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Hegemony and crisis: An analysis of habit and ideology as mechanisms for achieving 'consent'

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis of the role played by ideology and habit in ensuring the stability of the socioeconomic order by looking at key passages from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* dealing with the notion of hegemony and its various aspects. This discussion is informed by Beasley-Murray's criticisms against the notion of hegemony and his insistence that, at times of crisis, ruling classes' ideologies stop mattering, and we should, instead, focus on domination and habit imposition. This piece attempts to clarify key concepts such as domination, leadership and ideology, as well as presenting distinctions between different 'forms of consent'. In response to Bealey-Murray's critique, it will also highlight how economic and political crises effect workers' habitual life, domination and habit imposition within production/surplus extraction, leadership style and the subsequent 'form' bourgeois ideologies must take to appeal to an electorate that has lost trust in political elites. It will then conclude with the opposite assertion: At time of crises, we should pay even closer attention to the 'morbid symptoms' displayed by bourgeois ideological trends.

Keywords

consent, crisis, Gramsci, habit, hegemony, ideology, populism

Introduction

How is the stability and reproduction of the socioeconomic order ensured? Within representative democracies, the liberal 'social contract view' would claim that this is achieved

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through the consent people express by voting. This gives the order legitimacy and popular support. In turn, this presupposes popular belief for the worldviews/ideologies spread by representative elites and consequent trust in their leadership. Similarly, within the tradition of critical theory, the concept of hegemony has attempted to explain consent as something relating to persuasion of the masses through ideology. While the concept of hegemony highlights a conflict between the interests of elites and the general population, the assumption is that the ruling class is able 'to present its interest as the common interest of all the members of society: (. . .) it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and present them as the only rational, universally valid ones' (Marx & Engels 1976: 60). However, we now see that the trust for institutions, politicians and mainstream media has been in decline across democratic countries. Should we then still assume that belief in mainstream ideologies and the perceived legitimacy of the order are the factors that ensure its stability and reproduction? In response to this question, some have argued that the era of 'hegemony' is now over. Dominant worldviews/values are not taken seriously; instead, habit is the key mechanism ensuring the stability of the order. Consequentially, we should shift our methodological focus from ideology to how our bodies are disciplined to endure and accept said order. This is the thrust of the notion of 'post-hegemony'. While the term was originally coined by Yúdice (1995: 4), it was fully developed by Beasley-Murray (2003, 2010). Other authors such as Lash (2007) and Venn (2007) defended a similar notion.

While there are differences between the elaborations of the concepts presented by each thinker, all notions of post-hegemony share a sense that, as trust for institutions and hierarchical structures wanes, we might have to rethink our understanding of the balance between domination, coercion and consent when considering what ensures the stability of the socioeconomic order. Thinkers who have employed and discussed the notion of hegemony for years (particularly those within the Gramscian tradition) were ready to reject the above thesis by demonstrating its never-ending relevance. Johnson (2007: 96), Chodor (2014) and, more recently, Thomas (2020: 2–3) all argued that the 'post-hegemony thesis' relies on a very narrow definition of hegemony, which is not in line with a more 'extensive' notion elaborated by Gramsci. Indeed, those authors show that Gramsci's notion of hegemony involves more than persuasion through ideology but also considers the role of coercion, domination and consequent inculcation of habits.

There are, however, some interesting and unexplored questions that this debate has undoubtedly raised for critical theory and the notion of hegemony. First, how can we conceptualise Gramsci's 'extensive' notion of hegemony? If we argue that habit is also an element within said notion, what exactly is its role in the formation of 'consent'? What is the 'place' of ideology vis-à-vis habit as a potential mechanism through which consent is achieved? Even if we might dismiss the notion that ideology is now irrelevant, has the problem of the 'lack of trust' changed its role within the broader notion of hegemony? If so, should our research focus more on habit rather than ideology?

My key arguments will be the following. Habit imposition/acquisition is an aspect of the domination imposed by the state (in its attempt of ensuring the stability of the socioeconomic order) and the firm (in its efforts to increase surplus extraction). The relationship between crisis and habit must be considered under said circumstances. On the one hand, changes in the socioeconomic order such as economic contractions and political

crises destroy the habitual life of the workers causing a feeling of uncertainty and anger against the establishment. On the other, the firm's domination will intensify, along with the efforts of destroying 'old habits' and imposing surplus extraction logics with more brutality. Nevertheless, workers 'previously acquired' habits will attempt to resist both. Ideology will be discussed as a means of justifying (or criticising) domination and as an aspect of leadership (as bourgeois parties seek to persuade workers to vote for them). I will argue that while the current political crisis has not changed ideology's 'usual' role, it has changed the form it must take to be persuasive. A lack of trust means that current ideologies must present a critique of some 'order', thus changing the usual relation between representative politics and the state within the structure of bourgeois ideology. While more traditional political actors would justify the institution/s of the state while representing it, the current right-wing populist feigns (through speech and theatrics) a somewhat antagonistic relation to the state (or at least some aspects of it). In other words, the legitimacy of the 'populist' representative is based on a critique of the entity he is representing. At the same time, while populist actors claim to bring 'order and stability', their 'political style' requires the endurance of crisis (to which populist actors contribute). Due to their chaotic nature, our focus should be directed towards the study of those types of ideology at times of crisis.

The first section of this article will provide an overview of the notion of hegemony and clarify the scope of this article. The second section will touch upon the debate surrounding the notion of post-hegemony by focusing on Basley-Murray's discussion of habit. The third section will look at key passages from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* dealing with hegemony, ideology, habit and the problem of consent. This will inform our definitions of domination, leadership and ideology, as well as inspiring distinctions between different 'types of consent'. This will be followed by a discussion of domination and habit imposition and finally one on leadership, ideology and crisis.

Introducing hegemony

The concept of hegemony has a very long history. Anderson traces the origins of the word to the noun 'hēgemonia' which can already be found in the works of Herodotus. He also argues that even the ambiguities relating to its meaning have ancient origins, as the distinction between hegemony as leadership based on consent and as force was already hinted at by Thucydides in his explanation of the Peloponnesian War (Anderson 2017: 1). The emergence of the concept 'became synonymous with the early struggles that existed within Greek city-states between the 1,400-year dynasties that stretched from the 8th century BC to the 6th century AD' (Worth 2015: 2) Within this context, the term described a situation whereby 'one city-state gained control and exerted influence over the system of governance as a whole' (Worth 2015) through a mixture of leadership and domination.

