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HEGEMONY AND RESISTANCE: TOWARD A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR CULTURAL POLITICS

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Abstract

Culture is often regarded as unproblematic: people may take for granted its orienting ideas and values. But culture is also a landscape marked by resistance, a place where the prevailing norms are called into question and used as societal weapons. The paper investigates how cultural phenomena like ideas and values become dominant, as well as how such leading ideas/values might be challenged, and maybe even changed, as a result of political actions. The writings of Antonio Gramsci provide the theoretical point of departure for this inquiry.

The paper pursues four interrelated topics. First, the concept of culture is examined from the perspective of several major theoretical traditions. Cultural politics is itself conceptualized. Second, Gramsci's insights into the rise of dominant ideas and values are delineated. Here we arrive at the terrain of hegemony, perhaps his most famous concept. Third, Gramsci's analysis of the ways in which dominant cultural ideas are transformed (or not) is discussed. Fourth, a Gramscian-inspired research agenda is outlined, along with suggestions for its use in future empirical studies of cultural politics.

Culture is often taken for granted by those embracing the very ideas and values that orient them to daily life. Nonetheless, culture can become a terrain of resistance when the prevailing norms are called into question, and indeed become weapons wielded in political struggles. Two interrelated themes guide this paper. What is the relationship between culture and politics? How is a "cultural politics" implicated in both the perpetuation and the change of a polity? Such questions will lead us to investigate how cultural phenomena like ideas and values become dominant, as well as how such leading ideas and values might be challenged, and perhaps even changed (or otherwise modified) as a result of political actions.

As the starting point for my inquiry I propose to examine how one philosopher and activist, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), addressed issues pertinent to those two questions. The paper elucidates Gramsci's perspectives on culture and political action, elaborating where necessary to suggest fruitful departures for the study of cultural politics. Because of the fragmentary nature of Gramsci's writings, many composed under conditions of ill health and incarceration in Mussolini's Italy, I will often precede from the varied perspectives of those social and political theorists who have interpreted and adapted Gramsci's thoughts.

The paper is subdivided into four main sections. First, I examine the concept of culture, and from that discussion conceptualize cultural politics as gleaned from several major theoretical traditions. Second, I will delineate Gramsci's analysis of the rise of dominant ideas and values within culture; this will lead us onto the terrain of hegemony, perhaps his most famous concept. Third, I will discuss Gramsci's analysis of how dominant cultural ideas become transformed, or not, as a result of political struggles. Fourth, I will formulate a Gramscian-inspired research agenda that might be applied to

"real world" situations and cases.

As a final note, this paper delineates a Gramscian framework for the study of cultural politics. I do not treat his theory as a whole, and accordingly, do not generally dwell on any discrepancies or contradictions that may be found in his voluminous writings. My purpose is to sketch a useful framework that is internally consistent, and which may be empirically applied to the analysis of cultural politics. In that spirit I will highlight the theoretical lessons we might learn from Gramsci, as well as some of his limitations. Others have examined Gramsci's early writings (Gramsci 1977 and 1978), as well as his notebooks from prison (Gramsci 1971). Those scholars explore the nuances, contradictions, and sophistication of Gramsci's thought (e.g., Anderson 1976-77; Bates 1975; Boggs 1984; Buci-Glucksmann 1980; Fiori 1973; Joll 1977; Merrington 1978; Sassoon 1978; Todd 1974; West 1988).

Culture and Politics

Of the many definitions of culture that have existed across the centuries, a common definition holds that it provides the ways to view the world, making sense of it for oneself, one's community, and one's political system. Thus, culture is a general orientation to the world at large (Williams 1976). The goal of culture in the European understanding of the term is education, or *Bildung*. Culture is to edify us, uplifting us to a sublime and beautiful place above the material world, called *civilization* (Frankfurt Institute 1972, 89-90). Such a rigid distinction between the material and the ideal domains has theoretically collapsed, as we shall read below.

The Stuff of Culture

The formation of culture entails the slow accumulation of common experiences, and interpretations thereof, through which people orient themselves. Culture, especially from the perspective of our own, seems to have an almost eternal quality: with no beginning and no end, our culture will surely endure longer than we will. Humans tend to find great solace in this.

Humans also usually derive some psychic comfort from identifying with a particular group (or society) and its associated culture. Indeed, such identity is integral to the psychological composition of humans. Culture functions in two ways that help to forge the identity of the group: to integrate and to differentiate (Wallerstein 1990). The first function refers to group identity: that which we all hold in common, and which makes us unique as a group in the cosmos. The second function pertains to the salient distinctions between groups, distinctions which engender a complex range of emotions and behaviors, including group pride and xenophobia.

Culture provides the guidelines for human action. In analyzing the constituent strands of a culture, we will find values pertaining to religion, politics, history, economics; in short, we will discover values related to all domains of human action and thought. Those values are manifested in many cultural forms: art, literature, music, dance, television, and movies. The specific forms, while concrete practices in and of themselves, nonetheless, are not univocal: they do not mean exactly the same thing to each and everyone within that culture. The cultural forms have, in other words, multivocality.

The "stuff" of culture are the symbols around which meanings are formed. Symbols can be an idea, like liberty or nationality, and/or can be substantiated in an object like a flag. Such symbols express the values that people hold, often passionately, for them. Yet symbols are not univocal, for they do not express only one meaning for all

within a society, or for all time. Symbols have the inherent potential for multivocality. Groups thereby attempt to interpret and reinterpret the symbols according to their own perceived interests, interests which may be for private gain, the public good, or both. Culture thus contains a bewildering array of ideas and values, expressed in numerous, multivocal forms—even to the extent where we should consider that a society possesses multiple cultures and subcultures. Moreover, intellectuals like Barber (1992) and Huntington (1993) draw our attention to the global stage where cultural clashes may yield significant political and economic consequences.

Among the ideas and values within a culture, some can be delineated as predominant. They predominate neither in the sense of overriding other values, nor in the sense of rendering other values insufficient to inspire people (Taussig 1980). Rather, some ideas predominate in the sense that they help to orient people to the tasks of fulfilling survival needs during everyday life (García Canclini 1993). Certainly, many cultural values do indeed uplift us, but as humans we never stray far from basic needs, like shelter or food. Such needs are fulfilled in the material world, a world integral to any culture, even the most spiritual and sublime. Hence, culture is not isolated from material existence, even if its manifold expressions are themselves not immediately derived from the quotidian world.

