MOVEMENT
LEARNING CATALYST

Learning activity

# Mapping hegemony and disrupting power

**TIME**: 90 mins

**LEARNING AIMS:**

- Understand hegemony and map hegemonic structures and relations in our contexts
- Identify weaknesses in hegemonic structures and relations
- Identify opportunities of organising to disrupt hegemonic structures and relations

**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS**: 10-30 in groups of 2-3 from the same country or movement.

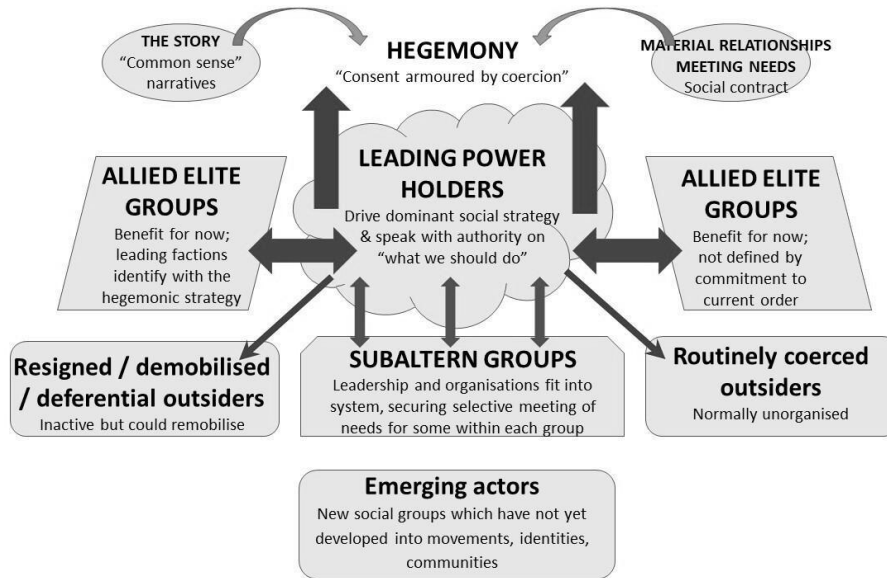**PREPARATION AND MATERIALS**: Write text

**FRAMING:**

This is a two-step process best done in small groups with broadly shared experiences and understandings. First you map out how you see hegemony as working in your own country or issue. Then you think about what is already weak and where the possibilities for change are. The point is not so much to arrive at a final answer as to start thinking in this kind of strategic way about how power currently works and what may be possible.

