Gramsci’s concept of hegemony at the national and international level.

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Abstract

The work of Antonio Gramsci has been very influential in the field of International Political Economy. Not only has the Italian revolutionary’s body of thought been taken as a starting point for conceptualising hegemony at the international level – something this paper is mostly concerned with – it has also provided a source for a critical understanding of the International in general. Given my aim, the first part of the paper will look at how Gramsci’s concept of hegemony has been understood by influential scholars in the field of IR such as Arrighi and Cox. Secondly, relying on more recent literature on Gramsci, engaging with the critical edition of the Quaderni and dwelling on some important tenets of his body of thought, I will outline another interpretation. Differently from the above scholars, hegemony will be understood as being economic, civic and political and defined as dialectical unity between leadership and domination, including both the moments of consensus and coercion. In due course I will look at how a ‘fundamental class’ can realise hegemony and identify structural, economic causes for why it can run into crisis.

The third part of the paper then turns to the International and presents how Arrighi, Cox and the Amsterdam School have applied Gramsci’s concept to this field. Relying again on the Quaderni, I will discuss a still relatively unexplored field in the literature: how Gramsci himself thought of international relations and hegemony within it. According to the reading proposed here, international relations in the ‘modern’ capitalist world are conceptualised dialectically and result as being characterised by rivalry amongst different states. Hegemony accrues to states (not classes). It is based on economic and military power of a given state relative to other states (likely to change over time) and describes a state’s degree of autonomy – hence also its ability to influence other states’ behaviour in different ways. Therefore, in my concluding remarks I will argue that Gramsci’s analysis of the International cannot be counted amongst Neogramscian analyses. For Gramsci presents an analysis closer to Lenin’s “Imperialism” and to a lesser extent to the realist school. Gramsci, it will be argued, provides a very rich and helpful framework for understanding International Political Economy.

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Students of international relations or political economy in international relations often engage with the concept of hegemony as somehow related to the revolutionary and co-founder of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci. Despite the different meanings given to hegemony, Gramsci has always been identified as the thinker to have developed the concept.

The aim of this paper is then to look at Gramsci’s concept of hegemony more in depth and to assess whether its interpretation as put forward by scholars of international relations as well as its application to the international is convincing. The first part of the paper will outline how scholars of political economy of international relations which engaged with Gramsci more substantially, i.e. Arrighi and Cox, have understood Gramsci’s notion. The second part of the chapter (section two) will instead consider the Critical Edition of Gramsci’s Notebooks proposing, in important instances, a different reading compared to the above authors. Section three will examine how Gramsci has been applied to the field of international relations and on the other hand look at how Gramsci himself conceived of International Relations and hegemony at the international level. Section four, my concluding remarks, will outline key differences between Gramsci and so-called Neogramscians and argue that Gramsci’s analysis, which comes closer to Lenin, is helpful for the understanding of International Political Economy.

While looking at Gramscis’ Notebooks in the second section of the paper, the discussion will be informed by Anderson’s influential article “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci” (1976) as well as more recent publications on Gramsci, such as Alberto Burgio’s “Per Gramsci” (2007) Adam Morton’s “Unravelling Gramsci” (2007), Fontana’s chapter “Hegemony and Power in Gramsci” in “Hegemony: Studies in Coercion and Consensus” (2009), Peter Thomas’ “The Gramscian Moment” (2009). Differently from Arrighi and Cox, as well as some of the above authors, the reading proposed here, will emphasise Gramsci’s characteristic Marxism (section 2.2) and how this influences Gramsci’s development of new concepts, among which, hegemony. Following the latter approach the subsequent sections will focus on the process of realisation of hegemony (2.3), define the concept and look at its relation to domination (2.4), outline where hegemony is located (2.4) and focus on how hegemony is exercised (2.5). In addition, section 2.6 will also outline how Gramsci theorises crises of hegemony and eventually ask whether Gramsci proposes implicitly a theory of hegemonic transitions (section 2.7). Based on the reading of Gramsci developed throughout section two, section 3.2 will look at how International Relations and hegemony at the international level are treated in the Quaderni.

1. Influential Readings of Gramsci in the field of International Relations

Giovanni Arrighi is one of the authors that take Gramsci seriously when cogitating on the concept of hegemony and reflecting upon ways in which this concept could be applied to the international. Central to Arrighi’s analysis is the claim that hegemony does not equal domination tout court. The power of a hegemonic group (or a state) is “more” and “different” from pure and simple domination.

For Arrighi in fact power can also be understood in Machiavellian terms and hence that it can take the form of a “combination of consent and coercion”. Consent is associated with moral leadership, while domination implies “the use of force, or a credible threat of force”. Arrighi claims that a dominant group’s power then can be based on domination, “pure and simple” one might say, which rests on coercion and force; or it can be based on domination and hegemony. Arrighi in fact understands hegemony eventually as addendum (“additional power”) to domination which “accrues to a dominant group by virtue of its capacity to place
all the issues around which conflict rages on a “universal” plane\(^1\). This idea is based on Gramsci’s statement that “it is true that the State is seen as the organ of one particular group, destined to create favourable conditions for the latter’s maximum expansion” But, he continues showing that the interests of the particular group need to be conceived and presented as the interests of all and hence to be ‘universal’. In Gramsci’s words: “the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motorforce of a universal expansion, a development of all the national energies”\(^2\)

In an influential article called “Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method” Robert Cox also analyses Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony” and gives some guidelines on how it could be applied to the field of international relations. As Arrighi he underlines the Machiavellian root of Gramsci’s understanding of power, exemplified by the comparison with a centaur: “half man, half beast” and hence power as “a necessary combination consent and coercion”\(^3\). Hegemony prevails, Cox argues, when “the consensual aspect of power is in the forefront”\(^4\). Because hegemony is “enough to ensure conformity of behaviour in most people most of the time”, coercion will be mainly latent and used only in particular, deviant situations.

In addition to Machiavelli’s insights as source of inspiration for Gramsci’s reflections on hegemony, Cox individuates the debates within the Third International on different strategies for the creation of a Socialist State. In this context he argues that Lenin conceived the proletariat as a “dominant and directing class”: domination and hence dictatorship over enemy classes and leadership and hence hegemony over allied classes. For Cox though “Gramsci’s originality” has been to develop the concept of hegemony further and to apply it to the bourgeoisie as opposed to the proletariat and to appreciate cases in which the bourgeoisie attained hegemonic positions and eventually to discern it in situations in which the bourgeoisie was not able to do so. Historically, Cox argues, bourgeois hegemony was “necessarily” accompanied by concessions to subordinate classes in order to gain their acquaintance in bourgeois rule.

Cox then expands on different concepts of Gramsci’s body of thought showing how hegemony is a key element in many of them – especially the State, Passive Revolution and the Historic Bloc. Regarding the State, Cox argues that it was the “perception of hegemony” that inspired the Italian author to “enlarge his definition of the state.”\(^5\) Cox maintains that the hegemony of the ruling class, which is exercised over a whole social formation, eventually “constrains” the administrative, executive and coercive apparatuses. For this reason, he argues, a conception of the state which attempts to take account of this, needs to include the basis of the political structure, ie civil society.

But following Cox’s reading of Gramsci the bourgeoisie was not able to establish bourgeois hegemony in all countries, whereby Gramsci distinguished situations in which the bourgeoisie was able to so and others in which it achieved its ends only partially. While the former case is characterised by the bourgeoisie’s ascent to power through a thorough social revolution, the latter is characterised by its rise to power through so-called “passive revolutions”. “The concept of passive revolution” Cox then maintains “is a counterpart to the concept of hegemony in that it describes the conditions of a non-hegemonic society – one in which no dominant class has been able to establish hegemony in Gramsci’s sense of the term”\(^6\)

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1 Arrighi (1994), p.28.  
2 Gramsci, quoted in Arrighi, p.28  
4 Cox (1987), p. 164  
A final point made by Cox concerns Gramscian concept of the “historic bloc” and the essential role played by the hegemonic social class. Following Cox, Gramsci’s concept of historic bloc is a “dialectical concept” insofar as different interacting elements form a “larger unity”. What is at stake is the relation between the “structure” and the “superstructures”, whereby Cox argues, Gramsci stresses the “juxtaposition and the reciprocal relationships” between the structure (“the economic sphere) and the superstructures (“political, ethical and ideological spheres of activity”) avoiding to reduce “everything” to either economics or only to ideas. The hegemonic class is necessary for an historic bloc to exist because it “maintains cohesion and identity within the bloc” through the diffusion of a common culture. Very important in this context is the role played by intellectuals, which are “organically connected” to the hegemonic class and perform specific functions, which for Cox are the following: “they perform the function of developing and sustaining the mental images, technologies and organisations which bind together the members of a class and of an historic block into a common identity”.

Although praising Gramsci for historicising his concepts Cox maintains that the “Machiavellian connection” makes it possible to apply the concept of hegemony to different historical situations and to apply it to relations of dominance to different constellations, among which, as will be shown in the third part of the chapter, international relations.

2. Gramsci’s Concept of Hegemony at the national level

2.1. The common starting point: The 3rd International, and from Aristotle to Gramsci via Machiavelli.

The Anglo Saxon debate on Antonio Gramsci’s body of thought has been mainly shaped by Perry Andersons’ famous article “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci” appeared in the New Left Review in 1976. There Perry Anderson concludes eventually that Gramsci’s analysis and political strategy that derived from it were deeply misleading. As he puts it, ”the weakness of Gramsci’s strategy is symmetrical with that of his sociology”8 and will be evident from the analysis of hegemony proposed here Anderson conclusions are contestable, as also Thomas indicates speaking eventually of the “Antinomies of Perry Anderson” himself rather than those of Antonio Gramsci9 and as the analyses put forward by other authors, as for example Burgio and Morton, suggest.

Despite this Anderson’s reconstruction of the term’s origins seem to be shared. Similarly to Cox, Anderson underlines that Gramsci reflected on the term that was used to describe the relationship between proletariat and peasantry characterised by “the persuasive nature of the influence the working class should seek to win over the peasantry” in contrast to “the coercive nature of the struggle to overthrow Tsarism”10 and applied it to describe the relation between bourgeoisie and proletariat, in particular to the “forms of consent” of the working class to the rule of the bourgeoisie. As also Thomas notes, “Anderson was correct to note that Gramsci extended a concept originally used to theorise the leading role of the Russian proletariat in the struggle against Tsarist absolutism, in order both to advocate a strategy for the European (and more broadly, international) working class movement and also to analyse the forms of established bourgeois State power in the West”11.

In various articles Benedetto Fontana has analysed Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and especially its relation to Machiavelli’s thought. In a chapter written for a collection called

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8 Anderson (1976), p. 76.
9 Thomas (2009), p. 56.
10 Anderson (1976), p. 44.
“Hegemony: Studies in Coercion and Consensus” (2009), Fontana also recalls the debates in the Third International, but in addition, provides some significant material on the origins of the concept, going back to ancient Greek history writing and philosophy which he takes as a basis for understanding Gramsci’s notion. For Fontana in fact hegemony “derives from the Greek “egemon” (guide, ruler, leader) and “egemonia” (rule, leadership), and generally it means the pre-eminence or supremacy that a state, social group, or even an individual may exercise over others.”12 Importantly he notes that the politico and military alliance of which the hegemon is a leader is based on voluntary and free members, in this case of ancient Greece, city states, which are following the author “structurally independent and distinct from each other”13 The two great historians Herodotus and Thucydides then, Fontana recalls, used the concept “hegemony” to describe the Greek military and political alliance.

According to Fontana, Aristotle and Isocrates use the term “hegemony” when distinguishing between two forms of rule: “despotic or imperial” and “hegemonic rule”14. Here Fontana refers to Aristotle’s’ Politics and Isocrates’ Panegyricus stressing Aristotle’s distinction between “despotic” and “political (or constitutional)” rule, whereby the former is used to account for power exercised by a master over slaves and hence “power exercised over unequals in the self-interest of those who exercise power”; ‘political or constitutional rule’ occurs instead when power is exercised “by and among equals”, for example free and equal citizens, and not just for self-interest but in the interests of all. It is in the discussion of the latter constellation that Aristotle uses the term “hegemony” as opposed to despotism and domination. According to Fontana, Isocrates takes a very similar stance when describing Athens’s “transformation” of the “Delian League” into the “Athenenan Empire”, the first being characterised by hegemonic rule, while the second by despotic rule. Also here in fact the Greek rhetorician underlines that the former “is leadership exercised over consenting and autonomous allies”, while the second “domination coercively exercised over conquered subjects.”15 Moreover Fontana recalls that Thucydides expanded the notion of hegemony showing how Athens became “the cultural, moral, and intellectual leader of Greece”16

Having clarified the distinction between “hegemony” and despotism as presented in ancient Greek philosophy and historiography, Fontana discusses Gramsci’s treatment of Machiavelli in the same way as Arrighi and Cox do, underlying Gramsci’s appreciation of Macchiavelli’s distinction which leads to understand force as opposed consent, authority as opposed to hegemony. Following this reading there is a more or less unchanged millenarian understanding of hegemony starting from the Ancient Greeks and leading to Gramsci via Machiavelli. As Fontana underlines in Gramsci’s formulations when discussing hegemony there is “a striking resemblance to the distinction established by Aristotle and Isocrates.”17 Also for Anderson Gramsci mainly reproduces Machiavelli’s analysis, however noting that while Machiavelli eventually exclusively focused on force, Gramsci focused on the consensual aspect of power and writes “the Prince and The Modern Prince are […] disturbing mirrors of each other”.18

2.2 What is usually forgotten: The Philosophy of Praxis and Croce’s legacy

There is however another aspect that needs to be considered when trying to understand Gramsci’s concept of hegemony usually neglected by scholars in International Relations: Gramsci’s legacy with Benedetto Croce, his reflections on the dialectics and the Philosophy

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13 Fontana (2009), p. 82.
14 Fontana (2009), p. 82.
15 Fontana (2009), p. 82.
16 Fontana (2009), p. 82.
18 Anderson (1976), p. 49.
of Praxis which throw light on the Italian author’s approach when elaborating new concepts. Of particular interest are Notebooks 10 and 11, Gramsci’s ‘philosophical workshop’ or ‘backstage’ where the methodology applied for his ‘sociology’ throughout the later notebooks is clarified. Anderson notes an “inadvertent movement of thought” and “curvatures” in Gramsci’s reading of Croce, a view that is not shared here, stressing Gramsci’s consistent critical engagement with the latter author.