The dominant interpretations of values and ideas frame the social and political behavior of humans. People and politicians will debate the specific interpretation of a cultural form, or how a specific public policy accords with their culture's values. By so doing, it can be said that certain ideas, regardless of the disputes they engender, will set the terms for the debate. They set the parameters for political and social policies, indicating the topics that should remain untouched and the areas where debate is viewed as reasonable.

To argue so does not reduce cultural ideas and values to the interests of only one group. For example, freedom as an idea/ value exists for both industrialists and workers. For the former, it is the freedom to make profit using their own property; for the latter, it is freedom to earn a wage, and perhaps even to become self-employed. Hence, freedom does not serve only the interests of one group over another. All supposedly benefit, albeit not in the same way or degree.

Despite the seeming permanence of culture, the ideas and values of a culture do indeed change. Reinterpretations of previous values, as well as new values, come to hold sway over the members of a society. The forces of change derive from domestic and international pressures, often during times of social maelstrom and fire. Culture becomes a battleground, or a field of resistance, as different groups contend over which set of interpretations will emerge as the conventional way(s) to view the world.

The Concept of Political Culture

Political culture, as one conceptual distinction within the broader notion of culture, focuses on the ideas and values of individuals toward politics in general and toward governmental institutions and policies in particular. There was a time when the notion of political culture itself reigned as a paradigmatic concept by which to understand politics. More specifically, political culture was associated with the rise of the so-called "Behavioral Revolution" in the field of political science after World War Two. In the well known cross-national work, *The Civic Culture*, Almond and Verba (1965) devised the concept to account for how an individual's cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations toward the polity led to different political outcomes and behavior. They were

especially interested in whether the citizens involved themselves in civic duties and democratic participation (or not, as they discovered in some cases). The critics of the concept of political culture argued that it yielded more in the way of description and classification schemes than explanatory power (Chilcote 1994). In addition, what some researchers claim as the concept's theoretical usefulness—that of a functionalist explanation as to why societies persist (Thompson *et al.* 1990)—is viewed by critics as too limited to explain, for example, how certain ideas and values come to prevail over others, or how culture itself changes in the face of various societal forces. Doubtless, the debates will continue.

Other fields of inquiry within political science have utilized the concept of political culture. Such would include the political modernization studies. Those inquiries tended to focus on how new, or newly independent countries, could implement government policies that were designed to forge national unity from a diversity of cultures (with the latter's often attendant traditional, "premodern" orientations). According to the political development approach of the Committee on Comparative Politics of the Social Science Research Council, this is called the *identity function* (Binder *et al.* 1971; also Almond and Powell 1966). But the studies often ran afoul of cultural politics "on the ground:" the distinct cultures themselves at times resisted complete identity with the country at large. The Basque people, for example, have maintained their strong cultural identity despite governmental actions and geographic incorporation within the larger national identity known as Spain. In many political modernization studies the implicit and explicit judgements as to what is or is not modern in a political culture have faced criticism for elitist tendencies, for suppression of viable differences, and for being advocates of pro-Western values.

To address the theoretical lacuna of explaining the rise of value orientations within a political culture, we can turn to the studies of post-materialism, a term originating in the work of Ronald Inglehart (*e.g.*, 1981). Put simply, post-materialism holds that changes in societal conditions tend to engender changes in value orientations and (hence cultural practices), which in turn can lead to changes in political behavior and the goals of political actors. Economic prosperity, for example, tends to generate favorable orientations toward pro-environmentalist concerns, resulting in the activism that we have witnessed over the last few decades.

Certainly, proponents of the concept of political culture will concur that politics is about (to paraphrase a well-known definition) who believes what, and how such beliefs and ideas are used to support a polity. Yet how orientations expressed in a political culture can be used to transform society wholly or in part is a different issue altogether. That is the stuff of cultural politics.

Theoretical Perspectives on Cultural Politics

Cultural politics is an area of inquiry that, while not always labeled as such, nonetheless has been studied in numerous ways by scholars in the disciplines of the social sciences and, not surprisingly, the humanities. Much of the research starts from three simple premises. First, culture may be "objective"—in the limited sense that it stands outside of any particular person—but culture is never neutral because it is in culture that the rules and norms which orient people to everyday life come to be established. Such "normalities" include promulgating the official versions of events, determining what is worthy and valued, and establishing what is to be remembered and forgotten (Jordan and Weedon 1995). Second, culture is "produced" within society via a whole

spectrum of social practices (whether via material practices or via discursive practices is often contested; see below). Political actions, as a type of social practice, help to constitute culture and to reconstitute it. Social divisions and inequalities thereby will be expressed, reproduced, and legitimated in culture. Third, culture is not monolithic and not necessarily passively accepted by the people; for example, resistance to cultural norms and to the official version of history are commonplace (Jordan and Weedon 1995). Cultural politics, as Jordan and Weedon succinctly define it, concerns "the legitimation of social relations of inequality, and the struggle to transform them" (1995, 5).

Two basic theoretical perspectives have interrogated the relationship between culture and politics with renewed vigor over the last few decades: Western-style Marxist analyses and postmodernist deconstructions. Both Marxist and postmodernist scholars have grasped the theoretical and practical "utility" to be gained by analyzing culture vis-à-vis politics. The battles for any societal change or for any particular set of goals will be significantly, some say decisively, fought in the realm of culture. The struggle for the hearts and minds of the people—in addition to (or even despite) their material interests in any given outcome or policy—will be waged with ideas and values. Conversely, popular resistance to domination and exploitation will find expression in literature, the arts, mass media, street fairs, music, and any number of other cultural sites (Harris 1992). Both academics and activists must be theoretically attuned to the signs.

Fundamental to the debates over how to conceptualize cultural politics is the issue of material interests arising out of our embeddedness in a capitalist mode of production. For some analysts, cultural politics will fundamentally eschew material interests, embracing instead a sense of community and affinity with others that will figure into the person's or group's identity (Epstein 1991; Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Other researchers in the Marxist tradition will argue that cultural politics must not neglect material interests, whether based on class, individual or group, lest one be indicted for idealist and voluntarist conceptions of human agency. Yet such material interests do not enjoy a direct, unmediated relationship between the economic structure and the superstructure of politics, to use a more orthodox Marxist phrasing. For them, this provides a theoretical ingress into the study of culture.

