Neo-Gramscians: Interpretations on Ideas, Institutions and Culture

Gramsci’s ideas have provided a resource for many different thinkers across the latter half of the twentieth century. While much focus has been placed on the works of various Marxist and Gramscian thinkers, this paper will argue that the real vitality of neo-Gramscian approaches lies in the works of Robert Cox, Kees van der Pijl and Stephen Gill. In the early 1980s, Robert Cox applied neo-Gramscian critical analysis to international studies by emphasising the role of ideas, institutions and material capabilities in the making of the global order. The Coxian epistemology was extended and enriched by Kees van der Pijl and Stephen Gill who analysed social and historical forces that shaped various capitalist systems. For van der Pijl, the Atlantic ruling class was central to his analysis of European capitalism whilst Stephen Gill focused on the roles of transnational capitalism and capitalist economic social forces in shaping the global political economy. Randolph Persaud questioned the silence of ethnicity in neo-Gramscian approaches and lobbied for its inclusion, and other neo-Gramscian scholars emphasised the limitations of the Coxian approach as focused entirely on the North and under reference the works of Stuart Hall and Ernesto Laclau because they do not fit neatly into the anti-globalist rhetoric of the neo-Gramscian scholarship. The article, however, argues that neo-Gramscian approaches can be utilised to study US technological hegemony and its consequences, particularly in the emerging global digital economy.

Introduction

The role of state in shaping political discourse remains an important and pervasive pillar of statecraft and political inquiry because the state is seen as an encompassing entity that embodies the will of the people and as a result a legitimate body politic. The state-centric approaches in the traditional settings of political science and international relations have focused on state dynamics of power politics, ideas, institutions and culture, and using various theoretical approaches, various theorists attempted to understand the role of state actors in shaping domestic and international affairs as discrepant narratives on power and privilege. In this regard, the role of powerful social forces, elite and

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dominant classes, or in the Gramscian sense\(^2\) hegemonic forces and elite historic-blocs shape international and domestic political orders in unique and often problematic ways, creating new social ontology and reflexivity in the process, and above all, capitalist ideas ensure primacy of bourgeoisie narratives in both national and global political discourses. However, since the early 1980s, a reinterpretation of the work of the Italian scholar, Antonio Gramsci, has allowed for the establishment of multiple level counter elite epistemologies for conceptualising the analysis of state, and in particular hegemonic historic blocs that continues to shape capitalist ideology, culture and institutions. However, intra-state social, political and economic dynamics allows for deeper analysis of social and historical forces, creating critical discourse and reflection on the terrains of political power, civil society activism, public policy, social mobilisation, political tactics, social forces and counter-hegemony. It is here that neo-Gramscian scholarship has left an indelible mark, traversing the traditional restrictions of international affairs and state centric analytical paradigms of explaining the state without human activity\(^3\) as the new normal in global political and international affairs. In this paper, I will discuss the role of neo-Gramscians in the study of global order, social forces, and counter-elite politics and social narratives on ideas, institutions and culture since the 1980s. The neo-Gramscian scholarship serves as a reference point for critical reasoning based on problematising capitalist social and historical forces as both local and global expressions of domination and agitation, control and resistance and in-group and inter-group struggles. More importantly, these social forces are caught in dialectical historical field force where both dominant elite groups and anti-elite forces use strategy, tactics, and connective action\(^4\) to critique political authority.

It is important, therefore, to understand the capitalist historic bloc and in particular the way in which ideas against capitalist historical and social forces were critiqued and problematised by the neo-Gramscians in the early 1980s.

### Understanding Historic Blocs

Kees Van der Pijl from the Amsterdam School notes that between 1991 and 2004, there were some 386 academic papers written using Gramsci’s ideas and as a result the “application of Gramsci’s ideas is no longer confined to Italian studies and political philosophy, but runs across the social sciences.”\(^5\)

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Questions about power and the role of the ruling classes in determining social and economic development and under-development led many Marxist theoreticians to re-analyse the work of Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci, who critically looked at the concepts of “ideas”, “institutions” and “culture,” which were inter-connected in a psycho-physical nexus of elite political hegemony and control. In such an interwoven context, Gramsci defended cultural logic and critical thinking and re-theorised culture:

Culture is something quite different. It is organisation, discipline of one's inner self, a coming of terms with one's own personality; it is attainment of higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one's historical value, one's own function in life, one's own rights and obligations.6

The role played by ideas and culture in hegemonic formations were important in understanding the complex political realm where the elite ideology and power converged to create dominant social and institutional narratives on social and cultural forces. What Gramsci was doing was moving away from the Marx’s mode of production and the dialectical tensions between capital and labour and basing his political ideas on the philosophy of European historical materialism on developing epistemic links between theory and practice, and on social forces and history. In his conceptualisation of the political realm, Gramsci theorised that human beings acquired consciousness of structural conflicts on the level of political ideologies which enabled class consciousness and mobilisation. From this, he argued that the theoretical-ideological principles of hegemony have epistemological significance, in the sense that knowledge is not only based on idealism but also on pragmatism and practical applications of ideas, institutions and culture. In Gramscian terms, “the realisation of a hegemonic apparatus determines a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge”7 that are based on elite and capitalist political structures and founded on domination, subjugation and class conflict. Domination of the elite was possible due to the engineering of political, economic and social systems which were founded on the exploitative capabilities of capital.

