

## AN ESSAY ON GRAMSCI'S CONCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

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**Özet :** Bu makalede Gramsci'nin en tartışmalı kavramlarından biri olan sivil toplum kavramı irdeleniyor. Gramsci'de sivil toplumun altyapıya mı yoksa üstyapıya mı ait olduğu açıklığa kavuşturulup, sivil toplum üstyapıya yerleştirildikten sonra, bu durumun Gramsci gibi Marxist bir filozof için ne anlam ifade ettiği tartışılıyor. Sivil toplum, politik toplum ve ekonomik alan ayrımının Gramsci'nin çalışmalarında, organik değil, metodolojik bir ayrım olduğu vurgulanarak, Gramsci'nin bu metodolojik ayrımı somut organik gerçekliği, yani integral devleti, analiz etmek için nasıl kullandığı gösteriliyor. Politik toplumla sivil toplumun bir sentezini somutlaştıran integral devletteki liderlik kavramı ve güç (politik toplum) ile rıza (sivil toplum) arasındaki karşılıklı ilişki açıklığa kavuşturuluyor. Gramsci'deki farklı liderlik biçimleri tartışılıp açıklığa kavuşturulduktan sonra, Gramsci'nin, devletin farklı tarihsel dönemlerinde liderliğin farklı sınıflar tarafından kurulduğu ve uygulandığı çeşitli yolları incelemek suretiyle, toplumu kapitalizmden sosyalizme dönüştürecek yeni bir politik stratejiye ulaşmayı amaçladığı ileri sürülüyor.

**Abstract:** This paper discusses Gramsci's concept of civil society, which is one of Gramsci's most disputed concepts. It identifies whether civil society in Gramsci belongs to infrastructure or superstructure. After placing civil society in superstructure, it discusses the implications of this for a Marxist philosopher such as Gramsci. By pointing out that the distinction between civil society, political society and economic sphere is a methodological distinction, not an organic one, it shows how Gramsci uses this methodological distinction to analyse the concrete organic reality, the integral state. It clarifies the concept of hegemony and the inter-relationship between coercion (political society) and consent (civil society) in the integral state which embodies a synthesis of political society (coercion) and civil society (consent). It, then, discussing and clarifying the different forms of hegemony in Gramsci, argues that Gramsci, by investigating the variety of ways in which hegemony is established and exercised by different classes in different historical periods of the state, aims to achieve a new political strategy that will transform the society from capitalism to socialism.

### I. Introduction

No Marxist thinker has had his ideas subjected to so different, incompatible and contradictory interpretations as Antonio Gramsci has. Nor is any Marxist work plagued by ambiguity and the difficulty of accurate and systematic reading. There are various reasons for this: firstly, his work is very comprehensive and covers a wide range of subjects. Therefore, it is possible to approach it from a variety of perspectives, for example, history, sociology, literary theory, politics and cultural studies. Secondly, Gramsci wrote in the appalling conditions of the special prison at Turi near Bari in Southern Italy

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with his work scrutinized by the fascist prison censor.<sup>i</sup> Finally, it is necessary to mention that these different interpretations of his work are ultimately linked to the differing political agendas of his interpreters.

One of Gramsci's most disputed concepts is that of civil society. The main characteristic of this concept is that though sharing some elements with Marx's and Hegel's concept of civil society, it has differences that make it original. Gramsci (SPN: 12)<sup>ii</sup> defines civil society as "the ensemble of organisms commonly called private" and contrasts it with political society or the state. However, the problem lies in the relationship between the two realms. Sometimes the political and civil societies are in balance, and sometimes identical, while his integral state encompasses both realms. Furthermore, the border of these two realms is determined by hegemony, that is, the relationship between coercion and consent which operate within the two realms. The main aim of this paper is to investigate this changeable inter relationship between the state and civil society in Gramsci.

