

Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism

Hegemonic Apparatus

A: adawat al-haymana. – G: Hegemonialapararat. – F: appareil d'hégémonie. – R: apparaty gegemonii. S: – C: lingdao jigou 领导机构

Gramsci analyses, with the concept *apparato egemonico* or *apparato di egemonia*, the social terrain on which 'leadership' is contested. Against the background of the defeat of the Italian workers' movement by Fascism, the beginnings of Stalinisation in the Soviet Union and the new formation of capitalism by the Fordist mode of production and way of life, the concept aims at an analysis of such forms and dimensions of domination, or of the conquest of power of the subjugated classes, that are based upon consensus (and not directly on violence or its threat): 'A hegemonic apparatus can be defined as any institution, place or agent that organises, mediates and confirms the hegemony of a class over other classes' (**Francioni** 1984, 175). The increasing significance of hegemonic apparatuses can be expressed, despite civil achievements, in the growing subalternity of the 'many' in relation to the 'few'. In contrast, **Gramsci** sketches out his 'philosophy of praxis' as a project of overcoming such subalternity. The installation of a hegemonic apparatus is equivalent to a 'philosophical reform': insofar as it 'creates a new ideological terrain, it effects a reform of consciousnesses and of methods of knowledge, its a fact of knowledge, a philosophical fact' (Q 10, § 12).

1. The etymology of 'apparatus' represents an initial difficulty of the reception of the notion of a hegemonic apparatus. In Latin, *apparatus* means formulation, preparation, decoration, pomp, military and liturgical accoutrement as well as equipment. In the course of the eight-

eenth century, the German meaning of the term was extended to the totality of people and arrangements for the fulfilment of certain tasks (Etymol WB 1, 65). While the dimensions of meaning of 'formulation' and 'assembly' (from the verb *appare*), 'decoration', 'ornament' as well as 'pomp' or 'display' are still present in the Romance languages, the notion of 'equipment' is dominant in German; thus the tendency of understanding the Italian 'apparatus' one-sidedly as 'machine'. The active or sensuous dimensions (e.g. as dimensions manifested as 'fascination') thus remain underexposed. Still less is the practical dimension to be dismissed. 'Hegemony', for example, is used by **Thucydides** in numerous passages in his history and is related to the characterisation of political and military leadership or power. When the concept was used in the Russian Marxism of the Second International at the end of the nineteenth century, or later by the Comintern, it also was used to express questions of political strategy (cf. **Anderson** 1977, 15 et sqq.).

2. **Marx** and **Engels** use 'state machine' and 'state machinery', not 'state apparatus'. However, the perspective is both genetic and structural. 'As against bourgeois-civil society, the state machine has consolidated its position' (*MECW* 11, 186; trans. modified), **Marx** claims in the *18th Brumaire*: 'the first French Revolution, with its task of breaking all separate local, territorial, urban and provincial powers in order to create the civil unity of the nation, was bound to develop what the absolute monarchy had begun: the centralisation, but at the same time the extent, the attributes and the agents of governmental power' (*MECW* 11, 185). After Napoleon had perfected this 'state machinery', the following régimes added a 'greater division of labour':

‘Every *common* interest was straightway severed from society, counterposed to it as a higher, *general* interest, snatched from the activity of society’s members themselves and made an object of government activity [...]. All revolutions perfected this machine instead of breaking it. The parties that contended in turn for domination regarded the possession of this huge state edifice as the principal spoils of the victor’ (*MECW* 11, 186; cf. *MECW* 22, 485; *MECW* 22, 532–7).

The revolutionary opposing position is that of the Paris Commune: ‘While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society’ (*MECW* 22, 333; cf. **Engels**, *MECW* 27, 179).

