

# Empowering critical international theory by applying action research methodology to its inquiry

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes the influence and relevance of Gramscian and Habermasian critical international theories within the context of recent developments in the world politics that do not function in favour of these discourses' emancipatory objectives and projections. It first looks at their emergence as alternative paradigms to the traditional conceptualizations in the discipline of IR and then compares the roots of their theoretical positions and their contribution to the analysis of international politics. Its main argument is that both Gramscian and Habermasian critical international theories can be empowered by learning from each other's strengths as well as applying a participatory action research methodology into their analyses.

*Key words:* Gramsci, Habermas, Critical Theory, international politics, action research.

*JEL codes:* F50, F59.

## 1. Introduction

From the 1980s onwards critical international theories with their reflective, emancipatory and challenging research agendas have made a truly fundamental contribution to the discipline of international relations. However, after 20 years from the dawn of the critical thinking in the field, it seems reasonable to reconsider the theoretical position of this mode of thinking in the wake of the international developments of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and particularly of the post-September 11 era, such as the revival of state-centred paradigm and geopolitical thinking in conceptualizing global politics, the continued erosion of individual freedoms on behalf of maintaining security and order in the insecure environment of worldwide fear instilled by terrorism, the growing popularity of the clash of civilisations thesis and the unraveling of the predatory effects of

contemporary globalisation. Emancipation goal of critical theory was challenged and dealt a severe blow by all these backward steps and this also looks at first glance to be the starting point of the relative weakening of the explanatory power and relevance of both neo-Gramscian and Habermasian conceptualisations and their respective consent-based or ideological hegemony conception and the idea of speech community in particular. Thus a reconsideration of the Habermasian and Gramscian versions of critical international theory in terms of their epistemological, ontological and methodological approaches to the study of international politics is now a pressing necessity. In this context, this paper seeks to answer the question of whether it is possible to correct critical international theory's, both its Gramscian and Habermasian variants', defects and troubled aspects with the methodology of action research and its action-oriented features. To this end, it first compares these two contemporary representations of critical international theory in order to see how they interact and if they may learn from each other's positions in analyzing the world politics, and then applies action research methodology to their conduct of research concerning global issues, thereby offering a way of enhancing the stature of critical thinking in IR.

Here is the more detailed outline of the paper. As the study intends initially to present a comparative analysis of the two contemporary versions of critical international relations theory, it first gives a brief account of both the historical origins and development of (the Frankfurt School's) critical theory and of arrival and evolution of critical paradigm in international relations in the wake of inter-paradigm debate in the 1980s. Secondly, it focuses on the Habermasian and Gramscian versions of critical international theory and the criticisms levelled by other discourses about their basic assumptions. In the first section of this chapter, Habermas's critical international theory is analyzed within the theoretical framework of his categorisation of human interests and his theories of communicative action and ideal speech situation. The application of his theory to international relations and the critiques provided by postmodernists and feminists to its core assumptions are also addressed. The second section, which presents an outline of Gramscian critical international theory, concentrates on his conceptions of hegemony, historical bloc and state/civil society complexes, and discusses the main problems and flaws in his theoretical position from the perspectives of other critical discourses. Thirdly, the similarities and differences between these two versions of critical theory are explored in terms of both their epistemological and ontological positions towards the problems of international relations and their methodological approaches to the research process and data collection. The paper concludes with an overview of both the main contribution of these two discourses to the study of international relations with regard to their theoretical innovations and methodological assets and how their relatively weakened role and position in the discipline can be strengthened

and consolidated through the application of action research methodology to their inquiry.

## 2. A brief history of critical international theory

The historical roots of contemporary critical theory date back to the 'Frankfurt School' of the 1930s and 40s with its representatives such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Lowenthal, Walter Benjamin, and more recently Jürgen Habermas. As a theoretical project aiming at criticising and transforming the present societies through the effective use of human reason, it represents itself as a radical way of thinking about modern societies and the unresolved problems inherent in them. It differentiates itself from the traditional (bourgeois) forms of theorizing on the grounds that its purpose is to achieve the goal of forming a community of free persons liberated from all forms of domination resulting from scientific-positivist understanding of science (Horkheimer 1972; Held 1990; Hoy & McCharty 1994; Wiggerhaus 1994; Jahn 1998; Horkheimer & Adorno 2002). In this sense, it provides a reflective way of thinking in contrast to traditional theory which has remained unable to grasp its own historical premises, assumptions and functioning.