In Section I, I shall analyze the relations of structure and superstructure and, in Section II, that of state and civil society. In section III, I shall attempt an explication of each different version of hegemony that refers and corresponds to a certain historical phase of the state in which civil society and political society (consent-coercion) or the rulers and the ruled have an intrinsic link which forms the state in that historical phase. I argue that by investigating the relationship between consent and coercion in the different historical phases of the state (or the different forms of the state) Gramsci aims to achieve a new political strategy in order to transform the state, that is, he is trying to find an answer to the question of how the working class may overthrow capitalism and transform the society from that of capitalism to socialism.

## II. Structure and Superstructure in Gramsci

It is essential to begin with the analysis of the relationship between structure and superstructure in order to identify whether civil society belongs to structure or superstructure in Gramsci. This relationship will be analyzed in this section of the essay. Section II builds on the discussion in this section and clarifies the concept of civil society, that of the state (political society) and the relationship between them in Gramsci's conception of the integral state. Thus, as Gramsci's conception of civil society and the state will be made evident in Section II, grounds for the investigation of the internal relationship between them in different uses of hegemony will be established.

One of the most familiar and original theses of the relationship between structure and superstructure in Gramsci belongs to Norberto Bobbio (1979). He claims that in Gramsci's work there is a double inversion as pertains to the Marxist tradition:

1. The primacy of the ideological superstructures over the economic structure;

2. The primacy of civil society (consensus) over political society (force).

Bobbio's starting point is that although in Marx civil society is a structural moment,<sup>iii</sup> in Gramsci, it belongs to superstructure. Furthermore Marx's conception of civil society as the whole realm of economic relations (structure) is a decisive movement and determines the political moment, while Gramsci's conception of civil society as the whole of ideological-cultural relations, excluding the economic relationship, is determinant too. Bobbio concludes that both in Gramsci and Marx, civil society represents the active and positive moment of historical development. In Marx, however, this active and positive moment is a structural moment, while in Gramsci a superstructural one. Hence, in Marx structure has primacy over superstructure. In Gramsci this is inverted (Bobbio, 1979:30-34).

Though Bobbio's interpretation is impressive and boasts an extensive influence, it is nevertheless questionable. First of all, we should not forget that Gramsci is a Marxist thinker. Thus, he never questioned the principles of traditional Marxism. On the contrary, he took these principles for granted for his theoretical explorations in prison. Instead of repeating the familiar, he concentrates on the unknown. The determinacy and primacy of structure over superstructure as elaborated by Marxist tradition is familiar to, and not questioned by, Gramsci. He focuses on the unfamiliar, which is superstructure and completes Marx's project. Hence, in Gramsci, there should be no doubt that the economy is determinant in the last instance as in Marx. Gramsci's comprehensive elaboration of superstructure and conscious avoidance of the repetition of the primacy of the structure has been, then, misinterpreted by Norberto Bobbio.

Another point to be made is that when Bobbio compares the conception of civil society in Marx and Gramsci, he refers to Marx's conception of civil society as the whole realm of the economic sphere (whole structure) as it appears in Marx's "Preface to a Critique of Political Economy" (Marx, 1977: 388-392). However, Perry Anderson (1976: 30) focuses our attention on the fact that the usage of this concept, though in Marx's early writing, refers to the sphere of economic needs and activities, in his late writing, it refers to a generic designation for all non-state institutions in a capitalist social formation, and it is not identical with individual economic needs. Civil society appears as the realm of economic relations in "Preface to a Critique of Political Economy" where Marx specifies that "the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy" (Marx, 1977: 389). Here economic relations or structure seems to be identical with civil society. On the other hand, as Anderson (1976: 30) shows by referring to a passage from *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx's concept of civil society is not synonymous with economic relations, but it includes other non-state instruments which belong to superstructure: "the state enmeshes, controls, regulates, supervises and regiments civil society from the most all

embracing expressions of its life down to its most insignificant motions, from its most general existence down to the private individuals" (Marx, 1973: 186). We can conclude from this passage that except for the economic sphere, Gramsci's conception of civil society seems to be the same as Marx's conception in his late writings. Moreover, as we will see later, in Gramsci civil society has an economic content too (SPN: 208-209, 246-247). Hence, in Gramsci civil society, having an economic content, is merely placed in superstructure, while in Marx it is at times identical with structure, and at times it includes both structural and superstructural elements. This observation is opposed to Bobbio's arguments.