The dimension relevant for hegemony was already presented by **Marx** and **Engels** in the *German Ideology*: from the ‘contradiction between the particular and the common interests, the common interest’ in class-societies ‘assumes an independent form as the state, which is divorced from the real individual and collective interests’ (*MECW* 5, 46). It is ‘the *practical* struggle’ of these as well as ‘particular interests’ that run counter to these ‘common and illusory common interests’ that necessitate ‘*practical* intervention and restraint by the illusory “general” interest in the form of the state’ (47). The statal articulation of society as an ‘illusory community’ (46) means that ‘each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it is compelled [...] to present its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and present them as the only rational, universally valid ones’ (60). In reality, we are dealing here with a comprehension of the level and ‘grammar’ of the contestation for hegemony.

Engels drew attention in 1895 to the changed conditions of the struggle for power, which prefigure **Gramsci**’s proposition of the war of position: ‘far from winning victory by one mighty stroke, [the proletariat] has slowly

to press forward from position to position in a hard, tenacious struggle’ (‘Introduction’ to **Marx**, *Class Struggles in France*, *MECW* 27, 512). With the example of the right to vote, he refers to an ‘entirely new mode of struggle of the proletariat’, which was becoming effective and would be further extended. ‘The state institutions, in which the rule of the bourgeoisie is organised, offer the working class still further levers to fight these very state institutions’ (516). ‘The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of masses lacking consciousness is past’. Much more must the masses themselves be for a complete transformation of the social organisation, ‘the masses themselves must also be in on it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are fighting for, body and soul’ (520; cf. **Texier** 1998, 169–224).

3. **Lenin** sees the task as one of making the masses capable of an ‘independent involvement in the historical destiny of the country’ and of throwing off the ‘hegemony of the bourgeoisie’ (*LCW* 17, 238 et sq.). That can be achieved only through the formation of a bloc of all ‘intermediary democratic groups and sections’ around the working class (*LCW* 17, 215), ‘criticising the narrowness and short-sightedness of all bourgeois democracy’ (*LCW* 17, 80). In *State and Revolution*, he refers to **Marx**’s views in the *18th Brumaire* and affirms: ‘All early revolutions have perfected the state machinery, but it must be smashed, broken’ (*LSW* 2, 32).

Against the background of his experiences of the Revolution, **Lenin** affirms in 1921 that indeed ‘quite a small party is sufficient to lead the masses [...]. But to win, we must have the sympathy of the masses’ (‘Speech in Defence of the Tactics of the Communist International’ at the III Congress, *LCW* 32, 476). In his late work, he attempted to translate that into practical politics: power is not to be exercised for but rather through the proletariat. In the first great crisis of Soviet Russia in 1920/21, he developed the concept of the ‘realisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat’, in which the party works together closely with the sovi-

ets, state-apparatus and the unions as ‘transmission belts’. In differing ways, they should approach the masses, win them over, binding themselves with the masses (*LCW* 32, 21). Attempts to advance on this path preoccupied him until his death. If his concept is also intermingled with educationalist moments and related to a party that was also leading in an administrative sense, there are apparent already new forms of influence. For **Lenin**, the dictatorship of the proletariat contains ‘systematically guiding influence (also = struggle, though of a particular type, overcoming of a determinate completely different opposition and a completely different type of overcoming) on all workers outside the proletariat’ (**Lenin** 1970, 242). The mechanical dimension in this approach, as expressed in the metaphor of ‘transmission belts’, benefited **Stalin’s** simplifications (**Stalin**, *Works* 8, 34). The sense for a differentiated treatment of the hegemonic dimension of the struggle for power was lost.

4. **Gramsci** uses the expression ‘apparatus’ already before the *Prison Notebooks* in different connections like ‘economic apparatus’, ‘political apparatus’, ‘union apparatus’, ‘national apparatus of production’, ‘apparatus of industrial production’, ‘proletarian apparatus’ or ‘military-bureaucratic apparatus’. On the other hand, hegemony appears rarely before 1925 and, when it does, usually as a descriptive concept. Before **Gramsci** appropriated its usage under the influence of the Comintern in the sense of a strategy, he speaks rather of ‘prestige’ – a mode of expression which was inspired by his study of linguistics: language-geography brought the implementation of a determinate mode of speaking into connection with an overarching cultural and social life (cf. **Lo Piparo** 1979, 85–151). In ‘The Party and the Revolution’ (*ON*, 27.12.1919) he demanded that by means of ‘radiation of prestige’ (1977, 143) the PSI should ‘produce an embryonic apparatus of power in which the masses exercise their own government’ (*ON* 2, 369 et sq.; 1977, 144): through the ‘apparatus of spiritual government [*governo spirituale*]’ the party ‘exercises the most effective of dicta-

