Towards a Cultural Political Economy: Staging an Encounter between Marx, Gramsci and Foucault

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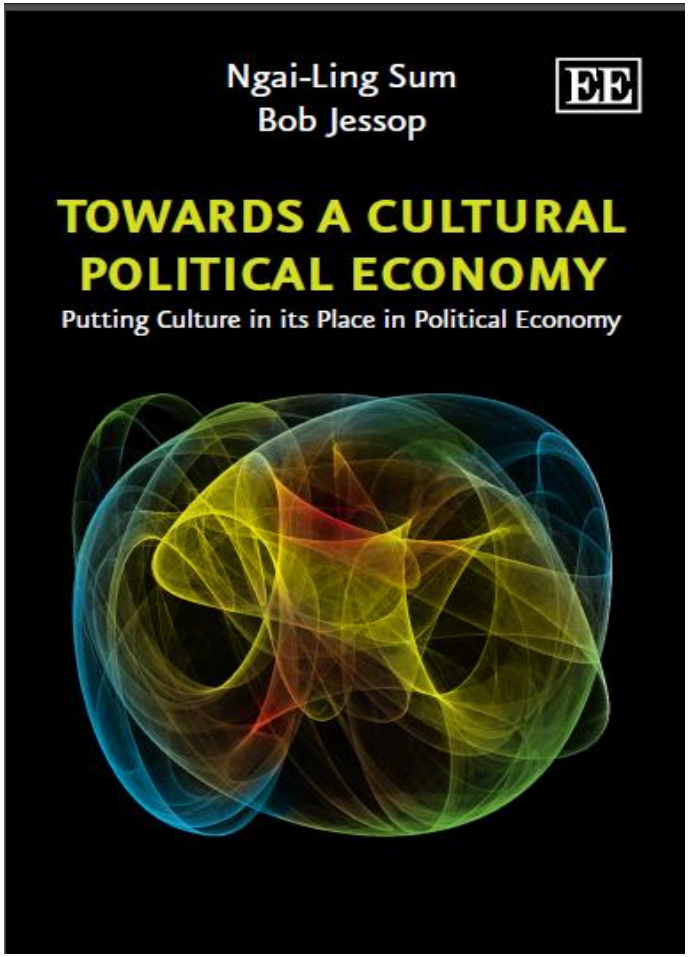
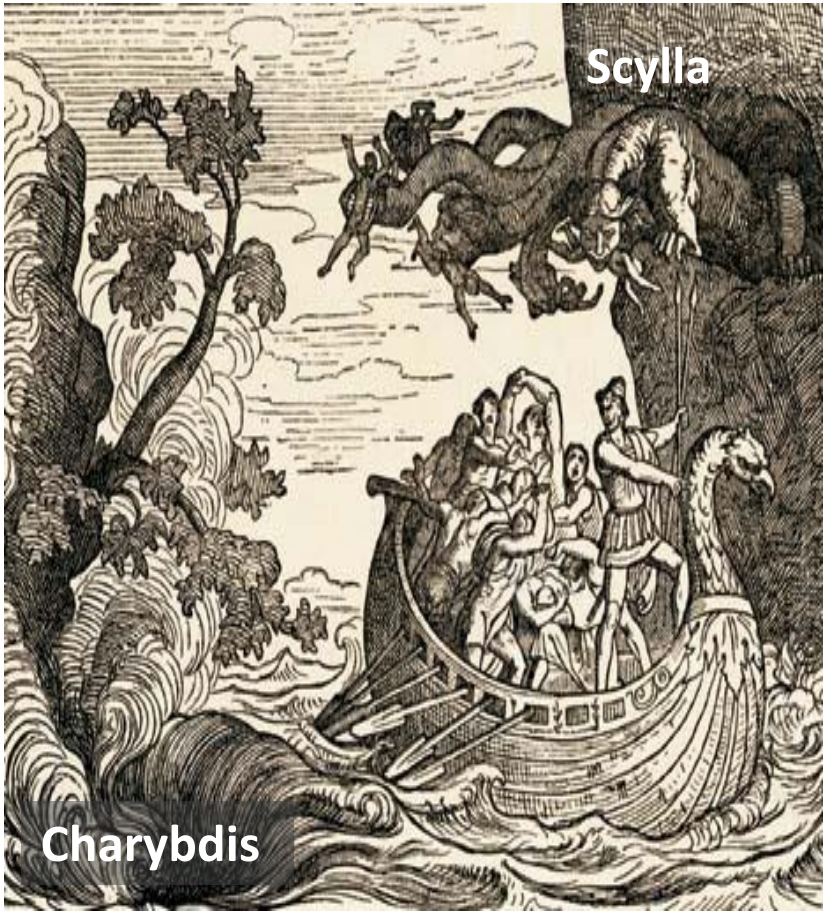
Outline: 4 Parts