The thesis in question, according to Bobbio, is that though both in Gramsci and in Marx, civil society represents the active and positive moment of historical development, this moment is a structural moment (social relations of production) in Marx, while a superstructural one in Gramsci. However, my argument against this assumption is that for both Marx and Gramsci, the active and positive moment of historical development is a structural moment. That is, in the last instance, economy is determinant. I shall elaborate on this point for the rest of this section and in section II. After refuting Bobbio's assumptions, we can now start to examine the novelty of Gramsci as a Marxist thinker as it connects to the relationship between structure and superstructure. In doing this on the one hand, the concept of civil society, that of state, that of economic sphere and the relations amongst them will be clear. Moreover, a general response to Bobbio and his followers is tangentially provided.

A study which aims to analyze the relationship of structure and superstructure in Gramsci should start with the recognition that for Gramsci the distinction between state and civil society is purely one of method and not organic, in concrete historical life, political society and civil society are the same thing. The distinction between these two moments is a practical canon of research, an instrument for a better analysis of an organic reality, which is his integral state, where civil society and political society are merged.

In his methodological approach, in order to analyze and understand the concrete reality, Gramsci separates state (political society) and civil society. Furthermore he distinguishes civil society from the economic structure. Then he assumes that the state (integral state) is the synthesis of civil society and political society. In doing so, he goes beyond the Marxist conception of the state as the apparatus of domination of the ruling class. This approach is new in Marxist tradition. Marx also separates civil society as structure from the state as one of the superstructural elements. He assumes that structure determines superstructure, conceiving the state as merely an apparatus of the ruling class or that of coercion, and civil society as identical with structure, or as economic relations + non-state organizations. However, Marx cannot integrate the relationship of structure and superstructure with the relationship of state and civil society. Therefore his approach is insufficient to grasp concrete reality. Gramsci's integral state as hegemony

protected by the armor of coercion reflects a much more articulate conception of the class nature of the state. The state is not only an apparatus of coercion, but also of hegemony. So, the conception of the state in Gramsci becomes concrete, not abstract as it is in Marxist tradition anymore. This concrete concept of the state (the integral state) allows us to analyze different state forms (Vacca, 1982: 56).

Furthermore, Gramsci tends to explain the relationship between state and economic sphere:

*Although it is certain that for the fundamental productive classes (capitalist bourgeoisie and modern proletariat) the State is only conceivable as the concrete form of a specific economic world, of a specific system of production, this does not mean that the relationship of means to end can be easily determined or takes the form of a simple schema, apparent at first sight. It is true that the conquest of power and achievement of a new social world are inseparable, and that propaganda for one is also propaganda for the other, and that in reality it is solely in this coincidence that the unity of dominant class—at once economic and political—resides. But the complex problem arises of the relation of internal forces in the country in question, of the relation of international forces, of the country's geopolitical position" (SPN: 116).*

In this passage, Gramsci implies that for understanding different concrete forms of the state, utilizing the abstract level of the mode of production is inadequate. Instead, it is an imperative to consider the political history, forms of consciousness and modes of organization of the classes. Thus his methodological distinction of civil society, state and economic sphere allows this kind of analysis of concrete reality.

The concrete forms of the state are determined by the ways in which the ruler and the ruled relate, relations in which the balance of power change, while it comes into being on the basis of a determinate mode of production which corresponds to the interests of the fundamental productive classes. Moreover, the initiative for its formation may have come from particular sections of the possible dominant block, which do not correspond to the economically fundamental part of that block, as it happened in Italian Risorgimento (SPN: 116-117). The concrete forms of the state are determined by the way in which the ruler and the ruled relate, and is not merely based on coercion, but is influenced by hegemony. Hegemony becomes the fundamental element of the state and allows the dominant class to realize its historical goals by going beyond its narrow economic-corporative interests (SPN: 118). Hegemony as intellectual and moral leadership over allied groups thus integrates the level of analysis of the mode of production with that of social formation, for, as Mouffe

(1979: 9) puts it, “Hegemony, which always has its basis in the decisive nucleus of economic activity, operates principally in civil society via the articulation of the interests of the fundamental class to those of its allies in order to form a collective will, a unified political subject”. Hence, the methodological separation of structure and superstructure appears theoretically as an organic unity in the concept of the historical block.