Within the Marxist tradition, attention paid to culture is attributed to the so-called Western Marxist branch in general, and to the Hegelian variations in particular. Considered part of Western Marxism, the structural Marxists are nonetheless viewed suspiciously by the others. Structural Marxists inspired by Louis Althusser deem ideology, and by extension culture, to be dominated by the larger structures of a capitalist mode of production (Althusser 1971). Human agency, and hence the significance of an intentionally transformative cultural politics, was fundamentally denied. Human agency refers to the capacity to reason reflexively about one's position vis-à-vis the social structures, and to call into question the precepts and content of thought itself. Such a general conception of reflexive human agency informs other thinkers in the Western Marxist tradition. The list ranges from Karl Korsch and the scholars of the Frankfurt School to British Marxists like E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams.

Scholars in the postmodernist, including the post-Marxist, schools likewise emphasize human agency, but a conception shorn of the various assumptions held by the Western Marxists (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Postmodernist analyses have their own assumptions about social reality. There is no necessary connection between things, or objects in the social world, and the signs/symbols which represent them. Any meanings that are generated occur "discursively" via an imposition of significance through

broadly defined human practices taking place in specific contexts. Such discourses implicate power. Power suffuses through society, and is embodied in the heavy weight of cultural traditions, and in the very lively weight of often coercive governmental institutions.

The conclusions emerging from postmodernism attack Marxist and non-Marxist theories with equal vigor. First, so-called "grand theories" of the prime mover of history and society are moribund. No one totalizing dynamic explains all or even the most significant facets of history. Thus, there is no privileged position—no foundation—from which to discern the working class as the universal class. Indeed, all universals, whether in ethics or in explanatory assumptions, deny the value of differences. Second, humans are "decentered:" no one trait can characterize or fully grasp the identity of a human. An individual is not simply (or only) a worker, a woman or man, of color or not, or reasoning or not. Rather, he or she is a complex articulation of many possible identities from which s/he constructs him/herself. Third, it follows that no one type of exploitation can be privileged as the most central. The intricately formed identities of humans belie any argument based a single form of oppression that must be vanquished before peace and harmony reign.

The postmodernist theories have not eluded criticism from many and varied a Marxist writer. Permit me to generalize several divergent rejoinders. Some indicate that postmodernists seem to have forgotten the existence of capitalist exploitation, an oppressive system which has spread to all corners of the earth. The postmodernist conception of individuals, it is argued, raises to theoretical primacy a notion of free-floating entities that face few external (*i.e.*, structurally imposed) constraints on thought or actions. Against such a "voluntaristic" viewpoint, these Marxists renew the call for class struggle and its use as a theoretical construct (*e.g.*, Wood 1986 and 1997; Rustin 1988). Other Marxists take to heart the accusations of teleology and grand abstractions that often have characterized Marxist analyses. Nevertheless, they argue that concepts like universal values and totality do not necessarily extirpate differences: after all, commonalities between individuals and groups exist concretely in the myriad ways that capitalist relations mediate our daily activities (Harvey 1996). These Marxists stress that the use of totality allows for the analysis of how different groups and classes interrelate in specific cases. Indeed, such Marxist concepts like totality permit us to better understand how class, an abstract category, is gendered and racialized in particular places and times. They enable us to probe into questions about the conditions that give rise to differences in the varieties of protest and cultural politics within a capitalist system (Williams 1973).

Given such criticisms, it might be risking overstatement to say that many Marxists and postmodernists share a common, albeit quite general, view on the significance of cultural politics. Culture is a "relatively autonomous" realm, one that exists (depending on the theoretical orientation) between the individual and extra-individual environment, or between the base and superstructure. The conditions therefore exist that make political actions not only possible, but also meaningful. Of course, how effective such political activities have been, or could be, is much debated. For such debates Gramsci's thoughts offer some insight, as the next sections will elaborate. It is perhaps ironic to note, that of the varied theories adapting Gramsci's Marxian-based concept of hegemony, some—like many postmodernists—stand in opposition to the Marxist tradition (see Harris 1992; Warren 1993).

The Dominant Ideas and Values Within a Culture

Gramsci's concept of hegemony helps us to grasp the consent accorded to the society's preeminent ideas. Yet hegemony must itself be understood in terms of how it is interwoven into society. Such requires us to investigate the social entity that hegemony supports and through which it comes to predominate (the historical bloc), the entities through which hegemony operates (the state and the intellectuals), and those on which it operates (individuals). Finally, we will examine the intrinsic instabilities of the bloc and its hegemony: as influential as hegemony is, it is not all powerful.

Gramsci's Concept of the Historical Bloc

We can begin to grasp Gramsci's relevance to cultural politics by focusing on his concept of the historical bloc. With this concept he sought to avoid the theoretical and practical problems faced by others who analyzed the social power and dominance of particular groups and classes. Specifically, there was a tendency for many scholars to reduce society to serving the interests of only one group, and to conceptualize the different social and political institutions as instrumental to the functioning of that dominant group. In such theories, the relationship between economics and politics was predetermined by the tenets of the theory, not something to be analyzed concretely. Gramsci fashioned a more nuanced and historically specific understanding of social power and cultural dominance (Hall 1986 and 1988, 53-7; Texier 1979; West 1988). In addition, the concept of the historical bloc counters pluralist analyses that do not consider the notion of structural power, and how this frames the leverage exerted by interest groups in their interactions with each other (Lukes 1974).

Arising from his study of Italian history, Gramsci theorized that a society can be understood in terms of a historical bloc of various social actors and the relationships between them (Gramsci 1971, 137, 366, 377, 418). Such relationships occur between different groups in the political, economic, and social spheres. The spheres can be analytically separated, but in reality are interconnected in any specific case (or social formation, to use a later term). Notably, not all groups in the historical bloc are primarily economic in their express function, although as we shall see with the concept of hegemony, such groups help to legitimate and reproduce hegemony. The historical bloc also includes the state and its institutions of political democracy and police repression.

The historical bloc revolves around a dominant social group. A group becomes ascendant based on its intricate relationships to the economic and political systems. A social group predominates within the realm of economic production and distribution because it is the one which provides the economic engine of society (Gramsci 1971, 181-2). Such a group thereby is accorded prestige by the people and is deemed valuable by the state (Gramsci 1971, 12, 181-2). For Gramsci, then, the dominant group is defined according to a Marxian conception of class, which when applied to industrial countries is delineated as the capitalist class, or some class fraction thereof. The Western state requires the general support of the dominant class: in a capitalist economy it is business, not the government, that makes the crucial economic decisions. However, the government does not necessarily support any specific grouping of industries (Gramsci 1971, 182).