- Some Points of Departure
- Staging a Encounter between Marx, Gramsci and Foucault
- Offering a Set of Heuristic Tool for Cultural Political Economy
- Concluding Remarks



1. Some Points of Departure



Following from Jessop's lecture

- Charts a route between Structural Scylla and Constructivist Charybdis
- Starts with the idea that the natural and social world is exceedingly complex
- Studies complexity reduction and its changing nature through processes of variation, selection, retention and negotiation

- **The selection, retention, and institutionalization of discourses depends in part on structural, agential, discursive and technological selectivities and**
- **the potential for social transformation in the 'extra-discursive' realm**
- **Staging an encounter between Marx, Gramsci and Foucault**

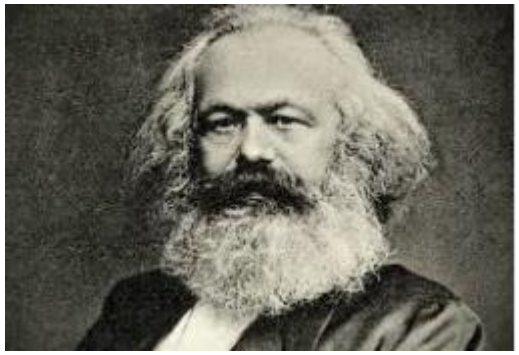
- **Focus on the issue of hegemonies – production of (counter-)hegemonies**
  - **Hegemonies are not just there, they have to be constructed**
  - **These involve material-discursive mechanisms, processes and practices whereby hegemonies (intellectual, moral and self-leadership) are built in diverse political/economic fields and in the wider society**

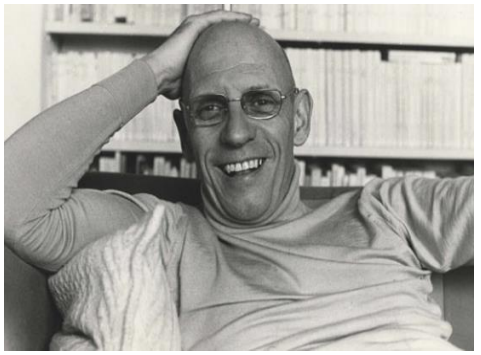
- **Examines the production of hegemonies as processes that involve actors discursively frame economic/political imaginaries (e.g., competitiveness, development, modernization, nationalism, poverty, crisis, hope, etc.)**
- **Does not assume organic intellectuals somehow pre-exist**
- **Studies how**
  - **discourses make organic intellectuals *and***
  - **organic intellectuals make discourses in a contingent, co-evolutionary manner**