In many respects, the co-opted weaker proletariat classes became victims of the bourgeoisie system “of alliances which forged a petit-bourgeoisie stratum within the working class, with vested interest in the established order.”8 For Gramsci, the state and the political regime in Italy in particular was a result of the elite historical discourses, where ‘northern capitalists bureaucratically superimposed themselves over the central and southern agricultural classes.”9 The dynamics of Italian politics provided Gramsci to question the evolution of the dominant classes of the Italian state and the

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9Ibid, p.59
regional social and cultural forces that permitted the formation, perpetuation
and continuation of inequality, class exploitation and elitism. In firming up his
theoretical and ideological foundations, Gramsci utilised the political
pragmatism of Benedetto Croce, who criticised the Marxist mode of production
as an idealistic economic discourse on class exploitation based on the
dialectical reasoning of the late nineteenth century European Marxism and
encouraged a more robust debate on the political superstructure. Whilst Croce
influenced Gramsci on his conceptualisation of power and politics and class
domination, it is at times hard to identify Gramsci’s political position because
of his constant revisions of his own ideas in the Prison Notebooks.

For Gramsci, the survivability of a historic-bloc rests very much upon the
skills of organic intellectuals and this bloc is in crisis should it alienate the civil
society, in particular the proletariat and the working classes and give rise to
both social and revolutionary consciousness that will lead to mass protests and
civil disorder that will undermine the legitimacy of the elite and the bourgeois
state. The Gramscian alliances of social forces or historic blocs are essentially
like biological organisms, which are “rendered concrete by the politic-ethical
form”
but one that could not be conceptualised outside its material and
practical content. Gramsci’s historic bloc has three interrelated elements
“economic, political-ideological and historical”
and these three elements
shape historical activities and events, including future histories, hegemony and
counter-hegemony.

Stephen Gill in his conceptualisation of the Gramscian historic bloc argues
that “the Gramscian approach explains the nature of the state in terms of the
complexity of state—civil society relations and shows how the nature of state
power is related to the strength of the dynamic synthesis between the key
forces in the economy and society, operating politically on an inclusive basis.
The synthesis between these forces creates what Gramsci called a historic bloc,
which may at times have the potential to become hegemonic,”
and according
to Jim Igoe, Katja Neves and Dan Brockington, “the historic bloc refers to a
historic period in which groups who share particular interests come together to
form a distinctly dominant class.”
There is a consistent understanding that
historic blocs are combinations of economic, historical and political social
forces that converge to establish a dominant social order informed by ideas or
ideology, institutions and culture. However, it is important to note that the
social forces unleashed by contending historical blocs could lead to anything
from populism to social democracy to neo-conservatism. Whilst Gramsci was

hopeful of his proletariat hegemonic project, he did acknowledge the forces of populism which did not fit neatly into Marxist analysis of ongoing tensions between capital and labour. Gramscian concepts were largely confined to Italian Studies but Robert Cox re-conceptualised the Gramscian historic bloc as interplay of ideas, institutions and culture which not only structures social and historical processes but configures capitalist economic and political systems in creating a world order. The control of capital and exploitation of workers are articulated at multiple levels by neo-Gramscian theorists who analyse and problematise capitalist political economy, class relations, historical and social forces, and institutions.

The neo-Gramscians

Robert Cox and the Critical School

By early 1980s, Gramsci’s theory on ideas, institutions and culture were expanded to theorise political power and social forces in the making of history. In particular, the neo-Gramscians were responding to a new capitalist order that emphasised least government and crude forms of deregulation and worker exploitation and further asserting the primacy of the market as the dominant social force in western democratic societies. The neo-Gramscian School started with the seminal work of Robert Cox,14 who extended Gramscian analysis to international studies and provided the framework for historical structures, where three categories of social forces- material capabilities, ideas and institutions-interacted to form capitalist hegemony and capitalist historic blocs.15 The Coxian method provided both the ontological and the epistemic relationship among material capabilities, ideas and institutions as three pillars of capital domination and marginalisation of labour and the proletariat. For Cox, material capabilities were productive and destructive potentials, including the capability of technology to shape social and historical forces in ways not conceived feasible in the past. Whilst Cox was concerned with industries and armaments, he nevertheless appreciated the role of organisations in shaping the global political order. For example, military industrial organisations were clearly defining American political hegemony in the mid-1970s to early 1980s and with the onset of neo-liberalism17 there was conscious efforts by the bourgeois elite in dismantling of the welfare state, and an emphasis on the centrality of international organisations such as the World Bank and the

15 Ibid, p.136
International Monetary Fund18 in shaping global political relations by embedding the logic of capital in all state and human activities. More important perhaps was the role of international economic entities to ensure dependency of Third World countries by implementing structural adjustments, fiscal discipline and environmentally irresponsible infrastructure loans, locking developing and less developed nations into a cycle of debt, economic dependency, ethnocentric controls and factionalisation. A critique of neo-liberalism was further developed by Stephen Gill who deep dived into the Gramscian superstructure to understand and expose the contradictions of the capitalist historic bloc established by the ruling political class that promoted neoliberalism, cultural synchronisation, consumerism, inequality and corporatism as normal mainstream engagements. Gill was a tactician who saw the inductive and deductive aspects of capital and became the most fervent critique of capitalism and the capitalist global political economy.

