Gramsci in the Postcolony:

Hegemony and Anticolonialism in Nasserist Egypt

Abstract

This article traces Gramsci's concept of hegemony as it travels from Southern Italy to Egypt, arguing that the concept 'stretches', following Fanon, through an encounter with the nexus of capitalism and (post-)colonialism. I explore a reading of Gramsci's concepts in a postcolonial context, paying special attention to colonialism and anticolonialism as constitutive of the absence or presence of hegemony. Through an exploration of the Nasserist project in Egypt—the only instance of hegemony in modern Egyptian history—I show how colonialism and anticolonialism were central to the formation of Nasserist hegemony. I look at two particular aspects of hegemony as a traveling theory (Said 2000) to bring to light some theoretical entanglements that arise when Gramsci travels, in turn highlighting the continuing theoretical potential thinking through such entanglements, as well as of thinking with Gramsci in Egypt and the broader postcolonial world.

Keywords: Gramsci, Middle East, Postcolonialism, Colonialism, Hegemony

Introduction

> I do not claim that, in any simple way, Gramsci 'has the answers' or 'holds the key' to our present troubles. I do believe that we must 'think' our problems in a Gramscian way - which is different. We can't pluck up this

> 'Sardinian' from his specific and unique political formation, beam him down at the end of the 20th century, and ask him to solve our problems for us: especially since the whole thrust of his thinking was to refuse this easy transfer of generalisations from one conjuncture, nation or epoch to another.
>
> —Stuart Hall (2002)

> As a way of getting seriously past the weightlessness of one theory after another, the remorseless indignations of orthodoxy, and the expressions of tired advocacy to which we are often submitted, the exercise involved in figuring out where the theory went and how in getting there its fiery core was reignited as invigorating—is also another voyage, one that is central to intellectual life.
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> —Edward Said (2000, 230)

Edward Said's ideas on travelling theory opened up new ways of seeing theories, ideas and concepts as fluid and always-in-motion, rather than fixed and static. Said raised questions not only about what theories are but about how they move from one place to another, and what happens when they do. Rather than assume that this movement is seamless and untroubled, Said pushes us to think of bumps along the road in this process of travel, and how these change the theories themselves. My broader intellectual project has been interested in thinking through the connections between Gramsci, Fanon and the Egyptian context from decolonisation to the present.[i] Bringing Egypt and Gramsci together meant that questions of traveling theory and Eurocentrism were always present, pushing towards a careful reflexivity in light of a tendency in much of the Marxist canon to de-centre race and colonialism. Although I had always consciously interrogated the assumption that Gramsci could simply be "plucked" from Sardinia and transferred to Egypt without context, it is here that I want to unpack the precise problematics that

emerge when we think through Gramsci's concepts in a postcolonial context such as Egypt. In particular, I want to think of the theoretical entanglements that come from "thinking with Gramsci" in the postcolony.

Scholars have explored the ways in which Gramsci's ideas move, travel, stretch and adapt; an edited volume entitled *The Postcolonial Gramsci* explores Gramsci's thought in the postcolonial world (Srivastava and Bhattacharya 2012), and a volume on *Counter-Hegemony in the Colony and Postcolony* looks at questions of hegemony and resistance across the globe (Noorani and Chalcraft 2007). In his work on Gramsci, Adam David Morton explored Gramsci's concepts—particularly passive revolution—through Edward Said's idea of travelling theory, arguing that Gramsci's concepts can become more radical as they travel (2013, 2007). My argument builds on this in the sense that I too am interested in exploring Gramsci's concepts through the idea of travelling theory. However, what primarily interests me are the entanglements that arise in thinking through hegemony in relation to empire and anticolonialism. I posit that it is the empirical realities of colonies and postcolonies, and thus specifically the structure of racialised colonial capitalism, that raises particular questions around the absence or presence of hegemony. I refer here to Frantz Fanon's call to always 'stretch Marxism' in the colonial context, arguing that when hegemony encounters the nexus of racial capitalism and (post-)colonialism it 'stretches.' In this piece, I show that as Gramsci travels to the colony and postcolony, his concepts become entangled with historically specific intersections of empire/race, and capital.

In order to unpack these intersections and connect them to hegemony, I focus on two eras in modern Egypt: the period leading up to independence in 1952, and the period after that was characterised by the rise of Nasserism and the founding of a postcolonial state. My work on Gramsci and Egypt stemmed from my interest in this particular historical moment of decolonisation. There seemed to be something singular about Nasserism as a project, which expressed itself in different ways: it is the era that has been most written about in post-independence Egypt; it is an era embroiled in intense controversy; and it is an era that expresses

itself in contradictory ways in the Egyptian popular imagination. It was in trying to understand this singularity—and whether it really was singular at all—that I came to Gramsci and his theory of hegemony. Gramsci did not understand hegemony as something 'positive' or 'negative' but rather a condition of rule that creates powerful effects, or, as John Chalcraft has written, a particular *structure of power* (2007). It is precisely this structure of power—so present under Nasser—that I am interested in.

