarchy’, ‘market’ or ‘network’ and instead for situated, spatio-temporally sensitive analysis showing how different coordination mechanisms combine in governance processes. This approach, it suggests, helps counter continuing analytical and normative biases towards one or other mode of coordination. The paper argues, finally, that although more empirical research is needed into governance configurations, there is some evidence of a trajectory towards domination.

Metagovernance

Metagovernance theory is distinguished by its attempt to make sense of the changing role of states in an era of proliferating networks and increasingly de-centred structures and institutions. Its central challenge is the notion, in Lash’s words, that social life
is no longer organized in accordance with a logic of structures, but rather a logic of flows that transforms states, economies and societies, the forces of order and disorder alike.\textsuperscript{10} It reflects on the normative and analytical implications of networks for the technologies of governing and citizenship, but without losing sight of the state.

However, there are numerous approaches to metagovernance. The following review discusses three influential perspectives: the post-structuralist account, where metagovernance is one dimension in a pluricentric system and metagovernors attempt to influence networks within a disordered polity; the critical realist approach, where metagovernance is defined as government + governance, subsists in the shadow of hierarchy and is understood as a medium of social regulation (or hegemony); and Foucauldian approaches, where metagovernance emerges from webs of discursive and symbolic power, constituting a governmentality of late modernity. The common ground, arguably, is that each approach pays insufficient attention to hierarchy. That is, metagovernance theory is silent about the conditions in which coercion flourishes.\textsuperscript{11} The second part of the paper develops a Marxist-Gramscian perspective, which re-instates hierarchy and coercion to a central place in the governing repertoire. The third part considers the implications of this perspective for theorising governance.

\textit{Pluricentrism: Metagoverning a Disordered Society}

The influential approach to metagovernance developed by Eva Sørensen and colleagues has evolved over a decade. Sørensen\textsuperscript{12} interpreted metagovernance as a practice; a tool for political leaders marginalized in a world of proliferating networks that undermine their capacity to govern. As a set of governing strategies and tactics, it ‘points to the mechanisms that public authority and other resourceful actors can use to initiate and stimulate negotiated self-governance among relevant stakeholders and/or to guide them in
a certain direction’. Learning to meta-govern would allow political leaders and state managers to harness and derive maximum potential from a world of networks.

According to Bevir and Rhodes, no sooner had the first wave of network governance theorists de-centred the state than metagovernance theorists, like Sørensen and Torfing and Jessop, had brought it back in reified form. Perhaps anticipating this critique, however, Sørensen and Torfing were moving away from neo-institutionalism towards a more radical interpretivism. They sought to ‘clear the ground for a rethinking of effectivity and democracy in the light of pluricentric forms of governance in which decision making involves a plurality of actors, arenas and processes’. In developing pluricentric theory, Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen drew from parallel developments in public administration, organisation theory and planning. They found that each has moved towards pluricentrism from rationalistic approaches, via the intermediate step of neo-institutionalism - itself an influence on metagovernance theory highlighting the increasingly complex challenges of governing a world of networks, anchored by shared norms, rules and practices. In pluricentric theory, metagovernance is only one of three coordinating elements. The others are the self-coordinating activities of networks themselves and the exchange of stories, through which ‘temporal moments of shared meaning’ are constructed. Pluricentric theory therefore decentres and radicalizes metagovernance. Metagoverning state officials must facilitate, guide and strategically frame ‘the formation and stabilization of coordination within governance networks’ (ibid), in a ‘messy and floating’ world, revolving ‘around interactive arenas that promote communication between a plurality of interpretive logics and situated practises’. Metagovernors confront ‘competing situated logics that are shaped and reshaped in and through networked coordination processes that promotes the construction of shared meaning and story
work’. In an unstructured world, governance is not read as the search for order by elites; it is rather the ‘construction of possible disorders’. Pedersen Sehested and Sørensen do not dispense altogether with hierarchy. Instead, they challenge the binary distinction between hierarchies and networks by ‘pointing to the relational, interpretive, interdependent, and interactive aspects of all coordination processes including processes in which public authorities seek to govern their subjects’. Thus, not all coordination is horizontal; rather, ‘vertical and horizontal aspects of coordination processes should be viewed as inseparable and indistinguishable.’ The idea that governance is simultaneously hierarchy and network is valuable and would seem initially to qualify the stress on networked disorders. But, they proceed to argue that hierarchy itself is transformed in pluricentric coordination. State planning is ‘a soft or subtle form of vertical coordination that does not rest on any strict hierarchical forms of regulation but gain impact through the rhetorical act of promoting a specific image of what the city is, where it comes from, and what its future might be.’ Hierarchy and network are thus effectively conflated, because vertical coordination itself depends on ‘negotiated interaction with multiple actors’. Consequently, ‘there are no clear hierarchies but only complex and floating processes of mutual adjustments in which those who select, facilitate, and create are just as transformed by the process as those who they seek to govern and guide’.

To paraphrase Marsh’s critique of Rhodes, interpretivists posit a contingent and disordered world, knowable, if at all, only through stories; but are prone to asserting the truth and necessity of their stories. Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen strike such a discordant note when they suddenly switch to the passive-voice and a quasi-rationalist vocabulary of ‘change’ to explain the need for pluricentric theory. Change, they argue, is ‘not only regarded as an unavoidable condition but also an ambition that manifests itself
through a constant call for reform, growth, and innovation in public governance’.