The most widespread use of the term hegemony is therefore within the field of international relations (IR) where it has traditionally referred to the idea that one powerful state is able to shape and maintain a given international order. Different conceptions would then emphasise either domination or consent as the key mechanisms for ensuring the stability of said order. Among the most discussed and debated notions of hegemony is the so-called 'hegemonic stability theory' (HST). Its basic contention

> is that the distribution of power among states is the primary determinant of the character of the international economic system. A hegemonic distribution of power, defined as one in which a single state has a predominance of power, is most conducive to the establishment of a stable, open international economic system (Webb and Krasner 1989: 183).

The traditional ('realist') version of this notion then sees 'a hegemon' as 'a state that is so powerful that it dominates all other states in the system' (Mearsheimer 2001: 40). The source of a state's dominance is thus its material power (a view that emphasises dominance rather than leadership through ideology) in relation to other states (Clark 2011: 2–3; Worth 2015: 60).

In his discussion of hegemony and the evolution of the concept, Worth (2015) proposes a useful distinction between

> two different understandings of hegemony (. . .): one that understands hegemony as a mechanism where one state controls others in the international system; and the other being the process that occurs when one class in society asserts its dominance over others by establishing certain ideological principles through which order can be maintained (p. 170).

The latter view is usually presented by the Marxian and Neo-Gramscian tradition within the field. As we see, the emphasis in this case is on class (rather than the state) and leadership (rather than domination). Still, this view acknowledges the importance of a dominant state in the creation, development and maintenance of the international order. As Cox (1987) explains, hegemony entails

> dominance of a particular kind where the dominant state creates an order based ideologically on a broad measure of consent, functioning according to general principles that in fact ensure the continuing supremacy of the leading state or states and leading social classes but at the same time offer some measure or prospect of satisfaction to the less powerful (p. 7).

Thus, within the Neo-Gramscian tradition, hegemony presupposes the existence of materially powerful state (as with the realists) but considers its leadership in the creation of an international order which encourages the spread of capitalism and the pursuit of the bourgeois economic interests across the globe. Accordingly, the phenomenon of 'globalisation' is viewed as a 'new geography of power' resulting from US international hegemony. As Agnew (2005) points out 'this world has not been brought about predominantly through direct coercion or by territorial rule, but rather through socioeconomic incorporation into practices and routines derivative or compatible with those first developed in the United States' (p. 13). Agnew's analysis of hegemony echo's Karl Polanyi's concerns about the effects the expansion of the market has on pre-existing social relations across time and space. Indeed, 'the emergence of market exchange' substitutes or eclipses 'relations of reciprocity and redistribution as principles of economic integration' (Agnew 2005: 42).

Even though the notion of hegemony within IR was inspired by Gramsci's *Notebooks*, their focus has been on how the order is maintained on a national level. While a discussion of hegemony 'within a state' needs to take into account the international dimension of the order (since the prescription of neoliberal policy by the United States restricts the

possibilities available for each state in terms of fiscal and monetary policy when facing fluctuations and contractions in international markets), our emphasis on the lack of trust in institutions and its consequences for political representation would naturally lead us to an analysis of how the state attempts to legitimise the neoliberal order domestically. Within this context, hegemony relates to the domination and leadership of the national bourgeois over the workers. Due to sovereignty, the state is experienced as the ultimate source of power in the creation of rules within its territory while also playing the role of 'regulator' of market relations. We could thus distinguish 'class hegemony' (as defined by Worth earlier) as having two dimensions: as something determining the overall structure of the international order and as something faced by the working classes in their everyday life and having both a local and national dimension.

We must also highlight the fact that, while ideology and leadership are often important elements within Gramscian notions of hegemony, domination and the imposition of material power are perhaps just as important (and that also goes for the previously discussed IR perspectives). For example, Williams (1977) argues that hegemony should be conceived as

> a lived system of meanings and values – constitutive and constituting – which, as they are experienced as practices, appear as reciprocally confirming (. . .) It is (. . .) in the strongest sense a 'culture', but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes (p. 110).

Similarly, Hall (1986) points out that

> ideas only become effective if they do, in the end, connect with a particular constellation of social forces. (. . .) So the way we conceptualize the relationship between 'ruling ideas' and 'ruling classes' is best thought in terms of the processes of 'hegemonic domination' (p. 42).

Similarly, broad conceptions of hegemony are also offered by Thomas (2009: 161–165), Johnson (2007: 99) and Joseph (2002).

The exact workings of 'hegemony' and the role of ideology for the 'formation of consent' to the socioeconomic order have been a controversial topic within English Marxism since the 1960s, when 'a competition began to see who could best apply Gramsci's concepts to British conditions' (Joseph 2002: 69). Joseph (2002) provides an in-depth overview of the debate between structuralist and humanist explanations for the stability of the order that emerged during the 70s and 80s (pp. 69–88). His own theory then tries to synthesise structural and agential aspects of hegemony by distinguishing between 'structural hegemony' and 'hegemonic projects/surface hegemony'. While 'conscious political expression depends upon underlying conditions (. . .), these conditions, in turn, would be nothing without some kind of expression'. At the same time, 'while structural hegemony has a certain causal primacy, the workings of surface hegemony (. . .) are not predetermined but have their own specific dynamics' (Joseph 2002: 131). Finally, the notion that consent is achieved primarily through ideology has very little basis in Marxism[1] and Gramscian concepts[2] as demonstrated by Abercrombie et al. (2015: 7–9, 14).

