

Antonio gramsci and theodor adorno concepts of the social world



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Which of these theorists - Antonio Gramsci or Theodor Adorno - provides greater insight into the nature of the social world in which we live.

This essay chooses to discuss key concepts from both Antonio Gramsci and Theodor Adorno. Additionally, Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" and "invisible power" will be critically analysed. As well as that, Adorno key ideologies of "The Dialectic Enlightenment" and "the culture industry", will also be critically analysed. However this essay will discuss how Gramsci provides a better insight into the nature of the social world in which we live, through his key concepts of hegemony, an example of same sex marriage in the USA will be used.

Gramsci provides an insight into the nature of the social world in which we live, through his key concepts of hegemony. Firstly, Urbinati (1998) argued that, Gramsci's idea of "coercion and consent" was the starting point of Gramsci's concept of "hegemony". More so, it is suggested that, Gramsci was one of the most influential Marxist theorists of the twentieth century and was notable for the development of hegemony, which is still relevant in modern society. According to O'Donnell (2000), Gramsci "shifted Marxism theory" in the "direction of culture and ideological analysis". Also, it is suggested that, Gramsci derived "the concept of cultural hegemony" from Karl Marx's theory, which addressed the "dominant ideology of society" reflects the beliefs and interests of the ruling class. However, Gramsci realized that there was more to the dominance of capitalism than the class structure and its exploitation of workers. As a result, Gramsci introduced the term hegemony, which is defined as

Smith (1991) defined the term hegemony as when:

“ Class and its representatives exercise power over subordinate classes by means of a combination of coercion and persuasion” (Simon, 1991) pg 13

Meanwhile, Share, Corcoran & Conway (2012), all agreed that, hegemony was developed to “ explore how dominant groups in society could intellectually and culturally dominate others”. Similarly, Relifer (2015) described “ hegemony” as “ invisible power”. Others quoted that, “ hegemony is power exercised with consent”. In the same way, Gramsci (1971) strongly believed that, power also lies in the ability to “ influence and shape the perceptions” of the lower classes, while convincing them either of the “ legitimacy of the system itself or of futility of resistance.” Gramsci (1971) believed that, this “ invisible power” was practiced in Marx’s idea of capitalism, where the dominant class (bourgeoisie), were able to change society’s way of making sense of the world. Mark (2007) likewise stated that, Gramsci changes hegemony from a “ strategy into a concept” is a tool for understanding society, in order to change it

Gramsci was the first to introduce the term “ hegemony”. According to Gramsci (1995) “ all men are intellectuals, one could therefore say, but not all men have the function of intellectuals”. Pound (1982) believed that, for hegemony to work, “ intellectuals” will be needed. For Gramsci, intellectuals are a broader group of social agents. They are extremely valuable to hegemony’s exercise of power, as they spread and generate “ the hegemonic ideology” of the dominant group. Storey (1994) suggested that, they help in manufacturing “ consent and construction of common sense”.

<https://assignbuster.com/antonio-gramsci-and-theodor-adorno-concepts-of-the-social-world/>

Gramsci (1995) suggested that, intellectuals can either be traditional or organic.

According to Gramsci, the role of organic intellectuals, comes from their position in society, “ which unifies their subjective and objective class consciousness, through the philosophy of praxis” (Mahutga & Norris 2007). For Gramsci, organic intellectuals are the dominant group’s agents exercising the “ subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government.” Their role in society includes organizing, administering, directing, educating or leading others.” Micheal (2017) suggested that organic intellectuals are part of a dominant class that speak for that class’s interests. They try to win people over to “ counter-hegemonic ideas” and organizations. In other words, organic intellectuals are special individuals who give a voice to those who need one and can inspire a group of people to fight for something worth fighting. For example, Kendrick Lamar is a modern day example of an organic intellectual. Lamar makes music that connects with his community of people and beyond. He is truly a once in a lifetime talent that uses his platform to draw attention to various social issues (Micheal, 2017).

On the other hand, Gramsci (1995) stated that “ traditional intellectuals” are those intellectuals associated with tradition and the past. Storey (1994) suggested that, these intellectuals are not directly connected to the economic structure of society, however, instead traditional intellectuals symbolize historical continuity and their function is to maintain this continuity. They are involved in the actual making of values through action and struggle. Michael (2017) argued that, traditional intellectuals consists of <https://assignbuster.com/antonio-gramsci-and-theodor-adorno-concepts-of-the-social-world/>

lawyers, teachers and doctors. Gramsci suggested that, traditional intellectuals are part of the institutions that reinforce the current hegemonic order. These institutions include universities, think tanks, the news media, and state employees. Unlike, organic intellectuals who seek to win consent to “ counter-hegemonic ideas and ambitions”.

