Consent and Submission: Aspects of Gramsci’s Theory of the Political and Civil Society

Vasilis Maglaras

Abstract
This article examines the concept of civil society as developed in the Gramscian theory under the prism of its ideological correlations, that is, as the field of development and reproduction of consent and submission to the political. It is in the framework of this analysis that the question of whether the Gramscian theory can become a modern instrument of theoretical elaboration of the forms that civil society is taking today is raised. Moreover, the concept of the state and the role the concept of hegemony has in the analysis of the class struggle which takes on the character of “intellectual struggle” is considered. Furthermore the relationship between the meaning of hegemony and that of ideology is developed as well as that between consent and submission. Within the aforementioned analysis, the article attempts among other things to bring forward the multiple antinomies Gramsci faces and which extend throughout his theory. Finally, it is argued that the validity of Gramscian theory, in connection to the questions raised in the present article, is limited only to the interwar period and has little analytical value for contemporary sociopolitical reality.

Keywords
Gramsci, Civil Society, Hegemony, Ideology, Marxism

Introduction
A main issue regarding Gramscian theory in general concerns its interpreting ability when one is dealing with modern social phenomena, such as a civil society. Is it a theory with analytical capabilities or simply a theory that states reservations against citizens organizations, because it associates them with the bourgeois class and its values? In the second case, the citizens unions lose their autonomy completely and their goals are totally absorbed by those of the society, as understood under the restricting meaning accorded to it by Marxist theory.

The concept of civil society, its ideological content, and its political reserves in general, have been the subject of multiple interpretations and conflicting theories. The limit of all the attempted analyses is the theoretical tradition used first to understand and second to interpret this phenomenon. However, the analysis is almost always connected to the historical context, the historical period, in the frame of which the said understanding is attempted. This is the cause, to a great extent, of the multiplicity of interpretations, that is, of the differentiation of the civil society phenomenon depending on the historical period of its emergence. In the following pages we will deal with the understanding of civil society by Gramsci, the contradictions, the ambiguities, and the analytical inefficiencies that his analysis presents. We will also try to show why his analysis for civil society cannot be a useful tool of understanding modern civil society institutions.

Civil Society As Mediation
Civil society appears in Gramscian theory as the mediating agent of the special (selfish) interest to the general (social) and consequently as a cause of rupture of the general interest. As a place of formation and reproduction of bourgeois values, the particular identity of the bourgeois class, it is a first stage in the competition of the social classes, a first phase in the struggle for ideological hegemony. Civil society thus appears as a place in which the relations of state and economy, private and public sphere are redefined, under the terms of an ideological competition that is expressed through hegemony. However, the differentiation of Gramsci from the Marxist tradition can be summarized in the disentanglement or the separation of the concept of civil society from the narrow concept of economic interaction.1 So, the interpretation of the phenomenon should now turn to the area of culture and the interaction of values of the public and the private spheres. This shift is of special interest, when we ponder that the analysis now passes to the level of superstructure,2 as far as the hegemony of the bourgeois values is concerned and it transforms the revolutionary project into an ideological

1 Greek Open University, Athens, Greece

Corresponding Author:
Vasilis Maglaras, Greek Open University–European Studies, P.O. BOX 16031, Athens 11503, Greece
Email: maglar@ath.forthnet.gr
struggle for the dominance of values in the area between state and economy. As Bobbio (1979) states, “Civil society in Gramsci does not belong to the structural moment, but to the superstructural one” (p. 30). Civil society can now become, according to Gramsci, the modern area of class struggle and competition and be used, in a sense, as a tool in serving class interests.