Gramsci was a Southern Italian Marxist who wrote extensively on political theory and sociology. His most well-known work, *The Prison Notebooks,* is a mine of political, social and economic analysis spread across hundreds of notes. Written during his time in prison, the notes and their fragmentary nature remind us of the limits to trying to extract clear and thorough theories and concepts from these notebooks. His concepts provide a complex framework with which to analyse social transformation, and his position as a Southern Italian Marxist and his attention to inequalities produced at various levels make him instrumental to theorising on global capitalism (Morton 2007). I found in his concept of hegemony a unique articulation of what makes some political projects rule more effectively than others: a balance between consent and coercion, where consent is embedded within coercion.

Where Gramsci understood hegemony as a structure of power mainly through an analysis of capitalism and class dynamics—leading him to call for a socialist hegemony—in this article I show that in contexts such as Egypt, hegemony as a structure of power necessitates a focus on empire and its concomitant forms of racialisation on the one hand, and capital on the other, always seeing these two as co-constitutive. This not only complicates the way in which we understand capitalism, it also pushes us to think of 'Third Worldist' and anticolonial articulations of socialist hegemony (Scott 1996, 1). In Egypt, the colonial situation produced a form of hegemony that was not principally socialist, but also anticolonial and nationalist. Socialism and a socialist imaginary were deeply embedded within this, but the anticolonial and nationalist dimensions were central to the formation of this hegemony. Where explorations of hegemony in centres of empire did not

necessarily take empire into account in analysing capitalism, this is difficult to do in colonies and postcolonies.[ii] Exploring the presence or absence of hegemony in postcolonial contexts, then, allows us to understand it as a structure of power that goes beyond capital; this move—or 'stretching' as Fanon might call it—renders visible the ways in which racial capitalism and (post)colonialism are central to the making of political projects *globally*. This becomes clear in a context such as Egypt, where the concept of hegemony encounters the colonial situation and must reckon with it.

I argue that we can understand the Nasserist project as the first, and only, instance of hegemony in modern Egyptian history. A connected argument, and what I focus on in this article, is that we cannot understand either the presence or absence of hegemony in postcolonial contexts such as Egypt without 'stretching' the concept, as Fanon would say. In other words, hegemony at a moment in which Egypt was decolonising was formed in and through various entanglements of empire and capital that raise important questions about the postcolonial situation. I look at two particular aspects of hegemony as a traveling theory to show why it matters that we understand colonialism and anti-colonialism as significantly altering how we think about Gramsci in Egypt and the broader postcolonial world. I begin by first contextualising Gramsci's theory of hegemony as a travelling theory. I then look at the first aspect of hegemony as travelling theory—the question of whether there can be hegemony in the colony—before turning to the second aspect, the centrality of anti-colonialism to Nasserist hegemony.

Gramsci as travelling theory

Edward Said wrote that theories sometimes travel to other times and places, and in that process can lose some of their power and rebelliousness:

> The first time a human experience is recorded and then given a theoretical formulation, its force comes from being directly connected to and organically provoked by real historical circumstances. Later versions of the theory cannot replicate its original power, because the situation has quieted down and changed, the theory is degraded and subdued, made into a relatively tame academic substitute for the real thing (2000, 416).

When he returned to the idea of travelling theory almost two decades later, Said had changed his mind. He noted that while it was true that travelling theories could sometimes become less rebellious as they travelled, the opposite was also possible: that they become more far-reaching and radical:

> This movement suggests the possibility of actively different locales, sites, situations for theory, without facile universalism or over-general totalising. To speak here only of borrowing and adaptation is not adequate. There is in particular an intellectual, and perhaps moral, community of a remarkable kind, *affiliation* in the deepest and most interesting sense of the word. As a way of getting seriously past the weightlessness of one theory after another, the exercise involved in figuring out where the theory went and how in getting there its fiery core was reignited as invigorating—and is also another voyage, one that is central to intellectual life (2000, 230).

Tying this to Stuart Hall's plea that we not use Gramsci like "an Old Testament prophet who, at the correct moment, will offer us the consoling and appropriate quotation," I want to think through what it means to understand Gramsci's theory of hegemony as a travelling theory that encounters the colonial and anticolonial when it arrives in the postcolony. I am interested in what it means to think of hegemony in Egypt in a Gramscian way, rather than to 'apply' it as a pre-existing theoretical framework (Hall 2002, Morton 2013). I am less interested, then, in a wholesale application of Gramsci's concepts and theories to Egypt and the Middle East,[iii] concepts that have

already been debated and defined elsewhere, and more interested in this process of 'thinking' that Hall alludes to.

Gramsci's position as a Southern Italian intellectual—occupying the position of periphery within the centre—opens up interesting possibilities for work looking at other global peripheries.[iv] Gramsci is perhaps the most popular Marxist theorist within the field of postcolonial studies, aside from Marx himself.[v] For postcolonial scholars who have turned to Gramsci, ranging from Edward Said and Stuart Hall to the members of the Subaltern Studies collective, he represents a departure from an orthodox Marxism that is economically deterministic and Eurocentric. Gramsci has also been popular among Arab Marxists, as Nazih Ayubi has noted (1996, 9), providing concepts that were applicable to the postcolonial world.[vi] This can be seen in the elasticity of his concepts and their applicability to the non-West, as well as in the fact that some of his early writings focused on imperialism and the 'Southern' question in Italy, and in particular Southern Italy's position as an internal colony.[vii,viii] Gramsci did not simply use the term 'subaltern' as a synonym for 'proletarian' but also, at times, paid attention to the intersections of nation and class in constructing the subaltern—a move that is clearly of value to scholars working in and on the postcolony.