torships, a dictatorship based on prestige’ (1977, 144). The only document that seems to indicate that ‘apparatus’ and ‘hegemony’ have an integral relation to each other appears to be in the article ‘Towards the Communist International’ (*ON*, 26.7.1919), where **Gramsci** refers to the ‘enormous administrative and political apparatus’ of the Entente, which had survived the War undamaged and is ‘now effectively the instrument of Anglo-Saxon world hegemony’ (*ON* 2, 152; 1977, 81).

4.1. The concept *apparato egemonico* appears in the *Prison Notebooks* for the first time in the context of the conditions of emergence of Action Française. After the First World War, ‘the hegemonic apparatus cracks and the exercise of hegemony becomes evermore difficult’, **Gramsci** notes in this context (*Q* 1, §48; cf. *Q* 13, §37). This problem is not specifically French: in Italy, ‘the discussion of force and consent’ is ‘relatively advanced’. ‘This discussion is the discussion of the “philosophy of the epoch”, the central motive in the life of the states in the period after the war. How to reconstruct the hegemonic apparatus of the dominant group, which had broken up due to the consequences of the war in all the states of the world?’ (*Q* 7, §80). **Gramsci** criticises seeing the cause of the decline in the fact that ‘a strong antagonistic collective political will had developed’. ‘If this were the case’, he says, ‘the question would have been resolved in the favour of this antagonist’. Instead, he sees numerous causes at work: ‘1) because great masses, previously passive, have entered into movement, but in a chaotic and disordered movement, without leadership, that is, without precise collective political will; 2) because middle classes that during the war had functions of commanding and responsibility, had them taken away with peace, remaining unemployed, precisely after having done an apprenticeship in commanding, etc.; 3) because the antagonistic force were unable to organise this effective disorder’. The problem consists in reconstructing the ‘hegemonic apparatus of these previously passive and apolitical elements’. That could not occur without force: ‘since in every state the ensemble of

social relations was different, the political methods of using force and the combination of legal and illegal forces had to be different' (ibid.).

4.2. These contemporary analyses are later supplemented with theoretical considerations on the historical role of hegemonic apparatuses. **Gramsci** takes up the 'affirmation of **Guicciardini** that two things are absolutely necessary for the life of a state: weapons and religion'. This formula can be translated in 'various other formulae, less drastic: force and consent, coercion and persuasion, state and church, political society and civil society, politics and morality (**Croce's** ethical-political history), right and freedom, order and discipline, or, with an implicit judgement of a libertarian flavour, violence and fraud'. For the political thought of the Renaissance, 'religion was consent and the church was civil society, the apparatus of hegemony of the leading group which did not have its own apparatus, that it, did not have its own cultural and intellectual organisation, but felt the universal ecclesiastical organisation to be this'. Here is expressed the idea that 'religion is openly conceived and analysed as an "*instrumentum regni*" [instrument of domination]'. The Jacobin cult of the 'supreme Being' could also be studied in a new way from this perspective, as an 'attempt to create identity between the state and civil society' and 'to grasp the entire popular and national life' (Q 6, §87).

In Daniel **Halévy**, **Gramsci** finds proof that the most important initiatives in France after 1870 did not emerge from political organisms that were based on the right to vote but, rather, from private organisms or relatively unknown high bureaucratic offices. He concludes from this 'that the common concept of the State is unilateral and leads to enormous errors', because 'by State one must understand... also the "private" apparatus of hegemony or civil society' (Q 6, §137). He develops the theme further in relation to 'the problem of political leadership in the formation and in the development of the nation and the modern State in Italy' (Q 19, §24), ascribing to the intellectuals an important role. The

moderates were able 'to stabilise the apparatus (the mechanism) of their intellectual, moral and political hegemony' by making 'individual, "molecular", "private" initiative' into their most important instrument and not, for example, 'a party programme according to a plan elaborated and constituted prior to practical and organisational action' (ibid.). That was possible, however, only because the moderates were the organic intellectuals of the upper classes: 'they were intellectuals and political organisers and at the same time bosses, large landowners or bailiffs, commercial and industrial entrepreneurs' (ibid.).