For Gramsci, political struggle, “the war of positions,” is the substrate of ideological dominance on the level of civil society and is therefore a voluntaristic element to the class struggle. Through this struggle in the field of civil society, the terms of hegemony shall be reversed initially in the field of ideas and afterward in the field of politics. At the point where hegemony in the field of ideas shall belong to the working class, the necessity for further existence shall cease for civil society, that is, the institutional interventions between the economic system and the political system. These multiple institutional mediations of the special interests, which are called civil society, shall cease, according to Gramsci, to be an element of the social in the socialist society, because the material conditions for their existence shall no longer exist. As one can see, the identification of civil society as an embankment for the protection of the hegemony of the ideological primacy of the bourgeois class is a particular element in the Marxist theory that Gramsci introduced and it is immediately connected with the Leninist model of transition to socialism. To defeat the bourgeois state, the institutions that mediate for it on the level of civil society must first be conquered. A new change in values or culture is thus required, where the new intellectuals of the working class shall hold a central role.

The rejection of economic determinism by Gramsci led his theoretical analyses to a more flexible historical-interpreting model for understanding social relations, to a more realistic ad hoc model, that takes more into account the historical juncture and the correlation of powers to understand the social. Within this frame, more emphasis is placed on the ability that people possess to alter their living conditions, and the reasons for which the conquest of the state has not (yet) been achieved are shown in a more empirical (realistic) manner. Gramsci understands that in the interwar period civil society, the multiple mediations between state and workers operate as a “machine” producing and reproducing consent, as an ideological mechanism, a political force which secures consent to the hegemony of the dominant class. The church, the unions, the broader civil society’s unions with their multiple goals reproduce the ideological dominance of the bourgeois class and extract the consent of the workers to the capitalist manner of production. Thus it seems that in the game of ideological hegemony, the “intellectual and moral hegemony” (Georgiadou, 1996, p. 20) of the bourgeois class is better expressed via the consent that is extracted by the institutions of civil society. The class struggle for change is thus centered for Gramsci in the ideological hegemony, a struggle of influence of consciousnesses.

The double reversal attempted by Gramsci, as Bobbio (1979) calls it, aims on one hand to a new interpretation of civil society, via its distancing from the classic Marxist tradition, and on the other hand to the reexamination of the concept of hegemony on the basis of a new “meta-”Leninist approach. The material conditions of production (the base, according to the Marxist conceptual scheme) are mediated by the hegemony that develops as an ideological dominance of the material conditions that reproduce the bourgeois class. This hegemony is exercised via the intervening institutions of civil society, which thus appear as an autonomous area and field of the class struggle. The distancing from the Leninist position of the immediate inversion of the state results now as a realistic historical necessity for Gramsci, one which sees the political society, the state mechanisms, as a limiting element in the class struggle. In the developed West of the interwar period, school, university, and church reproduce the dominant values of the bourgeois class, forming “a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks” (Gramsci, 1976, p. 238) establishing a successful class authority. “Modern political technique,” according to Gramsci, became totally transformed after Forty-eight; after the expansion of parliamentarianism and of the associative systems of union and party, and the growth in the formation of vast State and “private” bureaucracies . . . In this sense, entire “political” parties and other organizations—economic or otherwise—must be considered as organs of political order, of an investigational and preventive character. (Gramsci, 1976, pp. 220-221)

The Gramscian connection of the state to civil society and the association of both with the dominant ideology of the bourgeois class, as well as with the effort to reproduce this ideology via a mechanism of persuasion, that is, the legalization and extraction of consent of the dominated, constitutes the main methodological element of analysis used by Gramsci for all the particular associations formed in abstraction from the state. No organization in the framework of civil society, no matter what its purpose, can remove from its activity the reproductive character of the bourgeois ideology it undertakes. Gramsci has definitely excluded the possibility for these organizations to be serving values and goals that transcend those of the bourgeois class, that is, the possibility for ideological autonomy. Such an ascertainment is obviously fallacious, if analyzed under the present socio-political juncture.

