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Gramsci and Us: Toward Gramscian Strategy in the Neoliberal Moment

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**Gramsci and Us:
Toward Gramscian Strategy in the Neoliberal Moment**

by

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Toward Gramscian Strategy in the Neoliberal Moment**

The neoliberal moment has been hegemonized by the Right and seen the disorganization of the Left and its politics of class struggle. Developing Left strategy requires a reconstitution of that project, as well as a firm understanding of both hegemony and counterhegemony. Antonio Gramsci, the Italian communist leader and intellectual who developed these concepts, offers a critical voice for creating Left strategy in the neoliberal moment. In this paper I develop a Gramscian strategic framework in order to better evaluate the strategic implications of social movement activity in the contemporary United States. I study the Occupy Movement, the 2006 Immigrant Uprising, and the still emerging model of Transformative Organizing. I argue for the utility of Gramsci-inspired, context-specific strategy of the “war of position,” and extract lessons on how to do the long-term “spadework,” movement building, and Left reorganization work in line with this overarching strategy.

“Note the problem of religion taken not in the confessional sense but in the secular sense of a unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct. But why call this unity of faith ‘religion’ and not ‘ideology,’ or even ‘politics’?”

—Antonio Gramsci

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1

Introduction

This thesis is premised on the idea that the Left in the United States needs strategy. New strategy, better strategy, and informed strategy. It assumes that sociological insight can play a role in generating that strategy; but it also assumes that a sickly Italian communist who spent a large part of his adult life in prison can help us generate strategy. And maybe most importantly it suggests that some of the best insights are emerging on the ground in the movements and movement organizations that people are hard at work building. It assumes that strategy will emerge from the experience of struggle, a well-grounded theoretical orientation, and a long, hard look at the moment and context that our fight takes place in.

Shortly I'll address the question of why I think *we* need strategy. But I'll start with why I think *I* need strategy. I was radicalized before coming to Vassar, and before participating in anything resembling a movement. But my consciousness and activity have been immeasurably changed by the process of participating in collective struggle. I began organizing for fundamental social change in a moment filled with sporadic upsurges. As exciting as each of these moments has been, they have always given way to the long, slow, patient work—the “spade work” as Ella Baker called it. And they have always been matched blow for blow by the might of neoliberal power. As a socialist asking the question “how do we make a revolution,” I am confronted by the question of “how does all this work add up?” The conversations and research that have inspired this piece have posed the same question in a variety of contexts. This thesis is a small attempt to build on that work and develop answers. I argue that a self-conscious struggle for hegemony can help us understand how we make our disparate movements, our spadework, and our brief

upsurges add up. This thesis may be only a small part of partial, developing answer, but it is animated by the basic assertion that “we have no choice but to do all of the patient and deliberate work necessary for such a strategy to come into being” (Lee and Williams).

I think we need strategy because the Left is deep inside an internal crisis and is therefore incapable of meeting the challenge of the neoliberal moment. That challenge is an interlocking set of crises that takes different form in different places, but fundamentally undermines dignity, justice, peace, and sustainability. It is a crisis of imperialism, of the ecology, the economy, and society. It is austerity, capitalist globalization, fossil fuel consumption, imperial wars, mass state violence against people of the global south, people of color in the global north, and immigrants making their way between both worlds. That list can go on and on. Its length suggests the depth of the crisis. And the promise of the Left has always been to diagnose the root causes of these intersecting ills, and suggest a project of human emancipation to combat them.

But that Left has been founding wanting, especially in the United States—which is the focus of this thesis. The Left in the United States is in disarray. It cannot offer a sustained and coherent challenge to neoliberalism, and at best is waging defensive actions. The Left is unable to exercise leadership over society and the disparate forms of resistance that have cropped up. And these moments of resistance have indeed cropped up. The editors of *Jacobin Magazine*, in their 2014 issue on strategy describe this “frustrating paradox” where there is plenty of activity and earnest resistance, but “the balance of forces and tenor of discourse” continue to move rightward (Jacobin). In short, as I will argue throughout this thesis, we live in a moment where the Right has hegemonized the Left’s defeats, and deepened its control and power to the detriment of popular forces, including but not limited too, the international working class.

This crisis is not a foregone conclusion. There is undoubtedly a complex and formidable set of structural underpinnings of this crisis that no political force can simply will out of existence. However, the Left's weakness is in part due to its own inability to meet the crisis successfully. The Jacobin editors explain, "Here is the crux of the problem: our traditional organizational forms — namely, the mass party and the trade union — are in steady decline, and we have yet to identify and construct adequate replacements" (Jacobin). That requires a great deal more than tinkering with organizational structures. This thesis, and Gramsci's work more broadly, invites us to wrestle with what it means to develop a social and political force that can effectively construct a revolutionary transformation in these difficult times. The Gramscian answer, is at least in part, to begin "sketch[ing] out an entirely new form of civilization" as Hall might put it (1987:8).

Gramsci's theory offers something vital to this project. My goal is to extract that and put it in dialogue with the current moment and the movements that are partially driving social change in the U.S. right now. That requires a different reading of one that seems to dominate the academy right now. That dominant reading of Gramsci is often focused on culture in ways that are divorced from the strategic questions of political formations, counterhegemony, and collective action. By reading Gramsci's work, contemporary theory and strategy, and looking at three social movements in the U.S., I will develop a framework that addresses the question of strategy and allows for a richer engagement with ongoing forms of social struggle.

In Chapter Two, I will argue that in spite of important contextual differences, the neoliberal era is best understood through Gramsci's theory of hegemony. The continued relevance of Gramsci need not imply a static reading of his work, and so I will also draw on more recent scholars to construct of vision of Gramsci that understands the mutually constitutive

nature of capitalism, race, gender, culture, and nation. With this we gain an expanded, and strategic, concept of class and class struggle.

Using this particular reading of Gramsci paired with contemporary articulations of socialist strategy, I will draw out the key strategic implications of Gramsci's theory. Flowing from his theory of hegemony, Gramsci's strategy revolves around the concepts of the "war of position", the political party as "collective intellectual," the analysis of the "conjuncture," and the formation of an "historical bloc." His methods involve Marxist analysis, attendance to contextual specificity, assessments of conjunctural phenomena, and a textured understanding of the dialectical nature of material and symbolic forces.

Wedding these concepts and methods, we arrive at a framework that can be put to work. Chapter Three attempts to more thoroughly place Gramsci's theory in the neoliberal context, and draw out a usable strategic framework. Chapter Four is an application of that framework to three movements (or almost-movements) that have emerged in the last decade: The Occupy Movement of 2011, The Immigrant Uprising of 2006, and the developing constellation of Transformative Organizations.

In my concluding chapter I will attempt to both extract lessons from an application of the Gramscian framework, as well as assess the utility of the framework itself. These lessons and evaluations can hopefully advance the project of undertaking the "patient and deliberate work" to move from strategy toward victory.

2

Situating Gramsci

The development of a Gramscian strategic framework begins with an attempt to make sense of Gramsci's work. To do so, I will organize his concepts around two main themes: hegemony and counterhegemony. By looking at both of these themes and making serious renovations based on more contemporary theories of social formation, the broad strategy of a war of position emerges. Understanding the war of position, I will argue throughout this paper, is critical for understanding the operation of neoliberal capitalism.

Hegemony

The simplest definition of hegemony that Gramsci offers is a "combination of force [coercion] and consent" (Gramsci 2000:261). But beneath that simple formulation is a revolutionary reconceptualizing of the nature of domination under modern capitalism. What he noted in the post World War One period, was that any simple understanding of the state, of a singular ruling class, and of social control simply did not describe the situation in advanced capitalist societies. It was the failure of Left and the rise of the Right that made that painfully clear for Gramsci. Here he contrasted the East (the Russian Empire) with the West (capitalist democracies). In the East, where a Bolshevik vanguard overthrew the collapsing regime, "the state was everything," but in the West, "there was a proper relation between state and civil society, and when the state trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed"

(Gramsci 2000:229). Gramsci gives us more than a study of two geographic regions, he sets up a conceptual distinction between types of capitalist rule.

The hegemonic mode is distinct in four key ways. First, rule is not accomplished by the state alone, and in fact relies heavily on civil society—the non-state institutions that construct everyday life. Second, no singular ruling class with fixed, determined interests rules can be said to exist, but rather an historical bloc with its own hegemonic project. Thirdly, this bloc does not simply “rule.” Hegemony is marked by leadership over society which is both material (coercive and institutional) and symbolic (leadership over ideas, morality, culture), not just “rule.” And lastly, and in many ways a combination of the previous points, hegemony is always a product of both coercion and consent, always in dialectical interplay.

A foundational concept for Gramsci is “civil society.” Capital achieves hegemony not through repression alone, but through its control over social life and the institutions of civil society. “The ‘trenches of civil society’” Burawoy summarizes, “effectively organized consent to the domination by absorbing participation of the subaltern classes, giving space to political activity but within limits defined by capitalism” (2011:7). Not only does civil society serve to channel and dampen dissent, a “pressure valve” theory articulated by many other theorists, it is permeated by capital in a way that creates an ideological terrain on which all identities, cultures, and political challenges are constructed. Gramsci argues that “To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is ‘psychological’; they ‘organize’ human masses, they form the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.” (2000:199).

This continual reconstruction of consent is fundamentally different from other forms of domination. It is incredibly dynamic, and incredibly adaptive. Capital is not “over there,” a clear

and perceptible antagonist—but is “right here,” embedded in everyday life and social relations. This capacity to permeate social life is a result of institutional processes and struggle for control over the institutions that constitute everyday life. This is why Gramsci adopts the military metaphor of “trenches” and “fortifications.” Every institution that capital controls provides resistance to the moments of rebellion, the mass mobilizations of subaltern classes in the face of persistent inequality. This forces us to take seriously the “material structure of ideology,” the politics of everyday institutions, as seriously as we take the larger structural features of capitalism. Things like “libraries, schools, associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture and the layout and names of the streets” all are fortifications that must be contested if capital is to be effectively challenged (Gramsci 2000:381).

It is by navigating institutions—being socialized within them, interacting with them, even challenging them—that the curious mix of consent and coercion occurs. And it is truly a navigation, often unconscious, often fraught, but seldom cold and calculated. As Paul Willis explains in his Gramscian analysis of education and social reproduction in Britain, unfree conditions can be entered “freely,” because capital’s control over the life process runs deep enough to incorporate, disorganize, and keep “partial” structural analyses that arise in informal and cultural challenges to capitalist control. Willis explains, “The very concreteness, denseness, buried radicalism, and relevance of informal cultural processes, and the very substance of their claim on individuals is their greatest weakness in the larger social context” (1977:166). For Willis, the education system is such a powerful fortification because of the ways it shapes consciousness dynamically. It does not dominate the students in any simple way, but it is through their creative resistance, through the scope of possibility that it presents, that reproduction occurs. Common sense does not have to be “false consciousness” or dominated “groupthink.” It

more often than not is a sense of diminished possibility, a sense that the best way to get along with it, to deal with the hard realities of life under capitalism is to unhappily accept its logic, even if rejecting its spirit and its outcomes.

This understanding of the material structure of ideology and the crucial role that civil society plays in the reproduction of capitalist social relations marks hegemony as a distinctive and powerful mode of social control. It suggests that struggle is a truly multi-dimensional thing, and that “power” means a great deal more than state power.

Another key distinguishing feature of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, is his enriched concept of the “class” that rules. Gramsci’s concept of the historical bloc is a way to transcend the limited idea of a “ruling class” by connecting the question of “leadership” and power to the question of ideology and common identity. What defines a hegemonic bloc is not that it has absolute dominance in society (as is often ascribed to Gramsci), but that it exercises “leadership” and “direction,” it mobilizes a coalition of groups and suggests that their interests can be subsumed under one group’s leadership. It does so ideologically and materially. This historical bloc is built on a material foundation – a specific political economy (ie. imperial capitalism), and on this foundation a particular set of cultural/ideological arrangements is created that shapes and is shaped by that base. On this terrain a broader morality, worldview, and set of interests is defined which ultimately cements a united ruling coalition, a form of leadership that papers over potential antagonisms and creates a certain kind of stability and order. The historical bloc is both a material and symbolic project, the product of what Hall calls a politics of “production” and “articulation” with no results predetermined or essentially fixed (1987:4, 6-7). By this Hall indicates that the very political project of forging common interests is necessarily ideological, it requires constructing a collective will, creating ideological “cement,” and producing a political

subject and political subjectivity out of many political possibilities. Here, Gramsci's dialectic between base and superstructure finds its concrete manifestation. The historical bloc is essentially an organic unification of these two concepts: "structures and superstructures form a 'historical bloc'" together, Gramsci explains (2000:192).

This synthetic concept allows us to move past economic determinism and reductive models of class struggle, while avoiding the postmodern trap of divorcing politics and identities from the material world. It poses the question of ideology as the "cement" of a hegemonic coalition, rather than as the entirety of politics or a mere epiphenomenon. But this cement is not to be underestimated. Every hegemony requires an ideology that can cement it together, and that can integrate diverse social sectors, lead these sectors, gain some measure of their consent, and articulate their material and symbolic interests (Sassoon 1987:122-123). "The notion of a historical bloc is precisely different from that of a pacified, homogenous, ruling class" Hall explains, "It entails a quite different conception of how social forces and movements, in their diversity, can be articulated into a set of strategic alliances. To construct a new cultural order, you need not reflect an already-formed collective will, but to fashion a new one, to inaugurate a new historic project" (Hall 1987:7). Gramsci uses the term "integral" to describe the successful organic integration of a hegemonic coalition.

