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Gramscian Perspectives on Populism

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Josef Korbel School of International Studies

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Luke W. Mooberry

June 2019

Advisor: Professor Micheline Ishay

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## Abstract

Increasingly liberal states are facing challenges from populist movements. This paper argues that the prison writings of Antonio Gramsci can provide important insights into the phenomenon and how to counteract it. The first two sections outline a set of Gramscian analytical tools: hegemony, non-hegemony, passive revolution, and Caesarism. These theoretical tools are then applied to different periods of the Third Republic of France, 1870-1940. This paper looks at this French example because it features unique relationships between populism, ideology, and the experience of liberalism prior to World War II. The third section demonstrates the implications of non-hegemony within international society, and how it affects and shapes states' domestic lives and inter-state relation

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## Introduction: Antonio Gramsci and the Populism Moment

The extensive carceral works of Antonio Gramsci provide a comprehensive set of analytical tools for analyzing the rise of populism today. As evidenced by the successes of candidates like Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the United States, and movements such as Brexit in Great Britain and “Le Front National” and “Les Gilets Jaunes” in France, a backlash fueled wave of populism is increasingly submerging western societies. Former bastions of liberalism are slowly succumbing to illiberalism as a result of this upsurge. Outside of the Western European and American contexts, populism is also on the rise in Modi’s India, Duterte’s Philippines, Netanyahu’s Israel, and Orban’s Hungary.

Gramsci provides an interesting diagnosis of the possible shifts from stability to instability, or from hegemonic societies to non-hegemonic societies. Populism, as Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau have shown, is not necessarily illiberal in nature.<sup>1</sup> Yet, non-hegemonic features in liberal societies – populism, for example – can pave the road to illiberalism. Neither non-hegemonic societies nor populist movements have pre-determined socio-political outcomes. Post-World War I history shows that misdiagnosed situations may have catastrophic effects, as is evidenced by the way Western liberal societies embraced first populism and then extreme forms of nationalism and fascism.

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<sup>1</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. (London: Verso, 1985)

Without an understanding of the relations between civil society and the state, such confusion can further contribute to the erosion of liberal democracy.

Furthermore, the existing literature on hegemony has a tendency to ontologically prioritize hegemonic societies and their structures, at the expense of non-hegemonic studies. What is seldomly discussed is the tenuous line between hegemony and non-hegemony, and how one form of regime can lead to the other. My thesis addresses this lacuna. Based on Antonio Gramsci's writings, my thesis focuses on the fragility of societies and the conditions that lead them to populism (or extreme nationalism). Gramsci's notions of hegemony and non-hegemony are central to the understanding of these conditions. "In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous," he wrote, adding that:

"in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks..."

In this sense, Gramsci sees the "West" as hegemonic, as the structural relations of its civil society remained uncontested during State crises.

More space will be devoted to developing hegemony and non-hegemony in the next section, but – to put it simply – the demarcation between the two lies in differing levels of civil society fragility. Hegemonic legitimacy is usually based on a social consensus—which does not need to be universal in content. A state is legitimate when the dominant group (or the hegemonic group) in civil society can persuade subaltern groups of the benefits of a given worldview. This persuasion allows the dominant group to relinquish control of coercive tools embodied in political society. This separation



between civil society and political society allows the state to mitigate conflict between disparate social groups. Historically, hegemony has not been the dominant mode of socio-political organization because of the difficulty in establishing and institutionalizing social relations based on consensus.

Non-hegemonic societies, such as Russia prior to World War I, are different. In these societies, the majority of the population does not share a common worldview. For a fragmented civil society, or a weak hegemonic group, the institutions of civil society are an integral part of the state. When civil society is fractured and its institutions “gelatinous,” leaders can easily appeal to catch-all populist or nationalist ideologies to unify a discontented population. This does not mean that non-hegemonic societies are necessarily societies in turmoil, as was the case in Russia prior to the Bolshevik revolution, but they are nonetheless prone to social upheaval. In hegemonic societies, where some form of bureaucratic institutional impartiality exists, the majority of the population consents to the main ideology of the state. In contrast, in non-hegemonic societies, the state controls the vacuum created in the absence of a strong civil society.

The transition from hegemonic to non-hegemonic society is the focus of this thesis, which is shaped by four overarching questions: First, how do Gramscian analytical tools help us understand the shift to social fragility (or vice-versa)? Second, what is the historical legacy of these social changes? Third, what are the implications of non-hegemony on the international system? Fourth, how can a Gramscian analysis offer insights to counter populism and nationalism in the West? This thesis argues that Gramscian tools help us understand the anatomy of illiberalism and the fragility of liberalism both in the domestic and international spheres. Furthermore, based on

historical lessons of the interwar period, Gramscian analysis provides possible strategies for countering contemporary authoritarian trends.

This thesis is divided into three sections. The first two sections outline a set of Gramscian analytical tools: hegemony, non-hegemony, passive revolution, and Caesarism. These theoretical tools are then applied to different periods of the Third Republic of France, 1870-1940. I selected the French example because it features unique relationships between populism, ideology, and the experience of liberalism prior to World War II. The third section demonstrates the implications of non-hegemony within international society, and how it affects and shapes states' domestic lives and inter-state relations. Finally, I conclude with some considerations about a Gramscian strategy for overcoming the rise of illiberalism.

## 1. Gramscian Perspectives on the Foundations of Populism

Before continuing, I will provide definitions for the key concepts of this paper. The first section defines populism; the second Gramsci's use of hegemony and non-hegemony. Once these definitions are in order, the paper will move on to conceptualize them in terms of the dynamics of social relations and individual consciousness.

Unpacking Gramscian concepts is a precarious task, requiring some overarching discussion and contextualization. To begin, Gramscian concepts are presented in a dichotomous manner, with examples including hegemony and non-hegemony, common sense and good sense, or the reactionary and the progressive. These concepts take on the appearance of ideal types encompassed within sets of dualisms. The defining of these dualisms, as with hegemony and non-hegemony, relies on a certain fixity of characteristics or outcomes which are identifiable beyond specific contextualization. The form of this presentation is liable to be troubling to some readers. Few, if any, social realities fit into a dualistic conceptualization, making it ill equipped analytical tool.

Fortunately, Gramsci's concepts are not arrested in a typological state. Instead, this dualist problematic leads to their necessary inclusion in Gramsci's historicism, which transforms these static typologies into historical and developmental processes. This historicism takes on the form of social processes made understandable through certain concepts which only exist at the conjunction within the particulars of a historical

moment. Therefore, hegemony, rather than existing as an inflexible ideal type, can analyze many different historical moments by adapting them to the relevant context.

### *1.1 Defining Populism*

This paper prefers its own slightly refined definition of populism over one of the many extant within populism literature. This definition's modifications serve to better situate the term within the context of the Gramscian analytical tools. It is not likely to fit all potential groups which might be labelled as populist, but it is adequate for understanding an important dynamics of hegemony and non-hegemony. This distinction is vital to understanding populism in hegemonic terms.

To fit these two principles, this manuscript defines populism as follows:

1. Populism represents the divisions between both “the people” and “the elite,” and “the people” and the existing social order, regardless of that order's hegemonic status. “The people” are those individuals which make up a populist movement, having become sufficiently conscious of social contradictions.<sup>2</sup> “The elite” serve as a political stand-in for the inadequacies of said order, given their status—or perceived status—as its chief beneficiary and protector.
2. Populism is “ideologically thin,” a concept which attempts to capture the association between populist movements and stronger ideologies (liberalism, fascism, socialism, etc.).<sup>3</sup> Populism does not carry any *necessary* political agenda

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<sup>2</sup> In Section 2.3 “The Populist Conscious,” I deal with the individual's development of consciousness of social contradictions in greater detail

<sup>3</sup> Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 13.

in the sense of thick ideologies; instead, it maintains a fluid development in relation to the “will of the people.”