Although the Frankfurt School's critical theory constitutes a complex and heterogeneous cluster of thought and great differences can be found between particularly the former members of this school and Habermas and his associates, both groups have some interests and beliefs in common, such as their exploration of the barriers to and possibilities for emancipation, their reliance on human potential on the path to emancipation, and their adoption of interdisciplinary approach to the understanding of the social reality (Held 1990; Devetak 1996). However, the international dimension of these commonalities has largely been ignored by most members of the Frankfurt School. At this point, critical international relations theory has endeavoured to build a theory of world politics which is grounded on the conceptions and purposes of critical social theory, especially on the goal of 'universal' emancipation (Neufeld 2001).

There have been three discipline-defining paradigmatic debates, each is 'an expression of the on-going quest for better theory' (Neufeld 1995), in the evolution of international relations, and critical international theory has grown out of the third debate between positivist-(neo)realist and critical paradigms. This debate has largely provided the necessary theoretical ground upon which a critical turn in international relations theory can be built (Lapid 1989; Linklater 1990; Cox & Sjolander 1994; Neufeld 1995; Wæver 1996; Keyman 1997; Murphy 2001). Critical turn is concerned intrinsically with the epistemological questions the third debate has left unanswered and attempts to construct a theory of 'knowing' rather than of 'being' or 'doing' (Cox & Sjolander 1994). Here, it intends to examine the relationship between power and knowledge and draws our attention to the

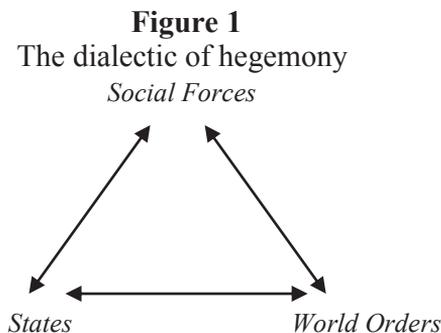
fact that knowledge claims in critical enquiry are not produced scientifically, as in the case of neo-realism, but socially and historically (Neufeld 1995; Keyman 1997). In accordance with its socially and historically constituted epistemological character, it naturally opposes to the taken-for-granted ontological status of the reality, and instead reflects upon international relations theory itself (Cox & Sjolander 1994). In addition to its epistemological and ontological challenges to positivist-neorealist perspective, critical international theory also presents a normative standpoint which makes the practice of inclusion/exclusion resulting from modernity's conception of self its central theme, and focuses on the extension of democratic human community (Keyman 1997). Thus, it grows as a theoretical approach which has situated emancipatory politics at the heart of its analysis at all levels.

It is possible to speak of four different discourses or schools in critical international theory, namely Habermasian, neo-Gramscian, postmodern and feminist discourses. In the next chapter, in order to provide a theoretical basis for a comparative analysis in what follows, the first two critical discourses are briefly analyzed in terms of their epistemological, ontological and normative approaches and assumptions.

### 3. Gramscian and Habermasian critical international relations theories

#### 3.1. Gramscian critical international theory

Gramsci's work has been applied to the spheres of international relations and political economy by Robert Cox who has attempted to account for the existing world order and explore the possible ways of changing it and of creating an alternative world order (Cox 1981). His explanation of the production and reproduction of this order draws on the nexus between domestic and external (social) forces. The interconnection among social forces, states and world orders, thus, constitutes the crucial element in his attempt to develop a neo-Gramscian version of critical theory (Cox 1981; Burnham 1991; Keyman 1997). To this end Cox employs the conceptual tools drawn from Gramsci, such as hegemony, historical bloc and integral state.



Hegemony in Gramscian sense can be described as ‘a historical fit between social forces, states, and a world order’ (Keyman 1997: 8). It arises from the interplay between internal and external social forces which are defined in terms of the relations of production. Although hegemony consists of three intertwined dimensions, namely, the political, the economic and the ideological, the hegemony of a social group must be absolutely founded upon an economic base and content so as to acquire the consent of subordinate social groups (Mouffe 1979; Cox 1983, 1987; Augelli & Murphy 1993; Buchanan 2000; Persaud 2001; Morton 2003). On this basis, as a dialectical concept, hegemony is conceived as a historical combination of coercion and consent. Indeed, as Gramsci states, ‘the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ (Gramsci 1971: 57). To illustrate, analyzing *pax-Britannica* of the nineteenth century, Cox and Arrighi have pointed out that it was based on both the rise of British sea power as a means of domination and the spread of liberalism as the underlying ideological element of this hegemonic order (Cox 1983, 1987; Arrighi 1993). Thus, unlike the classical-realist conceptualization, the Gramscian view of hegemony contains not only material capabilities, but also an ideological element, namely the creation of consent. These economic factors and ideological-political structures interact with each other through historical blocs.