At the end of this section, the conclusion reached is that in Gramsci, structure is primary and conditioning. This does not mean superstructure is not active, moreover, superstructural activities sometimes become determinant in the relation to the structure. This elaboration of the relationship between structure and superstructure enables Gramsci to form a concrete idea of historical dialectics.

### **III. The State, Civil Society and Hegemony in Gramsci**

In the light of what we have discussed above, the concept of the state, of civil society and that of hegemony needs to be clarified further. In Gramsci, the state is not only the instrument of the ruling class, opposing traditional Marxist theory, but a complex web of social, economic and political relations. “The historical unity of the ruling class is realized in the state, and their history is essentially the history of states. But it would be wrong to think that this unity is simply juridical and political, the fundamental historical unity, concretely, results from the organic relations between state or political society and civil society” (SPN: 52). In this complex web of relations, the ruling class manifests itself in two ways: domination (political leadership) and moral and intellectual leadership (SPN: 45). Thus his conception of integral state embodies a synthesis of political society and civil society or that of coercion and consent. This conception of state “is dictatorship + hegemony” (SPN: 239). In this sense, the state is not only the apparatus of government (coercion), but also the private apparatus of civil society (consent). So, both the concept of political and civil society becomes the aspects of the theory of the integral state (Texier, 1979: 69). Therefore, the integral state represents not only political activities, but also social, intellectual and moral activities, namely whole superstructural activities. All these superstructural activities which are represented by the integral state have a class character, because, as highlighted before, it is in organic relationship with the sphere of economy.

Since concrete form of the state, determined by the ways in which fundamental classes succeed in organizing the whole framework of relations between rulers and the ruled, are based on both consent and coercion, in the integral state hegemony appears as the synthesis of consent and coercion. This is simply the exercise of political, social, cultural and economic activities.

*It is true that the state is seen as the organ of one particular group, destined to create favorable conditions for the latter's maximum expansion. But the development at the expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the 'national' energies. In other words, the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interest of the subordinate groups, and the life of the state is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups—equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point, i. e. stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interest (SPN, p.182).*

In this passage, the economic aspect of hegemony is clear. In order to achieve its historical goals, the ruling class goes beyond its narrow economic-corporative interests, and in this way creates its system of alliances or hegemonic block by compromising with other classes. This hegemonic block, as the unit of the dominant and subordinate groups under the rule of the first, reflects the political aspects of hegemony. Furthermore, hegemony operates as intellectual-moral activities through the society, in order to impose hegemonic class's conception of the world, and this is the ideological aspect. Since hegemony has economic political and ideological aspects, the struggle for hegemony automatically becomes important. Before having access to power, the struggle for hegemony is on the one hand to dissolve the hegemonic block and isolate the dominant class politically and ideologically from the alliance of other groups, on the other hand, to secure the control of the new political block thereby to constitute it (Texier, 1979: 63).

The struggle for hegemony, in particular, is a struggle to turn the working class and its party into a potential ruling class, it is the process by which it constructs, even before the transfer of power, the elements of the new society which will develop after it. During this period, the working class "can and indeed must already exercise leadership (before winning governmental power)" (SPN: 57). Before winning the governmental power, hegemony can only be exercised in civil society, not in political one. The struggle takes place in civil society.