This concept of a hegemonic coalition relies on a nuanced understanding of leadership. Like so many "common sense" terms that he elaborates, Gramsci means so much more than the traditional notion of leadership. As Sassoon points out in her reading of Gramsci, leadership dialectically combines two things: "direction and dominance" (1987:111). Once again, Gramsci employs the coercion/consent dialectic to indicate that a hegemonic bloc doesn't simply coerce its opponents and allies, but that it leads them, it wins social forces over to its worldview, its

form of rule, and dominates those that refuse that leadership. “The leading class is in fact only such if it accurately interprets this combination [of national and international forces]—of which it is itself a component and precisely as such is able to give the movement a certain direction, within certain perspectives” Gramsci explains (2000:231). Hegemonic power can be measured by the extent to which a leading class successfully sets the terrain, the scope, the framing for all other groups.

The result is a specific mode of rule, different from those in other moments and other contexts. But it is the mode of rule that has come to encompass the globe, albeit with a high degree of variation. Some states clearly rely heavily on coercion, others lean much more heavily toward consent. Some areas have large broad based movements that contest hegemony in a variety of ways, others do not. In each society different antagonisms intersect and transform each other in various ways. The result is always specific—regionally, nationally, and even within the nation. And yet capitalism most frequently functions with a mixture of coercion consent, capital has deep roots within civil society, and a hegemonic bloc with capital at its center manages to continually set the terrain and rhythm of social life.

This explains a number of phenomena that we must continually contend with in the United States. They dominate our landscape, and must be reckoned with if any transformational strategy is to be forged. First, we see the power of ideology to create a terrain favorable to the hegemonic bloc. We also see the ways in which hegemony is capable of shifting, and the ways in which the dominant bloc is capable of adapting and incorporating subaltern interests and maintaining its moral and intellectual leadership. We also see the myriad ways in which coercion reinforces consent, and consent reinforces coercion.

Without diving too deep into the complex debates on class consciousness in the U.S., it is safe to say that an ideology of “There is No Alternative” is dominant across the United States. Moreover, even in moments of struggle and resistance, the terms of the debate are dictated by a fairly restrictive common sense. For example, how many times have we heard that labor unions fight for the “middle class”? In its most obvious forms, there is a noticeable and frequent disjuncture between what people say they want and what they do or even vote for.

Is this false consciousness? Gramsci would argue not. “Self-deception can be an adequate explanation for a few individuals taken separately, or even for groups of a certain size, but it is not adequate when the contrast occurs in the life of great masses.” Gramsci explains, “In these cases the contrast between thought and action cannot but be an expression of profounder contrasts of a social historical order” (2000:328). For Gramsci, this “signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes—when, that is, the group is acting as an organic totality. But this same group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group” (2000:328). A hegemonic bloc controlled by capital has clearly shaped the ideological terrain in profound ways. This does not suggest an absence of alternative ideologies and collective consciousnesses, but does suggest that these are frequently and actively disorganized by the hegemonic bloc.

A theory of hegemony also helps us account for the incredible durability of capitalism, and the strength of the ruling historical bloc. My research hasn’t turned up any single definitive understanding of the current historical bloc in the United States. However, this historical bloc certainly has capital as its leading class, while still encompassing a wide variety of groups. It

usually includes a broad part of the middle class, some segments of the white working class, and increasingly elite segments of communities of color. Despite this, it has always been staked on white supremacy, as well as colonialism and imperialism. It has proven itself to be extraordinarily adaptive. It has incorporated subaltern groups, shifted in times of crisis and revolt, and yet continually constructs a new unity and rebuilds the bloc. This rhythm has played out in every era of U.S. politics: from the Civil War to Reconstruction, from the Great Depression to the New Deal, from the movements of the 1960s to the Regan era. In each moment we saw the ruling historical bloc to struggle to articulate a strategic unity of social forces, and at times face serious revolutionary threats. Nonetheless, the bloc was able to achieve some limited forms of class compromise, to fold new social sectors into the state, and to develop a new culture capable of encompassing a large enough swath of the formerly excluded, angry, and disposed, while violently repressing those who challenged its continued leadership.

U.S. history has also demonstrated the tightly knit mix of coercion and consent at work in many institutions throughout civil society, the state, and the economy. A theory of hegemony is uniquely suited to contend with this phenomenon. Mass incarceration for example, a key pillar of the neoliberal project powerfully demonstrates the ways in which coercion and consent function together. As Loic Wacquant points out in *Punishing the Poor*, the intertwined systems of mass incarceration and workfare rely on material discipline and punishment as well symbolically shape the broader common sense and “sociomoral order”:

Penal institutions and policies can and do shoulder both tasks at once: they simultaneously act to enforce hierarchy and control contentious categories, at one level, and to communicate norms and shape collective representations and subjectivities, at another. The prison symbolizes material divisions and materializes relations of symbolic power; its operation ties together inequality and identity, fuses domination and signification, and welds the passions and the interests that traverse and roil society. (Wacquant 2004:xvi)

This fusion of domination and signification can be found, Gramsci would argue, in all institutions. In order to develop a counterhegemony, it is necessary to contest a social system that employs both material and symbolic powers, that controls and shapes, that welds together while ripping apart. We turn to this complex task in the next section.

Counterhegemony

Gramsci was always a party intellectual, a philosopher of praxis in his own right—committed to developing strategy and party forms capable of acting on a diagnosis of capitalist hegemony. What makes Gramsci's concept of social change so useful is that it suggests that dominated groups can construct a hegemony of their own. In many ways, the dialectics that produce and enforce hegemony can be reversed in a counterhegemonic process. This can take place on multiple levels: it can happen individually as common sense is “renovated” and “elaborated” into good sense; it can occur on a cultural and institutional level as organic intellectuals exercise control over civil society and as a mass party acts as a collective intellectual; and it can occur at the level of the historical bloc, as a new bloc takes shapes to replace the old one, and as broader moral reformation shifts the very terrain of political possibility.

It would be convenient to read the histories of capital's hegemonic ascension and look for a simple model. And Gramsci's study of the French Revolution, the Italian revolutions, and the creation of American Fordism, and even the power of Catholicism point to the utility of this historical study. However, no schematic is truly available, as the potential for a working class revolution under capitalism contains contradictions and difficulties that are specific to capitalism, and require novel forms of struggle. One of the major hurdles for the construction of a working

class hegemony, is that the very nature of capital's hegemonic power disorganizes and lowers the intellectual and cultural capacities of the working class. It is a class that is taught not to rule, even if with great courage and great ingenuity it finds numerous ways to exercise control of its own. As Gramsci explains:

Creating a group of independent intellectuals is not an easy thing; it requires a long process, with actions and reactions, coming together and drifting apart and the growth of very numerous and complex new formations. It is the conception of a subaltern social group, deprived of historical initiative, in continuous disorganic expansion, unable to go beyond a certain qualitative level, which still remains below the level of possession of the state and of the real exercise of hegemony over the whole society. (in Sassoon 1987:129)

The upsurges and failures of the socialist experiments of the 20th century seem to confirm this point, and the true complexity and enormity of a counterhegemonic project. While large parts of the world have experimented with any number of socialist alternatives to capitalism, socialism never achieved the hegemonic durability nor the democratic leadership capacities that Gramsci suggests are crucial to the revolutionary process.

In spite of the complexity, Gramsci's writing on counterhegemony is "electrifying" to use Stuart Hall's term. Capitalism produces a large group of people who have a material interest in changing it. But like capitalist hegemony, it requires a moral and practical leadership that is far from being an inevitable product of capitalism. Luckily, capital's leadership and control over civil society and the state both can be contested, and this process of contestation, when matched with a self-conscious, critical, and politically sharp initiative of will, can build an alternative historical bloc. Lucio Magri describes the general Gramscian counterhegemonic process this way, referencing the Italian Communist Party's (PCI) Gramsci-inspired strategy:

Wide and lasting social support had to be won, especially from the working classes, around a coherent programme; and a 'historical bloc' had to be constructed to pursue that programme as a real prospect. Finally, it was necessary to transform subaltern masses into an alternative leading class, capable of organizing social struggles and managing the spaces of power that were gradually captured. (Magri 2011:57)

In contrast to Lenin and Kautsky on the one hand, and the syndicalists on the other, Gramsci believed that the process of transforming into an “alternative leading class” began with the kernels of critical analysis and ideology that are self-produced by subaltern classes. This “good sense” is not simply introduced by an external vanguard with a monopoly of scientific socialist thought. It emerges from the experience and self-production of the working class. However, Gramsci breaks with the syndicalist tradition in noting that hegemony conditions experience, limits experience, and diminishes the capacity to conceptualize everyday life. Good sense remains a kernel of common sense, but it is a kernel embedded in what Willis describes as the “concreteness”—the “buried” nature of lived experience and the fine-tuned caution that emerges from constant coercion and previous defeats. It must be elaborated. For Gramsci that does come from without, in the form a collective intellectual—a political party.

The party is tasked with reversing the material/symbolic dialectic in favor of the working class. Material struggles that arise from the essential antagonisms of capitalism, when wedded to an counterhegemonic ideology can work in tandem to transform common sense into good sense. Material struggle opens up the moral, intellectual, and practical space to develop a class’ ability to lead and articulate new identities and ideologies. The Transformative Organizations that I will analyze in this thesis offer prime examples of the potency of this effect. By consciously, ideologically, and strategically contesting the institutions that reproduce the common sense, these organizations transform limited material struggles into expansive political challenges. For Gramsci, this effect is what a political party does across numerous struggles and on a larger scale. Just as material and symbolic forces can interact to produce hegemony, these same forces can work in tandem to bolster a counterhegemonic process.

Gramsci suggests that this requires conscious effort on the part of the party. Not all material struggles yield counterhegemonic politics, simply because if they do not have an ideological basis, if they do not create new cultures and new identities, they may transform common sense. It is essential for a counterhegemonic party to consciously exercise a hegemony of its own, and to do that it elaborates intellectuals, and conquers institutions in civil society.

Gramsci significantly renovates the concept of intellectuals. For Gramsci, intellectuals are a hegemonic group's "deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government" (2000:306). They elaborate common sense and help define and cement new ideologies and identities through constant with everyday life, what Gramsci calls "the simple." But they put that in dialogue with the structural analysis and ideological foundation of the party. Marta Harnecker describes this as "indirect knowledge" which is a necessary compliment to "direct knowledge" formed by the experience of subjugation. So intellectuals are necessarily organizers. And organic intellectuals are distinguished from traditional ones, in that they are produced by the class vying for hegemonic power. They are intimately connected to the experience and worldview of that class, and are therefore uniquely suited to exercise, organize, and perpetuate its hegemony. They are therefore the critical connective tissue between base and superstructure (Sassoon 1987:134).

An effective party is constantly producing organic intellectuals. Its cadres are able to function almost as priests do within the Catholic Church; connecting the broader church doctrine with the needs and experiences of the lay population. They socialize knowledge and help ensure that the work of "articulation" and "production" takes place by engaging and pushing the common sense of the class. But this function simply cannot happen if the party does not have the material power to capture institutions within civil society. As Sassoon puts it, "ideologies, as

furthered and embodied in the hegemonic apparatuses, organize society” (2000:135). To fully elaborate common sense and develop a new morality, a new collective will, and a new identity, it requires that the political party succeed in its trench warfare, and capture institutions that organize society and culture.

This whole process is only possible when the party develops a sharp analysis of the conjuncture. Because good sense is fashioned out of common sense, because ideologies are produced out the fabric of daily life, and because the process of constructing hegemony requires political power – counterhegemonic strategy involves knowing how to best intervene in the given historical moment with a given balance of forces and within specific culture forms. Leadership is simply impossible without an ability to command the moment, without putting a “long-prepared” “compact” and “self-aware” political force in the field (Gramsci 2000:209). The political party is precisely this long-prepared, self-aware force.

Without the work of a party seeking to consciously win material struggles, to conquer institutions, articulate new identities, and produce its own hegemonic infrastructure, upsurges are crushed and new identities, good sense, and cultural “space” are unable to be produced. Politics remains restive, but not hegemonic. Protest, unrest, rebellion may occur. But if they stop short of developing the capacity to govern, to lead, and to reform morality, culture, and everyday life, they will be unable to challenge capital’s hegemonic form of rule.

As civil society is captured, the balance of power shifts, and cultural space and collective unity emerges, the final task is to constitute a historical bloc whose ambition is first the conquest of state power, and then the use of state power to become truly integral and reinforce hegemony. For Gramsci, a counterhegemonic force does not “win” by seizing state power, but rather uses state power as lever to continually construct a new hegemony and render it increasingly integral.

For Gramsci, revolution is a process not a moment, and the party is the guide not the spark. The party “can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will, which has already been recognized and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begins to take concrete form. History has already provided this organism, and it is the political party—the first cell in which there come together the germs of a collective will tending to become universal and total” (Gramsci 2000:240).