A historical bloc can be defined as ‘a wider social and political constellation of forces’ (Gill & Law 1993: 93). The hegemony of a social class occurs in a historical bloc when it becomes aware that ‘one’s own corporate interest in their present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too’ (Gramsci 1971: 12, 136-137). Representing a historical fit between material capabilities, ideas and institutions, historical blocs serve as a mechanism which ‘brings the interests of the leading class into harmony with those of subordinate classes and incorporates these other interests into an ideology expressed in universal terms’ (Gramsci 1971: 180). As such, a historical bloc forms an organic link between political and civil society and signifies, in Gramscian sense, ‘a passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures’ (Cox 1983: 57).

Once hegemony is defined as an interplay between internal and external social forces, the state is conceptualized as an entity which unites the classical conception of the state and the structures of civil society such as media, the church, unions etc., making it a superstructural domain: ‘what we can do’ for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural levels: the one that can be called ‘civil society’, that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called ‘private’, and that of ‘political society’ or ‘the State’ (Gramsci 1971: 12). In this sense, hegemony encompasses both the political and cultural leadership simultaneously and civil society has a pre-eminent

position in this formulation because it is the domain in which a fit between the structural and the superstructural moments comes about (Mouffe 1979; Bobbio 1979; Gill 1990, 1993). Therefore, the concept of integral state is presented as a sphere where hegemony of the leading class is exercised and functioned. Then, as Cox states, an outward expansion of this internal (national) hegemony completes the whole process of forming a hegemonic world order (Cox 1981).

Gramscian discourse has been criticized by both neorealist scholars and poststructuralists. The most severely attacked aspects of Gramscian theory are its class reductionist nature in defining hegemony and its character which gives the category of class primacy over other social categories based on gender, religion or ethnicity (Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Keyman 1997). The accusation of reductionism results largely from its selection of productive relations as its object of analysis and in this respect, hegemony has become a concept which is produced in comply with the ideology of dominant classes. Also, when hegemony is defined only in terms of production no place remains for other social categories in the analysis of hegemonic order. Accordingly, this understanding of subject reduced to classes prevents critical theory from paying attention to the problem of inclusion/exclusion (Keyman 1997). This ontological preference means that the other categories are not considered sufficiently potent or eligible for altering and challenging to the prevailing hegemonic world order. Therefore, their role in constructing counter-hegemonic forces or blocs against hegemonic power, for example, the identity/difference dimension of emancipatory project, has been seriously neglected in the Gramscian thinking.

### *3.2. Habermasian critical international theory*

Habermasian critical theory has advanced Horkheimer's distinction between traditional and critical theory further and investigated the connection between knowledge and interests (McCharty 1978; Hoffman 1987; Held 1990; Diez & Steans 2005). At this point, Habermas designates the concept of 'knowledge-constitutive interests' and three categories of knowledge guided by them: technical interests, practical interests and emancipatory interests (Habermas 1972).

As the knowledge-constitutive interests of empirico-analytical sciences producing technical knowledge, technical interests are concerned with accounting for how human agents have mastered and manipulated nature and social relations through technical control. Historical, hermeneutic and cultural sciences are guided by practical interests that seek knowledge in the realms of language and action rather than observation. Finally, as the knowledge-constitutive interests of critical sciences, emancipatory interests concern liberation from 'hypostatized forces and conditions of distorted communication' which result from the mutual

reinforcement of technical and practical interests. On this account, emancipation means that human beings are capable of freeing themselves from all forms of domination preventing them from realising their inherent potentialities through reflective reasoning.

After having problematized these negative aspects of Western modernity which led the project of modernity to remain unfinished, Habermas proposes that in order to complete this project, technical-instrumental rationality should be replaced by communicative rationality, a concept which is drawn on communicative action (McCharty 1976, 1978; Morrow 1994; Keyman 1997; Diez & Steanz 2005; Weber 2005). In this way, it may be possible to constitute an ideal speech situation in which different identities can find the ways of communicating with each other freely and honestly. This situation seems nearly unachievable under normal circumstances since all participants cannot possibly express themselves. However, it is vital that all speakers in this discourse 'be free to question and refute claims of other speakers' (Blaikie 1993: 56).