The definition developed here is derived from Gramsci’s two principles of political science:

“1. That no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for further forward movement;” and

“2. That a society does not set itself tasks for whose solution the necessary conditions have already been incubated.”<sup>4</sup>

Populism fits into these two principles as both representative of productive forces without room for forward movement and as a potential solution to this lack of space and forward motion.

This conception of the relationship between populism and hegemony runs counter to those put forward by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. For them, populism acts as a counter-hegemonic force, pushing against the prevailing order in an attempt to overturn the existing order.<sup>5</sup> This is at least partially correct; under certain conditions, populism presents challenges to hegemonic apparatuses and institutions in ways which have historically been thought of as nonviable. While correct when discussing populism in a hegemonic state, this conception can also obfuscate an understanding of populism as the outcome of the transition to a state of non-hegemony.

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<sup>4</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 106-107.

<sup>5</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. (London: Verso, 1985)

But populism can also be the product of a non-hegemonic period. Populism in non-hegemonic societies have far different social implication then when occurring in hegemonic society. From both analytical and strategic perspectives, we should understand populism as both an individual response, and a social tactic of, the process of hegemonic transition. Populism therefore gains a manifold number of causes and pursuits which may be more or less successful depending on historical contingency.

The indeterminacy of a populist movement is therefore both limited and prone to adopting some deeper ideological premise. The relevant literature commonly conceptualizes such movements as “transitory” phenomena – the precursors to the development of a thicker ideology.<sup>6</sup> It is important to differentiate how hegemony and non-hegemony condition populism and its potential for transitioning into a “thick” ideology. In particular, we must avoid making populism dependent on the ideology it might become, rather than focusing on the becoming itself. Within a populist moment, there exists a multitude of potential outcomes which are, in part, defined by the process which develops them.

### *1.2 Social Dynamics in Hegemonies and Non-Hegemonies*

The principle concern in this section is how social dynamics influence civil-political contexts and to what extent this influence generates populist sentiments. Within hegemonic and non-hegemonic societies, there are certain non-specific processes which can help explain the phenomena. Collectively, these processes fall under the general Gramscian term “Passive Revolution.” Before engaging with this term, however, this

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<sup>6</sup> Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, 13.

paper cannot proceed without a more adequate definition of hegemony and non-hegemony.

Hegemonic Society: Characterizing the relationship between a hegemonic society and a hegemonic state are two factors which, acting in unison, together constitute hegemony: (1) The dominant classes of civil society having developed a consensual relationship with a broad majority of subordinate classes within civil society; and (2) the dominant classes of civil society having relinquished direct control over political society in favor of institutionalized structures coordinated by a bureaucratic class.<sup>7</sup>

Institutionalization of the state structure is the foremost means through which the dominant classes can achieve their hegemony, as its effects feed into the development of consensus. Institutions reduce the primacy of the coercive elements of the dominant social group through the structuring of social action. The reduction in coercive elements coincides with disconnecting these structures from class influences through the use of impartial state institutions. These institutional boundaries between civil society and political society improve the legitimacy of the state—and, by proxy, their dominance of the socio-economic hierarchy. Consequently, the continued success of hegemonic institutions is dependent on the acquiescence of some portion of the subaltern social groups, as well as their acceptance of the leading nature of the dominant classes.

Non-Hegemonic Society: Non-hegemonic society is built upon the integration of the dominant classes into the political structure through the weakening of institutional separations which demarcate society. In non-hegemonic society, there continues to be a dominant group, but this group has either lost—or failed to achieve—the legitimacy

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<sup>7</sup> Gramsci, *Selections*, 267-269.

necessary for it to establish the institutional structure of hegemony. Without legitimacy, the stability of the consensual social hierarchy is threatened. In the absence of hegemony, subordinate and subaltern groups may challenge the social hierarchy. In order to maintain their social position, the dominant groups are compelled to rely on the coercive elements of political society; establishing consensus is eschewed in favor of forging alliances of convenience and pursuing strategies of coercion.

Coercion deepens a society's struggles, heightening inter-group conflict. Stripped of the independence of institutions and bureaucracy, the state becomes staffed with the ranks of the dominant group. This furthers social fragility by connecting the dominant group directly to government failures. The state and its dominant class become welded together; the actions of the state becoming increasingly synonymous with the interests of the dominant group. The near-constant potential for instability in this form of civil-political union prompts subaltern groups toward escape from the social hierarchy. What we are concerned with here is why this escape manifests itself as populism.

Gramsci's concept of "passive revolution" is useful for understanding the instability inherent to non-hegemonic civil society. While attempting to maintain their dominance, the civil-political class will often attempt what Gramsci identified as passive revolution: a means of establishing a moment of pseudo-consensus between themselves and the other classes while maintaining the status quo of socio-political relations.<sup>8</sup>

Gramsci refers to these periods of socio-political contestation as a "crisis of authority":

If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer "leading" but only "dominant", exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great

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<sup>8</sup> Gramsci, *Selections*, 106-107.



masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.<sup>9</sup>

This definition takes populism as one potential symptom of the death of the old order and the birth of the new.

While passive revolution represents changes to some portion of the social structure, the dominant civil classes—seeking to avoid institutional separation of their coercive capacities—are seldom distanced from the political coercive apparatus. For this reason, non-hegemonic states often fail to escape from the cyclical nature imposed by passive revolution.. Passive revolution perpetuates the status quo through two other Gramscian analytical tools, co-optation and *trasformismo*, which are means of preserving the existing civil-political structure through incremental reform and political obfuscation.

Co-optation represents the incorporation of amenable elements of the subaltern classes' and non-dominant classes' concerns into the socio-political order. By strategically addressing these groups, the dominant faction fends off drastic social change. The effects of these partial methods tend toward temporary satisfaction, as these concessions are likely to increase pressure for further reform. The dominant classes rarely wish to give up control over the political levers, fearing the retribution of their subordinate classes, and this reluctance to relinquish power limits the extent to which they will go in addressing the concerns of the other groups.

By virtue of their necessity to appease certain social groups and the potential threat of ceding too much power, the dominant group of a non-hegemonic society is

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 306.

particularly prone to inciting conflict. Application of coercive force on points of social anguish or on the wrong groups leads to the widening of social discontent by revealing the coercive dangers of the state to otherwise passive social groups. Conversely, not enough control can leave room for the extreme elements of civil society to operate and grow, challenging the structure of the civil-political relations dominated by a particular class. Structural balancing does not occur as a single moment, but is rather a continual process.

Trasformismo is a process by which political factions in non-hegemonic societies show increased homogeneity in their political views. This is done in order to privilege the politics of the dominant social class over all other political viewpoints. This can occur in two ways. The first, which Gramsci refers to as molecular trasformismo, involves particular political figureheads going over to a “moderate political class” whose interests are largely in line with those of the dominant group. The second involves the political mass going over to some new moderate position following a divisive political event. Both manifestations of trasformismo have the effect of instilling politics with a lack of constructive discourse and practical action regarding the contradictions of society. Instead, the entire political system begins to appear corrupt or unproductive, as politics becomes reduced to its own class—with its own interests.<sup>10</sup>

### *1.3 The Populist Conscious*

This portion of the paper looks at how the growth of an individual’s agency can become a source of populism within both hegemonies and non-hegemonies. Embodied

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 58.

within each state are complex sets of tensions which Gramsci developed under the concept of the “dual perspective.” Examples of these dual perspectives include “force and consent, authority and hegemony, the individual and the universal moment.”<sup>11</sup> The perspectives are useful for formulating the dialectical tensions in society. Social relations formed the first half of this dialectical formula. In this section I will theorize the development of an individual’s populist consciousness as a perspectival counterpart to the dynamics of social relations.