2. Staging an Encounter between Marx, Gramsci and Foucault

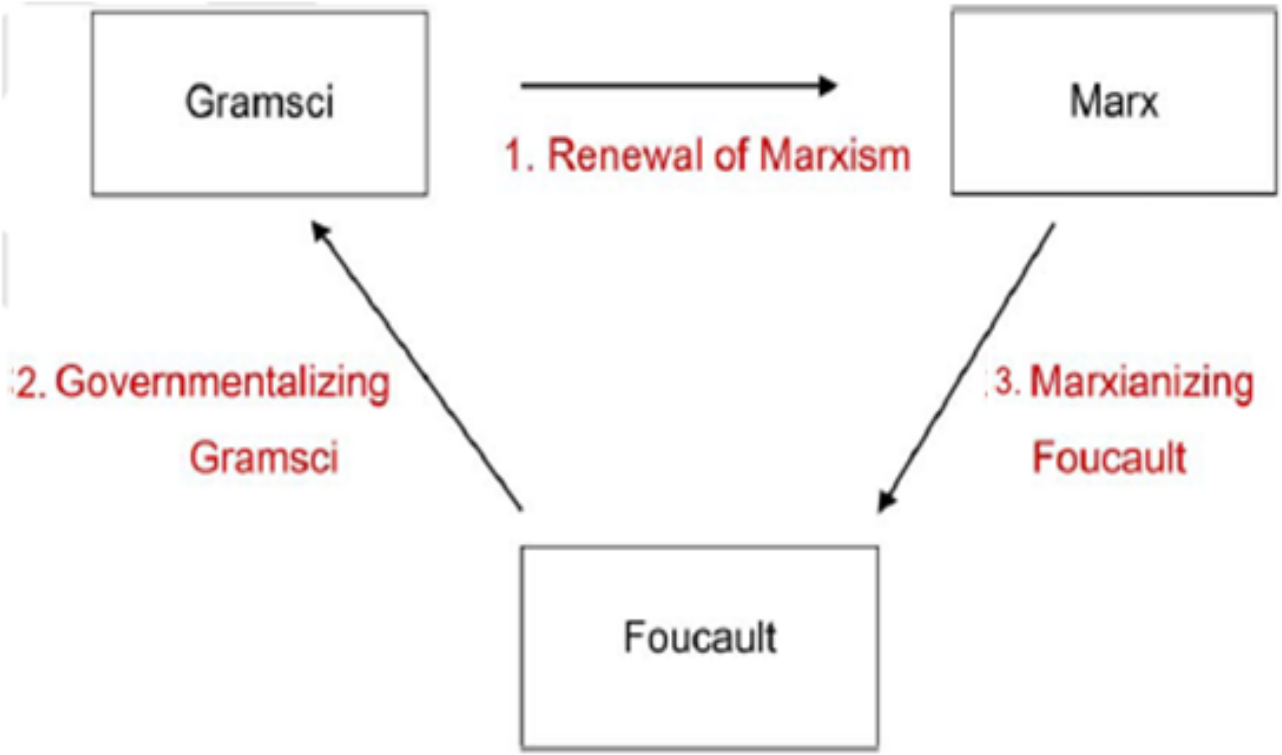
- **One way to explore the interface between the semiotic and extra-semiotic and the production of hegemonies is to stage a three-sided encounter between Marx, Gramsci, and Foucault (Sum and Jessop 2013, 203–14)**
  - **Marx provides the crucial foundations for the critique of political economy**
  - **Gramsci developed a 'vernacular materialism' (Ives 2004) that highlights the role of language in sense and meaning-making in mediating hegemony and domination across all spheres of society (Gramsci 1971; see also Thomas 2009; Green 2011)**
  - **CPE enhances this synthesis by integrating Foucault's insights on objectivation, subjectivation, power/knowledge, and their associated technologies of power and assembling of dispositives**

- **The encounter involves a triple movement based on Marsden's observation of**
  - **Marx can tell us <u>why</u> but cannot tell us <u>how,</u> and**
  - **Foucault tells us how, but cannot tell us why (1999, 135)**





A three-sided Encounter and Triple Movements



- **Renewal of Marxism**
  - **Gramsci's 'vernacular materialism' (Ives 2004) renews the Marxian critique of political economy with categories such as hegemony**
  - **It highlights the role of language in sense and meaning-making in mediating hegemony and domination (Gramsci 1971; see also Thomas 2009; Green 2011; Carlucci 2015)**

- **Governmentalizing Gramsci**
  - **Dissonance and consonance and between their work**
  - **A Gramsci and Foucault encounter by drawing on the Duisburg School of discourse analysis (Link 1983; Jäger and Maier 2009; Caborn 2007)**
  - **Gramsci's account of the creative role of hegemony (moral and intellectual leadership) in constituting power relations and Foucault's analysis of the productive and constitutive role of 'regimes of truth' and the assembling of dispositives**