In lesser-known writings, Gramsci reflects on Italy's own empire and the ways in which it contributed to rising fascism inside the country:

> This capitalist vice gripping the colonies worked wonderfully: millions and millions of Indians, Egyptians, Algerians, Tunisians and Tonkinese [Vietnamese] died from hunger or disease as a result of the devastation wrought on the wretched colonial economies by European capitalist competition. How could an Egyptian or Indian peasant make his prices competitive with the English or French or Italian state? Rice, wheat, cotton, wool – all this was secured for us Europeans, while the colonial peasant had to live on herbs and roots, had to subject himself to the harshest corvée labour in

> order to scrape a bare subsistence minimum, and had to suffer the raging of impetuous and untameable famines that rage in India like natural storms.
>
> For several years we Europeans have lived at the expense of the death of the coloured peoples: unconscious vampires that we are, we have fed off their innocent blood. But today flames of revolt are being fanned throughout the colonial world. This is the class struggle of the coloured peoples against their white exploiters and murderers. It is the vast irresistible drive towards autonomy and independence of a whole world, with all its spiritual riches. Connective tissues are being recreated to weld together once again peoples whom European domination seemed to have sundered once and for all (2000, 112-113).[ix]

In this newspaper article, we see a fascinating account of colonial capitalism as well as anticolonial resistance that weaves in the politics of racism, natural resources and extractivism, and a global system of dependency. While this type of analysis is conspicuously missing from Gramsci's more famous prison writings, which very much focused on the Italian context and not necessarily on Italian empire, I do think it is worth noting that his analysis here points to an understanding of colonialism and anticolonialism as central to international politics. Notably, his reference to the "Italian state" as being on the other side of the anticolonial subject suggests where he positions the Italian ruling class globally.

Interestingly, Gramsci has been one of the more prominent Marxist theorists in the Middle East (Ayubi 1996, 9). Omnia El Shakry has referred to the "lost archive of Arab Marxism" which she defined as a body of work produced by Arab thinkers based on Marxist ideas; although this archive is still being recovered, it demonstrates that Arab Marxists produced a significant body of work that brought together postcolonial contexts and Marxist ideas, much of which was based on their interpretations of Marx, Gramsci, and other Marxists (2015, 930). This is unsurprising given

the focus on anti-imperialism in nationalist movements across the Arab world (Halliday and Molyneux 1984). In this archive, capitalism was always intertwined with the colonial question. Similar to El Shakry, I argue that engagements with Marxists in general, and my own engagement with Gramsci here, should be read less as a wholesale adoption of Marxist tenets to the Middle East and more as a productive engagement, critique, and stretching of these tenets as they travel to postcolonial contexts.

In *Overstating the Arab State*, Nazih Ayubi notes that although Gramsci is familiar to the Middle East, there has yet to be a systematic application of his concepts to the region. This has changed more recently, with work by Maha Abdelrahman (2014), John Chalcraft (2007, 2016), Ziad Fahmy (2011), Hazem Kandil (2014), Alia Mossallam (2012), Roberto Roccu (2013), and Brecht de Smet (2016), among others. Gramsci's familiarity to Middle Eastern scholars and activists is telling of a similar understanding of the world:

> Gramsci's writings are texts with which you can enter into a dialogue, for they deal with issues that do concern us. Although they were written in Italy over half a century ago, the worries, aspirations and debates contained in them seem to be parallel to our own, to Arab and to international present-day concerns (Firyal Ghazul cited in Ayubi 1996, 9).

It is perhaps Gramsci's positionality as occupying a place within a periphery of Europe, then, that renders his work sensitive to questions of geographical power, which in turn allows Gramsci's concepts to travel. This has been noted by Ayubi, who argues that Gramsci's positionality as an Italian from underdeveloped Sardinia who had lived in Italy at a time of early capitalism combined with fascism makes him applicable to other peripheral contexts (Ayubi 1996, 8).[x] My own understanding similarly highlights his positionality within what we terms an 'internal colony' as what allows his concepts to travel. This is not to flatten the distinction between Southern Italy as an internal colony and Egypt as an external one; rather it is to underline that Gramsci's attention

to multiple levels of inequality infuses his work with a particular sensitivity to power operating historically and geographically.

One could ask whether my arguments around the specificity of hegemony in the context of Egypt might move us beyond hegemony and indeed perhaps even beyond Gramsci. My response would be that in highlighting the flexibility of Gramscian concepts such as hegemony, we open up space to reconsider what happens when the concepts travel. The possibility of travel is largely determined by the flexibility of the concept in question; the more inflexible, the more likely that the process of travel would come up against barriers that render the concept less applicable to contexts outside of the one in which it emerged. In my view, hegemony represents Said's second understanding of traveling theory: one that that could travel, and that was just as political in its new home.

