
Re-stating hegemony: a critique of postmodern governance theory

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Abstract

Influential theories of governance across the social sciences draw inspiration from postmodernism, exploring fragmentation, the dispersal of power and the rise of networked societies. Theories of networked governance have become enormously influential, with the Differentiated Polity Model (DPM) rising to the status of 'orthodoxy' in British political science. However, scepticism towards the orthodoxy is growing. Research suggests that governing networks reinforce hierarchies and bureaucracies, seeming to refute the emergence of a differentiated polity. The question, then, is what alternative theoretical tools might explain trends and patterns in the system of governance? Based on a discussion of the interpenetration of postmodernist ideology and neoliberalism, it is argued that strong-state tendencies characteristic of neoliberalism have trumped any trend towards the dispersal of power, undermining claims that networked governance reflects the emergence of a differentiated polity. This analysis points to the need for an alternative conception of governance capable of challenging post-hegemonic network theories, such as the DPM, and offering a different set of principles to guide governance research. To this end I invoke Gramsci, arguing that the promotion of networked governance is best conceived as the pursuit of hegemony. However, hegemony is partial and the micro-politics of networks suggest a trend from hegemony to domination, further suggesting a broader trajectory from 'governance' to 'government'. The paper concludes by developing five archetypes to inform research into governance as hegemony.

Introduction

A generation ago, Perry Anderson (1976: 5) noted that no term was so ‘freely or diversely invoked on the Left as that of hegemony’. Hegemony remained fashionable throughout the 1980s, as scholars sought to grasp the significance of Thatcherism (Hall, 1983, Jessop *et al*, 1988, Gamble, 1994). After Mrs. Thatcher resigned, however, hegemony, like the concept of Thatcherism itself, became increasingly marginal to the study of British politics (Hay, 2007). In its place, network theories, such as the Differentiated Polity Model (DPM) (Rhodes, 1997, 2007; Bevir and Rhodes, 2008) gradually acquired the status of disciplinary ‘orthodoxy’ (Marinetto, 2003; Marsh, 2008). The DPM is an example of ‘post-hegemonic’ theory (Lash, 2007; Thoburn, 2007), reflecting the notion that political power is dispersed and suggesting that in the face of social fragmentation, the network has become the dominant mode of political coordination.

This paper takes issue with post-hegemonic network theory, arguing for the revitalization of Gramscian political analysis (Johnson, 2007). Critics of the DPM have been quick to note that cross-sectoral governing institutions often more closely resemble hierarchies than networks (e.g. Perrons and Skyer, 2003; Skelcher *et al*, 2005; Wright *et al*, 2006) and that power relations between network actors are radically unequal (e.g. Davies, 2007; Marsh, 2008). However, these critical insights need systematizing in a critical theory of governance. The objective of the paper is to demonstrate how the Gramscian concept of hegemony can furnish us with insights into the dynamics of the networked polity that are unavailable to post-hegemonic network theories.

To this end, the paper demonstrates how governing networks operate as proto-hegemonic instruments. It is argued that at the level of institutional design, New Labour networks are unfaithful to the principles associated with the DPM archetype. Whereas the ideal-typical network is based on openness, plurality, reflexivity and trust, the actually-existing governing network is based on distrust and political closure, where value conflict is taboo and non-governmental actors are expected to mobilize resources in pursuit

of governmental ends. It is argued that these are the proto-hegemonic principles of ‘contributory consensualism’. At the level of network practice, the paper argues that these institutional design principles are often subject to tacit challenge by citizen-activists. Drawing on a study of strategic partnerships, it argues that public officials attempt to neutralize passive challenge by bureaucratic means, subverting the objective of building a productive network-based consensus. Since it is argued that active citizen assent is the signature of hegemony, the combination of tacit citizen challenge and state bureaucratization reveals the limits of governing networks as proto-hegemonic instruments, signalling a shift from hegemonic politics to the politics of domination (Arrighi, 2005). Further arguing that these developments are a micro-level case of the macro-level trend towards political centralization characteristic of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005), the paper poses the provocative question of whether Rhodes’ aphorism should be reversed to posit a shift, if anything, from governance to government. The kernel of this suggestion is not that government exercises effective control over citizens through networks, but that governance is a government-led *project* for the hegemonization of society, the flaws in which have led public officials to revisit the repertoire of bureaucratic management techniques.

The discussion proceeds in several steps. First, it explores the decline of hegemony and the rise of post-hegemonic network theory. The paper then examines the strengths and weaknesses of the emerging critique of the DPM before sketching the alternative Gramscian conception of hegemony that underpins the ensuing analysis of governing networks in the UK. Third, it explores the history of New Labour’s embrace of the networked governance paradigm in the context of the crisis of Keynesianism and the reconfiguration of capital as firms and states adapted to the ‘artistic critique’ of the 1960s generation (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005, 2006). Thus, it is argued, the hegemony of post-hegemonic network theory reflects the particular fusion of neoliberal practice and postmodernist ideology characteristic of the era, which may or may not end with the current economic crisis. Fourth, the paper discusses the role of the network in the New Labour project, identifying the proto-hegemonic character of network-like structures in the governing system. Assessing critical research evidence, it then considers the

effectiveness and limits of governing networks as proto-hegemonic institutions, suggesting a reactive shift from attempted hegemonization to attempted domination. Finally, it considers how a Gramscian framework might be operationalized. It outlines five archetypes to inform future research based on an asymmetric continuum from the comprehensively hegemonic to the counter-hegemonic and anti-hegemonic forms. The paper concludes that a reassessment of governance theory is long overdue and that Gramscian thinking can move the debate forward in ways that post-hegemonic theories cannot.