The broader goal of Gramscian philosophy, so long as civil society and its organizations have been associated with the bourgeois class itself and its ideological hegemony, is the delimitation of the revolutionary plans via the logic of gradual transitions. The wait for the collapse of capitalism under its internal contradictions does not seem to be enough of a revolutionary act. The control of the developed Western state will not be achieved via its simple collapse due to the
internal contradictions of the capitalist economic organization. In Russia, according to Gramsci, “the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled, a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed” (Gramsci, 1976, p. 238). This is the reason for the orientation of Gramscian theory toward “the need to educate and organize the collective will of the masses, preparing them for the coming revolution through the dissemination of new values that gave them a critical purchase on their current situation and galvanized them to action” (Gramsci, 1994, p. 14). In this framework, Gramscian theory seeks the creation of an alternative state, via the creation of an alternative civil society, that is, possibly revolutionary mechanisms which shall carry the values and goals of the working class and shall aim to the reproduction of values and the ideological dominance of the said class. Gramsci mentions that

The Turin communists posed concretely the question of the “hegemony of the proletariat” . . . The proletariat can become the leading and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of class alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State. (Gramsci, 1978, p. 443)

The role of the internal education of the working class and the development of a new culture which shall in turn lead to the creation of alternative associations for the bourgeois civil society penetrates the whole of the Gramscian analysis and poses the issue of the mechanism and the institutions of development of this culture. Gramsci does not seem to clarify sufficiently this apparently marginal issue. He does however contribute some thoughts in Socialism and Culture.

The fact is that only by degrees, one stage at a time, has humanity acquired consciousness of its own value . . . And this consciousness was formed . . . as a result of intelligent reflection, at first by just a few people and later by a whole class, on why certain conditions exist and how best to convert the facts of vassalage into the signals of rebellion and social reconstruction. (Gramsci, 1977, pp. 11-12)

Bellamy claims that the recognition by Gramsci of the importance of the creation of a new culture, under the prism of serving a gradual transition into the new state, is in fact the theoretical transcendence of the mechanistic determination of politics by the economy (Gramsci, 1994, p. 15). It is the point where Gramsci seems to disagree with scientific Marxism and the strict definition of the so-called superstructure by the substructure. Instead, he proposes a particular idea of partial autonomy of the political from the economic system, as well as the “relative autonomy of the political and ideological power of the State from the economic structure” (Bobbio, 1979, p. 27). So, in order for the revolution to succeed, the simple development of the forces of capitalism is not enough.

In the Prison Notebooks, however, Gramsci does not manage to present his work on the state and civil society in a unitary and cohesive fashion. In the most important of his texts that deal with the subjects in question, it seems that there exist quite a number of contradictions which raise multiple matters of interpretation or correct interpretation of his positions. Anderson (1976) notes about these contradictions: “There is an oscillation between at least three different ‘positions’ of the State in the West” (p. 12). As Hoare (Gramsci, 1976) stresses,

The State is elsewhere defined as “political society + civil society,” and elsewhere again as a balance between political society and civil society. In yet another passage, Gramsci stresses that “in concrete reality, civil society and State are one and the same” (pp. 207-208)

The contradictions observed in the Gramscian corpus are due to the nonsystematic and fragmentary way in which the creation of his political argument is attempted. Gramsci is mainly a politician and focuses his intellectual attention on the success of the revolution and not in the formation of a unitary and scientifically sound text.

In general, we believe that the interpretation Gramsci offers on civil society is behind the times and insufficient to explain the modern model of the organization of these admittedly private organizations, which however have broader goals that transcend their simple understanding as institutions for the development of selfish or class interests. To the degree that these organizations today set goals via open procedures and to the degree that these surpass the locality and the geographical limits of the state itself, they usually are vectors of values that transcend the selfish frame of reference of the market, diffusing the benefits that result from their action. The unions of citizens, mediating the special interest to the general one, aim for, and sometimes gain the lessening of selfish interest via cooperation and the development of a broader social consciousness, which results from the actions the organizations themselves undertake. The position that sees civil society as a mere product of bourgeois society is obviously a misidentification of its aims.

