Whatever happened to Coercion? A Gramscian Critique of Metagovernance Theory

Interrogating Urban Crisis: Governance, Contestation and Critique

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**Abstract**

Metagovernance theory sought to correct the bias against state power in network governance theories. However, a review of three prominent metagovernance perspectives shows that none adequately accounts for the persistence of coercion in the governing system. Based on a re-reading of Gramsci's conception of the historical bloc, the paper calls for a new focus on coercion in governance studies, arguing that it is integral to state power under capitalism. The paper distinguishes different forms of hegemonic and coercive rule and recapitulates the relationship between hierarchy, market, network and coercion so as to eliminate the analytical bias against coercion that typifies contemporary governance theory.

**Keywords:** coercion, Gramsci, hierarchy, Marx, metagovernance, state
Introduction

This paper restates the centrality of coercion in the governance system. For a generation, theorists have been preoccupied with the critique of rationalism and structuralism, advancing relational modes of inquiry focusing especially on networks. However, the rise of network-centred theories provoked controversy, not least about the role of the state. In Bevir’s and Rhodes’ (2010) genealogy, ‘first-wave’ theorists elaborating a de-centred account of the state were quickly contradicted by a ‘second-wave’ bringing the state back as metagovernor. In the hands of exponents like Jessop (2000, 2004), and Marsh (2011) metagovernance theory seeks to correct the anti-state bias, characteristic of what Marsh called the new ‘orthodoxy’ of network governance. This paper argues that nevertheless, metagovernance theory elides a central component of state power, coercion. It therefore genuflects excessively to the network-centric perspectives it sets out to critique.

The paper begins by reviewing three prominent accounts of metagovernance; the post-structuralist view developed by Sørensen and colleagues (Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen, 2011), the Gramsci-influenced approach associated with Jessop and Marsh, and the Foucauldian approaches of Bang (2011) and Graham (2010). It shows that whereas the former moves towards conflating hierarchy/coercion with network and the second confines hierarchy/coercion to the shadows, the third sees threat and coercion as pervasive but lacks the conceptual tools to incorporate them into a metagovernance framework. None, furthermore, develops an adequate distinction between hierarchy as a form of hegemonic project, and domination as direct coercion.

Drawing on Gramsci, the second part of the paper develops a theoretical framework for understanding the centrality of coercion in the governance system. The starting point for this endeavour is a distinction between the concepts of ‘ensemble’ and ‘dialectical totality’,
embodied in Gramsci’s (1971) reflections on the ‘historical bloc’. For Gramsci, capitalism is simultaneously ‘totalising’ in two senses; it is compelled to expand, enveloping ever-greater swathes of space-time to sustain accumulation, and its leaders seek political dominance through the organisation of hegemony. However, the historical bloc is prone to sundering by crisis-tendencies in capitalism. In this ‘strongly dialectical’ account, order is precarious and state-organised coercion an enduring condition of rule.

The third part of the paper develops a simple heuristic for reincorporating direct coercion into governance studies. It illustrates varieties of hegemony and varieties of coercion, rooted in Gramsci’s distinction between violence, administrative domination and economic compulsion. The paper argues that in empirical governance processes, different coordination mechanisms (hierarchy, market, network) characteristically combine with different modalities and degrees of coercion. The empirical challenge is to elicit configurations, juxtapositions and trajectories in a way that mitigates the current bias against coercion.

**Metagovernance**

Metagovernance theory is distinguished by its attempt to make sense of the changing role of states in an era of proliferating networks and increasingly de-centred structures and institutions. Its central challenge is the notion, in Lash’s words, that social life is no longer organized in accordance with the logic of structures, but rather the logic of flows (Lash, 2002: vii). It reflects on the normative and analytical implications of networks for the technologies of governing and citizenship, but without losing sight of the state.

The following review discusses three influential but distinctive metagovernance perspectives: the post-structuralist account, where metagovernance is one dimension in a
pluricentric system and metagovernors attempt to influence networks in a disordered polity; the critical realist approach, where metagovernance is defined as government + governance, subsists in the shadow of hierarchy and is conceived as a medium of social regulation; and Foucauldian approaches, where metagovernance emerges from webs of discursive and symbolic power, constituting a governmentality of late modernity. The common ground is that each approach pays insufficient attention to coercion.

Pluricentrism: Metagovernance in a Disordered Society

Sørensen (2006) interpreted metagovernance as a practice, a tool for political leaders with diminishing authority in a world of networks. As a set of governing strategies and tactics, it ‘points to the mechanisms that public authority and other resourceful actors can use to initiate and stimulate negotiated self-governance among relevant stakeholders and/or to guide them in a certain direction’ (Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen, 2011: 379). Learning to metagovern allows leaders to harness and derive public good from the world of networks (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009: 255).

According to Bevir and Rhodes (2010), no sooner had the first wave of network theorists de-centred the state than metagovernance theorists, like Sørensen and Torfing, had brought it back in reified form using the tools of neo-institutionalism. Perhaps anticipating this critique, however, Sørensen and Torfing were already moving away from neo-institutionalism towards a more radical interpretivism. They sought to ‘clear the ground for a rethinking of effectivity and democracy in the light of pluricentric forms of governance in which decision making involves a plurality of actors, arenas and processes’ (2009: 256). In developing pluricentric theory, Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen drew from parallel developments in public administration, organisation theory and planning. They found that each has moved away from rationalistic approaches towards pluricentrism via the
intermediate step of neo-institutionalism; itself an influence on metagovernance theory highlighting the increasingly complex challenges of governing networks by fostering shared norms, rules and practices (Lowndes, 2001). In pluricentric theory, metagovernance is one of three governing practices. The others are the self-coordinating activities of networks themselves and the exchange of stories through which ‘temporal moments of shared meaning’ are constructed (Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen, 2011: 388). Pluricentric theory therefore decentres and radicalizes metagovernance. Metagoverning politicians must facilitate, guide and strategically frame ‘the formation and stabilization of coordination within governance networks’ (ibid), in a ‘messy and floating’ world, revolving ‘around interactive arenas that promote communication between a plurality of interpretive logics and situated practises’ (2011; 375). Metagovernors confront ‘competing situated logics that are shaped and reshaped in and through networked coordination processes that promotes the construction of shared meaning and story work’ (2011: 376). In an unstructured world, governance is no longer the search for order by elites; it is rather the ‘construction of possible disorders’ (2011: 385).