To understand an individual’s reactions to the organization of society, Gramsci developed the concepts of “common sense” and “good sense.” With these terms, one can situate the consciousness of the individual within that individual’s historical conditions. Gramsci’s use of “common sense” differs from the meaning of self-evident or reasonable knowledge. Instead, his conception is ingrained in that knowledge which forms the intellectual foundations of society. These foundations permeate throughout social relations, acting as a sort of civil “concrete” for the epoch. This serves to reinforce the sets of socio-economic relations endemic to any historical moment.

Coupled with the Gramscian notion of “common sense” is its dialectical counterpart: “good sense.” “Good sense” represents those ideas and feelings an individual may have which contradict the “common sense” of the age. Awareness of this “good sense” is coupled with the recognition of injustice bound up in practical aspects of “common sense.” The individual has this “good sense” in active contradiction to the modes of thought dominant within the historical epoch in which they live. In coming to this “good sense” realization, the populist individual becomes conscious of the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 170-171.

contradictions at play in their socio-historical epoch. The hegemonic-reinforcing mechanism of “common sense” becomes susceptible to the conscious developments of the individual. The worldviews associated with the “common sense” begin to lose their legitimacy within the individual, weakening the relationship between the individual and hegemonic society.

This is not only a conflict between the intellectual foundations of the individual and society, but also a tension internal to the individual. Before the individual ever comes into conflict with broader society, they fight against the “common sense” embedded within themselves. As Gramsci writes, no one individual is purely made up of “common” or “good” sense, but is rather in a near constant dialectical struggle between the two. Their division, competition, and synthesis culminate in a consciousness of new perceptions and conceptions.<sup>12</sup> Through this process, the individual becomes aware of the distance between their own thought and the actions they take in the world, and this awareness becomes the basis for the individual’s populist emancipation from the social order.

The combination of these stages of conscious development has the potential to move into a mode of populist consciousness. The development of this political consciousness furthers discontent regarding the social, political, and economic structure which populist individuals view as reinforcing the societal contradictions they find most aggrieving. Hence, in changing themselves they begin to change the world:

To transform the external world, the general system of relations, is to potentiate oneself and to develop oneself. That ethical “improvement” is purely individual is an illusion and an error: the synthesis of the elements of individuality is “individual”, but it cannot be realised and developed without an activity directed

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 327-328.

outward, modifying external relations both in nature and, in varying degrees, with other men, in the various social circles in which one lives, up to the greatest relationship of all, which embraces the whole human species.<sup>13</sup>

Particularly under non-hegemony, the individual is in an indeterminate political space and likely without clear political organization. Traditional political parties may have difficulty adapting to the new populist stances of their former constituents, leaving these individuals unrepresented. Instead, it seems likely that the newly “conscious” tend to fall back upon deeply-grounded beliefs, psychological pathologies, and political actors able to make an emotional appeal to the populist individual.

Theodor Adorno’s notion of an “Authoritarian Personality” also explains this problem. In his study of the growth of illiberalism, Adorno argued that there are identifiable factors which make certain individuals more sympathetic toward authoritarian or otherwise illiberal regimes.<sup>14</sup> These factors limit the sublimation of thought to a one-sided, purely illiberal affair. What I am arguing here is that, first, these sublimated desires lack a definitive political orientation and can be liberal or illiberal; and, second, that the desires are instead derived from two independent sources, one being particularities (psychology and sociology) of the individual, the other the “common sense” against which the individual is reacting. Furthermore, the process of actualization is critical to understanding the political outcomes of these suppressed desires, which is an important part of section four.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 360.

<sup>14</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Introduction to the Authoritarian Personality*, ed. Stephen Bronner & Douglas MacKay Kellner, (New York: Routledge, 1989), 230-231.

Central to this political awakening is the perceptual superiority that comes with consciousness of contradiction. To distinguish themselves from the “unconscious,” populists form a loose self-conceptualization around the notion of “the people” vs. “the elite.” “The people” exist only for those who have uncovered these “truths” of the system and rejected those who are perceived as supporting the system in spite of its contradictions. Once these political lines have been drawn, individuals find themselves oriented toward a particular target of their discontent. The application of the individual political will merely needs this directionality once its intellectual logic is constructed.

#### *1.4 The Legacy of the Third Republic*

With these two theoretical levels of inquiry now laid out, I will proceed to analyze the Third French Republic within the context of the development of individual consciousness and changes in social relations. The Third Republic rose out of the ashes of the failed Second French Empire and Napoleon III Bonaparte. Seeking historical causation is a continuous, yet fraught endeavor; instead, I will map some of the Republic’s roots in order to better trace the recurring populism and illiberalism in French society during this period. One event in the early Third Republic stands out as its first hint of social discontent and illiberal potential: Boulangism.<sup>15</sup> Boulangism’s namesake is that of General Georges Boulanger, a figure whose ambitious political dreams threatened what little stability the early Third Republic maintained. But before analyzing General

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<sup>15</sup> Frederic Seager, *The Boulanger Affair: Political Crossroads of France 1886-1889*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 12-18.

Boulangier's political *virtù* in the next section, we will first look at the *fortuna* provided by individuals and social relations of the Third Republic.<sup>16</sup>

Following the family tradition, Napoleon III gained his imperial position in France through a coup d'état in 1850 which swept away the short-lived Second Republic and gave rise to the Second Empire, which came with certain measures of passive revolution. The new emperor fashioned himself as a liberal at whose hands France was to undergo a period of substantial reform. But for all the reforms he made to the French political system, Napoleon III had little effect on the endemic infighting amongst the nation's political factions.<sup>17</sup> By the 1860s, Napoleon III had substantially shifted decision-making into the authority of his parliament, while simultaneously increasing the power of the Republican faction of French politics. This only served to exacerbate the political infighting. On the right, the Royalists and imperial sympathizers argued against socio-political reform, opposed by reform-minded Republican and various radical groups.

Leaving political conventions of the right-left dichotomy behind reveals further depths to the infighting. The restoration of the Republic would ultimately unleash a struggle to contain and pacify the radical elements of the left. This political dysfunction matched the general dysfunction of French society. During this period of discord, no one was more front and center than Parisians—Jacobin advocates within the new Republic

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<sup>16</sup> *Virtù* and *Fortuna* are the two qualities which Machiavelli argued his "Prince" required. *Virtù* (Virtue or Skill) represented the political abilities of the "Prince." *Fortuna* (Fortune or Luck) represents the socio-political context which limit or construct the "Prince's" actions. Importantly, neither of these alone are sufficient for the "Prince's" political success; both are necessary in some measure.

<sup>17</sup> Roger L. Williams, *The French Revolution of 1870-1871*, (New York: WW Norton Company, Inc., 1969), 58.

who hearkened back personally and historically to the Revolution. The struggle played out in this French history is that which exists between all progressive and those which support the status quo developed under the passive revolution of the Second Empire.

