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On the Hegemonic Role of International Functional Organization*

A. A. Fatouros**

OUTLINE

- I. The Concept of Hegemony
- II. Functionalism: Its Assumptions and Its Law
 - A. Assumptions and Purposes
 - B. The Emerging International Law of Cooperation
 - C. The Paradoxical Relationship between Functionalism and Development
- III. The Hegemonic Impact of International Functional Agencies
 - A. The Case of the World Bank
 - B. Contexts and Modes of Impact
- IV. In Lieu of Conclusions: An Agenda for Research and Study

The international legal order is just entering the third decade of its universal phase. Before the early 1960s and the emergence of colonial territories into independent statehood, the international society of states was perceived as (and to a significant extent actually was) relatively homogeneous, consisting of members at comparable stages of economic development and belonging to the same major cultural family. Exceptions to these generalizations, while numerous, were largely ignored. International law and institutions clearly reflected these perceptions and facts. Now that the international legal order has embraced the entire world — a congeries of heterogeneous, culturally diverse and economically disparate states — one would expect some corresponding changes in its structures and principles. While, however, there have been a few such changes, they are few and far from radical. They cannot be seen

* This essay is part of a larger unfinished project. The awareness that it will be a long time before the project is completed led me to the decision to publish these tentative reflections, partly in order to force them into communicable form and partly to expose them to comment and criticism. An early version of the paper was presented as a lecture at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in February 1978.

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as cumulatively altering, to any significant extent, the structure and assumptions of the prevailing legal order.

The complex *problématique* of this phenomenon lies at the starting point of this essay. However, no attempt is made to provide here a comprehensive account or explanation of its forms, extent or causes. At this stage, inquiries of a more modest scope seem appropriate, in the hope that they may eventually lead to more comprehensive studies and conclusions. A particular class of international institutions is considered, the international functional agencies, that is, those international organizations whose activities relate "directly to economic, social, technical, and humanitarian matters . . . [and] are immediately and explicitly concerned with such values as prosperity, welfare, social justice, and the "good life", rather than the prevention of war and elimination of national insecurity"¹. In this connection, a specific concept, that of "hegemony", as found in the works of Antonio Gramsci, is brought forward, with the suggestion that it may prove a useful tool for understanding the manner in which these international institutions function, especially in dealing with the new states. The notion of "hegemony", until now used, with one major exception², solely in national context, is tentatively adopted here on a conceptual level, putting for the moment on one side its substantive historical and other facets. Later elaborations may attempt to enlarge the scope of its application and to explore the processes of its operation in transnational context. Some hints as to such possibilities are offered in the concluding section of this essay.

The article will then begin with two introductory discussions, of the concept of hegemony, on the one hand, and of the assumptions behind international functional agencies, on the other. I shall then proceed to illustrate the hegemonic role of such agencies by means of an inquiry into the work of the World Bank and less detailed references to the work of other functional agencies. The essay will conclude with an agenda for future research into the validity of the thesis offered and its possible applications in other international legal contexts.

I. *The Concept of Hegemony*

Certain caveats are necessary in approaching this concept. The term "hegemony" is used here in a special sense, significantly differing from other

¹ *Inis Claude*, *Swords into Plowshares. The Problems and Progress of International Organization*, 4th ed., 1971, 378.

² *Robert W. Cox*, *Labor and Hegemony*, *International Organization* 1977, 385. This pathbreaking essay extends the notion to the international institutional context in a manner consistent but probably not identical with the one proposed here. Subsequent debate on the

current senses and lacking the latter's negative implications. In the most established usage, hegemony means the political predominance of one state over another, or policies aimed at such predominance³. The term has been extended to cover relations of domination between social groups or classes. It is in that connection that it acquired a special meaning — the one relevant here — in the writings of Gramsci. It is now proposed to reapply the term as redefined to international relations⁴.

A useful elucidation of the Gramscian concept was provided in one of its earliest discussions in English:

By 'hegemony' Gramsci seems to mean a socio-political situation, in his terminology a 'moment', in which the philosophy and practice of a society fuse or are in equilibrium; an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society . . . informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations⁵.

The importance, and the usefulness, of the concept lies in its combining indissolubly the element of power based on coercion with that of consent, of acceptance because of shared perceptions and values. Cultural and intellectual elements are thus given equal place — better, are fused — with political and economic ones. As Raymond Williams put it:

For hegemony supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural, like the weak sense of ideology, but which is lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent, and which, as Gramsci puts it, even constitutes the limit of common sense for most people under its sway, that it corresponds to the reality of social experience very much more clearly than any notions derived from the formula of base and superstructure. . . . This notion of hegemony as deeply saturating the consciousness of a society seems to be fundamental⁶.

article focussed in the main on factual and political issues; see *Harold A. Dunning, id.*, 1978, 576; *Cox, id.* 579; *William A. Douglas and Roy S. Godson, id.*, 1980, 149. But see also *Cox, id.* 159.

³ See briefly, *Raymond Williams, Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 1976, 117—118.

⁴ The semantic confusions which arise because of the multiple meanings of the term can be disregarded at this stage, given the tentative character of the entire exercise. It may be that the simplest solution is to use the Italian form of the word, "egemonia", to refer to the Gramscian meaning. Cf. the article cited in the next note.

⁵ *Gwyn A. Williams, The Concept of 'Egemonia' in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci: Some Notes on Interpretation, Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1960, 586.

⁶ *Raymond Williams, Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory, New Left Review*, No. 82, 1973, 3, at 8.