

Gramsci's Civil Society in a Nutshell**

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Abstract

In civil society studies, Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist theoretician and politician, is regarded as a major thinker, if not, a hero, who reversely developed Hegel's ideas of the state and society. In particular, it is the notion of civil society which significantly distinguishes Gramsci from Hegel and Marx, not the notion of the state. Gramsci principally differentiated 'civil society' from 'political society'. He seemingly rejected the clear differentiation drawn in mainstream liberal theory between the state and civil society; instead, he said that civil society and state are one and the same. For Gramsci, 'State' is a sum of political society and civil society. State for Gramsci is broader than the state in common use. It denotes the political organization of society, the visible political constitution of civil society, not the government. Control of the state is accomplished through hegemony in civil society which is achieved through consent. Contrasted with the liberal concept of civil society favouring the protective role of civil society toward the individual against the giant power of the state, Gramsci's civil society instead functions as protective filter for the state. Civil society for Gramsci is thus essential; a state without civil society is a transparent one. Arguably, Gramsci's writing portrays an intricate and dialectic interrelationship between civil society, the state, and hegemony. Within this relationship civil society performs a dual and dialectic role, as an agent of government and the hegemonic forces that dominate the state. It might not be wrong to think that Gramsci did remake civil society into something more than a mere fiction and recapture the idea of Hegel about civil society as an essential mechanism for reaching a more energetic form of social unity.

Keywords: *civil society, Gramsci, state-society relations, political thought*

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ประชาสังคมของกรัมชีโดยสังเขป**

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บทคัดย่อ

ในวงการศึกษาเรื่องประชาสังคม นับได้ว่า อันตรีโน กรัมชี นักการเมืองและนักทฤษฎีมาร์กซิสต์ชาวอิตาเลียน เป็นนักคิดที่สำคัญคนหนึ่ง ประชาสังคมของกรัมชีพัฒนารากฐานทางแนวคิดอย่างกลับหัว กลับหางมาจากการเรื่องรัฐและสังคมของเยเกล อันที่จริง แนวคิดเรื่องประชาสังคมนี้เองที่ทำให้กรัมชีแตกต่าง อย่างโดดเด่นจากนักคิดก่อนหน้าอย่างเยเกลและมาร์กซ์ หาใช่เรื่องรัฐไม่ กรัมชีจำแนก ‘ประชาสังคม’ ออกจาก ‘สังคมการเมือง’ และปฏิเสธเส้นแบ่งระหว่างรัฐและสังคมซึ่งนำเสนอโดยกลุ่มแนวคิดเสรีนิยม กระแสหลักษ์ ในทางกลับกัน กรัมชีเสนอว่าประชาสังคมและรัฐคือสิ่งเดียวกันและเหมือนกัน รัฐในที่นี้คือ ผลกระทบของสังคมการเมืองและประชาสังคม รัฐของกรัมชีจึงมีความหมายครอบคลุมกว้างขวางกว่ารัฐใน ความหมายทั่วไป ไม่ใช่เพียงแต่วัสดุปัล ประชาสังคมของกรัมชียังทำหน้าที่เป็นโลปองกันรัฐอีกด้วย ประชาสังคม จึงเป็นแนวคิดที่สำคัญมากสำหรับกรัมชี รัฐที่ปราศจากประชาสังคมคือรัฐที่มีแต่เปลือกนอก

งานเขียนของกรัมชีแสดงให้เห็นถึงความสัมพันธ์อันซับซ้อนที่มีลักษณะวิภาคชีวิตระหว่างประชาสังคม รัฐ และอำนาจ ภายใต้ความสัมพันธ์นี้ ประชาสังคมมีบทบาทสองประการ กล่าวคือ เป็นตัวแทนของ รัฐบาลและเป็นชุมพลังอำนาจนำซึ่งครอบงำรัฐ ในกรณี จึงเป็นการไม่ผิดนักหากจะกล่าวว่ากรัมชี สร้างแนวคิดประชาสังคมขึ้นใหม่ที่เป็นมากกว่าการทบทวนหรืออธิบายเพิ่มเติมประชาสังคมของเยเกลอย่างที่ นักคิดสายมาร์กซ์มักนิยมทำ