Renovating Gramsci

One of Gramsci’s most salient methodological principles is his insistence on conjunctural specificity. To see the system as it is, to look at its complexity, what makes it novel, while carrying out rigorous structural analysis and dynamic social action—this was the task of the organic intellectual and the party. To understand the function of neoliberal capitalism in the United States, it is necessary to contend with the U.S. context. This means we must wrestle with the fact that the U.S. exists as the dominant imperial power in a unipolar world. This means we must wrestle with the U.S. as a racial state, founded on genocide and slavery and settler colonialism, and continuing to enforce a system of racial subjugation of people of color. This means we must wrestle with the depth of patriarchy and its embeddedness in state, civil society, and the economy. And we must contend with the most advanced capitalist economy, and its accompanying economic inequalities and violences that are often distinctive compared to other advanced industrial nations. Most importantly, we must contend with the myriad ways these inequalities and systems of oppression intersect and constitute one another.

The Marxist tradition has often failed to effectively account for the complexity of intersecting and mutually constituting systems of oppression. It has often substituted a reductive analysis of class for a sophisticated analysis of social formation, and the myriad antagonisms and

identities that make up a world dominated by racism, imperialism, sexism, and other systems of oppression. It has frequently regarded these features of the social world as epiphenomena, as expressions of an economic base.

It should come as no surprise then that Stuart Hall argues for Gramsci's importance to the study of identity and systems of oppression. Hall argues that Gramsci's theory of hegemony in particular lends itself to an analysis of social formation and the concrete processes of "mutual constitution," and the proliferation of antagonisms around identity. This allows us to see the ways in which racial, gender, and national formation occurs side by side with the creation of specific forms and strategies of rule. Developing a more holistic account of these multiple formations and the role they play within the current hegemony is a critical undertaking.

Hegemony is ultimately a way of conceptualizing the multi-faceted ways in which domination is formed historically and through culture, identity, and everyday life. By reading Gramsci in light of more contemporary work on racial and gender formation, we can see the utility of Gramsci's concept, as well as the necessity of renovating the reductive culture/class formation that he focused on. In particular, Gramsci's work helps clarify two key points about the nature of hegemony in the contemporary U.S. First, that capital doesn't erode "difference" but works through it. Second, that the ruling historical bloc in the U.S. is cemented by white supremacy, patriarchy, and imperialism, and carries out a sophisticated politics of articulation of its own. And lastly, that counterhegemonic movements will need to construct identities and an historical bloc that directly challenges this politics of articulation and capital's ability to mobilize difference.

Gramsci himself is of little use in directly addressing these questions. His writing on race and gender are limited. He combines occasional overtly racist remarks with the world communist

movement's commitment to anti-imperialism. He wrote little on women and patriarchy and was active in a movement that was dominated by men, even if it at times challenged patriarchal norms. There can be no doubt that these features of Gramsci's work place significant limitations on his theoretical and practical work. How can we understand hegemony without understanding a number of identities and intersecting systems of oppression? However, Gramsci's concepts are rich enough to be renovated. Hall reminds us that avoiding "literalism" is key, and that Gramsci can have utility beyond the topics he addresses directly or addresses imperfectly. This effort to reconstruct Gramsci demands that we locate Gramsci historically and structurally, and avoid looking to him for simple answers.

I have already described how Gramsci's theory of social formation allows us to move beyond reductive models of struggle. This is a point that subsequent theorists have been able to build on in analyzing the ways in which systems of oppression not only intersect, but mutually constitute one another. The result is a specific form hierarchy, one that involves class antagonisms but embedded in and expressive of patriarchal, racial, sexual antagonisms, national, cultural, ethnic, religious antagonisms. Gramsci did not make this point. But his theory helps us illuminate it. Gramsci's concept, when read in conjunction with more contemporary theory allows us to remove at least one key illusion: that capital would erode differences and through this process create a unified working class. Such a project of unity may be necessary, but it will be the product of an "initiative of will" and not an historical necessity. As Tomás Almaguer explains in his study of racial and class formation in California, "Contrary to Karl Marx's expectation at the time, the salience of racial status did not diminish in the face of expanded nineteenth-century proletarianization" and the same holds for gender (2009:11-12). Stuart Hall describes this as capital "harness[ing]...these particularistic qualities of labor power"—capital

“working through difference” (1986:24). This is a fundamental feature of the current historical bloc. To neglect it is to misunderstand the fact that blocs aren’t simply alliances of forces; they are dynamic products that have been forged ideologically as well as materially

The nature of hegemony in the United States represents a striking example of the ways in which an historical bloc can be constituted by more than labor/capital antagonisms, and is instead a complex social formation capable of incorporating many different groupings and employing ideologies emerging from all facets of culture and identity. Gramsci focuses almost entirely on Italian history to construct and apply the historical bloc concept. Fortunately, Moon-Kie Jung’s writing on the United States historical context provides a look into the ways in which white supremacy and imperialism played a key role in the creation of a durable hegemonic historical bloc. Jung’s piece “Constituting the U.S. Empire State and White Supremacy” highlights two key dimension to the racial formation of a hegemonic bloc. First, he points out the dialectical interplay between the material interests in colonial conquest and accumulation, and the symbolic power of white supremacy to rationalize and reproduce the racial state. He describes a dynamic of imperial and racial politics constructed upon the basis of material exploitation and expropriation. “The construction of U.S. colonial spaces” Jung explains, “—whether they be Indian lands, incorporated or unincorporated territories, the “several states,” or the United States as a whole—centrally turned on the racialization of their inhabitants, on the production and reproduction of white supremacy” (2011:9). The material project of colonization found a unifying symbolic project in white supremacy. White supremacy was formed by the brutality of what Marx called “original accumulation,” but also helped shape and reproduce that process.

But a Gramscian reading cannot leave our analysis with the simple formulation that material and symbolic projects were linked historically. The material and symbolic worlds work dialectically and dynamically. Jung reveals this in the ways in which white supremacy has materially impacted the construction of citizenship in the United States. By taking us into an account of the ways in which whiteness performs boundary work, Jung highlights a second key dimension of the historical bloc—the process by which ideology has material impacts capable of cementing an historical bloc. Jung describes the U.S. empire state as a “unified but differentiated whole”:

it makes certain distinctions between colonial and noncolonial imperial subjects as well as within those categories, but it also generates identities, parallels, and overlaps. Explicitly and implicitly, intentionally and unintentionally, the state thus divides and unites as it rules. (It thereby sets barriers against, and dialectically, possibilities for coalitions of resistance). (11)

We see a kind of racial boundary work, or whiteness as an ideological phenomenon that is adaptive, constantly doing boundary work, but capable of controlling the state to protect the material interests of a particular group (white, capitalist men).

Almaguer sees this dynamic taking place within the formation of capitalism in California. He describes the process of transformation of what we might call “white ethnics.” He writes, “While these ethnic designations may have had importance among European Americans themselves, such identities were subsumed by the racialization process. White supremacist practices, in other words, forged a collective identity among European Americans in the state that crystallized around their racial status as a ‘white population’” (Almaguer 2009:11). This is a powerful example of precisely the role Gramsci suggests ideology plays in cementing an historical bloc. White supremacy, Almaguer points out, is a textbook case of one of these unifying ideologies. To transform people whose lives were defined by often-vicious antagonisms

within Europe (marked frequently by war and genocide) and incorporate them into the hegemonic project of whiteness points to a sophisticated politics of articulation taking place within the formation of the capitalist historical bloc.

The dominant bloc has also engaged in a sophisticated gender politics. For example, the re-masculinization of the state and feminization of poverty have formed the basis of the neoliberal historical bloc. This trend often directly intersects with the class and race antagonisms that also produce the neoliberal bloc, as when the Reagan administration demonized the “welfare queens” during their attack on a social safety net won through labor, civil rights, and feminist struggles.

It is not only this strata that can engage in the politics of articulation. Omi and Winant point out a number of the ways in which the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s began to articulate common identities with the potential to construct an alternative bloc. Here they note both successes and weaknesses as local struggles morphed into broader challenges to empire and spurred movements to contest patriarchy and homophobia. They ascribe significant redefinition of racial ideology to the “political struggles of racially defined groups...waged all around the globe under a variety of banners” which were a product of the ways in which “racial dictatorship consolidated...oppositional racial consciousness and organization” (Omi and Winant 1994:65-66). Those excluded from the hegemonic bloc found common cause and politically organized resistance against white supremacy resulting in material and symbolic victories. However, they also note that “these challenges failed to consolidate a new political project of ‘radical democracy’ which could expand beyond the issue of race and aspire to majoritarian status” (Omi and Winant 1994:139). Although they do not use the concept, this process can be best understood as an ability to construct the unity of a counterhegemonic historical bloc. This would

have required the development of shared material interests, an ability to produce common identity and unifying ideologies, and the capacity to exercise leadership throughout civil society. Clearly the movements of the mid 20th century succeeded in part, but remained unable to transition to a mode of organization capable of achieving these aims, while also suffering from external repression and cooptation. The state remained a “racial empire state,” and its status as a racial hegemony weathered the storm of the movement moment.

A renovated Gramsci offers a great deal to the development of a strategy for building a counterhegemonic historical bloc—a 21st century socialist bloc. By addressing the “proliferation of the sites of antagonism”, the “politics of articulation,” production, and common identity, by employing a material and symbolic analysis, and a focus on collective action and coalitional possibilities, Gramsci helps us ask the right questions of our moment. This is of particular import in an era where what might be termed “identity politics” has been fragmented and non-hegemonic. The process of building an historical bloc and the infrastructure of hegemony (organic intellectuals, political instruments, etc.) is one of the fundamental tasks of the moment. “A collective consciousness,” Gramsci suggests, “in other words a living organism, is not formed except after a multiplicity has been unified through the friction of the individual members” (2000:245). Navigating that friction will require not only a patient politics of production, but also a firm understanding of the hegemony that is being contested. Coalitional resistance that remains an amalgam of interests and demands, that is simply the bunching up of black and brown, poor and working class, immigrant and U.S.-born, is meaningless and impossible without an ideological cement that is strong enough to hold it together. Unity must emerge from struggle and from ideological processes that articulate a common identity, one that will inevitably do battle with white supremacy and patriarchy, and imperialism, three forces

which have proved their ability to massively transform and unify a diverse array of identities and interests.

Understanding the War of Position

The war of position is a metaphor for understanding a broad strategy for struggle under a specific mode of capitalist rule – the hegemonic mode. It suggests that we need to rethink class struggle in fundamental ways, because the nature of class cannot be reduced to objective antagonisms between predefined groups. Moreover, the nature of struggle itself is redefined by the embeddedness of hegemonic power. The tight knit integration of coercion and consent, domination and direction requires a strategy capable of contesting both, and developing alternative leadership, alternative culture, and a dominance of its own. Politics becomes necessarily productive, focused on both articulation and power, even as it never ceases to require patient organization, decisive intervention, and concerted struggle.

The war of position strategy also invites us to rethink the agent of social change. In many ways class, with its common sense meaning as an economically determined group, is an insufficient category. This strategy requires that we view capital as necessarily racialized, gendered, and defined by the nation. To see a capital and labor antagonism without seeing an intersecting and mutually constituting field of antagonisms is to not see the reality of class at all. If we are to take the bold and strategic step to see the counterhegemonic process as one that involves articulating a common identity and forming an alternative bloc to capital's white supremacist, patriarchal, imperialist bloc, then we would do well to discard illusions that a singular existing identity is capable of subsuming and representing all the others. "Especially today," Stuart Hall writes, "we live in an era when the old political identities are collapsing. We

cannot imagine socialism coming about any longer through the image of that single, singular subject we used to call Socialist Man. Socialist Man, with one mind, one set of interests, one project, is dead. And good riddance. Who needs ‘him’ now, with his investment in a particular historical period, with ‘his’ particular sense of masculinity, shoring ‘his’ identity up in a particular set of familial relations, a particular kind of sexual identity?” (Hall 1987:6). Without abandoning the “decisive nucleus of the economic” we can and must develop an ability to construct a collective will that requires painful, careful, strategic choices and patient, grinding, democratic work. In this way class struggle is also about defining the class itself, and seeing this class as constituted by racial justice, gender justice, anti-imperialist struggles. Thus, we should define a working class through this long-term project—we should think of this evolving entity as a class with an antagonism (both material and subjective) toward a truly intersectional capitalism that works through differences constructed around race, gender, nation, and most broadly through culture. The Left in the United States, while eluding a simple definition, is what we might call the social force that seeks to heighten these intersecting antagonisms and challenge the systems that underlie them. It organizes, articulates, and constructs this broadly defined working class to confront capital’s broad and shifting historical bloc.

This understanding leads us to a counterhegemonic politics of bloc building, fighting intersectionally at numerous points of antagonism within spaces of production and reproduction, and contesting and elaborating the common sense. Our work cannot be to win reforms but to capture institutions. Our work cannot be to seize the state in a revolutionary moment, but to construct a new leading class to smash and replace the old one—before and after state power is gained. It’s a long march through the institutions not to reform them, but to transform the common sense they uphold. And it requires organizations capable of developing an entirely new

hegemony, of confronting “the choice between becoming historically irrelevant or beginning to sketch out an entirely new form of civilization” with the power to actualize that vision.

3

Toward Gramscian Strategy: A Framework

Gramsci In the Neoliberal Moment

Stuart Hall argues that Gramsci belonged to the “proletarian moment,” marked by a revolutionary wave that swept Europe from 1917-1920. Gramsci’s main theoretical contribution, however, is his attempt to reckon with the moment of failure that followed quickly on the heels of that period—his ability to “face the capacity of the Right—specifically, of European fascism—to hegemonize that defeat” (Hall 1987:1). Gramsci contended with the fact that a war of maneuver simply could not win, and the Left would have to develop a strategy for a prolonged war of position. Hall draws parallels to the rise of Thatcherism and neoliberalism, and implores us to use Gramsci to “ask the right questions about the politics of the 1980s and 90s” (1987:1).