But, who regards it as unavoidable, who is constantly calling, and who drives the compulsion to ‘change’? The agents are nameless and we are not told how, in a disordered pluricentric system the injunction, from wherever it comes, achieves any efficacy. This lapse into managerialist language begs the question of whether the concepts of hegemony and domination might cast a brighter light than pluricentrism on the role of ‘change’ and ‘innovation’ in the discursive and coercive armouries of contemporary governance.

**Metagovernance in the Shadow of Hierarchy**

Critical realists influenced by regulation and Gramscian theories are, typically, much more cautious about the retreat of hierarchy and, as Bevir and Rhodes highlighted, concerned with re-stating the role of the state conceived as an institutional complex, heterogeneous ensemble, or social structure constituting and sustaining a world of enduring power asymmetries. For them, metagovernance is part of the attempt to ‘forge and sustain a “successful” political project and scalar fix’, or more specifically secure the hegemony of neoliberalism. In contrast with Bevir and Rhodes, who dismissed it as a form of ‘modernist empiricism’, MacLeod criticized the influence of ‘soft institutionalism’ in governance theory for the opposite mistake; excessively de-centring power and taking ‘non-exploitative horizontal relations of networking and reciprocity’ for granted. State power is therefore crucial in critical realist accounts. Marsh, for example, conceives of metagovernance as ‘collibration’; the selective or strategic adjustment of the mix of hierarchies, markets and networks by metagovernors. Fawcett and Marsh both argue, like MacLeod, that the transformation to networks may have been exaggerated. According to Fawcett:
Metagovernance therefore not only indicates a continued role for the state in the regulation of self-regulating governance networks, but it also casts doubt on the view that the vertical hierarchies of the old social structures of the state have been replaced or subsumed by such networks.

Nevertheless, critical-realist accounts usually genuflect to the increasing importance of networks. Jessop, perhaps the most influential exponent, argued that ‘the state is no longer the sovereign authority’. It is ‘less hierarchical, less centralised, less dirigiste’. In developing metagovernance theory, Jessop drew on Gramsci’s theory of the integral state (discussed further below). In his reading, the concept highlights the limits of ‘imperative coordination’ and the role of discourses, ideologies and soft technologies (such as networks) in securing hegemony. He accordingly defined metagovernance as ‘the governance of government plus governance’ and as ‘governance in the shadow of hierarchy’, where coercion is held in reserve against the collapse of hegemony. Arguably, he re-assimilates the network-theoretical trope of ‘government at a distance’ to the concept of metagovernance in the ‘shadow of hierarchy’. Tellingly, Jessop sees metagovernance as cultivating the conditions for ‘reflexive self-organization’. As Marsh commented, metagovernance encompasses many different possible articulations of hierarchy, market and network, but tends to stress networking.

Consequently, it tends to pay far less attention to hierarchy than it does to cross-sector and multi-level networks. The concept of ‘the shadow of hierarchy’ is evocative and (with regard for ontological differences) complements the Foucauldian ‘politics of threats’, discussed below. However, it muddies the waters by ignoring coercion. The effect, especially in Jessop whose theory of state power scarcely alludes to it, is that coercion is either epiphenomenal or disappears from view altogether. As the following discussion
illustrates, this is a crucial omission because state and state-authorized coercion is pervasive. It is therefore necessary to distinguish the shadow of hierarchy (threat) from its enactment (force) and rethink the relationship between different modalities of coordination, regulation and discipline.

Foucauldian Metagovernance: Discipline, Control and Threat

For Rose, networks are part of a new liberal governmentality, (perhaps metagovernmentality), urging the state to govern ‘at a distance’ by summoning a ‘plurality of self-regulating actors and networks within an institutional framework ensuring a certain degree of conformity with broadly defined objectives’. However, there are different ways of governing at a distance. Bang and Esmark distinguished two governmentalities; discipline and control. They claimed:

Whereas disciplinary technologies and instruments sought to teach the subject self-discipline in accordance with rigidly prescribed standards of behavior, thought and physical constitution and expression (i.e., command of one’s body, self-limitation, frugality, rejection of animal impulses, etc.), control asks subjects to transgress limitations, to “think outside the box,” and to push the borders of the accepted. Self-control, far from self-discipline, implies freedom and self-realization; it implies being responsible only to oneself.

The governmentality of discipline is associated with the conditions of first modernity. Here, the subject is rule-bound. Bang helpfully sharpens the distinction, positing two Foucauldian ‘governing triads’: ‘sovereignty, hierarchy and discipline’ and ‘security, metagovernance and decentred governance’. The governmentality of control has elective affinities with Beck’s theory of reflexive modernisation, and Boltanski and Chiapello’s
project-oriented justificatory regime, where the subject is unbound; able, and indeed compelled, to pursue her own ever-evolving projects to which ends s/he must network and innovate. For example, Boltanski and Chiapello’s ‘new spirit of capitalism’ values ‘autonomy, spontaneity, rhizomorphous capacity ... multi-tasking, conviviality, openness to others and novelty, availability, creativity, visionary intuition, sensitivity to differences, listening to lived experience and receptiveness to a whole range of experiences, being attracted to informality and the search for interpersonal contacts’.  

On the face of it, Bang and Esmark describe an archetypally neoliberal governmentality centred on individualization and the compulsion to ‘change’ and ‘innovate’ described by Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen. But, for Bang, it has more positive connotations. Whereas the governmentality of discipline focused on abstract goods, such as nationhood, the governmentality of security, metagovernance and de-centred governance focuses on the ‘needs’ of individuals and groups; it therefore sustains ‘a much more positive, creative and facilitating dispotif of political authorization and normalization, conditioning self- and co-governance from below’.