Gramsci’s contribution is important to the degree that it removes from the analysis of civil society the romantic and sometimes irrational dimension accorded to it by some modern theories, which view this intermediate sphere as being exclusively an area for the birth of high values. It does however go too far by rendering civil society a covert mechanism for advancing the interests of the bourgeois class. The modern civil society
is not simply—as Marx would have it—a cockpit of competing individuals pursuing their private ends. It goes, that is, beyond individuals and the relations between individuals to encompass the life of the community as a whole. (Kumar, 1993, p. 378)

From the above, the effects of the Gramscian reading of the phenomenon of civil society are obvious, as well as the contradictions it contains. Gramsci’s theory is historically but not diachronically consistent. Even though it brought the analysis of civil society back to Hegel and distanced its interpretation from the tight Marxist cloak, which made it the epitome of bourgeois culture, theoretically stopping its total identification with the economy, the reach of the Gramscian theory is limited exclusively to the historical period of the interwar, as on one hand it incorporates a great part of the social to the possible content of civil society and on the other it associates the latter with the sphere of individualistic interest. This places the organizations and the institutions of civil society under inversion, under occupation, and under challenge by the forming values of the working class. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, it is obvious that there exists a social sphere for the development of individual and collective action of a Tocquevillian type, which is separate from the state and the economy and transcends the selfish volitions of the individual actors.

### Hegemony and Ideology

The concepts of hegemony and ideology in Gramsci, due to the particular content and the nonsystematic form of the theory itself, have created multiple problems to interpreters of his work, as far as understanding and demonstrating the existence of a clear relationship between them is concerned. So there exists, due to this intrinsic ambiguity, a real inability to show a basic cohesion of content when Gramsci uses those concepts. The following two positions show the ambiguity that can be produced by reading the Gramscian corpus. Eagleton (1991) states,

> The key category in the writing of Lukacs’s Western Marxist colleague Antonio Gramsci is not ideology but hegemony; . . . Gramsci normally uses the word hegemony to mean the ways in which a governing power wins consent to its rule from those it subjugates—though it is true that he occasionally uses the term to cover both consent and coercion together.

There is thus an immediate difference from the concept of ideology, since it is clear that ideologies may be forcibly imposed. (p. 112)

Gruppi (1972) also notes, “This is hegemony: the ability to unify and maintain united a social whole via ideology that is not homogenous, but is characterized by deep class contradictions” (p. 84). At the epicenter of the concept of hegemony, in both cases, there seems to lie the effort for the ideological association of the interests of the bourgeois class with those of the society as a whole, mainly those of the working class. The bourgeois class, via the dominant institutions of civil society, reproduces its hegemony via the projection of its special interests as general interests. Thus, the consent that is produced in the social is stemming from the intermediate organizations of civil society.

The concept of hegemony also reflects the relationship that develops between culture and force in capitalism (Jackson, 1985, p. 568). Culture no longer is, as with the analyses of the classical sociologists, an apparatus of socialization and exchange of values within the social. It constitutes the basic ideological tool of realization of the goals of the bourgeois class. The relation found by Gramsci between intellectuals and class interest stems from here. However, hegemony should not be considered exclusively the result of the cultural dominance of the bourgeois class, neither is it a static condition. “It moves on a terrain that is constantly shifting in order to ‘accommodate the changing nature of historical circumstances and the demands and reflexive actions of human beings’” (Carnoy, 1984, p. 70) Hegemony is covertly connected to the capability for the use of violence that is a monopoly of the bourgeois class, via the control it has over the state. So it can be presented as consent, via the institutions and the organizations of civil society, but also as submission via the monopoly that the state holds on the use of violence. Gramsci declares

1. The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the word of production. 2. The apparatus of state coercive power which “legally” enforces discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively. (Gramsci, 1976, p. 12)

Gramsci thus shows that the bourgeois class either exercises its direct dominance through the state or its hegemony through civil society and culture.