From hegemony to differentiation

The concept of hegemony was widely used by leading British political scientists during the 1980s and early 1990s in analysing the contours of bourgeois strategy and power under Thatcherism, but also in debating counter-hegemonic strategies for the left (e.g. Gamble, 1994; Hall and Jacques, 1983; Jessop *et al*, 1988). The concept has always been contested, but hegemony is defined for current purposes as comprehensive and active cross-societal assent for the social and economic goals of a constellation of class forces aiming to secure ‘the economic base of the dominant mode of growth’ (Jessop, 1997: 57-8). Once Thatcher fell, however, and particularly after the election of New Labour in 1997, Gramscian and neo-Gramscian analyses of British politics became rare, although there are signs of a timely mini-revival (e.g. Devine *et al*, 2007; Leggett, 2009; Townshend, 2009) and Gramsci always remained influential in other fields (e.g. Crouch, 1997; Jessop, 1997, 2002). A new set of conceptual tools for understanding governance and politics became popular, influenced by postmodernist thinking and dispensing with hegemony and counter-hegemony. Johnson (2007: 100) argues that the falling star of Gramsci met the rising star of postmodernism in the thought of Laclau and Mouffe (2001), who saw the counter-hegemonic task facing the left in the 1980s as mobilizing popular identities against the dominant neoliberal discourse. These ideas remain salient in the work of Laclau and Mouffe and fellow post-Marxist thinkers broadly in the *Marxism Today* tradition (e.g. Hall, 2003) who, while they reject classical Marxist conceptions of capital and class, assert that it is possible to mobilize diverse movements and identities around a collective project based on a relatively stable common discourse, capable of

overturning neoliberalism and pursuing an egalitarian agenda. However, Johnson (2007) contends that a radical, more relativistic postmodernism emphasizing dispersion and fragmentation became the dominant principle of social analysis, leading to claims that we live in a ‘post-hegemonic’ polity (e.g. Lash, 2007; Thoburn, 2007). In British political science, a variant of this latter approach became the ‘orthodoxy’ in the form of the DPM (Marinetto, 2003; Marsh, 2008), prioritizing dispersion and the challenge of coordination over power, inequality and resistance.

Explaining the decline of ‘hegemony’ is another debate, but the very use of the term, given Gramsci’s Marxism, was likely to be toxic to New Labour sympathizers keen to construct a ‘big-tent’. Further, the political struggles around Thatcherism had long subsided by 1997, as had the debate about the pros and cons of market capitalism. The return to ‘normal’ politics under conditions of relative social peace, conditions in which Marxism was widely seen as defunct, deflected attention from hegemony and counter-hegemony towards the pre-occupation with consensus, whose historical dominance in British politics Kerr (2001) laments. While ‘consensus’ and ‘hegemony’ have radically different connotations, Kerr (2007: 55) argues that neo-Gramscian analyses of Thatcherism (e.g. Hall and Jacques, 1983) also fell into the consensualist trap, exaggerating the reach of Thatcherite ideology at the expense of a more balanced assessment such as that by Gamble (1994).

As the influence of hegemony declined, a variety of inter-related concepts began to fill the void. Rhodes published his seminal work *Understanding Governance* in 1997, the year of New Labour’s election, setting out the principles of what is now called the DPM (Marsh *et al*, 2003) or alternatively the ‘Anglo-governance school’ (Marinetto, 2003). However, there is a notable resemblance between the DPM orthodoxy and other influential theories, which take the challenge to coordination posed by fragmentation as their starting points. For example, while the DPM and sociological institutionalism draw inspiration from different intellectual traditions (see Davies and Trounstone, 2010), they share the post-hegemonic assumption that contemporary governance is primarily about coordination through

networks. The social glue to networking, in both the DPM and neo-institutionalism is ‘trust’, which Putnam (2000) also considers crucial to building social capital. The assumptions common to these approaches are that power is fragmented and that the challenge of governance is to mobilize and coordinate governmental and non-governmental action, through networks bound by trust. Each is inflected to a greater or lesser extent by post-hegemonic notions about the role of networks in fragmented societies. Arguably, the philosophy of ‘second modernity’ (e.g. Giddens, 1998; Beck, 2007) is the intellectual touchstone in each case (see further below).¹

The DPM and its critics

In classifying the DPM as the new orthodoxy, Marinetto (2003) argues in Kuhnian style that an intellectual crisis will have to occur before it is displaced. He detected signs of an emergent critique, but no fully-fledged counter-hegemonic challenge capable of precipitating a crisis (2003: 606). Since 2003, a growing body of critical evidence has challenged the idea that governing networks are an emergent institutional form of the differentiated polity. The essence of the critique is that government-led networks seem to reflect less the emergence of a differentiated polity and more the continuation of hierarchy by other means. As Law and Mooney (2005) put it, ‘an iron fist lurks within the velvet glove’ of New Labour’s ‘revanchist’ agenda (see also MacLeod, 2002). Where citizen activists become involved in collaborative governance, there is also a tendency for them to experience these arrangements as alienating and even disempowering (Davies, 2007; Jones, 2003; Perrons and Skyer, 2003; Wright *et al*, 2006). Alternatively, they maybe ‘captured’ and estranged from the constituencies they purport to represent (Richardson and Mumford, 2002: 224). Importantly, some research suggests that where governing networks begin with a degree of openness and plurality, there is a trend towards elite closure, managerialization and de-politicization (Lawless, 2004; Skelcher *et al*, 2005; Davies, 2007). If so, this direction of travel would suggest that concentration, bureaucratization and hierarchy in the governing

¹ Interpreting the crisis of Marxism, leading sociologists announced the rise of post, liquid or second modernity. The term ‘second modernity’ is used hereafter as a saving simplification (see Dean, 2003: 119).

system are more than fading echoes of the Fordist epoch; rather, they maybe integral to the current mode of development (Arrighi, 2005; Rosenberg, 2005).

In response to their critics, Bevir and Rhodes (2008: 729) insist that the DPM is sensitive to the persistence of hierarchy, power asymmetry and structural inequality in networks and remind them that they describe networking as the new ingredient in a 'mix' with hierarchy and markets. However, their focus on the network as the *new* ingredient in governing privileges dispersion as the premise of social research and trust as the glue in governing institutions. This approach draws attention away from critical questions: is the UK (or anywhere) really becoming a differentiated polity? Are governing networks based on 'trust'? If there is a trend towards bureaucratization and hierarchy in networks, as critics maintain, what are the implications for theories whose premise is the opposite?

Attempting to make sense of the persistence of hierarchy in networks, David Marsh and colleagues developed the Asymmetric Power Model (APM), posing it as an alternative to the orthodoxy (Marsh *et al*, 2003; Marsh, 2008). The essence of the APM is that Britain is marked by continuing (if not growing) structural inequalities, which are reflected in political institutions and include the processes of resource exchange animating governing networks. Networked exchange relations may be increasing in importance, argue Marsh *et al*, but they are asymmetric. Moreover, they argue that the DPM tends to underestimate the continuing influence of the British Political Tradition and its top-down, elite-centred view of representative democracy. Thus, while there may be significant constraints on executive power, these are exaggerated by the DPM.