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Introduction

“For a hundred years or more in practically every part of America, the Church, the media, and the educational system – the three huge organic entities that Gramsci identifies as the fundamental institutions of civil society – have been used to disseminate their own dominant ideology among the social classes, including the popular ranks. ... We are liberating the state, because bourgeois civil society controlled the Venezuelan state as it wished.”

- Hugo Chvez in Caracas on 2 June 2007

It is so interesting to think that there is an idea of person in the past that affects and is widely applied nowadays, especially when considering that one of that kind of person is Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), a well-known Italian journalist, Marxist theoretician and politician who died in the Fascist prison.¹

All too often, Gramsci's ideas are importantly used and prioritized on false grounds and for the wrong reasons, whether by both supporters or resistors (Buttigieg 2009, 25); for instance, the contemporary importance of his ideas

is, paradoxically, made visible by the selective use and misuse of the ideas for politically instrumental purposes. The example stated above is partially interesting which happened in the summer of 2007 when the president of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez gave a speech at a mass rally supporting his refusal to renew the broadcasting license of the RCTV television station. For someone who studies Gramsci's ideas, it seems that it is not easy to disentangle the diverse threads of his thought that Chávez plucked out of context and put into his speech (Buttigieg 2009, 26).

Nowadays, a large number of people apply many thoughts of Gramsci for their own purposes, not only Chávez. Hence, Gramsci's ideas, to some extent, are still alive in political world and are used as ideological tools for a particular reason as well as becoming extremely influential in the academic civil society discourse (Katz 2010, 408). His view about civil society, differed from Karl Marx's, as the site of rebellion against the orthodox and the construction of cultural and ideological hegemony, conveyed through families, schools, and the media as well as voluntary associations, since all these institutions are important in shaping the political dispositions of citizens (Edwards 2014, 8), made

¹There are numerous studies employing and applying Gramsci's ideas across various topics and disciplines. These works are such as Davies (2011) on governance theory, Fontana (1993) and Finocchiaro (1999) on political theory, Salamini (1974, 1981) on sociology, Crenen (2002) on anthropology, Finocchiaro (2002) on philosophy, Entwistle (1979) on education, Garrett (2008) on social work, and Mann (2009), Newell (2008) and Loftus (2009) on environmental studies. However, it is a certain school that plays more active role in employing his ideas and has made the Gramscian approach so popular around the globe; the school name is 'Neo-Gramscian in International Relations/International Political Economy' a.k.a. 'Neo-Gramscian' (see Cox 1981, 1983; Gill 1993, 2003; Germain and Kenny 1998; Ayers 2008; Ramos 2006; nay 2010; Keane 1998; Saurin 2008; Griffiths, Roach and Solomon 1999).

him become the person who “may be single-handedly responsible for the revival of the term civil society in the post-World War Two period” (Foley and Hodgkinson 2003, xix).

In this sense, Gramsci, consequently, is the man that should be carefully studied as one of the major theoreticians of civil society; because of the popularity of his ideas today, it is necessary to look into his conception as Buttigieg (2009) said “*maybe, this is the time to start re-reading Gramsci*” (p.31).

However, this paper will not discuss what is right or wrong in the Chávez's speech or what is misunderstood in other work, but would like to deliver the main ideas of Gramsci, especially the notion of civil society and related concepts in order to set the main line of argument which is so popular in contemporary social discourse. It essentially aims to briefly and straightforwardly discuss Gramsci's idea of civil society by incorporating both his own work and, particularly, that of other scholars who are interested in Gramsci's.