However, as Jackson (1985) observes, the concept of hegemony in Gramsci shows particular ambiguity of meaning and must always be questioned in relation to the “values, norms, perceptions, beliefs, sentiments and prejudices that support and define the existing distribution of goods, the institutions that decide how this distribution occurs, and the permissible range of disagreement about those processes” (p. 569) The main question that must be answered is, hegemony over what, and by what means? The answer to this question seems to be facilitated by the transition of analysis to the level of false consciousness or double consciousness that exhibits the mechanism via which consent is
produced on a practical basis, as a social phenomenon that reproduces the dominant bourgeois structures. The hegemony of the bourgeois class is exercised via the false association of the working class with the values and the interests of the former, via the guidance of the will of the latter and the foundation of a conviction of no alternatives. However, false consciousness also appears as the limit of consent. Machiavelli’s Centaur—half human, half animal—is composed of the element of simple unmediated violence that delimits false consciousness as well. Gramsci mentions that “they are the levels of force and of consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilization, of the individual moment and of the universal moment (‘Church’ and ‘State’), of agitation and of propaganda, of tactics and of strategy, etc.” (Gramsci, 1976, p. 170). So, while the element of false consciousness, of willing adhesion by the working class to the interests of the bourgeois class, is dominant, the element of hegemony is apparent, in contrast, with the element of violence and submission that is included in the operating rules of the state or the political society. This relationship is neither mechanistic nor successive, but a relationship of balance of both sides of the state. The bourgeois society, at its more developed phase, requires less and less violence to assure its reproduction, to the degree that this reproduction is assured by the association of the classes on the realm of values and culture, that is mainly by the generalization of the self-interest as a general interest.

The priority that Gramsci accords to the element of consent against the element of simple violence represented by the political society directs his theory toward seeking the mechanism via which the supremacy of values is produced, and from a broader scope, the cultural supremacy of the bourgeois class. Jackson (1985) claims that “consent, for Gramsci, involves a complex mental state, a ‘contradictory consciousness’ mixing approbation and apathy, resistance and resignation” (p. 570). The system of hegemony does not base its aims for reproduction and dominance on violence, at the first instance, but on the transmission and generalization of its value and ideological content, to the degree and to the extent of course that such an effort achieves its aims via the evolved and institutionally complete social entity. Fiori (1990) holds that

Gramsci’s originality as a Marxist lay partly in his conception of the nature of bourgeois rule . . . in his argument that the system’s real strength does not lie in the violence of the ruling class or the coercive power of its state apparatus, but in the acceptance by the ruled of a “conception of the world” which belongs to the rulers. (p. 238)

For this reason, Gramsci, in his texts titled The Concept of Passive Revolution and Political Struggle and Military War (Gramsci, 1976, 1978), recognizes the failure of the socialist revolution in the developed West and the corresponding success in Russia due to the existence and the lack, respectively, of a developed civil society, that is of a “political superstructure” which would benefit or harm, respectively, the progress of the revolution. The mediation of civil society sets the struggle, according to Gramsci, on a course of inescapable maneuvers, from direct war for the conquest of the state (war of maneuver), to the ideological war for the conquest of civil society (war of positions), which is moreover located, theoretically, on the level of superstructure.

As emphasis is increasingly given to the superstructure, enough space is left in the Gramscian theory for a voluntaristic analysis of class struggle and for a larger role for political ideas and the historical situation. Thus, the analysis avoids teleology and dogmatism, and the differing course of capitalist societies is interpreted in a more sufficient manner. Gruppi (Gramsci, 1972) notes,

The dominant class exerts its hegemony to the degree that it can realize and maintain a historical coalition of contradictory sociopolitical forces, on the economic, political and state superstructure, which are linked by ideology. Hegemony is thus the moment of the political leadership and at the same time and for the same reason it is the leadership in the field of ideas, that is, intellectual leadership. (p. 41)

The success of the hegemony of the bourgeois class shall be judged by the manner and the degree to which conflicts inside the society shall be minimized, and by the ideological acceptance of the values of capitalism. This amounts to the acceptance of the division of society into classes as natural. The role of organic intellectuals in the processing and socialization of these values is related on one hand to the need for the existence of an “ideological apparatus” producing convincing political ideas and analyses of the social phenomena and, on the other, to the actual role of the cultural element (part of the superstructure) into social formation. The dependence of the course of the social on this “apparatus” is apparent in all Gramscian analyses, due to the special weight accorded to the need for the creation of such a critical mass of intellectuals from the working class, which will face the ideological war that shall ensue on the level of civil society.