- **Dispositive is 'a heterogeneous ensemble that includes elements such as 'discourses, institutions, architectural structures, prescriptive decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral or philanthropic propositions' (Foucault 1980, 194)**
- **Inspired by Foucault's work on discourse and dispositive, the Duisburg School examines the discourses and dispositives in the sedimentation the 'grammar' of the hegemonic or dominant discourses**

- **Marxianizing Foucault**
  - **A concern for the constraints on constituting objects of governmentality through the co-construction of discourses and dispositives**
  - **These configurations routinely produce uneven, unintended, and even contradictory effects**
  - **Foucault (1991, 2008a, 2008b) recognized these issues in his lectures on governmentality and statecraft (see also Jessop 2010).**
  - **Revisiting Marx (especially through a Gramscian optic) helps to identify the structural roots of these obstacles in the contradictions, crisis tendencies, and antagonisms of capitalist social formations and their intersections**

- **Based on this encounter and the strategic-relational approach (Jessop 2007), CPE identifies four general modes of selectivity in the remaking of social relations**
  - ***Structural***
  - ***Agential***
  - ***Discursive***
  - ***Technological***

- **Via a set of CPE heuristic tool**

3. Offering a Set of Heuristic Tool

- **This tool is intended to orient CPE research – it is not a theory but a guide to research questions and methods**
- **It highlights**
  - **the role of four selectivities of social relations and, more specifically,**
  - **seven moments in the production of hegemonies and counter-hegemonies**

Four Modes of Strategic Selectivity (Sum and Jessop 2013: 218-9)

Selectivity	Grounded In	Effects
Structural	Contested reproduction of basic social forms (e.g., capital relations, nature-society relations, etc.)	Structure favours certain interests, identities, agents, temporal-spatial horizons, strategies and tactics over others
Agential	Capacities of social agents (or sets of agents) to 'make a difference' in particular conjuncture – abilities to exploit structural, discursive and technological selectivities	'Make a difference' depends abilities to a) read conjunctures; b) repoliticize/depoliticize sedimented discourses; c) recombine/invent new technologies; and d) shift the balance of forces

Four Modes of Strategic Selectivity (Sum and Jessop 2013: 218-9)

Selectivity	Grounded In	Effects
Discursive	• Semiosis is rooted in enforced selection of sense and meaning in face of complexity • What can be enunciated, who is authorized to enunciate and how enunciations enter inter-textual, inter-discursive , contextual fields • Constraints and opportunities that are inscribed in particular genres, styles and discourses (e.g., news, consultancy reports, news releases, tweets, etc.)	• Semiotic resources can frame and limit possible imaginaries, discourses, arguments, identities and feelings • Shapes scope for hegemonies, sub-hegemonies and counter-hegemonies
Techno-logical (in a Foucaldian sense)	Assemblages of knowledge, disciplinary and governmental rationalities in specific sites, mechanisms of calculated intervention and/or governing social relations	• Specific objectivization, subjectivization, knowledging technologies and interwoven dispositives that shape choices, capacities to act, normalize intervention, convey legitimacy through rationality and effectivity

Seven Discursive-Material Moments in the Production of (Counter-)Hegemonies (Sum and Jessop 2013: 220-4)

- ***Discursive-strategic moment of social restructuring***
- ***Agential selective moment rooted in the wider social formations***
- ***(Inter)discursive selective moment in the order of discourses***
- ***Technological–selective moment in constituting social/economic reality***
- ***Moment in the constituting/ consolidating of subjects and sedimenting of common sense***
- ***Moment in re-regularizing and sedimenting social relations***
- ***Counter-hegemonic resistance and negotiations***