The parallel is a useful one. The mid 20th century saw a wave of decolonization struggles in the Third World, linkages between First and Third World revolutionary politics, the development of new social movements in the West, and the expansion and evolution of the welfare state. Peaking in the late 1960s, we might see rhythms of international struggle that approximate Gramsci’s Red Years—the brief bursts of wars of maneuver that clearly challenged capital. But this moment too came to an end, and once again the Right proved its capacity to treat “every moment of crisis as a moment of reconstruction” (Hall 1987:3). Marta Harnecker begins her book *Rebuilding the Left* with a sober accounting of the defeat. The collapse of the Soviet Union and rise of U.S. unilateralism, the expansion of capitalist globalization, the defeat of revolutionary alternatives in the Third World, and the destruction of the class “truce” and its welfare institutions in the First; this is the neoliberal conjuncture. Once again the Right has

hegemonized the defeat. Nevertheless, Harnecker takes hope in “a growing discontent” that appears to be “a new international cycle of struggles.” She therefore implores us to “rebuild the Left” in order to do what the Right has proven itself capable of doing – treating every crisis as a moment of reconstruction. We once again face “Gramsci’s question,” but within a new moment, on a new terrain and therefore we must “attend, ‘violently,’ with all the ‘pessimism of the intellect’ at [our] command, to the ‘discipline of the conjuncture’” (Hall 1987:1).

We can learn a great deal from Harnecker about both the neoliberal conjuncture and a Gramsci inspired strategy to intervene in it. In this section I will look at Harnecker’s work as well as a recent discussion of Left strategy in the *Socialist Register* to sketch the conjuncture and the forms of Left organization she suggests are capable of meeting the challenge of neoliberal hegemony. This however, will only be of partial use to us, because we must also attend to the specificity of the U.S. context. Drawing contrasts to the Latin American context, and using a recent study of U.S. social movement organizations, I will seek to place the Gramscian question in the neoliberal moment.

Harnecker as well as *Socialist Register* editors Leo Panitch, Greg Albo, and Vivek Chibber begin their analyses with an acknowledgement of the failure of Left strategy in the current moment. Anarchism has achieved a dominance of sorts, but remains wedded to “process and tactics,” “spectacular events” and not “their long-term consequences” (Socialist Register:x). The socialist Left, however, has exhausted its two main strategic schools: social democratic gradualism and Leninist vanguardism. Social democracy “ceased to have any connection with mass mobilization” lost its vision, and simply managed neoliberalism, while Leninism has been incapable of addressing a historical moment without sudden ruptures in which a long-term strategy that is “inevitably aggregative” is required (Socialist Register:x-xi). Harnecker’s project

is to not only address the neoliberal conjuncture, but to carve out a post-Leninist, post-social democratic politics for a new era of struggle.

Harnecker's departure is two-fold. First, we must understand neoliberalism as a strategy of fragmentation and demobilization. Second, the Left must begin to reckon with the social forces that have initiated a global cycle of resistance, and find ways to cohere that force while avoiding a vanguardist or pragmatist orientation.

Harnecker sites Alberto Binder's concept of "horizontal social control" as the mode of power that characterizes neoliberalism. Here, a logic of fragmentation reigns as "atomization of society into groups with little power" is worsened by "the orientation of these groups toward exclusive and partial ends" which leads to an inability to form a collectivity capable of challenging the ruling historical bloc and a non-ideological "shipwreck culture" (Harnecker 2007:22). Gramsci's theory is critical here. Cohering an alternative bloc with its own ability to rule and form a new common sense is a vital task for Gramsci. This emerges from an analysis of the way capitalism works: not through coercion alone, but through hegemony, which can only be contested through the development of another hegemony. The neoliberal strategy of fragmentation makes it difficult for any such force to cohere and exercise a hegemonic function.

The second of neoliberalism's one-two punch is its ability to create demobilized democratic forms. Neoliberalism does not abandon the liberal democratic form, but creates a limited scope of democratic possibility and hollows out any responsive mechanisms. This trend has the material impact of constraining reform, as well as an educative, common-sense forming function, which is to create a culture of lowered horizons, of TINA.

The result is a form of control that tightly integrates coercion and consent. Democratic bodies coexist with mass incarceration or other forms of state repression. Elected bodies make

decisions, all while international capital holds essential veto power. Oppressed groups gain some forms of representation, all while their agendas and forms of power are destroyed. State surveillance proliferates, but so does self-surveillance and a diminished sense of efficacy and possibility. These results show signs of being “integral.” The neoliberal state effectively moves beyond the “minimally economic, coercive functions of the State” and actively constructs a durable hegemony.

In spite of neoliberalism’s ability to achieve an integral form, Harnecker, Panitch, Albo, and Chibber see cracks in the historical bloc. They both cite recent waves of mass mobilization as locations of significant challenge. The *Socialist Register* editors cite the Occupy Movement, the Arab Spring, the Spanish Indignados, and Greek strikes and electoral gains as signs of a “global upsurge” (ix). Harnecker, writing in 2007, primarily draws hope from the growing Pink Tide in Latin America, as well as the proliferation of mass movements like the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil.

Harnecker suggests that the ability to develop a social movement Left with a revolutionary politics is the central task of a rebuilt Left. She defines revolutionary politics in a truly Gramscian way, as the “art of making the impossible possible”; of expanding capacities, consciousness, and power in order to change the balance of forces and the scope of possibility (Harnecker 2007:2). To carry out this task, she argues for something beyond the Leninist or social democratic party, something she calls a “political instrument”—understood as a concrete attempt at Gramsci’s “collective intellectual.”

Harnecker’s vision for this instrument offers a glimpse into what a Gramscian political party might look like. Instead of purely setting direction as a vanguard, the political instrument would act as space for connecting existing movements, and both listen to the specificity and

knowledge of movements, while pushing them toward a broader synthesis (Harnecker 2007:89). This would help widen the existing “cracks” within neoliberalism by stimulating movement activity, overcoming existing fragmentation by incubating (instead of commanding) connections and by widening these into a broader political challenge to the neoliberal historical bloc. Part and parcel to this broadened challenge, Harnecker suggests the need to abandon “workerism” or class reductionism and seek to defend “all social groups that are excluded and discriminated against economically, socially, politically, and culturally” and to understand the “transformative potential that exists in the struggles waged by all these sectors.” (Harnecker 2007:90-91). Moreover, the political instrument would have a fundamentally educative and “elaborative” function, introducing ideological and strategic ideas to local movements to render them more counterhegemonic, while in turn learning from these and synthesizing their experiences into its ideological and strategic framework. This is precisely why Gramsci offers the concepts of common sense and good sense, because he insists on both respecting the common sense, while in the words of Hall identifying that “both of those things struggle inside the heads and hearts of the people to find a way of articulating themselves politically,” and that it is the job of a political instrument to articulate them in line with a political project challenging capital’s hegemony (1987:6).

In many ways Harnecker is writing directly from the Gramscian tradition. Her focus is on the instrument as a collective intellectual, an agent that coheres an historical bloc, elaborates an ideology to glue that bloc materially and symbolically, and alters the balance of forces while capturing institutions within civil society. Harnecker’s at times reductive understanding of hegemony, and her fairly simplistic notion of unifying social forces can make her strategy appear somewhat facile. As discussed above, the project of renovating a totalizing view of the

Gramscian party requires a patient and complex politics of coalition building and reorganizing Left priorities. However, both Gramsci and Harnecker offer extremely important insights to the question of how to turn dispersed mass movements “into an alternative leading class, capable of organizing social struggles and managing the spaces of power that [are] gradually captured” as Magri would describe it (2011:57).

The United States context cannot easily map on to those strategic formulations. Harnecker’s sweeping work is inspired by Gramsci, but stops short of offering a more holistic understanding of building counterhegemony. It certainly stops short of figuring that out in the context of the neoliberal U.S. The U.S. is not only the leading force of neoliberalism—with a distinctive relationship to imperialism—it is also the location in which neoliberalism is arguably at its most integral. Both Gramsci’s and Harnecker’s strategy assume a high degree of social movement activity and numerous challenges to the state (even if those challenges coexist with forms of consent). Those assumptions do not hold in the United States.

Compared to the MST, with a loose membership of about 1.5 million, Venezuela’s million strong cooperative movement, or the scope of Bolivia’s Cochabamba uprising, the bursts of social movement activity and organization in the U.S. are hard to describe as a movement. Unlike in Brazil, Venezuela or Bolivia, U.S. movements and movement organizations are highly fragmented and assert little direct control over the state. While I define a social movement as “sustained activism of various organizations and individuals working towards a common goal of political, economic, cultural or social change,” I want to be careful to draw distinctions between the mass movements that Harnecker addresses and the movements that exist in the United States (Lee and Williams 2013:5).

The other half of Harnecker's equation of the social movement Left is an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist Left. To an even greater degree than social movements, that Left barely exists in the United States, and is almost impossible to compare to the large Left formations in Latin America or Greece like the PSUV and Syriza.

The low-level of mobilization and organization in the U.S., combined with a deeply rooted neoliberal model should caution us against any simple comparisons. So is there any use for a Gramscian reading of political strategy in the U.S.? I think there is. Gramsci helps us think about the development of a war of position strategy at different scopes of activity—at the level of the historical bloc vying for state power, as well as the local organization transforming consciousness through practice. Gramsci's moment and context led him to develop the more macro conceptual tools, but he was not silent on the politics of everyday and smaller scale struggle. As I argue above, and will continue to argue, he allows us to understand the project of Left strategy and Left rebuilding and ask the right questions.

A report by Steve Williams and NTanya Lee, two long-time movement organizers, suggests the ways in which a rebuilding project can begin in earnest by "laying a solid foundation" (2013:38). Their interviews with 158 movement activists across the United States reveals the existence of movement organizations building bases in key constituencies like working class communities of color, the emergence of national level coordination of local movement work, and the emergence of mass mobilizations like the Occupy Movement and Immigrant Rights Marches (Lee and Williams 2013:16-17). While the movement may be highly fragmented, have weak forms of organization, fail to achieve a mass scale, and lack collective strategy, the report speaks to both widespread discontent, and what might be called the tendrils of movements. While falling short of an easily defined and growing "cycle of struggles," there is

a sense that “these uprisings and mobilizations transformed the terrain on which social struggles take place. Hundreds of new activists are energized. Many experienced activists are open to exploring new and unconventional approaches” (Lee and Williams 2013:3).

The relations of force in the United States may mean that a long period of “laying a solid foundation” is in order. Nevertheless, ignoring the movements and movement organizations that are slowly trying to shift the balance of forces would be a mistake. The tendrils of movements poking through the hard ground of neoliberalism can actually be a location from which to develop strategy. We should build a politics to suit the moment, and a Gramscian strategy asks us to look at the trenches of civil society and capture the next fortification, though there may be many more to come. From a position of crisis within the empire, we can actually engage in our own work of reconstruction. In the following section, I propose a Gramscian strategic framework that is suited for the U.S. context of fragmentation, durable hegemony, and fledging movement formation. It will always be an optimism of the will that animates a desire to move from defeat to what Hall calls “beginning to sketch out an entirely new form of civilization” (1987:8). As Gramsci suggests:

such analyses cannot and must not be ends in themselves (unless the intention is merely to write a chapter of past history), but acquire significance only if they serve to justify a particular practical activity, an initiative of will. They reveal the points of least resistance, at which the force of will can be most fruitfully applied; they suggest immediate tactical operations; they indicate how a campaign of political agitation may best be launched, what language will be best understood by the masses, etc. The decisive element in every situation is the permanently organized and long prepared force. (2000:209)

In the following section, I will pursue the question of where “force of will can be most fruitfully applied” what sorts of “tactical operations” and by what means and “language” they can best take place. And I will focus on the power of organization—such a central concept to Gramsci—and how organizations can be understood and evaluated as part of a war of position strategy.

A Gramscian Strategic Framework

A Gramscian strategic framework allows us to develop the strategic implications of the current conjuncture and the array of social forces that inhabit it. It does so by asking the question, “how does this movement or movement organization fit into a war of position strategy?” It allow us to both evaluate and critique movements, while also making assessments about where a “long-prepared [Left] force” can most effectively be applied. Does asking these questions provide control over the direction any movement? No. Does asking these questions allow the Left to more effective carrying out its “practical activity,” its “initiative of will?” Yes. As Hall argues, rebuilding the Left requires a stark choice between capitulation and finding “another way of imagining” (1987:8). The “renewal of the whole socialist project” starts with the us asking the right questions about the real social world and beginning to work out a counterhegemonic project capable of one day vying with capital.

Asking the right questions requires that we draw on the right concepts but also do so at the right scope of activity. We cannot ask a community organization to build a historical bloc, nor we can ask a mass movement to patiently unpack an individual participant’s common sense. Conceptually, Gramsci wants us to ask the question: given the concept of an expanded politics, of politics as production, articulation, and elaboration, how can we find locations of counterhegemonic production, articulation, and elaboration? How can we find locations to expand capacities to govern and achieve leadership? How can we recognize that identities—particularly marginalized ones—are massively politicized, not epiphenomena that obscure political realities? Given the fragmentation of the current moment, how can revolutionary forces exercise real leadership, to produce “unity in difference” around a reconstructed common sense?