Interestingly, Marsh *et al* (2003: 316-7) note that the restructuring of the system of governance and the emergence of networks does not devolve power, but gives the State additional leverage, anticipating the argument that the networked polity has a proto-hegemonic character. However, the APM does not take the argument in this direction and does not purport to explain why, within a hierarchical and asymmetric

polity, the governing network should have become ubiquitous, what role it plays in contemporary society, or indeed, what drives the centralizing dynamic discussed above. The forces underlying the proliferation of asymmetric governing networks need to be grasped and this paper argues that the concept of hegemony sheds light on the challenge.

Hegemony: a Gramscian view

One of Gramsci's achievements was his grasp of how bourgeois power is maintained in democratic capitalist societies, a new problem for Marxists in the aftermath of the October Revolution (Forgacs, 1999). He identified the mechanisms of capitalist hegemony, notably the maintenance of formal equality through the system of universal suffrage and the ideological production and reproduction of public consent, in order to understand their implications for socialist strategy. As explained above, a notional state of pure hegemony can be defined as comprehensive and active cross-societal assent for the socioeconomic goals of a constellation of class forces. However, this formulation is only a starting point. The study of hegemonic strategies is about the changing relationship between coercion, resistance, active assent and passive consent for or against the goals of a dominant hegemonic bloc.

In his classic essay on Gramsci, Anderson (1976) argued that capitalist power is a 'topological system' with a 'mobile centre', so that in a political crisis 'capital re-concentrates from its representative into its repressive apparatus' (1976: 44). Conversely, to the extent that the democratic state obtains broad consent it need not act coercively. Yet, consent is partly '*constituted by* a silent, absent force', that of violence, without which 'the system of cultural control would be instantly fragile, since the limits of possible actions against it would disappear' (Anderson, 1976: 43, *original emphasis*). For Anderson, the spectre of force is crucial in manufacturing hegemony. The long shadow cast by the 1984 miners' strike, restraining union militancy to this day, is a case in point (although many would attribute the decline of union power to the epochal decline of the collective subject (e.g. Giddens, 1998)).

However, Anderson sees the widespread belief that people ‘*exercise an ultimate self determination*’ within the existing order’ (1976: 30, *original emphasis*) as the primary source of consent in democratic capitalist societies. The democratic foundations of consent are supplemented with other ideological nostrums, including the bourgeois appeal to technological rationality and the cult of experts entailing ‘deference to technical necessity’ (*ibid*). The flaw in any hegemonic strategy in a democracy is that capitalism tends to generate expectations among subordinate classes as the condition of consent to it, which as a crisis-prone system it cannot fully meet (1976: 29). Hence, consent tends to break down from time to time and universal assent is never achieved.

In this light, the struggle for hegemony is constant. During periods of ‘normal’ politics, struggle tends to be about the mobilization and reproduction of consent, but just as resistance never disappears, neither does the spectre of violence. The dialectic of force and consent is fluid, depending on a variety of structural and contingent factors. There are consequently degrees of hegemony, ranging schematically from universal and active assent to limited and more or less passive and grudging consent involving concessions, controls and more or less state coercion depending on the extent of public adaptation or resistance to the prevailing hegemonic bloc (Jessop, 1997: 57). However, it is only when contradictions are experienced in ways that undermine the prevailing commonsense that citizens may free themselves from the ideological baggage of the hegemonic bloc, such as can happen in a major economic or political crisis. In the ideological maelstrom precipitated by crises, counter-hegemonic blocs are able to mobilize and compete for hegemony.

This précis makes the balance of force and consent problematic and suggests, as Gramsci argued, that it is important to historicize the relationship between passive/active consent and coercion/resistance to grasp the characteristics of a conjuncture or an epoch. Coercion entails force on a continuum including violence, incarceration, mundane forms of bureaucratic manipulation and control and the ‘silent compulsion’ of market forces. Consent is, as Gramsci put it, in one way or another ‘voluntarily given’

(cited in Anderson, 1976: 52), secured without force through the legitimating appeal of formal democracy and the means of ideological reproduction, which contribute to making our sense of what is appropriate seem commonsense.

As there are different degrees of coercion, so there are different degrees of consent. It can be given passively and grudgingly, or actively and enthusiastically. Anderson shows how Gramsci distinguished between successive historical modes of consent (1976: 31), while Poulantzas pointed out that any dominant ideology proselytizes active assent (cited in Anderson, 1976: 30). Thus, mere grudging or passive consent appears to be inadequate for the purposes of the prevailing hegemonic bloc. Today, for example, Dean (2004: 73-4) argues that New Labour's 'heroic' citizens act autonomously and take responsibility for their own welfare; he might have added that as good communarians, they also take responsibility for family and community. Passivity with respect to the goals of a prevailing hegemonic bloc can become, in effect, sullen resistance and a drag on progress. In elucidating the concept of 'symbolic mastery', Bourdieu pointed to the means by which the cultural symbols of class domination effectively silence the would-be critic. He argued that 'one may be able to resist an argument without being capable of arguing resistance, still less of explicitly formulating its principles' (1984: 461). This is the essence of passive or tacit resistance.

The extent to which passivity or passive resistance should be construed as a tacit challenge to hegemony is a matter of controversy. Fleming and Spicer (2003) draw attention to the different ways that employee cynicism is understood in organization studies. They argue that while expressing cynicism may allow employees the illusion of autonomy, they continue to carry out the tasks allotted them in the manner prescribed by corporate culture and do so very effectively. This is an important insight. Nevertheless, as Fleming and Spicer also illustrate, cynicism is viewed as a psychological defect by the managerial cadre, whose over-riding imperative is competitive advantage. To this end, management control systems 'target the very selves of workers' and try to persuade the worker to 'want on his or her own what the

corporation wants' (Deetz, 1992: 42 cited in Fleming and Spicer, 2003: 166). Thus, employers fear the corrosive effects of cynicism on the firm's ability to compete even if, in deflecting open resistance, it allows production to proceed unhindered in the short term. The negative effects of cynicism for a hegemonic bloc should not, therefore, be discounted. It can lead to stagnation in the face of the struggle for competitive advantage and may contribute to the development of crisis. The importance of this point will become clear in the discussion below concerning the proto-hegemonic characteristics of governing networks.