Post-hegemony and habit

Our overview of the notion of hegemony tried to highlight the fact that, while the concept entails an analysis of leadership, political projects and consent, most accounts within the Marxist tradition also emphasise the role of domination in ensuring the stability of the socioeconomic order. This is something also pointed out throughout the debate surrounding post-hegemony. For example, Thomas (2020) argues that the notion of post-hegemony assumes hegemony to be merely a 'system of power' based on 'securing' consent of the masses through ideology (pp. 12–13). However, as Chodor (2014) points out, this 'rests on a highly problematic and selective reading' of Gramsci (p. 492). So, what would justify the claim that hegemony is now redundant? Beasley-Murray (2003) argues that 'we are witnessing the decline of ideology' (p. 118). Individuals are becoming increasingly detached from party politics and disillusioned about their potential benefits: 'voter apathy reigns' (Beasley-Murray 2003: 118). This led to a shift from 'a society characterised by discipline to a society characterised by control' (Beasley-Murray 2003: 119). This view is allegedly supported by Žižek's notion of 'cynical consciousness', which assumes people have stopped trusting ruling classes. They still partake in the reproduction of the socioeconomic order, but they do so cynically. As Žižek (2008) puts it, 'they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it' (p. 24). This supposedly proves the inadequacy of the concept of hegemony as dominant power is not exercised through discourse (e.g. speeches, newspapers) but through 'the order of bodies' (Beasley-Murray 2003: 120). While similar arguments are made by Lash (2007: 56–59) and Venn (2007), the notion of habit is mostly developed in Beasley Murray's book by incorporating Bourdieu's habitus/field dichotomy in his analysis (p. 117). Beasley-Murray (2010) contends that 'the state gains legitimacy through the habitual resonances that structure immanence itself' (p. 201). While the notion of hegemony presupposes consent through ideology and, when this fails, 'coercion', he highlights 'processes that involve neither consent nor coercion. A focus on habit enables us to grasp the workings of the habitus: a collective, embodied feeling for the rules of the social game that is activated and reproduced beneath consciousness' (Beasley-Murray 2010: x). Indeed, he approvingly quotes Negri (1999) in describing 'consent' as 'the inevitable deferral to transcendence, to constituted power, and its apology' (p. 29). In other words, consent is an 'a-priori' assumption about the legitimacy of the order and belongs to the transcendental realm where it plays the role of justification/apology. The existence of the order already presupposes we consent to it.

Beasley-Murray's conception of habit is like Bourdieu's habitus/field dichotomy. The field is a social and spatial situation characterised by various positions and unwritten rules while habitus is a set of (largely unconscious) dispositions acquired through our interaction with the field that becomes an 'incorporated state' (Bourdieu 2000: 11). This relationship is then metaphorically described as one between a game (the field) and 'the feel for the game' (habitus). The game's 'stakes' and its rules come across as necessary and self-evident to the players: 'the game presents itself to someone caught up in it, absorbed in it, as a transcendent universe, imposing its own ends and norms unconditionally' (Bourdieu 2000: 15). The stability of the socioeconomic order is thus ensured by

people's habituation to it. They are so 'absorbed' in the game that it appears as the natural order of things, so they simply go along with it:

> this submission is in no way a 'voluntary servitude', and this complicity is not granted by a conscious, deliberate act; it is itself the effect of a power, which is durably inscribed in the bodies of the dominated, in the form of schemes of perception and dispositions (Bourdieu 2000: 171).

There is, however, one point over which Beasley-Murray disagrees with Bourdieu. For the latter, habitus is a fundamentally conservative mechanism that produces an 'extraordinary inertia' against social change (Bourdieu 2000: 172). Instead, Beasley-Murray (2010) argues that while 'habitus secures social reproduction', it also 'allows for the possibility of resistance' (p. 197) and goes as far as to say that even social change 'is achieved through habit' (p. x). While this claim is not fully developed in the text, it is an interesting suggestion that is worth exploring. Let us now turn to the *Prison Notebooks* for an overview of Gramsci's remarks on some of the matters so far discussed.

Hegemony in the *Prison Notebooks*

While the term hegemony appears countless times in his *Notebooks*, Gramsci never explicitly defines it. Its meaning for Gramsci is thus debated. This is arguably the case with most of his concepts, particularly ideology (see Liguori 2015: 75–80 for a summary of relevant passage). Furthermore, Gramsci's overall philosophy is stated in ways that are often contradictory and enigmatic, as with his discussion of 'objectivity' (see Morera 2011: 38–132). Undeniably, Gramsci often speaks of hegemony as something relating to consent (see, for example, Gramsci 2011, vol. 3, p. 265, 284, and 2014, vol. 2, p. 991, 2011). In other passages, the notion is 'characterised by a combination of force and consent which balance each other so that force does not overwhelm consent but rather appears to be backed by the consent of the majority' (Gramsci 2011, vol. 1, p. 156). The following passage seems to suggest a way to distinguish between those two aspects of hegemony:

> If the state represents the coercive and punitive force of a country's juridical order, the parties – representing the spontaneous adherence of an elite to such regulation, considered as a type of collective society that the entire mass must be educated to adhere to – must show in their specific interior life that they have assimilated as principles of moral conduct those rules that in the state are legal obligations (. . .) From this point of view, the parties can be seen as schools of state life (Gramsci 2011, vol. 3, p. 217).

So, on the one hand, the state creates, maintains and enforces laws. On the other, bourgeois political parties must create a moral environment that supports and justifies them. In other words, if the state is the entity that dominates subordinate groups, political parties create narratives and values that justify said dominance. Of course, Gramsci (2011) points out that this attempt to instill dominant values is the result of a long process of habituation that starts through the school system: 'education is a struggle against

instincts linked to rudimentary biological functions, to dominate it and to create the man that is "in touch" with his times' (vol. 1, p. 211).

Another important aspect of hegemony for Gramsci (2011) is its economic dimension: 'hegemony is political but also and above all economic, it has its material base in the decisive function exercised by the hegemonic group in the decisive core of economic activity' (p. 183). Indeed, he goes as far as to say that 'hegemony is born in the factory and does not need many political and ideological intermediaries' (Gramsci 2011, vol. 1, p. 69, 2014, vol. 1, p. 72). Since the capitalist decides the rules organising the productive process within her firm, Gramsci (2011) describes this as the 'internal "legislation" of the factory, which is entirely under the control of the sovereign and unchecked will of the entrepreneur' (p. 171). The economic aspect of hegemony is mostly developed through Gramsci's analysis of Fordism, whose aim was to turn workers into 'trained gorillas'. This was attempted by developing their

> mechanical side to the maximum, to sever old psychological nexus of skilled professional work in which intelligence, initiative, and imagination were required to play some role, and thus to reduce the operations of production solely to the physical aspect. (. . .) The industrialist is concerned with the continuity of physical efficiency, the muscular-nervous efficiency of the workforce (Gramsci 2011, vol. 2, p. 216).