Hegemony in Egypt

Hegemony refers to a process where a particular social force goes beyond its narrow interests to universalise their project to other social forces and subaltern groups. These social forces are within the ruling class itself, but also within the subaltern classes. Hegemony initially referred to the process by which the working class could overthrow the ruling class and establish itself as hegemonic. It was Gramsci's adoption of the concept that saw it being applied to the bourgeoisie.[xi] Although the concept of hegemony dates back to 19th century Russian labour movement, Gramsci credits his use of the term to Marx's 1859 text *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (Boothman 2008, 201). Although Gramsci's point of departure was bourgeois hegemony (Thomas 2009, 223), he did not see it as identical to proletarian hegemony; as Brecht de Smet notes, for bourgeois hegemony consent is created through paternalism and reformist politics; for proletarian hegemony, consent is formed through a continuous and reciprocal exchange between leaders and led (2016, 88-89). Hegemony goes beyond ideology as false consciousness to instead understand

ideology as a political project based on norms, values and ideas that form a convincing worldview. This worldview is what allows a ruling class to exercise power, particularly material power.

Hegemony, then, is the result of the production of consent and the ability of a ruling class to embed coercion within that consent—a "consensual political practice" that differs from brute coercion (2016, 144). Consent and coercion always exist together, and any deployment of coercion must be grounded in consent; in other words, it must be seen as legitimate. In relation to Egypt, de Smet writes: "The hegemonic rule of the dominant class can very well rely on a disproportionate use of force (war, occupation, state violence), as long as this is accepted as necessary and in the interest of the common good by its allies," (2016, 25). Under hegemony, then, coercion exists but is seen as legitimate or necessary.[xii]

Gramsci's work centres the dialectic between the material and the ideational, explaining his emphasis on coercion and consent:

> The methodological criterion on which our own study must be based is the following: that the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways: as 'domination' (*dominio)* and as 'intellectual and moral leadership' (*direzione).* A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to 'liquidate,' or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, must continue to 'lead' as well (1971, 207).

Hegemony is thus formed at two levels—the political and the civil. The power of the ruling class is not just centred on the state but exists throughout society: "In reality civil society and the State are one," (Gramsci cited in Thomas 2009, 68). The distinction between civil and political society reproduces the coercion versus consent relationship in spatial terms, with consent lying in the realm of civil society and coercion in the state (Thomas 2009, 167). A hegemonic project, then,

sees the emergence of different norms, values, and ideologies, as well as the creation of different material conditions. It thus expresses the spirit of its time.

The concept of hegemony, for Gramsci, is tied to his concept of the *national popular*. This emerged from his call to centre the needs and concerns of the masses when it came to political organising. The national popular was thus a way of centring the politics of hegemony in the national traditions of a given context, in this case Italy, and to not become detached from the questions and issues that move local politics. Any ruling social force trying to create hegemony had to take on a national popular character in order to be a popular force. This process was intricately linked to the formation of hegemony: moving from economic and political interests that were provincial to those that were national; forming a political alliance that was representative; and focusing on the nationalist battle for hegemony even while internationalism and regionalism remained important. We thus see that hegemony and nationalism come together for Gramsci in this concept. This is important in the Egyptian context, as well, although it is anticolonial nationalism and its particularities that emerge as crucial.

Nasserism became hegemonic for various reasons: partly because of the specific historical conjuncture during which it emerged—that of decolonisation, which I return to later—and partly because the Nasserist project mobilised ideas and implemented material changes that spoke to the dominant consciousness of the time: anti-colonial nationalism. Recall that hegemony does not imply the absence of coercion, or even lower levels of coercion; for many groups, the Nasserist ruling class was heavily dependent on coercion. Instead, hegemony signals the presence of high levels of consent that do the political work of legitimising forms of coercion that co-exist alongside it. In the case of Egypt, it is only when consent was produced as a counterbalance that we see the presence of hegemony.

The Nasserist project, formed in the early 1950s, was led by the Free Officers who were initially a nationalist movement, made up of different trends including the Muslim Brotherhood, the Wafdists and the Communists (Botman 1986, 350). It was in 1949 that Nasser established the

'founding committee' of the Free Officers' movement, initially composed of eight men who met to discuss what kind of political action was needed in Egypt: Nasser, Abdel Mon'im Abdel Ra'uf Kemal al-Din Hussein, Khalid Mohieddin Abdel Hakim Amer, Salah Salem, Hassan Ibrahim, and Abdel Latif al-Boghdadi. In the early 1950s, the first Free Officer pamphlets were printed, stating that the goals of the movement were to bring an end to British imperialism, palace and government corruption, feudalism, and to tackle the Palestine question.

On July 23 1952, a mere three years after the Free Officers were formed, Anwar el Sadat announced to the nation that a coup had taken place, and an outpouring of national support followed. Military bases and installations, the national broadcasting station, and the Suez Canal were seized. In his book outlining the goals of the revolution, Nasser emphasised the destructive British presence in the Suez Canal, the destruction of imperialism and feudalism, the establishment of social justice, and the establishing of a democratic system (1954, 6-7). The road to an actual hegemonic project being created, however, was rocky. Some of the groups that had supported the Officers were side-lined and dealt with through coercion, such as the Muslim Brotherhood,[xiii] while others, like the Egyptian communist movement, were approached through a mixture of consent and coercion. In the early days of their time in power, there were major disagreements among the Officers as to how they should build a 'new Egypt.' While there may have been broad consensus around state-led development and anti-colonialism, there was equally broad disagreement over how these should be achieved. For instance, there were intense debates around questions of land reform, and the extent to which it should take place, as well as over democracy and political space, with some arguing that there needed to be limits on democratic politics and others pushing for democracy right away.[xiv] A particularly acute crisis within the ruling class took place over a power struggle between Nasser and Abdel Hakim Amer, who led the military. By 1961, the two men effectively controlled different aspects of the country, and Amer's downfall was only to come after the 1967 defeat.