Ideas for Robert Cox relate to inter-subjective interpretations of the visions of the ruling class which establishes the rules for ideational discourse where confrontation, consensus and diplomatic19 agencies are applied as strategic moments to construct social and political realities of the elite. Cox noted that there were other forms of ideas including that of the ruling class where “nature and the power of the prevailing social ideology” constituted common ground of social discourse and domination. Institutions, however, were established to inform a particular elite order and as Cox argued institutions take on their own life and they become battlegrounds for opposing tendencies between capital and labour. For Cox, institutions and hegemony are closely related20 because institutions are set up by the dominant classes to establish and sustain bourgeois hegemony. Institutions eventually become important in the establishment of hegemony as elite narratives of ideas, institutions and material capabilities are eventually challenged by counter-hegemonic historic blocs,21 leading to the realignment of historical structures and modes of production. Cox established that out of ideas, institutions and material capabilities, three conceptual political and historical interrelated forms emerged including production where core-periphery relations were obfuscated by multinational and transnational activities, state institutions and systems of governance became increasingly dictated by free enterprise states and regimes, and world orders eventually demarcated by capital and planned economies.22 Whilst the ideas of Robert Cox were transformational in the understanding of the capitalist historical bloc, Kees van der Pijl23 and Stephen Gill and David Law

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20 Ibid, p.137.
analysed two important dominant historic blocs: the Atlantic ruling class and transnational capitalist hegemony.

Kees van der Pijl and the Atlantic Ruling Class

Following on from Cox, Kees van der Pijl utilised Gramscian theory to analyse the Atlantic ruling class. For van der Pijl, the bourgeois hegemony in the North Atlantic was made up of two identical frames of reference: money-capital concept and the productive-capital concept where “the money-capital and productive-capital concepts constituted the vantage-points from which historically specific, and increasingly synthetic, strategies for adjusting bourgeois rule and international relations to the ongoing process of internationalisation were developed.” Utilising Gramsci as a reference, van der Pijl constructed the foundations of the Atlantic ruling historic bloc that was based on Fordism, Taylorism and one that subordinated labour to capital. The Atlantic bloc evolved into an increasingly complex entity and employed scientific and instrumentalist management practices to ensure “state-monopolistic controls of the economy, postponing the restructuration of class relations by imposing a reactionary united-front configuration on the bourgeoisie, first in Italy and Germany, and subsequently in Hitler’s Europe in the early twentieth century.” The fascists were able to attain hegemony by assembling ideas and institutions that promoted populist and nationalist discourses as “normal” mobilisation of counter-hegemonic interests. However, the fascist money-capital and worker discourses were fundamentally flawed for it rested on a misguided notion that nationalist, populist, capitalist and class interests of the elite and the proletariat were mutually exclusive. In fact, the fascists wanted to achieve state monopoly by manipulating various factions of the civil society and they managed to achieve this with some degree of success due to internal factionalisation of the socialist movement in the early twentieth century.

Kees van der Pijl developed his state monopoly theory by implying “that the state prominently assists in the task of imposing the discipline of capital on the vastly enlarged industrial working class, employed in new types of industry.” Referencing Cox, van der Pijl argued that there was merger of nationalism and welfare by state managers to disrupt the social forces generated by urbanisation and industrialisation that caused enormous social interruptions. The ruling capitalist Atlantic historic bloc ensured that it utilised material capabilities to subvert challenges from labour and marginalised social

25Ibid, p.26
26Ibid, p.42
27Ibid, 156
forces and promoted a culture that shaped economic competition and elite enrichment in post-war Europe. Also important in the analysis of money capital was the transnational hegemony of the Atlantic ruling class that promoted neoliberal economics based on “the attack on the corporate ‘fortresses’ – trade unions and welfare states first, business firms next – which had formed in the three decades of hegemonic corporate liberalism and had become a fetter on the rate of exploitation of labour.” In hindsight, the populist and nationalist discourse gave rise to a mutated form of capitalist formation that encompassed not only free market principles but authoritarianism and deliberate lack of accountability and transparency as the ideologies of the new transitional capitalism that spread after the Second World War.

Stephen Gill and Transnational Capitalism

Stephen Gill and David Law distinct from Kees van der Pijl looked at transnational capital and its structural manifestations and infestations in not only Europe but globally. Gill further developed his thesis on capitalism by modifying Gramsci’s theory of hegemony where political hegemony of the bourgeois elite would be fully achieved when major institutions and forms of organisation- economic, social and political- as well as cultures of dominant state become models for emulation in other subordinate or peripheral states. In this view of hegemony and historic blocs, the patterns of emulation are most likely in the core or most developed states, rather than in the less developed periphery. In essence what the neo-Gramscian scholars like Gill were doing was using Gramscian theory—in particular his most important theoretical formulations hegemony, historic blocs, ideas, culture and institution- to analyse the fault lines of global capitalism and elite domination and focus on the structural power of capital which had material capabilities to integrate large parts of the globe into a single capitalist bloc and marginalise labour and wages.

It was the transnational capitalist historic-bloc that defined international institutional structures such as the Trilateral Commission, which was created initially as a response to a pervasive sense that the international system and the global distribution of power were in a state of flux. According to Stephen Gill, the Trilateral Commission, in the post-war era, became the “network” from which the ideological basis for a capitalist world economy emanated. This supra-state institution, however, also assisted in the shaping state policies, especially of countries that were members of the liberal and neo-liberal

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30 Kees van der Pijl, “What happened to European Option for Eastern Europe” in Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton editors, Social Forces in the Making of the New Europe (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p.188.
capitalist bloc. Capital had significantly increased its structural capabilities thus
directly challenging and occasionally undermining the relative power of the
state which became subordinated to transnational interests. Historic structures
are shaped by this structural power of capital within the transnational mode of
production, and according to Gill, "the staggering flow of transnational finance
have a much more murky 'nationality', with the result that they fit less well into
the nation-centred analytical categories still quite common in theories of
capital-state relations." In fact, the increase in the structural power of capital
and the decline in the relative power of the state assisted the growing structural
power of business.