Indeed, 'nobody is unorganised and without a party [...], if we understand organisation and party in the broadest and not formal sense. In this multiplicity of particular societies [...] one or more prevail relatively or absolutely, constituting the hegemonic apparatus of a social group over the rest of the population (or civil society), basis of the State comprehended strictly as governmental-coercive apparatus' (Q 6, §136). When there are weak points in this political hegemony, 'it is to be noted how in the public sphere the improprieties of the administration of justice make an especially disastrous impression: the hegemonic apparatus is most sensitive in this sector, to which the arbitrary acts of the police and the political administration can also be referred' (Q 6, §81).

Sometimes, the concept is only present in a conceptual sense, not literally in terms of the word itself. Thus, for example, **Gramsci** speaks of the 'material structure of the superstructure' (Q 4, §12; Q 11, §29), of the 'complex of trenches and defences' or of the 'ideological structure of a ruling class', of the 'material organisation intended to maintain, to defence and to develop the theoretical or ideological "front"'. The most important part of this is the press and the publishing houses. Additionally, there is 'all that which influences or can influence public opinion directly or indirectly: the libraries, the schools, circles and clubs of various types, to architecture, the placement of streets and the names of them. The maintained position of the Church in modern society cannot be explained if one doesn't recognise the

daily and patient efforts that it makes in order to develop continually its particular section of this material structure of ideology' (Q 3, §49). **Francioni** holds it for 'probable that the concept of the material structure of ideology, correlative to that of the hegemonic apparatus, represents for **Gramsci** merely an early and provisional formulation, a perhaps not entirely satisfying draft, particularly when the note only had one development and was not taken up again in a thematic notebook' (1984, 179).

4.3. The **Hegelian** concept of an ethical or cultural state, as it was propagated by **Croce**, can also be more clearly comprehended with the concept of hegemonic apparatus: 'every State is ethical insofar as one of its most important functions is that of elevating the large mass of the population to a determinate cultural and moral level. [...] The school as positive educative function and the courts as repressive and negative educative functions are the most important activities of the State in this sense: but in reality a multiplicity of other so called private initiatives and activities, which form the apparatus of political and cultural hegemony of the dominant classes, aim at this end'. If, for **Hegel**, 'the development of the bourgeoisie in its expansion' could appear to be 'unlimited', 'in reality only the social group that posits the end of the State of itself as the goal to be reached can create an ethical State' (Q 8, §179).

5. Similar approaches, even if less radical, can be found in the Austro-Marxists, who attempted to theorise the hegemony of the working class in the same period (cf. **Albers** 1983, 19–50). Thus, in the Linz Programme, we read: 'in the democratic republic, political domination is based no longer on political privileges, but on the ability, by means of its economic power, the power of tradition, the press, the school and the church, to keep the majority of the people under its intellectual-cultural [*geistig*] influence' (**Bauer**, WA 3, 1022).

Such considerations became relevant again in the 1960s. In particular, the student-movement and the experiences of the democratic-

socialist government in Chile in 1970–3 with its bloody defeat by the military coup posed the question concerning the possibilities of a left-hegemonic project once again. **Christine Buci-Glucksmann** directed attention in this context to **Gramsci's** concept of hegemonic apparatus, which is a 'concept of the same order as those of organic intellectual and historic bloc' and the lack of attention for which had brought forth a 'number of negative effects': 'the primacy of the ideological over the analysis of the superstructures, the primacy of the problematic of the historical bloc over that of the relations of force and the state, a deviation in Gramscian interpretation of a cultural-idealist character' (63). **Buci-Glucksmann** discusses the concept of hegemonic apparatus in relation to **Althusser's** 'ideological state apparatuses' (ISA).