The Nasserist project achieved high levels of consent, I argue, in several ways. Some of these are not the result of any political work they did themselves; as they were able to mobilise certain ideologies and energies that pre-dated them, and also emerged during a historical moment in which the question of anti-colonialism was dominant. In other ways, the ruling class did contribute to these levels of consent; they did, for example, expend energy into spreading their project through Egyptian civil society, be it through popular media such as *Voice of the Arabs*, or through their transformation of Egypt's educational system. Indeed it is difficult to think of a sphere within civil society[xv] (defined in a broad Gramscian sense) that the Officers did not intervene in. Because of the complexity behind the creation of consent under Nasserism, we are precluded from any simple dismissal of Egyptians as either having been duped by Nasser or as having been repressed into acquiescing to Nasserism. Egyptians rearticulated the ideological and material tenets of the Nasserist project in complex ways, making them their own.[xvi]

This everyday politics of hegemony cannot be easily side-stepped, and should be central to how we understand the Nasserist project and its afterlives, which were to last for decades to come. In a rich ethnography of the workers that built the Aswan Dam—one of Nasser's major infrastructural projects—Alia Mossallam notes how poetry and songs in support of Nasser and the revolution that were created and shared by people during this period cannot be understood straightforwardly as propaganda, as this would assume that people were simply manipulated. Rather, people engaged with and critiqued these cultural forms, and because people related to the broader struggle, they were willing to sacrifice for it. Workers essentially rearticulated the values put forward by the hegemonic project and through this process made them their own (2012, 130). In building the dam, workers were aware of the stakes: this was a nationalist project that was central to how Egypt would be perceived globally: "International politics became a realm of the everyday. In working on the dam, its builders believed they were chipping away at imperialism, building the history of a new nation and inscribing themselves into it," (2012, 131). Workers

described themselves as having been mobilised—not conscripted—precisely because they wanted to feel part of this new project, and new country (2012, 143).

Beyond ideologies, however, there is another reason for the hegemony of the Nasserist project, and that is its materiality. The dismantling of the landed elite, the land reform program, the introduction of free education and healthcare, and the guarantee of employment after graduation, were some of the material changes put in place by the Nasserist project. None of these are beyond critique, and they still relied on the reproduction of capitalist development. At the same time, they transformed the ability of many Egyptians to access social services and social mobility. Also falling under material shifts are the major infrastructural projects the Nasserist ruling class embarked on, including the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and the building of the High Dam. These infrastructural projects spoke directly to the Egyptian population, again through their connections to nationalism, independence, and independent economic development.

Here it is useful to turn to Fanon, as he directs our attention to the *international* context within which Nasserism was produced and reproduced. I posit that hegemony and its establishment are always already international, but that the international was very much colonial and structured to reproduce dependency. Reading Nasserism's interventions in the international politics of the mid-twentieth century is another way of casting doubt on the simple narrative that reads Nasserism as purely dependent and as incapable of interrupting colonial and capitalist structures. From the infrastructural projects of modernisation to the Suez crisis, Nasserism repeatedly posed a challenge, however small, to the colonial international, even while simultaneously upholding some of its key tenets. It is this complexity, in all of its contradictions, that are of particular interest.

Hegemony in the colony/postcolony

In his book *Dominance without Hegemony*, Ranajit Guha argues that postcolonial societies differ from nations that were former colonial powers because of their position in the global system (1997). Understanding the limitations faced by local elites during colonial times allows us to acknowledge that colonial rule was based on dominance and coercion rather than consent; in the colony hegemony did not and could not have existed because consent was outweighed by coercion. The ramifications of this are immense because of Gramsci's core assumption that hegemony can only exist if both civil and political society are incorporated into the hegemonic project. As Guha notes in the case of India, because there was no hegemony, the state—by extension—could not assimilate civil society to itself. Moreover, the Indian bourgeoisie was incapable of speaking for or representing the Indian nation, and thus their attempt at creating hegemony was never able to incorporate all aspects of social, cultural, political and economic life. While Guha accepts that there is domination and subordination, he argues that the "organic composition of power is dependent on a host of factors and their combinations, circumstantial as well as structural," (Guha 1997, 22) and that in the postcolonial context, coercion is key:

> It is clear that coercion comes before persuasion and all other elements. This precedence accrues to it by the logic of colonial state formation. For there can be no colonialism without coercion, no subjugation of an entire people in its own homeland by foreigners without the explicit use of force. Coercion prevails in domination as its crucial defining element. For that power had established itself initially by an act of conquest (1997, 24).

Siba Grovogui makes a similar point, stating that the context for consent in the postcolony was an "unparalleled machinery of coercion," (2011, 180). The colonial state could never be hegemonic in the sense of persuasion dominating coercion. Colonial states by definition are first established through coercion and violence, even if institutions are later constructed to create consent among specific segments of the population. Indigenous leaders through which colonial rule is constructed

are always in a complicit relationship with imperialism and thus—through a series of processes—become isolated from vast segments of society. This is precisely why, Guha argues, they are unable to create a fully hegemonic system.