As Morera (2011) puts it, 'this process is, in short, the attempt to create a new type of worker who will be well adapted, both physically and psychologically, to the new conditions of production' (p. 145).

So far, we have mostly viewed hegemony in terms of domination and justification. Domination is exercised by the state and the firm and entails a process of education and habit acquisition while justification is articulated and spread through ideology. While the specific meaning of the notion is debatable, Gramsci undoubtedly conceives ideology as a 'conception of the world', that is, a world view or belief system. While ideology is sometimes equated with conceptions of the world as such (something rather broad that also includes science, religion, folklore and common sense), other times, it seems to describe a political outlook with practical consequences. For example, Gramsci (2011) defines ideology as 'an intermediate phase between general theory and immediate practice or politics' (vol. 2, p. 155). A similar definition can be found when Gramsci (2014) draws the distinction between ideology and philosophy: 'ideology is any particular conception of the world of the internal groups of the class that proposes to help in the resolution of immediate and circumscribed problems' (vol. 2, p. 1231). For now, we can just think of ideology as a kind of world view which leads individuals to collective action. The notion plays a key role in Gramsci's understanding of political leadership, which is (at least partly) conceived as a struggle between various political parties' ideologies attempting to gain support for their policies, win over the electorate and ultimately gain state power. To be victorious, a party's ideology must consider the 'interests and tendencies of those groups over whom hegemony is exercised' (Gramsci 2011, vol. 2, p. 183). Once state power is gained, the party also becomes dominant (Gramsci 2011, vol. 1, pp. 136–137) insofar as it can shape and impose rules over the rest of the society.

Our discussion of ideology has seen it as something spread by political parties either to justify domination or as a means to win over the electorate and gain 'state power'. While this emphasis makes sense due to the scope of this article, we must acknowledge that both ideology and hegemony are discussed by Gramsci within a broader context. First, in line with Marx's famous 1859 Preface (Marx & Engels 1987: 263), Gramsci sometimes describes ideology as a terrain in which 'men become conscious' of conflicts (see Gramsci 2014, vol. 2, p. 1492, for the most developed note on the 1859 Preface). This suggests ideology is not simply something propagated by ruling groups but a terrain of struggle between different conceptions of the world (including radical ones that are critical of bourgeois domination). Second, Gramsci see ideology as something spread by a variety of means. For example, in Notebook III, note 49, he discusses 'the material organization meant to preserve, defend, and develop the theoretical or ideological "front"'. There he argues that

> its most notable and dynamic part is the press in general: publishing houses (which have an implicit and explicit program and support a particular current); political newspapers; reviews of every kind – scientific, literary, philological, popular, etc.; various periodicals, including even bulletins.

He even adds that 'everything that directly or indirectly influences or could influence public opinion belongs to it: libraries, schools, associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture, the layout of the streets and their names' (Gramsci 2011, vol. 2, p. 53). Third, even though the ruling classes attempt to exercise hegemony by controlling the state and different apparatuses within civil society, this process, as Gramsci points out, must necessarily struggle against local traditions, practices and beliefs. Local reality produces its own folkloristic beliefs and peculiar forms of common sense, which might clash with the values, beliefs and costumes the ruling classes attempt to impose (Gramsci 2011, vol. 1, p. 187). To assess whether a group's 'hegemonic leadership' is successful, we must precisely look at whether their ideology manages to become part of the masses' common sense and supplants the already existing costumes and beliefs. Only when a worldview takes the shape of a dogma and universal truth among the masses can we say that the attempt to establish hegemony has been successful on an ideological level.

Defining key concepts

Through our discussion of Gramsci, we have established that hegemony operates via leadership and domination. Our reading of the *Notebooks* has also tried to touch upon the roles of habit and ideology. However, none of those concepts has been defined, and their relationship to the creation of 'consent' is yet to be clarified. Some passages suggest a distinction between 'passive and active' consent (see, for example, Gramsci 2011, vol. 2, pp. 92, 201). While the meaning of this dichotomy is never explicitly explained, it could point towards a distinction between those who 'actively' consent to the social order with conviction and those who (while not necessarily embracing the social order on a conceptual level) 'passively' consent to the order out of perceived necessity/fear of punishment. In the next section, I will argue that while the latter is achieved through

domination and habit imposition, the former belongs to the realm of ideology. However, we must first clarify what those other concepts mean.

Broadly speaking, we might conceive hegemony as a theory of social influence of a group or class over another. This entails a set of efforts by ruling classes/groups to dominate and lead subordinate groups. Domination might be conceived as a combination of the following: (1) the imposition of rules, (2) the process of education to those rules, (3) supervision, (4) punishment. Domination entails an 'underlying power to punish', without it, those rules have the same weight as suggestions. Leadership then is simply defined as an effort to create faith in one's person, products, views and project*s*. Leadership thus concerns persuasion and (we might say) active consent (explicit/declared support for x). As we said earlier, this entails belief in the ideology spread by representatives. But what exactly is ideology?

While the following definition has been inspired by Gramsci's works, it also attempts to narrow it to isolate 'politically salient' worldviews rather than worldviews as such (as we mentioned earlier, Gramsci's own use of the term seems to oscillate between the two). Another key source of inspiration was McCarney's *Real World of Ideology*, particularly the passage where he argues that ideologies

> embody an assessment or grading of, evince a pro or contra attitude towards, states of affairs and human activities; towards, that is, particular patterns of social arrangements and the practices that seek to modify, preserve, strengthen, undermine or transform them. (McCarney 1980: 80–81).

