

Lecture 20 Sociology 621
HEGEMONY & LEGITIMATION
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I. HEGEMONY

Hegemony is one of the most elusive concepts in Marxist discussions of ideology. Sometimes it is used as almost the equivalent of “ideological domination:” to describe a class an ideologically hegemonic (or to talk about the hegemonic ideology) is just to talk about the dominant/dominating ideology.

Gramsci, who made the most sustained classical discussions of this concept, used it in a rather different way. Hegemony designates the capacity of a class for what Gramsci termed “moral and intellectual leadership.” To understand this notion we need to first see what is meant by “leadership” and then link it to the moral and intellectual aspects of leadership, and then to the specific issue of ideology:

1. Leadership

A leader must be distinguished from a boss. A boss tells you what to do. A leader induces you to do things by virtue of the assurances you have that the leader is concerned with your interests, is advancing your interests. In class terms, a ruling class has leadership capacity if it is able to somehow link the interests of subordinate classes to its own interests in the pursuit of a social project which reproduces its own dominant position. Leadership implies the capacity to give direction to social development, *to establish the project of the ruling class as the universal project* by tying the interests of subordinate classes to that project.

A hegemonic class, then, is not just a ruling or dominant class, but a ruling class that manages to organize its rule in a particular way: namely, by *linking the interests of subordinate classes and groups to its own*. When the GM CEO proclaims, “What’s good for GM is good for America” he is affirming the hegemonic character of the American bourgeoisie in the 1950s for this was not a complete illusion. The American capitalist class had a project of economic and social development which did in fact tie the interests of large segments of the working class to the interests of capital.

Michael Burawoy’s analysis of the machine shop is a good example of hegemony: Burawoy distinguishes between two forms of organization of the machine shop, what he calls the **despotic organization** of work and the **hegemonic organization** of work. In the former, productivity is mainly assured through surveillance, controls, and discipline; in the latter it is assured through a “game” in which competition among workers striving to increase their individual incomes and “make out” on the shop floor has the effect of directing their activity in ways that enhance productivity. This latter game is a hegemonic form of the labor process: some of the interests of the workers are met – the possibility of higher wages – but in a way that links them to the interests of the capitalist class more closely.

More generally, in the period of stable accumulation and expansion, the bourgeoisie has the possibility of generating a material basis for hegemony through redistributive policies and the Keynesian state. This is Przeworski’s general argument about the material basis for hegemonic politics in electoral democracies: parties are forced to play by certain rules if they are to avoid being isolated from the working class, but if they play by those rules then they act to tie the interests of the working class to those of the Bourgeoisie in various direct ways.

2. Moral and Intellectual Leadership

All of this is hegemony in general. Ideological hegemony represents the specific effects of hegemony at the ideological level, and this is where the “moral” and “intellectual” elements come in, corresponding to our earlier discussions of normative ideology and mystification/cognition respectively.

2.1 Two visions of what it means to have an antagonism to oppositional ideological systems:

a) The two contending ideologies can be seen as antagonistic in terms of each element within them, so that a proletarian ideology is simply the negation point-by-point of bourgeois ideology. This is what Mouffe refers to as the view:

Ideological struggle as the confrontation of two paradigmatic ideologies.

b) The two contending ideologies can be seen as containing many of the same elements, but they are organized into a different “matrix.” Thus, the belief in individual freedom is an element in both bourgeois and proletarian ideology, but because of its link to the belief in private property in the former and its link to collective self-determination in the latter, the meaning of the element itself changes. In this view, ideological struggle is over the appropriation and reappropriation of elements into different class matrices, rather than the confrontation of two polarized paradigms.

Ideological struggle as struggle on the terrain of ideology rather than between ideologies.

Hegemony = second view: The view of ideological hegemony as involving moral leadership necessarily presupposes the second of these views. Aspects of normative principles which are rooted in popular struggles, popular consciousness and culture are appropriated by the bourgeoisie and tied to other ideological/moral elements so that they serve the bourgeois project. **Such a hegemonic situation sets a trap for revolutionaries**, because it suggests that to oppose to the bourgeoisie is to oppose individual freedom, civil rights, etc., and many revolutionaries in fact accept these terms of the struggle. To the extent that the bourgeoisie is able to define the form of ideological struggle in this way, it effectively isolates revolutionary ideology from the working class, since many of these elements are in fact organically related to the working class itself.

2.2 *Moral leadership*: incorporating popular/oppositional moral elements into the hegemonic ideology

2.3 An example: articulation of elements in bourgeois ideology vs socialist re-articulation

Elements:

- freedom
- democracy
- private property
- equality
- material well-being

How are these “articulated” in bourgeois ideology?