The concept of hegemony affords Gramsci the capability of conceptualizing the state anew, this time in the differentiation from the Marxist analysis, which envisioned it as a simple tool of repression in the hands of the bourgeois class. This change is obligatory due to the new historic and social circumstances of the interwar period and the apparent development of the state as the vector of interests for ever larger parts of the populace that stemmed from the expansion of the right to vote. The Tsarist state of the Russian revolution remained feudal and mainly a nonbourgeois state of repression and exclusion. Gramsci, though, faces a new, more complex political and social reality in Italy in the interwar
period. This new reality, the differentiated form of the interwar Italian state from the state of the Marxist analysis, is expressed with clarity in the following excerpt from the *Prison Notebooks*:

It should be remarked that the general notion of State includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say that State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armor of coercion). (Gramsci, 1976, pp. 262-263)

This change of the state in bourgeois society is its new dynamic element, which is the socialization of its ideological content and its diffusion through the dominated classes and the rendition of its special interest, the exploitative character of the capitalist economic organization, into general interest, incorporating and associating the whole of society into and with its goals. Glucksmann (1980) notes,

In the case of a successful hegemony, in fact, a class leads forward the whole of society (national function). Its “attraction” for the allied (and even enemy) classes is not passive but active. Not only does it not depend on simple mechanisms of administrative coercion, of constraint, but it is not even exhausted in the “mechanisms of ideological imposition, ideological subjection” (Althusser), or in legitimation by symbolic violence (Bourdieu). (p. 56)

The dimension that Glucksmann (1980) accords to the successful hegemony, as a generalized hegemony, is connected to the change that was mentioned above, which the interwar state was subject to, in relation to its capability to integrate nonprivileged classes of the population via the generalization of the right to vote (democratic dimension) and the socioeconomic improvement of the position of the workers (economic dimension). Bobbio (1979) stresses, “In Gramsci, the relation between institutions and ideologies is inverted . . . the ideologies become the primary moment of history, and the institutions the secondary one” (p. 36)\(^5\)

The Gramscian analysis of hegemony is thus an open analysis, which continuously processes the historical conditions and differentiations. Within this framework, it does not seem particularly heretical to claim that the Gramscian theory incorporates elements of relativity and vagueness to the degree that its content depends on historical categories. This particular methodological approach is what led the Gramscian analysis of the state to be sufficiently differentiated from the Marxist position. The state ceases to be a simple tool of the bourgeois class. It is a political organism with complex and contradictory functions, as well as a mechanism of reproduction and integration of new elements. This is the reason it adjusted with great ease, as a mechanism of direction and regulation, to the postwar socioeconomic conditions. Carnoy (1984) notes,

In reality, the State must be conceived as an “educator,” in that it tends precisely to create a new type or level of civilization. Because one is acting essentially on economic forces . . . the conclusion must not be drawn that super-structural factors should be left to themselves, to develop spontaneously to a haphazard and sporadic germination. (p. 76)

Competing interpretations of hegemony have been developed that pertain mainly to the origin of the concept but also to the way it is used by Gramsci. The most well-known conflict pertains to the content of the concept, which is in part related to its origin, but more substantially, to the degree it deviates from Marxist theory. However, all of these analyses contain, to a certain extent, the vagueness and the uncertainty that stems from the effort to construct a regular interpretation for any theory. The concept of hegemony, as noted by Hoffman, agreeing with Anderson,

had a long prior history as “one of the most central political slogans in the Russian Social-Democratic movement, from the late 1890s to 1917” and was taken by Axelrod, Martov and Lenin to refer to the role of the working class as a leading force in the fight for democracy. (Hoffman, 1984, p. 52)\(^6\)

This concept, in the form above, dominated the Russian theoretical camp and perhaps that is where Gramsci came into contact with it.