**FACILITATION:**

Step 1. Mapping Hegemony  in your context

Thinking about the overall shape of your society (or around the issue you are working on – this also works), what does the basic power structure look like? As best as you can, try to fill in the different spaces in the hegemony model (below). As far as possible you should put in specific social groups (e.g. as defined by race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability etc.) and/or organisations (e.g. corporations, parties, state institutions, media, social media, etc).
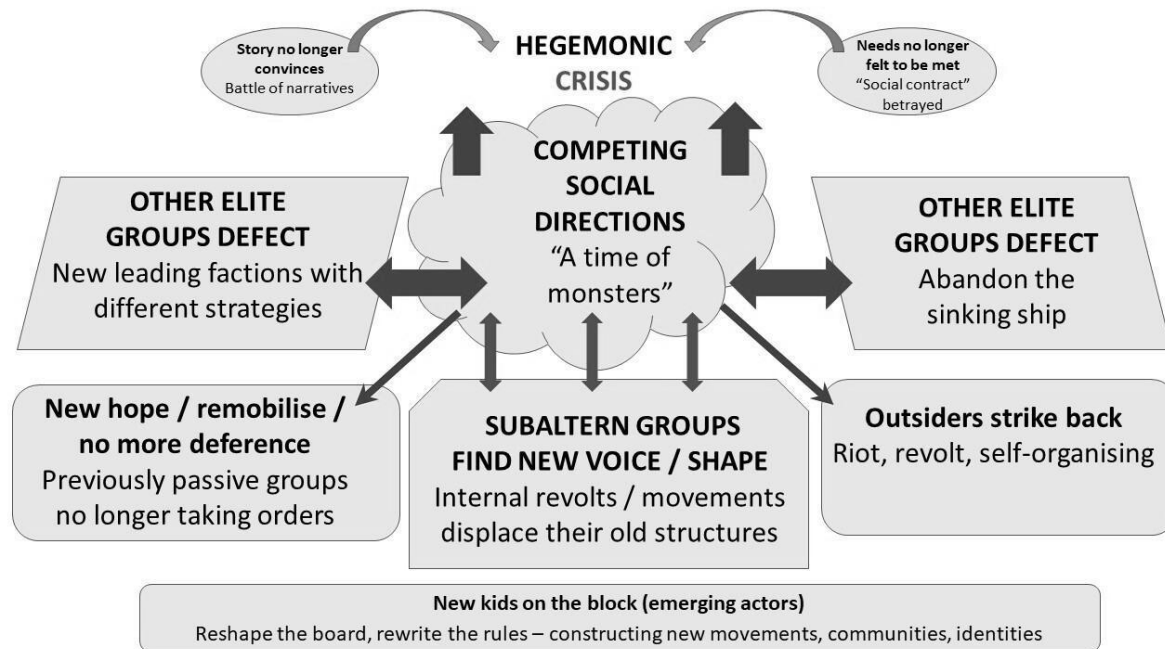
Discuss with one another why you think different social groups and organisations are best placed where you have put them. Think about the relationships between these different spaces: what relationships are really strong and which are under pressure?

*Mapping Hegemony by Natasha Adams (2024)*

### Step 2. Identify weaknesses in hegemonic structures and relationships

Paying particular attention now to crises and conflict, try to name where you can see change already happening in your society or around your issue. You are using the same social groups and organisations you have already identified in Step 1, but now you are looking for where the structure of alliances is not working very well. Remember in step 1 you already looked at which relationships (between different spaces) are strong and which are under pressure. Discuss with one another why you are identifying these weaknesses. Are they fundamental problems that can't be patched up, or are these short-term difficulties (from the point of view of the current power structure)?

*Mapping Hegemonic crisis by Natasha Adams (2024)*

### Step 3. Identify opportunities for change

Within each of the different parts of the hegemony map, identify what could be done to help develop self-organised popular agency (the capacity to act collectively)? Think about the emergent social groups, routinely coerced people, the resigned/defeated/demobilised and what is usually the largest space – subaltern popular groups that are currently organised but in ways that broadly support the status quo.

Where do you think existing relationships between these spaces can be fundamentally disrupted by creating different relationships "from below"? I.e. what needs, problems, conflicts offer strategic possibilities for change that can be spoken to not only by the populist far right etc. but also by movements from below?

Can you see the possibility for a future structure of alliances "from below and to the left" – based on self-organisation rather than supporting the leading powerholders, drawing on numbers rather than ready access to state structures, on the capacity to disrupt rather than controlling economic power and/or on creativity rather than on being able to mobilise patriarchal, racist etc. cultural hierarchies?

### *Conclusion and takeaways*

This activity shows us the strategic relevance of analysing the power structure within society or the specific issue at hand through the lens of hegemony. This helps us locate the placement of different social groups and organizations within the hegemonic model and identify the weaknesses in the hegemonic structures and relationships, particularly during crises and conflicts. Hegemonic analysis also us to explore opportunities for

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self-organization and alliance building  to disrupt hegemonic structures and relationships for systemic change.


## SOURCES:

Antonio Gramsci's *Lyons Theses*, *Southern Question*, *Prison Notebooks* – all available in many editions and languages.

Cox, L. and Nilsen, A.G. (2014). *We Make Our Own History: Marxism and Social Movements in the Twilight of Neoliberalism.* London: Pluto.

Collective work by Laurence Cox, Natasha Adams, Hilal Demir, Holly Hammond, Gee McKeown and Jeroen Robbe.