Or as Hall puts it, “what are the political forms through which a new cultural order [can] be constructed, out of this ‘multiplicity of dispersed wills, these heterogeneous aims... Can we find the forms of organization, forms of identity, forms of allegiance, social conceptions, which can both connect with popular life and, in the same moment, transform and renovate it?’” (1987:6).

A strategic framework must be animated by those questions. But it also must make them relevant for the actually existing organizations, the questions must be posed in conjuncturally specific terms. To do that, I propose breaking down Gramsci’s concepts on a macro to micro scale. At the most macro level, Gramsci offers the historical bloc as both a concept and a layer of analysis. On this level leadership is asserted over entire social groupings, contests frequently play out at the level of the state, and transformation takes on epochal significance. Here we see the synthesis of base and superstructure into historically dominant forms of rule. Gramsci’s writing on historical blocs, moral reformation, military power, and wars of maneuver; Omi and Winant’s writing on the racial state; Harnecker’s writing on revolution; all of these help us build an analysis at the bloc level.

Beneath this level (in scope) is the institutional level. Here we see the variegated, complex and shifting institutions that are produced by the base and superstructure of a historical bloc. These are the “trenches of civil society” that Gramsci consistently returns to, or the “material structure of ideology.” Material and symbolic forces shape the terrain on which people move, and this terrain is complex but understandable. Gramsci’s writing on institutions, Willis’ understanding of the complex, textured, and often contradictory ways that institutions reproduce inequality, and the literature on the impact of social movements all help us understand the relations of force, sites of antagonism, and the interplay between material and symbolic forces that take place at the institutional level.

At the most micro level is the ideological level, or what Gramsci would call the “simple.” Here common sense and good sense sit uneasily side by side as people navigate everyday life and everyday acts of consent, apathy, and resistance. Critically, this is where the process of elaboration can most effectively take place, and where individual level consciousness transformation is possible. Gramsci’s writing on “elaboration,” Harnecker’s concept of “indirect knowledge” and organizational sociology help us pose questions at this level.

A brief analysis of one social movement organization, drawing heavily on the empirical work of Jonathan Bix, as well as my own movement participation should illustrate the ways these conceptual and multi-leveled frameworks can help us ask the right question. From this analysis of City Life/Vida Urbana (City Life), I will draw out the questions and methods of a Gramscian strategic framework.

City Life is a grassroots organizing project that began as a socialist community organization in the 1970s and has changed its focus with the shifting needs of its base. When the foreclosure crisis hit, City Life quickly shifted to begin organizing homeowners (a group typically viewed as homogeneously white, middle-class, individualistic property owners) and tenants in foreclosed buildings (a group typically viewed as working-class and people of color). Their work with this coalition in the working class neighborhoods of Boston has defended hundreds of homeowners and tenants from displacement at the hands of the big banks. Their mass meetings reach hundreds, their mobilizations, thousands — and they have begun spreading their work throughout Massachusetts and beyond.

City Life and the radical housing movement are pushing for non-reformist reforms, primarily by building a movement to decommodify housing and delegitimize market ideology. Threatened and displaced homeowners have fought back not because they embraced an abstract

structural critique from the outset, but because City Life's organizing work has remained in touch with their everyday life needs, practices, and common sense. The combination of concrete victories, the development of a culture of solidarity, and the development of a political analysis are what allow the group to contest hegemony.

City Life has successfully protected hundreds of families from displacement, often with militant eviction blockades. But the depth of its organizing is shown in how many continue to fight for others' homes even after they have lost their own. For dozens, City Life's meetings are a routine part of their life, even years after their individual struggle is over. While broad structural change is the ultimate goal of City Life, it recognizes that such change requires a mass movement and that what builds a mass movement is fighting and winning smaller battles. On the level of everyday experience, winning a "small battle" means something quite big. These victories transform the disempowerment built into the daily life of these communities. Moreover, solidarity isn't something that is taught — it is lived and built.

Collective affirmation through techniques such as storytelling and call-and-response are continuously present at meetings and actions. Through these and other routine practices of struggle and group formation, City Life creates its own social universe where dominant culture is turned upside down — where collective struggle and continuously fighting for others often becomes more important than one's own home. The organization uses political education and discussion, which are present in every meeting, to allow homeowners and tenants the moral space to challenge disempowering dominant ideologies. Foreclosure is the first site of education, and it is this initial focus on a "narrow issue" coupled with an accessible yet expansive political education that allows homeowners and tenants to develop a deeper structural awareness.

So much of Left analysis is from “scratch” because it is socially and culturally removed from the lived experience of the structures it critiques. One of City Life’s primary tasks is fostering organic intellectuals among the people who are best suited to elaborate a structural analysis given their proximity to the foreclosure crisis: homeowners and tenants. They are not just eloquent orators acting as a mouthpiece, but are on the ground and integrated into the affected group. They know about how things actually work, feel, and are accomplished, and they share the structural critique on both practical and intellectual levels (Resnick and Bix 2013).

Is City Life building a historical bloc? No. But they are purposefully building power among the sectors of society that have a material interest in a fundamental break with capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and imperialism. As they contribute to a national level movement, they lay critical groundwork for the establishment of a potential historical bloc with a “radical” ideology that glues it together.

Is City Life reading the conjuncture and intervening as a decisive revolutionary force? No. But the organization has made an assessment of the specific terrain created by finance capital exploiting people at the point of reproduction—within the realm of housing. And its intervention in a timely, widely felt issue has allowed it to build a large base.

Is City Life a “collective intellectual” that elaborates organic intellectuals to serve as the “deputies” of a counterhegemony? No. But its combination of leadership development and political education creates a small group of organic intellectuals who build a broader movement and contribute to a counterhegemonic project.

Is City Life a mass movement that challenges capital? No. It is a community organization with a relatively limited impact on finance capital’s ability to function in a handful of

communities in Massachusetts. But in small ways, on a local level, it alters the balance of forces, and helps build a national level movement through its work with the Right to the City Alliance.

Is City Life a political party capable of moral reformation? No. But it does renovate the common sense by intervening in the eviction process with a combination of solidarity, moral community, direct action, and concrete material victories.

A number of organizations, movements, and Left formations with these characteristics or the ability to nurture these forms of organization would contribute immensely to a sophisticated war of position strategy. Renovating or elaborating common sense can happen in a multiplicity of ways within various kinds of organizations, mobilizations, and movements. Organic intellectuals can be produced by more than just mass communist parties. The balance of forces can be alerted in local and partial ways, even if these don't portend a looming revolutionary rupture. And lastly, a historical bloc emerges from many small coalition efforts, many articulations of common identity, many forms of ideological production. It may not cohere as a world-historical force in this moment, but the spadework to make it happen can be present or lacking within the various parts of a social movement.

With this in mind, I suggest we ask the following questions of contemporary social movements. Each set of questions corresponds to a level of analysis, to help us to evaluate in realistic and relevant ways.

Macro

- What historical bloc is being built? What kind of ideological material is being developed that can cement a bloc? What forms of shared material interest form the basis of the bloc?
- What is the nature of intervention into the conjuncture? What type of conjunctural possibilities are contained within the movement?

- How can we understand the movement's impact on the overall balance of forces?

Institutional

- What kind of counter-hegemonic infrastructure is produced? Can we see organic intellectuals being elaborated? Can we see new material structures of ideology opening up?
- What types of identities are produced? Do they have unify in difference? Is there measurable leadership and direction offered? Do they produce a collective will?
- What is their ability to capture institutions of civil society, even if that capture is necessarily partial in the absence of a unifying project?

Micro

- How does this movement renovate the common sense? What kind of elaboration takes place?

These questions help us locate the “forms of organization, forms of identity, forms of allegiance, social conceptions” that contribute to the formation of a counterhegemony. By asking these questions of contemporary social movements, we are better suited to figure out where interventions can take place. We are more capable of discerning what parts of our movements should be developed, what parts should be contested. We can also more effectively determine where we have found fruitful opportunities within the neoliberal conjuncture, where a counterhegemonic politics is flourishing and where conditions make it difficult to sustain. And lastly, we can better understand what kinds of Left political formations must be created to fulfill the critical roles that only a party or political instrument can fulfill.

In my next chapter, I will turn to a few such social movements, both their long-term organizational structures and mass mobilization moments.

4

Gramscian Strategy in Modern Social Movements

As we turn toward an application of our Gramscian strategic framework we will look at three different social phenomena, all of which have qualities of social movements, engage in some degree of counterhegemonic contestation, but none of which qualify as “full service” movements or mass political parties. This exercise should help us illuminate both the cases that are being studied, and the framework itself. They are not, however, meant to be comprehensive. A more systematic study of the movement landscape, the balance of power, and the potential sectors of an alternative bloc requires not only a far more expansive study, but also a well-connected political force capable learning from the fights it is engaged in, and of matching a strategic analysis with a collective will. One person cannot and should not undertake this effort, because it is necessarily a collective process. As the editors note in a *Jacobin* editorial, the question to ask isn’t always “what is to be done” but is rather “who the hell is going to do it?” (Jacobin). In the absence of such an effort, or rather as a very small and humble contribution to those efforts, I’ll tackle just three cases that I am most familiar with, and where my research has been concentrated.

The first case is the Occupy Movement, the 2011-2012 upsurge that began in New York and spread rapidly around the country mobilizing hundreds of thousands (maybe more) in disruptive class-based protest. The second is another mass mobilization, although one that engaged a very different base of people: the 2006 Immigrant Uprising that took place in the

Spring of 2006, and culminated in a millions-strong labor-community mobilization on May Day of that year. The last case is not a mass mobilization, but a slowly cohering sector of organizations involved in Transformative Organizing, a radical approach to community organizing in working class communities of color.

All three represent major moments of contestation that challenge the specifically neoliberal contours of society. All three have clear counterhegemonic potential, as well as major implications for Left strategy. The two mass mobilizations face the question of how does a moment become a movement, while the section on Transformative Organizing asks the question of how organizations can scale up in moments of upsurge. All three involve overlapping, but different sectors, and therefore project different visions of a potential alternative bloc. All three suggest the potential and limits of a politics of articulation in a moment of fragmentation. And lastly, although most importantly for this thesis, I have some kind of personal connection to all three. I was personally involved in Occupy, am involved in Transformative Organizing, and had experienced some of the post 2006 mobilization organizing during the 2013 mobilizations around immigration reform.

The Occupy Movement

The Occupy Movement, Todd Gitlin persuasively argues, “stalled in its attempts to make a transition from a moment to a movement” (2013:3). It was more moment than movement, but was a powerful moment nonetheless. It can be best understood as a creative, energetic mobilization influenced by the global upsurge that took place in the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America in 2011. Though it was distinct from these other movements in a number of

fundamental ways, Mohammed Bamyeh makes the case that “a global culture of protest” emerged in 2011, and that a number of commonalities united these various mobilizations:

The year 2011 may be remembered as the year where various protest movements around the world took form without complex ideological language, and did not seem to be in a hurry to discover a new ideology to express the multiple interests that constitute them. They mobilized around a collective opposition to the ‘system’ in the name of general abstraction—‘the people.’ The little person, whose face a large and unresponsive system had placed a ‘no alternative’ sign, feels the need to respond by doing something great and noble. (2012:18)

The populist bent to Occupy was complicated by something more than a critique of corruption; it was a decidedly class-based mobilization, though it suggested a very broad 99% vs. 1% class antagonism. This can be explained in part by the structural conditions that helped make a small (and often bizarre) initial protest the spark of a mobilization that took center stage for a brief period of time in late 2011. The rise of finance capital, the economic collapse of 2008, and the insecurity and dashed expectations of a generation of young people, all specifically neoliberal phenomena, contributed to the salience of the moment (Milkman 2012:13-14). What arose was a movement that focused on growing inequality, but contained a sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit, but always more embodied than articulated resistance to the workings of “the system” itself.

This politics was both populist and insular. Gitlin and others have documented a division between its inner core and the outer movement. While there was clearly overlap, an anarchist-influenced, prefigurative, horizontal, and encampment-oriented inner core stood out from the unions, membership organizations, and less-radical outer movement that mobilized on certain days of action in very large numbers. The inner core’s cadre was drawn from the generation of the disaffected youth, many of them students touched by neoliberalism’s painful expansion. That

anger was channeled by a tactically innovative, veteran anarchist leadership who “opened up a different political path, [which] the millennials were primed to explore” (Milkman 2012:14).

The politics that this yielded—with an emphasis on process, prefigurative lifestyles, horizontalism and democracy of the encampments may have helped tap into long-standing grievances and reenergize a broader “99% movement” incorporating unions, membership organizations, and progressives, but it also led to fundamental divisions. Tensions between these groups created a strategic impasse. “The ‘inner movement’s’ awkward fit with that ‘outer movement’ blocked transformation into an enduring structure capable of winning substantial reforms over time. When the encampments were dispersed by governmental authorities, the core lost its ability to convert electronic communications into the energy and community that derive from face-to-face contact” (Gitlin 2013:3). The result of state repression and waning momentum was a crisis of leadership, with the inner core no longer being able to lead the outer movement toward next steps and deepened strategy.