Pedersen Sehested and Sørensen do not dispense altogether with hierarchy. Instead, they challenge the binary distinction between hierarchies and networks arguing that ‘vertical and horizontal aspects of coordination processes should be viewed as inseparable and indistinguishable’ (2011: 377-8). The idea that governance is simultaneously hierarchical and networked is valuable and could temper claims about the emergence of networked disorders. However, they argue that hierarchy is itself transformed in pluricentric conditions. State planning is ‘a soft or subtle form of vertical coordination that does not rest on any strict hierarchical forms of regulation but gain impact through the rhetorical act of promoting a specific image of what the city is, where it comes from, and
what its future might be’ (2011; 385). Vertical coordination itself depends on ‘negotiated interaction with multiple actors’. Moreover, ‘there are no clear hierarchies but only complex and floating processes of mutual adjustments in which those who select, facilitate, and create are just as transformed by the process as those who they seek to govern and guide’ (2011: 386). Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen here move towards dissolving hierarchies into networks.

Marsh (2011) argued that although interpretivists posit a contingent and disordered world knowable only through stories (if at all), they are prone to asserting the truth and necessity of the stories. Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen seem to follow this pattern when, in explaining the need for a pluricentric approach, they abruptly switch to the passive-voice and a quasi-rationalist vocabulary of ‘change’. Change, they argue (2011: 389), is ‘not only regarded as an unavoidable condition but also an ambition that manifests itself through a constant call for reform, growth, and innovation in public governance’. But, who regards change as unavoidable? Who is constantly calling for it and why? We are not told how in a disordered pluricentric system such a monotone injunction, from wherever it comes, achieves any authority or efficacy. In addition, it overlooks the authoritarian and coercive practices driving ‘change’ and ‘innovation’ in neoliberalising regimes (Callinicos, 2006: 1-2).

*Metagovernance in the Shadow of Hierarchy*

Critical realists influenced by regulation-theoretical and Gramscian approaches are, typically, more cautious about the advance of networks. As Bevir and Rhodes highlighted, they restate the role of the state, conceived as an institutional complex, heterogeneous ensemble or social structure constituting and sustaining a world of enduring power asymmetries (Jessop, 2004; Marsh, 2011). Metagovernance is part of the attempt to ‘forge and sustain a “successful” political project and scalar fix’ (MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999:
In contrast with Bevir and Rhodes, who dismissed it as a form of ‘modernist empiricism’, MacLeod (2001: 1153) criticized the influence of ‘soft institutionalism’ in governance theory for the opposite mistake; excessively de-centring power and taking ‘non-exploitative horizontal relations of networking and reciprocity’ for granted. State power is therefore crucial in critical realist accounts of metagovernance. Marsh, for example, describes it as ‘collibration’; the selective or strategic adjustment of the mix of hierarchies, markets and networks by metagovernors (2011: 44). Fawcett and Marsh argue, like MacLeod, that the transformation to networks may have been exaggerated. According to Fawcett (2009: 57, cited in Marsh, 2011: 45):

Metagovernance therefore not only indicates a continued role for the state in the regulation of self-regulating governance networks, but it also casts doubt on the view that the vertical hierarchies of the old social structures of the state have been replaced or subsumed by such networks.

Nevertheless, critical-realist accounts genuflect to the rise of networks. Jessop, perhaps the most influential exponent, argued that ‘the state is no longer the sovereign authority’. It is ‘less hierarchical, less centralised, less dirigiste’ (2000: 24). In developing metagovernance theory, Jessop drew on Gramsci’s theory of the integral state (discussed further below). In his reading, the concept emphasises the limits of ‘imperative coordination’ (the command state) and the role of discourses, ideologies and soft technologies such as cultivating trust-based networks, in securing hegemony. He accordingly defined metagovernance as ‘the governance of government plus governance’ (2000: 23) and as ‘governance in the shadow of hierarchy’ (0204: 52), where coercion is held in reserve against the collapse of hegemony. Arguably, he moves towards assimilating the network-theoretical trope of ‘government at a distance’ to the concept of metagovernance
in the ‘shadow of hierarchy’. Tellingly, Jessop sees metagovernance as cultivating the conditions for ‘reflexive self-organization’ (2011: 246). As Marsh commented (2011: 44), while metagovernance encompasses many different possible articulations of hierarchy, market and network it tends to stress the rise of networking. Consequently, it pays far less attention to hierarchy and coercion than to cross-sector and multi-level networks.

The concept of ‘the shadow of hierarchy’ is evocative and (with regard for ontological distinctions) complements the Foucauldian ‘politics of threats’ discussed below. However, it muddies the waters by ignoring coercion. The effect, especially in Jessop whose theory of state power (2007) scarcely alludes to it, is that coercion becomes epiphenomenal. As the following discussion illustrates, this is a crucial omission because state and stateAUTHORIZED coercion remains pervasive, perhaps increasingly so. It is therefore necessary to distinguish hierarchy (sovereign authority) and the shadow of hierarchy (threat – see below) from direct coercion and rethink the complex modalities and articulations of hegemonic regulation and force in the governing system.