Modes of Selectivity	Discursive-Material Moments of Production of Hegemonies
Structural selectivities	***Discursive-strategic moment of social restructuring*** (V, S, and R)
Agential selectivities	***Agential selective moment rooted in the wider social formations*** (V, S, and R)
Discursive selectivities	***(Inter-)discursive selective moment in the order of discourses*** (S and R)
Technological selectivities	***Technological–selective moment in constituting social/economic reality via dispositivization*** (S and R)
Hegemonization and Restructuration	***Moment in constituting/consolidating of subjects and sedimenting of common sense*** (R) ***Moment in re-regularizing and sedimenting social relations in the material terrain*** (S and R)
Counter-Hegemony	***Counter-hegemonic resistance and negotiations*** (C and N)

A. Discursive–strategic moment of socio-economic restructuring

- **Faced with the profound disorienting effects of political and economic crises and challenges to act in the face of *urgences* (emergencies, urgent problems, challenges, crises, and so on)**
- **Actors at different scales and sites with varying degrees of embeddedness in institutions, organizations and social relations may rethink their opportunities for economic and political actions, leading initially to a proliferation of responses**

- **This often involves struggles/cooperation over renewal of imaginaries where diverse social, economic, political and spatio-temporal imaginaries emerge to re-evaluate past meaning systems and to interpret the conjuncture**
- **Issues are problematized and new objects of governance proposed to provide new entry points and ways of framing from one or more standpoints**

- **These discursive frames are more influential when promoted by nodal actors**
- **These frames are often linked and recontextualized to different sites and scales**
- **The knitting together of discourses and practices mediates the emergence of (inter)- discursive spaces**

B. Agential selective moment rooted in the wider social formations

- **The differential embedding of actors in social relations affects their capacities to deploy (inter)discursive networks to build new objects of governance**
- **Some agents, by virtue of their nodal position in social networks, have better capacities to read particular conjunctures, refocus arguments, displace opponents, structure responses, introduce timely imaginaries and worldviews**

- **Their discursive framings and subsequent retentions consolidate these agents as intellectual forces**
- **They inspire other agents, individual and collective, to share their conception (hegemony integrates subaltern concerns) and forge a particular worldview.**
- **This mode of knowing and sensing is not based on ‘false consciousness’ or ideological manipulation but involves the construction of object fields and subject positions**

C. *(Inter)discursive selective moment in the order of discourses*

- **The knitting together of genres in particular social practices give rise to the (inter)-discursive space**
- **This space comprises activities and documents of different genres (e.g. conferences, reports, speeches and workshops)**
- **In these chains, combination of genres can selectively restrict or transfer meanings**

- **The transfer and combination of genre(s) also entails the recontextualization of ideas and information to new sites, scales and conjunctures**
- **This allows for the selective reconfiguration of knowledge to new contexts and create image of (dis)continuity as well as density/fragility**

D. Technological–selective moment in constituting social/economic reality

- **Discursive technologies involve a set of knowledge, expertise, techniques, technologies and apparatuses that construct authority and marginalize others as well as guide actions and modify processes**
- **These knowledging technologies could include:**
  - **economic, social, managerial and norm-based knowledge of market, competitiveness, development, poverty reduction, sustainability, etc.**

- **modalities of expertise of significant agents (e.g. top academic economists, politicians, management gurus, IMF/WTO/WB officials, standard-setting agencies, opinion makers etc.)**
- **knowledging techniques, technologies and their epistemic grammar (logics of inevitability, linearity, classification, performance, metaphors etc.) to speak about the object**
- **apparatuses (e.g. consultancy reports, plans, programmes, blueprints, guidelines, standards, codes of conduct, best practices, numbers, indexes, targets, scorecards, etc.)**

- **This ensemble of micro-technologies and interwoven dispositives selectively map sites of intervention, regulate behaviour of people, and guide practices**
- **Through sedimented bodies of knowledge they discipline behaviours, normalize judgements, and mediate self-governing and self-leadership**

E. Moment in the constituting/consolidating of subjects and sedimenting of common sense

- **Under the actual or imagined gaze of an authority or interwoven dispositive and truth regime, objects are identified and subjects positions are bought to life**
- **These processes of objectivation and subjectivation involve the intermeshing of top–down and bottom–up (re)production of object fields and subject positions in multiple sites (e.g. databases, guidelines, codes, indexes) and settings (e.g. offices, families, schools)**