Ideology can then be defined as a terrain of struggle between ideas containing the following elements: (1) the social commentary, (2) the vision of the future and (3) the strategy to bring the vision of the future into reality. The social commentary is any type of speech or thought that explains and evaluates social phenomena (including social structures, social problems, the socioeconomic order in general, etc.). It does so by creating causal connections (whether true or not) between said phenomena, another social phenomena, groups or (as with conspiratorial explanations) individuals. If the phenomenon to be explained is positive (e.g. wealth creation), what causes it will be viewed positively (e.g. capitalism), consequentially if something (e.g. capitalism) is said to cause a negative phenomenon (e.g. poverty), it will be viewed negatively. This is the sense in which explanations and value judgements are linked together within the 'social commentary'.

The vision of the future is then linked to the picture of social arrangements as explained by the commentary and creates an image of a better society (typically where the problems highlighted by the commentary would disappear). Finally, strategy represents the moment of 'political action' whereby groups plan how to bring about the vision of the future (often according to the diagnosis presented by the commentary). This definition of ideology does not discriminate in terms of coherence, scope, sophistication and so on. It implies that any narrative that seeks to explain the social world and its aspects (even the most bizarre) can be classed as an ideology purely in virtue of its object of knowledge (social phenomena) and (potential) political significance. While ideology can be employed by ruling classes to justify the socioeconomic order and attempt to find support among other groups, it can also be an instrument for oppressed groups to come

together and fight them. Thus, this is a 'neutral' notion of ideology as opposed to a negative conception, such as the notion of 'false consciousness' or more sophisticated critical accounts such as Larrain's (1983) concept of ideology as 'concealment of contradictions' or Rehmann's (2013) notion of 'ideology-critique'.

Coming back to the notion of 'consent', we can now make some distinctions that will inform our discussion of domination and leadership. Passive consent can be defined as consent to a specific set of rules and values without necessarily embracing them at a conceptual level. Passive consent simply entails agents will follow the rule even though they might not like them, that is due to a sense of perceived necessity caused by their constant involvement in the 'game' (as with Bourdieu's idea that once you are so absorbed in the game, you might not have time to wonder about its legitimacy), peer pressure or for fear of punishment. Active consent entails that agents will not only follow the rules but also believe they are good and legitimate rules (they will thus embrace the ideology justifying the rules/domination). As a result, agents embracing rules due to active consent will do so with more passion, attention to detail and zeal. Conceptual dissent can be conceived as the 'critical attitude' of those passively consenting to the rules but begrudging them in their mind. The 'dissent' is only conceptual because the agents are afraid of actually breaking the rules due to punishment (although they might express their disapproval verbally with like-minded peers).

Domination, habit and crisis

Our definition of domination highlights that we are not here talking about arbitrary coercion imposed by individual actors. As Jessop notes, 'domination treat capacities as socially structured rather than socially amorphous (or random). At stake are systematic, institutionalized, regularly reproduced reciprocal relations rather than one-off and unilateral impositions of will. Power as domination secures the continuity of social relations' (Jessop 2016: 94). Or as Jeffrey Isaac (1987) puts it, 'rather than A getting B to do something B would not otherwise do, social relations of power typically involve both A and B doing what they ordinarily do' (p. 96). This is why we have argued that habit acquisition through routine should be viewed as a product of domination. Within capitalist societies, two entities can be said to dominate individuals: the firm and the state.

Our overview of Gramsci's analysis of Fordism shows how firms create and impose rules, educate their employees to them, supervise them and punish them if they break them. This is to ensure optimal levels of productivity and surplus extraction. The functioning of the whole social relation depends on at least the 'passive consent' of employees to the firm's rules. However, what exactly is the source of this consent? Liberals would argue that the worker is consenting to a mutually beneficial relation. Marxists know too well that the workers only 'consent' to sell their labour power because they lack the means of production, and this is necessary to survive. Thus, within the context of the firm, economic necessity is the source of consent, rather than habit; the latter is best viewed as the mechanism that allows workers to endure and reproduce the relations that have been imposed upon them.

See, for example, Amazon's brutal treatment and surveillance of its workers. If Taylor's aim was to turn workers into 'trained gorillas', Amazon's treatment of its workers is

perhaps best summed up by their defiant slogan: 'we are not robots!' The domination of Amazon workers (rule setting, education, supervision and punishment) has been extensively discussed in Delfanti's case study of one of the Italian Amazon Fulfilment Centres (FC) through the employment of a Marxist framework inspired by 1960s' 'Operatismo' literature. Delfanti (2021) explains that 'Amazon's labour is organised around four core processes: receive, stow, pick and pack' (p. 42). Each labourer performs a very specialised process and is under constant surveillance. For example, workers carry a barcode scanner tracking their location and how long it takes them to complete the task (Delfanti 2021: 47). The scanner dictates a fast pace of labour, the so-called 'amazon pace' as described below:

> As you are loading an object onto the cart, the next one appears on the scanner. So as you are loading your cart you start moving, and as you are arriving you already take a look at what you are to pick next, you don't stop (Delfanti 2021: 43).

The scanner is also used to surveil the workers by allowing management to track their position and assessing their performance. Education takes place within the so-called 'schools':

> Crash courses for workers to learn a specific process, such as pick or receive. In turn, this permits the FC to rely on masses of workers who can quickly be put to work in the warehouse and endure work rhythms, thus fostering fast turnover of the workforce but maintaining high productivity levels.

The reduction of labour to mindless tasks allows Amazon to treat its workers as disposable, which leads to the ever-looming threat of Amazon's 'punishment' (being fired). This is particularly the case for temp-workers, who must make sure they keep up with the 'amazon pace': 'at the beginning you quickly need to find a way to get your contract confirmed. You can be a pander, or you can run. Most people run. You have to run' (Delfanti 2021: 50).

Of course, businesses must also try to create 'active consent' for their rules to further improve efficiency. Delfanti (2021) describes this when talking about 'Amazon warehouse culture' (p. 49), with its emblematic motto: 'Work hard. Have Fun. Change the World'. In trying to set a friendly and human tone in its inhuman working environment, 'FC mimics corporate campuses such as Google's or Facebook's. This includes informal and colourful environments, foosball tables, loud music, and free goodies' (Delfanti 2021). Daily efforts are made to persuade workers to embrace their role with zeal through 5-minute briefings:

> workers are asked to raise their hand and suggest a 'success story' in front of the rest of the team (. . .). During briefings, managers may also say something about the team's performance, which workers are implicitly required to celebrate. As reported by a worker, managers at times say things like 'yesterday we had an insane productivity rate!' followed by applause (Delfanti 2021).