The core has not disappeared. But its impact remained limited. A primarily student movement, mostly white, mostly middle class (though “more racially and ethnically diverse than is often presumed”), it had tenuous connections to other sectors of society, and an easier time dissolving into lifestyle politics or a return to normalcy (Milkman; Gitlin). As Gitlin puts it, “Although all factions paid lip service, at least, to the idea of ‘organizing in the community’, there are not so many enduring networks of such organizers, and they are largely untrained... The activists know they need a wider base, but do not know how to find or activate one” (2013:16). Despite this limit, Occupy managed to achieve some important material and symbolic victories. Occupy demonstrated a strong ability to capture media attention and reframe ongoing debates. It also helped win some limited reforms from major banks. Its greatest contribution was

probably the consciousness it created—offering the possibility of resistance to financial powers that seemed outside the realm of democratic accountability.

A Gramscian strategic framework can help us better understand these successes, as well as the strategic impasse that helped contribute to failures. Beginning on the micro level of our framework, we can see a great deal of common sense being altered by the Occupy Movement. This is where the greatest counterhegemonic production was taking place—person to person, inside movement spaces, and in conversations stimulated by media exposure. In response to Gitlin, Craig Calhoun has argued, “The occupation created a certain charmed community of participants linked by the charisma of co-presence. This helpfully insulated internal conversations against external pressures. But it also limited the further development of the moment into a movement” (2013:32). Calhoun is correct in pointing out the double-edged nature of insularity. In a moment where capital’s hegemony is incredibly durable, developing a “charmed community” of activists is a basic precondition for larger resistance. Calhoun’s point is that Occupy created its own life-world and its own logic.

My own experience in the movement confirms that assertion. Despite a great deal of incoherence, the ability to imagine another world was nurtured by the occupations. I saw my own ability and the abilities of many others to conceptualize struggle grow with the movement. And not just for participants—the “hope, earnestness, spunk and playful nonviolence, struck chords in a much larger public” as Gitlin explains, and this too challenged the common sense idea that Wall Street’s power is unassailable, a key component of neoliberalism’s market logic (2013:10).

This counterhegemonic effect was still limited in many ways. The other edge of the insularity sword is that without deep connections to an outer movement and broad sectors of

society, the message could be distorted or rendered incoherent. This happened a great deal for the Occupy Movement. The occupation tactic offered a soapbox, but the strategic limits of the movement combined with a repressive state and corporate media, made it hard to transform that soapbox into a space for movement building. The renovation of common sense, Gramsci reminds us, is a patient, persistent process, and one that requires gaining long-term control over civil society. Absent the coalitions and strategy capable of sustaining the fight, Occupy could renovate the common sense for a select group, and only offer an interesting, if at times confusing challenge to a much larger group.

This phenomenon points to some major difficulties that Occupy faced, which are helpfully illuminated by asking Gramscian questions about its relationship to institutions. Occupy undertook a great deal of institution building, with most occupations boasting kitchens, libraries, educational events, etc. But its emphasis on prefigurative politics, the difficult (and often repressive) organizing environment, and the relative lack of a base made it extremely difficult for Occupy's participants to capture and hold any institution in civil society. Even its physical location was eventually recaptured by the state. In Gitlin's memorable phrase, "OWS changed the political landscape, but it can't build a home there. Thus its predicament" (2013:23). The inner core's strategic failure to develop a material practice capable of winning gains and capturing institutions and its focus on prefigurative politics and horizontalism came at the expense of a politics of power suited to base building and capturing institutions within civil society.

Moreover, without a base and deeper organizing efforts, Occupy proved largely unable to elaborate a layer of organic intellectuals. The ephemerality of the moment, its momentum as well as the pervasive skepticism of leadership and divisions of labor (an essential for

organizations in Gramsci's mind), made this task difficult, if not impossible. That being said, myself and a number of other people that I know developed as organizers in Occupy and continued to hone their craft in institutions that spun out of the "movement," or that they came into contact with because of the movement. Divorced from a more cohered and defined class interest, however, developing activists cannot fulfill the organizational function of exercising hegemony that is so critical to Gramsci's conception. Occupy's institutional impact may in fact lie primarily in the protest repertoires and basic skills that it left behind, which appeared (to me) to surface in Black Lives Matter mobilizations in late 2014.

Occupy managed to both forge a collective identity, and reject that undertaking at the same time. It embraced a politics of production, although its underlying logic (whether explicitly supported by most participants or not) made this production limitless and without discipline or coherence. "Occupation gave the movement a more cohesive identity than the diverse ideologies of its members could do, including not least a visual identity to outsiders" (Calhoun 2013:30) but like other global protest movements, Bamyeh points out, they "did not seem to be in a hurry to discover a new ideology to express the multiple interests that constitute them" (2012:18).

This grappling with an expansive and productive politics highlights Gramsci's assertion that even an expansive politics requires a "choice of some conformism or other," a great deal of "friction" and "rehearsals" for "the orchestra to live as a single 'instrument'" (2000:325, 245). It also suggests the need to unite a materially shared interest of the working class with an articulated common identity in opposition to neoliberalism. Occupy offered a creative, often unintentional attempt to forge a historical bloc in opposition to finance capital. But it built that bloc out of mostly students and the white middle class facing the increased instability of neoliberalism. While not a dismissible or insignificant group, it is fundamentally disconnected

from a working class base and especially working class communities of color with a deeper, more sustained interest in material change. In this sense, leadership of the nascent bloc was totally upside down. Instead of a bottom-up coalition with drew in students and those most recently rendered precarious, Occupy emerged as a student led mobilization that reached out to others to march under its banner. Absent a great deal of what Ella Baker used to call “spadework,” the long-term organizing that lays a foundation for robust movement building, students with the biographical availability, time, energy, and sense of efficacy that comes from their institutional location are likely to exercise leadership over a movement that often encouraged process and dramatic performance over material gains and long-term transformational strategy.

In spite of these limitations, Occupy proved capable of reading the conjuncture correctly and making a dynamic intervention. Right in the shadow of Wall Street, Occupy constructed a truly symbolic politics of resistance focused around public space as “the commons” as visual, lived, and politically disruptive alternative to the private greed of Wall Street. This perceptive intervention was likely a major cause for Occupy’s success. In a moment where financialization, crisis, and private capital’s undemocratic practices were wildly unpopular, the responsible institutions remained insulated from direct challenge and a sense of possibility. Gitlin notes that “what floated this [horizontal] style was that Occupy was, believe it or not, the first American social movement to begin with the benefit of majority support for its main thrust” (2013:8). Whether or not this support is as great as Gitlin suggests, Occupy managed to rapidly shift the debate and open up fissures within the common sense. This victory is a testament to the necessity of understanding the conjuncture in order for popular forces to make meaningful and potentially explosive interventions.

The 2006 Immigrant Uprising

From about March through May of 2006, millions of immigrants and their allies took to the streets in a massive mobilization demanding justice for immigrants. The immediate cause was the proposed Sensenbrenner Bill, passed by the House of Representatives in December 2005, which would have further criminalized undocumented immigrants, empowered local law enforcement to enforce punitive laws, and punish the acts of solidarity of those who assisted immigrants (Jonas 2006:6). The movement that emerged challenged not only this law, but also decades of criminalization of immigrants. At its height it linked up with existing movements and organizations to magnify its power, it mobilized hundreds of thousands of mostly working class Latinos at an unprecedented scale, and won significant victories while garnering significant backlash.

This upsurge emerged out of long-developing demographic and political trends. The U.S. economy has always relied on cross-border migration, and has frequently exploited the racialized Latino population living on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border. Neoliberal free trade only exacerbated that need, destabilizing third world economies and increasing the flow of migrants north. Combined with imperialist wars and subsequent humanitarian crises in Central America, the period of the 1990s and 2000s has seen a massive influx of immigrants from Mexico and Central America. This period also saw a heightening of repression at the border and within the United States, what Jonas calls the creation of “a national security regime for immigrants” (2006:9).

This trend was countered by grassroots organizing efforts and the establishment of non-profit organizations building a pro-immigrant infrastructure. These “well-established institutional

networks,” Corder-Guzman, Martin, Quiroz-Becerra, and Theodore argue, “were able to draw on preexisting organizational networks and relationships to fashion a forceful, public response to HR 4437” (2008:599). This era was also marked by a significant shift within the U.S. labor movement. After years of waning influence, and due to powerful organizing efforts by immigrant workers and consistent internal political pushing from within, the AFL-CIO moved from a nativist, anti-immigrant position toward a reform oriented position during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Both organizational networks have laid infrastructural foundations for the outpouring of activity that would occur in 2006.

2006 represents a truly mass mobilization on a huge and exciting scale, as well as arguably one of the most dramatic mass labor actions in decades with the “strike” on May Day of 2006. If we view the immigrant uprising as inextricably linked with demands for economic justice, which for many participants and organizations it certainly was, we can see the framing of its May 1st “A Day Without Immigrants” (or in Spanish literally “the Great American Strike”) as a massive economic and social work stoppage. In the lead up to May Day of 2006, “labor and immigrant rights groups joined together with immigrant communities throughout the country to launch a series of mobilizations and protests that culminated in the largest International Workers Day demonstration in U.S. history” (Narro et al 2007:49). This work stoppage/protest/boycott/student strike tactic mobilized millions, and shutdown entire commercial districts and enterprises throughout the United States (Narro et al 2007:54). It garnered mixed support from organized labor and mobilized other immigrant groups and allies. This culminating event in the months of upsurge represents one of the most important mass labor actions in recent history, and helped demonstrate the power of mobilized immigrant communities.

The uprising of 2006 dissipated in momentum, but organizing efforts and subsequent victories followed. The Sensenbrenner Bill did not become law. Student organizing around the DREAM Act has proliferated, and efforts at comprehensive immigration reform have continued and even remobilized many in 2013. These efforts have yielded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which protected some undocumented youth, and more recently have led to executive action from President Barack Obama to expand DACA to millions of adults. However, the border security drive has not stopped, deportations have intensified under President Obama and efforts to criminalize immigrants and Latinos such as Arizona SB 1070 and Alabama's HB 56 have expanded.

These post 2006 efforts have seen the division between an emerging transformative pole and a reform/incorporation pole within the movement. Alfonso Gonzales documents this split in his writing on oppositional immigrant politics. He suggests that there exists a hegemonic "consensus" politics around immigration, which relies on the "façade of inclusion" plus intensified "immigration control apparatus" plus limited reforms (Gonzales 2010:15). With support from mainstream politicians and a wealthy, well-connected Latino elite, this position's "punitive logic" results in "rendering invisible the human rights consequences of enforcement and the root causes of migration in U.S. foreign and economic policies" (Gonzales 2010:16).

In response to this accommodationism, an oppositional pole emerged which began from "the premise that no human being is illegal and that militarization is not an acceptable price to pay for regularization":

Groups like DRUM, Vamos Unidos, and others affiliated with the NNIRR are trying to reframe the immigration debate from one narrowly focused on legal status to one around questions of human rights and economic justice. They seek to unearth how migration is intricately linked to the process of neoliberal restructuring and the management of displaced people on a global scale. (Gonzales 2010:18)

This response is noteworthy, because it demonstrates one part of the movement's orientation to combatting the neoliberal roots of the immigration crisis. It suggests that the immigration reform fight is not simply a fight for incorporation of a specific group, but has potential to morph into a transformative political movement. This evolution remains largely potential, as Gonzales points out there is a dearth of unity and strategic direction on the part of fairly autonomous oppositional organizations. However, these groups helped drive the 2006 mobilization, and have demonstrated that the fight for immigrant rights represents a challenge to neoliberalism. "Under the circumstances, building a counter-hegemonic migrants rights movement will require a long-term strategy" Gonzales warns, "It will take years to develop the leadership of working-class migrants and to develop the politically autonomous organizing structures necessary to win moral and intellectual leadership away from the Democrats on immigration issues" (2010:18).

Employing a Gramscian strategic framework helps illuminate the potential for this long-term counter-hegemonic process to unfold. On the micro level, questions of consciousness transformation are particularly difficult to parse. Without having conducted participant observation, and without encountering research that focused on the consciousness of participants, it is very hard to answer questions about renovating the common sense. One indicator is the extent to which oppositional politics has emerged, suggesting an expansion and ideological deepening process. If nothing else it suggests that the mobilizations offered a site of contestation, a location from which a counterhegemonic politics can be born. Another indicator is the backlash that clearly emerged. Common sense narratives about citizenship, economics, and human rights were challenged by a movement proclaiming that "No Human Being is Illegal" and highlighting the nation state's dependence on immigrant labor (Narro et al 2007:53). The large right-wing

response likely emerged when a common sense ideology about immigration was beginning to be transformed through a vigorous grassroots mobilization.

At the institutional level the movement has proved capable of winning some massive material gains in a way that Occupy never was. Not only reversing punitive legislation, but clearly creating a pressure environment for the Obama Administration to opt for some reform is a testament to the power that was demonstrated in 2006 and afterwards. Guzman et al argue that this power likely emerged from the network of institutions and organizations that acted as an “organizational staging ground” to use Doug McAdam’s term. They note the “dense network of community-based organizations, social service providers, hometown associations, churches, labor unions, community leaders, media personalities, and elected officials” (Cordero-Guzman et al 2008:601). Again, in marked contrast to the fragility of Occupy’s institutions, the immigrant rights movement has demonstrated a strong capacity for institution building, especially non-electoral forms of social organization.