- Freedom means freedom from coercion by the state over the use of private property; this implies sanctity of private property. Freedom is deeply connected to private property.
- Democracy depends upon private property and is the form of the state that protects freedom.
- Democratic constraints on private property are an affront to freedom
- equality means equality of citizenship rights, not material conditions
- material well-being is maximized by freedom + private property

Some of these have been incorporated from popular struggle, especially democracy

Socialist Rearticulation:

- true democracy depends upon equality of material wellbeing
- freedom means freedom to do things, not just freedom from
- equality means both equality of rights and conditions
- democracy should constrain private property in order to enhance freedom

2.4 Intellectual leadership: A similar process occurs in intellectual leadership: To be hegemonic, bourgeois ideology cannot simply deny the lived experience of workers, dismiss the cognitive categories generated out of daily life of people in capitalist society, but rather it must appropriate these categories, integrate them into an intellectual structure which is coherent and compelling, but which organizes these categories around a logic which supports rather than undermines the domination of that class. This is what effective propaganda does, effective theoretical ideology, etc. This is what a lot of ideological framing does: it takes some lived experience and then reframes it in a way that makes sense but supports the project of the dominant class.

3. Hegemony and Counterhegemony: Ideological Class Struggle

Classes and other social groups struggle on the terrain of ideology--to use Mouffe's formulation following Gramsci--not just over ideology. The challenge to the hegemony of the ruling class requires the formation of a counterhegemony, a reorganization of the normative and cognitive structures in ways that support alternative practices and ways of living. This is, indeed, a struggle, and struggle implies two terms (at least). Counterhegemonic symbols and norms are constantly threatened by reincorporation into the hegemonic ideology itself. Example: women's liberation symbols in advertisement (Cindy Costello's M.A. Thesis), where liberation symbols are appropriated from the women's movement, integrated with conventional symbols of bourgeois ideology and accordingly transformed by virtue of the new Matrix within which they are located. The effect is that liberation becomes a reaffirmation of male domination and commodity production, individualism, etc. “You've come a long way baby” in Virginia Slims ads in the early 1980s.

Gramsci argued that the distinctive characteristic of Western Capitalist Societies was the vitality of the hegemony of its ruling classes. This meant that a direct assault on their class power/state power in the manner of the Bolshevik revolution was impossible. Instead a “war on position” was required, a form of struggle in which the objective was the erosion of the hegemonic hold of the bourgeoisie. Such struggles require counter-institutions, counter-media & culture, the creation of what is sometimes called a “proletarian public sphere” where working class culture can be articulated, etc. This is a protracted form of struggle, and involves very different practical activities from the war of “maneuver” characteristic of revolutionary efforts of the first half of the 20th century.

4. Hegemony and marginalization

Hegemony creates a context in which radical, militant resistance is likely to become marginalized. Such *marginalization of opposition* is not primarily the result of propaganda which explicitly declares it to be unrealistic or unthinkable; rather, it is primarily the result of the very effectiveness of the “leadership capacity” of the dominant class itself, of its capacity to actually incorporate elements from the opposition itself, thus undermining the overall oppositional project.

The marginalization is then often reinforced by the *active responses* of oppositional forces themselves: because they are afraid of incorporation/reintegration within the hegemonic “matrix,” oppositional forces may artificially polarize their positions, may polemically insulate themselves from “contamination” by the hegemonic ideology. The effort is to make themselves unincorporatable into the hegemonic ideology, but the effect may be to make them more deeply isolated from the working class itself. This is precisely what makes a hegemonic system hegemonic: to engage it on its own terrain is to risk absorption; to refuse to engage that terrain is to deepen marginalization. Ultimately this implies that a successful counterhegemonic strategy must change the “conditions of possibility” of the terrain itself. Needless to say, it is not obvious how this can be done. This is what happens when radicals reject liberal values in toto, reject ideas like the rule of law or due process as “bourgeois”

It is because of this that hegemonic rule is associated with the concept of “consent” (often used in Gramsci): consent to the system of rule is generated by the dual operation of the marginalization of alternatives and the partial accommodation of one’s own material interests and normative concerns. As Therborn stresses, such consent is not opposed to coercion--every hegemonic system implies a system of coercively imposed premises/rules--but it subordinates or incorporates the individual subjectively in a different way from a directly coercive regime.

II. LEGITIMATION: IDEOLOGY & NORMS

In this section I want to explore two interconnected issues concerning normative structures:

- 1) What is the relationship between legitimation and other aspects of ideology?
- 2) How should we understand the process by which particular normative structures are produced and reproduced?

1. The Normative Dimension of Ideology

This is the commonsense notion of ideology: ideology as an *ism*, as a systematic world view containing values and norms, notions of what is good and bad, right and wrong.

Mystifications helps to support legitimation:

Legitimation is, of course, very closely tied to mystification and cannot be understood apart from it. The belief that the United States is a just and good society -- the normative judgment -- is closely related to the claim that there is fact opportunity for advancement and that failures are individual faults. But there is some independence of the two since the belief that individual outcomes are what matters, are what is important rather than collective outcomes, is a normative premise which does not logically depend on any given account of those outcomes.

Legitimation obstructs demystification.