Within the context of state power, class domination is spread across various institutions or (as Althusser would put it) apparatuses. Now, the complexity of this

arrangement, the specific role of the state and its very nature are a source of great debate, which is perhaps best summarised by a series of puzzles put forward by Jessop (2016):

> Is the state best defined by its legal form, coercive capacities, institutional composition and boundaries, internal operations and modes of calculation, declared aims, functions for the broader society, or sovereign place in the international system? Is it a thing, a subject, a social relation, or a construct that helps to orient political action? (pp. 20–21).

Considering the scope of this article, we might simply conceive the role of the state and its related apparatuses simply in the context of our definition of domination. The state directly creates rules and regulations that apply within its sovereign territory. In our early years, education is asserted through the school system, where we are accustomed to discipline and acquainted with the laws and basic rules (e.g. punctuality) we must respect to be 'operational' members of society. Supervision is then carried out by the police force, while punishment is exercised through the judicial system. We know that the state is also a key mechanism for protecting private property, capitalist relations of production and for promoting laws and regulations that will benefit some factions of the bourgeois (that compete over its control). It also has a general function of habituating subordinate groups to a certain way of life and morality. For Gramsci, this distinguishes the 'capitalist state' from previous states:

> In former times, the dominant classes were essentially conservative in the sense that they did not seek to enable other classes to pass organically into theirs; in other words, they did not seek to enlarge, either 'technically' or ideologically, the scope of their class – they conceived of themselves as an exclusive caste. The bourgeois class posits itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the whole of society, assimilating it to its cultural and economic level: the entire function of the state is transformed, the state becomes 'educator' (Gramsci 2011, vol. 3, p. 234).

The state can thus be said to 'dominate' individuals insofar as it imposes a certain way of living and demands we conform to it.

While each state will have its own peculiar national myth, language and social/cultural practices associated with the land over which it presides, all 'capitalist states' must also ensure the protection of private property and habituate its people to social practices (e.g. exchange, wage-labour, competition) and values (e.g. self-interest, individualism, monetary gain) associated with market economies. Of course, the market is not an independent phenomenon that must be kept in its 'natural or optimal' state as with the idea of 'free market'. Markets cannot exist without states regulating them (including the 'freest market' imaginable). The way states react to the market is also not a matter of them bowing down to a natural and self-regulating force. This must be viewed within the context of American hegemony. As Joseph (2002) puts it, 'The current dominance of the neo-liberal model pioneered by the Anglo-Saxon countries is not based on the domination of the global economy over the nation-state, but on the deliberate "deregulating" policy of dominant nation-states, most notably the US' (p. 203). Thus, the relationship between 'states and markets' or states and capitalism does not lend itself to a

straightforward separation between two entities due to their interdependence and mutual interaction. Indeed, the precise nature of this relation has been the source of much debate among Marxists (e.g. the Poulantzas/Miliband debate).

The 'order' imposed by the state is therefore not only something to do with its sovereign territory and peculiar laws, it also includes our habituation to the logics of international capitalism. So, how is the stability of this order ensured? In the case of the state/capitalism order, I believe Beasley-Murray is right in arguing (along with Bourdieu) that this is established through habit. None of us ever 'consent' to this state of affairs, but its existence appears natural simply because we have been used to it since the very day we were born. No belief in a dominant ideology claiming the 'fairness' of this system is needed because whatever our view might be, the power the states and capitalism assert over us cannot be escaped. Building a life under capitalism demands our 'passive consent' to the socioeconomic order even if we dedicate our lives to its critique; while our thoughts might assault it, our daily habits remind us of our subservience to it. Nevertheless, habit can also be the source of our resistance against the order. As Polanyi shows, markets tend to disrupt and destroy pre-existing social relationships (see Polanyi 2001: 49–58 for a discussion of pre-modern economic relationships based on logics of reciprocity and redistribution). He goes as far as to argue that capitalism limits the moral development of individuals: 'Under such system, human beings are not allowed to be good, even though they may wish to be so' (Polanyi 2018: 147). Thus, as capitalism destroys pre-existing 'fields', workers' habits are deprived of their usual surroundings. Consequentially, the pre-existing habit will tendentially 'resist' the newly imposed market logics. A similar argument can be made in relation to workers' resistance against the firm. For example, imagine someone recently forced to work for Amazon after a redundancy. As with Fordism, it is clear that Amazon tries 'to sever old psychological nexus of skilled professional work'. Previously acquired work-related habits such as creativity, critical thinking, self-management and so on will clash with Amazon's 'robotisation' process as it seeks to destroy them. In the case of non-US workers, a similar clash is likely to occur between Amazon's American corporate culture (e.g. intense supervision, impossible productivity targets, no breaks, ridiculous slogans) and workers' local attitudes and work-related practices. For example, Delfanti (2021) describes how Italian workers react to Amazon's '5-minute briefings' of 'success stories': 'it is not uncommon to hear workers ironically characterise the briefings as "dog and pony shows" or "Alcoholics Anonymous meetings" as they describe cracks in the warehouse's culture of fun' (p. 58).

Having said this, can we say (as suggested by Beasley-Murray) that habit can cause social change? In my view, this is not a compelling argument. The problem is that social change is brought about through collective political action. This entails individuals and groups coming together and forming strategies and aims that are peculiar to their socio-political situation. If capitalism disrupts habits, then people who face it can only rely on their habits to resist it, but not to create an alternative to it. They must adapt and form a strategy that works in their new context. This entails that while habit can be a means to resistance, precisely due to (rather than despite) its conservative nature, it wants to bring back things as they were. As Dewey (2007) puts it, 'No matter how accidental and irrational the circumstances of its origin, no matter how different the conditions which now exists are to those under which the habit was formed, the latter persists until the

environment absolutely rejects it' (p. 125). Social change must entail a movement towards the 'unknown', something that habit (by definition) is not equipped for. So, what happens to habit at a time of crisis? Crises even disrupt the habits of workers who are already accustomed to capitalism and its rules. Changes in demand for labour, automation, inflation, unemployment, cuts in welfare and healthcare and so on have an overwhelming effect on our lives. Less money means I cannot do what I usually do, and unemployment and low demand for my skills means that I might have to find another line of work to survive. This also has consequences for relations of reciprocity which survive to this day. See, for example, the relationship between offsprings and parents. In smaller communities, the latter expect the former to help taking care of them as they grow older. However, as unemployment causes young people's emigration towards big cities, this relationship is broken. As the socioeconomic 'order' we have been accustomed to is eroding, people experience frustration and anger. Those precarious situations also lead workers to compete for the 'fewer jobs' left in the market. The domination of the firm (as illustrated through our example of Amazon) will likely intensify (and with it the extraction of surplus value) as workers become more and more 'disposable' due to higher levels of unemployment and competition over fewer positions.