When outlining and reflecting upon the Philosophy of Praxis, Gramsci criticises Aristotelianism and dualism, which according to him are still very much influential. “The whole of humanity” he observes, “is still Aristotelian and common opinion still follows that dualism which is characteristic of Greco-Christian realism. That knowing is a “seeing” instead of “doing”, that truth is outside ourselves, existing as such.” [Q.10, p. 1296].

As opposed to the above Gramsci praises the dialectical method as “doctrine of knowledge and spinal cord [midollare] substance of historiography and of political science” [Q.11 p.1425]. However, when praising the dialectical method, Gramsci, as is well known, has the “new dialectics” [Q.11 p. 1425] in mind, which reformed and developed Hegel’s old dialectics. “In a certain sense” Gramsci writes “the Philosophy of Praxis is a reform and a development of Hegelianism. It is a Philosophy freed from (or which tries to free itself from) every unilateral ideological and fanatical element. It is fully consciousness of contradictions, in which the same philosopher, understood individually or understood as an entire social group, not only comprehends the contradictions but poses itself as an element of the contradiction, elevates this element as principle of knowledge and hence of action” [Q 11, p. 1487]

Gramsci recognises eventually some significant dialectical unities within Marxism in the realm of the economy, philosophy and politics all deriving from the “dialectical development of the contradictions between human beings and the material world”. For the economy the central unity is Value, “hence the relationship between the worker and industrial forces of production”; in philosophy the dialectical unity is Praxis, the relationship between human will (superstructure) and the economic structure; In politics finally the unity is given by the relation between the State and civil society [Q 7 p. 868]. However it would be misleading to understand these unities as separate from each other. As Gramsci underlines in the Philosophy of Praxis “the general concepts of history, politics, economics form [si annoñano] in an organic unity.” [Q. 11, p. 1448]

As we have already noted, a central and influential figure for Gramsci’s intellectual development is Benedetto Croce, a leading intellectual at Gramsci’s time. Gramsci remains a strong critic of Croce, however he nevertheless critically praises many of his achievements – even many of the themes dealt with in the Quaderni are a critical re-elaboration of themes touched previously by Croce. What Gramsci particularly criticises in Croce is the latter’s idealism and speculative philosophy. For Gramsci in fact Croce’s main problem was to sublate the Philosophy of Praxis and in so doing to bring it again on an Idealist path. In Gramsci’s words “as the Philosophy of Praxis has been the translation of Hegelianism in historicist language, so Croce’s Philosophy is in greatest measure a re-translation into speculative language of the realistic historicism of the Philosophy of Praxis” [Q.10, p. 1233]. What Gramsci praises in Croce on the other hand are important useful elements in his “ethico-political history”, which for Gramsci represents the climax of Croce’s body of thought. “Croce’s historiography and conception of history as ethico political history” Gramsci suggests, “should not be judged as futility to be completely dismissed”. Important elements are Croce’s dealing with culture, intellectuals, the relation between civil society and the State as well as, it must be underlined, hegemony. Gramsci thus writes that Croce has “energetically drawn attention on the importance of facts concerning culture and thought in the development of history, on the function of great intellectuals in the organic life of civil society and of the State, on the moment of hegemony and consensus as necessary forms of the
concrete historic bloc” [q.10, p. 1211]. That some of these insights are not futile, Gramsci then observes, is demonstrated by the fact “that the greatest modern theoretician of the Philosophy of Praxis”, alias Lenin, “has revalued the front of cultural struggle and constituted a doctrine of hegemony as a complement of the theory of the State as force.” [Q. 10, p. 1235]. In addition, while recalling Croce’s reproach to the Philosophy of Praxis for not having done for modernity what Machiavelli did for his epoch, i.e. elaborating on the problematic of hegemony and consent, Gramsci replies that this accusation shows the “all the injustice of Croce’s attitude” and that it was Marx himself that developed “in nuce the ethico-political aspect of politics or the theory of hegemony and consent, beyond the aspect of force and of the economy” [Q.10 p. 1315]

However, what is needed in order to make Croce’s concepts and historiography useful is a “re-translation” of Croce according to the doctrines of the Philosophy of Praxis – ethico-political history as the one presented by Croce “is an arbitrary an mechanical hypostasis of the moment of hegemony”. Similarly to Engels’ Anti-Dühring it would be then necessary to complete an Anti-Croce, a task for which, Gramsci writes, “it would be worth that an entire group of men would dedicate ten years of activity” [Q.10 p. 1234] – or, one might say, a single great mind: Gramsci’s.

The centrality of the dialectics in Gramsci and the influence of Benedetto Croce can hence not be dismissed when looking at Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. Enriching the discussion with these elements already points to some tensions with the above strands of interpretation: how can a conception of hegemony as dichotomy be maintained, given Gramsci’s critique of a dualist approach as opposed to the dialectic method which is an essential element of the Philosophy of Praxis?

2.3. From “an sich – Sturm und Drang” Hegemony to the full realisation of Hegemony

Differently from other expositions of the concept of hegemony, the suggestion here is to engage with one central note in the notebooks labelled “Analysis of Situations” to be found in notebook 13. For the ‘Analysis of Situations’ which deals with the analysis of ‘epochal’ and revolutionary transformations offers, as Gramsci himself outlines, “an opportunity for an elementary exposition of the science and art of politics” [Q. 13 p. 1560] and hence brings together many aspects of Gramsci’s theoretical developments and innovations. The note on the “Analysis of Situations” presents in fact Gramsci’s re-elaboration or rather concrete development of the famous themes and tenets present in Marx’s Preface to the Critique of Political Economy which for Gramsci is “the most important authentic source for the reconstruction of the Philosophy of Praxis [Q 11, p. 1441].

Gramsci’s note then starts from two essential principles taken from Marx’s text. Firstly, Gramsci paraphrasing Marx writes that “no society poses itself tasks for whose accomplishment the necessary and sufficient conditions do not either already exist or are not at least beginning to emerge and develop”. Secondly, that “no society breaks down and can be replaced if before it has not developed all the form of life that are implicit in its internal relations” [q 13,p.1579] In addition Gramsci repeatedly underlines the deep importance of Marx’s statement that “human beings take consciousness of the conflicts in the structure on the terrain of ideologies” [Q. 13 p. 1592]. One could argue that the latter assertion is a key in Gramsci’s body of thought that opens up a giant field of research, whereby it enables to draw on Croce, whose “re-translation” permits to put attention on the particular status of human beings understood as ‘philosophers’, exploring the notion common sense, language, culture, the role of intellectuals and so on.

What is important to stress here is that Gramsci seems to follow ad litteram and very seriously Marx’s ‘advice’ on the necessity to study both the structural transformations and the ideological forms: “In studying such transformations” as Marx stated, “it is always necessary
to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out”. It is then fundamental Gramsci writes to analyse “how the historical movement is born out of the structure”, to see how “the formation of active political groups” takes place [Q.11 p. 1422] and how such a group going through the revolutionary process can bring about societal change and become hegemonic. The conflict in the structure will mediately impact on the superstructures given human being’s political action since changes in the structure by themselves will have no direct impact on the superstructures as will be also shown when dealing with organic crises (section 2.6).

Gramsci’s analysis of situations seeks to elaborate on the above process more in depth and puts forward that societal change is going to take place depending on the relation of forces. The latter can be distinguished in three levels or moments. Firstly Gramsci individuates the objective relation of social forces which are strongly related to the structure. This relation is “objective”, “independent from the will of human beings” for it is based on the given positions in production different social groups have. The second and successive moment is the relation of political forces. Here Gramsci seeks to consider the grade of homogeneity, self consciousness and organisation the various social groups were able to achieve. The third moment is constituted by the relation of military forces. This moment is “immediately decisive”, whereby historical development “oscillates between the first moment and the third with the mediation of the second”.

Of particular importance is then the second, mediating, moment, i.e. the relation of political forces, as this moment explores whether, given the structural preconditions as depicted in Marx’s preface, human beings indeed achieved political consciousness. Following Gramsci it can be divided into three levels which “correspond to the different moments of the collective political consciousness, as they have manifested themselves so far in history” [q 13, p. 1583].

The first level, Gramsci argues, is the most elementary, and called “economic-corporate”. The example Gramsci makes is about a ‘shopkeeper’ that feels that he should be [dover essere, ‘an sich’] in solidarity with a ‘manufacturer’ without being it yet in real terms. The second phase is when all the members of the social group develop the consciousness of solidarity, however, Gramsci underlines, “only in the economic field” [Q 13 p.1584]. At this stage the “question of the state”, i.e. whether the social group should try to seek political power, is already posed. However, while the “question of the state” is posed, it is only so in a partial way, as far as the social group only calls for “politico-juridical equality” [Q 13, p. 1584] in order to influence legislation, rather than ‘fully’ taking over, or rather, forming a new State. Intellectuals play already an important role having the function to organise the group in question: “Every social group, which is born on the original basis of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates at the same time, organically, a class [ceto] or more classes of intellectuals. The latter give to the group homogeneity and awareness of its own function in the economic field”19 [Q.4 , p. 478-84]

In the third phase the social group develops the consciousness that the corporate interests “in their actual and future development” go beyond its corporate milieu and as such can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups. This third grade is for Gramsci the most political and represents the clear or complete [netto] passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures. It is at this that the different ideologies elaborated by the different social groups become “party” and a fight begins between them until only one or a combination of them prevails, and imposes itself and spreads in the whole social sphere.

19 See also Cospito in Frosini (2004), p.78.
The social group that will win the fight, will be able to put all the questions around which conflict rages on a universal plane, creating in this way the hegemony of a fundamental group over a series of subordinate groups. It is at this stage that Gramsci proposes the definition of the state Arrighi has chosen for presenting Gramsci’s conception of hegemony. Here Gramsci argues then that the state “is conceptualised as the organism of a group destined to create favourable conditions for the maximal expansion of the same group”, but he underlines that “this development and this expansion are conceptualised and presented as motor force of an universal expansion, of the development of all national energies” Concretely this leads to compromises whereby fundamental group’s interests will prevail, however, up to a point, not in fact up to the “narrow minded corporate interest” [Q. 13 p. 1584]. The role of intellectuals becomes even more important since they will become the “deputies” of the dominant class organising ‘spontaneous consensus’ and having also the function to organise the apparatus of coercion. [Q. 12 p. 1519]

It is important to note though that the latter outcome is not the only possible one and that the analysis of situations should not be read as a strict set of rules. According to Gramsci, the following outcomes are possible: 1) systemic change as seen before; 2) “the old society resists and secures itself a breathing period, exterminating physically the elite of the enemies and terrorising reserve masses”; 3) “the reciprocal destruction of the conflicting forces” [Q.13 p. 1589].

We have noticed that in the case in which the fundamental social group succeeds in bringing about societal change it is able to become hegemonic, whereby “the unity between political and economic ends” as well as “the intellectual and moral unity” [Q.13, p.1584] will be achieved. Gramsci calls this process “catarsi” he discusses when analysing the relation between structure and superstructures. In case of a successful revolutionary process, the structure, Gramsci writes, stops being an “external force” (or Marx’ “fetters”) that puts pressure on human beings, and will “assimilate” them to her and “becomes an instrument for creating a new ethico-political form” [Q10 p. 1244]. For Gramsci this is a central moment because “it coincides with a chain of syntheses which are the result of the dialectical process” [Q.10, p.1244] . The “chain of syntheses”, could be the following: the creation of a new State, the full realisation of hegemony and the establishment of a new “historic bloc”, where “the social economic content and ethico-political form” can again “concretely identify themselves” [Q. 10, p. 1237].

Following Gramsci in order to achieve again a unity between civil society and the economic structure, the former needs to be “radically transformed” [Q. 10, p. 1253] and he underlines that the State will be used to achieve this aim by the new ruling group: “The State is the instrument to adequate civil society to the economic structure, but it is necessary that the State ‘wants’ to do this, that hence it will be the representatives of the changes that occurred in the economic structure that will lead it” [Q.10, p. 1255].

For Burgio, it is possible to argue that the different ‘phases’ or ‘levels’ in the relation of political forces correspond to the development of different forms of hegemonic relations. “It is realistic to assume” he writes, “that in a society still characterised by primordial forms of consciousness”, hegemonic relations will have prevalently “economic content.”

On the other hand, while the second moment is characterised by hybrid hegemonic relations, the third moment of “ethico political maturity”, as seen, corresponds to the hegemony of a fundamental social group over other subaltern groups.

Burgio’s assertion seems to be mostly correct. It is, however, probably the hegemony of a social group that evolves with the latter and not society as a whole that goes through different phases of consciousness and hegemony. “Hegemony” of a social group then, evolves pari

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20 Burgio (2007), p. 132
passu with the passage of the group through the different ‘levels’ envisaged by Gramsci. Yet, it seems that hegemony is only effectively realised, i.e. a group achieves the “real exercise of hegemony” [Q 16 p. 1861], as it becomes dominant, hence after taking political power. Hegemony “at this side from possession of the State” [Q 16 p. 1861], i.e. before taking political power during the ‘Sturm und Drang’ or ‘Romantic’ phase of political struggle as Gramsci calls it [Q.11 p. 1508], can “only” be ‘political hegemony’.

But to understand this as a possible option for achieving stable class rule would be misleading. In fact eventually Gramsci develops the following argument which, he claims must be seen as “foundation” for the analysis: “A social group can or rather must be leading even before conquering governmental power (this is one of the principal conditions for the same conquest of power)” [q19 p. 2010-2011]. Hegemony becomes “ethico-political”, whereby the fundamental social group is able to perform the “real exercise of hegemony over society as a whole” [Q 16 p. 1861] after taking political power winning the fight in the struggle for Hegemony as it becomes hence dominant and hegemonic.