Consequently, the hegemonic strategy is concerned not only with maintaining social peace, but also with mobilization. Until the onset of the present crisis, whose implications for hegemony and counter-hegemony cannot be discerned at this juncture, the neoliberal vision of the market order was, for all practical purposes, hegemonic. The prevailing pro-market commonsense and the lack of effective opposition to it was a powerful symbol of capitalist hegemony (Devine *et al*, 2007). However, as was explained above, no hegemonic project is ever complete because the imperative to creative destruction embedded in competition, accumulation and crisis requires constant moral as well as technical innovation. Maintaining hegemony is not only about naturalizing the market, it also about mobilizing and naturalizing activism of the right kind. There is a fine line between encouraging active citizenship and ensuring that it does not tip over into dissent. Hence, a strong, carefully managed hegemonic project is essential, the reach of pro-market ideology notwithstanding. The paper now explores the roots of New Labour's hegemonic project and the place of the governing network within it.

New Labour and the New Spirit of Capitalism

To grasp the origins of New Labour's philosophy of networked governance, it is helpful to explore the roots of the neoliberal conjuncture in the maelstrom of May 1968 and its aftermath. The decade between the late 1960s and the late 1970s was one in which Keynesian bureaucratic states entered a crisis. The movements of 1968 and after represented an attempt to bring about a solution of the left.

However, their eventual defeat left the crisis unresolved and the agenda open to appropriation. Harvey (2005) notes how the new right seized on the theme of 'freedom' dear to the 1968 generation, and used it as an ideological tool in fashioning the neoliberal turn, backed by overt class and coercive state power. The role of coercion in defeating organized workers, creating a milieu in which widespread consent for a market-centred order became feasible, and enabling a decisive redistribution of wealth to the top 1% in the income hierarchy, should not be underestimated. However, if hegemony is distinguished from domination (Arrighi, 2005: 50), then the manner in which assent is generated, or not, is of central importance.

Boltanski and Chiapello (2006) contribute to this analytical challenge, by exploring how the capitalist system appropriated the 'artistic critique' motivating the 68 generation of activists, forging a 'new spirit of capitalism'. Whereas the 'social critique' of capitalism condemned inequality, the artistic critique lamented the routine and standardization imposed by Fordism. It castigated capitalism for obliterating individuality, demanding increased personal autonomy and re-asserting the creative spirit. Harvey (2005) notes how in the ensuing struggles the left foolishly and unnecessarily ceded the terrain of individual 'freedom' to the right, while Boltanski and Chiapello explain how the capitalist system itself recuperated the critique. In place of the moribund Fordist system, they argue, capitalism reinvented itself, producing a new 'connexionist' or networked paradigm centred on the knowledge economy. Whereas Fordism was based on routine and standardization, the knowledge economy relies on the virtues of creativity, individual adaptability, communication and the art of connecting laterally in project-based teams built on affective trust. It therefore relies on the networking capacities of reflexive individuals (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006). For Boltanski and Chiapello, the new spirit captivated French authors of the artistic critique, many of whom later joined the state elite, and imbued government with it. If the image of a flexible networked system serves as a powerful justification for capitalism, it also serves as a powerful justification for the contemporary state, re-inventing itself using the language of networks, deemed by New Labour as 'peculiarly appropriate to the operation of the enabling state' (Bevir, 2005: 46).

Boltanski and Chiapello limit their account to developments in France, but it has wider resonance. As Callinicos (2004: 427) put it, the discourse of ‘networks and heterarchy’ has become the dominant mode of self-description by capitalists globally. For example, the World Bank’s statement of values includes:

personal honesty, integrity, commitment; working together in teams – with openness and trust; empowering others and respecting differences; encouraging risk-taking and responsibility; enjoying our work and our families (cited in Bang, 2003: 244).

Thus, the capitalist renaissance of the 1980s and 90s was, throughout the West, inflected by the connexionist legitimating discourse described by Boltanski and Chiapello. Mouffe (2008) rightly argues that while Boltanski and Chiapello avoid Gramscian language, the emergence of the new spirit represented a hegemonic intervention, appropriating, integrating and neutralizing the demands of the counter-hegemonic movement of the late 1960s. In this light, it is possible to envision the juxtaposition of neoliberalism and post-hegemonic network theory as the manifesto of a cross-national hegemonic bloc comprising powerful elements in the market economy and state elites and seeking to mobilize the active assent of society as a whole. The hegemonic bloc may have distinct national and sub-national characteristics and rely on a variety of mobilizing discourses reflecting place-specific histories and struggles, but if this account is right, the juxtaposition will be evident in some form in many contexts.

It is certainly evident in the way that New Labour adapted to the rigours of the global capitalist renaissance, led by Margaret Thatcher in Britain. Mrs Thatcher inflicted heavy defeats on the trade union movement and radically undermined the appeal of class solidarity, while championing the cause of individual freedom and entrepreneurship. Thatcher’s chastening of the organized working class precipitated a major crisis on the left and prompted a re-think of fundamentals. The majority saw her success in restoring the hegemony of the market as arising from epochal changes in the structure of

society (e.g. Leggett, 2009). New Labour has been heavily influenced by theorists of 'second modernity', who believe that the present epoch is defined by the decline of tradition and deference, the rise of the prosperous, educated citizen and individualization (Beck, 2007), or what Giddens called the rise of the 'autotelic' (internally driven) subject, who bears a resemblance to Boltanski and Chiapello's autonomous, networking project worker in the new economy.

For Giddens and New Labour, the work of the 'modern' left with respect to individualization is not mourning but celebration. The great success of post-war social democracy, it is claimed, was to free most of the working class from brute deprivation and the daily struggle for survival (Bentley and Halpern, 2003: 79). However in doing so, it abolished the conditions that gave rise to it, rendering the socialist project obsolete (Giddens, 1998: 2-3). Unchained from the daily grind of subsistence, 'post-materialist' individuals, the cosmopolitan 'me generation' (Milburn, 2006), became history makers and gained control over their own life courses for the first time (Mouzelis, 2001). In this view, freedom from the realm of necessity promised by communism has been achieved under capitalism, with the socialists of yesteryear heroic but unwitting midwives to the new society.

For third way thinkers and New Labour leaders, this essentially progressive view of individualization is a potent explanation for why Thatcher was able to defeat the miners and why the government cannot go back to the era of post-war egalitarianism and state ownership. There is an obvious homology here between the liberal ontological claim that 'we are individuals' and the New Labour claim that 'we are individualized'. Leggett (2009) rightly notes that no single political logic flows from individualization, but nevertheless the homology is important in explaining the juxtaposition of reflexive individualism, the network and the free market New Labour thought. Liberalization, marketization and personalization are faithful to the new spirit of the individualized citizenry and to its penchant, *pace* Boltanski and Chiapello, for networking in the knowledge economy.