Foucauldian Metagovernance: Discipline, Control and Threat

For Rose (1999), the imperative to network is part of a new liberal governmentality (perhaps meta-governmentality), urging the state to govern ‘at a distance’ by summoning a ‘plurality of self-regulating actors and networks within an institutional framework ensuring a certain degree of conformity with broadly defined objectives’ (paraphrased in Sørensen and Torfing, 2009: 238). However, there are different ways of governing at a distance. Bang and Esmark (2009: 26) distinguished two governmentalities; discipline and control, based loosely around a distinction between hierarchical and networked modes of regulation. They claimed:
Whereas disciplinary technologies and instruments sought to teach the subject self-discipline in accordance with rigidly prescribed standards of behavior, thought and physical constitution and expression (i.e., command of one’s body, self-limitation, frugality, rejection of animal impulses, etc.), control asks subjects to transgress limitations, to “think outside the box,” and to push the borders of the accepted. Self-control, far from self-discipline, implies freedom and self-realization; it implies being responsible only to oneself.

The governmentality of discipline is associated with the conditions of first modernity. Here, the typical subject is bound by, and loyal to sovereign authority. Bang helpfully sharpens the distinction, positing two Foucauldian ‘governing triads’: ‘sovereignty, hierarchy and discipline’ and ‘security, metagovernance and decentred governance’ (2011: 437). The governmentality of control has elective affinities with Beck’s (2007) theory of reflexive modernisation, and Boltanski and Chiapello’s (2005) project-oriented justificatory regime, where the subject is unbound; able and indeed compelled to pursue her own ever-evolving projects to which ends s/he must network and innovate. The ‘new spirit of capitalism’ values ‘autonomy, spontaneity, rhizomorphous capacity ... multi-tasking, conviviality, openness to others and novelty, availability, creativity, visionary intuition, sensitivity to differences, listening to lived experience and receptiveness to a whole range of experiences, being attracted to informality and the search for interpersonal contacts’ (2005: 97).

For Bang, the governmentality of control has positive connotations. Whereas the governmentality of discipline takes abstract goods like nationhood as its object, the governmentality of security, metagovernance and de-centred governance focuses on the ‘needs’ of individuals and groups; it therefore sustains ‘a much more positive, creative and facilitating dispositif of political authorization and normalization, conditioning self- and co-
governance from below’ (2012: 18). The governmentality of control is, theoretically, empowering.

However, Bang argues that in practice neoliberalism relies not on empowerment but threat. For example, networks are a vital tool in the metagovernance of security, but Bang sees them being subverted by ‘the “iron fist” of hierarchy and discipline’ (2011: 436). He argues that neoliberalism depends on threat, because agents are not fully enrolled to the project (2011: 439-40). But in so conducting themselves, neoliberal leaders undermine their own claims to legitimacy, which he sees as anchored in the hegemony of contracts (2011: 436). It could be argued that Bang’s politics of threat constitutes a third governmentality. The distinctions are that whereas ‘discipline’ appeals to sovereign power, and ‘control’ invokes personal freedom, self-control and creativity, ‘threat’ evokes fear as the source of order in a world of chaos and danger.

Bang treats threat as a boundary problem, symptomatic of turbulence on the cusp of modern and late modern politics. However, he overlooks an important insight implicit in Boltanski and Chiapello’s new spirit of capitalism; neoliberalism itself espouses the principles of late modernity; the virtues of networking, personal responsibility, creativity, security and light-touch regulation are integral to it (Moran, 2010: 34). These are principles to which corporations and political leaders regularly appeal. Why, then, should they resort a politics of threat to discipline officials and citizens who espouse the very same commitments and, ostensibly, try faithfully to implement them? (Author). For if governmentality ‘governs the souls’ of elites and subalterns alike, how can threat be a tactic of government at all?

Graham’s (2010) Cities under Siege is an enthralling (and disturbing) exposition on the governmentality of threats. Although he does not employ the concept, Graham points to the emergence of what might be called ‘military metagovernance’; the politics of threat
radicalized. He argues that we are witnessing the militarization of cities; the rise of martial control secured in the technologies and practices of everyday life. Warfare is no longer conducted in trenches and fields, but in living rooms, schools and supermarkets (2010: xv). It is close-up and personal, fought through the medium of technologies that appear everywhere and (sometimes) nowhere. Graham highlights a plethora of Foucauldian boomerang effects; techniques first tried and tested on people in ‘frontier’ cities of the developing world and then applied to impoverished immigrant and dissident communities in Western, so-called ‘homeland’, cities. What he calls the ‘New Military Urbanism’ is characterized by massive ‘technophiliac’ state surveillance organized by networks of governmental and corporate actors, subtle and not-so-subtle processes of enrolment and routinisation through the medium of hi-tech gadgets, GPS, media, film and video-games – terrain on which normative and cognitive distinctions between ‘civilian’ and ‘military’ are being eroded (2010: xi). Militarized ‘tracking and targeting’ ‘permanently colonize the cityscape and the spaces of everyday life’, not only in the frontiers but also the homelands where terrorists and insurgents lurk and pose a continuous threat (2010: xiv). Unlike Bang, who treats the politics of threats as a boundary problem, Graham sees it as boundless and permanent (2010: xv).