Opposed to them were the Royalists, bolstered by the peasants and rural Frenchmen.<sup>18</sup> The basis for this alliance between the conservative Royalist faction and the rural classes can be found in the modernizing economic policies implemented by the government of Napoleon III. Free trade policies of the 1850s and 1860s fundamentally altered the makeup of French economic life, with the Anglo-French Treaty of 1860 exemplifying this new commercial and industrial reality. The essential purpose of this treaty was to open up the French economic system to the manufactured goods of the United Kingdom, pushing the formerly monopolistic industries of the French economy out into the broader world of competition. The result was the unsettling of France's rural population, whose traditional agricultural goods were replaced by cheaper, mass-produced equivalents. Increasingly, the urban populations of France strained under the influx of rural farmers seeking new, competitive work. The modernizing policies also increased rural political knowledge, a development which in turn led to growing criticism of the existing social construction's lack of focus on rural society.<sup>19</sup> Soon, an amalgam of social alliances formed the backbone of the state's passive revolution. From these competing political systems, with these alliances ultimately forming the foundation of the populist discontent of the 1880s.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Burns, *Rural Society and French Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 56.



The end of Napoleon III's liberal regime did little to stem France's systemic political infighting or stabilize the state which characterized the ongoing passive revolution. Rather, French affairs following the collapse of the Second French Empire during the Franco-Prussian War resulted in the creation of the Third French Republic. Along with inheriting the basic social, political, and economic failings of the Second Empire, the founding of the Third Republic was further complicated by the conditions of its birth. Immediately the Republican government struggled from a lack of institutional legitimacy, war and foreign occupation, and the attempted succession of the Paris Commune. The loss of the monarchy and return of the republic further inflamed these reactionary tendencies. In particular, the Royalist wing emerged unified, though solely on the condition of seeking a return to monarchy, be it Orléanist, Bonapartist or Bourbon.<sup>20</sup>

The events of the Franco-Prussian war were traumatic for the populations of the French capital, upending the common sense perceptions which had existed since the French Revolution. The subsequent explosion of the Paris Commune kept Parisians in a state of unrest and uncertainty. In summing up the results of this disruptive period, Sorel claims, "In a country which had been convulsed by so many changes in Government, and which consequently had known so many recantations, political justice had something particularly odious about it..."<sup>21</sup> The home of the revolution had its mass revolutionary self-perception shattered following the violent repression of the Commune movement in 1871. In France, Parisian or otherwise, we find the historical embodiment of the

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<sup>20</sup> Seager, *The Boulanger Affair*, 70-75.

<sup>21</sup> Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T.E. Hulme, (New York: Peter Smith, 1941), 106.

Gramscian quote, "... the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born."<sup>22</sup> As we will see in the coming sections, the struggles between old common sense and various new senses manifesting themselves in analytically interesting ways for the establishment of the state.

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<sup>22</sup> Gramsci, *Selections*, 276.

## 2. Social and State Consolidations of Populism

The forthcoming section is interested in how the contents of populism become actualized in a political program based on the constituent elements developed in the earlier section. I conceptualize populist politics as operationalizing around three levels of organization, Anarchism, Caesarism, and the Modern Party. These organizational differentiations and their political implications are derived from the possible relationships between the populist collective and populist leadership. After opening with a brief discussion these organizational paths, I will then move onto this section's primary focus – the Gramscian formulation of Caesarism.

### *2.1 Political Paths of Populism*

The emancipation of the “gelatinous” masses of individuals from their “common sense” consciousness characteristically includes the potential for increased political engagement. The three political pathways presented in this section take some variation on the form of a “collectivized will, directed towards a given political objective.”<sup>23</sup> Direction of the collective will can come from several potential sources, differentiated by organizational complexity. At the lowest levels of organization (Anarchism), populist sentiments are relatively fluid as compared with rigidities of hegemonic society.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 125.

Conversely, the higher the level of organization the closer populism gets to becoming a “thick ideology” (the Modern Party).

At its lowest form of organization, populism shares the same unstructured and anti-structure agenda of many anarchist movements. Consequently, populism at this level is relatively synonymous with anarchism, both rejecting the social order due to its perceived failings. Due to these ideological conceptions about organization, neither populism nor anarchism is capable of significant political change alone. Within the scope of an entire society, the diffuse nature of these discontents results in discontinuous challenges to society, but no substantive social restructuring. This path often results in resignation, an end-point signifying the individual’s acceptance of the inadequate social relations and a suppression of the individual’s discontent.

This does not mean that this level of consciousness disappears, but rather, devolves from the collective to the individual. These populist movements become a social variation on the sublimation seen within individuals during the development of their conscious. The consequence of this sublimation is the building of discontent within society, which in turn amplifies the individual sublimation by removing the potential of recognition by fellow populists’ consciousnesses. This is likely to lead to further social and individual narcosis tied directly to unmitigated desires.

Due to its own organization weakness, populist anarchism may also join with other groups or factions with greater degrees of structure. This generally means working with some form of Caesarist movement or political party, on the ground that both seek to overturn the existing political order. If anarchist movements continue to operate independently, they risk losing internal support to these groups which offer greater

political change. There are several prominent cases of these coalitions, particularly on the left where anarchists are often grouped with socialists and communists. Similarly, during the 1930s and 1940s a number of Anarcho-Syndicalists joined growing Fascist movements because of the movements' lack of political success.

The inadequacies of anarchist movements often portend a more robust populist formation, Caesarism (or interchangeably, Bonapartism). As the name would imply, Caesarism is defined by the leadership of a Caesarist figure. This leader becomes the embodiment of the populist discontent, successfully organizing together disparate elements of the discontent. Caesarist leaders are capable of significant feats of populist unification delineated along two distinct dimensions, reactionary and progressive. Like anarchism, Caesarism comes with its own organizational flaws and political ramifications in non-hegemonic societies. The French section will show the rise, fall, and consequences of a French Caesarist in the early Third Republic, General Georges Boulanger. His movement, Boulangism, was one of the outcomes of the socio-political convergences shown in the earlier section and is symbolic of the political conditions throughout the period.

The third and final potential path – which I will conclude this paper with – comes in the form of the Modern Party, which Gramsci referred to as the “Modern Prince.” As the highest form of organization, the qualities of the Modern Party necessarily entail the ability for the development of new social structures. Unlike Caesarism, the party is bound to a single unifying individual, and unlike anarchism, it has no necessary ideological aim. Instead, the Modern Party's strength is its hegemony-like organization, establishing an organic consensus between the collective and party leadership.

## 2.2 *Caesarism and the State*

Non-hegemonic societies are in a constant ebb of passive revolution, a revolution that never changes the pre-revolutionary socio-economic relations of civil society. The attempts by the dominant portions of civil society to (re)establish their leading role serve only to maintain the fractious nature of the state, with neither the progressive nor the reactionary elements winning out. Equilibrium in non-hegemonic society is axiomatically negative, as it stalls necessary social progress and produces sublimated discontent. Though disequilibrium has the potential to produce illiberal outcomes, it is also the only means for liberal outcomes in a non-hegemonic society. Equilibrium necessary breeds future instability, while only disequilibrium supplies the necessary potential for hegemonic stability. The constant competition and conflict in the non-hegemonic society rarely breeds a strong party, instead each side in civil society neutralizes another.

The weakness of non-hegemonic society opens it up to the entry of a third political force, a “Man of Destiny.” Gramsci, therefore, refers to the perception of Caesarism as the “solution” to a specific historico-political situation characterized by the equilibrium of socio-political forces.<sup>24</sup> Caesarist populism is, therefore, connected to this leader endowed with the charismatic personality and savior who is uniting varied groups from a collection of classes behind some form of anti-establishment cause. Caesarism can also exist without a Caesar, particularly where a parliamentary system exists compromise between the two competing factions becomes increasing possible without substantive

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<sup>24</sup> Gramsci, *Selections*, 219.

civil changes.<sup>25</sup> Coalition governments are examples par none for the capacity of modern parliamentary governments to provide some measure solution to the problems of political stagnancy.