2.4. Defining Hegemony eventually as the dialectical unity of leadership and domination, consent and coercion

The latter reading leads to re-address the question on how hegemony, usually associated with consent, and domination, usually associated with coercion, relate to each other. We have seen how Cox conceptualises the relation as dichotomy: hegemony occurs when the consensual aspect of power prevails, while in the case of domination force prevails. Arrighi keeps the distinction between domination and hegemony as being related to force and consensus respectively, arguing though that hegemony must be understood as “additional power” that accrues to a dominant group, envisaging hence the possibility to pass from domination tout court (or domination without hegemony) to ‘domination and hegemony’, ‘force and consensus’ in the exercise of power.

The full passage encountered above in which Gramsci exposes the idea that a social group should be leading before and in order to take political power reads as follows and can help to throw light also on the other issue we seek to explore here, i.e. the relation between domination and hegemony. For the sake of clarity I present both versions, the one from notebook 1 (1929-30) and its re-elaboration five years later in notebook 19 (1934-35).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1 p. 41 (1929-30)</th>
<th>Q19, p. 2010-11 (1934-35)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The historical political criteria upon which one needs to found the research is the following:</td>
<td>The methodological criteria on which one needs to found the examination is the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a class is dominant in two ways, that is, it is ‘leading’ and ‘dominant’.</td>
<td>that the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and as ‘moral and intellectual leadership’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It leads the allied classes, and dominates over the adversarial classes.</td>
<td>A social group is dominant over adversaries it tends to “liquidate” or to submit also with armed force and is leading over allied and like-minded groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21 Gramsci uses inverted commas when speaking about “political hegemony” before taking power as opposed to political hegemony, without inverted commas after taking power in Q1 p41. See section 2.4 for a further discussion. For an analysis on Gramsci’s statement that groups must be leading also before taking political power see P. Voza in Frosini (2004), “Le parole di Gramsci”, p. 189-191.
Therefore, even before attaining power a class can (and must) lead; when it is in power it becomes dominant, but continues to lead as well

... there can and must be a ‘political hegemony’ even before going to government, and one should not count solely on the power and material force which such a position gives in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony

A social group can or rather must be leading even before conquering governmental power (this is one of the principal conditions for the same conquest of power); later, when it exercises power and even if maintains it strongly in its hands, it becomes dominant but it needs to continue to be ‘leading’ ...

... there must be hegemonic activity even before going to power and that one should not count only on material force which power gives in order to exercise an efficient leadership

While Arrighi recognises ‘domination’ as being a precondition for hegemony, the argument made here following the clarity of the above passages is that generally the contrary seems to be the case: as stated, a certain level of hegemony (‘political hegemony’ in inverted commas [q1]; ‘leadership’ or ‘hegemonic activity’ [q19]) is a precondition for taking political power and hence for domination. In addition both notes suggest that once political power has been grasped and hence domination attained, the exercise of leadership continues to be a condition for its maintenance.

We eventually see that domination and hegemony are interrelated: the attainment of domination requires a certain form of hegemony and the realisation of hegemony requires political power and domination. The two concepts hence also form an organic unity and need to be understood dialectically. Thomas speaks of “the dialectical integration of hegemony with domination”22 and Burgio, eventually, reaches the same conclusion arguing that distinction Gramsci makes between the two terms is of conceptual and not real nature: “the distinction has to be count among the distinctions which are conceptual (Gramsci would say “methodical”) and not among real distinctions (“organic”).”23

And yet, how are we to call the organic unity or synthesis between hegemony and domination? Following Luciano Gruppi, we call it hegemony, which would lead us to affirm that hegemony is the dialectical unity between ‘domination’ and ‘hegemony’.24 Apparently confusing, this formulation is also present in Gramsci where in some instances he refers to “hegemonic” as a mixture of “direct domination and hegemony” [Q.19, p. 1962]. A matter of concern is thus that Gramsci uses the term hegemony both to characterise the unity of the two moments, and to label one of the two moments. But in the latter usage it is possible to argue that hegemony signifies ‘hegemony before its full realisation’ such as ‘political hegemony’ or ‘hegemonic activity’, or as a synonym for ‘leadership’ and later for ‘intellectual and moral leadership’. The above passages show for example that ‘political hegemony’ in inverted commas in Q1 is rewritten as ‘leadership’ in Q19. Therefore it is possible to put it as follows: hegemony as the synthesis of domination and leadership. In fact this is the definition that Gruppi adopts. A similar definition is also given by Callinicos, where hegemony is understood as “the synthesis of political domination and ideological leadership”25. Worth to note is that Gramsci himself has put attention on the problematic of

translating scientific and philosophical notions arguing how new concepts are sometimes still expressed in an old terminology: “one needs to take account that no new historical situation, even if she is due to the most radical transformation, transforms completely language, at least in its external, formal aspect” [Q.11, p. 1407]. The formulation adopted here seems therefore the most plausible and able to reflect Gramsci’s development of a new concept, using an ‘old’ terminology: Hegemony then will include the moment of “intellectual and moral leadership” as well as the moment of “domination”.

We can thus argue that hegemony as synthesis of “moral and intellectual leadership” and “domination” is realised given that political power is grasped and that the fundamental social group was and continues to be “leading”. What about coercion and consent? Following the argument made so far, and as Thomas observes, the relationship between consensus and coercion “can only be rationally comprehended as a dialectical one.” The combination of consent and coercion in the “exercise of hegemony” is well exposed in the following note: “the ‘normal’ exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary régime is characterised by a combination of force and consent, which counterbalance each other [si equilibrano], without force predominating excessively over consent [Q 1, §48; quoted in Thomas, p. 151]. Thus Gramsci’s centaur should not be conceptualised as “half man, half beast” but as dialectical synthesis between the two.

Cox’ and Arrighi’s claims must hence be dismissed following this reading of Gramsci. Hegemony recognized as dialectical unity between leadership and domination cannot be understood as a opposite to domination, nor can hegemony be understood as possible ‘addition’ to domination. And yet there are situations in which Gramsci envisages the possibility of “domination without hegemony” we will now explore.

“Domination without hegemony” as an exception in passive revolution?

The process of societal change as depicted in the ‘Analysis of Situations’ can occur in different forms. Referring to the French Revolution for example Gramsci speaks of revolutionary rupture which bring about societal change. In other instances, as seen when presenting Cox’s reading, Gramsci refers to “passive revolution”, whereby Gramsci borrows this concept from Vincenzo Cuoco, noting though that “it is evident that the expression of Cuoco regarding the Neapolitan Revolution of 1799 is nothing but a starting point as the concept is completely changed and enriched” [Q15 p. 1775] . The difference between passive revolution as opposed to, one might say, ‘active revolution’ is well explained by Callinicos: “Gramsci uses the expression ‘passive revolution’ initially as a means of interpreting the Risorgimento as a process through which bourgeois domination is established, gradually and by means of compromise among the exploiting classes, in contrast to the radical and punctual destruction of the ancient régime instituted in France from below by the popular masses in 1789-94 under leadership of the Jacobins”.

Differently from Cox one might argue that passive revolution does not need to describe a situation in which “hegemony in Gramsci’s sense of the term is not established” but rather that on the one hand hegemony can be established by other means and on the other hand that the concept is broader than Cox assumes. Even so, the concept of passive revolution remains intriguing as Gramsci applies it to different situations. On the one hand and initially, it refers indeed to processes that entail changes of the social structure as a whole, but on the other hand as the concept is extended in the Quaderni it also describes changes within the same social structure as Callinicos and others as Voza and Burgio have shown.

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26 Thomas (2009), p.150.
28 Cox, op cit.
But differently from the situation above where the social group is leading and exercises “political hegemony” also before taking State power, in the case of passive revolution “Piedmont-type” situations can occur. Such situations are characterised by the fact that the social group that seeks change does not exercise political hegemony. “It is one of the cases” Gramsci therefore continues “in which these groups have the function of ‘domination’ without ‘leadership’: dictatorship without hegemony” [Q 15 p. 1822] In fact the role of leadership is taken over by an “external force” [1822] and in this particular case, “this force was Piedmont” [1822]. For this reason Gramsci argues “Piedmont had a function that to some extent can be compared to that of a party” [1822.]. Following Gramsci’s argument here, Callinicos seems to suggest that in the process of passive revolution that led to the Italian state formation is characterised by the “absence of hegemony”\textsuperscript{30}. Gramsci’s “foundation” for the analysis seen before, according to which a class needs to be leading also before taking political power, is paradoxically developed in the note in which Gramsci analyses the Italian state formation. There Gramsci stresses how the Partito Moderato of Cavour was ‘politically hegemonic’ or leading in particular over the ‘Partito d’Azione.’ [Q1 p. 41] adding, when revisiting the text, that this “truth” enables to understand the revolution without revolution or “passive revolution according to the expression of Cuoco” [Q1 p. 41], whereby this argument is unchanged in Q. 19, [Q.19 p. 2010-2011]. Hence while it seems true that the corporative and retrograde Italian bourgeoisie spread throughout the peninsula was not exercising leadership or a certain degree of hegemony, leaving this task to the external force ‘Piedmont’, it is difficult to argue that the process of passive revolution can involves the absence of hegemony tout court. However we again notice that the process that lead to the establishment of hegemony as depicted in the ‘Analysis of Situations’ is but a historically derived model that nevertheless enables different outcomes. In fact as this ‘exception’ shows, other combinations are possible which can result in different levels of hegemony and stability in class rule.

Having clarified this point it is important to dwell on where hegemony is ‘located’ and to focus on how hegemony is exercised, which will be analysed in the next two paragraphs.

2.4 Understanding the Integral State and locating Hegemony

When discussing Croce, Gramsci observes how the latter affirms that the “real State” has sometimes not to be found where one would believe it to be, i.e. in the juridical apparatus, “but in ‘private’ forces” [Q.8 p. 1087]. In earlier note, where Gramsci criticises the “gross error” in the conception of the State as presented by a French author for not having understood that for State one needs to intend “the ‘private’ apparatus of hegemony or civil society” as well as “the governmental apparatus” [Q. 6 p. 80]

The relation between “civil society” and the “State” in Gramsci has been a widely discussed issue. Importantly, Perry Anderson argues that Gramsci proposed three distinct ‘models’ of the State. In the first model civil society is preponderant over the State. In the second model Anderson recognises “civil society is presented as in balance or equilibrium with the State”. The third and final ‘model’ sees the State as including ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’ alike.

The distinction Perry Anderson proposes is very problematic. As has been outlined when discussing Gramsci’s methodology underlying his dialectical approach, the relation between civil society and the State has to be understood as a dialectical unity. This argument comes even more tellingly to the forefront in Gramsci’s notes on “economism”, where the Italian author also criticises the liberal doctrines on the state. There he underlines how the distinction between civil society and the State is a “theoretical error” made by liberalism, whereby a

\textsuperscript{30} Callinicos (2009), p. 4.
methodological distinction is made and presented as organic distinction”, whereas in “effectual reality”, “civil society and the State identify themselves” [Q. 13, p. 1590]. Morton also understands Gramsci’s State theory as being a theory of the ‘integral state’ which combines civil society and the State. Following Morton then for Gramsci “the state is but a form of social relations within which methodological distinctions can be made between the ensemble of ‘private’ organisms in civil society and that of the state or ‘political’ society.” But probably the most elaborate and articulate critique to Anderson has been put forward by Peter Thomas in “The Gramscian Moment” where he shows how Gramsci theorises the state as class state following the footsteps of Marx, however complicating the picture.

Having recognised the integral State as incorporating what is usually called State and civil society, an important step is to see now where hegemony is ‘located’. The central point of reference is a passage in notebook 12, which dedicated to the intellectuals in which Gramsci (again methodologically and not organically distinguishing) writes that “It is possible, for now, to fix two big superstructural “levels”, the one that can be called of “civil society”, hence the ensemble of organisms vulgarly called “private” and the one of “political society or State” which correspond to the function of “hegemony” that the dominant group exercises over the whole of society and the one of “direct domination” that expresses itself in the State and “juridical” government” [Q.12, p 1518]

While Morton, having just appreciated the organic unity between civil society and the State, makes a step backwards in his argument, and hence maintains, following notebook 12 above, that civil society and the State “respectively correspond to the function of ‘hegemony’ and ‘direct domination’.” He thus argues that hegemony concerns exclusively civil society. Burgio, following Gramsci’s elaborations in these opening notes on the intellectuals, reaches eventually the conclusion that hegemony not only concerns civil society, but also the “other superstructural level”, i.e. political society or the state in a stricter sense understood as political and institutional sphere. The correspondence of civil society with hegemony and the State with direct domination falls, in the moment in which the State is correctly understood dialectically as “integral State”. Equipped with his analysis on the integral state and Gramsci’s conception of the relation between civil society and the State based on Hegel and Marx, Thomas probably correctly also locates hegemony in both “civil society” and “political society”: hegemony, according to Thomas’ interpretation, is a “practice ‘traversing’ the boundaries between them.” “It must necessarily” he adds “because political society itself and the power concentrated in it are integrally related to civil society and its social forces, as their mediated, higher forms.”

The interpretation offered by Burgio and Thomas seems to be more consistent with Gramsci’s dialectical conception of the integral State offering a more cogent and developed analysis than Cox, who nevertheless noticed the importance of the ‘integral state’. Morton, who shares the idea on the integral State fails to appreciate the theoretical consequences this has on the ‘location’ of hegemony.

But so far hegemony has been associated only with ‘superstructural levels’. Differently from this, a reading of Gramsci can suggest that while hegemony is associated with the two superstructural levels, it has its foundations in the structure: As Gramsci writes, “if hegemony is ehtico-political, it cannot but be also economic, it cannot but have its foundations in the decisive function that the ruling group exercises in the decisive nucleus of economic activity” [Q 13, p. 1591]. Hence hegemony even “must” have its foundations in the structure reflecting Gramsci’s overall analysis on the relation between structure and superstructures.