However, Bang argues that in practice neoliberal metagovernance relies on threats. For example, networks are a vital tool in the metagovernance of security, but Bang sees them continually subverted by ‘the “iron fist” of hierarchy and discipline’. He argues that neoliberalism depends on threat, because agents are not fully enrolled to the project. But in doing so it undermines its own claims to legitimacy, which he sees as anchored in the supremacy of contract relations. Arguably, Bang’s politics of threat constitute a third governmentality. The distinctions are that whereas ‘discipline’ relies on self-restraint and appeals to sovereignty, and ‘control’ invokes personal freedom and creativity, ‘threat’ evokes fear as the source of order, amid chaos and danger.
Bang treats the politics of threat as a boundary problem, symptomatic of a tension on the cusp of modern and late modern politics. However, he overlooks an important insight implicit in Boltanski and Chiapello; the neoliberal hegemonic project espouses the principles of late modernity; the virtues of networking, freedom, creativity, personal security and light-touch regulation are integral to it. These are means by which it seeks to legitimize capitalism in the information age. Why, then, should it have to rely on a politics of threat to manage public officials and citizens who espouse the very same commitments and, ostensibly, try sincerely to implement them? For if governmentality ‘governs the souls’ of elites and subalterns alike, why should threat be a tactic of government at all? And, in the conditions of late modernity are not the politics of threat one of Beck’s ‘zombie categories’ anyway?

Stephen Graham’s Cities under Siege is an enthralling (and frightening) exposition on the metagovernance of threats. Although he does not employ the concept, Graham points to the emergence of what might be called ‘military metagovernance’; the politics of threat radicalized. He argues that we are witnessing the militarization of cities; the rise of martial control secured in the technologies and practices of everyday urban life. Thus, he observes that warfare is no longer conducted in trenches and fields, but in living rooms, schools and supermarkets. It is close-up and personal, fought through the medium of technologies that are everywhere and (sometimes) nowhere. Graham highlights a plethora of Foucauldian boomerang effects; techniques first tried and tested on people in ‘frontier’ cities of the developing world and then applied to immigrant and dissident communities in western so-called ‘homeland’ cities. What he calls the ‘New Military Urbanism’ is characterized by massive ‘technophilic’ state surveillance organized by networks of governmental and corporate actors, subtle and not-so-subtle processes of enrolment and
routinization through hi-tech gadgets, GPS, media, film and video-games – terrain on which normative and cognitive distinctions between ‘civilian’ and ‘military’ maybe eroded.  
Militarized ‘tracking and targeting’ ‘permanently colonize the cityscape and the spaces of everyday life’, not only in the frontiers but also the homelands, where terrorists and insurgents lurk invisibly among the compliant population and pose a continuous threat.  
Unlike Bang, who treats the politics of threats as a boundary problem, Graham sees war as boundless and permanent. 

Military metagovernance is a web of governmentalities forged within networks of governmental actors, allied and co-dependent corporations (like Raytheon) and firms in the entertainment sector, whose products sanitize violence against the ‘frontiers’, as well as homeland universities that pander to the ideologies of security and ‘sell’ security solutions. The goals of ‘formal infrastructural war’ therefore ‘blur seamlessly into the structure of economic competition and energy geopolitics’. However, Graham’s account of boundless and permanent warfare simultaneously highlights the pervasiveness and ubiquity of direct coercion. This is a world of brutal geopolitical violence, provocatively called ‘urbicide’, organized to maintain class and ethnic frontiers inside and outside the Western homelands, to reinforce the international order, neo-imperialist exploitation and subsume new land and territories into the global market. In the homelands it includes violent policing of disorder (Davis College style) and the erection of security zones for the world’s financial centres (green zones), conceived by military metagovernors as ‘urban warfare’ amid ‘pervasive low intensity conflicts’. His book was published early in the current economic crisis, but Graham was perceptive in citing Steinmetz’s argument that we maybe witnessing the transition to an ‘enhanced police state’. The governmental response to the Euro crisis and widespread urban unrest throughout the continent
exemplifies. Military metagovernance continually gives way to overt violence of both the persistent low-intensity and episodic high-intensity kinds.

But why should this be? Graham does not consider the relationship between threat and force directly, but does demonstrate how military metagovernance fails. Crucially, he argues that it rests on a fantasy; the vain notions that technological control can substitute for diminishing economic and military power or that that the soul of the citizen can ever be comprehensively governed. He argues: ‘in practice, the bullets often fall far from their target. They fail to function, continually break down, do not deliver the anticipated results and do nothing to address the root causes of feelings of insecurity ... the complex assemblages through which it operates are in fact highly precarious’. However, even commentators who are incredulous about the efficacy of governmentality ‘tend to replicate the birds-eye perspective of the press and impute too much power to the war machine’. Thus, we should pay greater attention to the fact that ‘an entire society cannot be controlled by individualized simulation and surveillance ... much less an entire world’.

Overwhelming as it may seem, the new military urbanism is therefore symptomatic not of comprehensive hegemony, but of its fragility. The ultra-sophisticated technologies of symbolic violence, threat, preference manipulation, surveillance, ideology and discourse power are insufficient to sustain social order. Arguably, this control deficit, the limited efficacy of threat, explains the ubiquity of coercion in Graham’s story as it constantly emerges from the shadow. Like Bang, his Foucauldian analytics leave the reader with questions. In Foucauldian accounts state violence (including state-orchestrated and state-licensed violence) is usually treated as the antithesis of power and is of little interest. Consequently, they fall short of a convincing account of how and why threat and outright coercion appear to be enduring conditions of social order. How, then, do we make sense of
the movement between discipline, security and threat on the one hand, and the anti-project of outright domination on the other?