Arguably, this is a far more powerful justification for New Labour's commitment to markets than the pragmatic mantra that states cannot insulate themselves from the hyper-competitive global economy and may explain the apparent lack of regret for the passing of Old Labour among the New Labour elite. Far from being regretful, its politics are suffused in a breathlessly excited change narrative '... the world has moved on apace. The pace of change, often driven by global forces can be startling' (DCLG, 2006: 154). With the reflexive individual embedded in a connexionist economy and an increasingly connexionist polity, globalization can be presented much more as an exciting opportunity than as a threat.

New Labour's juxtaposition of markets, networks and individuals has been hegemonic in mainstream political discourse for a generation (Devine *et al*, 2007). It could be seen as an attempt to adapt the new spirit of capitalism to the objectives of the centre-left. It has lent New Labour its political and intellectual energy, enabling it to form 'big-tent' alliances with powerful business leaders as well as largely retain the loyalty of a battered trade-union movement, whose leaders gloomily accept many of its strictures. At the same time, however, New Labour recognizes cultural and structural impediments to this otherwise exhilarating conjuncture (although in its excitement, it forgot that capitalism is crisis prone). These impediments, and the government's response to them, illustrate the proto-hegemonic characteristics of the networked system of governance.

The limits of the conjuncture

The government's account of the individualized, post-socialist, world is one of progress but not triumph. There remains a significant challenge centred on the reinvention and revitalization of community and mobilizing citizens in pursuit of the national interest. In Gramscian terms, Retort (2004) argues that late capitalist societies suffer from 'weak citizenship'. Neoliberalization and its attendant inequalities, they argue, has caused low levels of participation in public life. The downside of the conjuncture, from the standpoint of hegemony, is anomie. This is of concern, argues Retort, because it has become a drag on economic growth and, as public scepticism about the Iraq war suggests, undermined patriotism.

The challenge this antinomy poses for New Labour is how to nurture ethics of personal responsibility and community while maintaining the spirit of flexible entrepreneurialism envisioned in its approach to globalization. It conceives the challenge in a number of ways. First, it recognizes that the decline of the collective subject is a problem for social cohesion (e.g. Miliband, 2006). In political terms, as former Minister Alan Milburn (2006) put it, ‘a less deferential, more democratic world is threatening a crisis of legitimacy for the active politics that is the hallmark of the left’. Thus, the ‘me generation’ remains unfulfilled and yearns for a new mutualism compatible with cosmopolitan, post-materialist, individualism. Second, it recognizes that not all have shared in rising prosperity, maintaining that a relatively small underclass is marooned from the mainstream majority. The government’s social inclusion agenda is concerned with integrating *les exclus* into this notional mainstream (Gray, 2000). Third, New Labour is paranoid about the continuing influence of ‘forces of conservatism’: those cultural recidivists, like public sector workers and trade unionists, who hark back to obsolete socialist ideas and risk damaging the country’s prospects in the global market place (Taylor-Gooby, 2000; Stoker, 2002). To invert Rosa Luxemburg’s famous aphorism, New Labour fears that we face a choice: capitalism or barbarism. ‘Paranoia’ underlies the exhilaration (Stoker, 2002: 432) and lends it the sense of urgency embodied in the constant demand for ‘change’ and ‘innovation’ in the public sector (Davies, 2008: 7).

These dysfunctional features of the conjuncture present a significant hegemonic challenge. Part of the challenge, discussed in depth elsewhere (see Davies, 2009a,b), is to foster an alternative basis for cohesion within shattered working class communities where the revitalization of class consciousness is considered both undesirable and untenable (Ronneberger, 2008: 140). This objective, to repair the fabric of fragmented communities, is conceived in terms that draw heavily on the principles of ‘conservative communitarianism’ (e.g. Davies and Crabtree, 2004). Another element of the challenge, addressed here, is forging an active and productive consensus between governmental and non-governmental actors,

including citizen activists. This is the strategic role accorded to governing networks (Sorensen and Torfing, 2005).

Where solidarity and resistance are the mobilizing principles of class politics, 'trust' animates the relationship between governmental and non-governmental actors in the differentiated polity (Rhodes, 1996, 1997). Granovetter (1973), noted that whereas groups, cliques and organizations are bound by strong ties, including control systems and obligations associated with kinship, 'weak ties' such as trust and empathy lubricate the relationship between groups and individuals with distinctive interests. Trust between reflexive individuals is the lubricant in governing networks. For New Labour, networked governance is normatively path dependent, nourishing the sense of a common interest among individuals seeking community and providing the institutional means by which members of a fragmented polity can engage as active citizens in a non-coercive, productive dialogue, thus furnishing closer relations of trust and yet more productive collaboration in a virtuous circle of sunk investments and returns (e.g. Geddes *et al*, 2007: 110-111). The trust-based network is thus an adaptive mechanism, not only the basis of economic dynamism in the knowledge economy but also a flexible means of maintaining social cohesion in the epoch of second modernity.²

By the time New Labour was elected in 1997, constructing governing networks was already a high priority, not only in Britain but also in much of Europe (Kjaer, 2004). However, it was only after 1997 that 'partnership', the prevailing form of governing network in the UK, became the ubiquitous vehicle for organizing governmental and non-governmental interactions, particularly at the urban scale. The New Labour interpretation of the conjuncture made building a cross-societal partnership a matter of common sense. It is therefore possible to point to positive feedback (Pierson, 2000) between theories, like the DPM, proclaiming the rise of the networked society and the policies promoting it, which lend

² Although the virtuous circle maybe broken when the reflexive individual, exercising characteristic moral entrepreneurship, decides to move on to the next project (Bentley and Halpern, 2003: 83).

support to the orthodox view that Britain has moved from a system of government to governance. Of course, the political and the theoretical cannot be reduced to one another; there are substantial differences between network-based theories and the practice of networked governance, which, as demonstrated below, are significant for understanding its effectiveness as a proto-hegemonic instrument. Nevertheless, it is possible to point to a homology between the economic, the political and the academic realms, where the theory and practice of networking rose together and reinforced one another.