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33 Thomas (2009), p. 177.
34 Thomas (2009), p. 177.
Hegemony originating in the structure will be mediated through the superstructures, however the degree of mediation may differ. This is at least what Burgio seems to suggest. Immediately, capitalist relations of production themselves may be seen as source of “hegemonic energy”, as Burgio likes to call it, giving rise, among others, to commodity fetishism. On the other hand, for example in the case of Fordism a minimal mediation is required, where as Burgio remind us, Gramsci thinks that “hegemony is born in the factory and necessitates only a minimal quantity of professional political and ideological intermediaries.” [Q. 22, p. 2146] Burgio’s assertion that hegemony is ‘released’ and immediately has an impact on the superstructures is however not convincing, because in fact it actually strongly contradicts Gramsci’s overall analysis on the relation between structure and superstructures. As Gramsci points clearly out in notebook 7 “The pretence (presented as essential postulate of historical materialism) to present and outline any fluctuation in politics and in ideology as an immediate expression of the structure needs to be theoretically combated as a primitive infantilism” [Q.7 p. 871]. How the structure itself is influenced by the superstructures is clearly shown where Gramsci considers the “determinate market”: “ ‘determinate market’ means hence to say ‘determinate relations of social forces in a determinate structure of the apparatus of production’, a relation which is guaranteed (and hence maintained permanent) by a determinate political, moral and juridical superstructure” [Q.11 p. 1477]. Thus the structural origin of hegemony is itself influenced by superstructural levels and cannot be considered as immediate.

2.5 The Exercise of Hegemony: Imposing consensus

Starting from the “analysis of situations” we have seen how a particular social group, given the structural preconditions as explained in Marx’s Preface to the Critique of Political economy, can become “really hegemonic”. Hegemony then has been understood as a process going through different ‘levels’ corresponding to the evolution the social group itself goes through and as a being eventually realised as the dialectical unity between leadership and domination. Proposing a reading of Gramsci that appreciates its notion of the integral state, hegemony has been ‘located’ in both ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’. Apart from being therefore civic and political it has been argued that hegemony is also economic having its “foundations in the structure.”

Following the argument made so far, we can thus appreciate following definition of the State: “The State is the whole complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class justifies and not only maintains its domination but is also able to obtain the active consensus of the governed” [Q. 15, p. 1765], whereby ”the bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, able to absorb the whole of society, assimilating it to its cultural and economic level: the whole function of the state is transformed: the State becomes ‘educator’ etc. [Q. 8, p. 937]

In Notebook 13 Gramsci expands on the State as educator and on the way in which civil society is adjusted to the structure and to the interests of the dominant class, arguing that it has the task of “creating new and higher types of civilisation”, “to adequate ‘civilisation’ and morality of vast masses to the necessities of the continuous development of the economic apparatus of production” [Q13 p. 1566]. He then asks how this is achieved and in particular the way in which necessity and coercion can become “freedom” [Q13 p. 1566]. Answering this question Gramsci maintains that an “extended” concept of right must be developed, whereby the latter must also include “the domination of civil society that operates without ‘sanctions’ and without compulsory ‘obligations’, nevertheless exercising a collective pressure and obtains objective results in the elaboration of customs, in the ways of thinking and operating, in morality etc.” [Q13 p. 1566]. On the other hand he underlines the role of coercion in the process whereby the apparatus of coercion ensures ‘legally’ the discipline “of those groups which do not ‘consent’ neither actively nor passively”. The apparatus of coercion will be however also deployed for society as a whole, and not just for those who do
not consent, especially in moments in which “spontaneous consensus fades away” [Q. 12 1519].

It is on this background that the Gramscian conception of “hegemonic apparatus” can be understood stressing the praxis of hegemony, or as Thomas puts, looking at “the concrete form in which hegemony is exercised”35. Following Glucksman he argues that hegemonic apparatuses include both private and public institutions as well as agents, especially intellectuals36 Morton does not mention hegemonic apparatuses, but speaks of “material structures of ideology” and “social infusoria” he identifies as being publishing houses, newspapers, journals, literature, museums, art galleries etc. which help to impose consensus. Therefore Morton observes that “Gramsci can thus be described as a paramount theorist of capillary power”37, an idea that also Burgio shares.

For Thomas eventually the pedagogic aspect hegemony and the state can be compared to ‘biopolitics’ underlying though that the latter is based on class power: “Gramsci’s concept of a hegemonic apparatus” he thus writes, “can be comprehended as a realistic translation of the themes that have more recently been proposed under the thesis of biopower and biopolitics, a thesis that remains however, despite its proponents’ claims, functional to a modern conception of sovereignty that obscures the specific nature of class power”38. Similarly Burgio speaks of an ‘anthropologic factory’

And yet, stable a constituted hegemonic order may appear, it can be shaken by crises, something that will be addressed in the next section.

2.6. The Structural Roots of Organic Crises and their Realisation as Crises of Hegemony

Another important Gramscian theme related to the question of hegemony which is unfortunately not analysed by Arrighi and Cox is the one of crises of hegemony. Importantly Gramsci distinguishes between organic and conjunctural movements within the structure and consequently between organic and conjunctural crises. By organic movements Gramsci means “relatively permanent movements” [Q. 13 p.1579], while conjunctural movements “present themselves as occasional, immediate, nearly accidental” [Q 13 p. 1579]. However, Gramsci underlines that conjunctural movements are themselves dependent upon organic movements and that it is necessary to be able to find the “right relationship between what is organic and what is occasional” [Q 13, p. 1580]. By saying so he draws attention to the fact that it is a common error not being able to distinguish between organic and conjunctural movements and hence for example “to expose as immediate causes those which however operate mediately” [Q 13, p. 1580]. Differently from occasional or conjunctural movements, organic ones have a “meaning of vast historical reach” [Q 13, p. 1580]. Organic crises are then associated with a situation in which “insuperable contradictions show up (come to maturity) in the structure” [Q.13 1582] and can “sometimes protract themselves for tens of years” [Q.13 p. 1579].

The Quaderni eventually consider two organic crises: the crisis of feudalism accompanied by the rise of ‘modernity’ or capitalism, and the organic crisis of capitalism itself which this section will refer to. Among the authors taken into account the only one who seriously deals with the question of crises in Gramsci is Burgio, especially in his earlier book “Gramsci storico” (2003). For him crises are the central theme in the Quaderni which in the final analysis deal especially with the crisis of “modernity”. Following Burgio’s reading, Gramsci divides “modernity”, i.e. the bourgeois epoch into two periods. Looking at Gramsci’s “Notes

38 Thomas (2009), p. 203.
on National Life in France” we notice the contours of a long boom or an expansion characterising the first period: “The economic base, due to industrial development is continually expanded and deepened, the most rich in entrepreneurial spirit and energy from lower classes arise up to the ruling classes. The entire society is in a continuous process of formation and dissolution, followed by formations which are more complex and richer in possibilities” [Q. 13 p. 1637]. But all this generally lasts, Gramsci recalls, “up to the epoch of Imperialism and culminates in the world war” [Q.13, p. 1637], whereby in paragraph seven of the same Quaderno, Gramsci is more precise about the turningpoint: “1870, with European colonial expansion” [Q. 13, p. 1566]. The second period then, from the 1870s onwards, is characterised by a process that stands in opposition to the first outlined above, whereby here “the bourgeois class is ‘saturated’: not only she does not assimilate new elements, but rejects one part of itself” [Q. 8, p.937]. As Burgio puts it “Following Gramsci’s judgement the epoch of progress comes into a irreversible crisis from 1870-71 onwards and sees its down for ever with the world conflict”39.

Consistently with Gramsci’s overall analysis, Burgio reiterates the organic crisis’ structural roots, without however identifying any particular ‘insuperable contradiction’ in the economy40. Another reading though can suggest that the structural, economic roots of the organic crisis of capitalism Gramsci looks at, are based in production and manifest themselves also in tendency of the rate of profits to fall. When discussing the latter Gramsci criticises Croce’s view for just considering Marx’s intuition as outlined in Volume three of Capital. Contrary to this reading, Gramsci claims, similarly to David Harvey’s analysis in “Limits to Capital”, that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall must be understood as “dialectical term of a vast organic process” [Q10 p. 1283] relating Volume I and Volume III of Capital. The problem of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, Gramsci writes, “is already laid down in the first Volume of the Critique of Political Economy, where relative surplus value and technical progress, precisely as a cause of relative surplus value, are treated; at the same time it is observed how in this process a contradiction arises, hence while on the one hand technical process permits a dilatation of surplus value, on the other hand it determines, for the changes that it introduces in the composition of capital, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and this is demonstrated in Volume three of the Critique of Political Economy” [Q. 10, p. 1278]. Gramsci underlines at the same time that “the tendency of the rate of profit to fall has neither something automatic nor something which is imminent to it” [Q.10 p. 1283]. Hence, Gramsci recognises the deep importance of counteracting tendencies underlying that “the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is presented as the contradictory aspect of another law, the one on production of relative surplus value, in which one tends to eliminate the other with the forecast that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall will be the prevalent [Q10 1279]. At the same time he notes that the counteracting tendencies have limits. These are reached, as Gramsci points, out when “the ‘mobile frontier’ of the capitalist economic world will have found its columns of Hercules” [Q.10, p. 1279]. Aside from this metaphorical analogy Gramsci observes that “the counteracting tendencies which can be summarised as the production of an always greater amount of relative surplus value, have limits, which are given, for example, technically from the extension of the material’s elastic resistance and socially from the degree of bearable unemployment in a determinate society” [Q. 10, 1279]41. Gramsci’s treatment of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall then depicts indeed a “relatively permanent movement” [Q. 13 p.1579] in the structure where, as his

39 Burgio 2003, p. 133.
40 Burgio 2003, p. 161-162.
41 He puts it even more clearly in notebook ten where he lists three limits: “1) the limit of the maximal resistance of material; […] 2) the limit to the introduction of new machines, that is the relation human beings – machines; 3) the limit given by the saturation of world industrialisation, taking account of the rate of population growth and of production to reproduce the means for private consumption and means of production [Q 10, p. 1313]
definition of organic crises suggests, “insuperable contradictions show up (come to maturity)” [Q.13 p. 1582].

However, as Burgio notes, and consistently with what has been said so far, Gramsci’s identification of the “organic crisis” since the 1870s onwards does not depict a fast general societal collapse due to it. While reflecting on the falling rate of profit and underlying its centrality, Gramsci writes that “The economic contradiction becomes political contradiction and is resolved politically through an overthrow of praxis” [Q. 10, p.1279] Following the discussion on the “analysis of situations” outlined above (section 2.3) which depict the complex interaction between structure and superstructures and processes articulated in different grades, it is then possible to analyse how structural economic contradictions can indeed become political and hence reach the level of the superstructures and induce a societal crisis or ‘realise’ the crisis. It is in fact only when the latter level is reached that it is possible to speak of an organic crisis of the “State as a whole” which for Gramsci is a “crisis of hegemony”. As he puts it in Notebook 13: “One speaks of ‘crisis of authority’ an this is exactly the crisis of hegemony, or crisis of the State as a whole” [Q. 13 p.1603].

Such crises are characterised by the fact, Gramsci argues, that social groups detach themselves from traditional parties, whereby the latter and the leaders of these parties “stop being recognised as an expression of their class or fraction of a class” [Q. 13, p. 1602]. More generally this takes the form of a detachment of civil society from political society. As the Italian Marxist puts it “Detachment of civil society from political society; there is a new problem of hegemony, that is the historical base of the State has moved” [Q. 7, p.876]. Burgio eventually summarises crises of hegemony as follows dwelling on the problems arising from the breakaway of civil society and political society: “There is a ‘crisis of hegemony’ when ‘civil society’ stops providing the function of hegemonic apparatus of the dominants […] removing the normal support of direction, of the organisation of consensus […] from the ‘Government – State’.”42 As Gramsci puts it in notebook seven “the old intellectual and moral leaders of society feel that the ground under their feet is fading away, they discover that their ‘sermons’ have become exactly ‘sermons’” [Q7, p. 863]

Gramsci gives two specific reasons for why “hegemonic crises” and hence “crises of the State as whole” occur. Either, he argues, because the ruling class has failed in a “big political enterprise” or because “big masses […] have suddenly passed from political passivity to a certain activity and propose demands which in their disorganic complex constitute a revolution” [Q 13 p. 1603].