The reasons for this are multiple. One is the extreme violence of colonisation, both subjective and material, and the intense reliance on force, military power and policing to extract natural resources, wage war, and order populations. Another is the inability of colonial powers to spread their normative cultural ideals outside of particular classes, mostly located in urban centres. While some segments of society may have consented through internalising the norms, ideals and values of empire—for instance intellectuals such as the modernist reformers of Egypt in the early 20th century—this does not successfully pierce the whole of civil society to an extent that would allow for the creation of hegemony. We see then both the presence of extreme coercion alongside the inability to create widespread consent. The question that then naturally arises is: what happens when these nations become independent? Can internal hegemony be created, now that these nations are governed by indigenous ruling classes?

Fanon argues that this is difficult, if not impossible. For Fanon, the local postcolonial bourgeoisie can never attain full, meaningful independence following the end of colonial rule: "This bourgeoisie will manage to put away enough money to stiffen its domination. But it will always reveal itself as incapable of giving birth to an authentic bourgeois society with all the economic and industrial consequences which this entails," (1963, 17). Fanon's work traces the emergence of a dependent bourgeoisie in newly-independent nations as a sign of continuing subservience to imperial rule. Because this bourgeoisie must answer to global capital rather than to social forces within its own society, radical movements within these societies are constrained in their ability to bargain with capital and the state elite more broadly. This political position stems from the fact that this class is reliant on foreign rents rather than investing in productive activities; in other words, it continues to be economically dependent even after colonialism official ends:

> The national bourgeoisie, which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime, is an underdeveloped bourgeoisie. The national bourgeoisie is not geared to production, invention, creation, or work. All its energy is channelled into intermediary activities. The national bourgeoisie has the psychology of a businessman, not that of a captain of industry (1963, 98).

This psychology, as Fanon calls it, dramatically affects the extent to which newly-independent nations can change patterns of investment. He goes on to write:

> The national economy of the period of independence is not set on a new footing. It is still concerned with the ground-nut harvest, with the cocoa crop and the olive yield. In the same way there is no change in the marketing of basic products, and not a single industry is set up in the country. We go on sending out raw materials; we go on being Europe's small farmers who specialize in unfinished products (1963, 151).

It is useful to note, however, that where Fanon generalises across colonised countries in Africa, there are distinctions that should be made in terms of the development of the bourgeoisie itself. Recall Amilcar Cabral's work here on Guinea Bissau, where he points to the presence of only a petty bourgeoisie, rather than a national bourgeoisie.[xvii] Where a petty bourgeoisie is largely incapable of any type of meaningful economic development, as Fanon notes, a national bourgeoisie occupies a slightly different place within global capital and is thus more able to play a leading role post-independence. In both instances, the bourgeoisie—petty or otherwise—reproduces some form of colonial modernity; the question is to what extent. This ultimately matters because, as I argue in the next section, where the petty bourgeoisie is incapable of creating hegemony, the national bourgeoisie—as we saw in various African countries—is conversely capable of and at times successful at this.

In a sense, Fanon provides a more extensive version of the Marxist notion of a ruling class—this is where we see his call to 'stretch Marxism' in action. For both Guha and Fanon, the situation

of the colony and postcolony is different from the metropole because the local bourgeoisie has been created through different historical processes. Because of its dependency on colonial powers, it is unable to play the role the bourgeoisie in the metropole plays. At the same time, the violence of the colonisation process itself prevents any form of meaningful consent from being created. This renders the colonial moment one of domination, rather than hegemony.

Anti-colonialism and hegemony

If colonialism precluded the creation of hegemony in Egypt pre-1952, anti-colonialism was to—largely—make hegemony possible post-1952. The Nasserist project, formed in the early 1950s, was built on the pre-existing energies of anticolonialism. Rather than nationalist sentiment acting as a backdrop in the formation of this project, it was precisely its condition of emergence. Nasser and the Free Officers created a project around nationalist goals that had already been created and popularised by various social movements that came before them. Egypt pre-1952 was bursting with anti-colonial activity, and the failure of the Wafd—Egypt's first nationalist and primarily liberal political party—to achieve meaningful independence set the stage for the more radical project led by Nasser and the Officers. Nasserism, then, owed its hegemony to the anticolonial moment—a moment that was both national and international.

The moment of decolonisation took the world by storm, and should be understood as one of the most pivotal moments of the twentieth century. Vivienne Jabri argues that we should understand and contextualise the politics of newly-independent nations as attempt to "access the international": "In its role in both accumulation and the establishment of legitimacy, the postcolonial state is an interventionist state: it seeks to construct a hegemonic structure that functions to legitimize a political economy of development; it builds a state apparatus geared for planning as well as the mobilization and management of national resources; it negotiates its role as allocator with the demands of a modern sector that seeks its own stakes in the developmental

economy," (2012, 102). However, this is always done vis-à-vis the international; it is this tension that mediates anything and everything the postcolonial state does. Similarly, Adom Getachew argues that we should contextualise anticolonial nationalism within the historical conditions of its emergence and understand it as always-already internationalist (2019).