Drawing upon these ideas and assumptions, Richard Ashley has introduced Habermasian discourse into international relations theory and differentiated critical theory from positivist-neorealist mode of thinking (Ashley 1981; Linklater 1990; Diez & Steanz 2005). On the basis of this distinction, since neorealism cannot pass the test of critical theory by virtue of its failure 'to understand the ideological component of the approach, particularly the content of the norms, rules and values that underpin the society of states' (Hoffman 1987: 239), it serves for merely the technical and practical interests of states and the state system and hence have a legitimising rather than transformative effect on international system. In this formulation, critical theory is described as an emancipatory project providing a helpful tool to problematize positivist-inspired paradigms (Hoffman 1987; Keyman 1997). In this respect, incorporating Habermas's theory into international relations theory would mark a new theoretical approach in which neither the interests of dominant powers are privileged and nor the existing order is protected.

Even though some writers have asserted that critical theory and especially its Habermasian version represent the next stage in international relations theory, Habermas's critical theory has been subject to severe criticism by anti-foundationalists and postmodernists. Among its most attacked features are its patriarchal and Eurocentric tendencies, the problems of universalism and foundationalism, the problematic nature of consensus, and the ignorance of subject in its analysis (Ashley 1981; Hoffman 1987; Keyman 1997; Diez & Steanz 2005). For instance, the postmodern discourse has attacked the foundational and universalist nature of the concept of communicative rationality and argued that it would not be easy to reach consensus among the nations which have different national interests and potentials in the categories of economic, military and political power in today's globalized world (Diez & Steanz 2005). At this point,

Habermas is unable to propose any satisfactory solution to this problem except to acknowledge the Eurocentricist nature of his theory. In addition to its Eurocentricism, the Habermasian discourse has presupposed the adaptation of the subject (different identities) to the ideal speech community and so ignored the subject's desire to express itself with its own specificity in this community (Keyman 1997). This exclusion of subject from the analysis, too, helped the reproduction of Eurocentric discourse of modernity.

#### 4. A comparative analysis of Habermasian and Gramscian critical international theories

It is obvious from the analyses above that Habermas and Gramsci have worked in fundamentally different paradigms. Indeed, the former has focused on communication between human beings, using linguistics approaches and methods while the latter has viewed productive relations as ultimately determinant and sought emancipation in productive sphere rather than in language. This difference is closely connected with their efforts to reconstruct the method of historical materialism.

Although based his theory of language and communication on the concepts and assumptions of Marxism, Habermas has engaged in a systematic reconstruction of the Marxist thought (McCharty 1979; Dickens 1983; Linklater 1990, 1996; Miller 1999). To Habermas, the human element in Marx's analysis of society has been left aside and human evolution has been considered in terms of the conditions of economic progression which naturally suppose a linear and deterministic understanding of history because of his sharp distinction between the forces of production (technical activity) and the relations of production (practical activity) (McCharty 1979; Held 1990; Morrow 1994). By contrary, Habermas tends to adopt an approach that leaves out the notion of revolution and class struggle from the theory (Linklater 1996), and offers a 'more differentiated and complex' mode of historical materialistic thinking which relies on 'the autonomous capacity of society to rationalize normative structures in order to accommodate and mitigate the rationalization of...productive forces' (Devetak 1996: 162). Indeed, as Huspek has put it, 'following the linguistic turn in philosophy, Habermas has argued that the source of human emancipation is located neither in a specific class nor in any other empirically bounded group (e.g., artists, students, intellectuals) but rather is immanently present within all speakers' communicative competencies' (Huspek 1997: 269). In conclusion, Habermas's effort to reconstruct historical materialism has resulted in the replacement of the paradigm of production and social labour by a new paradigm of language or communicative action.

Habermas's theories of communicative action and speech community have been increasingly made use of in the discipline of international relations and have particularly become prominent in the works of Habermas-influenced authors such as Thomas Risse, Mark Hoffman, Andrew Linklater and Axel Honneth (Linklater 1996; Devetak 1996; Rengger 2001; Weber 2005; Diez & Steanz 2005). For example, Linklater is concerned with revealing 'the ways in which communities come to be bounded and distinct from one another' and 'how boundedness and separateness change over time' (Linklater & Macmillan 1995: 12-13). Risse, too, in his investigation of decision-making processes, has discussed the question of whether communicative action would replace strategic action both in the bodies of governance and in the behaviours of decision-makers (Diez & Steanz 2005).