Leadership, ideology and crisis

We have discussed how ideologies propagated by the ruling classes often serve the purpose of legitimising domination by justifying the existence of certain social relations and rules (capitalism, the coercive power of the state) on the basis of a certain desired/beneficial (wealth, safety) outcome. If we agree in the legitimacy of the order or its parts, we are 'actively consenting' to it. When sudden contractions in the market disrupt our habits, the response of the right has usually been that of 'enduring' this time of crisis to later reap the benefits the 'creative destruction of the market' will bring. The party in power will then go ahead and implement neoliberal policies to attract investments. In terms of economic policy, there is no denying that while neoliberalism has been heavily challenged intellectually, from a practical perspective, liberalisation of industries and austerity are still the key strategies employed by most economically developed countries in the global North. Can we then simply say that nothing has changed from the days of Thatcher and Reagan? While the underlying 'orthodoxy' of economic policy has remained almost unchanged, party ideologies have undergone a significant conceptual change due to a more extreme version of 'populism'.

If by populism we mean a tendency towards trying to appeal to common people and harness their grievances, as well as an appeal to national sentiment and myths, this tactic has already been exploited by the likes of Thatcher, as Stuart Hall's (1988) study has amply shown: 'Thatcherism's "populism" signals its unexpected ability to harness to its project certain popular discontents, to cut across and between the different divisions in society and to connect with certain aspects of popular experience' (p. 6). However, if populism is defined as also entailing an elite/people conception of society, the creation of a situation of crisis within discourse and a critical attitude towards some aspects of the socioeconomic order, we can see we have something different in our hands. For example, Mudde (2004) defines populism as

> an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people (p. 543).

According to Moffitt, populism is '*a political style that features an appeal to "the people" versus "the elite", "bad manners" and the performance of crisis, breakdown or threat*' (Moffitt 2016: 43–44, emphasis in the original text). Moffitt argues that populism is not (as we might think) something merely 'caused' by the crisis (as a 'purely external' phenomenon). Instead, he sees 'the performance of crisis as an *internal feature of populism (. . .).* It is often the case that populists must play an important role in "setting the stage" themselves by promoting and performing crisis' (Moffitt 2016: 9). The ideology of current right-wing populists works not only by harnessing workers' grievances but also their critical stance towards the establishment. Thatcher dominated with an iron fist. She crushed all dissent and told us all was justified for the greatness of the United Kingdom. Trump is more likely to be remembered because of his own protests against the legitimacy of the 2020 elections and the subsequent attack on Capitol Hill he orchestrated. In other words, current right-wing populists go much deeper in their exploitation of workers' anger insofar as they also tap into their anti-establishment attitude. As such, it has a chaotic element within it even if right-wing populists still want to be perceived as the bastions of 'order and safety'. There are thus various contradictory tendencies in the way in which the populist attempt to gain people's support: They aim to represent the establishment and its 'order', and yet they must gain support by criticising it and fomenting disorder (or at least conceptual dissent) within it. They claim they will 'end' the crisis, yet their political style requires its persistence. If people were to regain trust in traditional politics, the populist actor would be 'put out of business' so to speak.

This shows the resourcefulness of the right when facing a crisis of legitimacy. Post-hegemony theorists are too optimistic in their view that a lack of belief in dominant ideologies will lead to potential change. They underestimate the power of dominant parties to harness criticisms against the order for their own gain. So how exactly is this achieved? How can exploited workers be recruited by the far-right neoliberalism when they have been affected by austerity and had their world crashed by market contractions? To answer this question, we might first come back to the 'fuzzy' relationship between states and market discussed earlier. While they might disagree over the exact relationship between the bourgeois and the state (and the latter's degree of autonomy from the former), Marxists scholars have a clear view of how capitalist logics of surplus accumulation and automation coupled with state austerity will lead to cyclical economic crises and subsequent poverty, inequality and unemployment. However, this is not necessarily clear for someone possessing no such knowledge. Who is to say the state is not entirely responsible for the economic crisis? After all, politicians always claim they can 'solve' even the most difficult problems when they seek to be elected. Now, while we might not trust them, we might still believe they have the power to solve issues such as inflation, unemployment, poverty and so on. They simply wish not to. From this follows that even phenomena such as global economic contractions could be perceived to be the responsibility of individual political actors who either fail to prevent/solve them or directly planned them.

Far-right populism creates causal connections that explain deeply structural economic problems by reference to the nefarious machinations of political elites. The workers' anger originating in their economic conditions and their mistrust for elites is thus redirected towards specific institutions and political figures. This often entails the spreading of a conspiratorial explanation for events and the Manichean view of politics as a conflict between 'good and evil'. See, for example, Jerome Corsi's depiction of Trump's relationship to the 'deep state'. Corsi (2018) claims that to 'kill the deep state' and

> to save his presidency, Trump must expose a host of criminally cunning Deep State political operatives as enemies to the Constitution, including John Brennan, Eric Holder, Loretta Lynch, James Comey, and Robert Mueller – as well as Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton (p. 3).