According to Stephen Gill, the capitalist market economy of the United
States is now ever more central in the world economy, although its centrality
contains substantial contradictions for the rest of the world because of
economic inter-dependence. The changes in the United States reflect a global
trend which we can call the internationalisation of the state, a development
which calls into question the Westphalian model of state sovereignty. Thus,
globalisation is linked to, and partly engenders a process of mutation in
previous forms of state and political identity and retards the development of
satellite states. According to Gill, the neo-Gramscian framework provides
theoricians with a set of meta-principles to help explain and interpret the
ontology and the constitution of historically specific hegemonic configurations:
"social ontology rests upon the inter-subjective ('historical-subjective')
frameworks that help to objectify and constitute social life, such as patterns of
social reproduction, the political economy of production and destruction, of
culture and civilisation." Far reaching academic developments in international
relations theory, in particular with the seminal work of Robert Cox in 1981,
1983 and 1987 opened up new areas of research and critical analysis.
Developing Cox's Gramscian historical materialism, Stephen Gill analysed the
structural power of capital and the associated transnational mode of production,
including cultural imperialism and social forces unleashed by neoliberalism in
the 1980s. In addition, for Gill it became imperative to understand the
transnational power of capital which provided the ideological and legal
legitimacy to the capitalist global political economy. The neo-Gramscian
approaches have, therefore, reinvigorated Gramscian studies by providing a
new analytical paradigm based on the interpretation of Gramsci's Prison
Notebooks.

Stephen Gill identifies "cultural imperialism" as one of the drivers of the
global political economy and argues that there exists a global constitution on

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32Jeffrey A. Winters, "Power and the Control of Capital," World Politics, Vol 46, No.3, 1994,
p. 421.
33John Stopford and Susan Strange, Rival States, Rival Firms: Competition for World Market
34Stephen Gill, Restructuring Global Politics: Trilateral Relations and World Order "After"
the Cold War, York University Centre for International and Strategic Studies Working Paper
No. 11, 1992, p. 10.
35Stephen Gill, Power and Resistance in the new World Order, (New York: Palgrave
Macmillan, 2003) p. 44.
capital that operates in ways that seek to subordinate the universal to the
particular interests of large capital, that is its discipline operates hierarchically
(in terms of social classes, gender, race and in terms of national power) within
and across different nations, regions and in the global political economy.
According to Gill, “part of what is at issue is how world society has been
progressively configured by possessive individualism, that is by individual,
particular, or private appropriation, while production has become progressively
universal and socialised. According to Gill, new constitutionalism prescribes a
series of measures to restructure states and civil societies based on the primacy
of free enterprise, and the discipline of capital operating broadly within the
constraints of classical liberal notions of the rule of law.”37 Gill, van der Pijl
and Cox appreciate the role played by culture in hegemonic formations but
these are not central to their analysis of the international economic system. Gill
adopts a Gramscian framework to analyse transnational capital which allows
hegemonic powers like to the US to dominate the global political economy.
Kees van der Pijl is concerned with the relative power of the Atlantic ruling
class and Cox utilised Gramscian framework to look at social forces in the
making of international historic blocs.

All three neo-Gramscian scholars construct an interlocking model that
analyses ideas, institutions and culture in the making of the capitalist world
order as well as sustaining the global political economy as a capitalist historic
bloc. The model also is customised by Kees van der Pijl to analyse regional
social forces, including the creation of the Atlantic ruling class.

World, Past and Present at the International Studies, Association Annual Convention, Los
The neo-Gramscian model imposes that ideas, institutions and culture forms the foundation of capitalist hegemonic social forces that operate within the logic of capital. Elite domination is established by engineering political institutions, economic systems, and governance frameworks that work hand in glove to sustain a regime of commodification, capital accumulation and labour exploitation. Capitalist ideas emerge from experiences where ethnicity, class, capital, labour, technology and policies intersect to form the political apparatus on control and consensus. According to Henk Overbeek, consensus is “constantly re-worked through, the agency of social forces, both those forces (fractions of the bourgeoisie, privileged layers of the working class, etc.) which are (being) incorporated into the historic bloc as well as those oppositional and counter-hegemonic forces that attempt to block or deflect this emerging new historic bloc.” Whilst capitalist control and class continues to play an underlying theme in elite political and economic discourses, the dominant social forces assumes hegemony whereas marginalised and exploited groups contemplate counter-hegemony with aims to assemble deliberative and

alternative ideas, institutions and culture of the subaltern. However, marginalised voices often struggle to establish counter hegemony because they do not have structural, relational or constitutive power to counter capital exploitation. Stephen Gill and Claire Cutler summarised the neo-Gramscian model as one characterised by bourgeois control: “bourgeois hegemony implies the rule and forward-looking leadership of a bloc of social forces drawn from political and civil society, which sustains the existing order by incorporating and gaining the consent of subordinate social classes, presenting its leadership as legitimate and operating as if it is in a general or universal interest.” Moreover, the elite bourgeoisie system is highly complex and entails an elaborate system of coercion and consent, token welfare and exploitative reign of free market mechanisms.

Robert Cox heard the voices of neo-liberalism and re-analysed the purpose of historical forces and argued that “historical structure is a picture of a particular configuration of forces.” Cox re-casted Gramscian ideas and developed a conceptual model for analysing hegemony, historic blocs and material capabilities by extending the state centric applications of Gramscian historic on to the international arena and argued that capitalist power, production and social forces operated in both the core and the periphery by marginalising workers. Cox’s Gramscian international historic bloc influenced the works of Kees Van der Pijl in their analysis of the Atlantic hegemonic historic bloc and Stephen Gill and David Law’s global political economy and transnational hegemony.

However, since the 1980s, there have been a number of academics who questioned the silence of ethnicity and culture in the neo-Gramscian approach. Randolph Persaud analysed the significance of race and ethnicity in informing global colour lines. Hannes Lacher argued that the Coxian method was a response to the rise of neo-liberalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s and was too focused on the North American experience whereas Owen Worth observed that the neo-Gramscians have not considered the works of Gramscian and Marxist theorists such as Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and Ernesto Laclau.