Theodor Adorno also provides insight into the nature of the social world in which we live, through his key concepts. Unlike Gramsci, Theodor Adorno concepts were based Weber’s understanding of “ instrumental rationality”. According to Mueller (1979), “ Instrumental rationality” means doing whatever it takes to achieve a goal, as long as it aids with your “ ultimate objective”. Mueller claimed that, this type of rationality was in contrast to objective and autonomous rationality, which is engaged in the “ examination of values and ascertaining goals”. Similarly Sherratt (1999) added that instrumental rationality has “ freed man from nature” however resulted in violence. In this way, Adorno argued that, in “ Dialectic of Enlightenment”, the rationality of the enlightenment regarded anything, “ people included” as an “ alienated objects” to be used and controlled.

According to (Ashley 2005), Adorno stressed “ the Enlightenment era of human progress and liberation has become flawed because of the way it was being perused”. According to Hassan (2009), the introduction to the enlightenment was an attempt to analyse why humanity has “ sunk into a new kind of barbarism” instead of shifting into a “ new state of human condition”. Similarly, Moore (2010) suggested that, this moving away from nature has resulted a state where the “ principle of oppression has taken overall of human life”. Adorno (1979) believed that this oppression is <https://assignbuster.com/antonio-gramsci-and-theodor-adorno-concepts-of-the-social-world/>

revealed through “ human rationality”, which has created “ a one track mind” designed for “ subduing and exploiting nature, in which humans are included. In contrast to Gramsci, Adorno (1997) believed that “ administered society is to promise the freedom of individuality while simultaneously prohibiting it”. Similarly, Sherratt (1999) suggested that, “ the dialectic of enlightenment” encourages conformity and erases any heterogeneity. However, this is similar to Gramsci concept of hegemony, where organic intellectuals try and get people to join their “ hegemonic ideas and ambitions”. By doing this they encourage conformity and aid in erasing heterogeneity.

In addition, Adorno (1991) created the term “ culture industry” to label how “ popular culture” in the capitalist society are similar to industry in producing “ standardized products which produce standardized people”. Additionally, Adorno (1991) stated that, this “ popular culture” is displayed a “ refuge and distraction for work”, however instead maintain people in this world of products and consumerism. Likewise, Adorno and Horkheimer (1991) both agreed that culture industry, has changed people into “ passive and subordinated subjects”, who are powerless to fully take serious responsibility for their own action. This is crucial for a “ functioning democracy”. Adorno (1991) argued that as a result, people gladly maintain the system by taking part in it.

In the same way, Adorno quoted that “ amusement has become an extension of labour under late capitalism”. Cummings (2004) proposed that, in modern society people are controlled at work and in their free time.

Adorno added that, although they long to escape the boredom of their place
<https://assignbuster.com/antonio-gramsci-and-theodor-adorno-concepts-of-the-social-world/>

of work, they are simply changing to another piece of the machine. All part of the system of producer to consumer. Adorno emphasised that, there is no chance of “ becoming free individuals”. Instead Adorno stressed that, the only “ freedom” culture industry has to really offer a “ freedom” from thinking.

The final argument purposed by Adorno and Horkheimer suggested that people under capitalism and people with in the culture industry “ suffer the same fate”. Adorno purposed that, these people are forced to the trade value with “ no intrinsic or unique traits” as part of the Enlightenment dream.

In my opinion, Antonino Gramsci provides a greater insight into the nature of the social world we live in. This is displayed through, the theory of hegemony. The theory is particularly useful in understanding the fight for same-sex marriage, as it addresses how a dominant class uses its cultural leadership on other classes to try to maintain their societal position (Gramsci , 1992). In addition, Dean (2012) argued that, “ domination and maintenance of power” by the hegemonic class, strongly influences the subordinate classes to accept the dominant classes values. Dean suggested that, this creates an agreement within society, in which the subordinate class “ identifies what is good for them through the perspective of what is good for the dominant class”. In doing this, Dean (2012) stressed that, the subordinate group establishes a culture of their own, where they establish a distinction between the norms and values of the dominant class (Gramsci, 1992).

American culture believes in the “ ideology” that, marriage should be strictly be between a man and a woman. In relation, to the same sex marriage, “ the hegemonic group” is the heterosexual community. Dean (2012) posed that, the hegemonic group mainly consisted of people with conservative thoughts and religious beliefs. The “ hetero group” accept marriage only between a man and a woman. They believe that this is the “ norm” and everyone else should follow. Nevertheless, Dean (2012) noted that, in the USA when there was an attempt to grant homosexuals the same privilege of marriage, the dominant heterosexual group joined forces to abolish these laws, in order to return the definition of marriage to a heterosexual institution (Nicholson-Crotty 2006). By doing this, “ the dominant group” exploited their power through “ state initiatives” and popular vote, in order to maintain their dominant position in the institution of marriage. Dean (2012) purposed that,“ hegemonic heterosexual community” norms, values, attitudes, beliefs and moralities have become internalized by the rest of society, they become part of what is generally called “ common sense.” In this sense, Dean suggested that, some “ organizing principle of society” are unchallenged through the “ process of socialization” into every area of daily life.