The above significant ‘level’ of crisis is however reached only around the first world war. Contrary to what might be expected in fact, but consistent with Gramsci’s dialectics and anti-determinism, the post 1870s period is, initially, characterised by a consolidation of the system. As Burgio puts it “while one would expect a homogenous situation of critical and dissolutive processes, what one finds is a contrasted picture, characterised by a prevalent consolidation of the social and political system”43. This paradox is also evident in an another of Gramsci’s notes on “speculative philosophy”: here he shows that while hegemony is disintegrating at the level of the base, the ruling class, which is here fully in power, elaborates a dogmatic and highly speculative system of thought to counteract the problems arising at the base. Gramsci explains this as follows: “One can hence say that every culture has its own speculative and religious moment, which coincides with the period of complete hegemony of the social group that expresses and probably coincides with the moment in which the real hegemony is desegregating at the base; molecularly. But the system of thought, exactly because of this (to react to the desegregation) perfects itself dogmatically, it becomes transcendental “faith”: this is why it is possible to observe that every so-called decadent epoch (in which a desegregation of the old world takes place) is characterised by subtle thought and is highly “speculative”. [Q.11, p. 1481-1482]

43 Burgio, 2003, p. 141.
‘The economic contradictions’ which reflect themselves also in the tendency of the rate of profits to fall “becomes political” producing a crisis of hegemony then with and after the first world war as indeed “1) big masses, which were so far passive, start to get in movement […]” 2) because middle classes which in the war had function of command, are deprived of it in peace time, becoming unemployed [Q7 p. 912]. This following Gramsci is a crisis that touches the capitalist world as a whole: “In every country the process is different, even if the content is the same. And the content is the crisis of hegemony of the ruling class” [Q. 13, p. 1603] In general, the old structure, in which the contradictions came to maturity, is unable to satisfy the aspirations of the subalterns, whereby Gramsci strongly underlines the problematic of unemployed, which as seen before, can represent one of the limits when trying to counteract the tendency of the rate of profit to fall: “The old structure”, Gramsci writes, “is unable to maintain and to provide satisfaction for new exigencies” putting segments of the population in “permanent or semi-permanent unemployment” [Q. 1, p. 116]. Burgio understands this process as a process of social exclusion, whereby the “continuous expansion of moral and material needs of the masses” stimulated by the previous growth phase cannot be met anymore.44 However, again, not relating this assertions with Gramsci’s economic analysis, he forgets to mention why the structure is unable to provide satisfaction for these needs. And yet in the pages dedicated to Fascism, Burgio himself mentions the importance of economic elements for explaining the ‘irruption’ of the masses: “The masses of the agricultural and industrial proletariat” he writes, “were bound by conditions of life and of work made unbearable by the crisis; hence their respective movements, different and not coordinated between them, but sufficiently strong to represent a menace for the survival of the bourgeois order.”45

There are two ways in which the different bourgeoisies eventually react to the economic contradictions which in the long run realise themselves as crises of hegemony, trying to find remedies to the latter: one is fascism and the other is fordism. Both are complex themes in Gramsci’s Quaderni and to analyse them in depth at this stage lies beyond the scope of this section. Worth nothing is that both reactions to the organic crisis, despite their differences, show some similarities. As Burgio, analysing Gramsci’s observations on Fordism and Fascism clearly states, “beyond appearances the[ir] programmes coincide”46. Both reactions are characterised by a mutation of hegemony – and not its disappearance - in which the coercive moment is more accentuated, albeit in different forms. Both Fordism and Fascism redesign the economy trying to overcome the structural problems, whereby Fordism is much more successful. Regarding Fordism Gramsci clearly identifies its ‘mission’ to counteract the tendency of the rate of profit to fall: “the tendency of the rate of profit to fall would be hence at the basis of Americanism, that is it is the cause of the accelerated rhythm in the progress of production and labour methods and the modification of the traditional worker” [Q.10 1313]. Fascism also, as Burgio outlines in “Per Gramsci” (2007) proposes structural changes which include elements of a planned economy, as for example a public credit system which plans long term investments, in order to react to economic stagnation with the purpose to revitalise the economy.47 According to Gramsci though, both responses to the organic crisis are about to fail. While Fascism suffers from a regression to economic–corporate interests which blocks economic revival, the progressive innovations which characterise Fordism cannot be fully developed under capitalist relations of production48.

45 Burgio 2003, p. 184.
48 Burgio 2003, chapters VI and VII.
2.7. Gramsci’s theory of hegemonic transitions?

The process of realisation of hegemony which eventually enables the “real exercise of hegemony” analysed starting from Gramsci’s ‘Analysis of Situations’ and the process of crisis of hegemony presented in the last section are, of course, related. While the former depicts the possible ascendency to hegemony from the perspective of previously subordinated groups, hence the emergence and realisation of a counter-hegemony, the crisis of hegemony describes the same process from the perspective of the hitherto hegemonic social group (or class). They represent a process of hegemonic transitions, whereby the hitherto existing hegemony collapses while at the same time a new hegemonic order is established. Thomas very concisely describes the intersection of the two moments for the case of a successful Revolution. Concerning the Russian Revolution Thomas thus writes: “When the Russian proletariat had demolished this pillar of State power by forging hegemony among the popular classes - in effect, subtracting their consent from the constituted power, in order to constitute their own - the time became ripe for the whole edifice to collapse and a new State to be constructed in its place”49

As Gramsci underlines it is “the problem of the relations between the structure and superstructure which must be accurately posed and resolved” [Q.13, p. 1578-79] if we want to understand whether, in this case, hegemonic transitions can occur. We have seen that Gramsci’s analysis starts from structural elements, focussing on objective changes in production which modify the objective relations of force – something that can be studied, Gramsci argues following Marx, with the methods of natural sciences. Changes in the structure do not directly, but only ‘mediately’, bring about the changes in the superstructures and as such they constitute but the potential for societal change and hence hegemonic transitions. It is in fact at the level of ideologies that human beings become conscious of these changes and one of Gramsci’s main contributions is to have shown how this can occur distinguishing different levels. In the process a counter hegemonic force can develop and challenge the crisis ridden existing hegemonic order.

At this point Gramsci envisages different possibilities: there is a possibility that societal change, or hegemonic transition, occurs either through an active revolutionary rupture or through passive revolution; a second option is however that “the old society resists and secures itself a breathing period, exterminating physically the elite of the enemies and terrorising reserve masses” ; an finally a third option suggests the mutual destruction of counter-hegemonic forces and hitherto hegemonic forces. This is certainly something we want to think about when analysing hegemonic transitions at the international level. But before doing that it is important to look critically at how Gramsci’s concept of hegemony has been applied to the field of international relations.

3. Gramsci’s Concept of Hegemony in the Field of International Relations

3.1. Arrighi’s and Cox’s application of Gramsci’s concept to the international and the Amsterdam School.

When looking at the way in which Gramsci’s concept of hegemony has been applied to the field of international relations two ways to do so stand out. While the different readings of Gramsci proposed by Arrighi, Cox and following the latter author, the Amsterdam School result in different ‘translations’ or application of Gramsci’s concept of hegemony to the field of international relations, other authors claim that Gramsci himself dealt with international relations using the very same concept of hegemony as he did when considering the national dimension.

49 Thomas, p. 197
When looking at the way in which Arrighi has applied Gramsci’s concept to the International we notice how a particular state has the chance to become hegemonic if it can “credibly claim to be the motor force of a general expansion” or “because it can credibly claim that the expansion of its power relative to some or even all other states is in the general interest of the subjects of all states.” Following this approach Arrighi proposes an historical narrative according to which the historic development of the capitalist world system can be understood as having been shaped by the rise, full expansion and supersession of four subsequent hegemonies since the 16th century. Arrighi has underlined the differences in each regime arguing that each of them progressively showed an “increase in size, scope and complexity”, focusing especially in their ability to decrease costs, whereby “each step forward in the process of internalisation of costs by a new regime of accumulation involved a revival of governmental and business strategies and structures that had been superseded by the preceding regime.”

Differently from Arrighi, Cox recognises ‘only’ two hegemonic periods: the first called Pax Britannica from 1845 to 1875, while the second hegemonic period is labelled Pax Americana and lasts from 1945 to 1965. The corollary of this is that the periods between the end of the Pax Britannica (1875) and the beginning of the Pax Americana (1945) as well as the period starting with the end of the Pax Americana are conceptualised as being non-hegemonic.

Similarly to Arrighi, Cox underlines that a hegemonic state creates a world order that is also in the interests of other states. As he puts it: “a state would have to found and protect a world order which was universal in conception, i.e., not an order in which one state directly exploits others but an order which most other states [...] could find compatible with their interests.” However, differently from Arrighi, Cox maintains that hegemony goes beyond interstate relations alone, since at this level the interests of different states are eventually likely to collide with one another. For this reason a hegemonic world order demands the establishment of links between civil societies across borders, forging a global civil society and global classes. Accordingly he writes that “the hegemonic concept of world order is founded not only upon the regulation of interstate conflict but also upon a globally conceived civil society, i.e. a mode of production of global extent which brings about links among social classes of the countries encompassed by it.”

The establishing of an hegemonic world order thus conceived occurs in different steps. A “powerful state” goes through a social and economic revolution which enables a social class to establish its hegemony within it. This process following Cox not only changes the economic and political structure within that particular country. It also “unleashes energies which expand beyond the state’s boundaries.” This occurs as other states “emulate” the latter state by adopting its “economic and social institutions” its technology and culture. The process by which the “hegemonic model” is exported to other (peripheral) countries is characterised by passive revolutions, whereby the latter countries “try to incorporate elements from the hegemonic model without disturbing old power structures.” It is in his later book “Production, Power and World Order” (1987) where Cox explains how the creation of a global civil society with global classes, necessary for the achievement of an hegemonic world order, is constructed, focussing on cross border alliances and mutual interests: “The social classes of the dominant country find allies in classes within other countries. The historic blocs

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50 Arrighi (1994), p.30
underpinning particular states become connected through the mutual interests and ideological perspectives of social classes in different countries, and global classes begin to form.\textsuperscript{57}

But to fully appreciate Cox analysis of hegemony at the international level it is important to dwell on his earlier article “Social Forces, States and World Orders” (1981), which anticipates most of the themes developed more substantially in the just mentioned book “Production, Power and World Order” (1987). In this text Cox conceives historical structures as being characterised by three interrelated levels: 1) social forces associated with production; 2) forms of state and 3) world orders. The relation between these levels is succinctly summarised by the author himself: “Changes in the organisation of production generate new social forces which, in turn, bring about changes in the structure of states; and the generalisation of changes in the structure of states alters the problematic of world order”\textsuperscript{58}. “In a preliminary approximation” the three levels can be also understood as configurations of material capabilities (“productive and destructive potentials”), ideas (“collective images of social order held by different groups”) and “institutions” (the stabilisation and perpetuation of particular orders).

Having distinguished between the three levels, a hegemonic world order can then be described as situation in which there is a “coherent fit” or “conjunction” between the different levels: as Cox puts it hegemony is based “on a coherent conjunction or fit between a configuration of material power, the prevalent collective image of world order (including certain norms) and a set of institutions which administer the order with a certain semblance of universality.”\textsuperscript{59} A concrete example that might illustrate this proposition can be taken from his treatment of the Pax Britannica or the Pax Americana.

Following his reading of Gramsci, Cox warns not to confuse hegemony with domination or to make the error to use the term hegemony as a combination of domination and hegemony as Chinese political leaders did. These meanings given to the concept of hegemony, Cox argues, “differ so much from the Gramscian sense of the term” that they are best translated with the term “domination.”\textsuperscript{60}

The work of Robert Cox has been very influential for the so called Amsterdam School or Amsterdam Project, coined according to the research group working at the University of Amsterdam and including, amongst other scholars, Kees Van der Pijl, Hank Overbeek and Bastiaan Van Appeldorn.

What characterised their research program, even before what Overbeek terms “the Gramscian Turn”\textsuperscript{61} of the aforementioned School, is an interest in transnational relations, which following an historical materialist approach are viewed to be central for the understanding of the international political economy. Their critique is devoted to those theories that take states as central actors, but they also criticises those schools of thought which looked at transnational relations and hence at non-state actors focusing especially on Transnational Corporations (TNCs) or Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), neglecting what for the Amsterdam School are central to the analysis: transnational social forces, in particular transnational classes.

A particularly affinity can be established with Cox’s conceptualisation of a global civil society and the latter author substitution of the “state” by the ‘state/society’ complex” which in the words of Overbeek became a “key point of departure for the retheorisation of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[57] Cox (1987), p. 7.
\item[58] Cox (1981), p. 137.
\item[59] Cox (1981), p. 139
\item[61] Overbeek (2004), p.123.
\end{footnotes}
transnational class formation.”

For the Dutch author the assertion made by Cox leads to make the following affirmation, dear to the Amsterdam School: “that politics is primarily about social forces and that states are expressions of particular configurations of social forces rather than ‘actors’ in their own right.”

As a consequence of this insight – it can be already argued here - hegemony at the international level is then eventually seen as being exercised by social forces or (transnational) classes, not states. Again as Overbeek puts it “Hegemony in the global system is therefore seen as a form of class rule, and not primarily as a relationship between states.” Despite the similarity with Cox, there are specific aspects in the approach and the theorising of the ‘transnational’ developed by the Amsterdam School which are worth outlining.

First it must be noted that when conceptualising hegemony the Amsterdam School does not take Gramsci as a point of departure - but Juergen Habermas. Following the steps of the German philosopher then, Van der Pijl distinguishes between external and internal socialisation. The former is related to the labour process and “proceeds through the appropriation of external nature.” Internal socialisation instead refers to the “transformation of mental outlook and world view” of people which proceeds through “normative structures through which needs are interpreted and actions are legitimised and made binding.” Here the “Gramscian notion of hegemony” is equalled to so-called ‘Concepts of Control’ – a term he borrows from Ries Bode. Concepts of control are “frameworks of thought and practice by which a particular world view of the ruling class spills over into a broader sense of “limits of the possible” for society at large.” In an other formulation it is defined as follows: “A concept of control represents a bid for hegemony: a project for the conduct of public affairs and social control that aspires to be a legitimate approximation of the general interest in the eyes of the ruling class and, at the same time, the majority of the population, for at least a specific period.”

Van der Pijl, similarly to Cox distinguishes between hegemonic and non hegemonic social formations, labelling the former ‘Lockean’ and the latter ‘Hobbesian’. Hobbesian states are strong states enabling, for example, the “transformation from feudal (or colonial) social relations” the Lockean states instead are “determined by a specific stage of socialisation” in the aforementioned sense where society becomes self regulating enabling such states to withdraw and to intervene only when emergencies make direct interventions necessary. The form of rule prevailing in Lockean states is hegemonic (in the Coxian interpretation of Gramsci) because it is “based on consent, backed up only in the last instance by the coercive apparatus of the state.”

But to apply ‘socialisation’ and “concepts of control” to individual states is, strictly speaking, wrong. Importantly in fact, the Amsterdam school argues that socialisation is a transnational process and not confined to the nation state. Socialisation Van der Pijl argues “cuts across the fixed pattern of the state system, and supports a normative structure superior to those coinciding with particular states.” For this reason Van der Pijl prefers to speak about a “Lockean heartland rather than individual lockean states,” whereby “states have only a

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67 Van der Pijl, quoted in Overbeek, p.
limited degree of autonomy left“ as they are less relevant for socialisation within their territory. What underpins socialisation as transnational process is “the expansion of capital across national borders.”