*Through the private organisms of which the most important are the political parties and the unions, but which also reveal a multitude of ideologico-cultural forms (newspapers, reviews, literature, churches, and associations of all kinds) which will have to be listed. The solidity of a state (apparatus of government) depends, in fact, on the consistency of the civil society which serves as its basis...The form of superstructural activities of which civil society is the place, may well be ideological, but their content is economic and social and the struggle to win hegemony is a struggle for power. This is why civil and political society are identified in actual reality (Texier, 1979: 65).*

However, it should be kept in mind that the integral state refers to parliamentary democracy or bourgeoisie state. Gramsci called this form of hegemony which corresponds to this integral state as the normal exercise of hegemony. Therefore though here the form of hegemony appears as the synthesis of coercion and consent, for another type of state, since the inter-relationship between consent-coercion determines the form of hegemony and hegemony in this way determines the concrete form of the state, another form of hegemony will be valid, that is, every state exists with its appropriate hegemony. Hence the proletariat must create a new complex of relations and forms of its own appropriate hegemony to establish a new kind of state (socialism).

If by the elaboration of hegemonic apparatus, a class which is fundamental on the domain of production becomes the ruling class of the whole society, then what is the role of coercion in the integral state? In writing "a social group dominates antagonistic groups which it tends to liquidate or to subjugate even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups" (SPN: 57), Gramsci expresses that while the ruling class exercises its hegemony over subordinate classes which accept its rule, it exercises its dictatorship over hostile social classes which reject it. He puts it another way when he writes:

*The question is whether one has the necessary force, and whether it is productive to use it. If the union of two forces is necessary in order to defeat a third, a recourse to aims and coercion (even supposing that these are available) can be nothing more than a methodological hypothesis; the only concrete possibility is compromise. Force, can be employed against enemies, but not against a part of one's own side which one wishes rapidly to assimilate and whose good will and enthusiasm one needs (SPN: 168).*

Moreover coercion even plays a role in the educative and formative function of the state. The aim of the state "is always that of creating new and higher types of civilization; of adapting the civilization and morality of the broadest popular masses to the necessities of the continuous development of the economic apparatus of production" (SPN: 242). For Gramsci, "every state is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of population to particular cultural and moral level, a level which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to interests of the ruling class" (SPN: 258). Thus, for Gramsci, the state is not merely an apparatus of coercion, but it has an ethical function. How does coercion play a role in this ethical function of the state? It is evident from the passages above that Gramsci's assumption of the state is an instrument for conforming civil society to the economic structure (SPN: 208). Thus, he distinguishes between the state and economic structure and civil society. They have reciprocal relations; and civil society is the mediator: "between the economic structure and state with its coercion stands civil society, and the latter must be radically transformed, in a concrete sense and not simply on the statute-book, or in scientific books" (SPN: 208). In order to conform civil society to the new structure, the state has two elements: consent and coercion. Moreover, for transforming the society to socialism, for destroying the old homo economicus and burying it with all honors, force is inevitable; these cannot be realized by persuasion, and therefore, must be done by force (SPN: 208-209). Hence, he does not deny the inevitable role of force within any great historical transformation as a Marxist thinker.

From the discussion so far on the integral state, which refers to the bourgeoisie state, the inter-relationship between coercion (state) and consent (civil society) becomes clear. Hegemony as the structure of capitalist power in the integral state is simultaneously and indivisibly dominated by consent and determined by coercion (Anderson, 1976: 36). Cultural domination is embodied in political institutions: regular elections, civic freedoms, rights of assembly etc.. Therefore political society appears as an apparatus of hegemony. So the integral state has not only the aspect of coercion but also more importantly consent. To put it another way, the ruling class exercises its hegemony in civil society by the support of coercion (whole political society) to achieve the consent of the masses. As Perry Anderson (1976: 37) clarifies: "the normal conditions of ideological subordination of the masses...are themselves constituted by a silent, absent force which gives them their currency: the monopoly of legitimate violence by the state" and with force, the system of cultural control "is immensely powerful—so powerful that it can, paradoxically, do without it: in effect, violence may normally scarcely appear within the bounds of the system at all". However, in a supreme crisis, coercion becomes both determinant and dominant. This means that political society extends and gains fundamental importance and role, for hegemony becomes inadequate to

solve the crisis which the bourgeoisie state confronts. In practical terms, because of this kind of crisis, the state starts to intervene more in economic and social life than in normal situations, as we will see in the next section.