Hegemony in the postcolony—just as in the colony—is thus always and already international in its being mediated through global politics. However, because the international has been created in and through empire, hegemony is always already tied to histories of imperial rule. Following the Subaltern Studies view that hegemony could not exist under colonialism, and where Fanon argues that the first ruling class to emerge after independence could not be hegemonic, I instead trouble this by suggesting that while Egypt under British colonial rule was not subject to hegemonic rule, Egypt's first post-independence ruling class was. This not only reveals the connections between hegemony, colonialism, and the international, but also shows why hegemony remains a valuable concept in analysing postcolonial contexts. This hegemony, however, was largely dependent on anticolonialism, both local and global.

Nasserism's connections to both internationalist and regional movements is part of the story of the hegemonic project that was built. Pan-Arabism, pan-Africanism and Arab socialism created crucial forms of transnational solidarity and positioned Egypt as an important hub within the new formation of post-independence nation states. What is interesting is the way in which Arab socialism as well as pan-Arabism and pan-Africanism carried out the political work of creating consent within Egypt's new ruling class; within Egyptian society; and both regionally and internationally. These ideologies of postcolonial solidarity are central to the hegemony created under Nasser, as well as to the creation of material connections between Egypt and other decolonising nations.

Built on specific ideas of geographical connectivity, these ideologies were much more about a shared goal of anticolonialism and the desire for a new global order. It was through Arab socialism in particular that Nasser was able to create an ideological consensus within the Free

Officers and the broader ruling class. Although some Officers disagreed with how far socialist policies should go (including Nasser), the ideological components of Arab socialism formed a common language that connected them and worked as consent. Pan-Arabism similarly allowed Nasserism to expand beyond Egypt, both in terms of ideology—the way Egyptian Arabic became hegemonic across the Arabic-speaking world; the popularity of Egyptian film, literature, and music; and the centrality of Egyptian cultural forms more generally—but also in terms of geopolitical power. The failed union with Syria and Egypt's disastrous intervention in Yemen—which stifled Yemen's own quest for independence under the rubric of 'Pan-Arabism'—highlight the ways in which Nasserist hegemony operated locally, regionally and internationally.

Indeed it is useful to point to the ways in which anticolonialism as a global ideology inadvertently allowed for states, such as the Nasserist state, to amass power and reproduce colonial modes of governing. This is where it becomes pertinent that we distinguish within anticolonialism itself, in order to draw out the radical movement-centred versions on one end of the spectrum and the state-led versions on the other. Where Nasserism as a project reproduced multiple forms of coercion, it was largely able to do so by constantly invoking more radical forms of anticolonial ideology in reference to its project. This is precisely because of its reliance on the radical movements that preceded independence, movements that mobilised anticolonialism in different ways but that all centred the question of nationalism and independence. Inadvertently, Nasserism was thus able to build on this while ultimately delivering a project that continued to reproduce particular forms of inequality as well as one that reproduced large amounts of social violence.

The success of Nasserism as a political project was also connected to the strength of the socialist imaginary of the 1950s and 1960s. As David Scott writes, "Socialism was the name of a variously configured oppositional idea of political community defined largely in terms of anti-imperialism, national self-determination, and anti-capitalism," (1999, 11). These ideologies and movements were a product of a very particular historical moment—referred to as the Bandung Era by Samir Amin (Scott 1999, 11)—and this goes some way in explaining the weakness of the

ideologies produced by ruling classes that came after Nasser. At the same time, the Nasserist ruling class clearly understood the importance of (seemingly) clear ideologies that could capture widespread sentiments, ideals and values, and that could be used to push forward a new hegemonic project at the national level.

Within Egypt, and beyond the ruling class, Arab socialism united the Egyptian public by functioning as an ideological vessel in which anticolonialism, nationalism, and independent development came together. Although there are extensive debates around whether Nasserism was truly a socialist project, what matters more is that it was able to act as a unifying ideology despite this and despite the contradictions it contained. Just as with pan-Arabism and pan-Africanism, the varying meanings contained within these broad ideological projects did not mean that they could not do the important political work of bringing people together under the banner of anticolonialism.

From workers to students, from feminists to liberals, anticolonial nationalism was central to the mobilisation we see in contexts such as Egypt before independence. For many active within these movements, nationalism was intricately connected to other causes such as anti-capitalism or feminism. Because independence was the most important political, economic and social goal, nationalism was part and parcel of many movements. This reveals why the Nasserist project was able to extend its hegemony so quickly and thoroughly. The Nasserist project was both new and old: a continuation of radical anticolonial energies through the formation of a state-led political project that centred anticolonialism.

The hegemony of the Nasserist project cannot be explained simply through its ideological pronouncements, but was also a result of the appeal these had with the broader population, as well as the tangible material shifts that were felt by many. As Mossallam writes, "Nasser's ideas were hegemonic because people could relate to them and they answered a desire for freedom and growth," (2012, 170). The power of anticolonial nationalism was precisely its ability to unify across parts of society in ways that produced strong levels of consent. By cultivating particular notions

of the nation, development, freedom and futurity, Nasserism was a project that spoke to many despite differences in how people understood themselves, their position within the nation, and the path national development should take. On top of this, the tangible material changes people experienced as a result of the project are no small matter: Egypt's political economy altered during this period in ways that suggest a deeper analysis of Nasserism is important.