The leading social group or class is dominant in the sense of occupying a hegemonic role within society (detailed shortly). It, however, is not the only important group in the social formation. Gramsci exerted great effort to delineate the crucial roles played by other groups and institutions within any particular society. Economic interests are

but one motivation for human action in a society, Gramsci believed. Other motivations exist, especially in Catholic Italy. He enumerated various groups and institutions with roles to play in culture and its interpretations, including the church and interest groups (as we might call them), as well as political institutions like the government (Gramsci 1971, 342). Such diverse institutions and groups as those, we can infer, will make it difficult to alter conventional ideas and norms.

A crucial point must be highlighted in Gramsci's concept of the historical bloc. Some interests of the different social groups—especially in their material form—are satisfied. The bloc's persistence is based on some measure of compromise and accommodation between the bloc's various groups. Conceptualized this way, the historical bloc is more than an alliance (that is, based on material interests) among different social groups and classes in the political and economic spheres. There is, in essence, a congruence of interests within the bloc at any one point in time, especially if the interests of different groups are framed more or less in the terms of the dominant ideas. Nevertheless, while the bloc is based on consent, coercion is never far away (on this see below).

The historic bloc exists throughout society because it incorporates many different groups. It must also be noted that not all groups are part of the shifting accommodations of the historical bloc. The apathetic and unorganized by definition would be excluded from the bloc. Also, some have noted that a group may fall out of favor and thus may not be supported by the bloc (Mitchell 1993). Hence, "membership" in the bloc by most groups or classes is not necessarily permanent.

For Gramsci, the governmental institutions of the state are part of the historical bloc (or as some have argued, the state is the central organizer for the bloc; see Buci-Glucksmann 1980). As indicated, the state is ultimately dependent on the dominant class (Gramsci 1971, 180, 258). However, for Gramsci the state is potentially autonomous from the direct manipulation of any specific group or class. The state is autonomous in the following way. Governmental apparatuses make policy in the service of the historical bloc as a whole. Because the bloc is societally hegemonic, the state thus can claim autonomy via its representation of the universal political interests as manifested in and by the bloc (Gramsci 1971, 182). However, in a more basic sense, the state is not "structurally autonomous" from capitalism itself (to use a later, non-Gramscian term; Hamilton 1982, 24). The state relies on capitalism; it is the market system, and not the state, wrote Gramsci, that fundamentally powers the economy in industrialized countries (1971, 182).

The terrain of the Western state consists of two features. First, it includes the institutions that perform political functions like the legislatures, executives and judiciaries, regardless of whether the specific form of government was fascist or democratic. The state and its governmental institutions constitute the arenas of politics in which the many struggles over economic and other matters are fought. Industrialists, store owners, and bankers do not staff government positions, at least not as members of business. Second, the state possesses coercive apparatuses: the state has police and military forces and can use them legitimately. On that point Gramsci echoed the sociologist Max Weber.

By those two features, Gramsci highlighted the extensive "reach" of the state. He stressed the ability of government to reach the citizens through consensual means (laws and policies made by elected representatives) and coercive means (the police and military who enforce the laws). Thus, the state in Western Europe is conceived by Gramsci

to encompass, both political society (the public sector institutions), and also civil society (the private sector of businesses and workers) (Gramsci 1973, 204). As Gramsci formulated it, "the state = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion" (Gramsci 1971, 263; see Sassoon 1978, 27; cf. Anderson 1976-77). He sometimes called this the integral conception of the state: the state "in its integral meaning: dictatorship + hegemony" (Gramsci 1971, 239). Drawing on the thoughts of Macchiavelli, Gramsci compared the state to the mythological beast, Chiron the Centaur. For him, the centaur symbolized the melding of consent and force into one entity (Gramsci 1971, 170). Thus, according to Gramsci, hegemony always has coercion in the background, if ever the popular consent to dominant values should fail (see Przeworski 1980).

The state plays a major role in promoting hegemony. It helps to foster the popular consent for the prevailing interpretation of culture within a bloc. Gramsci wrote:

[E]very state is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level...which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes (1971, 258).

Thus, the state also reaches citizens in an educative capacity in addition to its implementation and enforcement of laws. Government institutions, we can infer, will figure prominently in the manipulation of cultural interpretations and in the dissemination of hegemony. Government arenas will provide the major sites, and the state (speaking in the name of "the people") will be a major actor, in the struggles over culture.

Gramsci's Concept of Hegemony

The dominant ideas permeating the historical bloc refer to the concept of hegemony. The societal dominance by a leading group, especially as regards its economic position, translates into "direction" within all of society via hegemony. For Gramsci, hegemony is defined as the leadership of ideas and values (1973, 235), a leadership that is educative of those who adhere to it (1971, 350).

Hegemony indicates a dominant ideology, but one that is broadly defined, not narrowly conceived to be in the interests of only one social group. Ideology, in Gramsci's words, must be grasped "in its highest sense...[as] a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life" (1971, 328). Such an ideology helps to unify the different groups within the bloc (Gramsci 1971, 328).

Hegemony, defined with regard to the **entire society**, refers to the commonly held cultural values, as well as to a mode of thinking. Gramsci wrote that "the realisation of a hegemonic apparatus...determines a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge...." (1971, 365)." Hegemony, hence, *leads* in that it becomes the mode in which we understand our world; it frames our very ideas in terms of what is reasonable and what is not (see also Cohen and Rogers 1983). For Marxist analyses, capitalist hegemony is exemplified in several telling cases: in the value placed on the "Individual" and individual freedom, in the conceptual framework that separates the economic from the political (Wood 1986 and 1995), and in accumulation strategies like the export-orientation orthodoxy of the World Bank (Jessop 1983). Postmodern theorists would deem hegemonic any set of ideas/values on race, gender, sexuality, decorum, and style that could be considered as "normal" (Harris 1992). Hegemonic modes of thinking entail linear

thought, and the use of binary opposites like good/bad behavior, male/female roles, or "straight/kinky" sexuality.

That hegemony intimately involves the form and content of thought does not preclude a material dimension. Indeed, hegemony is integrally related to the material basis of consent. The material basis of consent, as Przeworski called it (1980), refers to the leading role played by capitalism in organizing how people are to provide for their material well-being. In a market system—with few people owning and directing the businesses in which they earn their livelihood—the groups that own and control the means of production are viewed as necessary for survival, and hence are perceived as the bearer of universal interests. It is therefore quite (instrumentally) rational to view the world in market terms.