At the end of this section, my conclusion is that Gramsci's conception of the integral state which is his general conception of the state refers to the bourgeoisie state. The state encompasses both political and civil society. Hegemony appears as the synthesis of coercion and consent. In more concrete terms; the cultural ascendancy of the bourgeoisie operates to maintain the capitalist order within a political democracy (by the supports of the governmental apparatus) whose state is not directly repressive.

#### IV. The Different Forms of Hegemony in Gramsci

Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which we have investigated in section II in order to illustrate the internal relationship of civil society and political society (or that of consent and coercion) in the integral state which refers to parliamentary democracy, is only one of his concepts of hegemony. However, he has a variety of concepts of hegemony in his writings. While in the integral state, hegemony is the synthesis of consent and coercion (hegemony = consent + coercion), at sometime, the consent-aspect of hegemony disappears in this formulation, so the forms of domination (coercion) without hegemony comes into being; and at sometime the form of hegemony without coercion exists by eradicating coercion.

Now the question that arises is why Gramsci has different concepts of hegemony. Is there a fundamental contradiction in Gramsci's notion of hegemony, due to the variety of concepts that he offers? Or, does each different usage of hegemony refer to a different type of state? If so, then we are confronted with another question: what is his purpose in analyzing the conception of hegemony in different types of state? In order to provide a reply for these questions we should explore the different uses of hegemony employed by Gramsci.

a.) *Hegemony in the Integral State:* The exploration of the different uses of hegemony in Gramsci should start by examining his usage of hegemony in the integral state, because this version of hegemony is the normal exercise of hegemony, which is used to examine the different versions of hegemony which exist in other forms of the state. As we have analyzed in the preceding section, this wide conception of the state is composed of political and civil society. "The state is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its domination, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (SPN: 244). As we have expressed above, this use of the state is peculiar to parliamentary democracy in which the normal exercise of hegemony (armored by coercion) appears. Hence, consent is not isolated from force, and they function together in parliamentary democracy.

*If force and consent balance each other in a just relation, if force appears to rest on the consent of the majority, power is exercised in a normal way. But such an equilibrium requires precise conditions: a great development of private energies in civil society, an ideological and economic individualism, an enlargement of the economic base which will not upset the countryside / town equilibrium, a phase of colonial expansion, and finally a more or less link between universal suffrage and national feeling organized around the concept of nationhood—which cements consensus at the national level. All these conditions relate in turn to one which is even more essential: the absence of a relation of forces favoring the popular forces. In these precise conditions of equilibrium, government can obtain a permanent and organized consent. (Buci-Glucksmann, 1982: 124).*

But this normal exercise of hegemony in parliamentary democracy has been broken by the crisis which it has confronted. So, the Fascist, or Stalinist state, in short, the forms of authoritarian statism (whose common characteristic is bureaucratic crystallization) exists as the response of capitalism to the crisis, reflecting an alienation between the state and civil society. Let us see now how this alienation between the state and civil society happens and how it leads to the forms of authoritarian statism in which appears a new form of hegemony which Gramsci called passive consent.

*b.) Hegemony in the Forms of Authoritarian State:* Every state has to rely on the consent of at least some other classes. Only with coercion, no state can survive. Therefore the economically dominant class has to assure the consent of at least some classes. The fundamental class and the classes whose consent it gains by the elaboration of hegemony to realize its historical ends, form altogether the hegemonic or dominant block. That is, because of the function of hegemony, there is not just a dominant class, but a dominant block. The economically dominant class of this block is insufficient to determine the concrete forms of the state. This initiative belongs to another group of this block which Gramsci called intellectuals—not in direct relation with the world of production, “but is in varying degrees mediated by the whole fabric of society and by the complex of superstructures, of which the intellectuals are, precisely, the functionaries.” The functions of these groups are “precisely organizational and connective” (SPN:12).