- **These dispositives frame sense perceptions of the social and help to form the bases of Gramsci's 'common sense'**
- **These forms of governing common sense are multi-faceted, composite and even contradictory**
- **This 'contradictory consciousness' means that agencies view the world from a perspective that contains both hegemonic modes of thinking *and* forms of critical insights.**
- **This mix varies across individuals, with some more energized affectively to maintain hegemonic modes of thinking while others are more ambivalent.**

F. Moment in re-regularizing and sedimenting social relations

- **These subjectivities and identities are performed, repeated and stabilize over time**
- **As forms of strategic logic, they become regularized and sedimented through various strategies, institutions and governance (this is a further stage in dispositivization)**

- **They institute certain forms of (capitalist) life and preclude others in uneven and contradictory ways**
- **The greater the range of (sub-)hegemonic sites in which these resonant logics are selected and strategies promoted, the greater the potential for coalition-building around hegemonic project(s)**

- **Efforts to conserve or rebuild social relations involve 'unstable equilibrium of compromise' between groups and class fractions**
- **These 'moving but unstable equilibria' may result in temporary strategic fixes that may accommodate some contradictions whilst others may fuel crisis**
- **This unevenness invites continuous challenges from the marginal/subaltern groups**

G. Counter-hegemonic resistance and negotiations

- **The variety of sites, scales and social networks on which these processes unfold and the existence of 'contradictory consciousness' inevitably generate a surplus of meanings and unevenness with regard to class, gender, ethnicity, nature, place, etc. that cannot easily be contained by strategic essentialisms that privilege just one identity**
- **Hegemony is not a cohesive, unilateral, monovalent relationship of leaders and led; it is riddled with tensions, contradictions, and depends on the 'suturing' of difference that is always vulnerable to pulling apart and ruptures**

- **This opens up the possibility of counter-hegemonic struggles and the building of solidarity networks (e.g., movement-oriented NGOs, World Social Forum etc.), alternative knowledge and leadership**
- **These networks may disrupt/subvert dominant cultural symbols and practices in the forms of:**
  - **'branding from below' (e.g. *'Another World is Possible'*)**
  - **use of strategies by unions and social movements (e.g. strikes, walk-outs, political demonstration, name and shame etc.)**
  - **use of tactics by the weak/subalterns (e.g. political theatre, insurrectionary art, resort to lies/secrets/fictions/parodies; refusal to speak etc.)**