In Gramscian terms, the big-tent politics symbolized by the governing network enable New Labour to present itself as the ‘ethico-political’ representative of universal values, independent of narrow economic, social or class interests’ (Fontana, 2002: 161), an approach that Gordon Brown renewed in 2007, when he formed a government comprising ‘all the talents’. If the juxtaposition of neoliberalism and networking is the manifesto of a dominant historic bloc, the governing network is an institutional vehicle for maintaining and extending it into society at large.

From post-hegemonic theory to proto-hegemonic institutions

However, it is arguable that rather than reflecting the post-hegemonic structure of a connexionist polity, the governing network is, on the contrary, a tool for social engineering, or a technology of control oriented to remaking society in the image of the theory. The degree to which the ‘new spirit’ has actually been realized is a matter of debate in management studies (e.g. McCann, 2008). Boltanski and Chiapello comment, for example, that it is ‘intended to *legitimise* the connectionist world and restrict its practices in such a way as to substantiate the affirmation of a justificatory constraint that acts on behalf of the common good’ (2005: 173, *original emphasis*). On this reading, the ‘new spirit’ is, as Mouffe (2008) argues, more the proto-hegemonic ideology of the historic bloc than a set of hegemonic or even post-hegemonic practices.

This perspective is borne out in the development of governing networks in the UK, where the principles governing institutional design are those of control and remoralization. First, in relation to control, it is notable that New Labour's consensual rhetoric does not proclaim the end of ideology as such (Fairclough, 2000). Rather, it 'abjures ideological conflict, which it regards as *passé* and attempts to neutralize it (Davies, 2009c: 82-3). Stoker's insights illustrate. He identifies two New Labour narratives on the future of local governance; the top-down 'constrained discretion' model and the 'networked community governance' model. Interestingly, he finds that in both cases, 'rituals expressing key values' are 'largely absent'. He comments that 'in terms of emotional attachment and ritual expression both paradigms are underdeveloped' (Stoker, 2005: 171). Davies (2009c: 91) suggests that silence concerning values and expressive rituals is not mere oversight. Drawing on an empirical study of citywide strategic partnerships he argues that political conflict is taboo, the taboo deriving from the rules of the game hardwired into partnerships. Rather than create a culture in which affective trust is built through a pluralistic dialogue, conflict is structured out of the network system (see Fairclough, 2000; Jessop, 2002). This approach, described by Laclau and Mouffe (2001: xi) as New Labour's 'sacralization of consensus', arguably reflects the government's paranoia about the 'forces of conservatism' (Stoker, 2002). It suggests that 'suspicion' or 'distrust' is the political cornerstone of the system. Consensus is still the objective, but control the means. Put another way, were governing networks faithful to the new spirit, they would nurture the expressive drive whereas governing networks censor it (see Bourdieu, 1996).

Second, the network is a medium for 'remoralization' through which public officials promote communitarian values, for example the 'gift culture' that Gordon Brown (2004) placed at the heart of his conception of 'Britishness'. In the context of governing networks, the 'gift culture' manifests itself in the form of a contributory principle. Davies (2007: 790) argues that the contributory principle is a moral injunction on citizen activists to mobilize their resources in support of strategic governing objectives, which serve as a proxy for the common good. Public officials responsible for the administration and supervision of partnerships have internalized the principles of 'contributory consensualism' in a way that

renders them insensitive to alternative perspectives. Hence, as Skelcher *et al* (2005: 590) put it, they express ‘puzzlement’ when asked about the democratic accountability of partnerships because the question did not fit with the commonsense goal-focused view of partnership embedded in their managerial *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990). Since the managerial cadre has responsibility for designing and running them, it is no surprise that its commonsense assumptions are encoded in governing network design.

Thus, the structural form of governing networks bears little resemblance to post-hegemonic ideology. They are rather proto-hegemonic in that they eschew the ‘open’ modus operandi of trust-based networking for a ‘closed’ paradigm based on the politics of contributory consensualism. The degree of practical mastery by citizen activists of political rectitude and the gift culture is therefore the key indicator of how effectively governing networks serve a hegemonic function, or not.

From hegemony to domination: the bureaucratization of governing networks

The emerging critique of the DPM discussed above suggests, among other things, that recalcitrant citizen activists have not mastered these principles. Davies’s research on city strategic partnerships in Dundee and Hull (2007, 2009) explains why, by exploring the micro-dynamics of the state-citizen interface in depth. As argued above, public officials have internalized a commonsense view of the active citizen role in partnerships as an obligation to contribute to the governing effort. However, citizen-activists tend to see them as vehicles through which they can exercise a political voice and obtain resources for their communities. This might be described as a social democratic culture, or ‘culture of entitlement’ in opposition to the ‘contributory principle’ (Davies 2009a,b). However, within the partnership environment, these value conflicts between public officials and citizen activists were sublimated and closed to conscious deliberation. Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* explains how tacit knowledge develops and cultural and linguistic resources contribute to sustaining class power (Bourdieu, 1990: 9). In this light, managers and community activists each drew on their distinctive *habitus* in

interpreting the partnership environment, meaning that in a context where conflict was taboo they could not understand each other, despite nominally sharing a common vocabulary (Davies, 2007: 793).

Political misrecognition caused considerable bitterness. The citizen activists were branded ‘trouble makers’, the public managers ‘control-freaks’. These [r]elatively trivial proxy conflicts tended to displace substantive value conflicts, reflected in comments about the self-serving behaviour of other partners’ (Davies, 2009c: 89). Bourdieu (1984: 462) further argues that where working class activists engage with dominant groups, it ‘discredits and destroys the spontaneous political discourse of the dominated’. The language of the dominant group imposes ‘a total but totally invisible censorship on the expression of the specific interests of the dominated, who can only choose between the sanitized word of official discourse and inarticulate grumblings’. Proxy conflicts are a case in point and from this perspective, the censorship of the social field proved successful in neutralizing the expressive drive, silencing the political critique (Geddes, 2006: 93).

However, these proxy conflicts have a double meaning in relation to the proto-hegemonic function of governing networks. They denote a form of self-censorship, but nevertheless subvert contributory consensualism. The relentless, if sometimes reluctant, pursuit of government targets by public officials means that even inarticulate grumbling is taboo. In practice, proxy conflicts were sufficiently antagonizing to public officials that they felt they had to restructure the partnerships, further marginalizing the ‘trouble makers’. This process of ‘creeping managerialism’ (Davies, 2007: 787) subverts contributory consensualism. The trend towards more overtly coercive and hierarchical network management signals a move away from hegemonic politics towards what Arrighi (2005) called ‘domination without hegemony’, where moral leadership is supplanted by force. As argued above, the government’s approach to networked governance was founded on mistrust. Nevertheless, to the extent that in the early days of initiatives like New Deal for Communities there was a degree of openness to different perspectives, the trajectory has been towards political closure (Lawless, 2004).