Whether or not these institutions are strong enough or ideologically unified enough to effectively capture and hold institutions in civil society is much more doubtful. And here again Gonzales’ point about the lack of unity among the counterhegemonic pole of the movement becomes particularly salient. What this network of organizations and civil society institutions has been able to do, in fits and starts, is articulate a common immigrant identity, one that is particularly linked to the broad struggle for economic justice and basic human rights. As Cordero-Guzman et al explain:

In the case of the 2006 immigrant mobilizations, punitive immigration policies created a sense of a ‘linked fate’ among immigrant groups, providing unity that is a necessary precondition for collective action...[which] was the foundation of the broad-based coalition that mobilized large numbers of demonstrators in cities across the United States. (2008:604)

This ability to develop a linked fate identity among disparate groups, and the coalitional politics that has resulted suggests that a robust politics of production is taking place within the immigrant rights movement. This identity has become a condensation point for sustained action beyond 2006. Moreover, the mobilizations consistently linked labor and citizenship in a way that points to the potential for a working class anti-imperialist politics. Instead of citizenship flowing from the law, many activists suggested it came from the labor that immigrants conducted, and that labor's mobility in light of neoliberal globalization. As Narro, Wong, and Shaddock-Hernández argue, this frame helped continue the decades long transformation of the labor movement. And while labor played a critical role in the uprising, it remained divided on key questions such as the May Day strike, and could be described as “lagging beyond the momentum” and failing to “rise to the occasion and to play a leadership role in building and sustaining this movement” (Wong et al 2007:50). A much-needed transformation of the labor movement would offer a powerful institutional home for a transformative immigrant and labor rights politics.

Even if this remains a distant possibility, the implications of the embryonic coalition that emerged in 2006 are huge. The macro level Gramscian questions about the historical bloc are extremely helpful when asked of the 2006 Uprising. The racialized, imperialist nature of neoliberalism has yielded a restive and increasingly organized immigrant population displaced from the Global South and residing within the empire. This is a strategically important structural position, one that threatens to unite anti-neoliberal politics across borders. When linked to a politics of incorporation, this threat diminishes. When linked to a critique of neoliberalism and a working class movement—as we saw happen in partial ways during 2006—this points to what Jonas calls “the potential power of proactive, decolonizing rights strategies ‘from within’” (2006:16). Linking of immigration and labor, human rights and a transformative critique offers a

major contribution to an ideology that can cement a working class, majority People of Color bloc with deep connections to the 3rd World.

New Working Class Organizations and Transformative Organizing

Transformative organizing is a still-developing model of community organizing that has begun to cohere in the last two decades. It is a model and methodology of revolutionary Left organizing that stands in contrast to the more reformist and non-ideological traditions that have arisen in the 20th century. This model and the organizations that uphold it are one component of a larger process that is happening across movement sectors, which seeks new modes of organization of the working class within the current conjuncture. This process, which I will describe as the emergence of New Working Class Organizations (borrowing a term from Jon Liss and David Staples), is different from both the Occupy moment and the 2006 Immigrant Uprising. It is far more like the spadework that made both moments possible. But it too represents a particular response to the neoliberal conjuncture, and has critical strategic implications, and as such will be useful to apply a Gramscian strategic framework to.

I do not think it is possible to see something called “New Working Class Organizations” emerging as a separate and distinct entity in the United States. As Josh Warren White points out, a revolutionary Left organizing tradition exists throughout U.S. history, including resistance to colonialism, socialist/communist labor organizing, and New Left revolutionary politics. Many of the organizations that I will call New Working Class organizations, have a long history and rich traditions that cannot be said to represent distinctive reactions to the specificity of the neoliberal recomposition of the working class. The term is useful, however, for noting that an evolution has taken place, and that what could (very) generously be called the “working class movement” in

the United States has begun to adapt to the rhythms of the neoliberal conjuncture and find creative forms of organization to meet the needs of the moment. This is a truly exciting development in an historical moment hegemonized by the Right. It suggests that critical lessons are being learned from the (many) defeats of the Left and the working class in the last 30 years.

The new working class organizations that have emerged represent something more than the self-defined “transformative” organizations. They include workers centers pursuing new models of labor organizing, traditional labor led campaigns among low-wage workers (like Justice for Janitors, Our Walmart, and the Fight for 15 struggle), community organizations in the Right to City and National Domestic Workers alliances, as well as the crop of transformative or “radical” community organizations (like POWER, Causa Justa, Chinese Progressive Association, Coleman Advocates, the Labor/Community Strategy Center, Tenants and Workers United, City Life/Vida Urbana and NEW ROAD, Miami Workers Center, CAAV, and more recent additions like SAFE and Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson). There are others emerging as well, especially around the Ferguson mobilizations and growing Black Lives Matter movement.

What makes the term New Working Class organizing meaningful is that these organizations represent a particular response to the neoliberal conjuncture. Neoliberalism is not simply an expansion of free trade and deregulation, but a class project that has reconfigured the nature of work and the working class itself. Liss and Staples put it this way, “Over the last twenty years – through the scrapping of welfare, the importation of both high and low-tech labor, declining wages, intensified policing and incarceration, increasing numbers of women-headed households, and the profound upheaval of gender-based work structures – the U.S. working class has been substantially recomposed” (3). They further note the decline in industrial jobs, the rise of low-wage service and “social reproduction” industries, the flexibilization of work, the

shrinking of average workplace size, and the suburbanization and sprawl of the working population. Again, all of these occur in racialized and gendered ways, alongside massive flows of immigrants displaced by neoliberal policies (Liss and Staples 3).

The result has been a need to rethink traditional organizing strategies, both within labor organizations and community organizations. Labor's focus on male industrial workers, and their NLRB dependent mode that is bureaucratic and focused exclusively on the point of production has simply been unable to organize this new working class (Fletcher and Gapasin 2009:197). Union density and power have declined dramatically as a result of these failures to adapt to the "discipline of the conjuncture" as Hall might call it. Community organizing, with its dominant Alinskyist orientation, has proved itself incapable of really tackling neoliberalism as a political project, and has instead settled for winning limited and often easily eroded reforms. This model has emphasized a narrow conception of self-interest and a non-ideological style of organizing. The result has been an anemic response to the material and symbolic challenges of the historical moment, and a relative inability to contribute to broader movement building.

What unites the New Working Class organizations is an attempt to adapt to the neoliberal conjuncture in new and creative ways. Almost all have a focus on organizing beyond the point of production, even when that work is still relatively central. Most incorporate a strong critique of white supremacy, patriarchy, and sometimes imperialism, and organize those most impacted by neoliberal restructuring—women, people of color, and immigrants. Most have a more ideological and movement-focused orientation to organizing. Even the most traditional understand that larger class solidarities are necessary for winning meaningful victories. And all are responding (to some degree) to the areas of social and economic life most transformed by neoliberalism

(immigrant workforces, gentrification, mass incarceration and police violence, low-wage service sector growth, predatory finance capital and debt regimes, etc.).

In spite of these similarities, there are marked differences in the organizing models adopted and the strategic outlook of the leadership. SEIU's Fight for 15 campaign is fundamentally different from POWER's transit campaign, and a more reform oriented Right to the City alliance member organization might have a very different culture from a labor-financed workers center. Organizing at the point of reproduction, strategically building bases of people of color, women, and immigrants, and combatting neoliberal institutions are all key components of a transformed and combative workers' movement, but these have only been adopted partially and sometimes pragmatically.

The emerging Transformative Organizing model, pioneered within the community organizations with greater tactical flexibility, has offered a "condensation point" around which a more unified practice can emerge. It has a self-conscious strategic thrust, and a high degree of theory-informed practice (Williams 2013). It is by definition suited for New Working Class organizations, but is more focused and has a long-term vision that goes beyond new organizational forms. In some ways, the real ingredient that Transformative Organizations bring into the mix is a well-crafted Left ideology. The goal is to build a counterhegemonic historical bloc by renewing the Left and mass movements.

Josh Warren White outlines the specific interventions that the transformative model helps make in the development of a strong Left. The Left lacks, and the model can provide:

1. A mass base
2. An assessment of the political economy and a long-term strategy
3. Leadership of oppressed nationalities
4. A feminist praxis
5. Participation in movement building (75)

This list captures something essential about the role that the Transformative Organizing model is playing in this moment. By building power within working class communities of color, by organizing ideologically, by doing intensive leadership development and capacity building among oppressed groups, and by developing a movement oriented transformational strategy, this model contributes immensely to a revival of the Left, but more specifically, to the development of forms of Left organization capable of meeting the challenge of the neoliberal moment. But Warren-White's list doesn't go deep enough. By employing a Gramscian strategic framework, we're better able to see how the model responds successfully to the "discipline of the conjuncture," but also where it falls short.

Let's start with the "micro" question of a Gramscian strategic framework: How do transformative organizations renovate the common sense? What kind of elaboration takes place? This is arguably the level where transformative organizations are strongest. Jonathan Bix's in-depth study of the transformative organization City Life/Vida Urbana reveals the extent to which common sense is renovated through the everyday practices of a transformative organization. As he puts it:

The process of transformation that individuals go through by participating in this radical community organizing—from coming to an organization primarily out of material self-interest with the intention of receiving a limited service to staying for the long-term based on the ideology of radical collective justice and the joining of a community and culture of solidarity—must be described as a counter-hegemonic transformation. (Bix 2014:119)

The ability to impact a small group of people who walk in the door, dozens, maybe hundreds, possibly thousands, is extremely high for transformative organizations. In no small part this is due to their emphasis on ideology and culture, and the "feminist praxis" of caring/relationship building/community that White references. Bix's work highlights the relationship between an abstract organizing model and the on-the-ground practices of a single community organization,

and concludes that the model is effective at transforming common sense ideology. The nature of elaboration is usually a shift from “individual guilt” to “collective struggle,” from a sense of resignation to a structural analysis. In a society where individualization and resignation are built into the fabric of daily life, this is no small feat for a community organization.

This impact, however, is mainly on those who join the organization. A war of position strategy involves the capture of institutions and the production of a hegemonic infrastructure. This leads to the institutional level questions like “what kind of infrastructure is produced? What kind of identity and collective will is formed? What is a transformative organization’s ability to capture institutions of civil society?” Here, transformative organizations offer a strong orientation, but struggle to achieve results. There are no real instances of dominating an institution, the way a powerful Left force like the Italian Communist Party did with local governments, or the ways in which socialists in Mexico achieved control over some local educational systems (like the one that produced the Ayotzinapa martyrs). That being said, the ability to build counterhegemonic spaces within the organization suggests that when a stronger mass scale is achieved, and the balance of forces shifts to a greater degree, that transformative organizations will have a large repertoire of counterhegemonic tools to draw from. For instance, as Bix points out in his study, transformative organizations are extremely good at producing organic intellectuals, the members of the base who serve as the “deputies” of a new hegemony. This would be furthered by control over larger institutions within civil society that many more people come into contact with. While these organizations produce strongly held common identities that unite across difference, they do not produce a collective will simply because their impact is so limited in scope.

On the most macro level, the level of the historical bloc, a Gramscian strategic framework asks the questions: “what bloc is being built, and what holds it together? What is the nature of transformative organizations’ interventions into the conjuncture? And what is their impact on the overall balance of forces?” Here, transformative organizations adopt a conscious read of the political economy and seek to organize those most impacted by neoliberal restructuring. As such they prefigure an alternative historical bloc. That bloc is black, brown, and Asian working class and immigrant communities as the leading “class,” with support from a sector of the white working class. It is essentially, as Eric Mann points out, an anti-imperialist bloc (2001:87). The ideological cement of this bloc is a Left ideology that sees capitalism and imperialism as gendered and racialized, and sees working class protagonism and mass struggle as the force capable of rupturing that system. The underling base is a shared material interest in break with the system as all of these groups are severely (and disproportionately) impacted by exploitation, insecurity, and state violence.

The model also consciously addresses a set of interlocking crises and contradictions that define the neoliberal conjuncture. It addresses the imperial crisis of the United States and the contradiction of mass migration. As NTanya Lee and Steve Williams explain, the U.S. empire is dominant, spreading a capitalist version of globalization and free trade, but is also faced with the human consequences: large immigration from neo-colonies to the metrople. This creates a strategically positioned group that is both without the empire and within it (Mann 2001:88). The U.S., then, is headed toward becoming a majority non-white state governed by white supremacy. (Lee and Williams 2013).

Additionally, capitalism’s crisis tendency means that in moments of acute crisis, the white, male working class faces many of the conditions that communities of color and women

face all the time. Leadership by working class communities of color can lead those breakaway strata, as opposed to the Left hierarchy that has usually had white workers as its leading group. By building an anti-imperialist bloc to erode the forms of white supremacy and patriarchy that have helped cohere the capitalist bloc and divide resistance, this model points the way in a direction of a revolutionary strategy suited for the racialized and gendered nature of neoliberalism.

To this Lee and Williams would add an ecological crisis, which has the potential to array a broad set of forces against the unsustainable capitalist political economy. This too poses a question of leadership and “articulation,” because many different coalitions are possible, with many different hegemonies able to form as this crisis develops. The Transformative Organizing model has little to say about the relationship of this strategic question to the on-the-ground struggles. This omission will become increasingly pressing as the crisis intensifies.

The question of intervention in the conjuncture is another complicated one for Transformative Organizations, an aspect of the model that has only been partially fleshed out. For Gramsci, a strong analysis of the conjuncture is key, so that a compact, well built organization can effectively navigate the conjunctural terrain in its quest for hegemony. The strongest Transformative Organizations have been responses to the most pronounced conjunctural features of neoliberalism. For example POWER formed by organizing workfare workers in the post welfare reform moment and City Life achieved its biggest growth by organizing people in foreclosure in the post-financial crisis moment. In both organizations, a wider social process shaped by neoliberal restructuring became locations for intervention and successful organization. It would require further study to draw comparisons to other organizations, and determine if these kinds of conjunctural interventions have a greater impact in

terms of organizational size and media/cultural attention. But my experience and knowledge about both is that a clear reading of the specificity of neoliberalism contributed to their success.