The economically dominant class delegates the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government to the intellectuals; particularly the power of state or political hegemony is delegated by the bourgeoisie to bureaucracy, (military-civil). “Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production,

creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields" (SPN: 5). In the dominant block which consists of the ruling class and its allied classes, a division of labor exists between the economically dominant class and its intellectual stratum which is delegated foremost for using coercion and serves it. At this stage, this intellectual stratum thinks itself as an integral part of the ruling class. However, this division of labor in the dominant block later fragments the politically and economically dominant class. After this fragmentation, intellectuals start to think of themselves as the ruling class. So, a conflict exists between the politically dominant class and the economically dominant class in the dominant block. This is an alienation between civil and political society. In concrete terms, to represent the interests of the whole society by organizing relation between leaders and the led on the basis of consent or by shaping the led to follow the objectives of the leaders, the bourgeoisie has two main instruments which are parliamentary system and bureaucratic system. (Migliaro and Misuraca, 1982: 83).

*The separation of powers, together with all the discussion provoked by its realization and the legal dogmas which its appearance brought into being, is a product of the struggle between civil society and political society in a given historical period. This period is characterized by a certain unstable equilibrium between the classes, which is a result of the fact that certain categories of intellectuals (in the direct service of the state, especially the civil and military bureaucracy) are still too closely tied to the old dominant classes (SPN: 245).*

Migliaro and Misuraca (1982: 83-84) interpreted this situation as follows: "the conflict between parliamentary and bureaucratic systems demonstrates the fact that the categories of intellectuals in the direct service of the state, especially the civil and military bureaucracy, are too closely linked to the old ruling classes. This link is such that the bourgeoisie project of representing the interests of the whole society breaks down because of bureaucracy transformed into a caste which separates the state from civil society and makes it absolute". The civil and military bureaucracy takeover increasingly political functions and the exercise of coercion and occupies the political society. The bureaucracy breaks from the economically dominant class and becomes the ruling class by exercising political power. Furthermore, the bureaucracy becomes commonly understood as the whole state, hence the state becomes no more the means but itself the ends. The result is, political power tends to suppress civil society or the hegemony of the economically dominant class. This is an alienation and conflict of period which ends with the victory of bureaucracy and leads to the forms of authoritarian statism in which passive consent as a new form of hegemony appears.

Gramsci's concept of passive consent refers to Stalinist dictatorship of the proletariat and fascist states of the twenties and the thirties in which there is a bureaucratic repressive relation between the leaders and the led. In these states, consent is indirect, because of the absence of a base for democracy and the absence of popular initiative. The means in which this kind of consent is established from above to below are purely statist and the instrument of coercion. Therefore, for Gramsci, these are totalitarian political forms. "Where there is a single totalitarian governing party...the functions of such a party are no longer directly political, but merely technical ones of propaganda and public order, and moral and cultural influence. There thus, of course, remains an indirect political function..." (SPN: 149). Moreover, in those places where party (as governmental apparatus) incorporates into the state, the party tends to suppress and elevate the boundary between state and civil society.<sup>iv</sup> "The contemporary dictatorships legally abolish these new forms of autonomy"—as parties, trade unions, cultural associations—"and strive to incorporate them within state activity: the legal centralization of the entire national life in the hands of the dominant group becomes totalitarian" (SPN: 54n). The result is that in those countries, the border of state and civil society is abolished in favor of state, and state, civil society and party merge into each other. There is thus no private initiative, the masses "have no other political function than a generic loyalty, of a military kind, to a visible or invisible political center. . .the mass following is simply for maneuver and is kept happy by means of moralizing sermons, emotional stimuli, and messianic myths of an awaited golden age, in which all present contradictions and miseries will be automatically resolved and made well" (SPN: 150). Hence, there is no autonomous civil society, even no autonomous state from the party.

As Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1982: 121) noted, from Gramsci's comparative analysis of the French and Italian bourgeoisie revolution, we can comprehend that the forms of passive and indirect consent relate to the historical process of passive revolution. In this comparison, because of the ruling class which relies primarily on the state, on coercion or domination, and the absence of popular initiative and democracy, Gramsci assumes *Risorgimento* as a passive revolution which is a dictatorship without hegemony. The state, by creating its repressive apparatus (administrative, bureaucratic and even police), encompasses the whole society (SPN: 104-106). In this kind of totalitarian state, coercion appears without consent.