DuGay (2002: 11) asserts that ‘Hobbesian conceptions of “sovereignty” and “authority” still matter and have by no means been eclipsed by the development of governance’. Put another way, sovereignty and authority may have been eclipsed by the ideology of governance, but are central to its practice.

Consensualism gives way to control and hegemony to domination. By extension, notwithstanding the structural disaggregation of the state under New Public Management, it is arguable that ‘governance’ is now giving way to ‘government’.

Engels described petty crime, or privatized redistribution, as ‘the crudest and least fruitful form of rebellion’ (Merrifield, 2002: 40). Tacit and passive resistance in governing networks maybe equally fruitless from the standpoint of the left (Fleming and Spicer, 2003). Yet, in the context of ‘creeping managerialism’, it signals the limits of hegemony. McCann (2008) makes a similar point in his search for the new spirit of capitalism among UK financial services workers. He found that far from appealing to ‘trust’ and using networks as mechanisms co-opt and neutralize critique, managers tend to use traditional techniques including old-fashioned bullying and intimidation and assert traditional hierarchical prerogatives. McCann therefore questions the effectiveness of the ‘new spirit’ as a mobilizing force. In this light, the critique of post-hegemonic network theory seems to resonate across the state-market divide, suggesting that roll-forward bureaucratic coercion is the norm.

This micro-level analysis of the politics of governing networks also reflects contradictions evident in the juxtaposition of neoliberal practice and postmodernist ideology at the macro scale. For Harvey (2005), despite claiming to promote ‘freedom’, neo-liberalism is actually characterized by the synthesis of market liberalism and state authoritarianism (see also Gamble, 1994). One reason for this is that the marginalization caused by neoliberalization imposes high management costs on the state. A more pressing reason in the present crisis is that without massive state intervention to absorb corporate debt, the whole system is liable to collapse. Either way, the ‘free economy and the strong state’ (Gamble,

1994) tend to go hand in hand. As Hobsbawm (1989: 46) put it: '[t]he state must henceforth, in the interests of withering away, give ever more precise directions about how its funds should and should not be spent ... central power and command are not diminishing but growing, since 'freedom' cannot be achieved but by bureaucratic decision'.

The managerialist response to cynicism and mistrust in governing networks shows this process at work in microcosm. The analysis suggests that while the 'new spirit' might have been the most effective ideological vehicle for neoliberal capitalism in the aftermath of 1968, it has been persistently subverted by the centralizing dynamics of the market system that gave rise to it. At the micro-political scale, any movement towards a networked polity in the halcyon days following New Labour's election has been subverted by similar centralizing trends. If the relationship between neoliberal capitalism and post-hegemonic network theory turns out to be dialectical rather than synergistic, then it points to a structural anomaly in the New Labour hegemonic project.

The object of the above analysis is to make the case for conceptualizing governing networks as flawed proto-hegemonic institutions, rather than as the political form of a differentiated polity. It also poses a friendly challenge to advocates of the APM to consider whether the critique of the DPM could usefully be re-framed in Gramscian terms. The APM does not explore the social significance of the governing network in depth. The persistence of the British political tradition, to which the APM appeals in explaining the persistence of hierarchical governance, maybe helpful in explaining why, when confronted with citizen recalcitrance, public officials schooled in the contributory principle resort to control-freakery. However, the persistent roll-forward of hierarchy in network-like institutions casts light on the dialectics of hegemony and domination and signifies the limits of governing networks as proto-hegemonic institutions. The APM further, and correctly, points to the power inequalities inherent in governing networks. However, it misses the central point of Gramscian analysis, that the idea of the post-hegemonic governing network is to legitimize power by re-branding it as a common resource. As

Boltanski and Chiapello put it ‘the balance of power is no longer a salient issue when the main objective is the creation of a sense of belonging, a feeling of satisfaction with and trust in one another’ (2005: 183). Actors bring what they have to the table and greater power simply reflects greater capacity to contribute. In this generative model of governance, the three dimensions of power as domination are transcended for a fourth constructive dimension to which it is irrelevant whether power is asymmetric or not (Marsh *et al*, 2003), provided that all ‘stakeholders’ are in the loop. In this context, drawing attention to power asymmetry, as citizen activists often do, violates the principle of trust-based exchange and symbolizes a tacit challenge to hegemony.

Researching governance as hegemony

In this final section, it is argued that conceiving networked governance as the pursuit of hegemony draws attention to a range of possible hegemonic, counter-hegemonic and anti-hegemonic archetypes. The heuristic below allows for the theoretical possibility that DPM networks and comprehensively hegemonic networks might emerge, while suggesting that the flawed proto-hegemonic, or partially-hegemonic, governing network dominates in the UK. The DPM, as argued above, is an example of post-hegemonic theory, for which flexible structures of collaboration form and dissolve, bringing together a fluid plurality of interests in pursuit of goals that are also likely to be in constant flux. In the hegemonic form, all governmental and non-governmental actors have practical mastery of the demands, tasks, conventions and symbols of collaboration. They are at ease in the company of others from different social backgrounds, capable of advocating and contributing vigorously to the network agenda and channel the expressive drive into a depoliticized discourse of resource mobilization and problem solving (Mathur *et al*, 2003).

Drawing on urban regime theory, an alternative theory of networked governance based in neo-pluralist political economy, it is possible to identify a third archetype, governance by exclusion or domination. Stone (1989) shows how the typical American business regime comprises city managers working

informally with business elites in a relationship of structural interdependence. He argues (1993) that the alliance of urban state and market elites makes it extremely difficult for 'lower class' groups to gain access to the urban regime. On the other hand, the UK governing network seeks to mobilize governing resources by co-opting citizen-activists in a context where direct business involvement is, typically, tokenistic. Where the partnership pursues hegemony, the archetypal urban regime seeks to promote growth through the bilateral pre-emption of the governing agenda (Davies, 2009b).