The reconstruction of historical materialism has also been a central theme in Gramscian discourse. Although worked within a Marxist-Leninist framework and based his work on historicism, Gramsci has reconceived Marx's base-superstructure distinction and in some ways transcended it by emphasizing the realm of civil society (Germain & Kenny 1998). He has also challenged to mechanical and economistic interpretations of Marxism by stressing the role and importance of folklore, myths and national identity in the formation of hegemonic orders; objected to the idea of transhistorical or universal truth; put a special emphasis on both the role of human consciousness in the construction of identities and the relationship between hegemony and individual consciousness (Morera 1990; Gill 1990; Devetak 1996; Germain & Kenny 1998; Rupert 2005); and finally, interpreted history quite differently from Marx by arguing: 'the movement from one historical conjuncture to another was neither predetermined nor linear' (Germain & Kenny 1998: 10).

For the neo-Gramscians, Gramsci's work offers an innovative reading of historical materialism which can be easily observed in his conceptions of hegemony, historical bloc and civil society. To illustrate, many scholars have analyzed the emergence of US hegemony in this context and argued that post-Second World War *pax-Americana* was established through the inner (Keynesian-Welfare State) consensus between the state, the working class and the American business elites (Cox 1981, 1987; Gill 1990, 2003; Rupert 1995) and was maintained through a transatlantic historical bloc led by the US (Maier 1978; Mjøset 1990; Cafruny 1990; Rupert 1995; Gill 2003). However, after the relative decline of American power in 1970s, a neoliberal historical bloc led by the forces of transnational capital and ruling class has from the early 1980s onwards replaced this transatlantic bloc in today's globalized world (Cox 1987; Gill 2003). On the other hand, as Rupert puts it, the new transnational bloc has been increasingly challenged by a variety of transnational social agents in 1990s and while some of these forces are class-based, many others are not (Rupert 2005).

## 5. Empowering neo-gramscianism through some habermasian insights

Though both paradigms differ substantially from each other as can be seen from the analysis above, some Habermasian themes such as the construction of intersubjective understanding (hegemony), linguistics and communication (hegemonic ideology) can be found in Gramsci's works, too. Nevertheless, despite his reformulation of Marxism, as Laclau and Mouffe have contended, Gramsci's attempt to ground his work upon these non-economic issues has remained fairly unsatisfactory. Indeed, since 'the ultimate core of the hegemonic subject's identity is constituted at a point external to the space it articulates', i.e. the realm of politics, it is still the proletariat that is relied on as a unifying class within the neo-Gramscian projections of counter-hegemonic reactionism to the existing hegemonic order (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 85). For Laclau and Mouffe, given the increasing political significance of language and linguistic dimensions of labour, this conception of hegemony can be reconceptualized through the insights of linguistic methods and approaches employed by Poststructuralist thinkers such as Saussure and Wittgenstein. At this point, by arguing that language plays a crucial role in Gramsci's conception of hegemony as a combination of coercion and consent and by emphasizing that this role does not necessarily mean a movement from reality to the realm of discourse, Ives insists that Laclau and Mouffe's trajectory from non-linguistic economism to social theory should be reformulated as 'a shift from Gramscian Marxism that also draws heavily on (anti-nomenclature) linguistic concepts in combination with economic analysis to a linguistically informed post-structuralism' (Ives 2005: 466). This reformulation, according to him, would make possible to construct a fresh Gramscian approach to language that 'does not bifurcate language, communication or symbolic action from labour as do many theorists including Habermas...' (Ives 2005: 456).

Despite that there are epistemological (productive relations vs. communicative action) and ontological (productive forces vs. communicating subjects) differences between Gramscian and Habermasian critical paradigms, it is arguable that both share a pluralistic, interdisciplinary approach with regard to research process and data gathering since they underline the socially mutable and historically contingent nature of knowledge claims. In this sense, critical theory do not deny the accounts and methodologies of scientific sciences - producing third person-perspectives - and interpretive sciences - producing first-person perspectives - and make use of them to achieve the dialectical and critical aims of its own methodology and to generate a second-person perspective (Bohman 2005). While the role of human consciousness in social life has been widely ignored by positivism, the data of critical methodology consists of human consciousness (intersubjective meanings) (Neufeld 1995;

