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**Final Exam Soc. 101B**  
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Question 1: In opposite to post-Marxists (Lukács, Gramsci) who were concerned by the unpredicted stability of capitalist society, neo-Durkheimians like T. Parsons, E. Gellner and W. Kornhauser focus their reflection on social cohesion of modern society. Neo-Durkheimians explain the stability of modern society with the rise of societal structures and culture. They use the original Durkheim's concept of *organic solidarity* that builds cohesion among people as long as modern society grows. For neo-Durkheimians, modern society is stable since its cohesiveness expands as division of labor occurs. However, the three neo-Durkheimians we studied this semester differs in their counter-arguments to post-Marxists (negative argument), as well as on how cohesion and consensus develop in modern society (positive argument).

Parsons' critic of Marx is based on the fact that modern society is more complex than Marx's dichotomy between proletariat/workers and bourgeois/owners. On the bourgeois side, Marx's simple concept of owner operated family firm is not real: modern firms are based on separation of power (a board of directors owns, a CEO manages, and it is rarely controlled by a family). On the proletariat side, stratifications emerge (technicians, skilled workers, unskilled workers). For Parsons, Marx's theory of proletariat revolution is based on a too simplistic view of modern society. What Parsons called *pluralization* of modern society is ignored in Marx theory (Parson 1967:110,113).

Gellner is also concerned with the oversimplification of Marx's views, but he is more focused on the consequences of division of labor. In modern society, workers are highly specialized and very mobile. If alienated, Gellner argues that a worker can change job whenever he /she wants. Marx did not take the notion of *occupational mobility* into account. The proletariat solidarity envisioned by Marx is in fact impossible because of

occupational mobility. For Gellner occupational mobility explains why proletariat revolution did not occur (Gellner 1981:755,756).

For Kornhauser, Marx did not see the role of what he called the *intermediate structures*, a complex set of associations to which people belong voluntarily. Kornhauser writes that individuals “*can influence decisions more effectively through their own groups*” (1959: 82). The cross interactions that arise on a daily basis in modern society make it more and more stable as it develops.

On the positive argument, Parsons insists that in modern society means / ends calculations or rationalization guides individual decision. While explaining that values and traditions are stabilizing modern society, he also describes a modern society that tends to undermine them: traditions have been “*debuked*” (Parson 1954:128). Parsons elaborates on the danger of rationalization, but does not provide a credible explanation for stability.

Gellner establishes the link between modern industrial society and nationalism. The *homogeneous* modern society initiates “*loyalty, rhetoric and devotion*” or what he describes as nationalism, the only way according to him to stabilize modern society. (Gellner 1981:768).

Thanks to *cross-cutting affiliations* Kornhauser explains how *intermediate structures* reinforce modern society. Belonging to a multiplicity of associations, individuals move from one to another following leaders they believe in. The US bi-party system is seen as coalitions of diverse interests that don't pursue a specific one (1959: 80). American parties produce social stability and tend to move to the center and avoid extreme positions to maintain a large base of members. For neo-Durkheimians modern society complexity and constant evolution is building-up its stability over time.

Question 2: Critical theorists like F. Pollock, H. Marcuse and J. Habermas are concerned by social integration or the ways in which individual fit or not fit into social role offered by society. They look for ways to change society for it to achieve its full potential (everybody is at his/her full potential). Critical theory sees Marx's theory limits in its exclusive focus on exploitation and the economy. For critical theorists, domination and political authority is a way to stabilize modern society, and to manage capitalism crisis by intervening in the market economy. For critical theorists relations of domination and authority is what hold modern society together. Domination itself becomes ideologically justified, appearing to be a necessity for social functioning. However, the three theorists have different views and focus about societal optimization by domination.