The deep state is clearly depicted as a nefarious entity, but its evilness appears through association with the 'evil individuals' above. The distinctions between singular evil individuals and their 'institutions' are thus blurred. This allows populist actors to tap into anti-establishment sentiment without advocating any real restructuring of the social order. Everything can be solved once the 'evil conspirators' have been 'eliminated'. The same logic can also be used to attack a specific institution and advocate its destruction due to it being an instrument of said conspirators. Furthermore, the conspiratorial worldview provides populists actors in power an excuse for their failings as they can always claim 'individuals in the deep state' are stopping them from acting as they wish. This worldview makes it so that populists can constantly make arbitrary choices in relation to their 'target' institutions/individuals, as well as allowing them to seek leadership without a coherent plan, a consistent ideology and economic strategy. For example, the 'coherence' of Trump's worldview is based on a loosely constructed narrative of conspirators who are 'out to get him'. This is the 'thread' that links his choices and becomes part of his wider struggle against the nefarious world order. For the Trump supporter, an 'epic adventure' story of good vs evil is more appealing and exciting than coherent but dry policy proposals based on a 'traditional' party ideology. The Trumpian ideology is best understood as a story that follows a protagonist in his epic battle against evil. What would count as 'ideology' (e.g. an account of how the social world works, diagnosis of problems, subsequent policy, etc.) appears simply as some vague world-building surrounding the 'main plot'. This perfectly suits the 'charismatic individual politics' of populist actors and their narcissism. Now, despite Trump's emphasis on his fight against the 'globalist' world order and potential deviations (e.g. Trump's trade war with China) from neoliberal orthodoxy, his economic policy is still anchored on a firm 'free market' attitude. As Worth (2019) points out:

> In attacking Clinton as a 'Progressive Socialist Globalism', Trump's election leaflets were to portray him as the American nationalist alternative that would put up tariffs, protect American workers and dismantle trade agreements, and at the same time reduce regulations and taxes and reinforce free market capitalism (p. 131).

Thus, neoliberalism and the myth of the free market keep asserting themselves as a dominant ideology despite the surface theatrics of populist actors.

Conclusion

Let us now come back to the questions put forward in the introduction. We illustrated how a broad notion of hegemony, as having economic and political aspects, can be formulated. Domination has been defined as a series of efforts to impose rules, educate individuals to them, supervise them and punish them if they break them. Domination thus relates to the creation of routines and a process of habitation to the structures and rules imposed on individuals. We have argued that two 'agents' of domination exist under capitalism: the firm and the state. The former imposes rules that make up its 'internal order'. While habit acquisition is necessary for workers' endurance of the conditions imposed by the firm, 'consent' is determined by the workers' lack of the means of production and their subsequent need to survive. Our position on habit and its role for the consent to the socioeconomic order partly agrees with Basely Murray's. We agree with him and Bourdieu in saying that we never really have the time to 'consent' to our lives under said order as by the time we can even think in those terms, we have already been heavily habituated to its existence and practical necessity. While some of us might 'actively' consent to this order, most of us passively consent to it even though we might be very critical of it on a conceptual level. In other words, while dominant ideologies attempt to justify and legitimise the order, our belief in them is not necessary for the order to reproduce itself. We also agree with his view that habit can be the source of resistance. However, we argued that meaningful social change requires an ideology that brings actors together and equip them to deal with novel situations (something habit alone cannot do). We partly disagreed with Beasley-Murray's argument about the intensification of habit imposition during periods of crisis. On the one hand, we argued that crises primarily disrupt habits as they destroy or heavily alter the socioeconomic order and our relation to it. On the other, periods of crisis are a prime opportunity for the firm to increase its surplus accumulation by making its domination more intense and doubling its efforts to impose habits on the workers.

Let us move to the question of whether ideology is still an important element of hegemony even during periods of crisis. We must begin by noting that, from the start of this article, we assume that 'lack of trust' in politicians and institutions is evidence for a lack of belief in a dominant ideology. While there is some truth in this argument (politicians are, after all, the greatest 'producers' of political ideologies), whether this is an accurate representation of our current political climate depends on what we mean by 'dominant ideology'. We have seen how populist ideologies integrate a critique of institutions, politicians and the elites in their narrative. However, if by 'dominant ideology' we mean a general 'bourgeois ideology', the view that capitalism is natural or at least necessary for any society to function, then this worldview is yet to be challenged. Most people are likely to believe there is no alternative to capitalism. Most political parties do not even propose any economic policy that substantially deviates from neoliberalism either. Thus, one might argue that while the belief in the idea that 'capitalism/neoliberalism' is necessary is not required for the stability and reproduction of the socioeconomic order, this view has now been engrained into 'common sense'. In other words, even the thesis of people not believing in 'dominant ideologies' is only partially true.

Our analysis of leadership at the time of crisis has shown us how party ideologies are changing to cater for people's lack of trust in the establishment. This leads to a contradictory ideology which foments dissents while promising 'order' and promises to end the 'crisis' while its persistence is necessary for the populist actors' 'style'. We have seen that populists can explain problems rooted in capitalism and neoliberal economic policies as being caused by 'evil elites' controlling the state. This allows populist actors to harvest both workers' anger and their distrust against the order they represent. This leads to a much more chaotic manner of doing politics whereby no coherent set of policy proposals is necessary. The theatrical 'performance of crisis' and the blaming of political adversaries through allegations of conspiracy are the logics that determine the populist narrative. So, what does this entail for the concept of hegemony and the role of ideology within it? We saw how the notion of post-hegemony suggests a loss of relevance of ideology at the time of crisis. My argument is very much the opposite: Ideologies become even more important in our analysis at the time of crisis. At times of relative stabilities, bourgeois party ideologies tend towards sameness, and their impact on the socioeconomic order is not likely to change much relative to their various expressions. During our current 'populist wave', we are witnessing unpredictable and chaotic political actors. While their anti-establishment attitude does not displace the hegemony of neoliberalism (indeed it embraces it), their opportunist and arbitrary critique of institutions and structures make their effect on the socioeconomic order unpredictable and potentially catastrophic. If Donald Trump could rally his supporters against the results of the 2020 election, democracy itself could be his next target; after all, it would be better to destroy it rather than it becoming an instrument for globalists' conspiracies.

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Notes

1. The only passage coming close to this idea is the talk of 'ruling class, ruling ideas passage' in the *German Ideology* (Marx & Engels 1976: 59). However, the notion that ruling classes 'dominate' intellectually can be read in many ways.
2. Gramsci never explicitly states that the consent towards the socioeconomic order is primarily achieved through ideology.

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