We should also understand what hegemony is not (here I follow Raymond Williams 1976, 118). Three uncharacteristic features of hegemony come to mind. First, hegemony is not a narrowly framed world-view, a philosophical concept usually confined to the domain of intellectuals and their academic discussions. Second, it is not a group-specific ideology, insofar as such an ideology is defined as arising solely from, and thereby limited to, one ruling group (Gramsci 1971, 375-6, 407-8). Third, and quite importantly, hegemony does not involve coercion. We do not have to be forced into believing the hegemonic interpretations of events, for such are natural to us. Gramsci believed that coercion does make not a solid ground for compelling and enduring values.

For Gramsci, hegemony can be exercised at various geographic scales: national, international, and global (Gramsci 1971, 350). Indeed, he wrote of Western culture as being globally hegemonic (1971, 416-7). Nonetheless, due to his acceptance of countries as sites of struggle, Gramsci stressed that the analytical point of departure must be national (1971, 240-1). Such a global hegemony, by inference, points to the dominance of a group or class on a wider scale. Correspondingly, the different international and global actors will have interests that may or may not harmonize with the hegemony wielded by a national group. Also, we can theorize that the interests of international groups may not harmonize with the interests of the subordinate groups within a country's bloc. Hence, the (domestic) alliances constituting a historical bloc may face internal tensions, especially if the hegemonic views within their country do not mesh with the interests that may lie at the heart of the leading group's external alliances with foreign actors.

After having discussed hegemony and how it is exerted by a dominant social group or class and the state, we should turn to a discussion of the object towards which hegemony is directed, namely, the individuals in the subaltern groups or classes of society. Also, crucial for our purposes is the role of intellectuals in supporting and contesting hegemony. In the following discussion we will also examine the basis for a counter-hegemony, one located in Gramsci's conception of human nature.

Gramsci believed that the essence of humans centered on the creative dynamism of the human will and reason. Humans create themselves insofar as they "modify the ensemble of the concrete conditions for realising [their] will to the extent of [their] own limits and capacities and in the most fruitful form" (Gramsci 1971, 360; also see 133). An individual's nature, hence, does not reside in what s/he is, but rather what s/he can become despite his/her personal background and present societal environment (Gramsci 1971, 351). Correspondingly, wrote Gramsci, individuals are all thinkers, although they all do not have the social function of the intelligentsia (1971, 9).

Individuals do not live isolated, feral existences; they live in societies. In the modern industrial countries, individuals gathered together into groupings constitute the working class, the peasants, and other strata. All are impacted by the institutions of the historical bloc, even if not necessarily a member of it. All are within the reach of the state, the Church, and the production processes of industry. In particular, the impacts of industrial production lead to what Gramsci termed the mechanization of the worker—a process that molds humans to fit the machines. While Gramsci argued that such a mechanization of production deadens the body, it does not necessarily destroy the person's essential capacity to reason critically (1971, 308-10; also 286, 301-4).

Hegemony is translated into what Gramsci called "common sense." Common sense is the everyday manner through which people filter information, and by which they conduct their lives. The elements of common sense derive from many sources, including the myriad institutions that compose any social formation. Gramsci discussed common sense in negative terms: it is fragmentary, incoherent, conformist (1971, 419), and is also disjointed and episodic (1971, 324; also 331, 441). Common sense, for Gramsci, conforms to the swirling chaos of different ideas and values that course through the social institutions, both inside and outside of the bloc. Although derived from different sources, its very incoherence would effectively hinder a trenchant critique of hegemony itself.

Given Gramsci's notion of common sense, the hegemonic interpretation of cultural values are accepted more or less uncritically by many, but not all, of the people. Despite the negative tenor of his definition of common sense, Gramsci must be understood in terms of his dynamic view of the individual, as presented above. Individuals can rise above such conformity to the existing hegemony. Hegemonic interpretations are not etched in the brains of the masses. The subaltern can become active and conscious instead of remaining a passive being riven with contradictions (Gramsci 1971, 336-7).

For Gramsci, intellectuals are crucial to creating and perpetuating a hegemony, as well as to developing an alternative one, a counter-hegemony. The basic role of intellectuals is to provide guidance and to personify (so to speak) the hegemony of the historical bloc (Gramsci 1971, 10-2), or the new (counter-) hegemony in a new historical bloc. Intellectuals, according to Gramsci, are scattered throughout all social institutions and groups, and are not located in any particular one (Gramsci 1971, 342; also Gramsci 1973, 204). Even in the institutions outside of the historical bloc we can find intellectuals exerting (perhaps unintentional) influence that could, but not always, operate in ways that support hegemony (e.g., by contributing to the plethora of contradictory strands within common sense; see Rupert 1997).

Gramsci enumerated two types of intellectuals: traditional and organic. The traditional intellectuals are those essentially connected to and supportive of the bloc, including its dominant social group or class (Gramsci 1971, 10). The organic intellectuals come from the subordinate groups, both inside and outside of the bloc (Gramsci 1971, 10, 418). The organic intellectuals are especially useful in changing the dominant ideas of culture, for they can construct a new and rival hegemony around the subaltern groups within the bloc, as well as those previously apathetic. Organic intellectuals can articulate the demands and help to educate the same people with whom they have their roots.

Given the diverse and multiple locations of intellectuals, especially the traditional ones, we must ask a question. Does this make it harder or easier to change the hegemonic interpretations of the culture? Gramsci's reply would probably focus on the

relationships between the organic intellectuals and their group of origin (read working class). The best chance for fundamental change in the dominant cultural values would thus be via the organic intellectuals joining forces with those of their social origins.

The Inherent Instability of the Historical Bloc and Its Hegemony

Despite its influence and seemingly (almost) pervasive grip on the common sense of society, hegemony is not necessarily stable. We can trace its weaknesses through various inferences from the writings of Gramsci. The historical bloc and the hegemony of a dominant group are produced and reproduced throughout society. Because of the nature of the alliances, the bloc can be said to be found in all realms: in politics, economics, social institutions, and so forth. The historical bloc thus permeates society—but such must not be mistaken for the bloc's stability or permanence. As the historical bloc goes, so goes hegemony. That is, shifts within the historical bloc can affect hegemony, and as hegemony is modified (perhaps with an alternative hegemony), there is the potential for the creation of a new bloc. I use five dimensions to delineate the characteristics of the bloc's instability.