Apart from the origin of the concept, there exists some conflict concerning whether it is itself a part of orthodox Marxist theory or perhaps a “deviation,” one however explained by the need for a readjustment of content of the Marxist theory, in light of the historical situation and the changes that took place within the interwar state, the bourgeois class, and the economic organization. Hoffman (1984) claims that many important analysts of Gramscian theory, such as Bobbio, Adamson, and Mouffe, having taken the Marxist theory of the state as instrumental, have resorted to fallacious readings of Gramsci on the second level, due to the misunderstanding of the Marxist theory (Hoffman, 1984, p. 51). However, of no particular aid to developing a coherent position relating to the historicity of the concept and to its content is the same vague and sometimes contradictory or differing use from period to period by Gramsci himself. Glucksmann (1980) has located, with particular success, these uses throughout the Gramscian corpus, which is to say in the so-called *Political Writings* and in the *Prison Notebooks*. Hoffman, in his effort to support his position that the Gramscian corpus is neither revisionist, nor does it apply to its contemporary version of social democracy, as Femia (1987) has argued, makes a very interesting argument. He notes that

The term had a wider applicability, for why did Lenin regard proletarian leadership as so essential in the
struggle for democracy? Precisely because in Tsarist Russia, as in Marx’s Germany of 1848, the bourgeois appeared too weak to provide the kind of revolutionary leadership which their historical counterparts like the French Jacobins had been able to display. (Hoffman, 1984, p. 56)

However, the good theoretical moments of the Gramscian theory cannot obscure the fact that this view was unable to sufficiently construct a coherent body of analyses that on one hand completely understands and on the other transcends the special historical juncture within which it develops. Hoffman (1984) shows this dimension of the Gramscian corpus as follows: “Yet, his attempt, for all its pioneering significance, falls. Where the classics present synthesis without analysis, Gramsci offers analysis without synthesis and so the challenge of the Machiavellian Centaur, how to unite synthetically the analytically separate, still remains” (p. 75).

Conclusions

Whichever view one may adopt concerning the Gramscian concept of hegemony, or Gramsci’s overall theory, to the degree that it can be considered a unified and systematic view of the social, it is an interesting aspect of the Marxist theory, clearly integrated in the revisionist camp. Gramsci had understood not only the multiple political and socioeconomic changes which took place at the beginning of the 20th century but also the different level of development of the state, the bourgeois society, and civil society that is observed between Russia and the rest of the West. Because the goal is the revolution and the inversion of the multiple class divisions that the bourgeois society entails, he can only adjust his theoretical goals so that his analyses can interpret the new socioeconomic phenomena with adequacy. This adjustment, however, gave birth to multiple antinomies which removed the possibility of the Gramscian corpus ever becoming a modern Marxist view of the social.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

Notes

1. Carnoy (1984) notes the following on the subject of civil society in Gramsci: “He provides an analysis of historical development that rejects the narrower Marxist version of civil society as incomplete and not relevant to the Western (Italian) situation” (p. 75).

2. The concept that Gramsci is the theoretician of the superstructure, breaking with the “orthodox” Marxist tradition, has been developed mainly by Bobbio (1979, pp. 21-47). However, against Bobbio’s argument, who ranks the overall Gramscian analysis at the level of superstructure, there exists strong and, to a certain degree, valid critique. See the classic study of Glucksmann (1980, chap. 3, especially, notes, 5, 64), as well as Jones Steve (2006). Moreover, for an analysis true to the “structure–superstructure” model, See. Ransome (1992) and Femia (1987).

3. Carnoy (1984) has made an interesting categorization of the concept of “war of positions” on the basis of four main characteristics (pp. 81-85). Also cf. Ransome (1992, pp. 144-150), Femia (1987, pp. 50-60), and Anderson (1976, pp. 8-9).