It is here that the ingenuity of the Nasserist project surfaces: it promised something new, by building on energies that had been building for a long time. To do this, it used the same language, discourses and ideas that many Egyptians had already become familiar with; it also put in place material projects that Egyptians had been calling for, such as nationalisation and industrialisation. Thus the Nasserist project was old and new; it was made up of the past, but promised a different future. The tragedy, of course, is that even though it was a continuation of these radical energies, it also betrayed them by both falling short of their radical goals as well as unleashing tremendous social violence in order to rule. What we see, in the end, is a project that embraced capitalism within state-defined limits, rather than anti-capitalism or socialism; state control over public space, rather than democracy; and the co-optation of many movements, rather than ruling alongside them.

Conclusion

This article has posed the question of what it means to think about Egyptian politics in a Gramscian way. I have traced some of the ways in which Gramsci's concept of hegemony stretches when it encounters the postcolonial context of Egypt. The first is through understanding the impossibility of hegemony in the colony; the second through highlighting how resistance to colonialism is what produced the possibility of hegemony in the postcolony. This encounter produces various forms of entanglements, above all with racial capitalism, (post)colonialism, and

anticolonialism. These entanglements highlight the richness of the concept of hegemony itself, as they show how it continues to provide a productive frame as it travels.

In Egypt, the absence and then presence of hegemony can only be understood in relation to colonialism, past and present, and the particular forms of racial capitalism it produces. The ways in which colonies were incorporated into the world capitalist system entailed extreme amounts of violence that precluded the creation of consent, legitimacy or widespread support. The birth of postcolonial nations similarly included massive amounts of violence—the aftershocks of which continue to reverberate with us today. The tragedy of colonialism, then, is not only its existence, but its production of forms of resistance that were then mobilised for projects that continued rather than disrupted colonial violence, structures, and lifeworlds. This is not to lessen the very real hopes and dreams millions of people invested in anticolonialism, and the very tangible effects this had for many, including millions of people within Egypt. It is rather to pay tribute to the complexity of that particular historical moment, and everything that was made possible, and impossible, by the brief opening up of political space globally.

I have understood Egypt's differential position within the global political economy as producing theoretical entanglements for a concept such as hegemony, which was so clearly thought of and understood in relation to the context of Italy at a certain historical moment. While Gramsci was sympathetic to questions of colonialism, colonial capitalism, and anti-colonial resistance, as shown in some of his writing, and while his positionality within what he called an 'internal colony' may have led him to pay more attention to colonialism more broadly, the fact remains that hegemony as imagined by Gramsci does not centre colonial capitalism and anti-colonial struggle. This article is a contribution to thinking with Gramsci in the postcolony, even as Nasserism does not stand in for all other postcolonial projects, although similarities abound. Reading Nasserism through hegemony not only unpacks some of the entanglements of hegemony in the postcolony, but also provides an invigorating lens through which to understand the power and legacies of Nasserism as a political project. Indeed what better expresses the decline of Nasserism than

Gramsci's famous adage: "The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear," (1971, 276).

Biographical note

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[i] *Anticolonial Afterlives in Egypt,* forthcoming with Cambridge University Press, 2020.
[ii] For more on hegemony as a global concept, see Morton 2007.
[iii] As Morton has written, this would be an uncritical form of travelling theory.
[iv] Gramsci wrote extensively on Southernism and the particular problems Southern Italy faced that were similar to the problems faced by formal colonies in other places. "Italy presents itself as a case study for understanding the colonial relationship, both in international terms—as having been both subject to external powers and a colonising power itself—and in domestic terms—as the dominance of the North over the South," (Srivastava and Bhattacharya 2012, 4-5).
[v] Given the tense relationship between postcolonial theory and Marxism at certain junctures, the popularity of Gramsci is even more indicative of his potential in analysing postcolonial contexts. For more on this relationship see: Lazarus 2011; Rao 2016.
[vi] For a well-known critique of the ways in which postcolonial scholars use Gramsci, see Brennan 2001.
[vii] In particular, Gramsci's writings on India and British colonialism, on Southernism and on Italian imperialism demonstrate the importance he gives to colonialism and global politics.
[viii] For more see: Srivastava and Bhattacharya 2012, 3; Brennan 2001, 159.
[ix] I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer who brought this quote to my attention.
[x] Similarly, Morton has pointed to Gramsci's sensitivity to dependency and the national/international as reason for why we should think of his concepts as global (2007).
[xi] As Peter Thomas notes, hegemony was initially a theory to theorise and guide the proletariat in allying itself with other subaltern groups; it was Gramsci's usage of the concept to analyse bourgeois power that was his most unique contribution to the concept (Thomas 2009, 60).
[xii] A special thanks to Brecht de Smet who encouraged me to think of coercion-consent in this sense.
[xiii] See: Kandil 2014.
[xiv] Muhammad Naguib in particular, officially president of Egypt, favoured a liberal democratic approach that did not include banning parties or removing people from office. What was controversial about this, according to other Officers such as Nasser, was that it allowed too much political space through which colonial powers could infiltrate and influence Egyptian politics. A clear power struggle emerged between Naguib and Nasser, who came to represent these opposite poles. Naguib was eventually removed from power.
[xv] Civil society, for Gramsci, constitutes schools, religious institutions, journals, clubs, political parties and other such social institutions, whereas political society refers to formal public institutions such as the government, police, military, and courtrooms.
[xvi] For excellent work that looks at this, see Mossallam 2012.
[xvii] I want to thank Zeyad el-Nabolsy for pointing this out.