Main Line of Arguments:

Gramsci's Civil Society

No one can deny that ‘hegemony’ is the most widely known concept of Gramsci which is popularly applied and cited in various occasions. However, a lot of his social and political notions were established while he was in jail through over 30 notebooks called the *Prison Notebooks*, which in fact, did not discuss only the concept of

hegemony. There are still many concepts that are related to civil society, the state, and power (Ruccio 2006).

Gramsci's theories, fairly speaking, were conducted in a specific time and place, Italy, namely the theoretical inquiry of this Italian into the Marxist tradition was the consequence of an effort to make sense of the historical trajectory of his own society (Chandhoke 1995, 147). Nevertheless, his thinking was able to engender reflections which have influenced fellow theorists from other times and places.

Gramsci had rethought the history, sociology, and politics of the positivist socialist tradition and mainly questioned “*why revolution had failed to take place in those countries which had provided the classic preconditions for socialism, and why it had occurred in unexpected places*” (Chandhoke 1995, 148). His process of rethinking led him to scrutinize and contribute the valued concepts of civil and political society, and hegemony (Chandhoke 1995, 148; Femia 2001, 139-140).

The correct idea of civil society of Gramsci, to be honest, cannot be understood by studying only one notion about hegemony, the state, or the civil society itself. Gramsci generally conceptualizes civil society in the framework of hegemony, the institutionalized cultural elements or complex sets of political, social and cultural powers, which are necessary for the functionality of the societal whole (Pyykkönen 2010). The term, therefore, is

highly associated with other concepts. For example, Chandhoke (1995) insists that understanding civil society is a precondition to apprehend the state (p.148). a new focus on ideological and cultural matters that initiated an important superstructural theorization of civil society was derived from the concept of hegemony (Ehrenberg 1999, 208). Additionally, Bobbio (1988) argues that civil society is “*the necessary starting point*” (p.77) to understand key ideas of Gramsci and it is the use of the concept of civil society that significantly distinguishes him from Hegel and Marx, not the notion of the state.²

It is important to note that a main reason why Gramsci’s writings seem a little bit messy is that Gramsci’s notion of civil society, like much of his conceptions, is not concluded in a single place in his writing, but rather develops gradually from early observations in his pre-prison work through fragmentary and apparently unsystematic

formulations in several of his *prison notebooks*.³ Whereas there are a few passages in the *Prison Notebooks* where Gramsci mentions the term of civil society in a more formal and organized way, much of his remarks on the concept are intertwined with his analyses of a vast variety of issues (Katz 2010, 408).

Unlike Marx who believed in ‘base’ and saw civil society as a space for relations of production, civil society, for Gramsci, is located within ‘superstructure’, which is related to institutions, forms of consciousness and political and cultural practices (Katz 2010, 408; Williams 1978), as Bobbio (1988) describes “*civil society in Gramsci does not belong to the structural sphere, but to the superstructural sphere*” (p.82). Thomas (2009, 137) also explains that Gramsci’s civil society is “*the terrain upon which social classes compete for social and political leadership or hegemony over other social classes*”. In this case,

² Bobbio’s portrayal of civil society as the necessary starting point to grasp Gramsci’s conceptions has not gone uncontested (See Coutinho 2012; Texier 1979). Coutinho, for example, asserts that such way of analysis, in spite of its philological merits, can lead to false theoretical conclusions and suggests that for a proper understanding of Gramsci’s concept of civil society, one should read Buttigieg’s work instead (See Coutinho 2012, 77).

³ To write while imprisoned, his circumstances must have been extremely hard. He had to be careful when he would like to mention about particular people and concepts which hugely had a chance to be censored by Fascist jail wardens. He also studied theories and contributed works without opportunities to access sufficient sources of information such as libraries. What he did, basically, just reviewed his own knowledge and life experiences. For these reasons, plenty of sentences and chapters in the prison notebooks, on one hand, are too abstract, vague, and discontinuity. On the other hand, that makes his writings attractive and interesting because it allows readers to interpret, discuss, and disagree with in order to grasp and then dynamically develop comprehension about his writings and ideas. Nevertheless, it is hard to deny that Gramsci’s developing and improving the idea of civil society from Hegel and Marx can be accounted as one of original ideas of him.