The remainder of the paper explores how a Marxist reading of Gramsci can respond to these questions. It develops the Gramscian proposition that force, itself a multiplicity of technologies, must be integral to theories of power and governance because it is a condition of rule under capitalism, explaining why the meta-governmentality of control tends to be subsumed into the politics of threat and violence, or otherwise confronts conditions that it cannot transform within the confines of capitalist modernity.

**A Marxist-Gramscian Theory of Coercion**

There is an underlying methodological tension between metagovernance and orthodox Marxist theory, exemplified in the work of Jessop. In a nutshell, the question is whether the macrocosm should be conceived as a loosely and contingently coupled ensemble (Jessop), or a dialectical totality. Jessop explained his position in a debate about the relationship between social structure and hegemony:

... I question the feasibility of totalization practices and argue that they can succeed only relatively, precariously, and temporarily within specific socially constituted spatio-temporal fixes that displace and defer many contradictions, crisis-tendencies, and conflicts to marginalized places and spaces within and beyond the boundaries of this fix and/or into the future.

Jessop described his strategic-relational approach to structure and action as a ‘general social ontology’ that does not itself validate specific concepts, theories or approaches. Indeed, as a ‘general heuristic’, it is compatible with a range of ‘particular strategic-relational theories’. Yet, it is inflected with the analytical biases that derive from
Poulantzian roots; the relative autonomy of spheres, the precariousness of structural-couplings among autopoetic systems, incredulity towards totalizing conceptions of the macrocosm and partiality towards the tropes of complexity and networking. He comments that modern states do not ‘exercise power largely through direct and immediate coercion – a sure sign of crisis or state failure’. But, as Graham vividly highlighted, this argument is untenable - they do so all the time. Jessop’s fragmentary social ontology arguably leads him to favour de-centred accounts of the macrocosm and propose a ‘weakly’ dialectical model of socioeconomic relations, which could explain why his empirical analysis of state power and metagovernance accords coercion so little attention. The following paragraphs develop a Marxist reading of Gramsci, arguing that the social ontology of ‘dialectical totality’ can make better sense of the ubiquity of state organized coercion.

Gramsci’s legacy is still hotly contested, but there has recently been a renaissance in Marxist readings, contrasting with the popular revisionism of Laclau and Mouffe. These include original studies by Adam Morton and Peter Thomas as well as modest applications in critical governance studies. These accounts restate Gramsci’s enduring commitment to, and elaboration of, Marxist principles; dialectics, capital, class, crisis and revolution. Gramsci’s perspective on the question of totalities has received little scrutiny, but can be elicited from the Prison Notebooks. He defined the ‘historical bloc’ as the ‘unity between nature and spirit (structure and superstructure), unity of opposites and distincts’, where ‘historical bloc’ refers to the sum of all social relations. In Gramsci, the concept is both totalizing and dialectical. He argued, for example, that the theoretical challenge in developing a ‘science of dialectics’ is to ensure that the ‘general concepts of history, politics and economics are interwoven in an organic unity’, before considering each element as an
‘independent and distinct’ science.\textsuperscript{72} This analytical pendulum movement, between ‘whole’ and ‘parts’, exemplifies the Marxist method.

Gramsci argued that ‘structures and superstructures form an “historical bloc”. That is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production’.\textsuperscript{73} Here, he poses the question of the relationship between ‘totality’ and ‘ensemble’, the latter used by Jessop to underscore his heterogeneous social ontology. The basis for such a distinction is evident in the prison notebooks and again Gramsci anchors it in Marx (the Preface to the \textit{Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy}).\textsuperscript{74} Discussing the social determinants of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, he commented that ‘what counts is not the opinion of Tom, Dick and Harry, but the ensemble of opinions that have become collective, a social element and a social force’.\textsuperscript{75} Later, he added what ‘the idealists call “spirit” is not a point of departure but a point of arrival, it is the ensemble of the superstructures moving towards concrete and objectively universal unification and it is not a unitary presupposition’.\textsuperscript{76} Gramsci further commented:\textsuperscript{77}

The variability of the ensemble of the material forces of production can also be measured, and one can establish with a fair degree of precision the point at which its development ceases to be merely quantitative and becomes qualitative. The ensemble of the material forces of production is at the same time a crystallisation of all past history and the basis of present and future history: it is both a document and an active and actual propulsive force.

These remarks emphasize the totalising dynamic within capitalism and point to a qualitative distinction between ensemble and totality. Whereas an ensemble is the sum of its parts (passive-quantitative), a totality exercises causal power; it is ‘propulsive’ (active-
qualitative). Conceiving the historical bloc as exerting causal power, as more than the sum of its parts, is arguably the essence of Marxist critical realism. In practical terms, and following Marx, Davies argued that ‘the capitalist system is tendentially “totalising” in the sense that as capitalists seek higher returns on investment, they also try to subordinate ever-greater swaths of society and space to the accumulation imperative’. The dialectical structure of capitalism (e.g. the tendency of myriad market transactions to cause a falling rate of profit over time in the system as a whole) means that it is difficult to ‘imagine a world in which every interstice of space, time, body and mind is commodified’, however: ‘Marxism maintains that there is no sustainable way of practising capitalism which escapes this totalising system impetus’. In other words, the rules governing the reproduction of capitalism, and its consequent propensity to expand, tend contingently and iteratively to transform the ensemble of practices constituting and governing production, distribution and exchange into a dialectical totality.