The Gramscian category of ‘historic bloc’ is consequently ‘transnationalised’ and labelled ‘transnational historic bloc’ implying therefore the identification of a transnational structure and transnational superstructures. The fight for hegemony (or for the imposition of concepts of control) therefore takes place on a transnational level amongst transnational social forces or classes. Transnational class formation Apeldoorn argues following Van der Pijl “takes place through such organizational channels as corporate interlocks, but also through elite socialisation in all kinds of transnational forums or ‘planning groups.” It is at this level that concepts of control are elaborated, formulated and propagated and where they have the chance to become hegemonic: “It is within the Lockean heartland that we have to think of the circulation of concepts of control. The struggle for hegemony between fractions of the bourgeoisie, through which the general tendency of the transnational ruling class asserts itself nationally and between the different states within and outside the Lockean heartland, replaces the traditional forms of world politics ever more by ‘global domestic politics’”

Mentioning transnational capital fractions fighting for hegemony (or the assertion of concepts of control) at the international level leads us to introduce another central element in the Amsterdam School. According to Overbeek the analysis put forward by Cox runs the risk of presenting the hegemony of a unified transnational class echoing Kautsky’s notions of “ultra imperialism.” Against this, the Amsterdam School recognises a form of rivalry, which following their analysis on transnational classes, is a rivalry amongst (transnational) ruling class fractions as opposed to capitalist states. Here it is again Van der Pijl’s analysis that stands out. According to the latter author, (ruling) class formation is determined by the bourgeoisie’s relation to the working class on the one hand and by the “functional positions” different fractions of the bourgeoisie hold in the process of circulation of capital on the other hand.

But the Amsterdam School not only has a transnational version of ‘civil society’ it also has one about ‘political society’. In fact the Amsterdam School has analysed the historical emergence of “quasi state structures” on an international scale. As Henk Overbeek writes, “transnationalisation is complemented by the establishment of a complex governance

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74 Apeldoorn (2004), p. 165. In this context Van Appeldoorn underlines that transnational socialisation and the creation of transnational social forces is not merely a consequence of the internationalisation of capital drawing the attention to the relationship between pre-capitalist world market and Capitalism, showing how the former was important for the latter and how the latter in turn transformed the former. As he puts it: “The world market itself generated transnational commercial and financial networks enabling the formation of transnational social forces. However,” he continues “[...] capitalism transformed the world market into a capitalist market based on the imperative of continuous expansion and deepening of capitalist social relations.”
75 Van der Pijl (2004), p. 159.
78 Van der Pijl (1984), p. 22. Regarding the first determination of a “general class interest” Van der Pijl elaborates on Marx differentiation between “absolute surplus value production” and “relative surplus value production” . Looking at the second determination Van der Pijl recognises different fractions of capital mentioning for example “bank, commercial, or industrial capital.” whereby the former leads to a formal subordination of the working class characterised by “rigid polarisation of the employed and the employers”, while the latter leads to the real subordination of the working class and “fosters flexibility in the relation between capitalists and workers on a count of an apparently common interest in rising productivity”. Van der Pijl (1984), p. 1.
structure (among a group of states) with quasi-state features serving as the world’s banker and providing the power (here relying on one or a few states) to safeguard capitalist relations of production around the globe”

We notice therefore how the Amsterdam School even more radically than others applies some of Gramsci’s notions to the international, focusing on the creation of the lockean hartland, the formation of transnational classes and transnational quasi state structures.

While Arrighi, Cox and the Amsterdam School elaborate a translation of Gramsci’s concept to the field of international relations, other authors, as mentioned, go even further claiming that Gramsci himself operates with the same concept when discussing the national and the international. Thus Cospito concludes in his study on Gramsci’s concept of hegemony by arguing that that the latter applies to “a territorial entity within a nation state (town – countryside, North – South; over a group of nations, over a continent, over the whole world (imperialism); of a class or a fundamental social group over subaltern groups, and also, internally to each of those, of groups and, above all, parties”.

Morton similarly argues that “it is fair to say […] that Gramsci dealt with ‘relations within society’ and ‘hegemonic systems within the state’ with the same concepts as he did ‘relations between international forces’,” whereby the concept of hegemony “can sustain explanatory power beyond the national context in relation to the international because this was already how Gramsci developed the concept.” In particular, relying partially on Cox, Morton proposes a reading of Gramsci which suggests a linkage between hegemonic relations within states and hegemony at the international level. As he puts it: ‘relations within society’ […] that constitute ‘hegemonic system within the state’ were inextricably linked to ‘relations between international forces’ […] that constitute ‘the combination of states in hegemonic systems.’ Again following Cox’s steps it is through passive revolutions that “the rule of capital is maintained”, whereby the ‘theory of passive revolution encapsulates the process of capital accumulation shaping state forms that are embedded in the geopolitical patterning of world order.”

3.2 Gramsci’s conception of “hegemony at the international level”

While the reading of the Quaderni – following Gramsci’s own advices on how to reconstruct the thought of important authors - enables perhaps a correct reconstruction of Gramsci’s thought on issues such as the “Philosophy of Praxis”, the “Critique of Benedetto Croce”, “Italian State Formation”, “Fascism”, “Americanism and Fordism” among others, his take on international relations is more difficult to disentangle. Cox even observes that Gramsci actually “did not have very much to say directly about international relations.” Yet, as I try to show in what follows, there are some important issues that can be investigated which enable to attempt a partial reconstruction on Gramsci’s analysis of international relations and of hegemony at the international level in particular. As we shall see, Gramsci’s interest in international relations results from his dialectical approach whereby the national and the international are interrelated. The analysis of ‘situations’ within countries and an accurate

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analysis of a country’s historical development therefore require to understanding the impact of the international on a given country.

3.2.1 Great Powers as Hegemonic Powers

Unsurprisingly, the usual starting point for analysing Gramsci’s understanding of international relations is his investigation of Italian state formation where he underlines the importance of considering international factors when looking at the process of state formation in Italy. Therefore in notebook 19 Gramsci criticises a book on the Italian Risorgimento for not sufficiently appreciate the relation between the national and the international: “a determinate European historical nexus” Gramsci thus writes instead, “is at the same time an Italian historical nexus, to be necessarily inserted in Italian national life” [Q19, p. 1962]. There the theoretical foundation for this procedure is grounded in a comparison between the conception of ‘individual personality’ and ‘national personality’, whereby the national as well as the individual personality should be understood as ensemble of international and social relation respectively: “the national personality (as the individual personality) is a mere abstraction if considered outside the international (or social) nexus. The national personality expresses a “distinct” of an international complex, for this reason it is bound to international relations.” [Q19 p. 1962]

Yet it is again in the notes concerning the Analysis of Situations, where Gramsci qualifies and clarifies the above proposition showing how the degree by which states influence other states differs. In notebook 13 the Italian author distinguishes between greater and lesser powers arguing that the former have a greater degree of autonomy in respect to the former and showing how to calculate the hierarchy of power among states. For Gramsci a great power is a hegemonic power which he defines as being “chief and guide of a system of alliances and of greater and minor agreements” [Q13, p.1597-98]. What characterises a great power then is “its ability to impress upon state activity an autonomous direction, of which other states need to support the influence and repercussion”. “The line of an hegemonic state (hence of a great power)” he writes in a similar tone elsewhere, “does not oscillate because it does determine the will of others and it is not determined by them. This, because the political line is based upon what is permanent and not immediate and random, [it is furthermore based on] its own interests and on those of other forces which concur in a decisive way to form a system and an equilibrium” [Q.13 p. 1629].

Following the above definition of hegemony, a nation state can be world hegemonic if it has “the possibility to imprint upon its activities an absolutely autonomous direction, of which all other powers, great and minor, have to feel the influence” [Q 2 p.166]. It must be noted that Gramsci speaks of hegemonic powers in the plural, whereby other greater and minor hegemonic powers will be able to influence other states’ behaviour while being themselves influenced by relatively greater hegemonic powers. For the above reasons in a widely cited note, Gramsci goes on to argue that because the actions of hegemonic states have repercussions on lesser states, the history of the latter to some extent can be explained by the history of the former: “just as, in a certain sense, in a given state history is the history of the ruling classes, so, on a world scale, history is the history of the hegemonic states”[Q15 p.1759].

86 For example in the Lyon Theses Gramsci argues that fascist, would-be imperialist Italy could influence other states while its actions were in fact strongly influenced by greater powers and in the latter’s interest: Italy’s tendency to Imperialism will result in “a war that will be waged, in appearance, for Italian expansion. But fascist Italy, in reality will be an instrument in the hands of one of the imperialist groups which contend amongst themselves the domination of the world” [Thesis 16]
As noted above the hierarchy of power among states can be “calculated”. In particular this can be done by considering the following three points: 1) “extension of territory” taking into account also the population of a given country [Q 13 p. 1598]; 2) “economic power” drawing a distinction between “productive capacity” and “financial capacity” [Q 13 p. 1598]. As will be outlined later, Gramsci applies this to show how the United States were able to strongly ameliorate its economic position vis a vis Britain for example, whereby the author underlines Britain’s increasing “invisible exports, hence the interests of capitals placed abroad” [Q.5, p. 615]. Finally, but very importantly, Gramsci lists 3) “military power” which summarises the territorial expansion and economic power [Q 13 p. 1598].

In addition, Gramsci adds a fourth, however unpredictable [imponderabile], point: “the ideological position a country has in the world, in being a representative of progressive forces in history” [Q.13, p. 1598]. However, if Gramsci does not rule out this possibility for the “modern world”, at the very least he questions it by asking whether a nation state can profit from its ideological position, as for example France did after the revolution: “Is cultural hegemony of a nation over others in the modern world possible? Or is the world already that unified in its social economic structure, that a nation, if she can have chronologically the initiative of an innovation, she cannot maintain the ‘political monopoly’, and hence use this monopoly as a basis for hegemony? [Q. 13p.1618]. A final important element Gramsci mentions is “internal tranquility”, whereby the author has in mind “the degree and intensity of the hegemonic function of the ruling social group” [Q. 13, p. 1577]. Following his argument “internal tranquility” is an important precondition for expansion of a great power, expansion that can be undermined by internal costs (e.g. police) a ruling group faces to maintain its hegemony.87

3.2.2. Rivalries…and War as the ultimate Arbiter for Hegemony

For Gramsci the “calculation” of the hierarchy of power is particularly important to assess whether a great power is eventually able to win a war against its contenders [Q. 13 p. 1598]. War is in fact the ultimate and decisive factor “to establish what needs to be understood as being a great power” [Q 13 p. 1628]. Equally important is ‘prestige’ and hence a possible threat of war: “to have all the elements [mentioned above], which within the limits of what is predictable, give certainty of victory, means to have a potential of diplomatic pressure of a great power, that is, it means to obtain a part of the results of a victorious war without the need to fight it” [Q 13 p. 1598]. On the other hand a great power can be such just “on diplomatic papers” in the case in which a state needs to borrow heavily in order to undertake military campaigns. In reality such a nation state “is considered as a probable supplier of manpower for the coalition that has the means not only to maintain its own military forces, but also to finance those of other allies” [Q. 13, p. 1629].

And wars amongst states are, according to Gramsci, very likely under capitalist relations of production. In Gramsci’s analysis on “the origins of wars” between states in notebook 13, we note that the origin of wars has ultimately domestic character and is intrinsically related to the capitalist mode of production. According to the Italian Marxist states collide with one another, as the ruling groups of different countries try to overcome profitability problems which afflict their territory by simultaneously seeking to enlarge the social basis over which it is possible to “extract surplus value” leading to colonial expansion or expansion of zones of influence in a limited space hence clashing with other powers. For example “Capitalist Europe, rich in means and once the rate of profit started to show the tendency to decline, had the necessity to widen the area of expansion of its profitable investments: hence the creation

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87 A counter argument Gramsci mentions, is that ancient Rome was able to expand despite strong internal fights. However, for Gramsci Rome represents a special case since “Rome was the only great power at the time and that it had not to fear the competition of other powerful rivals after the destruction of Carthago” [Q. 13 p. 1577].
of colonial empires” [q19, p. 2018]. Expansion is preferred to further extraction of surplus value within the domestic territory, where this is still possible, because this would alter a certain domestic equilibrium between rulers and ruled which could lead to “social catastrophe”. While this underlying tendency is abstract it becomes “concrete and immediate” during crises as indeed “the extraction of surplus value in [a country’s] historic base has become difficult or dangerous beyond certain limits, which are however insufficient” [Q. 13, p. 1631].

Therefore, it seems, Gramsci, is also very critical to any conception of transnational classes and transnational states under capitalist relations of production. Worth noting is the fact that this is historic specific, as in the case of the Roman Empire Gramsci contends that the latter presented a cosmopolitan transnational class and state as becomes clear throughout his notes on humanism, renaissance and Risorgimento where he refers to ancient Rome. Sure, Gramsci recognises the cosmopolitan character of capitalism, even in its early writings, as for example in his article on the “League of Nations”. However, he nonetheless recognises the limits to that posed by the “national life” upon which capitalism is also based. One of the central contradictions he identifies for the deepening of the organic crisis of capitalism therefore lies exactly in the contradiction between the cosmopolitan character of capitalism and its national basis: “One of the fundamental contradiction is the following” Gramsci thus writes, “while economic life has as necessary premise internationalism or even better cosmopolitanism, national [statale] life has always developed in the sense of ‘nationalism’, to ‘think about oneself’” [Q15, p. 1757]. A further example is the impossibility, according to Gramsci, that during the British Empire a transnational, unified ruling class could come into being, differently from the cosmopolitan Roman Empire where this was rather the case. As he asserts, “English nationalism [inglesismo] has obstructed the fusion of the national groups, which necessarily were on the way to be formed throughout the empire, into a unified imperial class”[Q 17, p. 1949]. The idea that the decision making of Englishmen could have been decisively influenced by others Gramsci labels as “absurd” [Q. 17, p. 1949].