Gramsci presented a radical innovation to the whole Marxist tradition. He seriously studied Marx⁴ and subsequently added many aspects to Marxist theories. Althusser (2005), one of the great Marxist philosophers, once mentioned Gramsci as the only one “*who has really attempted to follow up the explorations of Marx and Engels*” (p.114).

Essentially, the superstructure is the space of mass cultural and ideological reproduction, and it is composed of two crucially superstructural levels:

“the one that can be called civil society, that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called private, and that of political society, or the State. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of hegemony which the dominant group exercises throughout society, and on the other hand to that of direct domination or rule exercised through the State and the juridical government” (Gramsci 1971, 12).

Compared to Marx, civil society for Gramsci

includes “*not all material relationships, but all ideological-cultural relations; not the whole of commercial and industrial life, but the whole of spiritual and intellectual life*” (Bobbio 1988, 83). Although it partly seems that Gramsci is more similar to Marx than to Hegel as what both Gramsci and Marx emphasize is no longer the state like Hegel did, but civil society—thereby reversing Hegel’s idea, the dissimilarity between them is more obvious in that Marx’s reversal insinuated the transition from the superstructural to the structural, whereas in Gramsci the reversal occurs within the superstructure itself (Bobbio 1988, 83)⁵

As a matter of fact, saying that Gramsci, however, developed his concept about civil society from only Marx is not correct and reasonable. Bobbio (1988) notes that, contrary to what is commonly believed, Gramsci, in effect, was openly indebted to Hegel for developing the term. Gramsci (1971, 208) declared what he means by civil society is that “*a distinction must be made between civil society as understood by Hegel, and as often used in these notes (i.e. in the sense of political and cultural hegemony of a social group*

⁴Beem (1999), for instance, points out that as far as civil society is examined, for Gramsci, Marx’s analysis is either simply wrong or historically obsolete because this concept is both more or less than Marx said it is: less than the entire basis for modern society, “*the base upon which the whole edifice of the state rests*”; but more than “*the sum total of economic relationship*” (p.106).

⁵As the detailed discussions of Hegel’s and Marx’s concept of civil society are not this article’s objective, for further discussion on their concept of civil society, please see Femia 2001; Beem 1999, chap. 5; Ehrenberg 1999, chap.5; Bobbio 1987, 1988; Pelczynski 1984; Stillman 1980.

over the entire society, as ethical content of the State” The passage, thus, can be interpreted in the sense that Gramsci claims that his civil society obtained from Hegel’s and this notion is superstructural (Bobbio 1988, 84). It is possible to say that Gramsci did expand and alter the ideas of Hegel dramatically (Beem 1999, 106).

From this point, although both Gramsci and Marx refined their own concept of civil society from Hegel, the result of their interpretations of Hegel’s went into different ways. For Marx, the focus is about all economic relations and his starting point was the Hegelian notion of ‘the system of need’ (See Hegel 1991). For Gramsci, he specifically referred to the ethical content of the state, namely the regulatory institutions, the corporations, along with the family, together creating “*the ethical root of the state, the one planted in civil society*” (Gramsci 1971, 255). What Gramsci had in mind regarding to Hegel, in sum, is how the organizations and regulation of the varied interests supply the basis for the transition towards the state, as in Hegel words: “*the transit from the sphere of civil society into the State takes place*” (Gramsci 1971, 256). In other words, as noted by Beem (1999), Marx focused on the first stage of Hegel’s civil society—the system of needs—which might be similar to bourgeois society involving economic relations. Instead, Gramsci’s understanding of the term is most closely associated with the third stage of Hegel’s concept; “*civil society develops and creates within itself the*

seeds of its transformation. Civil society [thus] starts with a crass, egocentric ethic, but by and through its functioning, it creates a higher ethical standard, and finally becomes, in Hegel’s words, “the ethical root of the state” (Beem 1999, 106). As concluded by Chandhoke (1995), “*Gramsci is much more Hegelian than Marxian in the denomination of this sphere*” (p.151) because economics, for Marx, was the determining force whilst for Gramsci it is the economic as well as the ideological factors which are important. It is thus sensible to see Gramsci as the Marxian return to Hegel.