Gramsci anchored his theory in such a dialectical reading of capitalism. He defined Marx’s ‘law of tendency’ as the primary source of contradiction and discordancy within the historical bloc. The tendentially declining rate of profit, he argued, is ‘the dialectical process by which the molecular progressive thrust leads to a tendentially catastrophic result in the social ensemble, a result from which other individual progressive thrusts set off in a continual overhauling process which cannot however be reckoned as infinite …’. In other words, the capitalist system reaches a theoretical endpoint the moment it ‘subsumes all space-time and counter-tendencies exhaust themselves’. In practice, Gramsci understood the Marxist theory of value as the contradictory moment of ‘a larger and expanding organic unity’, ‘the central term of the dialectical totality constituting the historical bloc’.
Applying this dialectic helps makes sense of why coercion is ubiquitous in the governing system. According to Gramsci, holding together the ‘unity of opposites and distincts’ requires the cultivation of hegemony by a governing bloc or constellation of ruling class and allied forces. He argued that comprehensive hegemony occurs if a governing bloc can mobilise all ‘society’s material and ideational resources, achieving both unity of economic and political goals and ‘intellectual and moral unity ... on a “universal” plane’.

But, this ideal-typical moment of hegemony never comes. The theory of the integral state explains why.

Gramsci defined the integral state as ‘political society + civil society’, where ‘political society’ is government by force, and the struggle for hegemonic leadership – ‘governance’ - is reinforced by the ‘armour of coercion’. It is the sum of ‘governing institutions, practices and technologies enmeshed in the struggle for hegemony throughout state and civil society.’ Metagovernance theorists, like Jessop, deploy the integral state to emphasize the non-coercive dimensions of power – the ‘shadow of hierarchy’. Jessop rightly notes that Gramsci developed the concept as a means of critiquing interlocutors who conflated the state with coercion. However, he also saw hegemonic enrolment as an enduring struggle and never suggested that coercive power could be confined to the shadows. As Davies argued, Gramsci ‘repeatedly stated that hegemony and domination are dialectically related terms of the “contradictory and discordant” political economy of capitalism .... short of implausibly comprehensive hegemony, the hegemonic bloc must rely to some extent on threat and outright domination’. In Mitchell’s terminology, coercion and consent, hegemony and domination, are ‘dialectically entwined and inseparable ... violence and discipline are ubiquitous’.
According to Anderson, the explanation for the ubiquity of violence and discipline under capitalism lies in the limits of hegemony. He argued that the flaw in capitalist hegemonic strategies is that because capitalism is vulnerable to increasingly severe and contagious accumulation crises it tends to cultivate expectations among subaltern classes - the basis of hegemonic consent - that increasingly it cannot deliver. That is, hegemony tends to be fragile and consent precarious because the governing bloc cannot help breaking its promises, such as those regarding social inclusion, prosperity or personal fulfilment that secure public assent. Thus, crises are prone to fostering greater or lesser degrees of asymmetry between promise and expectation, disposition and experience. The asymmetry may lead to both anomie and resistance, but subalterns are most likely to challenge hegemony and forge counter-hegemonic projects when these asymmetries widen. As Graham highlighted, the governing bloc narrates counter-politics as ‘disorder’, even when they do not involve insurgent tactics; the state enacts, coordinates, sanctions or otherwise gives tacit consent to coercion.

Capitalist States

The Marxist-Gramscian approach to hegemony rests on the assertion that state officials and capitalists have shared, or at least congruent interests and will try to act in concert insofar as they must do so to maintain capitalist rule. Sustaining this claim requires a brief detour into developments in Marxist state theory. According to Engels, the state had a dual nature; it was both inherently territorial and inherently coercive, a ‘special public force’ consisting ‘not merely of armed men, but also of material appendages, prisons and coercive institutions of all kinds, which becomes stronger in proportion as the class antagonisms within the state become sharper and as adjoining states grow larger and more
populous’. In other words, Engels’ states have inward and outward facing coercive functions; the former to maintain social order, the latter to engage in geopolitical (imperialist) competition, which Engels saw becoming more salient as new territories were subsumed to capitalism and the space for expansion was squeezed. Concluding a recent debate on ‘how to solve the many states problem’, Callinicos argued that the generic features described by Engels recur, in historically contingent and spatio-temporally variable forms, in the era of globalisation.

Callinicos’s objective was to develop an explanation for the entanglement of capitalist states and economies capable of avoiding conflation, the creation of dualisms, and particularly the abstraction, a-historicism and functionalism characterising the state derivation debate. He argued that states adapting early to capitalist modes of development gained enormous advantages in geo-political competition with laggards; that is, they found capitalism useful in pursuing other goals. These initially contingent entanglements meant that ‘by the late nineteenth century the dynamics of interstate rivalry had become thoroughly interwoven with those of capital accumulation’; the combined and uneven development arising from competition, crises and associated imperatives for rival capitalist states and enterprises to expand. Accordingly, imperialism is understood by Callinicos as ‘the intersection of economic and geopolitical competition’ in a plural international states system. In the vernacular of critical realism, capitalist states and capitalist economies are concrete socio-spatially variable, determinations of the capitalist mode of production as a whole, as it emerged from the crises of late Feudalism. If, as Callinicos claimed, the international states system remains irreducibly plural and competitive despite globalization, because of the ‘centrifugal pulls generated by the
tendency to uneven development’ inherent in capitalist economic and geo-political competition, then conflict maybe partially mitigated but cannot be dissolved entirely for as long as capitalism pertains.