The bloc's own composition does not conduce toward stability. Instability is contained within the very core of the historical bloc itself: it is not homogenous, but rather is composed of alliances between various groups with unequal amounts of power. Such alliances are themselves based on compromises between the groups (Hall 1988, 54). It follows that the interests of the groups will shift over time. New interests will need to be addressed, and new compromises will need to be made, if the historic bloc is to be perpetuated in some form. However, the very diversity of groups may make it more difficult to find a common ground. New compromises will not necessarily be made, and new accords will not necessarily be reached among the diverse groups of the bloc. Such tensions would point to the bloc's inherent instability.

The dynamics of a capitalist economy might interfere with the smooth functioning of the historical bloc, and the inter-group relations therein. This economic dimension of the bloc's instability derives more directly from Gramsci's analyses (1971, 12, 161). Insofar as the leading group within a historical bloc possesses economic power, then pressures from internal or external forces could threaten its economic base, and thereby could jeopardize its dominant position. The likelihood that this potential instability will occur depends on a host of factors, characterized by Gramsci as "epochal" in impact. Specifically, he considered that capitalist crises might be the major economic cause that could lead to a complete change in Italian (and European) societies. Of course, following his formulations of the interplay between politics and economics, epochal pressures could lead to societal changes only through the creation of a socialist counter-hegemony and the concerted political action of a revolutionary party, as discussed below.

Geography also matters to the stability of the historical bloc, especially in regard to the relationship of place to capitalist dynamics (Agnew 1987). As capitalism produces and reproduces uneven development (Smith 1990), some political jurisdictions will encounter a devaluation of their built environment and a subsequent economic decline, while others will seek to attract firms to their areas so as to encourage economic growth (Harvey 1989, 136-148). To the degree that a place's economic vitality rises and falls we can expect some tension to occur among the bloc's members. As a place declines there is the potential—but only that—for new groups or classes with oppositional ideas and values to come to the political fore. Such a possibility is itself derived from the function-

ing of hegemony. The hegemonic ideas held by members of groups within the bloc are based to some extent on how they help the members understand and cope with their experiences. If such ideas are deemed inadequate to account for reality, then other values might be reasonably accepted.

The societal aspects of the historical bloc foster possible problems: the uneven diffusion of the bloc within a social formation does not conduce toward its stability. The bloc's permeation throughout society is uneven, a point which is inferred from Gramsci, although he did not specify it in this fashion. All groups are not members of the bloc. Also, all individuals, institutions, and geographic scales are not completely and not equally "saturated" by hegemony (regarding geographic variation, see Gramsci 1971, 182). That a rival hegemony can potentially be created and disseminated (especially via organic intellectuals) indicates that some spaces remain for maneuver against the dominant culture.

The fifth and last facet of the bloc's intrinsic instability draws upon psychology. This dimension indicates the bloc's hegemonic permeation of society does not have a uniform effect on all people or institutions therein (i.e., not everyone believes with equal fervor, and perhaps some do not believe at all, such as could occur in subcultures; see Hall 1986, 23-4). This follows from Gramsci's conception of the individual, as stated above. Given the lack of a uniform effect, there always exists the (empirically verifiable) possibility that groups and regions will dissent from the hegemony. A historical bloc thereby can be theorized as inherently unstable.

A cautionary tone is warranted. Inherently unstable does not mean *immediately* unstable. Also, inherently unstable does not mean that changes in cultural values will *automatically or uniformly* change to a new, common re/interpretation if some crisis should affect the historical bloc. Nonetheless, given that a historical bloc arises in specific circumstances via the actions of humans with potentially changeable interests, hegemony is not necessarily eternal. Its cultural interpretations are not written in stone. Hence arises at least some of the importance that social movements have attached to cultural politics. Understanding the bloc's weaknesses and the limitations of hegemony permit us now to discuss how a Gramscian-informed framework can help in the analysis of potential changes in the dominant cultural ideas.

Challenging the Dominant Ideas and Values

Altering hegemony is integrally connected to changing the historical bloc, given Gramsci's conception of their interrelatedness. A change of the hegemony of the historical bloc could occur as a result of pressures on the bloc. Such pressure could arise from historical events conjoined with counter-hegemonic activities by oppositional groups. Those influences on hegemony would operate on (in a surgical sense) the weaknesses inherent within the historical bloc, and possibly could topple the bloc and its hegemony.

In this section I will detail the premises involved in the change of dominant ideas, as inferred from Gramsci's prison writings. Because no hegemony and no historical bloc stand outside of historical events, also to be outlined briefly are the "forces of change:" the pressures of economic developments and integration, as well as the impacts of cultural encroachment. Although Gramsci did not label the forces of cultural change as such, they are evident in his thought.

Forces Operating on Culture: Potential Pressures on Hegemony

Forces, both endogenous and exogenous to the society, can disrupt the dominance of the leading social group within the historical bloc, and hence can come to effect its hegemony throughout society. For Gramsci, economic dysfunctions assume a major role as catalysts for hegemonic changes; examples include economic downturns, unemployment, and declines in the standard of living. Also included would be consequences of economic development and economic integration. The latter could consist of trade accords like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). In addition, given Gramsci's view of the interrelatedness of economics, politics, and philosophy, other forces possibly could be inferred to have an impact on society, and hence on the historical bloc. For example, cultural encroachments by another country (whether through imperialism or product domination) could have political and economic consequences, as Gramsci noted (1971, 176), and probably would be expressed in cultural politics.

The material interests of the various social groups within the bloc are subject to change due to the many forces just described. Consequently, the alliances which comprise the bloc may shift due to new, perceived interests. Former allies within the bloc may now be at odds with one another; such could occur if one group benefited more than another. A strategy challenging the extant hegemony could target the more disadvantaged groups through cultural politics.

The Premises of Hegemonic Change

I will set forth seven premises that underpin Gramsci's theory on changes in the dominant ideas and values. First, his theories were not crudely reductionist. For him, politics, economics, and philosophy were interwoven into one social totality (Gramsci 1971, 168, 403, 407-8). Accordingly, effects on one would have some impact on the others—but the influence may be indirect, or else very minor. There was no necessary conversion of, for example, economic problems into political effects, or even into specific philosophical thoughts. Economic conditions, hence, were not directly reflected in politics or culture (Gramsci 1971, 168, 184; see also Hall 1986; Mouffe 1979). Struggle in all spheres was accordingly vital for a transformation of hegemony.