Finally, the heuristic includes a counter-hegemonic archetype. This might take a number of forms, including 'networked insider resistance', 'networked outsider resistance' and 'class-based coercive resistance'. The Community Development Projects of the late 1960s and 1970s are an instance of the first kind. The CDP was a government funded community regeneration programme. However, in defiance of their brief, several CDPs developed a critique of political economy (Cockburn, 1977; Dinham, 2005), albeit to little effect as they were closed in 1978. The second counter-hegemonic type is 'networked outsider resistance', the preferred mode of organizing among leading elements in the 'no global' movement. Just as the network became the organizing principle of the new spirit of capitalism, it has also become, for theorists like Hardt and Negri (2000), the organizing principle of the new spirit of resistance. The network is thus claimed and contested by the new spirit of capitalism, the neoliberal state, the anti-capitalist opposition, proponents of second modernity and postmodern governance theory (Callinicos, 2006: 63). Third, however, Marxists see the trends depicted in theories of second modernity as conjunctural rather than epochal. The question is, as Callinicos puts it (2007: 306), whether the narrative of second modernity reflects ineluctable changes in the social base or has 'hypostatized into social trends' the life experiences of 'a generation of Western intellectuals who came to adulthood in the 1960s' and were demoralized by the failure of the 68 movement. In arguing the latter position, he contends that the decline in class politics in Britain is reversible. The continuing propensity for militant strikes in Europe, including recently in France and Greece, supports this view, although these actions do not appear to have an overtly project-based, or counter-hegemonic character at present.

Any typology must be prefaced with a warning that the point is not only to assign cases to it, but also to explore the conditions in which different types develop, or not. With this cautionary note, the asymmetric continuum below illustrates five archetypes considered from the standpoint of hegemony.

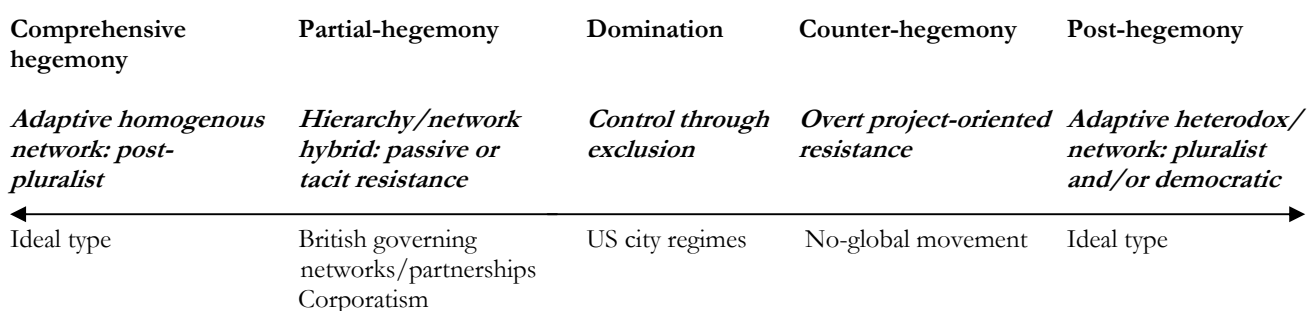


Figure 1: Five governance archetypes

To operationalize this framework is it necessary, finally, to explain what it means for the study of power. Arguably, it supersedes the perspective that requires one to decide whether to study ‘power over’ (domination), or ‘power to’ (production). Rather, the study of hegemony poses the question of what resources are, or are not, mobilized and how effectively they are deployed in support of, or in the construction of, a hegemonic or counter-hegemonic bloc. If governing networks generate new capacity, for example in the field of human capital development, how is this capacity mobilized? To what ends is it deployed and at the expense of what alternative interests, agendas and capacities (e.g. Davies, 2009a)? The central claim of this paper is that in answering these questions, a Gramscian approach has more to offer than post-hegemonic governance theory.

Conclusion

The limits of post-hegemonic network theories of governance are becoming increasingly clear and the need for alternatives pressing. The advantage of the Gramscian approach is that it provides a basis for articulating the relationship between macro developments in political economy and social theory that

explain the rise of the network paradigm, the institutional forms that governing networks assume at the meso level and the micro-political interactions whose feedback effects in the network system contribute to the centralizing trend, which marks the passage from hegemony to domination. The increasing resemblance of governing networks to centralized bureaucracies and the homologous trend towards centralization in global political economy identified by Harvey (2005) and others, are counterfactuals that the DPM does not acknowledge, let alone explain. By focusing on the challenge to hegemony posed by tacit resistance, the analysis also tempers the historic bias towards consensus in an earlier generation of Gramscian studies, regretted by Kerr (2001). At the same time, it illustrates that social peace and ideological conformity are insufficient for the construction of a comprehensive hegemony.

The ideas of Gramsci can therefore be the basis for a substantive challenge to the orthodoxy, offer a platform for moving beyond it and pose the provocative question of whether the dominant underlying trend is, in fact, from hegemony to domination, or governance to government. Further research into governing networks from the standpoint of this question could be very valuable. However, networks are only one instrument in a hegemonic project with international as well as local dimensions, and of which New Labour itself is only a small part (e.g. Arrighi, 2005). In this light, it is pertinent to consider how much attention should be given to the study of governing networks in political science, towards which the DPM and its critics inevitably draws us. Claiming that the light of the 'new spirit' is being extinguished by the emergent contradictions and crises of contemporary capitalism implies that there are other more important research foci for the study of hegemony.

Nevertheless, there is a good Gramscian case for continued research into the politics of governing networks. Gramsci distinguished two modes of political analysis. *Grand politica* considers the founding and destruction of systems, the rise and fall of socioeconomic structures and clashes between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic blocs. *Piccolo politica* explores disjunctures, conflicts and struggles within an established socioeconomic order (Fontana, 2002: 170). Lefebvre famously believed that the *piccolo politica*

of everyday life is a crucial nexus in the battle for hegemony. He argued that daily life is saturated by routine, repetitive and familiar practices, but contains contradictions because, *pace* Anderson, promises of unalienated leisure and growing prosperity 'are denied by the very regressive forces of commodification that spread them' (Kipfer, 2002: 131-133). While it stretches credibility to describe networked governance as 'the politics of everyday life', the point holds to the extent that studying networks can furnish us with insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the dominant hegemonic project at the micro-level.

If this account has substance, the research challenge is to develop rich and textured understandings of how networked governance serves, or fails to serve, the ends of the dominant political project, or its successor, and how it grows or declines in prominence in future. This means that the study of networks should be placed squarely in the political economy and social theoretical traditions, examining how they reproduce and embed structures of hegemony and domination, or generate conflict and resistance and with what impact in the wider system. In pursuing these ends, the ideas of Antonio Gramsci will be invaluable.

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