As with populism, Caesarism lacks a definitive or pre-determined political orientation. Caesarism instead is constrained and shaped by the socio-historical and political environment it emerges from. Seldomly is Caesarism or populism defined totally by right or left-leaning groups. Instead, they tend to incorporate diverse segments of political life, including those within traditionally antagonistic camps. In Gramsci's conceptualization, Caesarism take on one of two reified dimensions, Reactionary and Progressive. The positionality of these dimensions does not exist along the traditional right-left political spectrum but references the ability to introduce new structures of social relations (Progressive) versus the re-institution of the old order (Reactionary).

Reactionary Caesarism represents the general failing of the progressive forces of society to unite fractious domestic elements. As a result of this weakness, the reactionary Caesar forms a position attractive to disenfranchised members of society, including traditionally progressive groups. This explains the strange alliances that are often drawn together during cases of reactionary populism, such as the alliance between the northern petit bourgeoisie and the southern masses in Italy during the interwar rise of fascism.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, there is necessary potential for emergent political phenomena, within a Caesarist movement. Caesarists tend to rely on actualizing the sublimated desires of individuals, particularly when illiberal populist forms are pursued. This process creates a

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<sup>25</sup> Gramsci, *Selections*, 220.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 272.

political feedback loop of recognition and self-fulfillment for the individual with the end of political confederation.

In order to facilitate their agenda, the reactionary Caesarist may make small, placative concessions to select progressive elements but, ultimately, the need for these concessions is tempered by the social levels of dissatisfaction. through the co-optation of fringe progressive elements. The program of the reactionary Caesar is conceptually straight forward, as their expressed goal is the return of the pre-revolutionary social ordering. Reactionaries differ in the ways in which they return to and maintain the old societal status quo. This status quo also guarantees the return of passive revolution following the end of the Caesar rule. Reactionary Caesarism – having failed to secure the state through institutions – is bound to see a reversal of and backlash toward their vulnerable agenda.

Progressive Caesarism's potential rests on its ability to develop the necessary social and political conditions for the development of a new hegemony. This entails the development of a new state structure and bureaucracy and the creation of consensual bounds between disparate groups. "Progressive" should not suggest that this form of Caesarism brings about a hegemonic order, but rather that it provides the conditions and innovations for change from one type of state to another type. Progressive Caesarism – by the nature of its reliance on the unitary figurehead – is structurally weak in the same sense as reactionary Caesarism. Similarly, this figurehead holds together the progressive coalition, without whom the bounds between groups begin to dissolve.

Gramsci shows this dissolution, and how to counteract it via a new hegemonic state, by using two historical examples. First, the defeat of Napoleon I France returned



the French state to the rule of Bourbon Kings rule until the Revolution of 1848. In the absence of a figure to continue to the historically progressive achievements of Napoleon France reverted to the old monarchical order, prioritizing the role of the nobility in the social order. Second, Caesar needed Augustus following his death to affirm his vision for an Imperial Rome, shows how the changes the progressive Caesarist need to be continued and institutionalized by a second movement or actor. Caesar had not built a hegemonic society, though he laid the foundations for one. Therefore, without Caesar Augustus, the state would have relapsed back into passive revolution. As Machiavelli wrote in *The Discourses*, “Hence kingdoms which depend on the virtue of one man do not last long, because they lose their virtue when his life is spent, and it seldom happens it is revived by his successor.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it is wise to be wary of the appearance of the progressive Caesar, as it is likely that the progressive elements they bring to society will live on only as long as the Caesar lives or maintains his body of support.

Following the rise of the Caesar, social discontent begins to find the capacity to find life within the state apparatus. This is always tempered by the degree to which the Caesar has managed to build up an organizational capacity to overcome the institutional roadblocks of the previous social relations. This can lead to varied sets of potential outcomes between the anti-hegemonic force headed by the Caesar and the remnants of the old order. For historically determinant reasons it is not inconceivable to find that the older order cannot be overcome by the means used by the Caesarist leader.

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<sup>27</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus of Livy*, ed. Bernard Crick (London: Penguin Books, 1970) 141.

The example Gramsci provides of the Italian *Risorgimento* is a prime example of the faltering of a mobilized discontent force. Though these forces alongside Garibaldi and Mazzini helped to unify the Peninsula, they were unable to overcome the old apparatuses of regionalism and the church. These old foundations of the Italian order found new life in the Kingdom of Italy, hindering its ability to adapt to the new age of modern life. While manifesting as progressive forces, they proved unable to formulate a political structure committed to the progressive nature which they endeavored upon, instead falling back into the comfortable apparatuses of the old order which has not been eradicated. This led to the establishment of the Moderate Party which would dominate Italian politics until the rise and fragmentation of the Italian Socialist Party.

### 2.3 French Caesarism

The summation of populism and Caesarism are near synonymous with each other, with populist political movements replacing the revolutionary movements and coup d'états that traditionally ushered in Caesars. In the words of Gramsci, "In the modern world, with its great economic-trade-union and the party-political coalitions, the mechanism of the Caesarist phenomenon is very different from what it was up to the time of Napoleon III."<sup>28</sup> This is referring to the changes that came with the introduction of mass political parties, an event which happens to coincide with the rise of the Third Republic in France. During this period, Caesarism would see the abandonment of its old mechanism of military coup, as was seen in the rise of Napoleon III, and instead utilize

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<sup>28</sup> Gramsci, *Selections*, 220.

the growing political particularization which stimulate mass parties. Boulangism, therefore, represents one of the first forces within France to have harnessed this tool.

We can see a similar story throughout the Third Republic of France in the inability to overcome the old, entrenched structural supports of the Second Empire and Republic. Like a tumor hidden within a body, these elements of the old French state continued to stir up continual problems for the health of the French body politic. This comes in many forms throughout the life of the Third Republic, but one of the first manifestations of this sickness came in the form of the General Boulanger and the incidents surrounding his rise and fall.

Boulanger rose to prominence out of the failures of the French military during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871 and the subsequent political unrest which followed. In many ways, Boulanger rose to meet falling revolutionary fervor of the Parisian masses, the disgruntled anti-republican nobility, and the common French peasant gaining in political stature through this age. For the Parisian, Boulanger embodied the part of the revolutionary tradition which so often ran in concert with a growing nationalist sentiment which had gripped the city following Franco-Prussian War and Paris Commune. For the nobility Boulanger represented the potential for a return to an imperial, or at least monarchical, state much in the same way the Bonaparte family came to be held prior to the Second Empire. Lastly for the commoner, Boulanger was the new outsider to the system, shaking all the various establishments of the old orders, whether they were monarchical, republican, or Parisian Jacobin.

So, for a period, Boulanger represented a great threat to the system of order which the new republican government had thrown up under the joint strain of invasion and

abdication. But from these societal alliances that strengthen the Boulangist movement we can see the remnants of the old orders, the revolutionary, the noble, the peasant.<sup>29</sup> None of these received the full break from the previous social relations that they were due under this new age, which is what would ultimately lead them to this populist figure.

Boulangier would prove an incapable individual for securing the state. During elections in 1889, the Parisian people elected Boulangier as a deputy by overwhelming number. Based on this populist support, a coup d'état seemed near certain. What hindered Boulangier was ultimately himself, blundering and procrastinating on his political ascension until point at which the people lost faith in him. Having caused much discontent amongst the masses and threatening the stability of France domestically and internationally, Boulangier would eventually go into a self-imposed exile.<sup>30</sup>

There is Gramscian logic in Boulangier's failure. As a relatively new productive force, mass party politics had a significant developmental process throughout the Third Republic. Given this potential for forward development, it seems unlikely that Boulangier could have effectively toppled the French state. This is not to say that it was impossible, for in the moment after the 1889 elections there was great potential had Boulangier's will been added to that of the people. "In the modern world, only those historico-political actions which are immediate and imminent," Gramsci writes, "...can be mythically incarnated by a concrete individual."<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, Boulangier was incapable of being either immediate or imminent, and therefore his moment passed into history.