Critics of the Neo-Gramscians

What Cox, van der Pijl and Gill were missing was the significant role

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played by race and ethnicity in shaping the world order and transnational capitalist historic bloc. The challenge of ongoing absence of ethnic politics and inter-group conflict was highlighted by Randolph Persaud and Rob Walker who argued that race and ethnicity have been given the epistemological status of silence in international relations and provided alternatives on how questions of race might be taken up in the contemporary analysis of international relations.\textsuperscript{44} Quoting Haitian historian Michel-Ralph Trouillott,\textsuperscript{45} Persaud and Walker describe this status of silence as the moment of fact creation, the moment of fact assembly, the moment of retrieval and the moment of retrospective significance. Fact creation was discourses on white historical narratives where those of black or brown skins were identified as ahistorical anomalies in the overall colonial imaginary. Fact retrieval was an act of white conceptualisation where selective memory of white historians was utilised to re-write race and ethnic history of mostly exploited peoples, and the moment of retrieval was the point when black and coloured historians challenged, documented and published alternative social and political discourses.

However, Coxian methods have been criticised by other Marxist and Gramscian scholars as focused too much on North American and European experiences. Hannes Lacher argued that “historical materialism of Cox cannot be considered a successful reconstruction of historical materialism” because of self-limiting quality of the categories and concepts he deploys.\textsuperscript{46} Lacher continues that successful reconstruction of his analytical framework was based on “escape movement of the 1980s,”\textsuperscript{47} and has inherent bias in elite centric, top-down, instrumentalism.\textsuperscript{48} However, Lacher’s analysis fails to appreciate that the neo-Gramscian project of Cox was aimed at identifying the contradictions of neo-liberal political, economic and social hegemony and historic bloc, and Gramsci’s \textit{Prison Notebooks} provided the conceptual tools for identifying and analysing ideas, institutions and culture that informed resistance, control and counter-elite narratives in a growing unequal North American society. It may seem as if Cox was attempting to unconsciously delineate a number of historical structures\textsuperscript{49} but in fact he was paying attention to the “visions of what the discipline is/ought to be concerned with at the time.”\textsuperscript{50}

Cox was highlighting not only the failures of capitalism but was theorising

\textsuperscript{45} Michel-Ralph Truillot, \textit{Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History}, (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1995). Truillot provided a powerful narrative on the general silence of Western historiography on non-Western events and in particular those historical narratives that made sense to only Western observers and readers (see pages 96 and 97).
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, p.78
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, p.79
\textsuperscript{49} Hannes Lacher, \textit{Beyond Globalisation}, (New York Routledge, 2006)
and highlighting the pervasive aspects of capital that created core and periphery relations within western democracies and developing nations by embedding exploitation, inequality, dependency, violence and class wars. It was power, production and social forces of the bourgeois elite that restructured international and domestic politics and enabled material capabilities of capital to establish hegemony.

Owen Worth hopes to some extent to embed the neo-Gramscian approaches in the realms of Marxist orthodoxy. For Owen, Robert Cox inspired analysis has not taken in to account the works of Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and Ernesto Laclau. In fact, the most significant theoretical advancement in the neo-Gramscian scholarship on culture and ethnicity before Persaud and Walker was heralded by Stuart Hall who was influenced by Antonio Gramsci’s work on hegemony and used Gramscian theory to analyse culture and ethnicity in Great Britain. Hall sketched some of the ways in which Gramscian perspective could be used to “transform and rework some of the existing theories and paradigms in the analysis of racism and related social phenomenon.” This was a quantum leap in the reinterpretation of Gramscian theory because it successfully moved Gramscian thought from Italian studies to the study of ethnicity and culture in one of the hegemonic European states.

Hall developed an analytical framework around seven key social concepts: the centrality of history in cultural formations, the dialectical aspects of cultural discourses, the non-reductive approaches to the questions of culture, the non-homogenous nature of class, the lack of linkages among Gramsci’s key concepts (ideas, institutions and culture), the role of state in ethnic and class struggles, the role of culture in social formations, and the role of ideology in ethnicity and culture. Hall embedded Gramsci in history and in particular in historical processes and historical interpretation and argued that history played a role in cultural hegemony and influenced ethnic relations within nation states. Hall also analysed that ethnic relations were more fluid than class and that ethnic hegemony was sustained by hegemonic ideas, institutions and culture. In essence, Hall stated that class was not the only factor that contributed to ethnic hegemony but there were systemic and structural layers that permeated the social terrains of political hegemony.

Whilst Hall focused on culture and ethnicity as factors influencing the dominant historical bloc, Ernesto Laclau saw the Gramscian historic bloc from the perspective of the “logic of the contingent” where fracture and withdrawal became the explanatory horizon of social forces.” Laclau dismisses cognitive

approach to social forces by defining political hegemony as an articulatory practice that “links together contingent elements—linguistic and non-linguistic, natural and social—into relational systems in which the identity of the elements is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. A key condition of this approach is that all such elements are contingent and unfixed, so that their meaning and identity is only partially fixed by articulatory practices.”