Kandlbinder 2003). For example, having suggested the relative legitimacy of all theories and methods, Habermas, at the methodological level, has incorporated the methodologies of psychology and linguistics into his critical enquiry (Habermas 1974; Clarke 2001). Thus, in his theory, critical enquiry encompasses the all forms of knowledge: ‘interpretive understanding of systems of belief and modes of communication using the methods of historical-hermeneutic science; the critical evaluation of these; and the investigation of their causes by the methods of empirical-analytical science’ (Blaikie 1993: 55). Similarly, while Gramsci has based his analysis of society on culture, identity and politics as well as economic base, Cox, who ‘collapses Habermas’s distinction between technical and practical interests into the idea of problem-solving theory’ (Hoffman 1987: 237), holds that ‘critical theory contains problem-solving theory within itself’ although it has a conservative impact on theorising (Cox 1981).

#### 6. Applying action research methodology to critical international theory: an action-oriented and user-led approach to the analysis of international politics

On this basis, at the methodological level, it is reasonable to argue that as a form of self-reflective enquiry, *participatory action research* seems suited to the aims of critical sciences seeking, as table one shows, to change society and generate emancipatory knowledge. It is generally used in the studies of social work, education, and health and it is possible to speak of three types of action research (see table two): the scientific-technical; practical-deliberative; and critical-emancipatory (McKernan 1991 in Hughes 1995; Grundy 1982 in Masters 1995; Stringer 1999). The latter seeks to combine theory and praxis and in doing so intends to raise the level of collective, critical consciousness of participants or practitioners in order to empower them to see the problems they encounter and to change the social conditions leading to these problems (Grundy 1987 in Masters 1995; Guba 1990; Greene 1990; Schwandt 1990; Morrow 1994; Hughes 1995; Johnson 1999; Stringer 1999; Robson 2005; Bohman 2005; Fals-Borda 2006). At this moment, participants take roles in the stages of the research such as forming initial ideas, planning, implementation, and reporting (Seymour-Rolls & Hughes 1995). What is argued here is that those who before were objects of research become co-researchers (Blaikie 1993; Gomm 2004). In this sense, ‘to be critical is to assume that humans are active agents whose reflective self-analysis, whose knowledge of the world, leads to action’ (Kincheloe 1995: 75 in Johnson 1999). That is, they are capable of reflecting on their ideas and assumptions critically; of comprehending the historical and social roots of the present social order; and of changing this order through their new understanding of social reality so as to create alternatives to it. In this user-led research, participants, thus,

**Table 1**  
Three Paradigms for Research.

<b>Normative</b>	<b>Interpretative</b>	<b>Critical</b>
Society and the social system	The Individual	Societies, groups, individuals
Medium/large scale research	Small-scale research	Small-scale research
Impersonal, anonymous forces	Human actions	Political, ideological factors,
Regulating behaviour	continuously	power and interest
	re-creating social life	shaping behaviours
Model of natural sciences	Non-statistical	Ideology critique and action
		Research
'Objectivity'	'Subjectivity'	'Collectivity'
Research conducted 'from the outside'	Personal Involvement of the researcher	Participant researchers, researchers and facilitators
Generalising from the specific	Interpreting the specific	Critiquing the specific
Explaining the behaviour/seeking	Understanding actions/	Understanding, interrogating,
Causes	meanings rather than causes	critiquing, transforming
		actions and interests
Assuming the taken-for-granted	Investigating the taken-for-granted	Interrogating and critiquing the taken-for-granted
Macro-concepts: society, institutions,	Micro-concepts: individual	Macro- and micro-concepts:
norms, positions, roles, expectations	perspective, constructs,	political and ideological
	negotiated, meanings,	interests, operations of power
	definitions of situations	
Structuralists	Phenomenologists, symbolic	Critical theorists, action
	interactions,	researchers, practitioner
	ethnomethodologists,	researchers
Technical interest	Practical interest	Emancipatory interest

*Source:* (May 2001).

may learn how to rescue themselves from material and ideological domination and coercion through self-reflective reasoning.

From this perspective, it may be claimed that an action-oriented, participatory critical research methodology consists of three consecutive stages: theory, enlightenment and action. (Grundy 1982 in Masters 1995, Kincheloe 1995 in Johnson 1999). Although Gramsci has worked within a different paradigm from Habermasian theory and offered a production-based theory of emancipation, this three-staged model also appears appropriate for the goals of his discourse because both discourses share this view: 'research, which so far has been largely an instrument of dominance

and legitimation of power elites, must be brought to serve the interests of dominated, exploited and oppressed groups' (Blaikie 1993: 211). Also, as mentioned above, Gramscian discourse does not underestimate the importance of language in its analysis of hegemony and rather stresses the pressing necessity of enlightening social agents by organic intellectuals in their efforts to form counter-hegemonic discourses.