Consequently, it is quite obvious that Gramsci followed the idea of Hegel in differentiating civil society from the state yet, as Laine argues, Gramsci favoured some aspects of the Marxian traditions, believing the historical development of society appeared not in the State but in civil society (Laine 2014, 64). Nevertheless, while Marx thought of civil society as coterminous with the structure or socio-economic base of the state, Gramsci addressed civil society in the superstructure of society and made it “*the locus of the formation of ideological power*” (Laine 2014, 64). In the same way, civil society for Gramsci was a sphere wherein ideological apparatuses functioned and whose duty was to exercise hegemony to obtain consensus (Bobbio 1989, 29). Contradicting the work of Marx about civil society, Gramsci illustrated civil society as “*a sphere of both the individual and organizations with the*

potential for rational self-regulation and freedom” (Laine 2014, 64.), not the terrain of only individual egotism like Marx said.

From the broad picture, another difference between Gramsci, Marx and Hegel is, Fleming analyzed, that it was the former who gave a well-known direction of the twentieth-century civil society studies, beginning the process of adding two critical components to the understanding of the term. First, civil society could be regarded as it did not only inculcate established practices or beliefs, but it was also formed a site of social contestation, in which collective identities, ethical values, action-orienting norms, meanings and alliances were forged. Analyzing civil society from cultural and symbolic dimension, in a way, was more than a mere transmitter of practices. Second, civil society and its dynamic, creative side was underlined in terms of informal networks, initiatives and social movements as distinct from the framework of formal institutions (Fleming 2000, 304).⁶

Unfortunately, the application of Gramsci's ideas of civil society is often done in a simplistic way. In fact, his conceptions stress the complex relations between base and superstructure, civil

society and hegemony, and the position that civil society takes as the sphere that links hegemony to the state; Katz (2010) reasons that “*it cannot be reduced to simple dichotomies or to simple anti-statist sentiments*” (p.412).

Indeed, Gramsci was conscious of the complicated connections between base and superstructure and publicly objected to the economic determinism of Marxism, reflecting in many parts of his *Prison Notebooks* (Boggs 1984, 28). For instance, Gramsci (1971) wrote that “*mechanical historical materialism does not allow for the possibility of error, but assumes that every political act is determined, immediately, by the structure, and therefore as a real and permanent (in the sense of achieved) modification of the structure*” (p.408). He clearly opposed deterministic Marxists and thought of them that they, made mistakes of forming theories to explain social transformation because they were only interested in the base, ignoring other factors (Gramsci 1971, 412).

Seeing the weakness of deterministic Marxism, Gramsci, then, proposed the notion of hegemony, which based on the complexity of social, cultural, political, and economical

⁶Actually, Fleming writes that Gramsci brought three elements to the understanding of contemporary civil society, but the third one is not directly influenced by Gramsci but Jürgen Habermas and his followers, which was later considered as the public sphere. In this way civil society basically is spaces, where equality, critique, problematizing the unquestioned, accessibility and reflexivity happen, detached from the systematizing effects of the state and the economy. Located in civil society, this sphere allows people to come together to discuss the matter of common issues without coercion, and hereby forming the public (See Fleming 2000, 304).

relationship. To put it in his own language, Gramsci (1971) noted that “*it is therefore necessary to combat economism not only in the theory of historiography, but also and especially in the theory and practice of politics. In this field, the struggle can and must be carried on by developing the concept of hegemony*” (p.165).

