Challenging hegemony

Jeroen Warner
Disaster Studies group
Wageningen UR
Challenging hegemony

• Who worries about hegemony?

Realists – hegemony is good: worry about instability in nonhegemonic phase
Liberals – hegemony obstructs trade; it should be plus-sum and over time disappear
Radicals – against any hegemony; esp. empire
## Divided by a common language
*(after C. Hay)*

| Debäte:: | Anglo-US debate  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(Faces of power debate)</th>
<th>European debate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Who?     | Political scientists  
|          | –Dahl (decision-making) | Social theorists  
|          | –Bachrach & Baratz (agenda-setting) | - Foucault and Habermas  
|          | –Lukes (preference-shaping) | |
| Key issues | How to define power  
|          | Should it be defined such that it is measurable? | Is power ubiquitous?  
|          | Is liberation from power possible? (If not, what point theory?) |
| Nature  | Methodology | Ontology over methodology |
European debate

• Habermas: world undistorted by power and domination is possible
  – the emancipation of civil society could lead to reconstruction of the state and so offer a shift towards non-hegemonic governance

• Foucault: only the *nature* of power displayed can be changed
Direct vs. Indirect power

- Direct power: physical and psychological coercion, persuasion and blackmail
- Indirect power: context/conduct-shaping, e.g. legislative power of government
  It is latent and often an unintended consequence.
Bourdieu

- *Naturalization* as tactic of dominant individuals against heretical discourse and symbolic revolution of the dominated.
- Performative utterances i.e. speech acts such securitisation) are effects of *symbolic domination*
Edward Said

• Frustrated with Foucauldiean ‘lock-in’

Proposed means of resistance:
• to ‘know’ outside the hegemonic frame
• ‘to write back’ to the hegemonic structure
How to become a hegemon (Gramsci)

• A new historic bloc is **not** established by capturing the state but is established through the articulation of ‘persuasive ideas and arguments which build on and catalyse its political networks and organisations.’

=> concept of control
Foucault

• coercive power (military forces) ⇔ 'discursive' power

Trottier gives examples of ‘naturalised’ discourse (with perverse effects):
• Water as a human right
• Water development
• Water war
Foucault and resistance

History is an endlessly repeated play of domination. Humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination.

• Discipline breeds self-discipline. ‘... The perfection of power should render its actual exercise unnecessary.’

Ex:
• Even antiglobalists are ‘normalised’ a coalition of diverse interests, mobilized in the spirit of [neo-liberal] hegemony’s own values of development, democracy, and liberty.
Hegemonic Knowledge

- Groups of individual actors unite around what Hajer terms ‘storylines’—sets of ideas which, although sometimes highly contested, nevertheless unite actors in a particular way not only of talking and thinking about an issue, but also producing knowledge of an issue.

Virtual water?
Hegemonic challenge

- Realism
  Hegemonic competitors
  - Rogue States (North Korea)
  - Terrorists (al-Qaed)
  - Economic competitors (China)
  - Non-free states

- Gramscian counterhegemonic challenge
  - Antiglobalists
  - Indigenous
  - Left-wing revolutionaries (Bol, Cuba, Venez)
False consciousness?

Q: Why don’t the downtrodden revolt?

Because they are not aware of their true interest, and therefore haven’t become ‘social actors’

A1 ‘thick’ concept of hegemony: false consciousness or: they are fooled or fool themselves (consensual dominance)
A2 ‘thin’ concept of hegemony: naturalisation of social arrangement –
To hegemonise is ‘to subordinate others to oneself by closing off conceptual “openings” and making their dominant position appear simply in accord with Nature, and that things could not be otherwise.’

The role of intellectuals is to uncover hegemonic practice and mobilise them

Q: Why aren’t the oppressed aware of their true interests?
A: Because they are hegemonised (circular)

Or: or quiet compliance while changing own values.
This assumption is *patronising*

*(James C. Scott)*

- Opposition is rarely unified enough to rebel.
- They do rebel, but egemonised overestimate their chances of resisting.
- They cloak their resistance in terms that will sound unthreatening to the power structure (‘they talk up to rulers’).
Forms of resistance

- dropping out
- subversion (Parody); deviance
- impairing the social institutions (blockade, destruction)
- prefiguring alternatives
- realisation of alternatives

- Symbolic counterhegemony – hegemony as posture, it feels good to take the side of the underdog.
Laclau: From the classes to the masses

- Primacy of the political: no essentialism – no actor can lay claim to a privileged position in society. Endless chain of identities: Greens, feminists, gays, antoglobalists.

- Identity is outcome of discourse (discursive articulation) on basis of antagonism: relation of equivalence between opponents vs. oppressor; when antagonism decreases equivalence will be transformed back into an array of differences
Overthrowing *all* hegemony?

- Classical Marxism: government / elite rule is not eternal. No rule = no exploitation

↔ Burton: One type of hegemony will simply be replaced by another