4. Moreover, Gramsci states, “Government with the consent of the governed—but with this consent organized, and not generic and vague as it is expressed in the instant of elections. The State does have and request consent, but it also ‘educates’ this consent, by means of the political and syndical associations; these, however, are private organisations, left to the private initiative of the ruling class” (Gramsci, 1976, p. 259).

5. Of exceptional importance to understanding how civil society is associated with the bourgeois society and the state is the essay of Gramsci, “Hegemony (civil society) and separation of powers” (Gramsci, 1976, pp. 245-246).

6. This realization is better seen in the following excerpt: “But what does that signify if not that by ‘State’ should be understood not only the apparatus of government, but also the ‘private’ apparatus of ‘hegemony’ or civil society?” (Gramsci, 1976, p. 261).

7. Mouzelis and Pagoulatos (2003) put forward a new concept for civil society and its institutions, which transcends the Gramscian and Marxist concepts that identify it with the bourgeois society itself and its ideological and political reproduction. Using analyses by Cohen, Arato, Alexander, and Lockwood, they tend toward a restrictive, rather than expansive understanding of the modern form that civil society takes. This entails its broader autonomy, as well as its definite theoretical separation from the bourgeois and the dominant class, see (pp. 6-7).

8. Moreover, Bellamy (Gramsci, 1994) presents a concise but interesting historic reference of the concept of hegemony.

9. The texts mostly related to the state and civil society are found in the collection of Gramsci’s texts edited by Hoare, in Chapter II, subchapter 2. Beyond the ease offered by such a collection, there is also a summary and an informative introduction to each chapter about matters that Gramsci deals with as a whole in the texts that follow (cf. Gramsci, 1976).

10. On the subject of ambiguity and antithesis in Gramscian theory, see the comments by Hoare (Gramsci, 1976, p. 207) as well as Anderson (1976).

11. The Tocquevillian concept of civil society has been the epicenter of analyses over the past decade, without however its content being completely clear. Keith Whittington (2001), summarizing the relevant analyses of Putnam, Walzer, Taylor, Edwards, and Foley, gives a comprehensive definition: “Dense networks of social interaction are said to foster trust and social capital. Bowling together increases our willingness to rely on others generally and
to participate in collective endeavours. A robust civil society increases political participation, makes for a happy citizenry, and helps secure government effectiveness” (p. 21).

12. For an analysis of the concept of Hegemony and the way it was used by the reformists of Marxism see, Ives (2006). For an interesting application of the Gramscian concept of Hegemony to the theory of international relations and global politics, see McNally and Schwarzmantel (2009).

13. The article by Anderson (1976) is also a classic where the antinomies of the Gramscian theory are examined. Anderson notes, “No Marxist work is so difficult to read accurately and systematically, because of the peculiar conditions of its composition” (pp. 5-78, especially, p. 6).

14. For the relation between consent and submission cf. Anderson (1976, pp. 44-46).

15. For a similar analysis concerning the relation of structure–superstructure in Gramsci, cf. Femia (1987, pp. 61-129).

16. Also of interest is the attempt to examine the historical origin of the concept of hegemony.

17. Ransome (1992) agrees with this view, noting that the use of the concept of hegemony by Gramsci can be seen as an effort to take into account the new factors and develop a revised strategy for the revolution. He has analyzed Gramsci’s contribution concerning the concept of hegemony as follows: (a) in emphasizing its cultural and “moral” aspects, (b) by describing the process of necessary assimilation of sympathetic groups, and (c) as a means of analyzing bourgeois domination over subordinate, predominantly proletarian groups (pp. 128 and 138).

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Bio

Vasilis Maglaras is a visiting Lecturer at Greek Open University. His research interests include Epistemology of Social Sciences, Functionalism and the Epistemological relation between Economics and Sociology. He has recently published the book “Social Systems Theories, Parsons, Luhmann, Habermas.”