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<sup>29</sup> Frederic Seager, *The Boulangier Affair*, 12-18.

<sup>30</sup> William D. Irvine, *The Boulangier Affair Reconsidered*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>31</sup> Gramsci, *Selections*, 129.

For these reasons, the end of the Boulangist period of French politics signaled neither stability nor an end to the populist fervor. With Boulanger's disappearance went the royalist faction – the previously dominant political group – still alive but only ever to lurk in the shadows of French politics. What replaced it was the mass parties of the nationalists, with their growing and more out-spoken anti-Semitism. This would inevitably lead to the next great crisis of the Third Republic, the Dreyfus affair, particularly as these social forces were newly unbounded from their old party commitments and personal loyalties to Boulanger.

The relationship between the soon to be *Action Française* and former royalists was imbedded from the start – its founder Charles Maurras himself a royalist until 1898.<sup>32</sup> With the culmination of the Boulanger crisis, the remnants of the old French social order finally collapsed. The political organization of these right populist forces was a continual project for the French right. In particular, French Caesarist advocates recognized they required a new “man of action” who would be able to take decisive action. For one socialist turned nationalist, Gustave Hervé, this figure might be found in another general, General Pétain: “If, just between us, Boulanger was a fake, Pétain is no fake, he is pure and modest glory.”<sup>33</sup> Throughout this period of French history, some figures never ceased searching for the figure which might return France to the glory of its past, which led to the rhetorical and literal elevation of Caesarists.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>33</sup> Michel Winock, *Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and Fascism in France*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 31

### 3. Populism, Gramsci, and International Relations

International relations has a relatively large body of work dedicated to understanding Gramscian hegemonies in the modern world. The same cannot be said for non-hegemony, whose consequences remain relatively unexplored within international relations, to deleterious consequences. I seek to explore some of these consequences in this section. First, this requires establishing the relationship between hegemony and non-hegemony in the international system. The second section analyzes how international non-hegemony affects the domestic life of states through *trasformsimo*. The final section will look at how populism – or Caesarism – influences inter-state relations.

#### *3.1 Non-Hegemony and International Relations*

The introduction of Antonio Gramsci's carceral works to the field of international relations is now nearly thirty years old. Both fields have generated a significant number of works detailing the role of hegemony in international relation. Yet the vast majority of the Neo-Gramscian perspectives in the field have not significantly changed perspectives from those initially formulated by Robert Cox and Stephen Gill nearly three decades ago; a perspectives largely devoted to hegemony.<sup>34</sup> <sup>35</sup> Often these apply the consensus-based

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<sup>34</sup> *Global Restructuring, State, Capital and Labour* edited by Andreas Bieler, Werner Bonefield, Peter Burnham, and Adam David Morton, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

<sup>35</sup> *Gramsci, Political Economy, and International Relations Theory* edited by Alison J. Ayers, 53-73, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

notion of hegemonic relations to the relations between states, as they provide a particularly powerful explanation of both international capitalism and liberalism. By achieved internal legitimacy and order, hegemonic states become the leaders of international order, assuming roles as great powers or superpower on the strength of their civil societies.

Gramscian analysis has been applied with good reason, given the context of the Western socio-economic dominance since the end of World War Two. Throughout this period the West formed a hegemonic bloc – with the United States as the leading group – which dominated much of the international system. The international order is predominately structured on institutions and international bodies similar to those of western domestic societies and globally, and this order remains underpinned by a restrained coercive force. In this system, non-hegemonic states under this system eventually found themselves co-opted into the Western hegemonic international order.

International hegemonic order must be preceded by a hegemonic domestic order, without this internal unity the state will be in a rather unsound position in comparison to the states it is challenging. Times are changing in the international system in this sense. The international Western consensus is increasingly struggling to support its position under the weight of domestic populism. Potentially for the first time since the interwar period, international society is entering a period non-hegemony – therefore, the most pressing questions in international relations are about its impacts.

Like with non-hegemonic domestic society, non-hegemonic international system is a place of both contestation *and* potential. This results in both periodic stagnation and conflict, but also the entry of new figures, states, and ideas, which may create this new

order. The coming of these ideas and figures to the world stage embodies the potential for a necessary epochal transition into some new form of international societal arrangement. Most important is the creation of a space for change. Throughout this section I use the word movement to represent this change, in part because it is intentionally vague. Just as with domestic societies, non-hegemonic international society has no definite character other beyond its lack of consensus. Due to the diffuse nature of international society, potential outcomes become increasingly manifold. The particularities of each society become increasingly autonomous points of development, unhampered by an international order.

The period of non-hegemony is a space of potential development for civil societies and states, beyond which states lose their assumed universality and take on the particularities of its epoch. Like with the individual, this period is characterized by the consciousness of the state. This development of the state, now domestically in the form of civil-political union, causes it to uncover its own unhappiness in these international particularities and begins some type of international reorientation. This drive for international change is driven at the level of domestic society, as the distinction between the two levels becomes increasingly blurred by the civil-political union. This international movement is caused by the unmooring of the traditional class structures and the traditional state orders as they exist in the international “common sense”, instead being seen as immense contradictions through a growing “good sense.”

As the masses of society become aware of the political potential of non-hegemony, so too do states change to fill the new potential at the international level. There are two ways in which states are affected by a non-hegemonic international order



are *trasformismo* and Caesarism, which will be discussed in the following two sections. These are not the only concepts which states must contend with in non-hegemony, but the others fall outside the scope of this paper. Having previously developed the two concepts better allows for their comprehension, as their international application requires only slight modification. Therefore, the following sections will touch on the impacts of the concepts in a non-hegemonic international environment.

### *3.2 Domestic Life in International Non-Hegemony*

*Trasformismo* gains new contextualization and implications when applied to the international system. Rather than acting as a domestic political flattening, *trasformismo* under international hegemony becomes a means of applying methods adopted from an international hegemon in order to stabilize the domestic structure of civil-political relations. The socio-economic structures of international hegemonic society can provide a source of legitimacy for the dominant class of non-hegemonic societies to draw upon, strengthening their rule over the subordinate classes without the introduction of legitimate domestic institutions. As a consequence, the dominant social class is able to maintain power without institutionalization of the socio-political structure.

*Trasformismo* is incapable of fully implementing the structure of hegemonic societies nor does it attempt to establish a unique hegemony in its own right; this would weaken the attachment of the dominant classes to the political society. Instead, it erects an internationally legitimate edifice on their weak civil structure. Thus, when the international hegemony falters, the impacts are felt throughout states dependent on this source of stability. Examples of this include the proliferation of Western-dominated

international economic institutions (World Bank and IMF), which develop the domestic economic structure of developing states. Often when this occurs, it provides stability to old civil orders, propping up the structure of social, political, and economic relations rather than producing a new, domestic international order.

Just as the hegemonic apparatus tends to spread itself to other states through *trasformismo*, the same can be said of non-hegemony at the level of international society. States not only feel this impact through the loss of an external source of stability, but also in the spread of individual consciousness. Borders are permeable to either the ideational or material changes within other nations. Just as we make the assumption that hegemonic influences flow into other states through co-optation and *trasformismo*, so too must we accept that through the same practices counter-hegemony is spread. Regarding this Gramsci says:

“The drive for renewal may be caused by the combination of progressive forces, which in themselves are scanty and inadequate (though with immense potential, since they represent their country’s future with an international situation favorable to their expansion and victory).”<sup>36</sup>

The failure of a domestic progressive force may be found to be insufficient for bringing about a new hegemonic bloc, and therefore may fall back upon practices drawn outside the domestic social arrangements.