Laclau approaches hegemony as configuration of the contingent that cannot be explained by the structure itself but by social forces “which has to be partial to the structure”56. There is a consensus character of hegemony where there “would be an imposition of pre-given organisation principle and not something emerging from political interactions between groups.”57 Mark Devenney et al acknowledged Laclau’s conceptualisation of hegemony—particularly their work in the 1980s around hegemony—clearly included not only the extra-institutional, but also the institutional terrain, this possibility now seems to be closed off, and a significant terrain of struggle is left aside through its characterisation as “pure administration.”58 Whilst the tensions between institution and extra-institutional remains unresolved, Devenney argues for “sharp separation between the extra-institutional and the institutional, and the characterisation of only the former as amenable to politics, as well as the strictly descriptive and analytical character of his theoretical enterprise.”59

Despite important contributions from Hall and Laclau, the discovery of Gramsci and in particular the roles of ideas, institution and culture have provisioned rich analytical discourses on understanding hegemony and contending social forces on domination and resistance. As discussed, ideas are basically the ideology of the ruling class but this dominant ideology is subject to challenge during counter-elite activities. Ideology is also closely linked to culture and as Stephen Gill highlighted, the ruling class engage in cultural synchronisation through cultural imperialism and constitutional, legal, legislative and political controls, aimed at subordinating the masses. Dominant cultures operate both horizontally and vertically and have the structural capability and power to dominate and subjugate weaker ones. Institutions in the Gramscian sense are engineered entities of the capitalist system where electoral systems, government, constitutions and economic ideologies are utilised to embed neo-liberal hegemony. International organisations such as the Trilateral Commission, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund ensure neo-

57 Ibid, p.72.
59 Ibid, 310.
liberal and elite hegemony operate internationally and ensure safe guards are in place to enable the expansion of capital. Writing in support of neo-Gramscians, William Robinson reflects that “the neo-Gramsicians acknowledge profound changes to world order but many, although not all, retain the framework of the nation-state and the inter-state system in their concrete analyses of hegemony, despite the concomitant focus on transnational processes and forces.” Richard Falk argues that the emergence of neo-Gramsicians was as a result of lack of appreciation of historical forces in shaping world order. Joining Robinson and Falk are Craig Murphy, Mark Rupert, Adam David Moron, and Timothy Sinclair who acknowledge the contribution on the neo-Gramsicians in expanding critical thinking on historical structures, ruling classes and transnational capitalism.

Despite support from various quarters of academia for the neo-Gramsian scholarship, the fundamental question remains whether the ideas of the 1980s still relevant in the twenty first century. The answer is provided to some extent by Jonathan Pass who identified direct benefits of the neo-Gramsicians. According to Pass, “we are indebted to the neo-Gramsicians for enriching our understanding of the complexities of the transnationalisation process, specifically transnational class formation and the dynamics of regional integration, as well as supplying us with a useful set of concepts and analytical tools for theory construction.”

Mustapha Kamal Pasha argued that “the neo-Gramsian project in International Relations (IR) has offered refined, theoretically-informed analyses of the production, deployment, and effects of power on a world scale, avoiding the narrow methodological and epistemological constrictions of problem solving, whether rational choice, neorealism, or constructivism.” However, Pasha noticed that there were shortcomings in the neo-Gramsian

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approach because it proposed a reductionist conception of culture. This misreading of cultural forms “leads neo-Gramscians to discount the scope of the role of intellectuals and the broader social and institutional conditions for the reproduction of the public spirit and hegemony, which leads them unintentionally to reproduce an elitist, top-down notion of hegemony.”

Randolph Prasad and Alina Sajed recently highlighted the usefulness of Stephen Gill’s concept of consensus. According to the authors, the “idea behind consensus argument is that elites have managed to get the working classes and the poor to ‘buy into’ the key assumptions and practices and promises of capitalism as a social system.” However, Prasad argues for broadening the neo-Gramscian analysis to incorporate race and racism “conquest, empire, cultural hegemony, and to the reproduction of both capitalist economies and societies, not to mention the rather central role of race in the configuration of forms of state and world orders.”

Cox, van der Pijl and Gill also emphasise that the neoliberal transnational economic and political hegemony operates both vertically and horizontally within the international historic bloc with significant structural capability to influence global order. Whilst the modus operandi of the neoliberal system may differ among regions, ideas, institutions and culture of capital are aimed at creating a singular political, economic and social discourse based on the logic of capital.

**The Ongoing Relevance of Neo-Gramscians**

The ongoing relevance of neo-Gramscians, in particular of Robert Cox, is that they enable a theoretical framework to analyse hegemonic historical social forces as well as counter-hegemonic interpretations of history. Neo-Gramscian approach can be used to analyse any historical social forces including the rise and fall of neoliberal capitalism which is a central argument of many neo-Gramscian scholars, including the works of those that are not from the neo-Gramscian school. David Kotz has reinterpreted the history of neoliberal capitalism and his book *The Rise and Fall of Neoliberal Capitalism* the themes of his political economic history can be divided into three parts using the Coxian epistemology. The first part deals with the ideology of neoliberal capitalism and its practice, the second part references neo-liberal institutions like IMF, World Bank and WTO and the third part is the culture of easy

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70 Ibid, p.202
74 Ibid, pp.8-84
75 Ibid, pp.85-126
credit and less regulation of financial institutions, governments and international trade regimes that led to transnational fraud, corruption and global economic crisis.\textsuperscript{76} Similar analytical framework can be applied to the counter-hegemonic historical narrative on the environment and those who acknowledge and frame a counter history on environmental degradation and ecocide.\textsuperscript{77}

The neoliberal global political economy was established in the late 1970s by dismantling embedded liberalism of the welfare state of the 1940s and its principal motive was to abolish state intervention in the national political economy, which evolved from the ashes of the Second World War and influenced by the social liberal economics of John Maynard Keynes,\textsuperscript{78} who analysed imperfections of free market and proposed an alternative where state intervened to correct market failures of bourgeoisie capitalism. For Keynes, the political economy of free market by its very logic created huge inequalities and these problems could only be addressed by state intervention or economic policies that incorporated the unequal classes within the national and global political economy. It was the imperfection of the market and most importantly its inability for self-correction that led Keynes to argue for the welfare state and full employment.