For Pollock as division of labor expands, people's work and visions have to be coordinated, managed and regulated since individual's visions become too narrowly focused. Modern state is in charge of providing full employment for everybody, to secure the economy and to plan necessary raw material supply (1992:87). In a controlled and planned economy as envisioned by Pollock, the state main promise is full employment. The only way for state capitalism to fulfill its promise in a "*closely controlled*" economy is military expenditure (1992:76). Expanding military is increasing state jobs (1992:89) keeping the standard of living low while increasing level of skilled worker and technology.

Marcuse is a key figure from this line of theorists. He focuses on *domination*.

Domination is justified to hold society together, though political domination becomes a technical necessity. Marcuse follows Weber's ideas of modern society built around state or private bureaucracies that dominate society with rational means/ends approaches (1968:216). Marcuse's concept of *technical rationality* – a form of rationality established

by leader/bureaucrats to expand the forces of production - is opposed to *individual rationality* - free, autonomous and rational individual actions. Marcuse insists that bureaucracies are social machines that mediate human relationships in modern society. Moreover, bureaucracies' domination is a way to structure society and this particular form of domination is instrumental to enhance modern society cohesiveness.

The third theorist of this line of thought, Habermas, is building on theories formulated by Weber and Marcuse. He expands Weber's *instrumental rationality* and adds his vision of *communicative rationality* to Marcuse's *technical rationality*. As described by Marcuse, technology and science are seen as key ways to optimize the force of production; therefore they become ideologies to bring progress and well being to the masses.

Moreover, Habermas reformulates Marx historical development, adding to the notion of human labor the communicative aspect of Human nature. He writes,

*“Public, unrestricted discussion... and repoliticized decision-making processes is the only medium in which anything like ‘rationalization’ is possible”* (1971:119).

For him, a dynamic *public sphere* – a place where critical discourse based on rational thinking and mutual understanding occurs - is the ultimate way to improve society. Ends are really rationalized only with discourse democracy and the creation of a capable public opinion. Public sphere are ways to organize the critic of modern society, to review how domination is organized and to find practical solutions to optimize modern society. In pre-capitalist society, critical theorists justified structure of domination in modern society. However, in modern capitalist society, individual rationality has become a reality transforming the whole societal structures as well as individual thinking. This particular line of thoughts oriented towards domination is not really anymore explored.

Question 3: Post-modernists theorists like Daniel Bell, Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault are concerned with *individualization* of modern society. Human beings are seen as disciplined subjects who are products of history. Post-modernism is offering a new metaphor: society is not structured like a building that is erected over the years, society is a language; it is a system of signs. Languages are not the product of conscious human activity. Languages are malleable, in constant transformation. The shift of metaphor has serious consequences on how theorists think about social change. Post-modernists don't rely on theories of human nature. In post-modernism there is no need to draw historical development theories: society changes constantly with no specific direction. However, the three theorists have very different perspectives about societal *individualization*. In modern society, Bell sees culture as autonomous from social structures; in direct opposition to Weber's vision. For Bell, capitalism is not producing a culture that tends to reinforce itself. Modern capitalism produces an *adversary* culture that undermines society. Capitalism requires individual discipline, a vocational calling (see Spirit of Capitalism, Weber). However, uncontrolled lifestyle of people (discretionary social behavior, individual independence) undermines the fundamentals of capitalism. The emergence of the new cultural class (producers and consumers of education) that is totally autonomous from the elites creates an adversarial culture. Bell writes,

*"The enhancement of the single life became a value for its own sake"*  
*"Impulse and pleasure alone are real and life-affirming..."* (1979:49,51).

This form of modern and adversary culture - *the psychedelic bazaar* - (1979:54), where needs and consumption are shaped by culture, is for Bell totally counter-productive and it destabilizes society.