Military metagovernance is a web of governmentalities forged in networks of governmental actors, allied and co-dependent corporations in the military and entertainment sectors which sanitise violence against the ‘frontiers’, plus universities that pander to the latest neoliberal obsession with ‘resilience’ and ‘sell’ security solutions (2010: xxii). The goals of ‘formal infrastructural war’ therefore ‘blur seamlessly into the structure of economic competition and energy geopolitics’ (2010: xxv).
However, Graham’s account of boundless and permanent warfare also highlights the ubiquity of direct coercion. His is a world of brutal geopolitical violence provocatively called ‘urbicide’, organized to maintain class and ethnic frontiers inside and outside Western homelands, enforce international order, neo-imperialist exploitation and enrol new territories into the global market. In the homelands it includes increasingly violent policing of disorder and the erection of security zones for the world’s financial centres (green zones), conceived by military metagovernors as ‘urban warfare’ amid ‘pervasive low intensity conflicts’ (2011: 365). Graham suggested, citing Steinmetz, that we might be witnessing the transition to an ‘enhanced police state’ (2010: 113, fn). Governmental responses to the Euro crisis and widespread urban unrest throughout the continent exemplify: not the emergence of police states, but the centrality of coercion in the governing repertoire. Military metagovernance continually gives way to violence of both the persistent low-intensity and episodic high-intensity kinds.

But why should this be? Graham does not consider the relationship between threat and force directly, but does highlight the limits of the new military urbanism. He argues that it rests on fantasy; the vain notions that technological control can substitute for diminishing economic and martial power (2010: 146) or that the soul of the citizen can be comprehensively governed. He argues: ‘in practice, the bullets often fall far from their target. They fail to function, continually break down, do not deliver the anticipated results and do nothing to address the root causes of feelings of insecurity … the complex assemblages through which it operates are in fact highly precarious’. However, even commentators who are incredulous about governmentality effects ‘tend to replicate the birds-eye perspective of the press and impute too much power to the war machine’. Thus,
we should recognise that ‘an entire society cannot be controlled by individualized simulation and surveillance ... much less an entire world’ (2010: 364).

Overwhelming as it may seem, the new military urbanism is therefore symptomatic not of comprehensive enrolment, but of its fragility. The ultra-sophisticated technologies of symbolic violence, threat, preference manipulation, surveillance, ideology and discourse power are insufficient to sustain social order and cultivate the correct behaviours. Arguably, this control deficit, the limited efficacy of threat, explains the ubiquity of coercion in Graham’s story as it constantly emerges from the shadows. Like Bang, his Foucauldian perspective leaves the reader with questions. In Foucauldian accounts, state violence (including state-orchestrated and state-licensed violence) is usually treated as a form of anti-power, reflecting the analytical primacy Foucault accorded to governmentality (1982: 789). Consequently, they fall short of a convincing account of how and why threat and outright coercion appear to be enduring conditions of rule. How, then, do we make sense of the movement between discipline, security and threat on the one hand, and the anti-project of outright domination on the other? The remainder of the paper considers the contribution of Gramscian theory to addressing these questions.

A Gramscian Perspective on Coercion

There is an underlying methodological tension between metagovernance and Marxist theory, exemplified in the work of Jessop. In a nutshell, the question is whether the macrocosm should be conceived as a loosely and contingently coupled ensemble (Jessop), or a dialectical totality (Callinicos, 2006). Jessop (2003: 138-9) explained his position in a debate about Joseph’s (2002) monograph, on the relationship between social structure and hegemony:
... I question the feasibility of totalization practices and argue that they can succeed only relatively, precariously, and temporarily within specific socially constituted spatio-temporal fixes that displace and defer many contradictions, crisis-tendencies, and conflicts to marginalized places and spaces within and beyond the boundaries of this fix and/or into the future.

Jessop (2007:53) described his strategic-relational approach to structure and agency as a ‘general social ontology’ that does not itself validate specific concepts, theories or approaches. Indeed, as a ‘general heuristic’, it is compatible with ‘particular strategic-relational theories’. Yet, it is inflected with analytical biases that derive from Poulantzian roots; the relative autonomy of spheres, the precariousness of structural-couplings among autopoetic systems, incredulity towards totalising conceptions of the macrocosm and partiality towards the tropes of complexity and networking. Jessop comments that modern states do not ‘exercise power largely through direct and immediate coercion – a sure sign of crisis or state failure’ (2007: 4). But, as Graham vividly highlighted, they do so all the time. Jessop’s fragmentary social ontology arguably leads him to favour network-theoretical accounts of the macrocosm and propose a ‘weakly’ dialectical model of socioeconomic relations, which could explain why his analysis of state power and metagovernance treats coercion as epiphenomenal. The following paragraphs draw on Gramsci in developing the argument that a social ontology of ‘dialectical totality’ makes better sense of the ubiquity of state organized coercion.

Gramsci’s legacy remains contested, but there has been a recent renaissance in Marxist readings, contrasting with the popular revisionism of Laclau and Mouffe (2001). These include original studies by Joseph (2002), Morton (2011) and Thomas (2009) as well
as modest applications in the field of governance. These accounts recall Gramsci’s enduring commitment to dialectics, capital, class, crisis and revolution (Fusaro, 2010). However, his perspective on totality merits further discussion, and can be elicited from the Prison Notebooks. He defined the ‘historical bloc’ as the ‘unity between nature and spirit (structure and superstructure), unity of opposites and distincts’ (1971: 137), where ‘historical bloc’ refers to the sum of social relations. In Gramsci, the concept is totalising and dialectical. He argued, for example, that the theoretical challenge in developing a ‘science of dialectics’ is to ensure that the ‘general concepts of history, politics and economics are interwoven in an organic unity’, before considering each element as ‘independent and distinct’ (1971: 431). This analytical movement between whole and parts exemplifies the Marxist method.