All of these successes are very limited. It is worth emphasizing yet again that Transformative organizations have simply not achieved anywhere near a mass scale. The biggest questions for the model that go beyond internal organizational questions (like breaking with the non-profit legal structure, honing ideological practice, etc.), are essentially conjunctural questions. How can small organizations attain “conjunctural relevance” by organizing in ways that have a broader impact? How can Transformative organizations “punch above their weight” and change the consciousness of more than just their members? What kind of read of the conjuncture is necessary? These questions have gone relatively unanswered. In no small part that’s because these organizations don’t have enough power or resources to make carefully planned interventions, and form in a more organic and sporadic way.

Answering those questions will go a long way toward dealing with the perennial problem: how do we achieve “scope” and “scale”? Until a truly mass base is formed, it will be impossible to capture institutions and harder still to shift the balance of power between competing blocs. A strong read of the conjunctural terrain is one component of an answer to that question. But the other component is the relationship between long-term organizations and mass movement upsurges. Once again, the model and the New Working Class organizations more broadly have not proven that they play a decisive role in forming and leading mass movements. Part of that is simply because the relationship between “spadework” and upsurge is a complex one that develops in a number of ways over varying lengths of time. There was no simple relationship between the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)’s early attempts at industrial unionism and the upsurge that came in the 1930s. For a wobbly in the 1920s, there must have

been a lot of unanswered questions about the impact of their previous work. But the examples, repertoires, ideologies, and practical leadership of many early industrial unionists contributed immensely to the growth of industrial unionism more than a decade after their early efforts had been broken by repression.

So the jury is still out. One interesting and promising recent example, though, is the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. Two transformative organizers coined the hashtag and have offered a lot of leadership in Ferguson, in the Bay Area, and beyond. Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors are both key leaders within the world of Transformative Organizing, and demonstrate that the conscious, strategic leadership that is cultivated by the model offers the possibilities for positive relationships with mass movements that touch many more people than any one organization. How that leadership will continue to play out, and what direction this movement and others in the future will have...all that is still a big question mark.

This leads to the last major question that I think emerges from a Gramscian framework: what is the role of a Left instrument to coordinate these activities and build a counterhegemonic force. No organization can accomplish a counterhegemonic politics on its own. A war of position requires a political instrument. Sustaining organizations, developing an analysis of the conjuncture, coordinating resources, developing long-term strategy, and supporting and deploying leaders is not something that will happen by accident. The need for a Left instrument to develop the model, cohere and expand New Working Class organizing, and carry out these critical tasks is without a doubt a pressing one. Luckily, the folks who have played key roles in developing this model have been wrestling with this question. And recently they have formed a majority people of color, majority women cadre formation called LeftRoots to unite a layer of Transformative Organizers and develop the strategy and leadership necessary to build a

counterhegemonic revolutionary historical bloc. We can't know if LeftRoots has the ability to answer the Gramscian questions, to make interventions, to develop the model, and to rejuvenate and lead movements to come. But we can take heart that the questions are being asked and that the war of position has been joined.

5

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to synthesize Gramsci's theory with an analysis of social change occurring on the difficult terrain of neoliberalism. It is a humble attempt to build on the incredible work that is happening on the frontlines, especially in working class communities of color, especially among social movement Leftists, and especially emerging from the powerful mobilizations of the last decade. I argue that a Gramscian reading of these almost-movements can teach us a great deal. In this conclusion I will outline some of those lessons, with the hope that it is a departing point for deeper, sustained investigation.

One key lesson that runs across case studies is that the process of articulating an historical bloc capable of contesting the neoliberal one must emerge from real processes of struggle, coalition formation, and identity creation. This means going deeper than rhetorical or temporary alliances. Nowhere is that more clear than within the Occupy Movement, which advanced a 99% framework, but failed to construct a much needed unity from below. The mode of organization, the infrastructures that activists produce, the base that is being engaged, all have a powerful impact on who participates in a movement and what kind of ideological "glue" holds the group together. Here, we must see the spadework that predates upsurges as a critical location for carefully producing ideologies and common identities, and building bases among strategically positioned sectors.

A Gramscian analysis also highlights the need for a reconceptualization of class and class struggle in the 21st century. When we adopt an expansive politics, and seek to understand multiple locations of antagonisms as well as capital's truly intersectional politics of production,

we are required to revise older understandings of the working class. All three case studies articulate a different vision of class, but all highlight that the creation of a working class is a political project, not a predefined entity that will itself be organized. Here we can revisit Marx's oft-quoted idea of "a class for itself." In the *Philosophy of Poverty*, Marx writes, "Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself" ([1847]1999). We may expand that proposition: capital, its specific historical bloc, and its array of intersecting antagonisms, has created for a mass of people a set of potential common interests. This mass is thus already a class against capital, but not yet for itself. Only in the process of producing its own historical bloc will it become a class for itself.

Given neoliberalism's intersections of class power, white supremacy, patriarchy, and imperialism, we can begin to redefine class struggle, and the role of the Left itself, as an attempt to organize those with a direct material interest in transforming that system. While this highlights certain social sectors, for instance immigrant working class women of color in the United States, it also suggests that many groups have antagonistic relationships as a class. Creating a condensation point for these many intersecting, mutually constituting antagonisms is the work of building a counterhegemony, and it requires wrestling with complex material interests and equally complex identities and cultures. It will take many more upsurges and a lot more spadework to thoughtfully articulate the shared interests and shared identities. No struggle is too small for the Left to do this kind of work.

It takes a special kind of organization to do that type of work in the neoliberal moment. Another key lesson that a Gramscian strategic framework helps illuminate, is the importance of

developing new types of organization to wage counterhegemonic struggle. Old forms of organization have failed to respond to the discipline of the conjuncture, and the Left has been slow to adapt. If indeed there is a great deal of work to be done in the small battles for control over civil society, and many small interventions are needed to cohere a hegemonic social force, then the Left needs to be capable of winning those fights and using them to build a counterhegemony. The relatively new Left organization LeftRoots' project of developing cadre within social movements is an important step in that direction. Its goal of uniting and cohering those social movement Leftists is an urgent task. The formation of national networks like Right to the City and National Domestic Workers Alliance also points in the direction of a renewal of organizations that can connect disparate fights and incorporate them into a broader challenge. But these developments are still very new. The Labor movement has not kept pace, even as the AFL-CIO has made some significant changes. The Democratic Party continues its rightward slide. The period of experimentation will absolutely continue for the foreseeable future. A Gramscian strategic framework asks us to continually evaluate these experiments by a metric of hegemonic ability, so the Left may fruitfully expand what builds a counterhegemony and discard what does not.

Our case studies have revealed some locations for these interventions. In all three instances, we've seen that there is a great deal of variety in the orientation of the participants. This is most clear in the Immigrant Uprising of 2006 and subsequent immigrant organizing efforts. There, Gonzales reveals an emerging, if disorganized, oppositional pole competing for power with a reformist pole. In the Occupy Movement there was a marked tension between the inner core and outer core. Within the inner core, even, there was a great deal of debate about why that tension existed, and about the how the movement should best proceed. And Transformative

Organizing itself can be understood as the attempt to create a radical pole within the world of community organizing. New Working Class organizations most broadly are creating a pole of their own, especially within the Labor Movement, though the relationship is far more complex and not yet at the point of a meaningful break. However, what these cases point to is that developing transformative poles within a handful of strategic institutions is going to be the key to focusing our spadework.

These poles of counterhegemonic politics can change the very nature of any individual movement. Organizing immigrants as workers with human rights can yield a very different politics than incorporating immigrants into neoliberal versions of citizenship. An Occupy Movement that seeks to win power with a working class base can yield a different politics than an Occupy that emphasizes symbolic politics. Transformative poles within conflicted movements—within Immigration Reform, within community organizing, within the Labor movement, within the student movement, within the Black Liberation Movement, within the women's movement, within the LGBTQ movement—this is where our attempt to forge counterhegemonic strategy may see its most effective work. New types of institutions can be created, new points of connection found, and maybe most importantly, decisive and creative breaks from neoliberal politics can be made possible.

A Gramscian strategic framework also helps us understand the limits of current movements and movement organizations. Above all else, the problem that stands out is the problem of scale. Issues remain siloed and organizations remain small. State repression manages to strangle upsurges fairly quickly, and even with this level of coercion, there is a great deal of consent. It has proved remarkably difficult to unite or extend the mobilizations that have occurred, and harder still to turn small counterhegemonic spaces into mass organizations or

movements. The relationship between spadework and a more robust counterhegemonic politics is an unclear one. Part of Gramsci's insistence on conjunctural specificity, is acknowledging the challenges that define a moment, and pacing the party's activity to that moment. We may not see a real intensification of counterhegemonic struggle until a different kind of conjuncture occurs. Craig Calhoun's read of the 1960s is helpful here. He describes a movement wave as "conjunctures among multiple movements." They are the product of a bleeding and blending across upsurges that interact in dynamic and mutually reinforcing ways (2013:26). As of now, the difficulty in articulating common interests and common identities is very much a product of the fact the upsurges are taking place, but are not at a level of intensity of frequency where they bleed and blend into one another. Not that they are totally separate, but the level of mobilization is not high enough for there to be the kind of cross pollination that is particularly conducive to forming an alternative historical bloc. It will take both hard work and altered circumstances for the Left to develop its war of position strategy.

A Gramscian strategic framework makes these types of analysis possible. It would be very easy to extract an entirely different set of lessons out of each case study. I think the Gramscian tools point in particular directions and can stimulate a certain kind of much-needed thinking. But my purpose isn't just to draw some of my own tentative conclusions. I want to evaluate my framework itself: both what it reveals and what it fails to reveal.

A Gramscian strategic framework is good at taking a zoomed out view that does not exaggerate the importance of every movement or moment, while still seeing them as connected and significant. In that respect the framework avoids the all-too-common traps of cheerleading movements or of pessimistically dismissing them. The framework can also help organizers and participants focus their work by asking questions about the nature of the spadework they are

conducting. It does more than say “keep plugging away any way you can” while still affirming the importance of spadework in a context without vibrant and overlapping mass movements.

Relatedly, this framework helps reveal strategic aspects of movements that may not be obvious otherwise. It would be easy to see the repression of Occupy, its organizational form, and its base as three fairly distinct phenomena. But by employing the concept of the historical bloc, we can see that the failure of Occupy’s bloc building work made it hard to attract a base, reinforced its horizontal and overly symbolic politics, and made it vulnerable to state repression. Similarly, a lens that looks at the politics of articulation makes it possible to see the incredibly transformative potential of a Labor-Immigrant Rights movement that links transnational migration with workplace struggle. And an understanding of the dialectical relationship between material and symbolic struggles makes it possible to understand the power of New Working Class organizations that are winning material gains and developing organic intellectuals in the process. Without a Gramscian lens, these connections are easily obscured.

The framework also struggles to reveal some key things, and that means a great deal more work needs to be done to evolve and change the framework itself. In particular, this framework points in general directions without pointing to the tactics and specific tools that make counterhegemonic activity possible. Strategic direction is important, but so is robust strategy that gets us from “here” to “there.” Movements are incredibly dynamic and complex. Much of my research is really only scratching the surface. More research is absolutely essential for digging into the real nuts and bolts of any single movement or organization. And the reality of strategy is that it needs to be in dialogue with the nuts and bolts. But it’s not just a question of more research. Lessons need to be learned through practice, and Gramscian questions won’t always help with that type of learning. We need to look elsewhere for that. Organizers need to be

talking to one another. New ideas need to be ventured; new debates need to be had within movements. A war of positions strategy will emerge from that process as much as it will from a set of abstract questions.

Another weak spot of this framework, is that it is better suited to evaluate organizations and movements, and not the conjuncture itself. I have drawn on Gramsci to develop a loose analysis of the conjuncture, but I have not systematically asked questions about the balance of power, the different common sense ideologies, the different antagonisms, the nature of the historical bloc, etc. that define the conjunctural terrain. This framework struggles to fully align specific analyses with an overall understanding of the conjuncture, and that makes it hard to draw strategic lessons. That is in part due to the lack of robust Left organizations which can help us connect theory to action by developing an ongoing read of the conjuncture, but it is also a sign that this framework itself is underdeveloped. A better array of questions, especially ones that better analyze the conjuncture can leave us with better data on how to intervene in the conjuncture and what kind of strategic initiatives are possible.

WAGING A WAR OF POSITION

In spite of any limitations, a Gramscian strategic framework is critical because it helps us understand how to best wage a war of position in our context. And the need to wage a war of position has never been greater. Gramsci teaches us that every crisis is also an opportunity, every moment of destruction is also a moment of construction. It is an incredibly difficult task to take our moment of disorganization, of weakness, of disunity and see in it the moment of possibility, of creativity—to see a new and better future. But that is precisely what we must do. It requires both a pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will. The war of position is not a strategy

of “wait and see,” but a strategy that sees revolutionary possibility in the everyday work of struggle. If “thinking our problems in a Gramscian way” means anything, it means taking that possibility very seriously and not shying away from the challenge. If we do so, we have a world to win.

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