Hegemony, Leadership, and Civil Society

No one can properly understand the concept of hegemony without considering other concepts Gramsci proposed, including those of state and civil society.⁷ What sets hegemony apart from domination is the symbiosis between civil society and the state, leading to the necessity of meaningful way to study civil society as the term that is not separated from or exclusively opposed to the state (Buttigieg 2005).

Undoubtedly, hegemony is primary to Gramsci’s notion of civil society and he based the term on an idea of false consciousness (See elik 2007, 546-548; Lewy 1982; Lukcs 1972). Gramsci employed the notion of hegemony to address the process of political domination through ideological domination. He exposed how dominant elites exercise the state power as well as the popular culture, mass media, education, and religion to reinforce an ideology which supports their position

in the relations of force (Katz 2010, 408).

Gramsci thus defined hegemony as a form of control exercised by a dominant class, namely the bourgeoisie, the modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of waged labour, over subaltern groups, especially the proletariat in society (See Gramsci 1971, 12). Gramscian hegemony made reference to a process of moral and intellectual leadership by means of which dominated classes yield to their own domination by ruling classes, as opposed to being simply coerced or forced into accepting second-rate positions. In this sense, civil society is “*the patria of consent and hegemony, while the state is the locus of coercion and domination*” (Thomas 2009, 167-168). Therefore, hegemony refers to a moment, a socio-political situation which the superstructure align with the base (Katz 2010, 409).

To sum up, hegemony is not based primarily on coercion, violence or use of force, but on the consent of the people, although it is protected by the constraint in the end; if the hegemony becomes endangered in earnest, the state can use its force via police, army, prisons and other such apparatuses.

Showstack-Sassoon (1982) mentions that a way of life and thought, in hegemony, is dominant and spread across society to instill norms, values

⁷Actually, Gramsci is not the first person who talk about hegemony, but he is the one that broaden and deepen the notion with cultural and intellectual aspects (See Hoffman 1984, 55).

and tastes, political practices, and social relations. The norms play a crucial role in the hegemony.⁸ Hegemony infuses the society to such an extent that it equates to the reality of social experience. People, consequently, contribute to the reproduced dominance of the ruling class by welcoming the dominant culture's values and assumptions as their own ones. In other words, repression is replaced by inculcation (Moen 1998).

Class dominance conceptualized by Gramsci thus came from a marriage of coercion and consent. The ruling class becomes hegemonic and advocates its ideology as the commonsensical way of thinking using leadership and persuasion in order to acquire the people's consensus. Ideology jumps into the stage in the moment as a powerful tool for the dominant class which is, for Gramsci, something which in everyday language is often and non-reflexively and non-critically referred as the 'common sense', world view (Gramsci 1971, 419; Pyykkönen 2010, 30).

Since the dominant class gets firmly formed by producing and disseminating an ideological common sense, it conducts a system that embodies this common sense and then adapts it into a certain social order, or even "*makes it appear to be orderliness itself*" (Buttigieg 1995, 13).

Notably, coercion, nevertheless, is never completely absent from power arrangement, but it appears less visible; what matters in hegemony is the power of ideas and the politics of consent (Rupert 2005). Hegemony as the result of consent is exercised essentially through the sphere of civil society where consensus is promoted, not through the mechanisms of government.

The advanced tactic for hegemonically control of society of the hegemonic groups lays in the way that they allow for a space where free association and action (or a belief of free association and action) is permitted (Katz 2010, 409). Once the worldviews generated in this made free space meet prevailing socio-politico-economic positioning, they are thought of as doing so willingly and voluntarily. Actions within civil society, governed by hegemonic elites, perform to legitimize existing arrangements and relations of power (Katz 2010, 410). In this way, civil society, fundamentally, is the sophisticated instrument of ruling class, which sustains the class position via flexible means, allowing minor changes and adjustments and giving subaltern groups a feeling that change is possible. Practically, hegemony is mainly accomplished by indoctrination or education using different institutions of civil society, some of which are owned by elites and others are filled with the hegemonic ideology (See Adamson 1980).