Gramsci argued that ‘structures and superstructures form an “historical bloc”’. That is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production’ (1971: 366, original emphasis). Here, he posed the question of the relationship between ‘totality’ and ‘ensemble’, the latter used by Jessop to underscore his heterogeneous social ontology. Discussing the social determinants of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, Gramsci commented that ‘what counts is not the opinion of Tom, Dick and Harry, but the ensemble of opinions that have become collective, a social element and a social force’ (1971: 439). Later, he added that what ‘the idealists call “spirit” is not a point of departure but a point of arrival, it is the ensemble of the superstructures moving towards concrete and objectively universal unification and it is not a unitary presupposition’ (1971: 446, original emphasis). Gramsci further commented (2011: 466):
The variability of the ensemble of the material forces of production can also be measured, and one can establish with a fair degree of precision the point at which its development ceases to be merely quantitative and becomes qualitative. The ensemble of the material forces of production is at the same time a crystallisation of all past history and the basis of present and future history: it is both a document and an active and actual propulsive force.

These remarks suggest not that the historical bloc is a static totality, but rather that there is a totalising trajectory within capitalism. They further point to the need for a clear analytical distinction between ensemble and totality. Whereas an ensemble is the sum of its parts (passive-quantitative), a totality exercises causal power; it is ‘propulsive’ (active-qualitative). Conceiving the historical bloc as an emerging-emergent structure exercising causal power is arguably the essence of Gramsci’s Marxism. In practical terms, and following Gramsci, Author argued that ‘the capitalist system is tendentially “totalising” in the sense that as capitalists seek higher returns on investment, they also try to subordinate ever-greater swathes of society and space to the accumulation imperative’. The dialectical structure of capitalism (such as the tendency of myriad market transactions to cause diminishing returns in the system as a whole) makes it difficult to ‘imagine a world in which every interstice of space, time, body and mind is commodified’. However, ‘Marxism maintains that there is no sustainable way of practising capitalism which escapes this totalising system impetus’. In other words, the rules governing the reproduction of capitalism, and its propensity to expand, tend contingently (since expansion may fail) to transform the ensemble of practices constituting and governing production, distribution and exchange into a dialectical totality.
Gramsci anchored his theory of the state in this dialectical reading of capitalism. He defined Marx’s ‘law of tendency’ as the primary source of contradiction and discordancy within the historical bloc (1995: 429). Accumulation crises, he argued, are ‘the dialectical process by which the molecular progressive thrust leads to a tendentially catastrophic result in the social ensemble, a result from which other individual progressive thrusts set off in a continual overhauling process which cannot however be reckoned as infinite ...’ (1995: 432).

In other words, if it is not first overthrown, the capitalist system reaches a theoretical endpoint the moment it ‘subsumes all space-time and counter-tendencies exhaust themselves’. In practice, Gramsci understood the Marxist theory of crisis as the contradictory moment of ‘a larger and expanding organic unity’, ‘the central term of the dialectical totality constituting the historical bloc’ (Author).

Applying this dialectic helps makes sense of why coercion is ubiquitous and integral to capitalist power. According to Gramsci, maintaining the ‘unity of opposites and distincts’ requires the cultivation of hegemony by a governing bloc or constellation of ruling class and allied forces. He argued that a governing bloc achieves comprehensive hegemony, if it can mobilise all of society’s material and ideational resources, achieving both unity of economic and political goals and ‘intellectual and moral unity ... on a “universal” plane’ (Gramsci, 1971: 181-2). But, this ideal-typical moment of hegemony never comes. The theory of the integral state explains why.

Gramsci defined the integral state as ‘political society + civil society’, where ‘political society’ is government by force, and the struggle for hegemonic leadership – ‘governance’ - is reinforced by the ‘armour of coercion’ (1971; 262-3). It is the sum of ‘governing institutions, practices and technologies enmeshed in the struggle for hegemony throughout
state and civil society’ (Author). Metagovernance theorists, like Jessop, deploy the integral state to emphasize the non-coercive dimensions of power in the shadow of hierarchy (Jessop and Sum, 2005: 369). Jessop rightly argued that Gramsci developed the concept partly as a means of critiquing interlocutors who conflated the state with its coercive function. However, he also saw hegemonic enrolment as an enduring struggle and never suggested that coercion could be confined to the shadows. Gramsci ‘repeatedly stated that hegemony and domination are dialectically related terms of the “contradictory and discordant” political economy of capitalism …. short of implausibly comprehensive hegemony, the hegemonic bloc must rely to some extent on threat and outright domination’ Author.

Explaining the ubiquity of violence and discipline under capitalism, Anderson (1976: 29) argued that the flaw in hegemonic strategies is that because capitalism is vulnerable to increasingly contagious accumulation crises, it tends to cultivate expectations among subaltern classes - the basis of hegemonic consent - that it increasingly struggles to deliver. That is, hegemony tends to be fragile and consent precarious because a governing bloc cannot help breaking promises on which public consent is founded, such as ‘we’re all in it together’, social inclusion, prosperity or personal fulfilment. Thus, crises are prone to fostering greater or lesser degrees of asymmetry between promise and expectation, disposition and experience. The asymmetry implies no direct causal link with resistance. It may inspire counter-projects, induce passivity and despair or the rise of fascism; but subalterns are most likely to challenge hegemony and forge counter-hegemonic politics when it widens. Moreover, as Graham highlighted, military metagovernors construe protest as ‘disorder’, even when it entails no serious threat. The state enacts, coordinates,
sanctions or otherwise gives tacit consent to coercion. As is explained further below, it does so both reactively in the face of disorder and strategically as a vehicle for cultivating new modalities of rule.

**Capitalist States**

The Marxist-Gramscian approach to hegemony rests on the claim that state officials and capitalists have congruent worldviews and tend to act in concert insofar as they must to maintain the capitalist order. Sustaining this claim requires a brief detour into recent debates in Marxist state theory. According to Engels (1884), the state has a dual nature; it is both inherently territorial and inherently coercive, a ‘special public force’ consisting ‘not merely of armed men, but also of material appendages, prisons and coercive institutions of all kinds, which becomes stronger in proportion as the class antagonisms within the state become sharper and as adjoining states grow larger and more populous’. In other words, Engels’ states have inward and outward facing coercive functions; the former to maintain domestic order, the latter to engage in geopolitical (imperialist) rivalries, which he thought would become more salient as new territories were subsumed to capitalism and the space for capitalist state formation and expansion was squeezed.