Similarly, just as under hegemony, the transfer of non-hegemony does not go unmediated during transmission and adoption. “Here too is the place to recall the Hegelian parallel (carried over into the philosophy of praxis) between French practice

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<sup>36</sup> Gramsci, *Selections*, 116.

and German speculation.”<sup>37</sup> Each civil/political society is in a continual process of mediating, through social and state forces, between potential hegemonic ideas and counter-hegemonic forces. In this sense, the form and function of populism carries local particularity, adapting to the individual cases of non-hegemony. In some cases where two states are closely related, either by geography, diplomacy, culture, etc., these dissimilarities may be lessened, but they will still maintain unique qualities.

The reason for this is because of the particularities inherent in each state. Without the guiding light of a hegemonic state, each individual state is more likely to follow a relatively unique path. States during this period do not live in vacuums, singularly focused on the development of their domestic societies. Instead they peer across borders; states observe how their neighbors successfully mediate consensual relations within their society – an eventuality which may be taken as an imminent threat. This notion will be returned to in the next section, where becomes increasingly important within the discussion of Caesarism.

Throughout the Third Republic the struggle of becoming structured social relations and produced the intellectual currents of non-hegemonic reaction and progress. The chronicler of this previous age, Ze’ev Sternhell, is noted for have described these counter-currents in their fluidity and indeterminacy. Constituting neither the right nor left of politics, these anarchists and syndicalists of the era constituted a definitive counter-hegemonic movement - as well as the forerunners of fascist movements. Both Georges Sorel in France and Antonio Labriola in Italy produced their synthetic propositions out of

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<sup>37</sup> Gramsci, *Selections*, 115.

the potentiality of this indeterminate period which had long existed within their countries.<sup>38</sup> Both of these writers shared in an epoch of relative international non-hegemony, and as a result their ideas following across national boundaries and influencing the intellectual development of both each and their states in a mediated way.

Internationally, there is a final force which some states must contend with – namely the remnants of the last international hegemony. Depending on the degree of institutionalization of the international system, the bulwarks of old hegemonies may be difficult to get rid of. This is particularly the case in formerly hegemonic states, where the international hegemony originated from. This is due to the shared development between the domestic and international levels. The attempts to strengthen hegemony during its transition to non-hegemony can further worsen this struggle. It becomes increasingly difficult to extricate the structure of hegemony when they are highly integrated into the life of domestic civil society; much like a tumor within the body normal development.

The Gramscian narrative contains an often over-looked example of a hegemonic remains in the role of the Catholic church. The Church was throughout its modern history a remnant of an old international hegemony which clung to its home on the Italian peninsula. This process greatly inhibited Italy's development throughout its history, as its development would have necessarily destroyed the Church's power. Various Italian thinkers worked on ways of overcoming this domestic burden in order to see Italy flourish. Machiavelli worked through the church, using it as a materially capable force with a Caesarist like figure in Cesare Borgia.

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<sup>38</sup> Ze'ev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, trans. by David Maisel, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

Conversely, Gramsci sought to overcome the church. This had little to do with spirituality or religion in either case, but the fulfillment of transitions being made at the international level being mitigated within Italy. Particularly Gramsci was chasing the emancipation of the state from religion which had been developing in France and Germany since the Wars of Religion. One cannot underestimate the role of Rome and the Roman church in controlling the development of an Italian state, which is why for so many years France retained control over the Catholic church.

In the absence of a hegemonic force, states have less ability to orient themselves within the international system. This can be beneficial, as new systems and orders are capable of being charted in this space, potentially those more liberal than the current. But this space also allows for increases in competition and conflict. Under non-hegemony, no state knows which formulation of civil-political relations will create a new hegemony. States may be increasingly fearful of the advantages gained by their neighbor (and vice versa). Because of this wariness, States may also begin increasing material capacities as a way of offsetting their domestic instabilities. These tools allow for the intimidation and control of other states, further hampering the development of a new international hegemony.

### *3.3 Populist and Caesarist Inter-State Relations*

In the absence of effective hegemonic transformismo, the international system is increasingly open to the entry of dominant figures on to the international stage. Within a non-hegemonic international order, the potentiality for a Caesarist becomes both more varied and subjective to their state's internal politics and the predilections of neighboring

states. Within a non-hegemonic international society, old institutions do not disappear, but they often do not constrain Caesarist figures due to their increased lack of legitimacy. Without the presence of a hegemonic force, there begins to be more room for Caesarism to navigate international society to its desires, pursuing revisionist policies if reactionary or institutionally constructive policies if progressive.

These policies do not necessarily align with the position that the Caesarist takes within his domestic politics but rather conform to the distinct international historico-ideological construction which facilitated the Caesarists rise. Like Caesarism on the domestic level, international Caesarism is the product of a specific politico-historical period that fundamentally shapes what form that Caesarism will take internationally. In a space where hegemonic states exist, the Caesar faces two options for the international existence, either cooperation and co-optation the old hegemonic order or attempt to join/establish an in-development hegemonic bloc.

The Caesarist may hold on to some or all of the old hegemonic institutional system, using it to stabilize their control in the absence of domestic institutionalization. Former international order in the hands of a Caesarist can continue to manifest some of the effects of *trasformismo* through this process. In these cases Caesarism and the international order facilitate each other through the sharing of legitimacy, the former's developed through their charismatic capabilities and the latter's left over from its old hegemonic position. Caesarists, by aligning themselves with the global hegemonic force, can draw upon the economic, social, and political legitimation found in the hegemonic societies to facilitate their own rule.

Eventually the co-optative process of Caesarism will bleed the old international order dry. Without the body of the international hegemonic order, Caesarism becomes increasingly detached from the old institution boundaries. Like the individual gaining consciousness, the Caesarist becomes fluid, directing action tied to domestic feeling or emotional societal demands. This gives rise to many of the illiberal notions of international Caesarism, particularly in the modern world. Reactionary Caesarism begins to have the capacity to undermine the remaining international structures and virtues of the former order in hopes of some greater domestic standing found in the past. Old connections to the international order are scorned in favor of the possibility of grander position and gains. Combating these revisions are the often progressive Caesars who seek to re-enforce and reform the old international order.

The events of the Third Republic have implicit international implications bound up in the potential of the French Revolution. In the case of the Boulanger incident we know particularly of the concern of Bismarck regarding the potential of a unified and vengeful France under popular leadership. For one, he was concerned with the potential unification of the French state behind a competent leader, much the way he had recently brought together German unification. But he was also concerned with the pressure a revanchist French leadership would play on his own people, stirring up both nationalist and progressives. For Bismarck, Boulanger represented the potential for both an international and domestic revolutionary force - a meeting of the material and ideational concerns of a new integral state.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> William D. Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 36-39.

Gramsci made a similar point using the example of the French Revolution, with its mixture of revolutionary ideas and the progressive Caesarist figure of Napoleon, to show its sweeping international affects. “National revolts against French hegemony, and birth of the modern European states by successive small waves of reform rather than revolutionary explosion like the original French one. The “successive waves” were made up of a combination of social struggles, interventions from above of the enlightened monarchy type, and national wars-with the two latter phenomena predominating.”<sup>40</sup> This points to the development of new legitimized social orders developed during the Revolution. Though the Revolution was halted, this did not stop the spread modern state system which proceed to other European states through the mechanisms of international passive revolution and transformismo.