But the reverse is also true: beliefs in the American way, in individualism, in competitiveness, in manliness, etc., become obstacles to people seeing the real determinations at work in their social life. What is often called socialization or indoctrination or propaganda (depending upon the context) centers on buttressing the normative ideological supports for the existing society, which in turn act as blocks to struggles against mystification as well.

There is a frequent tendency among Marxists--and nonMarxists--to regard legitimation as the pivotal element of ideology, as the decisive aspect of subjectivity which explains consensus, acquiescence to the social order, etc. While it is important, I think that its importance is usually overstated. It seems to me that it is much more important whether or not people feel there are other alternatives than that they feel the existing society is "good" in explaining their political behavior. In this respect I agree with Therborn's image of different aspects of ideology being "lines of defense," with the normative aspect being less fundamental than the cognitive ones.

Still, legitimation and normative consensus is important, so let us look at its process of determination.

2. An example: *Individualistic competitiveness.*

2.1 three normative beliefs that constitute individualism

First, what are we talking about here, what is the subjective orientation in question? By individualistic competitiveness I mean the belief that

- (a) it is good to compete with others, to try to be better than others
- (b) one's worth/status is defined by how well one measures up against other people's performance (as opposed to simply how well one has actualized ones own capacities);
- (c) rewards that come from individual competition are justified, warranted, desirable.

All three elements are important, and all help to legitimize capitalism as a social order.

2.2 Explanations of prevalence of normative individualism

How can we explain the prevalence of this norm as part of the subjective structure of people in capitalist society? A variety of explanations can be distinguished, all of which could play some real role in the determination of this element:

- 1) Indoctrination/socialization:** children are taught through role models, television, schools, hero-worship, etc., that competitive individualism is an ideal to aspire to. The ideas is thus implanted into the minds of people through a process of symbolic manipulation and propaganda.
- 2) Cognitive dissonance:** people see that cooperation is unattainable & therefore devalue it.
- 3) Character structure:** As psychoanalysis would stress, it is not so much the inculcation of the belief as such, but the formation of the necessary kind of personality structure which underpins such beliefs. Norms are stable and structured because of their correspondence to a personality structure. This kind of analysis has played an important part in explaining such things as Fascist norms/ideology, where the argument has often been made that it is the underlying structure of personality--the authoritarian character structure--which underwrites those normative beliefs. Another example is the analysis of Racism where

the distinction is sometimes made between racists who are *organically racist* because of their personalities and racists who are *conventionally racist*, just because it is the norm, and who can easily shed their racism if conditions change. Depending upon the ratio between these two anchors for racism, it can be quite vulnerable to transformation.

4) Social practices: Competitive individualism is reproduced as a norm because the material practices of everyday life constantly validate it, make it adaptive for individuals and their families, punish people who violate it, and, less obtrusively, structure the alternative choices people face in such a way that it would require *an active practice of resistance to undermine such norms*. When you enter school, the micro-practices that are imposed on you reproduce norms of individualism, regardless of one's character structure (or if not regardless of, at least partially independently of that structure).

All of these play a part, and a fully developed Marxist social psychology would try to sort out the precise interconnections among these. But as a first approximation, I would argue that the social practices are the decisive moment in the process. Such practices ultimately provide the context for the transformation of such norms. But practices have their effects in the context of personality structures, and one might want to argue that character structure mediates the effects of practices on norms.

3. Coercion, consent & norms

The problem of norms play an especially important role in disentangling the relationship between *coercion* and *consent* within systems of domination. Take a simple example of trying to explain why workers perform labor effort within a capitalist labor process -- a fundamental problem within Marxist class analysis, since the conversion of labor power into labor is essential for capitalist exploitation.

Bowles & Gintis view in a terrific essay "Contested Exchange": surveillance + threats → effort. Employers face a trade-off between spending more money on supervision or increasing the cost of being fired by raising wages above the minimum to get people to work. Especially where supervision is costly or not very effective, because it is hard to monitor workers, wages will rise in order to increase compliance. These are called "employment rents".

Where do norms enter this process?

1. **authority norms:** obedience to legitimate orders as a moral principle
2. **legitimacy of orders** = because of legitimacy of ownership
3. **norms of reciprocity:** fair-days-work for a fair-days-pay
4. **solidaristic norms** among workers: shirking hurts other workers

4. Transforming norms

Part of what social transformation involves is transforming ideologies, including people's beliefs about what is good. Exhortation is one way of doing this: propaganda, cultural products, movies, books, etc. But sometimes what is needed is to change the conditions of micro-conflicts over norms by shifting incentives and sanctions, and then letting the norms change in response. This is at least part of how we might want to think about norms changing in the case of gender.

Three facts about the world as it is:

- (1) behavioral: women are much more likely to take care of young infants than men
- (2) ideological: both men and women generally believe that women ought to take care of children, and that women are more nurturant than men
- (3) dispositional: whatever the gap is in underlying dispositions between men and women over nurturance, it is smaller than the behavior differences.

The first two of these reinforce each other to block the translation of dispositions into behaviors. One way of changing the system, is to disrupt (1) through strong incentives, which then weakens (2) which then unleashes (3)