3.2.3. What Hegemony at the International Level entails

The usual starting point for looking at what the hegemony of a nation state over another entails, is to dwell on Gramsci’s analysis on the relation between northern and southern Italy, which Gramsci understands as a relation between town and countryside. “The historic relation between north and south” Gramsci writes, can be understood as “relation between a big town and a big countryside” [Q. 1, p. 35]. For Gramsci the relation between north and south was in fact characterised by the actuality that the north was hegemonic over the south, something that was not acknowledged by the ‘masses of the north’. As Gramsci puts it in notebook one: “the ‘misery’ of Southern Italy was inexplicable for the popular masses of the North: the latter did not understand that the [national] unity was not created upon an equilibrarian basis [between north and south], but that it occurred under the condition of hegemony of the north over the south. That is that the north was an ‘octopus’ that was making itself richer at the cost of the south, that industrial accumulation was dependent upon the impoverishment of southern agriculture” [Q1 p. 47]. In particular stagnation in southern Italy was due to its functions of “semi-colonial market” [Q1 p.36], whereby, and even more importantly, the south also provided labour power for the more industrialised north. This was achieved by specific government policies aimed at “manufacturing the manufacturer [“producing the factoryworker”Q1 p.44]. Also in this case the hegemonic relation was characterised by a combination of coercion and consensus: “implacable repression” by the “police system” and “political measures” such as “personal favours” in order to “incorporate on a ‘personal basis’ the most active southern elements in the ruling groups”. In this way “the strata that could have organised the discontent became an instrument of politics of the north”[Q. 1, p.36]. According to Gramsci this process led to the “mystery of Naples” described by Goethe in his Italienreise, where the latter demolishes the legend that people from Naples tend not to work, by arguing that contrariwise they were very industrious. However, as Gramsci outlines, their
activities did not lead to economic improvement as it was not productive. Gramsci takes this metaphor for describing southern Italy as a whole underlining the parasitism of a section of the population as rentiers and state bureaucrats for example, and malnutrition, endemic unemployment of many others [Q.22, p. 2144].

As Giorgio Baratta observes, for Gramsci this does not only concern Italy. Hence the town–countryside, North - South divide which characterises Italy is applicable to other areas in the world economy: “This situation does not apply only in Italy; to a greater or minor extent it presents itself in all the countries of old Europe and in even worse it exists in India and China, which explains the stagnation of history in those countries and their politico military impotence” [Q22 p.2145]. To some extent this recalls obviously Wallerstein’s and Frank’s “dependency theory” and the “development of underdevelopment”. However, whether “hegemony” leads in all cases to the development of underdevelopment according to Gramsci is at the very least questionable. As has been mentioned when discussing the origins of war before, Gramsci also very much underlines the “economic-financial” form of imperialism in the “modern world” associated with productive investments, which being “productive” stand in contrast to the situation he observes for Naples and southern Italy, where it is exactly the lack of productive work he observes. In fact elsewhere Gramsci writes that the hegemony of the north over the south represented an anomaly to some extent. Hegemony could have been “normal” and “historically beneficiary” if northern industrialism would have assimilated new economic zones in the south [Q 1, p. 131].

Generally then, “to dominate hegemonically” at the international level, as Gramsci puts it, entails “the appropriation of the work of others” [Q.19 p. 1988], whereby the peripheral nation’s economic life is subordinated to international relations” [Q. 13, p.1562]. The more this is the case, Gramsci argues, the more the so-called “party of the foreigner” becomes important. This party does not represent the “vital forces of the country” but exploits the situation to fight adversary parties representing hence “the subordination and subservience to hegemonic nations or groups of hegemonic nations” [Q. 13, p.1563]. In different notes Gramsci contrasts domination of “hegemonic character” and direct domination, whereby hegemonic domination is a mixture between “direct domination and hegemony”, underlining hence also in the case of hegemony at the international level the aspect of domination (force) within hegemony. An example is Italy, which, in Gramsci’s account experienced a period of “direct domination” and later of “domination of hegemonic character” [Q 19, p. 1962]. A further example for this contrast can be found in his analysis on the history of the United States, where he mentions some problems facing the United States which include the latter’s “domination” of Central America and “hegemony” over the Caribbean Sea and the Antilles” [Q.2, p. 168].

3.3 The structural root of “Hegemonic transitions” at the international level: Americanism and Fordism and the likely rise of the United States.

Consistently with Gramsci’s definition of hegemony at the international level, a ‘hegemonic transition’ or rather the rise to hegemony of a particular country occurs as the latter increases its economic power, which however needs to be realised also as military power, being war or the threat of war the ultimate arbiter that enables a nation state to become hegemonic.

In this sense it is interesting to see how Gramsci “calculates” the changing power relations after the First World war comparing economic data of the United States and the United Kingdom showing how the US gained a relatively stronger position presenting a higher GDP, a more sound balance of payments and so on [Q. 2 p. 168]. “Tacitly” Gramsci therefore writes “the United Kingdom had to acknowledge the supremacy of the United States” [Q 2

88 See Baratta (2003), chapter 8.
168]. In this context Gramsci also notes that the main actors in world politics changed, whereby European powers which have historically dominated world politics became less important: “Europe has lost its importance and world politics depends upon London, Washington, Moscow, Tokyo rather than the continent” [Q.2, p. 181]

The above factors are certainly already a manifestation of the United States possible rise or growing hegemony. The ultimate root for a country’s possibility to attain hegemonic status, however, is structural change within that country as, for example, the case of the United States exemplifies. Gramsci’s overall argument according to which “organic changes” in the social structure of a particular country lead to changes in international power relations via its “military expressions”, is well known: “Do international relations precede or follow logically fundamental social relations? Without any doubt they follow. Any organic innovation in the social structure, through its technical military expressions, modifies organically the absolute and relative relations in the international field.” [Q.13 p. 1562]

As has been mentioned in the previous section, the “organic change” the United States went through is represented by Fordism which refers to production, while Americanism refers to a particular ‘way of life’ associated with this production process. Fordism represents a crass reorganisation of production, which generally entails its “rationalisation” and a brutal adaptation of human beings to the requirement of this kind of production process. As Gramsci puts it “In the United States the rationalisation has determined the necessity to elaborate a new type of human being, adequate to the new kind of work and the new production process”[Q 22 p. 2147]. In this context Gramsci discusses different aspects the ‘elaboration of a new type of human being’ entails, focussing on questions regarding the deep changes in the ‘family’, ‘sexuality’, habits, customs etc, all of which have been obtained through a “skilful” combination of consent and coercion [Q22, p. 2171]. Finally Gramsci recalls that Fordism develops under a particular form of state, the liberal state. “The state” in the United States he argues “is the liberal state, but non in the sense of custom liberalism or effective political freedom, but in the more fundamental sense of free initiative and economic individualism” [Q. 22, p. 2156].

The economic results are however impressive. When discussing the tendency of the rate of profit to fall Gramsci mentions several points for why the fordist production method is more efficient and enables to counteract the above tendency and eventually to sharply ameliorate US economic achievements relative to other countries. Amongst others he mentions 1) better machines; 2) better raw materials, 3) new type of worker, 4) less waste of material 5) recycling of energy. This leads, Gramsci argues, initially to higher costs, while, in a second phase, these costs will decline as “relative and absolute production becomes greater than before using the same amount of labour power” [Q.10 p. 1312]. In the special notebook on Americanism and Fordism, the Italian Marxist underlines how the new production process enables hence to obtain “monopoly profits” and even to pay higher wages at the same time [Q. 22, p. 2172], echoing Marx’s analysis on the increase of relative surplusvalue. What can be noted here is that in the long term Gramsci already expects a loss of competitive advantages and renewed pressure on profitability due to the spread of this production technique, we will look at below: “but the monopoly will be necessarily firstly limited and then destroyed by the diffusion of the new methods [of production] internally to the United States and abroad” [Q. 22, p. 2172]

We notice hence the enormous and deep “organic changes” the United States undergo in order to strongly ameliorate its relative economic position on the one hand and, as has been mentioned, to propose a capitalist solution – even if temporary - to the organic crisis of capitalism on the other hand. Given the extent of those changes one of the central questions posed by Gramsci is whether Americanism and Fordism can even be understood as constituting a new historical epoch. [Q. 22, p. 2140]. From the Analysis of Situations it is clear that a new historical epoch, following and developing Marx, entails the development of
a new structure and new superstructures which will identify themselves into a new historic bloc. Right at the beginning of the special Quaderno dedicated to American and Fordism, Gramsci argues that if this were the case then one would have to analyse whether the constitution of this new historical epoch would occur through a passive or active revolution, and hence “if this could determine a gradual development of the type, analysed elsewhere, of “passive revolution” which have characterised the previous century or whether it only represents a molecular accumulation of elements destined to produce an “explosion”, i.e. an upheaval of the French type” [Q. 22 p.2140]

The answer Gramsci gives, is a clear “no”: Americanism and Fordism do not constitute a new historical epoch. In fact Gramsci generally points out that Americanism - with its “café life” and “ideology of the rotary club” [Q. 22 p. 2180] - does not represent something particularly new, pointing to the fact that in the United States the relation between classes has not changed: “nothing has changed in the relation between the fundamental groups: it is the case of an organic extension and intensification of European culture, which has only taken a new epidermis in the new American climate” [Q 22, p. 2180]. Even the production process in the final analysis does not represent “an original novelty”. It is in fact “the most recent phase of a long process that started with the birth of industrialism” [Q. 22, p. 2165]. As de Felice mentions this leads Gramsci to reassert that the concepts and the laws elaborated by Ricardo and later by Marx in the critique of political economy are still adequate for understanding the phenomena Gramsci witnesses: the market is still determined in the same way. As de Felice writes, quoting Gramsci “even the acknowledgment of the existence of new elements, even important ones, cannot lead following Gramsci to justify ‘the setting [impostazione] of new scientific problems’: the intervention of the state or the role of monopolies, as relevant as they might be, did not give rise to a new ‘automatism’. They reproduce the older one ‘on a bigger scale”89 [Q. p. 1478]

However, what must be underlined is that the fact that Americanism and Fordism do not constitute a new epoch with a new historic bloc does not mean that it cannot last for a long period or that it has not the potential to generalise itself. On the contrary, as the Italian revolutionary observes in notebook 14: “One must note that too often one confuses the ‘not constituting a new epoch’ with a short ‘temporal’ duration; it is possible to ‘last’ long, relatively, and not constitute a new epoch’ [Q 14, p. 1744]. Also, according to Gramsci, Ford’s method of production will spread. For it is ‘rational’ which implies that it will be generalised: “the problem arises on whether Ford’s type of industry, organisation of work and production is ‘rational’, and hence whether it can and should generalise itself” Answering shortly after “it seems that one can answer that Ford’s method is ‘rational’ and hence that it needs to generalise itself [Q. 22, p. 2171]. The mechanism by which this can occur is the “implacable weight” of US production and it is in this way that European states will also develop new forms of states and life adequate to the new production methods, although finding original combinations to do so : “The problem is the following: whether America, with the implacable weight of its economic production (and hence indirectly) will compel or is already compelling Europe to an upheaval [rivolgimento] of its economic and social axis, which is too antiquate.” This entails “the transformation of the material basis of European civilisation” and “the forced rise of a new civilisation” [Q.22, p. 2178-79]. According to Gramsci, this would have happened anyway over a longer period of time, but it is the pressure of capitalist competition that makes it that “immediately it presents itself as a recoil [contraccolpo] of American ‘high-handedness’ [Q. 22, p. 2178]. Analysing the impact of US economic power, Gramsci explicitly denies that changes in Europe will occur because of the adoption of American culture: “The problem is not whether in America a new civilisation and a new culture exists […] and if these are invading Europe: if the problematic is posed in this way, the answer would be easy: no it does not exist” [Q. 22 p. 2178].

89 De Felice, (1977), p. 204.
Probably for the deep changes outlined above, Gramsci nonetheless operates with the concept of passive revolution when considering Americanism and Fordism and possible future developments. However, this should not confuse: here passive revolution is used in its ‘second meaning’, and hence describing the “change in the way social groups are dominant” within the same structure as we have seen, as opposed to “the change of the dominant groups themselves” in the case of epochal change, to use, this time, De Felice’s differentiation. In the case of “hegemony at the international level” then transitions can occur also within the same structure as opposed to hegemonic transitions within the nation state that entail systemic change and the creation of a new historic bloc.

4. Concluding remarks

The reading of the Quaderni proposed in the last section suggests that Gramsci’s conceptualisation of the international comes closer to Lenin’s “Imperialism” and to some extent to some works within realist school in international relations than many “Neo-Gramscian” would concede. Paradoxical as this may be, it seems that Gramsci’s take on international relations, to a great extent, cannot be counted amongst Neo-Gramscian analyses. In these concluding remarks I wish to reiterate two key differences between Gramsci and the Neo Gramscians. The first i) refers to different usages of the term hegemony in the Quaderni, whereby at the international level hegemony according to Gramsci is exercised by states – not classes. The second difference concerns the role of ideas in hegemonic relations at the international level, which for the Italian revolutionary play a lesser role compared to Neogramscian analyses. Finally iii) I will therefore argue that Gramsci is best situated amongst that ‘school’ that takes Lenin as point of departure as opposed to the Neogramsian ‘school’ and make the point that his framework of analysis, as presented in this paper, still constitutes a fruitful approach for the understanding of international political economy.

i) Gramsci operates with different conceptions of hegemony when dealing with the national and the international. At the national level hegemony has been defined as dialectical unity between leadership and domination, including both, consensus and coercion. The term is used to depict the form of rule of the fundamental social group or class over subordinate groups in ‘modern’ capitalist states. Gramsci proposes a complex theory of the capitalist state, which in its integral understanding encompasses both political and civil society. We have noticed how the full realisation of hegemony requires the conquest of political power, i.e. of the state, and that hegemony then is exercised at different levels involving the economic structure, civil society and political society, whereby the State in its integral sense acts as educator and intellectuals play a very important role organising, amongst others, the apparatuses of consensus and coercion. Given the all encompassing nature of hegemony - being economic, civic and political - different authors recognise in Gramsci a theory of capillary power and ‘biopolitics’.

While Neo Gramscians (especially Cox and the Amsterdam School) aim to apply the above concept of hegemony to the international trying to find analogies between the nation state and the international, Gramsci avoids doing this. As has been noted the necessarily required assumptions that would enable the transposition of the concept from the national to the international, such as a global civil society, transnational ruling classes, a transnational (quasi) state are difficult to be conceived by Gramsci and the key argument runs as follows: while capitalism has a cosmopolitan character it is firmly based on nation states which make the creation of a transnational civil society and transnational state difficult to be conceptualised.