⁸Norms in this hegemony constitute the consent of the people because in a certain way, norms of the ruling class have become the accepted norms of the whole society and that the prevailing hierarchical positioning of the classes has become a norm as well (See Pyykkönen 2010, 30).

Apparently, Gramsci agreed with Marx that civil society in the capitalist society is, along with the state, a mechanism of social control. Beems (1999) affirms that the state and civil society function together to attain the aggregate dominance of the propertied classes; to put it more specifically, they serve the needs of the ruling class with completely different methods of control. Civil society is the non-coercive method by which the exploiting class extends and secures its power (Beems 1999, 107) and is conceived as the site of alternative hegemonies (Powell 2013, 49).

State and Civil Society

Gramsci showed slightly disagreement with Marx though they supposed both state and civil society work for the same master. The institutions of civil society have some measure of independence and autonomy which is the key to Gramsci's revolutionary strategy (Beem 1999, 108); civil society is the foundation for the transition to the new, completely realized state.

Since the superstructure is well defined differently from the base, which consists of social relations of production of a predominately economic character, and given Gramsci's critique of economic determinism favoured by Marx, it is frequently claimed that Gramsci developed a three-way distinction between the economy or the market, the state or the government, and civil society (Katz 2010, 408) or as in Gramsci's (1971) own words, “*between the economic structure and*

the state with its legislation and coercion stands civil society” (p.209).

However, some proposed that Gramsci's idea about the distinction between three elements of society, or civil society/state dichotomy in particular, was mainly used in methodological aspect (Laine 2014, 64). In this respect, these divisions are only analytical or theoretical and rather blurred in practice. As Buttigieg (2005) asserts that “*Gramsci's enlarged concept of the modern State is, therefore, triadic; its three elements, political society, civil society, and the economic sphere, are inextricably intertwined—they are separable only for methodological or heuristic purposes*” (p.43).

We can assume that Gramsci rejected the clear differentiation drawn in mainstream liberal theory between the state and civil society; instead “*civil society and state are one and the same*” (Gramsci 1971, 160). The most concise declaration regarding civil society and the state, for Gramsci (1971, 263), appears as “*one might say that State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion*” (p.263).

Gramsci (1971) discerned civil society as a part of his notion of the ‘integral state’ (p.267). The term ‘state’ categorized into two types: the political organization of society and the government, this state is the visible political constitution of civil society and not equate a government (Chandhoke 1995, 151).

Gramsci's state is the sphere for balancing force and consent (Greaves 2009, 163). Although political society is the most immediately visible feature of the state, civil society is its most resilient constitutive element. The complex relationships between them is what establishes hegemony and they mutually reinforce each other to the benefit of certain groups. Control of the state is accomplished through hegemony in civil society, hegemony that is achieved through consent (Katz 2010, 410).

Although Gramsci admitted that the state plays the significant role in nurturing civil society and moulding public opinion, he realized that the state should not be sustainably adored (Gramsci 1971, 268). In addition, providing a mode of seeing and classifying the state through its civil society, Gramsci concluded that the state is coercive power structure, but the state without civil society is transparent one (See Chandhoke 1995, 150). For instance, we can give an explanation of reasons why a communist revolution in Russia had occurred much more easily than in Italy, as Gramsci (1971) said whereas “*in Russia 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. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks” (p.238). That can explain why the situations between Western Europe and the East are so unlike, and the reason is that they have different state and civil society, which was suggested by Gramsci's influential theory of hegemony (Ehrenberg 1999, 209).