Though halted following the removal of Napoleon, the latent potential for a new international epoch remained and continued to influence both domestic and international socio-political life. The result of this unfulfilled potential led to it being reconstructed by both the Germans and French to different ends within the same socio-historical period. To what extent can we separate the French populist struggles to instill the ideas of the Revolution from a top down manner from the German attempt? Not only are they in an internal contestation amongst the social forces for the manifestation of an integral state, but they seek to externalize their national birth on the international stage. These epochal consciousnesses of the state seeks its recognition in another. It should be of little surprise that the German state was finally birthed in the halls of Versailles.

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<sup>40</sup> Gramsci, *Selections*, 114-115.



Before reaching this point in the German development though we must confront the transnational implications of the French Revolution, crucially in the Revolutions of 1848. Here Gramsci points to the proliferation and mediation of the revolutionary mindset of the French to the various other absolutist monarchies throughout Europe, principally the Germans and Austrians. While these were not successful in terms of governmental change, we see the laying of the entire potentiality of European development in this ideational spread. Within this French revolutionary foundation the rest of Europe orbited in a cycle of revolution/restoration, itself tied to the role of Caesarist as forces of either revolution (Progressive) *or* restoration (Reactionary).

Much of the Third Republic is characterized as an attempt to transcend non-hegemony, allowing it to overcome being held together by disparate forces internally and internationally. Of course, in the case of Europe these stable instabilities were utterly dissolved during the First World War and its aftermath. As the history shows, the potentials of the interwar turned towards reactionary forces at home and destructive forces abroad. The League of Nations, for example, proved ineffectual for the task of preventing the opening of political possibilities, as domestic Caesarist-like crises in Japan and Italy developed into international crises in both Manchuria and Ethiopia. International Caesarist movements, both reactionary and progressive, walk a delicate line between real and temporary change. Success for either side must live beyond their current figureheads and each must provide both a quantitative and qualitative change to the social and economic relations both domestically and internationally. Without the solidification of new social relations within domestic societies it is highly likely that there will be continued unrest in the western world and internationally.

The role of Caesarism and populism is readily apparent in today's international society as the discontent of populism has swelled throughout the formerly hegemonic western societies. A variety of populist movements have swept across the United States and Europe, emblematic of the conflict within western civil society between progressive and reactionary groups. With the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, reactionary Caesarism has come to grip the domestic political reins as well a challenge the old international order, not with progress but with a revisionism to a pre-Second World War international order. The United States is not alone in this turn towards the reactionary. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Italy, and Hungary have all made turns towards similar strains of reactionary populism.

The lack of hegemony within these countries' domestic politics results in the rise of Caesarist-like leaders or coalitions which introduce new social, economic, and political fragilities both domestically and internationally. The general disassociation with international organizations, the shunning of human rights concerns, and general refutation of liberal normative values can be found to some large degree in the civil society and political leadership of each of these states. It is this sort of reactionary and revisionist Caesarism that receives most of the attention within the contemporary international coverage, but there is also a strain of progressive Caesarism to be found as well.

The development of this strain of international progressivism is dependent on the actor presented in the concluding section of this paper, the Modern Party. The domestic Caesarist is an inadequate force for the development of a new hegemonic order due to the localized basis for their legitimacy. To actualize a truly hegemonic international system requires a group with broad consensual support from a wide number of states and

localities within the system. This entails one of two actions: Either the Caesarist conforms to some form of international bloc, which risks the loss of domestic support. The alternative is the development of an International Party, an international force with consensual legitimacy from both domestic and international sources, capable of institutionalizing the development of a new international epoch. In the section to follow, I make the case for the development of an actor capable of harnessing these sources and building a new social order.

## Conclusion: Modern Princes

Machiavelli ended his political treatise “The Prince” not with further political science, but rather with an “exhortation” for the liberation of Italy. In Gramsci’s words, “This is why the epilogue of “the Prince” is not something extrinsic, ...but has to be understood as a necessary element of the work - indeed as the element which gives the entire work its true colour, and make it a kind of “political manifesto.” Gramsci in turn developed his own conception of a “Modern Prince,” the emancipatory actor in potential in modern society. Utilizing Gramsci’s “Modern Prince,” I present a similar argument for responding to the contemporary rise in populism.

### *Princes and Progress*

In contrast to the indeterminacy of populism, Gramsci characterizes progress by its implicit ideological nature. This ideological disposition takes on two features: first, ideology diminishes the universality of abstract potential; second, it exchanges these for the particularity and subjectivity necessary to orient progress. In making this exchange, progress moves from what Gramsci calls “speculative immanence” to “realist immanence.”<sup>41</sup> The distinction is one of mediation, taking the unlimited potential and filtering it through strategic necessity, historical circumstance, and individualist motivation. How do individuals situate themselves, society, history, etc. in relation to the

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<sup>41</sup> Gramsci, *Selections*, 399-400.

potential immanent realities of world history? For Gramsci the answer is through their ideological commitments to a notion of progress. The inevitability of these commitments implicitly forces the movement from speculation to realism, by the individual and by the movements of social forces. Of course, it is not necessarily an easy task to move from the speculative to the real.

“Possibility is not reality: but it is in itself a reality. Whether a man can or cannot do a thing has its importance in evaluating what is done in reality. Possibility means freedom... But the existence of objective conditions, of possibilities or of freedom is not yet enough: it is necessary to “know” them, and to know how to use them.”<sup>42</sup>

Gramsci therefore, conceived of the “Modern Prince” as an actor capable of actualizing these socio-historical possibilities of ideology into reality.

A crucial element of the movement from non-hegemony to hegemony is the concepts of wars of movement and position; concepts which will become increasingly important if new civil orders are to be constructed out of the non-hegemonic system. The war of movement is the means by which a party might seize power within a state with weak institutional structures. Little work is needed to weaken the controls of the state; rather the party must simply mount an offensive to seize the center of power for themselves. From this position they then can begin to construct their new state structure and institutions. Gramsci used this example to make sense of the success of the Bolsheviks during the Russian revolution in comparison to the failings of other revolutionary movements.

In comparison to the empty center of Tsarist Russia, the modern West is a veritable bastion of institutional strength, upholding the order of the day whether it is

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 360.

hegemonic, non-hegemonic, or some degree in-between. For the hegemonic hopeful this creates a great difficulty in establishing a new societal structure, hence Gramsci prescribes a war of position. In fighting this entrenched force, the attacker must be willing to take the long route, pushing at the weaknesses of the defenses until it can storm the walls and seize the whole apparatus. It becomes apparent then when seeing this prescription why the progressive populist cannot win the fight, they lack the organizational strength to carry on beyond the individual leader and will eventually succumb to attrition.

Gramsci envisioned the party, not as an individual but as a superstructure that might unite the people behind a general unifying force that could extricate society from the constant clashes between the various classes. Through its organizational structure, the party would have the ability to carry on through the long fight against the institutional apparatuses that strengthen the non-hegemonic order. This party would be able to control the political apparatus while constructing a new economic and social relationship that would do away with the old order in favor of the new. A modern party must arise from somewhere in the contemporary world with the capacity to unite domestic and international civil society behind a singular notion of institutional society in order to achieve a real transition to a new civil structure.

Therefore, progressive or reactionary, there seems to be little hope that the current state of the western societies will provide the source of stability through their collective turn towards populism and the authority of its central guiding figures. Instead, the future looks to be one with the conflict of civil society at the forefront of both domestic and international politics, which if the past is any indication is a turn towards both unrest and

violence in both spheres. The Western world will be unable to extricate itself from a constant state of passive revolution, intercut with bouts of a Caesarist rule and the dangers it brings with such rule. But there remains hope that an organized body will arise with the capacity to unify disparate portions of civil society behind a more robust structure than the progressive Caesar and create an institution capable of building a new hegemonic order first domestically, then internationally.

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