In the first stage, critical theoretical knowledge is mainly generated in terms of the position and interests of human agents, namely, proactive and progressive participants who are oppressed by the structures of domination and manipulated by privileged actors in the present social order. Here, critical international theory is concerned with the question of how the oppressed or powerless whose interests and aspirations have been consistently ignored by global structures are able to express themselves and defend their rights and interests within these structures (Wendt 2001). Indeed, while a Habermas-influenced researcher may engage in understanding the conditions leading to the oppression of peoples of Third World countries and their revolt to the West in the context of inclusion/exclusion dialectic (Linklater 1992), a neo-Gramscian perspective tends to focus on the oppressed classes, i.e. the working class, by capitalist system in a given hegemonic order (Cox 1987; Rupert 1995; Gill 2003). Beyond this, however, a neo-Gramscianism with new insights and qualities added should also give a particular attention to the situation of all dominated social groups, irrespective of their class membership, and enabling them to offer a comprehensive bottom up reactionism to any kind of domination.

At this point, what makes critical enquiry distinctive is its adoption of an interrelated rather than interventionist methodology. That is, the researcher and the researched communicate with each other in a dialogic relationship (Habermas 1972; Blaikie 2000), and as a reflective partner and co-participant in this relationship, the role of researcher is to 'facilitate the emancipation of the victims of social, political and economic circumstances, to help people to transform their situations and hence resolve their needs and deprivations' (Blaikie 1993: 210).

Data collection and analysis in action research need to be systematic if it is aimed at initiating convenient changes. The methods can be any combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and they vary according to the needs of specific project and the stage in the research process (Morrow 1994; Lincoln 2001; Fals-Borda 2006). As a result, the researcher may use a wide variety of methods, such as literature review of the historical evolution of the conditions leading to the oppression (how these conditions came about and what conditions or injustices they currently represent, Greene 1990) or interpretive, dialogic interviews, in order to enhance his or her pre-understanding of the participants' worldview. These interviews would be either ethnographic ones which are concerned mainly with grasping the meaning of the participant's world or

those which are more interactive and concerned with revealing undisclosed meanings (Johnson 1999; Blaikie 2000; Bryman 2001; Robson 2005). After reflecting critically upon data and findings gathered to date, the researcher concentrates on comprehending the relations between these conditions and practical human activity.

**Table 2**  
Types of Participatory Action Research.

Philosophical Base	Technical Action Research	Mutual - Collaboration Action Research	Participatory Action Research
	Natural Sciences	Historical - hermeneutic	Critical Sciences
<b>The nature of reality</b>	Single, measurable, fragmental	Multiple, constructed, holistic	Social, economic. Exists with problems of equity and hegemony
<b>Problem</b>	Defined in advance	Defined in situation	Defined in the situation based on values clarification
<b>Relationship between the Knower and Known</b>	Separate	Interrelated, dialogic	Interrelated, embedded in society
<b>Focus of collaboration theory</b>	Technical validation, refinement, deduction	Mutual understanding, new theory, inductive	Mutual emancipation, validation, refinement, new theory, inductive, deductive
<b>Type of knowledge produced</b>	Predictive	Descriptive	Predictive, descriptive
<b>Change duration</b>	Short lived	Longer lasting, dependent on individuals	Social change, emancipation
<b>The nature of understanding</b>	Events explained in terms of real causes and simultaneous effects	Events are understood through active mental work, interactions with external context, transactions between one's mental work and external context	Events are understood in terms of social and economic hindrances to true equity
<b>The role of value in research</b>	Value free	Value bounded	Related to values of equity
<b>Purpose of research</b>	Discovery of laws underlying reality	Understand what occurs and the meaning people make of phenomena	Uncover and understand what constrains equity and supports hegemony to free oneself of false consciousness and change practice toward more equity

Source: (Masters 1995).

**Box 1**

## Data collection techniques used in critical action research.

Qualitative methods: ethnographic interpretation, participant observation, narrative, discourse, content analysis.

Quantitative methods: measures, surveys, scales, sampling, structured observation.