Second, facing pressures on its hegemony, at least some of the groups of the historical bloc will most likely mobilize in reaction. The state and dominant groups are obvious examples, but all actors within the bloc, including the subordinate ones, potentially could mobilize. New interests mean new demands, and thereby new alliances are possible. Groups may enter or leave the bloc (Mitchell 1993; Rupert 1995).

Third, the cultural sphere and governmental institutions will become major battlegrounds. Conflicts will occur, Gramsci wrote (1971, 184),

on a higher plane than the immediate world of the economy; conflicts related to class 'prestige' (future economic interests), and to an inflammation of sentiments of independence, autonomy and power.

Changes in the ascendant ideas will occur as political struggles, with the combatants wielding, among other things, what we could call "cultural weapons" (Gramsci 1971, 181). Together, the new ideas and values constitute a counter-hegemony.

Fourth, Gramsci classified the extent of a change in hegemony in terms of the nature of the forces pressuring the historical bloc. He labelled such forces as "organic movements" and "conjunctural movements" (Gramsci 1971, 177-8). They referred to

trends in the basic structure of the economy, but given Gramsci's nuanced understanding of society, such trends encompassed all of its economic, political, and social systems. An organic movement is targeted at the fundamental aspects of society. An organic change would be identified as a basic shift in the nature of the society: the economic and political systems would be altered in, Gramsci hoped, a socialist direction. A conjunctural movement, on the other hand, does not target the fundamental organizing principles of a (capitalist) society. Hence, a conjunctural change in ideas, we can say, would indicate only a change in degree, not in kind. A different elite, for example, may ascend within the historical bloc, but the hegemony established would not evidence an essential shift in the basic interpretations embodied within it.

Fifth, a fundamentally new hegemony and new historical bloc—an organic change—will possess a new material basis for consent: there would be new social relations of production (Gramsci 1971, 57). However, this new material base is achieved only via political actions (Gramsci 1971, 181-2). For Gramsci the Marxist, a focus on universal values and the universal class was a focus on the proletariat. The peasantry and other groups would not in themselves provide the means to reorganize economic production for a socialist society. The political mobilizing needed for a counter-movement would be performed by a revolutionary, or communist, party (Gramsci 1971, 15-6, 146-156, 334-5, 340).

Sixth, although the result of (cultural) politics was to be a new historical bloc, such a task would obviously not be easy. The dominant social group/class within the existing historical bloc, and presumably the state, would not remain idle. Traditional intellectuals scattered throughout society would resist the new rival interpretations put forth in the counter-hegemony. Also, the state would pursue policies reasserting the extant hegemony. These policies could vary from promises of more benefits for the disaffected groups to repression of the disgruntled groups and the counter-hegemonic organizations. According to Gramsci, there is an indicator of the collapse of hegemony and its associated bloc: he termed it the "crisis of authority" (Gramsci 1971, 210, 275). During such a crisis, the state would use coercion, not consent, to gain compliance with the laws. By this, it is reasonable to infer, the state would not use the political means of deliberation and compromise to resolve any threats to the bloc's hegemony.

Seven, Gramsci's concepts of the historical bloc and hegemony take for granted that the national scale is the appropriate level of analysis for cultural politics. Certainly, he acknowledged subnational variation in political behavior (Gramsci 1971, 182), as well as the international dimensions of a country's politics. Nonetheless, his theoretical point of departure was the country, and by extension the national state and its apparatuses (Gramsci 1971, 240-1). Thus, he did not theorize about actors operating at infra-national levels, like "local states" (Clark and Dear 1984), or urban growth coalitions—smaller scale blocs which Harvey (1989) termed "ruling-class alliances." Yet an analytical focus that was basically national might circumscribe serious analysis of subnational variations in the nuanced expressions of hegemony. It thereby might fail to grasp the strategic possibilities of a cultural politics having some effect at the differentiated subnational levels.

Conceptual Elaborations

We can draw several lessons from Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony. I will discuss the state's use of coercion, and then the great obstacles to any fundamental change in hegemony. I will end this subsection by examining how

Gramsci's framework can be enhanced by the addition of several concepts borrowed from another thinker several decades removed from Gramsci.

The use of coercion by the state is more problematic than Gramsci seemed to allow. Coercive measures to secure social order would not necessarily be viewed by the citizens as a sham—a point he seemed to suggest, but on which he did not fully elaborate (Gramsci 1971, 12). Given his personal beliefs, Gramsci considered that coercion employed by the state would not ultimately stop a transformation of the (capitalist) historical bloc and hegemony. But he did write that the use of state coercion might turn people into skeptics, people who believed that no fundamental change was possible (Gramsci 1971, 276).

Let me spin two possible scenarios on the use of coercion. In the first scenario, let us make the claim that there exists a potential tension between the hegemonic values of tolerance and peaceful resolution of problems, on the one hand, and an actual repressive event and its official justification, on the other. Now consider the following. If force is wielded by the government against, for example, a peaceful protest, then such coercion might come into conflict with the ideals of democracy and tolerance, insofar as such ideas are part of the political culture of that society. In that way, the coercion exercised by the government could contribute to undermining the credibility of the government. Perhaps, it would even come to subvert the historical bloc as a whole.

However, another scenario exists on the popular reaction to the state's use of coercion. In this example, the government justifies its bloody actions in the name of democracy, arguing that the dissenters—peaceful or otherwise—wanted to overthrow the established and beneficial social order. By repressing the dissent the country is saved (or maybe the right to private property is preserved). Thus, the reassertion of the old hegemony will take place within the meaning of the cultural symbols themselves, despite the blood flowing in the plazas. History seems to better support the second scenario. Class struggles may not lead to proletarian revolution.

Given Gramsci's dynamics of cultural transformation, fundamental changes in hegemony will be few. Much is required for organic changes to occur: an awesome supply of resources, and a tremendous amount of counter-hegemonic organizing. Moreover, the foes opposing such basic transformations are themselves mightily armed, with massive and varied powers wielded by the state and dominant groups. In most cases, therefore, the struggles over hegemony will not involve grand political battles. Rather, accommodations and new alliances will be the norm. Perhaps some new ideas or new interpretations of old symbols will occur, but no "organic" changes will transpire.