With Gramsci's passage mentioned above about the relation between the state and civil society, one can interpret that civil society, for Gramsci, acts as protective filter for the state, namely it safeguards the state. Contrasting with the liberal concept of civil society favouring the protective role of civil society toward the individual against the giant power of the state, Gramsci would considered that, contended Chandhoke (1995), “*it is not the individual but the state which is shielded by civil society*” (p.151).

Interestingly, the completely developed civil society, in Gramsci's thought, could withstand the storming of economic crises and protect the state (Gramsci 1971, 238). The state (or the government in narrow sense) could subsequently be shielded by hegemony organized in civil society, whereas the coercive state mechanism might strengthen the hegemony of the ruling class.⁹

⁹Refining the concept from Hegel, the notion of civil society in Gramsci's work can be regarded as “*the material bearer of the social figure of hegemony, as the sphere of mediation between the economic infrastructure and the state in the narrow sense*” (Coutinho 2012, 77).

Bobbio (1988) also proposed that the superstructure, for Gramsci, is the sphere of catharsis: the space in which necessity is resolved into liberty, understood in a Hegelian way as the consciousness of necessity. Moreover, not only altering the focus on the base of Marxist tradition to superstructure, but Gramsci also emphasizes the ideological factor, within the superstructural itself, over the institutional one. For Gramsci, civil society-state relation is not a simple association, but more complicated: between necessity and freedom, which links to the dichotomy between base and superstructure; and between force and consent, which corresponds to the institutions/ideologies dichotomy (Bobbio 1988). In respect to this point, Gramsci's civil society then, argued Bobbio (1988), is "*both the active object (as opposed to the passive) of the first dichotomy, and the positive object (as opposed to the negative) of the second*" (p.89).

Accordingly, Gramsci's civil society includes representative institutions of the economic sphere, such as employers' associations and trade unions, together with the more frequently accepted demonstrations of civil society, such as churches, parties, professional associations, educational and cultural bodies (Katz 2010).

Besides, Gramsci (1971) recognized that civil society with the band of voluntary organizations could facilitate the 'withering away of the state' (p.263). This situation is identical to the

progressive absorption of state mechanism (political society) by the voluntary entities of civil society (Femia 2001, 142). The interesting point is this seemingly minimal state might be just a transitional stage in a natural progression towards what Gramsci (1971) called '*the regulated society*' or a society without a state (p.263), resulting from the expanding of civil society and the hegemonic forces, until there is no room occupied by political society (Bobbio 1988, 94). It seems that the notion of civil society, consequently, take a significant part in the end of the state (Bobbio 1988, 94). Gramsci's transformation of society commences in civil society, and ideally ends with the finished enlargement of civil society so that it no longer needs a coercive mechanism to defend it.

Conclusion

Gramsci's writing portrays an intricate and dialectic interrelationship between civil society, the state, and hegemony. Within this relationship civil society performs a dual and dialectic role, as an agent of government and the hegemonic forces that dominate the state, which on one hand is exercised as a means to secure the prevailing power relations in society; and on the other hand, civil society is the sphere of creativity where counter-hegemonic forces progress alternatives to the hegemonic ideologies and practices, and from where, under particular conditions, reformist processes can be established (Katz 2010, 408).

Given the Hegelian tradition concerned with civil society, Beem (1999) esteems (or exaggerates) Gramsci as a hero in civil society studies, as he said “*Hegel gave birth to the modern concept of civil society, Marx killed it, and Gramsci resurrected it*” (p.109). However, it might not be wrong to think that Gramsci did remake civil society into something more than a mere fiction and recapture the idea of Hegel about civil society as an essential mechanism for reaching a more energetic form of social unity.

Gramsci brought the momentary equilibrium to Marxism tradition, prioritizing balanced views on both superstructure and structure of society as well as the value of human as a creator over history. Re-reading Gramsci this time is useful in many ways. His concept about state and civil society, in particular the notion about symbiosis relationship between force and consent, gives readers a holistic approach to understanding complex social and political transformation.

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