The welfare state that Keynes advocated came under increasing pressure from the free market and least government theorists like Frederick Hayek\textsuperscript{79} and Milton Friedman,\textsuperscript{80} who argued against any form of state intervention in the free market capitalist economy because they conceptualised the market as self-correcting system where market contradictions and free market failures are managed and imperfections rectified through trickle-down effect, characterised by fair distribution of wealth across various classes over time. But this was hardly the case. Inequality continued to fester behind the rhetoric of affluence and wealth concentration and social fragmentation intensified at an alarming and uncontrollable rate in many industrialised and developing countries.

In the Hayek formula, the individual pursuit of freedom (anchored in the system of private property) is the main plank of the Hayek program: everybody must be free to enter/exit the field of operations that is the market economy.


\textsuperscript{79}Friedrich A. von Hayek, \textit{The road to serfdom}, (New York: Routledge, 1980). Originally published in 1944 and re-published following the onset of neoliberal capitalism to argue in favour of free market economic forces.

\textsuperscript{80}Milton Friedman, \textit{Capitalism and Freedom}, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982)
Although it is called ‘market economy’, in fact the market is only the entry/exit point into an otherwise intractable process.

Friedman’s positive framework is shaped by Smith’s wealth-maximising laissez faire, invisible hand augmented by neoclassical analysis that perceives the optimal allocation of resources via voluntary exchange as the primary mechanism for economic growth. The foundation of Friedman’s wealth/freedom maximizing approach is the freedom of private individuals to employ and exchange their labour and resources voluntarily in free markets according to the “capitalist ethic”: “to each according to what he and the instruments he owns produces.”

The neoliberal economic discourses which emerged in the late 1970s and the early 1980s were based on three pillars of positivistic, epistemological and free market principles: deregulation, instrumentalism and free market discourses based on empirical considerations of rational choice and market forces, where individual and elite pursuits for self-enrichment and freedom reigned instead of collective welfare of citizens and civil societies. A small group of powerful and the rich defined the global political economic discourses and utilised institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization to craft elite capitalist political hegemony and free trade and globalisation regimes that promoted unfair trade and transnational exploitation of workers. Here the neo-Gramscians, Robert Cox, Stephen Gill and Kees van der Pijl, provided the analytical framework that enabled deep analysis of neoliberalism and the structures of capitalism that was operating globally.

States of the third world under a neo-liberal global regime are forced to operate within the unequal terms imposed by hegemonic entities and the elite who articulate core social, economic and political discourses within the terms of structures of control, subordination and marginalisation. Moreover, the mainstream discourses established by the hegemonic powers ensured economic dependency, neo-colonialism, social isolation, racism, and political hegemony of ethnocratic regimes. Neo-Gramscians like Randolph Persaud has been instrumental in identifying the challenges faced by the global south and in particular how ethnicity and culture in developing countries are subordinated to hegemonic histories and culture that defines what Persaud calls “global colour lines.”

Not only developing countries but historical narratives on fossil fuel, climate change and food security have been re-packaged by neoliberal approaches. David Levy and Peter Newell noted that “neo-Gramscian concept of hegemony can be usefully applied to understand the nature of governance system at the industry level.” The prevailing form of neoliberal governance is increasingly focused on ensuring that multinationals and hegemonic states

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are able to easily influence investment and trade policies transnationally including in the regions. In Latin America, “market openness made countries in the region more vulnerable to the external environments”\textsuperscript{84} However in Asia, there was “state capture by powerful domestic business groups” in support of realigning neoliberal capitalism by focusing on the growing technology markets for multinational US corporations.

Neoliberal capitalism has now expanded to include the growing technology markets that are based on mostly US companies developing and delivering digital devices, digital social media platforms and digital services. Digital devices include smart phones, internet of things, smart watches, body cameras, smart eye-glasses, and surveillance and biometric cameras. Digital social media platform includes facebook, twitter, linkedin, snap chat, whatapp, viber and digital services include Amazon web services, Google, Microsoft, Cisco, Netflix and host of other service delivery channels through resellers and business partners.\textsuperscript{85}

Towards US Technological Hegemony

The neo-Gramscian theoretical framework allows analysts to critically analyse the terrains of political forces that shape global, regional and local social and economic discourses. Of importance are historical discourses that challenge and re-assess embedded neoliberal capitalism which is transforming at a rapid pace to incorporate new technological capabilities including technological products, cyber espionage\textsuperscript{86}, data profiling\textsuperscript{87}, online hacking, digital surveillance, and deep data mining.

Cox’s theory on ideas, institution and material capabilities can be applied to the hegemony of technology companies, in particular, those US technology companies that continuously produces and updates technological products, platforms and services that have global reach. According to CNBC, the largest technology firms by 2018 sales estimates are: “Apple, $273.3 billion (FY ends in Sept.), Amazon, $228.7 billion, Alphabet, $131.3 billion, Microsoft, $106.4 billion (FY ends in June), IBM, $78.8 billion, Intel, $63.8 billion, Hewlett-

\textsuperscript{84}Jean Grugel, Pia Riggiorozzi, and Ben Thirkell-White, Beyond the Washington Consensus? Asia and Latin America in search for more autonomous development,” \textit{International Affairs}, Vol. 84, No.3, 2008, p.507.
\textsuperscript{86}Gary McGraw, "Cyber war is inevitable (unless we build security in)," \textit{Journal of Strategic Studies} Vol. 36, No. 1, 2013, pp. 109-119.
\textsuperscript{87}Sarah Myers West, "Data capitalism: Redefining the logics of surveillance and privacy," \textit{Business & Society}, Vol. 58, No. 1, 2019, pp. 20-41.
Packard, $54 billion (FY ends in October), Facebook, $53.8 billion, Cisco, $48.5 billion (FY ends in July), and Oracle, $39.8 billion (FY ends in May).”