Reflective methods: self-observation, frame reflection, knowing-in-action.

Convergent interviewing.

Focus Groups and other group methods.

Documents, mass media analysis, examination of official statistics and artefacts.

Popular education techniques.

*Source:* (Kirby and McKenna 1989; Morrow 1994; Stringer 1999).

Secondly, critical theory based on this knowledge now may be utilised as a means of enlightening ‘participants so that, coming to see themselves and their social situation in a new way, they themselves can decide to alter the conditions which they find repressive’ (Comstock 1982: 385). Through educative process participants would be aware of the fact that existing social conditions has operated against their interests so far and their new understanding of social conditions would change these unfavourable conditions in the future. As such this mutually educative process may help, for example, reach an ideal speech situation in Habermasian sense (Linklater 1996; Johnson 1999). Gramscian discourse argues here that a social group aiming at leading a counter-hegemonic movement (in the sense of emancipation from the hegemony of the dominant group) should develop a universal language (ideology) to attract other powerless classes to its cause (Cox 1987; Gill 2003). That is, it is this universal ideology that makes the oppressed become aware of the unfair functioning of the present world order.

Finally, the whole research process should result in reflective and conscious action which may guide in both altering the present social conditions and producing alternative needs and understandings. However, there is a serious problem in critical theory in relation to political action: the question of how to realize emancipation has remained unanswered. At this point, it appears satisfied with only defining emancipation as a process of critical self-reflection and associated self-transformation (Johnson 1999). For instance, even though they have analysed the possibilities of counter-hegemonic discourses and practices, the neo-Gramscian analysts have miserably failed to answer the questions of how the present world order would be replaced by a new one and of what forms it would take (Cox 1981, 1987).

After three stages are complete the whole process should be made subject to testing and the research findings and conclusions should be validated (Johnson 1999). Indeed, as Bohman puts it, ‘...the second-person perspective is not yet sufficient for criticism. In order for an act of criticism itself to be assessed as correct or incorrect, it must often resort to tests from the first- and third-person perspectives as well’ (Bohman 2005).

## 7. Conclusion

Although their works are different from each other epistemologically and ontologically, the contribution of Habermasian and Gramscian critical international theories to the discipline has been fundamental, and each on its own merits has provided a new theoretical and methodological ground upon which a genuine critical turn in international relations can be founded. On this basis, by separating interaction from production relations and claiming that communicative rationality offers the sole foundation for emancipation, Habermasian theory has represented a linguistic and communicative turn in the study of global politics. On the other hand, Gramscian discourse, with its production-based understanding of emancipation and new conceptual tools, has enabled us to analyse the processes of transformative politics within the method of historical materialism and hence constituted a serious alternative to positivist-realist paradigms. What unites two theories is that both judge critical theory superior on the basis of its emancipatory politico-normative content while acknowledging technical and hermeneutic sciences’ strengths. This provides us with a methodological basis for proposing an emancipatory, action-oriented research framework which embraces the crucial elements of action, enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation, themes which correspond to the specific interests and goals of both discourses. With this methodological approach, it is arguable that the two discourses would enhance their contribution further to the study of international politics, make possible to find the new ways of emancipation from all forms of domination in the Western-dominated world order and of forming political and institutional structures functioning in policytakers’ favour.

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## Özet

### Eleştirel uluslararası kurama eylem araştırması metodolojisi uygulayarak güç katmak

Bu makale, Gramscici ve Habermasçı eleştirel uluslararası ilişkiler kuramlarının önemini ve etkisini, dünya politikasında bu kuramların özgürleşimci hedefleri ve gelecek öngörülerini aleyhine işleyen son gelişmeler bağlamında çözümlemektedir. Makale, öncelikle uluslararası ilişkiler disiplinindeki geleneksel kavramsallaştırmalara alternatif paradigmlar olarak bu iki yaklaşımın ortaya çıkışını ele alır ve sonra da bunların kuramsal kökenleri ile uluslararası politika çözümlerine katkılarını karşılaştırır. Makalenin başlıca savı, hem Gramscici hem de Habermasçı eleştirel uluslararası kuramın, birbirlerinin güçlü yönlerinden yararlanarak ve çözümlerine katılımcı eylem araştırması metodolojisi uygulanarak güçlendirilebileceğidir.

*Anahtar kelimeler:* Gramsci, Habermas, Eleştirel Kuram, uluslararası politika, eylem araştırması.

*JEL kodları:* F50, F59.