Arguably, Engels’ perspective has stood the test of time better than Foucault’s (2009) speculation that governmentality would diminish the need for prisons. Concluding a recent debate on ‘how to solve the many states problem’, Callinicos (2009) argued that the generic features described by Engels continue to recur, in historically contingent and spatio-temporally variable forms, in the era of globalized capitalism. Callinicos’s objective was to develop an explanation for the entanglement of capitalist states and economies capable of avoiding the sins of conflation and dualism, as well as the abstraction, a-historicism and
functionalism of the state derivation debate (Clarke, 1991). He argued that states adapting quickly to capitalist development gained major advantages in geo-political competition with laggards; that is, they found capitalism useful in pursuing territorial goals (2009: 103). These initially contingent entanglements developed such that ‘by the late nineteenth century the dynamics of interstate rivalry had become thoroughly interwoven with those of capital accumulation’; the combined and uneven development arising from competition, crises and associated imperatives for rival capitalist states and enterprises to expand. Accordingly, Callinicos conceives modern imperialism as ‘the intersection of economic and geopolitical competition’ in a plural international states system. In the vernacular of critical realism, capitalist states and capitalist economies are concrete, socio-spatially variable determinations of the capitalist mode of production as a whole, as it emerged from the crises and revolutions of late Feudalism. If, as Callinicos claimed (2009: 92), the international states system remains irreducibly plural and competitive despite integrative processes such as Europeanisation and globalisation, and because of the ‘centrifugal pulls generated by the tendency to uneven development’ in capitalist economic and geo-political competition, then conflict maybe mitigated but not dissolved.

The kernel of this account is that acting coercively, home and abroad, is a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition for any capitalist state seeking economic and geopolitical advantage. It does not entail that political leaders and state managers must necessarily follow these imperatives – exit is always possible and bad judgement likely. But equally the relations of production in which they situate or find themselves, endow actors with certain capabilities while confronting them with dilemmas, challenges and constraints. If a political leader or state manager wishes to fulfil an appointed role successfully, s/he must abide by
‘rules of reproduction’ and fulfil the conditions making the role possible (Brenner, 1986).
Under capitalism, senior politicians and state managers apply themselves to the challenges of social order and geo-political competition to achieve these and other personal goals. Rhodes (2012: 39) objected to the critical realist conception of structure, arguing that ‘if all the relevant people change their actions, they will stop producing that structure’. In principle, nothing can prevent the entire caste of state officials from deciding to break the rules of reproduction. However, this is a truism that trivializes the problem of continuity and change, saying nothing about the conditions in which a mass transformation of beliefs, desires and practices might occur, or at what pace (Archer, 2000: 468). Moreover, it treats exit as non-problematic, as if an individual’s decision to abandon webs of goods, privileges, contracts and affective relationships associated with role-fulfilment could be accomplished without incurring social, economic and psychological costs.

In summary, coercion remains integral to the reproduction of capitalist states, and governing elites are likely to have very good reasons for continuing to play the game once enrolled in it. To be clear, however, coercion is not here presented solely as a condition of rule in economic or geopolitical crises. Disorder occurs in times of relative stability and coercion is used to deal with many social problems and conflicts in times of prosperity. Insurgency, furthermore, may occur without economic crises and does not always occur with them: agency matters. Rather, five claims are made. First, economic crises tend to enlarge the asymmetry between promises and everyday experiences and are a significant source of resistance, purposeful or otherwise. Second, because crises and disorder are integral features of capitalist development and capitalist geopolitics, so is coercion. In other words, thirdly, the Marxist-Gramscian theory of capitalism cannot explain every case of
state coercion or resistance, or the lack thereof; but it warrants the claim that coercion is integral to the governance of capitalist democracies and that state officials are likely to employ it; not only reactively in the face of resistance, but also strategically in attempting to re-acculturate and equip citizens for new accumulation practices. It therefore serves as a corrective to pluricentric and ensemble-based conceptions of metagovernance, while demonstrating the added value of a Gramscian approach in theorizing observations about the pervasiveness of violence, which Graham’s Foucauldian approach describes graphically but does not explain. Fourth, Gramscian theory allows us to re-assert the enduring presence of coercion under capitalism but does so without any judgement as to its efficacy, which depends on ‘relational’ factors that hegemons maybe unable to control, such as counter-hegemonic organisation and the resilience of ‘obsolete’ traditions. It further assists us, fifthly, in developing a more robust conception of ‘the state’, where violence is the ‘apotheosis of reification’ as strategy, and in which moment (among others) a state emerges from the world of flux and flow to become a real and tangible ‘entity’, having material and ‘thing-like’ qualities (Harvey, 2001: 192). Yet, as Graham’s webs of military power demonstrate, states are not straightforwardly monopolists of force. They are rather oligopolists enacting coercion and coordinating, sanctioning, licensing and tacitly approving threats and force by proxy agents. The discussion turns, finally, to how the preceding analysis can be used to rethink governance.