Baudrillard shares with Bell the idea that in modern society, consumption is essential; however Baudrillard argues that consumption follows class division and has a significant social role. When individuals seek out their needs and achieve their desires, it helps social integration. Distinctions among social classes are expressed in consumption patterns. Bell sees consumption as disintegrating society with every individual following the same path, while Baudrillard says consumption reaffirms class norms and stability. This is a vision of class division that is reinforced by patterns of consumption. The upper class is constantly searching for something new that would reinforce its domination. The social power of consumption comes from the “*symbolic exchange value*” of goods, or the signification attached to an object as social status enhancement. Baudrillard argues that symbolic exchange value is more important to use value (1981:30).

In opposition to Bell and Baudrillard, for Foucault it is not consumption that drives individuals, but *discipline* as a regime of power and a regime of knowledge. Discipline holds modern society together. It works by individualizing, and shaping human beings into responsible individuals. Examination brings together an observing hierarchy normalizing judgment, making individual objects of surveillance. Discipline as technology of power has spread over society, into all the different arenas of the social world (school, factory, office...). Power works not anymore with the use of violence (see example of Damien’s’ punishment 1979:3,7) but rather with a continuous set of operation that works on the “*soul*” (1979:16) to produce disciplined individuals.

Foucault’s theory of discipline explains why individuals are followers of social norms and are productive participants: disciplined society is a mandatory to get knowledge, and knowledge produces a disciplined society that spread more knowledge (1979:192). It’s a system that reproduces itself.

Question 4b: The key theme of the course is societal stability. Gramsci and Foucault, while belonging to very different school of thoughts, provide theories of social stability based on how domination occurs in modern society. In addition, both approach social stability outside the sphere of economy, focusing their interest at the individual level, on norms acceptance and consent participation. Therefore, Gramsci's concept of *hegemony* and Foucault's notion of *discipline* are in some ways comparable.

Foucault formulates his theory based on individualization, a specific approach shared by the post-modernist school of thought. Foucault explains that individuals are followers of social norms and at the same time are productive participants in society, thanks to *discipline* (1979:180). Disciplinary power works in modern society by making the individual a source of knowledge, the subject / object of power. It's a circular process, a continuous one, that builds modern society and its incredible stability (1979:192). In modern society, everybody thinks he/she is observed by others. In addition, examination forces social norms to be followed and accepted by every participant.

In his example about justice, Foucault insists that legal punishment is not anymore based on beliefs and irrational thinking, it is rather based on knowledge, "*Knowledge of the offence, knowledge of the offender, knowledge of the law*" (1979:19). For Foucault, the new rational way to conduct justice is now a quest toward a "cure" to societal problem while previously, public torture was supposed to discourage. Foucault illustrates with this example how modern justice is based on popular consent on rules (laws) that are publicly discussed, voted and then adopted by society at large. These dimensions of his particular definition of *disciplinary state* are also envisioned by Gramsci with his concept of *hegemony*.

Western Marxism, the school of thought of Gramsci, tries to explain the unpredicted stability of capitalism based on an analysis of superstructures. For Gramsci,

*“The supremacy of a social groups manifests itself in domination and intellectual and moral leadership”* (1971:12)

Gramsci defines the concept of *hegemony* as a move within civil society that brings one class interest to be shared by other. Hegemony is linked to the development of civil society, a specific sort of superstructure. Gramsci has a particular analysis of the consequence of capitalism development on class-consciousness: organic Intellectual grows of capitalistic production and development. Each class – the proletariat - will eventually get its share of intellectuals, capable of designing a political program and communicate it to society at large. The goal of the proletariat is to achieve hegemony – as it was achieved by the bourgeoisie - that is when particular class interests become shared by others. Hegemony is a consent of the population over one class interest. Hegemony is based on a program, accepted and shared by other. Hegemony is a strategy in which a class develops its intellectual activities and a political moral capable of integrating other societal influence.

It is possible to argue that Foucault’s definition of modern society *discipline* is a kind of *hegemony*. In order for people to be agent of consciousness, and to act as informed individuals, they have to be subject to some sort of power and accept social norms as the basis of society. Over the years, intellectuals and scientists (especially social scientists) helped shaping the laws that govern modern society and made them accepted by the population at large.

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