The kernel of this Marxist account is that acting coercively at home and abroad is a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition for any capitalist state seeking economic and geopolitical advantage. It does not follow that political leaders and state managers must follow these imperatives – exit is always an option. But equally, the relations of production in which they find themselves, or deliberately situate themselves, endow them with certain capabilities while confronting them with dilemmas, challenges and constraints. If a political leader or state manager wishes to fulfil an appointed role, s/he must abide by ‘rules of reproduction’ - the conditions making the role possible.\(^95\) Under capitalism, senior politicians and state managers must give their attention to social order and geo-political competition. They can always ‘make history’ but breaking the rules of reproduction, intentionally or otherwise, has precipitous consequences. Rhodes objected to the critical realist conception of structure, arguing that ‘if all the relevant people change their actions, they will stop producing that structure’.\(^96\) In principle, nothing can prevent the entire caste of state officials from deciding to break the rules of reproduction. However, Rhodes’ truism merely trivializes the problem of continuity and change, saying nothing about the conditions in which such a sudden mass transformation of beliefs, desires and practices might occur.\(^97\) Moreover, it treats exit as non-problematic; as if an individual’s decision to abandon webs of goods, privileges, contracts and affective relationships could be accomplished without social, economic and psychological costs.
In summary, coercion remains integral to the reproduction of capitalist states, and governing elites have compelling reasons to play the game. To be clear, however, coercion is not here presented solely as the condition of rule in economic or geopolitical crises. Disorder occurs in times of relative stability and coercion is used to deal with many social problems and conflicts in times of prosperity. Insurgency, furthermore, occurs without economic crises and does not always occur with them: agency matters. Rather, five claims are being made. First, economic crises tend to enlarge the asymmetry between promises and everyday experiences and thus are a significant source of social disorder. Second, because crises and disorder are integral features of capitalist development and capitalist geopolitics, so is coercion. In other words, thirdly, the Marxist-Gramscian theory of capitalism does not explain every case of state coercion or resistance, or the lack thereof; but it warrants the claim that coercion is integral to the governance of capitalist democracies and that state officials are highly likely to employ it to secure system reproduction in the face of resistance. It therefore serves as a corrective to pluricentric and ensemble-based conceptions of metagovernance, while demonstrating the added value of a Gramscian approach in theorizing observations about the pervasiveness of violence, which Graham’s Foucauldian approach describes graphically but does not explain. Fourth, Gramscian theory allows us to re-assert the enduring presence of coercion under capitalism, but does so without any judgement as to its efficacy; efficacy depends on ‘relational’ factors that it may not be able to control, such as counter-hegemonic organization and social movement resilience. It further assists us, fifthly, in developing a more robust conception of ‘the state’, where violence is the ‘apotheosis of reification’ as strategy, and in which moment (among others) a state emerges from the world of flux and flow to become a real and tangible ‘entity’, having material and ‘thing-like’ qualities. Yet, as Graham’s web of
military power demonstrates, modern states are not straightforwardly monopolists of force either. They are rather oligopolists; both enacting coercion and coordinating, sanctioning and tacitly approving violence by proxy agents, home and abroad. The discussion now turns, finally, to how the preceding analysis maybe used to rethink governance in the shadow and exercise of coercion.

Coercive Governance Reconsidered

Sørensen called for governance theory to transcend the hierarchy-network binary, but effectively dissolved hierarchy into network. Davies⁹⁹ and Grote¹⁰⁰ concluded that governance theory should adopt a critical stance towards perspectives subsuming institutions and practices into reified categories such as ‘hierarchy’ or ‘network’. Critical realist metagovernance helpfully conceives ‘government + governance’ as a dialectical relationship.¹⁰¹ However, it neither specifies modalities of coercion, nor elaborates an approach capable of explaining the relationship between hegemony and domination.

The starting point for an alternative approach is the suggestion that real-world governing processes are likely to embody multiple modes of coordination. Many studies of governing networks, for example, find that they combine trust – in rather short supply - implicit or explicit contract relations and imperative coordination in the form of managerial control-freakery.¹⁰² Grote,¹⁰³ once a scholar in the tradition of what he called the ‘horizontalist expectation’, undertook an in-depth formal analysis of governing networks in the European regions. He found not only that relations typically described in the vocabulary of networks were organized hierarchically, but also that simplistic formulations – hierarchy = command, market = contract, networks = trust,¹⁰⁴ were misleading. Grote suggested that markets can rely on command, networks on competition and hierarchies on trust. Thus, the
casual labelling of collaborative or other forms of ‘interactive’ governance as ‘networks’ has arguably contributed to inflating an ideological bubble, distorting both theoretical and empirical inquiry. To address this bias, two further steps are necessary; one is to specify the modalities of hierarchical coordination, especially the neglected coercive dimensions. The second is to reconsider the direction of travel and the changing spatio-temporal configurations of hierarchy, market and network, thereby extracting an underlying premise of metagovernance; that to a greater or lesser extent, governance is increasingly networked.

An Anatomy of Hierarchy

First, the preceding account highlights multiple indirect and direct modalities of hierarchical power – those associated respectively with ‘steering’ and ‘rowing’ and encapsulated in Lukes’ three dimensions of power. Metagovernance theory, especially its Foucauldian variant, is helpful in eliciting the former. Practices such as strategy, rhetoric, polemic, appeal, formal deliberation, reification (e.g. monarchy) and hegemonic enrolment contribute to governmental authority and hegemonic power – the second and third dimensions of power. Following Bang and Esmark, hierarchical practices of this kind can be conceived as constructive or enabling. To the extent that they marshal hegemony, Gramsci’s ‘intellectual and moral unity on a universal plane’ where citizens develop an instinctive feel for the ‘rules of the game’, other coordinative and regulative strategies are superfluous. In an ideal-typical scenario with high levels of enrolment to Bang’s governmentality of security, ‘inclusive’ network governance might flourish.