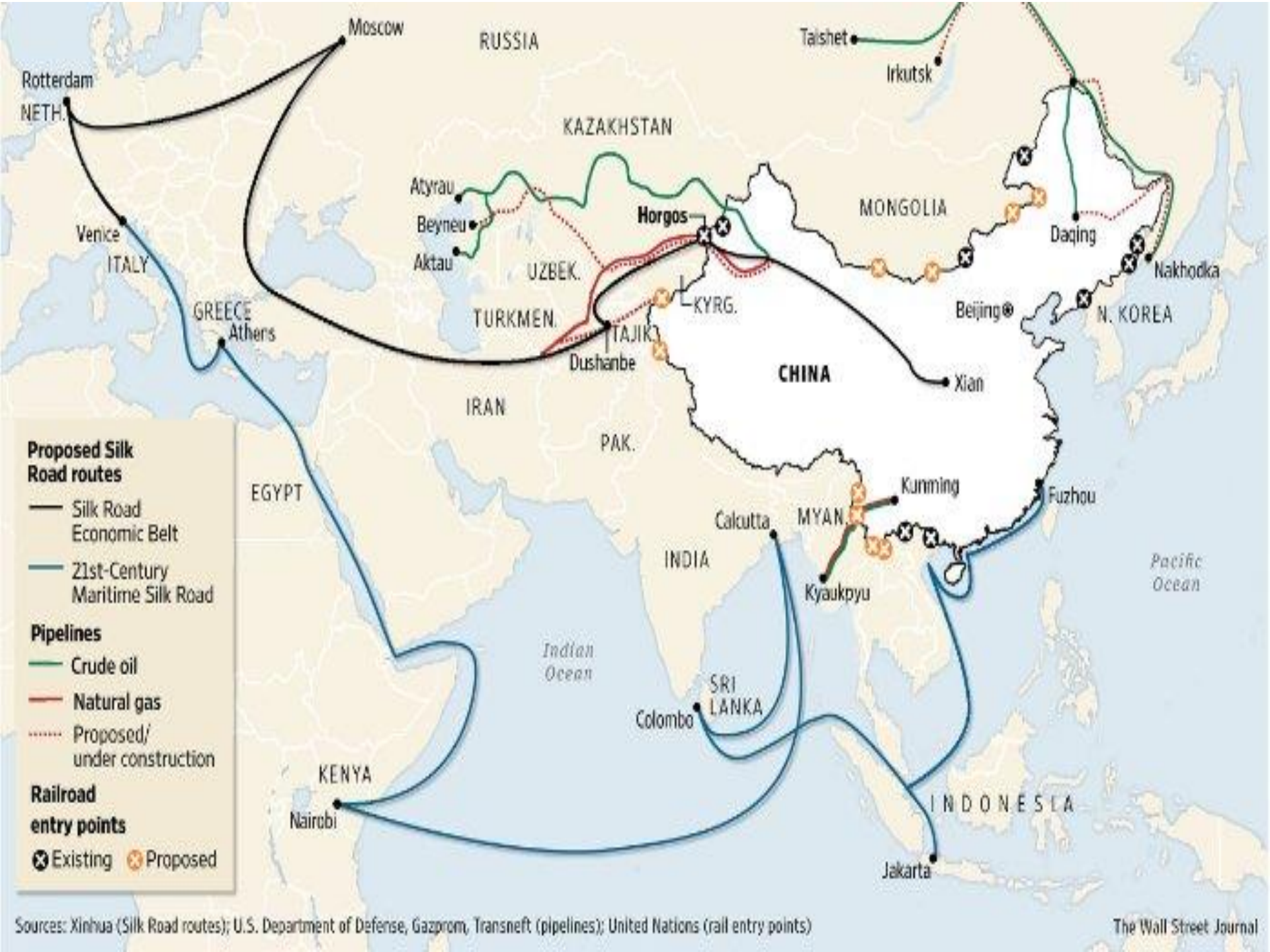
- **Hegemonic forces have to enter into dialogues (or confined discussions in a monologue context) with other groups**
- **Hegemonic forces negotiate and constantly shift ground in order to accommodate these challenges through a mix of depoliticization, re-moralization, coercion; domination**
- **This may prompt further variation and further selection and retention in the material–discursive terrains**

4. Concluding Remarks

- **Some specific starting points – steering a route between Scylla and Charybdis**
- **Staging a three-sided encounter between Marx, Gramsci and Foucault**
- **Sharing a set of heuristic tool based on 4 modes of selectivities and 7 material-discursive moments**
- **It is not comprehensive and simply illustrates how to translate macro-theoretical discussions to middle-range arguments by focusing on particular set of questions about the 'production of hegemonies'**

- **These moments are not sequential and need to be adapted and rethought for specific research agenda**
- **Scholars are recommended to**
  - **choose their own theoretical and empirical entry-point/standpoint to suit their own research**
  - **develop their own device that examines the semiotic and structural aspects in their co-evolutionary articulation**

- **My own entry point has always started with the discursive moments and the changing social relations therein**
- **Past work include the hegemonic discourses of :**
  - **Competitiveness as knowledge brand (2009)**
  - **Wal-Mart and Wal-Martization (2010)**
  - **Corporate social responsibility, stakeholder discourses and new ethicalism (2010 and 2014)**
  - **'BRIC' discourse during the crisis conjuncture (Brazil, Russia, India, China) (2013)**
  - **'China' as hope object for crisis recovery (2014)**
- **Now I am working on**
  - **China's 'One belt one road' imaginary (2015-)**



Sources: Xinhua (Silk Road routes); U.S. Department of Defense, Gazprom, Transneft (pipelines); United Nations (rail entry points)

The Wall Street Journal

The End

Thank you