c.) *Hegemony in the Working Class States*: In the same comparison mentioned above, Gramsci refers to the form of active direct consent relating to popular revolution. This kind of consent is expansive and democratic. The expanse of consent requires the absence of bureaucratic repressive apparatus between the leaders and the led. Therefore, it is anti-statist. "In this sense hegemony—as defining democracy as providing an index of forms of democracy from below to above—relies on the notion of democracy of

producers, an aspect of the factory councils and functions effectively as a critical anti-statist principle. This is why it cannot be reduced to a simple doubling of the state force" (Buci-Glucksmann, 1982: 119). Then hegemony becomes primarily a strategy for the gaining of active consent of the masses through their self organizations, starting from civil society, and in all the hegemonic apparatuses—life, factory, school, even family—and aims to create a collective political will which will transform society to socialism (Buci-Glucksmann, 1982: 119). Gramsci's concept of hegemony thus goes beyond the traditional Marxist conception of hegemony which emphasizes the forms of domination and refers to the corporate class which defends its own material interest. Conversely, hegemonic class in Gramsci universalizes its interests and ensures that its interests become the interests of the subordinate groups. This concept of active-direct consent exists in working class states. In these states, there is no coercion, no repressive apparatus, no state as political society but hegemony and civil society. So, there will be hegemony without coercion in the state. Therefore, passive revolution which may be, and is, used by bourgeoisie for the transformation of society, is not appropriate for the working class. For this transformation, the working class has to struggle for hegemony and thereby create its own hegemony which must find its basis in civil society. In the notion of the integral state (state = political society + civil society), state (political society) appears

*coercive element of the state as tendentially capable of withering away and of being subsumed into regulated society...It is possible to imagine the withering away by degrees, as ever-more conspicuous elements of regulated society (ethical state or civil society) make their appearance...In the doctrine of the state as regulated society, one will have to pass from a phase in which state will be equal to government, and state will be identified with civil society, to a phase of the state as nightwatchman—i.e. of a coercive organization which will safeguard the development of the continually proliferating elements of regulated society, and which will therefore progressively reduce its own authoritarian and forcible interventions (SPN, p.263).*

The working class, by elaborating its hegemony through civil society under the guard of the coercive organization as nightwatchman, tends to develop the regulated society, thereby transforming society from capitalism to socialism. During this period, the function of the state is to destroy and bury the remains of the capitalist order and to ensure the transformation of society to socialism. While civil society will extend against political society by degrees, political society will progressively become smaller and lose its own authoritarian and forcible apparatuses. Finally, political society will be

absorbed by civil society. When society is transformed from capitalism to socialism, there will be no need for the coercive apparatus since in the ideal socialist society, there is an absence of social and economic inequality and thus exploitation. Social classes do not exist and there will be no corresponding conflict between the classes. Socialist society or regulated society (hegemony without coercion) exists.

### V. Conclusion

Our investigation of the changeable inter relationship between state and civil society in Gramsci concludes that hegemony is differentiated according to classes and historical phases in Gramsci. Each version of hegemony refers and corresponds to a state in a certain historical phase in which civil society and political society, or the rulers and the ruled have an internal relation which forms that state. In the development of history, every state exists with its appropriate hegemony. What Gramsci aims by investigating the variety of ways in which hegemony is established and exercised by different classes in different historical periods is to achieve a new political strategy that will transform the society from capitalism to socialism.

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### Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> For Gramsci's life see, Anne Showstack Sassoon "Gramsci's Life", in Anne Showstack Sassoon, ed., *Approaches to Gramsci* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative Society Ltd., 1982), 150-158.
- <sup>ii</sup> In this paper all references to Gramsci will be to Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, edited and translated by Quintin Hoara and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971). From now on I will use shortly SPN for *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*.
- <sup>iii</sup> Bobbio makes this point, referring to Marx's "Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy". For "Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy", see David McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 388-392.
- <sup>iv</sup> Conversely, in the parliamentary democracy, ideological-cultural institutions have a very high degree of autonomy, therefore they can conceal and limit the degree to which they belong to the system of capitalist power, hence the separation of public and private is important and meaningful in this sense.