The politics of threat are a form of indirect coercion. From a Gramscian perspective they are associated with weak hegemony, where subtler technologies fail to govern the
soul. To the extent that, in Rose’s terms, fear crushes the power to act it is a politics of domination, not leadership.¹⁰⁸ Lest excessive unity and rationality be attributed to the incompetent and internally heterogeneous military-industrial networks practicing ‘military metagovernance’, threat may equally be a sign of unwarranted paranoia among would-be hegemons who, as Foucault pointed out, are enmeshed in the webs of power they weave. In this sense, threat maybe either a response to the limits of hegemony, or conceivably a limiting factor on hegemony by sub-rational hegemonic actors underestimating their power. Nor are fear and threat necessarily effective, in which case direct coercion maybe employed.

The Gramscian theory of hegemony-domination claims that when neither hegemony nor threat is sufficient to maintain social order, then states (and/or proxies) must deploy direct coercion if they are to reproduce themselves. But, force is not a matter of ‘the last instance’ if neither hegemony nor threat ever governs the soul completely. As Thomas put it,¹⁰⁹ the ascent to hegemony in Gramsci is a continuous struggle and ‘must be repeated each day’ for a governing bloc to maintain its rule. If, as Graham argued, governance is characterized by ‘pervasive low intensity’ conflicts together with episodically explosive interludes, then coercion is better understood as an integral condition of rule than as the instrument of last resort.

Like indirect forms of hierarchy, direct coercion is multi-faceted. Davies drew on Gramsci in eliciting three distinct kinds: violence, administrative domination and economic compulsion.¹¹⁰ Elaborating the multiple modalities of coercion reinforces the claim that it is pervasive. State violence by military, police or paramilitary forces, is one form. Administrative domination is a second. Gramsci, for example, defined ‘direct domination’ as ‘command exercised through the State and “juridical” government’¹¹¹ and as the
combination of ‘military and civil coercion’.\textsuperscript{112} Moreover, ‘it is the bureaucracy—i.e. the crystallisation of the leading personnel—which exercises coercive power, and at a certain point it becomes a caste’.\textsuperscript{113} Davies identified several forms of administrative domination corresponding with this definition; the ‘routine modalities of urban coercive power’.\textsuperscript{114} These include the magistracy, everyday policing and the regulatory enforcement functions of governmental agencies (tax collectors, traffic wardens, rent collectors and bailiffs). These everyday functions can be distinguished analytically from hegemony or threat, because they entail direct domination without violence (coercion in the shadow of violence).

Gramsci argued that laissez faire was a third form of domination, ‘introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means’. He continued: ‘It is a deliberate policy, conscious of its own ends … a political programme … to change the economic programme of the State itself’.\textsuperscript{115} The repertoire of state coercion in Gramsci therefore encompasses ‘violence + economic compulsion + administrative domination’.\textsuperscript{116} Table 1 summarises the preceding discussion, highlighting two modes of indirect coercion and three modes of direct coercion. If hegemony, threat and domination fail simultaneously, then state power reaches its limit in Marxist theory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect Coercion</th>
<th>Direct Coercion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hegemony (neoliberal)</td>
<td>Threat (shadow of hierarchy)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Governmentalities of discipline and control, the third dimension of power, the new spirit of capitalism, the network society</td>
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Table 1: Hierarchy: A Gramscian Perspective
Contested Hierarchical Governance?

Multiple forms of hierarchy, including direct domination, may subsist with trust and contract relations in any institution, complex of institutions or practices and in many different spatio-temporal configurations across place, territory and scale. The nature of these configurations and their relationship with counter-hegemonic politics is a matter for empirical inquiry. Jessop’s Gramsci-inspired continuum of hegemony, passive revolution, force-fraud-corruption and open warfare are possible types,\(^\text{117}\) to which we might add hybrids such as the routine processes of ‘hegemony-domination-resistance’ in the everyday governance of Western democracies.\(^\text{118}\)

However, the spatio-temporal pervasiveness of threat and violence, even at low levels, suggest that as Fawcett intuited,\(^\text{119}\) coercion may be understated and networking exaggerated. Many studies of governing networks – the myriad informal and formal interactive and cooperative relations between governmental and non-governmental actors – further draw attention to the pervasiveness of administrative domination in the very processes held to exemplify a transformation to networking. Moreover, across the social sciences, it appears that ‘wherever claims for the novelty or redemptive potential of networks are made’ there is a counter-literature ‘suggesting that they exaggerate or misrepresent social trends’.\(^\text{120}\) The politics of threat only add to the sense that Bang’s purported tension between early and late modernity may instead be that between would-be hegemonic ideologies professing the emancipatory potential of knowledge capitalism, and a dialectical totality which obstinately belies that claim and keeps on dragging us back into to a trenchantly ‘modernist’ present.
The spatio-temporal trajectory, how configurations of the ‘mix’ evolve across place, territory and scale, is also an important matter for empirical inquiry. In a conventional scalar division of coercive labour, the military repertoire is largely if not exclusively concentrated at the national and supra-national scales, whereas the means of everyday administrative domination tend to be localized. However, Davis and Graham highlight a more complex division of labour, with the full repertoire of coercive technologies increasingly converging in, over and around the city. Equally, the metagovernance intuition that we are witnessing an increase in networked coordination in the shadow of hierarchy may have greater force in some spatio-temporal configurations than others. A better appreciation of hierarchy would only help clarify this question one way or another.