**Understanding Coercion in the Governing System**

Although metagovernance theorists pay insufficient attention to coercion, they share the intuition that real-world governing processes are likely to embody multiple modalities of coordination; such as Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen’s (2011: 377-8) call for
governance theory to transcend the hierarchy-network binary, or Marsh’s (2011: 41) conception of the relationship between ‘government + governance’ as a dialectical one. In the field of governance, many studies find that network-like institutions combine trust – in rather short supply - implicit or explicit contract relations and bureaucratic coercion by public officials. Grote (2012), once a scholar in the tradition of what he called the ‘horizontalist expectation’, undertook an in-depth formal analysis of governing networks in the European regions. He found not only that relations typically described in the vocabulary of networks were organized hierarchically, but also that simplistic formulations – hierarchy = command, market = contract, networks = trust were misleading. Grote suggested that markets could sometimes rely on command, networks on competition and hierarchies on trust. All three depend, furthermore, on degrees of coercion. Grote concluded that the simplistic classification of governing processes into categories such as ‘hierarchy’ or ‘network’ was misleading. In particular, the tendency to emphasise ‘networks’ has arguably contributed to an ideological bubble (Lotia and Hardy, 2008: 371). To address the network-centric bias, two further steps are necessary; one is to specify the modalities of coercion. The second – a question for future research - is to reconsider the evolving spatio-temporal configurations of hierarchy, market, network and coercion, and the directions of travel in specific processes.

The term hierarchy is often used interchangeably with coercion, but is distinct. In its traditional sense, hierarchy refers to the governmentality of discipline; the capacity of states to govern through sovereign authority, making and enacting decisions on behalf of a consenting population and issuing commands that it readily obeys. Perri 6 (2011) used neo-Durkheimian categories to distinguish four forms of rule based on differing configurations of social regulation (modes of constraint) and social integration (modes of bonding,
attachment and detachment). His taxonomy distinguishes a hierarchical form comprising strong regulation and integration and ‘isolate ordering’ comprising strong regulation, but with weak integration - a more coercive type in conditions of weak social bonding. Interpreted through a Gramscian lens, hierarchy refers to form of hegemony, whereas isolate ordering is closer to ‘domination without hegemony’ (Arrighi, 2005). If the sovereignty principle has diminishing hegemonic efficacy, but is not supplanted by alternative integrative norms (or counter-hegemonic force), isolate ordering is one possible outcome. In this sense, hierarchy and coercion are dialectically related, although coercive power deployed overseas might equally underpin hierarchical power at home.

In contrast, the politics of threat can be understood as a form of indirect coercion. From a Gramscian perspective they maybe associated with weak hegemony, where subtler technologies fail to govern the soul and fear crushes the power to act (Rose, 1999: 4). Yet, Rose offers no compelling reason why fear should not unleash some self-governing capacities while diminishing others. Nor are the politics of threat necessarily a response to governance failure. Lest excessive unity and rationality be attributed to the incompetent and heterogeneous military-industrial networks practicing ‘military metagovernance’, threat may equally be a sign of unwarranted paranoia among governors who, as Foucault pointed out, are enmeshed in the webs of power they weave. In this sense, threat maybe a response to the limits of hegemony, a source of hegemony or conceivably a limiting factor on hegemony by sub-rational actors underestimating their power. The efficacy of threat for hegemony/domination is therefore an empirical question.

The Gramscian theory of hegemony-domination claims that when neither hegemony nor threat is sufficient to sustain order and cultivate an appropriate sense of good conduct,
then states (and/or proxies) must deploy direct coercion, if they are to sustain themselves. But, force cannot be a matter of ‘the last instance’ if neither hegemony nor threat governs the soul completely. As Thomas put it (2009: 224-5), the ascent to hegemony in Gramsci is a continuous struggle and ‘must be repeated each day’. If, as Graham argued, governance is characterized by ‘pervasive low intensity’ conflicts together with episodically explosive interludes, then coercion is better understood as an integral condition of rule than as the instrument of last resort.

Direct coercion is multi-faceted. Author drew on Gramsci in eliciting three distinct kinds: violence, administrative domination and economic compulsion. Elaborating the multiple modalities of coercion in this way reinforces the claim that it is pervasive. State violence by military, police or paramilitary forces, is one form. Administrative domination is a second. Gramsci defined ‘direct domination’ as ‘command exercised through the State and “juridical” government’ (1971: 12) and as the combination of ‘military and civil coercion’ (1971: 120). Moreover, ‘it is the bureaucracy—i.e. the crystallisation of the leading personnel—which exercises coercive power, and at a certain point it becomes a caste’ (1971; 248). In Weberian terminology, administrative domination refers to the successful projection of disciplinary power by the state machine. In a Gramscian account, it also entails direct and immediate bureaucratic coercion through the magistracy, everyday policing and the regulatory enforcement functions of governmental agencies (tax collectors, traffic wardens, rent collectors and bailiffs). These everyday functions are analytically distinct from hegemony or threat, because they entail direct domination in the sense of A compelling B to do something they would not otherwise, but without violence (coercion in the shadow of violence).
Gramsci treated laissez faire is a third form of domination, ‘introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means’. He continued: ‘It is a deliberate policy, conscious of its own ends ... a political programme ... to change the economic programme of the State itself’ (1971: 159-60). The repertoire of coercion therefore encompasses ‘violence + economic compulsion + administrative domination’ (Author). Table 1 summarises the preceding discussion, highlighting the distinction between the ideal-typical hegemonies of ‘hierarchy’ ‘market’ and ‘network’ and and the modalities of indirect and direct coercion. If hegemony, threat and domination all fail, then state power reaches its limits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hegemony</th>
<th>Indirect Coercion</th>
<th>Coercion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hierarchy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Market</strong></td>
<td><strong>Network</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmentality of discipline,</td>
<td>Libertarianism:</td>
<td>Governmentality of control, the new spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sovereignty, imperative</td>
<td>the rule of contracts.</td>
<td>of capitalism, networked society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coordination</td>
<td></td>
<td>Military metagovernance, symbolic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g. against immigrants).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threat</strong></td>
<td><strong>Violence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Administrative Domination</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Force/fraud/corruption, civil war, low-intensity</td>
<td>Everyday enforcement, hierarchical management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conflict, police violence, ghettoization</td>
<td>of governing institutions, change management,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘innovation’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Laissez Faire</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ghettoization, disinvestment, famine, scorched earth policies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Modalities of Hegemony and Domination**