In conclusion, “ the theory of hegemony” coined by Antonio Gramsci, addresses how a dominant class uses its cultural leadership on other classes to try to maintain their societal position (Gramsci , 1992). In the same way, Gramsci (1971) strongly believed that, power also lies in the ability to “ influence and shape the perceptions” of the lower classes, while convincing them either of the “ legitimacy of the system itself or of futility of resistance.” Gramsci (1971) believed that, this “ invisible power” was

practiced in Marx's idea of capitalism, where the dominant class (bourgeoisie), were able to change society's way of making sense of the world. However, for hegemony to work organic and traditional intellectuals are needed. Micheal (2017) suggested that, the purpose of organic intellectuals were to try to win people over to "counter-hegemonic ideas" and organizations. Meanwhile, traditional intellectuals are described by Storey (1994) as people that are part of the institutions that reinforce the current hegemonic order. On the other hand, Theodor Adorno concepts were based Weber's understanding of "instrumental rationality", which according to Mueller (1979), meant doing whatever it takes as long as it aids with your "ultimate objective". Adorno also introduced the term "The Dialectic of Enlightenment". Similarly, Sherratt (1999) suggested that, "the dialectic of enlightenment" encourages conformity and erases any heterogeneity. However, this is similar to Gramsci concept of hegemony, where organic intellectuals try and get people to join their "hegemonic ideas and ambitions". By doing this they encourage conformity and aid in erasing heterogeneity. Finally, Adorno (1991) created the term "culture industry" to label how "popular culture" in the capitalist society are similar to industry in producing "standardized products which produce standardized people". In short, Adorno and Horkheimer (1991) suggested that people under capitalism and people within the culture industry "suffer the same fate". Adorno purposed that, these people are forced to the trade value with "no intrinsic or unique traits" as part of the Enlightenment dream.

To conclude, Antonino Gramsci provides a greater insight into the nature of the social world we live in. This is displayed through, the theory of

hegemony. The theory is particularly useful in understanding the fight for same-sex marriage, as it addresses how a dominant class uses its cultural leadership on other classes to try to maintain their societal position (Gramsci , 1992). Additionally, Dean (2012) purposed that, in the USA “ hegemonic heterosexual community” norms, values, attitudes, beliefs and moralities have become internalized by the rest of society, they become part of what is generally called “ common sense.” In other words, hegemony still persists in modern society. In short, Gramsci provides a better insight into the nature of the social world in which we live, through his key concepts of hegemony

Bibliography

- Adorno, Theodor W. and J. M. Bernstein. 1991. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* . London: Routledge.
- Cumming, J. (2004). The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception (1944). *German Essays on Film*, , 169-180.
- Dean, L. (2012). The struggle for legitimacy of same-sex marriage and public opinion of same-sex marriage.
- Durham, Meenakshi Gigi. and Douglas Kellner. 2012. *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* . Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Fotanna , B. 1993. “ Hegemony and Power: on the Relation between Gramsci and Machiavelli.” *Choice Reviews Online* 31(08).
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. 1979. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorono* . N. Y.: Seabury Press.

- Mark C. J. Stoddart. (2007). Ideology, hegemony, discourse: A critical review of theories of knowledge and power. *Social Thought & Research, 28* , 191-225.
- Micheal , J. 2017. " Organic vs Traditional Intellectuals." *Theory Hunter* . Retrieved December 6, 2018 (<http://jallred.net/wordpress/306/2017/10/16/organic-vs-traditional-intellectuals/>).
- Moore, Alison. 2010. " Sadean Nature and Reasoned Morality in Adorno/HorkheimersDialectic of Enlightenment." *Psychology and Sexuality* 1(3): 250-61.
- Mueller, G. H. 1979. " The Notion of Rationality in the Work of Max Weber." *European Journal of Sociology* 20(01): 149.
- Pound, D. W. (1982). Hegemony and revolution: Antonio gramsci's political and cultural theory Southern Political Science Association.
- Reifer, Thomas. 2015. " Globalization, Hegemony and Power." *Antisystemic Movements and the Global System* .
- Share, P. Corcoran, M and Conway, B. 2012. *Sociology of Ireland* . Dublin: Gill & Macmillan: Pp 158, 292.
- Sherratt, Yvonne. 1999. " The Dialectic of Enlightenment: a Contemporary Reading." *History of the Human Sciences* 12(3): 35-54.
- Storey, John. 1995. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: a Reader* . New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.