For Gramsci hegemony at the international level is in fact based on the economic power realised as military power of a given country, being war or the threat of war eventually what

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“makes a hegemonic power” [Q. 13 p. 1628]. According to the reading of Gramsci put forward in this paper, a hegemonic power is characterised by its relative ‘autonomy’, and hence its ability to determine other countries’ behaviour rather than being determined by them. In fact Gramsci has a dialectical conception of the international whereby states represent a ‘distinct’ of international relations and are therefore influenced by developments in other states. For this reason the international is a very important element or variable when considering historical and contemporary developments within states as is clear from Gramsci’s concrete analysis of Italian unification and in a more abstract way in his “Analysis of Situations” where his approach is set out. The identification of different simultaneously existing hegemonic powers and hegemonic relations at the international level helps Gramsci to identify the geopolitical position of different countries within a hierarchy of greater and lesser powers or the relations of forces at the international level and to analyse how far the international influences domestic politics. It is probably for the above reason that hegemonic relations at the international level are linked to hegemonic relations within nation states as changing relation of forces at the international level will have an impact upon relations of forces within nation states by weakening or strengthening specific groups. We have also underlined the structural, economic roots which can bring about changes in the relation of forces at the international level.

Gramsci also underlines the conflicting and competitive nature of the relation between capitalista states driven to a great extent by the requirement of the capitalist mode of production: the “State is not conceivable but as a form of a determined economic world, a determined system of production” [Q. 10 p. 1360]. However, state behaviour is more complex than this, whereby “it is not said that the relation between goal and means is easily to be determined and that it can assume the form of a simple scheme obvious at the first sight” [Q. 10 p. 1360]. Such influencing factors shaping state behaviour include “the complex problem of the relations of forces within a given country” as well as “relations of forces at the international level, the geopolitical position of a given country” [Q. 10 p. 1360]. What must be underlined is that by embedding nation states in a particular historical and economic setting and showing how state behaviour is differently influenced, Gramsci also strongly distinguishes himself from the realist conception of International Relations.

Arrighi, who is usually not counted amongst the Neogramscian scholars and who stresses that the role of nation states is central, therefore comes far closer to Gramsci’s understanding of the international as compared to Cox and the Amsterdam School. Yet compared to Gramsci, Arrighi perhaps too strongly emphasises the consensual aspect by which subaltern states accept the leadership of the hegemonic state. In Gramsci’s analysis, it seems, the ‘leadership’ of a hegemonic power is ‘accepted’ because of the prevailing relations of forces and hence because of the economic and military power of the hegemonic state. Also, contrary to Arrighi’s usual identification of one hegemonic state, Gramsci speaks of hegemonic powers in the plural envisaging hence the coexistence of competing hegemonic powers, which however differ in their economic and military capabilities.

ii) Another difference with Neo Gramscian analyses is related to the role of ideas. Gramsci’s emphasises a country’s’ ‘ideological position’ as ‘basis for hegemony’ in the case in which, a state has gone through systemic and structural change, while other states are still organised in ‘older’ forms. An example for this is ‘modern’ capitalist France vis a vis other ‘retrograde’ European countries during the 19th century. However, for the 20th century capitalist ‘modern world’ the role of ideas has probably diminished as the world became “that unified in its social economic structure, that a nation, if she can have chronologically the initiative of an innovation, she cannot maintain the ‘political monopoly’, and hence use this monopoly as a basis for hegemony [.]” [Q. 13p.1618]. An interesting illustration for this is represented by Gramsci’s treatment of Americanism and Fordism and the implication of the United States as hegemonic power. We have noticed how in the case of the possible rise of the United States, given the extraordinary economic advantages the Fordist production process brings with it,
Gramsci criticises the argument according to which it will be because of ‘americanism’, the way of life and ideology related to this particular production process, that the Fordist factory and a form of Americanism might spread to other countries. In fact Gramsci argues that this will occur “indirectly” and for economic reasons as the United States’ economic weight and power will force other rival hegemonic powers to adapt to the more efficient production methods and hence to develop adequate ways of life and ‘state forms’ in order to respond to competitive pressures.

For Cox and his followers instead, the ‘unleashing of hegemonic energy’ (as Cox puts it) from one country to others and the creation of a hegemonic world order requires ‘a coherent fit’ between material capabilities, institutions and ideas, and, as most of their analyses show, ideas are the driving force for the establishment of hegemony at the international level as structural changes follow. Hence, contrary to Gramsci’s analysis on the implications of US hegemony, Neo Gramscians outline how social forces within one country can expand their hegemony by consciously ensuring (via ideas) the spread of what they label a particular ‘mode of production’ (rather than ‘production process’). A good example for this argument can be found in Bieler and Morton who write: “Social forces may thus achieve hegemony within a national social order as well as through world order by ensuring the promotion and expansion of a mode of production. Hegemony can therefore operate at two levels: by constructing an historical bloc and establishing social cohesion within a form of state as well as by expanding a mode of production internationally and projecting hegemony through the level of world order.” They show this interestingly taking the example of Americanism and Fordism (whereby power is eventually exercised not by the United States or the ruling class in the latter state, but by “Americanism and Fordism” itself): “For instance, in Gramsci’s time, this was borne by the expansion of Fordist assembly plant production beyond the US which would lead to the growing world hegemony and power of ‘Americanism and Fordism’ from the 1920s and 1930s.” 91 The role of ideas in characterising hegemony is even more strongly appreciated in other Neo Gramscian analyses as for example those made by Gill and Law. A critique to this approach has been, amongst others, put forward by Peter Burnham who argues that Neo Gramscian approaches tend to overestimate the role of ideas while underestimating the economy. In Burnhams’ view the restructuring of production occurs then for economic rather than ideological reasons. In his words: “the international restructuring of accumulation occurs in a context of inter-imperialist rivalry in which nation states struggle to overcome the contradictions of the capital relation.” 92 Burnham explicitly states in his text that he is not interested in “tracing the lineage of the concept [of hegemony] or the extent to which this usage is a correct reading of Gramsci.” 93 As has been showed a possible reading of Gramsci nonetheless suggests that Gramsci could agree with Burnham’s critique of the Neo-Gramscians.

Importantly the example of US hegemony, Americanism and Fordism shows us that for Gramsci, at least in this instance, the emulation of the ‘hegemonic model’ occurs because of the hegemonic state’s economic power and competition rather than because of ideological reasons. This confirms that shared culture and ideology must not be a precondition for hegemony as in Neo Gramscian analyses, and can develop as an indirect consequence. After all, in Gramsci’s examples of hegemonic relations at the international level hegemonic states and subaltern states or territories not always show similar productive and ideological conditions. Gramsci’s analysis on the hegemonic relation between industrialised northern and overwhelmingly agricultural southern Italy, as well as his wider application of this model to greater areas of the world economy can be taken as examples for the case that hegemony of one territory over another or of states over others does not necessarily require a similar organisation of production, similar forms of states and ideologies.

91 Bieler and Morton (2004), p. 93, own emphasis.
Yet while playing down the role of ‘ideas’ for the establishment of hegemony, it does not mean that consensus and leadership are completely absent in Gramsci’s analysis of international relations. In fact a hegemonic relation between territories and states is characterised by both consensus and force. Hence the ‘party of foreigners’ (consensus) alongside ‘brutal police force’ especially designed to protect the constituted order and to eradicate the development of potential challengers to the constituted order. Also, Gramsci mentions that the ‘political line’ of a hegemonic power will take into account the interests of other hegemonic powers in order to avoid the disruption of an established equilibrium.

iii) In the words of one scholar associated with the Amsterdam School, Henk Overbeek, the analysis put forward by Cox and Gill, as has been already mentioned, runs the risk of presenting a version of Kautsky’s ‘ultra imperialism’. As he puts it: “The emphasis on the mutual interest and ideological perspectives of social classes is characteristic not only of the work of Cox, but also of Stephen Gill’s (1990) influential study of the Trilateral Commission and much of his later work. Both authors focus on the rise of transnational historic bloc and of a transnational managerial class in command of the global economy. One might easily find a resonance here of the notion of ultra-imperialism as formulated on the eve of World War I by Karl Kautsky (1914)”

The observation made by Overbeek reminds us on the actuality of the debate between Lenin and Kautsky, which it seems to me, still lives below the theoretical edifice built in the recent decades and still constitutes a borderline between different groups of scholars in critical international political economy. The central question is then whether the understanding of the international political economy allows to conceptualise the creation of stable transnational alliances, which following the work of the Neogramscians result from the formation of transnational classes. Through the reading of Gramsci made by Cox, which became ‘leading’ in IPE, Gramsci’s insights have de facto being used to enrich and develop Kautsky’s thesis. The Amsterdam School which claims to have avoided the risk of ‘ultram imperialism’ by identifying rivalries amongst transnational class fractions, has actually but strengthened Cox’ argument by making it more complex – they have however by no means questioned its theoretical foundation.

Gramsci, however, as has been now many times mentioned, has given one major argument (one of the “fundamental contradictions” in capitalism for him) for why it is difficult to conceive the creation of transnational classes, a global civil society and hence a form of ‘ultra-imperialism’ though envisaging (temporary) alliances: “One of the fundamental contradictions is the following: while economic life has as necessary premise internationalism or even better cosmopolitanism, national [statale] life has always developed in the sense of ‘nationalism’, to ‘think about oneself” [Q15, p. 1757]. The individuation of the roots of Gramsci’s argument in the Quaderni would requires some further research, whereby the work of Ciliberto earlier and more recent work by Fosini could represent a good starting point. What can be noted is that, as Gramsci recognises it to be the case with Marx’s theory, for example, of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (“the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is presented as the contradictory aspect of another law, the one on production of relative surplus value, in which one tends to eliminate the other with the forecast that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall will be the prevalent [Q10 1279]), it seems that also here we are confronted with two opposing forces, with a specific tendency prevailing. The prevailing force towards ‘nationalism’ can be approximately interpreted in two ways. On the one hand ‘nationalism’ became to represent an important unifying force or cement binding rulers and ruled in modern nation states (“Before, the real etico-political relation between ruled and rulers was in the person of the emperor or the king […] as later the relation will not be that of

the concept of ‘freedom’, but the concept of nation and fatherland. The popular ‘religion’ that has substituted Catholicism […] is the one of “patriotism” and “nationalism” [Q.10 I]). On other hand it seems also possible to argue that ruling classes exist qua ruling classes in specific territories, whereby this requires a constant legitimisation of their position which can only take place in those specific territories: the process by which, as Marx puts it a footnote in Capital, “one man is king only because other men stand in the relation of subjects to him[;] they, on the contrary, imagine that they are subjects because he is king” \(^{96}\) seems to take place at a national level. But the fact that we are dealing with forces pointing in different directions enables to conceptualise specific, rather unsustainable situations and hence not equilibriums, in which ‘internationalism’ is relatively successfully pursued. The identification of the limits to the ‘internationalist tendency’ and hence an answer on how far it can go, also requires further research.

But as can be seen in Callinicos’ book ‘Imperialism and Global Political Economy’, Gramsci is notably not alone in recognising a contradiction between the national and the international, something that enables also to contextualise his analysis amongst a larger strand of thought. Hence also Ellen Wood makes a similar point: “It is […] the very nature of capitalism to intensify the contradiction between its expansionist imperatives and the territorial divisions of its original political (and economic) form” \(^{97}\). Interestingly, as Callinicos observes Wood’s argument “echoes Bukharin’s conception of imperialism as constituted by tendencies to both the internationalisation and the statification of capital.” \(^{98}\) There are, of course, also other arguments which suggest that it is difficult to go beyond a plurality of states. One of those arguments relates to Marx’s definition of capital as many capitals: “capital exists and can only exist as many capitals” and it “[i]t follows” Callinicos argues “that from a Marxist perspective ‘global capital’ cannot exist, but only a plurality of competing economic actors” \(^{99}\). Another argument is related to Lenin’s observation of uneven development (originally used in the polemic with Kautsky) and Trotsky’s conception of uneven and combined development. Following Callinicos’ text again, it is especially “capitalism’s inherent tendencies to uneven and combined development” which maintains states multiple. This is so because, the author goes on, “the tendency of capitalist development to generate spatially concentrated economic complexes creates very powerful centrifugal forces that would strongly work to sustain the political demarcation of the world into territorial states. Capitalists in such a complex would have an interest in preserving the existing state to which they had privileged access” \(^{100}\). And interestingly, also Callinicos speaks of a ‘tendency’.

Importantly, the latter two themes - that capital exists as many capitals and uneven and combined development - are not alien to Gramsci’s writings. The implications resulting from the development of those arguments could be therefore integrated in a Gramscian analysis of International Relations and hegemony within it. And it is certainly worth doing this. Gramsci’s theoretical framework – as put forward in this paper - seems to be well equipped to address major problématiques in contemporary capitalism. Gramsci’s writings provide an important resource not only for analysing developments within nation states in times of what is taking the form of an ‘organic crisis’, but also to analyse development at the international level and to understand how the former impact on the latter and vice versa. Hence, for example Gramsci’s conceptualisation of hegemony at the international level, could be useful to analyse the changing patterns and possible future developments of US hegemony and, simultaneously, what has recently been recognised as being (rival) German hegemony within the EU \(^{101}\).

\(^{96}\) Marx (2009 ed.), p. 70.
\(^{97}\) Wood, quoted in Callinicos (2009), p. 78.
\(^{98}\) Callinicos (2009a), p. 78.
\(^{99}\) Callinicos (2009a), p. 79.
\(^{100}\) Callinicos (2009a), p. 90-91.
\(^{101}\) See Lapavistas 2010.
Lastly, when discussing critical IPE (“firmly grounded in the historical materialist tradition”) Overbeek claims that the latter is constituted by ‘Open Marxism’ and ‘Neo-Gramscianism’. Critical International Political Economy it is argued shares Cox’s famous understanding of ‘critical theory’ for which the Canadian author notably takes Gramsci as particular source of inspiration: “Critical theory” for Cox “[...] does not take institutions and social and power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing.” Nearly claiming a monopoly over critical theory, too often have those schools of thought on the side of Lenin rather than Kautsky, been accused of an uncritical understanding of International Relations and put in the same box of what Cox has called ‘problem solving’ theory like the neo-realist approach. What about Gramsci?

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102 Overbeek (20049, p. 113-114.
103 Cox (1981)