In the case of less fundamental (*i.e.*, conjunctural) changes in hegemony, we might usefully draw upon the work of another scholar of culture, Raymond Williams. His concepts augment Gramsci's. Williams provided an empirically useful way to classify subcultures in conflict with the dominant culture (1973). He distinguished subcultures by the scope of their goals (also see Offe 1985). They can be "alternative" or "oppositional" in scope. Alternative subcultures seek a space in which to practice their particular values and traditions. An alternative subculture does not seek to impose its values on the dominant culture. An oppositional subculture, however, sets itself against the prevailing culture, seeking ways to supplant it.

Williams also distinguished subcultures by their form: "residual" or "emergent." A residual subculture refers to the vestiges of an earlier (either dominant or subordinate) culture that remain alive, practiced by some in the society. An emergent subcul-

ture is a new dominant culture trying to be born in the midst of the existing culture. A melding of Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams will be helpful in understanding the conjunctural changes in dominant ideas.

Studying Cultural Politics

Some scholars studying hegemony are noted for their studied avoidance of empirical inquiry (Harris 1992). Hopefully, that can be partially rectified with a Gramscian-based research agenda. My paper focused on the relations between the historical bloc and hegemony, as well as on the conditions of their existence. Those emphases illuminated how the bloc's groups are integrally tied to hegemonic ideas/values. Accordingly, we can not only describe and classify the objects of our inquiry—the politics of culture—but also study the relationships between the objects themselves. We can analyze, moreover, the social conditions that lead to changes, or not, in hegemony. From a theoretically informed perspective cultural politics can be fruitfully investigated. In that spirit, let me set forth a research agenda for analyzing cultural politics.

1. **Discover the groups, classes, class fractions, and governmental institutions that compose the historical bloc.** What are the interests and the alliances of those groups? How congruent are their varied interests? What is the potential for discord over the interests? Moreover, following Lears (1985, 580), we must clarify the nature of the interests involved: individual or collective, short or long-term, etc. Some scholars have studied the transnational bases of blocs (Cox 1987). Consequently, we should examine whether the bloc's members are domestic or foreign.
2. **Identify the dominant group or class within the historical bloc.** What is the power base(s) of the group? This source of power could be chiefly political-economic, and hence would be class-based. Or possibly the source of power could be a political and societal organization, such as the ruling political party of Mexico.
3. **Determine the societal tensions that grip the national or subnational scene.** Such societal tensions would be broadly defined to include political and economic problems of an organic or conjunctural nature, to use Gramsci's terms. Societal tensions also arise from international trade, production, and finance. We thereby can examine the domestic tensions stemming from trade agreements (NAFTA and GATT), as well as from international economic activities in general (Rupert 1995).
4. **Ascertain the nature and extent of tensions between groups within the historical bloc.** Such intra-bloc tensions could be expressions of shifting material interests arising from the overall societal tensions. As a consequence, they could potentially threaten the stability of the extant bloc.
5. **Discern the possibly changing nature of alliances within the historical bloc.** Do the groups seek to compromise, or else to exit the bloc? Are groups threatened with expulsion from the bloc, or diminished influence therein, if certain conditions are not fulfilled? What is the role of the national or subnational state apparatuses in addressing the intra-bloc tensions?
6. **Specify the sources of potentially rival historical blocs.** Previously apathetic groups, or actors previously unincorporated into the bloc, may become the target of member groups seeking leverage against others within the same bloc. Also, groups dissenting against the dominant bloc should be studied, both because of their potential to found a rival bloc, and because of the possible assaults against them by the dominant bloc. Research could classify such actors using Raymond Williams's

concepts. In so doing, we would be able to spot the range of interests that the groups are pursuing—interests perhaps not directed toward fundamental social changes, but only in modifications thereof. Attention should be accorded to any potential transnational linkages.

7. **Locate the intellectuals within the overall tensions occurring both within and without the historical bloc.** This is necessary insofar as some of the intelligentsia (or defined more broadly, opinion leaders) may not already be included within the bloc. Locations could include the educational system, religious institutions, interest groups, and political parties. Can any of the intellectuals or leaders be classified as residual or emergent? Are the intellectuals or leaders promoting an alternative or oppositional stance? Also requiring scrutiny would be the avenues by which the intellectuals communicate and spread hegemonic or counter-hegemonic ideas.
8. **Examine the uses made of the cultural weapons during the intra-bloc struggles, the shifting bloc alliances, and the establishment of potentially new blocs.** Therein, we should witness the battles over hegemony and its interpretations of the symbols of that society. The nature of the cultural weapons may or may not differ depending on the scope of the sub/culture's demands (alternative or oppositional). The range of possible interpretations may depend on the form that the sub/culture takes. A residual culture may harken back to bygone days, while an emergent culture may recast the dominant symbols in new ways so as to stress progress.
9. **Evaluate the potential use of coercion by the state apparatuses to halt fundamental changes.** Under what conditions might police or military force be used? Are such coercive apparatuses of the state unified with the governmental leaders? Under what conditions will the citizens accept force as a legitimate way to resolve conflicts precipitated by cultural politics? If police or military force has already been used, how was it justified? How have the citizens understood the implementation of force (e.g., do they believe it was legitimate)?

The advantage of such a research agenda lies in that it permits both interpretive analysis, as well as empirical research (Marsh and Stoker 1995). Case studies and comparisons between cases are also possible.

Conclusion

The thoughts of Antonio Gramsci—often fragmented, usually provocative—offer us a way to theorize the complex relations between culture and politics. Culture, framed in terms of hegemony, helps to unify a society around a set of powerful groups and classes. But this function of hegemony is not functionalistic or teleological, because as Gramsci indicated, the dominant bloc and its hegemony are not monolithic. The bloc is riven with instabilities, which an inquiry into cultural politics could bring to light.

Gramsci applied his insights to understand the trajectories of European history and the politics of his contemporary Italy. He analyzed events with an eye towards fundamental (i.e., organic) changes in the hegemony and historical blocs of his time. The Gramscian-informed research agenda that I fashioned in this paper likewise can be directed at such major societal changes. But the marked lack of actual cases directed me to reconceptualize how the forms of cultural resistance are expressed in other (more conjunctural) ways. Regarding Gramsci's thoughts, I noted what must be included, modified, and augmented in order to craft a framework to guide empirical research.

Future work should be directed toward applying such an agenda to concrete situations. Ultimately, the validity of Gramscian-informed theory will depend on its usefulness in interpreting the meaning of cultural politics—and perhaps even in generating a few useful hypotheses about the change in ideas and values. Such research hopefully will enable us to better comprehend culture and its discontents.

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