Ideas on technological innovation are generated by a group of researchers in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and these group of researchers carry out their tasks at various research institutions and knowledge hubs funded by US technological companies. The objectives of these research institutions and technological hubs are to develop, test and deploy digital artefacts ready for commercialisation. According to Frederich Wu, “in terms of research and development brain power, the U.S. National Science Board’s latest data reported that universities in America produced 39,834 STEM doctorates.” However, China is a distant second with 34,103 STEM graduates and increasing catching up with the US transnational technology companies by implementing counter hegemonic strategies such as the “Made in China 2025 Plan” that targets “the following 10 priority sectors: (i) next-generation information technology; (ii) advanced digitally controlled machine tools and robots; (iii) aviation and aerospace equipment; (iv) marine engineering equipment and high-tech vessels; (v) advanced rail transit equipment; (vi) low and new energy vehicles; (vii) power equipment; (viii) agricultural machinery; (ix) new materials; and (x) biopharmaceuticals and high-end medical equipment.”

The material capabilities of digital devices, platforms and services are far reaching because digital platform, devices and platforms have pre-built capabilities to send real time customer usage information to the parent companies holding intellectual property. In addition, new technology have capabilities to create biometric profiling and tracking of technology users, including the ability to undertake invasive surveillance and geo-locate particular persons and groups, and use deep data mining services to predict behaviour and political, economic and social outcomes. The most rudimentary form of computer attack was denial of service in the late twentieth century, but technology has become extremely sophisticated with the development and syndication of machine learning, artificial intelligence and robotics, including drone and satellite capabilities. In the last twenty years, the structural power of technology has increased significantly, including the geopolitical reach of transnational US based technological companies. There are three parts to this

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technological hegemonic structure: owners of technology, researchers and developers of technology and technology consumers. Big technology corporations control computer-mediated experiences, giving them direct power over political, economic, social and cultural domains of life – imperial control. According to Michael Kwet, “Global North intelligence agencies partner with their own corporations to conduct mass and targeted surveillance in the Global South – which intensifies imperial state surveillance. US elites have persuaded people that society must proceed according to its ruling class conceptions of the digital world, setting the foundation for tech hegemony.”

The US technology hegemony also displays a pervasive form of technological structural power aimed at creating dependency for less technological developed countries as identified by Michael Kwet. Stephen Gill identified this form of structural power with capabilities to incorporate large parts of the globe into the global capitalist political economy. However, this argument can be extended to include digital economy that is changing rapidly with technological advancement, colonising vast regions into an integrated digital space.

Similar to the Atlantic ruling class of Kees Van der Pijl, there is a new elite techno-class that has emerged as a result of the US technological hegemony. This techno-class wield considerable power and are instrumental in setting up technological research and development hubs in collaboration with government and private sector business partners across multiple nations. Stephen Gill identified that capitalism to operate at its optimum state, it requires set of rules, procedures and regulations that operate transnationally and this is achieved by the constitution of global capitalism. Similarly, the political economy of technology requires similar constitution where design, deployment and use of digital artefacts are regulated across states through a set of common rules and procedures.

These rules and procedures are now part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and World Trade Organisation agreements. According to Gaël Le Reux, the United States proposed its gold standard for digital trade and it “reflected the appropriately strong copyright protection and enforcement that (exist) in U.S. law and at the same time guaranteed that the TPP didn’t go beyond US law. In other words, it was a fairly straightforward projection of the United States’ Digital Millennium Copyright Act with unprecedented geographical coverage.” The TPP provision was aimed at ensuring that rules and procedures were firmly in place to support US technological hegemony. However, following US pull out from TPP, the new US government under the

leadership of Donald Trump sought strong intellectual protections from the World Trade Organisations for its digital infrastructure.\textsuperscript{97} Whilst not succumbing to retroactive analytics, the material capabilities of hegemonic and non-hegemonic actors, as described by Robert Cox, Stephen Gill and Kees Van der Pijl, continue to play decisive roles in shaping the international order and the global political economy. The international discourse has shifted from the traditional social forces and power relations of neoliberal economics to the one where distributed zones of digital transnational digital hegemony determine production, social and economic forces in the making of hegemony and to some extent counter-hegemony. The neo-Gramscian framework, as discussed, has a projective element that can be used to analyse contemporary US technological hegemony.

Conclusion

Gramscian theories on ideas, institutions, and culture provided the epistemological tools to critically examine political hegemony and potentially counter hegemony. Gramscian scholars in the 1970s started to re-examine ideas institutions and culture in the west and in 1981, Robert Cox extended Gramscian critical analysis to international studies by emphasising the role of ideas, institutions and material capabilities in the making of the hegemonic historic bloc. The Coxian epistemology was extended and enriched by Kees van der Pijl and Stephen Gill who applied critical theory to capitalist class social forces in Europe and to the capitalist and neo-liberal global political economy. The Atlantic ruling class was central to van der Pijl’s analysis whilst Gill focused on transnational capitalism, Trilateral Commission and capitalist social forces and its global domination. Randolph Persaud questioned the silence of ethnicity in international relations and Hannes Lacher and Owen Worth highlighted the limitations of the Coxian approach as focused on North American political experience. Nevertheless, Gramscian theory continues to provide a rich framework for academic discourses on contemporary US technological hegemony where Neoliberal capitalism has now expanded to include the growing technology markets that are based on mostly US companies developing and delivering digital devices, digital social media platforms and digital services.