Althusser noted **Gramsci's** influence on his own theory: '**Gramsci** [...] had the "remarkable" idea that the State could not be reduced to the (Repressive) State Apparatus, but included, as he put it, a certain number of institutions from "civil society": the Church, the Schools, the trade unions, etc.' (**Althusser** 1971, 142). While **Gramsci** had 'not systematised' his 'acute but fragmentary notes' and 'intuitions' (ibid.), **Althusser** intends to correct this. '*No class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses*' (146). In distinction to the centrally organised repressive state apparatus, 'the ideological state apparatuses are [...] "relatively autonomous" and capable of providing an objective field' for the unfolding of the class struggle (149). The experience of 1968 prompts **Althusser** to formulate that the ISAs, the dominating of which he sees in the school, are 'necessarily the location and the actual application of a class struggle, which in the apparatuses of the ruling ideology continues the general class struggle' (**Althusser** 1983, 456). He distinguishes between religious, educational, family, juridical, political (political system and parties), 'trade union' (here including both professional and employer associations), informational and cultural ISAs (cf. 143 et sq.).

While **Althusser** views the ISAs as means of power of the ruling class, Santiago **Carrillo** intends, by means of an extensive and energetic ‘democratisation of the state apparatus’, to deprive ‘bourgeois ideology of its hegemony in the ISAs’ (1977, 56). Nicos **Poulantzas** claims that **Gramsci** had explicitly ‘developed the theory of the ideological apparatuses as apparatuses of the State’ (1974, 299; trans. modified). The key question for him is that of the ‘power bloc’, in which he, like **Gramsci**, distinguishes between classes and class-fractions, which are nevertheless in no way ‘merged’ on an equal footing; rather, it is much more the case that one of these classes or class-fractions plays an unambiguously dominating role (1975, 141). The ‘heart of the matter’ consists in the distinction between ‘the state apparatus, narrowly defined, in the singular [and] several ideological State apparatuses’, in the plural (1974, 305). **Poulantzas** criticises **Althusser** for having undervalued the ‘distinction between the “private” and “public” state apparatuses’ (ibid.). Fixation on the ideological and repressive state-apparatuses threatened to prevent us ‘from locating the state network in which the power of the hegemonic fraction of the bourgeoisie is essentially concentrated [...] it obscures the character of the modalities required to transform this economic apparatus in the transition to socialism’ (1978, 33).

As in the case of **Poulantzas**, **Althusser’s** influence on regulation-school theorists is also noticeable in the fact that hegemonic apparatus does not become an operative concept in their work, even though they attempt to investigate the history and present of the capitalist mode of production as a sequence of historically specific political projects, social confrontations and institutionalisation-processes based upon compromise, and even though regulationist analysis works ‘with the concept of hegemony or rather with that of the ideological-institutional hegemonic system’ (**Lipietz** 1992, 187; cf. **Demirovic** 1992, 133 et sqq.).

Althusser later attempted once again to justify why his concept of the ISA was ‘more precise’ than ‘**Gramsci’s** concept of hegemonic apparatus’ (1978, 12): with the latter, accord-

ing to **Althusser**, the ‘apparatus’ is defined in terms of its effect or result, hegemony, without mentioning how they function – ‘as ideology’ (ibid.) – while he defined the ISAs ‘in terms of their “motor cause”: ideology’ (2006, 139). **Gramsci** contradicted himself when he, on the one hand, conceived the hegemonic apparatus as belonging to civil society and distinguished this as the ‘private’ in opposition to the ‘public’ of the state in the narrow sense; on the other hand, he identified the state with civil society (ibid.). – However, **Althusser** here ignores the difference between bourgeois-civil society [*bürgerlicher Gesellschaft*] and civil society [*società civile*] just as he does not notice the difference between the state in the narrow sense and the integral state; he misunderstands the sphere of mediation between the private and state in the narrow sense, opened up for Marxist reflection by **Gramsci**, as private. Finally, it should be noted that, when **Althusser** speaks of ‘ideology’, he ascribes an omni-historical meaning to it, which is thus not without difficulties compatible with a use of language that bases itself upon **Marx**.