Each of these conceptual elements is conceived as a building block, an input to complex and evolving processes, rather than as an empirical type. The basic regulative modes of hierarchy (sovereignty), market (contract) and network (trust) are unlikely to occur in pure form, because as Grote argued, each tends to depend, to some extent, on the other. At the same time, the limits of hegemonic integration mean that combinations of hierarchy, market and network are also likely to combine with degrees and kinds of coercion in the face or more or less active and purposeful public assent/dissent. Coercion itself maybe used reactively, in response to the limits of hegemony. For example, Cook, Hardin
and Levy (2007: 196) concluded, against the grain of network theories that societies are moving away from trust-based relations towards ‘externally regulated’ ones. Mundane examples of the erosion of democracy and incremental roll-forward of administrative domination in ‘collaborative’ processes are many and widespread, for example bureaucratic manipulation in response to the cussedness of citizen-activists refusing to play by the rules (e.g. Davies, 2007). But equally it maybe used strategically in attempting to build new hegemonies. For example, Žižek (2009: 18) suggested that avant-garde neoliberal regimes deliberately inflicted trauma on citizens to force them into shaking-off old preconceptions about their rights under the welfare state, ‘turning them into an ideological tabula rasa’.

Klein (2007) similarly refers to neoliberalism as a ‘shock doctrine’, ‘midwifed by the most brutal forms of coercion, inflicted on the collective body politic as well as on countless individual bodies’ (2007: 18). From this Gramscian perspective, coercion is not the antithesis of power, but its condition. Power, argued Fontana (2006: 43) has a ‘dual nature’ comprising ‘force and consent, violence and persuasion’. Coercion is integral to the spatio-temporally variable, complex and more or less fluid or stable configurations of hierarchy-market-network. Jessop’s Gramsci-inspired continuum of hegemony, passive revolution, force-fraud-corruption and open warfare are possible forms (2007: 241), to which we might add hybrids such as processes of ‘hegemony-domination-resistance’ in the everyday governance of Western democracies.

Whether governance is becoming more or less coercive remains an open question. Whereas network-centred theories anticipate that state coercion is a ‘zombie category’ (Beck, 2007), Arrighi (2005) perceived the transition from a period of partial hegemonic integration at the international level to one of domination without hegemony. It does not
follow from the erosion of hegemony based on hierarchical principles that states are necessarily losing their coercive capacities. Either way, anchoring hegemony in coercion, and the dialectics of hegemony-domination in a spatio-temporally sensitive theory of crisis and resistance, arguably makes better sense of contemporary processes than metagovernance in its present guises. It would be surprising indeed if coercion could subsist in the shadows, or if governmental-non-governmental relations today were rooted in high levels of either network-based trust, or sovereign authority.

Conclusion

Marsh (2011) rightly argued that the ideology of network governance has become a powerful orthodoxy. Metagovernance theory evolved in part as a critical reaction. In its critical realist form, it helpfully construes the relationship between government and governance as dialectical. However, it imports the vocabulary of networks to both sides of the government/governance relationship and confines hierarchy to the shadows. Its dialectic is therefore excessively weak and neither notices nor explains the pervasiveness of coercion. The paper argues that Gramscian theory offers a distinctive explanation for the ubiquity of coercion. In short, conceiving of the social macrocosm as a dialectical totality emphasizes structural instability, the limits of hegemony and explains why coercion is necessary, if insufficient, for sustaining social order.

This perspective has significant implications for the study of governance and particularly the organisation and exercise of coercion in governing systems. It suggests that a fruitful analytical distinction can be drawn on the one hand between different modes of hegemony, of which hierarchies, markets and networks are building blocks, and on the other between the modalities hegemony and domination: both are integral components of
political power. Viewed through this lens, state-organized coercion in its different guises is likely present to a degree in every facet of socioeconomic life. By re-stating coercion, the paper adds to growing calls, not least among former enthusiasts, for a comprehensive re-evaluation of claims that governance is increasingly about networks. The challenge for scholarship is to reconsider evolving, spatio-temporally variable configurations of all the elements, while also giving proper recognition to the modalities of coercion.

This perspective is inspired by a Marxist reading of Gramsci, but may be useful for other scholars seeking to learn more about governance configurations, including those positing alternative explanations and justifications for violence by, and against, the state (e.g. Frazer and Hutchings, 2011; Medearis, 2005). A new focus on coercion could elicit a variety of theoretical explanations, taxonomies and normative justifications, not only Marxist ones. The advantage of the Marxist-Gramscian approach, however, is that it warrants the claim that threat and violence are not exceptional, but indispensible conditions of rule. It also makes better sense than metagovernance of the fact that in governance studies at least the networks paradigm is increasingly viewed sceptically and with disappointment (Stoker, 2011).

This perspective has greater theoretical affinity with critical realist metagovernance theory than Foucauldian and pluricentric counterparts. However, there remain significant methodological differences, such as the contrast between Jessop’s incredulity towards totality and the orthodox Marxist embrace of it. The difference, in essence, is that between weakly and strongly dialectical conceptions of the macrocosm; those that see governance as ever-capable of steering around, mitigating or deferring the effects of capitalist crises and those who think this capacity is exaggerated, or being accomplished at ever-greater social and environmental cost. The premise of this paper is that the latter perspective makes
better sense of pervasive, multi-faceted coercion than the former and is, at the same time, a platform for the critique of the networks weltanschauung. Whether or not they agree, metagovernance theorists might find it fruitful to address the contrasts and distinctions drawn throughout the paper.

Acknowledgements

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