However, there are grounds for suggesting that the trend maybe, if anything, towards hierarchy. The rise of ‘military metagovernance’ itself suggests this may be the case. So does the bitter and violent struggle for and against austerity in Southern Europe, and for emancipation in the Arab worlds. As Bang argued, neoliberalism is prone to undermining the grounds of its own legitimacy, a tendency only aggravated by austerity and the emergence of ‘technocratic’ regimes in the Eurozone. Mundane examples of the erosion of democracy and incremental roll-forward of administrative domination in ‘collaborative’ processes are also many and widespread. Cook, Hardin and Levy concluded, against the grain of network governance theories that societies are moving away from trust-based relations towards ‘externally regulated’ ones. According to Arrighi, writing about the struggle for hegemony in international political economy, we are moving from a period of partial hegemonic integration to one of domination without hegemony. Thus, with due regard for spatio-temporal unevenness, one possibility is that the network mode of
coordination has decreasing hegemonic efficacy and contested, hierarchical governance is increasingly the norm. This possibility does not itself confirm the Marxist-Gramscian account. However, by anchoring the limits of hegemony and the intractability of coercion in a spatio-temporally sensitive theory of crisis and resistance, it arguably makes better sense of contemporary governance than metagovernance theory: it would be surprising indeed if hierarchy could subsist in the shadows, or if governmental-non-governmental relations were based on high levels of trust.

It is important to emphasize, finally, that the Marxist-Gramscian approach does not attempt to restore a ‘rationalist’ conception of governing, a theory of ‘imperative coordination’ where the state is sovereign, rational actors follow rules and the ‘coordination of functional systems’ is ‘seen as a result of some kind of invisible hand driven by a universal constitutive necessity related to the governing of all societies at all times’. Nor is it a theory of ineluctable progress. Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen themselves noted that Marxism criticized rational planning theory for ignoring class interests, while highlighting its utility for class domination. Marxism is propelled by its theory of crisis, which renders the notion of a comprehensively rational (and peaceful) capitalist order untenable. It seeks to transcend capitalism, but this depends on mobilising a conscious, collective subject. The distinction is therefore between theorising that acknowledges no structural constraints (beyond webs of discourse) and critical-realistic conceptions, which maintain that capitalist crises tend to undermine stability and order in a way that counter-hegemonic forces might exploit. Whereas the former heralds the rise of ephemeral networks that tenuously and momentarily coordinate disorder, the latter treats this proposition as empirically
unsustainable, or perhaps more generously as the vague premonition of a post-capitalist world.\textsuperscript{130}

**Conclusion**

Marsh rightly argued that the ideology of network governance has become a powerful orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{131} Metagovernance theory evolved in part as a critical reaction. In its critical realist form, it helpfully construes the relationship between government and governance as dialectical. However, it imports the vocabulary of networks to both sides of the government/governance relationship and confines hierarchy to the shadows. Its dialectic is therefore excessively weak and neither notices nor explains the pervasiveness of coercion. The paper argues that a Marxist reading of Gramsci offers a distinctive explanation for the ubiquity of coercion. In short, conceiving of the social macrocosm as a dialectical totality emphasizes structural instability, the limits of hegemony and explains why coercion is necessary, if insufficient, for sustaining social order.

This perspective has significant implications for thinking about the nature of contemporary governance and particularly the impact of hierarchy in governing systems. It suggests that a fruitful analytical distinction can be drawn between directly and indirectly coercive control technologies. Viewed through this lens, it is apparent that state-organized coercion in its different guises is present to a degree in every facet of contemporary socioeconomic life. By re-stating hierarchy, both theoretically and empirically, the paper adds to growing calls, not least among former enthusiasts, for a comprehensive re-evaluation of claims that governance is increasingly about networks.\textsuperscript{132}

This perspective on hierarchy is inspired by the Marxist-Gramscian framework, but may also be useful for other scholars seeking to learn more about the configurations and
juxtapositions of hierarchy market and networks, including those positing alternative explanations for a similar problematic. A new focus on coercion could elicit a variety of theoretical explanations, taxonomies and normative justifications; not only Marxist ones. The advantage of the Marxist-Gramscian approach, however, is that it warrants the claim that threat and violence are integral features of capitalist modernity. It also makes sense of the fact that in the field of governance studies at least, the networks paradigm is increasingly viewed sceptically and with disappointment.

The perspective developed above has greater theoretical affinity with critical realist metagovernance theory than Foucauldian and pluricentric counterparts. However, there remain significant methodological differences, such as between Jessop’s incredulity towards totality and the orthodox Marxist embrace of the concept. The difference, in essence, is that between weakly and strongly dialectical conceptions of the macrocosm; those that see governance as ever-capable of steering around, mitigating or deferring the effects of capitalist crises and those that think this capacity has been exaggerated, or is being accomplished at ever-greater social and environmental cost, as they spread and intensify. The premise of the current paper is that the latter perspective makes better sense of pervasive coercion than the former and is, at the same time, a platform for the critique of the networks weltanschauung. Whether or not they accept this argument, metagovernance theorists need to address the contrasts and distinctions drawn throughout the paper and abandon network-centrism to develop the concept any further.
Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to Professor Mike Geddes for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Notes


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