Althusser’s lack of distinction between statal and civil-society apparatuses has been continually criticised: as **Hall**, **Lumley** and **McLennan** argue, **Althusser** ‘always insisted on the need for specificity as part of the “necessary complexity” of the Marxist concept of totality. But the opposition to the concept of “civil society” has the theoretical effect, here, precisely of leading us to abandon specificity for a rather too convenient generalization’ (1978, 64). **Karin Priester** argues that this makes the ‘distinction between bourgeois democracy and fascism’ impossible (1979, 37). With the concentration on ‘ideology’, one further runs the risk of losing sight of the ‘whole organisation of the intellectual “function”, i.e. the whole organisation of “technical know how” and specialist knowledge’ in the hegemonic apparatus (**De Giovanni** 1979, 69). Such a hegemony-theoretical perspective would also open up a fruitful point of contact with many studies inspired by **Foucault**, for ‘there is no way of conceptualizing the balance of power between different regimes of truth without society conceptualized, not as a unity,

but as a “formation” (Hall 1986, 48). According to the assessment of the **Projekt Ideologie-Theorie**, Althusser begins from ‘the statal, solidified instances that have become autonomous over and against society; he puts himself in the standpoint of the “accomplished phenomenon” (MECW 36, 218)’ (PIT 1979, 115). Gramsci, on the other hand, was interested in the development of the relations of force in political conjunctures and confrontations, for the active ascension of a class to state-power (Hall et al. 1978, 68 et sq.; PIT 1979, 111). – Nevertheless, even on the side of Althusser’s critics, the position of the concept of hegemonic apparatus varies. While Haug, similarly to Buci-Glucksmann, holds the concept (in the plural and in the variant of ‘hegemonic apparatuses’) to be ‘indispensable’ (1985, 174), the concept is not to be found in the texts of Hall.

It is precisely the specifically Gramscian accent on the non-statalised public sphere that qualifies the concept of hegemonic apparatus also for the attempt to understand the fall of state-administrative socialism. Its claim to hegemony was increasingly substituted by a repressive system, in which the contest for the ‘hearts and minds’ occurred only formally, as one-sided state-propaganda (cf. Bollinger 1998). Here, one could have learnt from Gramsci that ‘unity and discipline’ must emerge from loyalty and due to conviction’ (Letter to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, Gramsci 1978, 432).

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Americanism, Austro-Marxism, base, bureaucracy, civil society [*società civile*], class-struggles, coherence, command-administrative socialism, common sense [*senso comune*], dictatorship of the proletariat, dismantling of the state, dissolution of the state, educationalism, ethical-political,

Eurocommunism, good sense [*buon senso*], grammar, Gramscianism, hegemony, historical bloc, ideology-theory, ideological power, ideological state-apparatus, integral state, intellectual, Paris Commune, party-apparatus, passive revolution, *Prison Notebooks*, relations of force, *Risorgimento*, state, state-apparatus, student-movement, subalternity, superstructure, war of position/war of movement.

Abbau des Staates, Absterben des Staates, Alltagsverstand, Amerikanismus, Austromarxismus, Basis, befehlsadministratives System, Bürokratie, Diktatur des Proletariats, Edukationismus, ethisch-politisch, Eurokommunismus, Gefängnishefte, geschichtlicher Block, gesunder Menschenverstand, Grammatik, Gramscismus, Hegemonie, Ideologietheorie, ideologische Macht, ideologische Staatsapparate, integraler Staat, Intellektuelle, Klassenkämpfe, Kohärenz, Kräfteverhältnisse, Pariser Kommune, Partei, Parteiapparat, passive Revolution, *Risorgimento*, Staat, Staatsapparat, Stellungskrieg/Bewegungskrieg, Studentenbewegung, Subalternität, Superstruktur, Zivilgesellschaft.