The Agenda-Setting Power of Epistemic Communities in Public Diplomacy

John Robert Kelley
Assistant Professor
School of International Service
American University
Washington, DC 20016
jkelley@american.edu

Abstract
Public diplomacy scholarship makes common reference to the components of information and influence. In simple terms, the delivery of information provides audiences with a set of issues to think about, while influence tells them how to think about them. These actions seek to impact the political landscape in some form, and today's public diplomats must immerse themselves in a process that brings about change. It begins with the identification of salient issues befitting of widespread attention, then involves in some order the placing of those issues on the global agenda, and the dissemination of information to concerned constituencies and the mobilization of resources into action. This role bestows an enormous amount of power to parties with influence over the agenda, echoing a perspective derived from the work of Antonio Gramsci and "neo-Gramscian" theorists that serves as the theoretical backdrop of this paper. The multi-layered nature of communicative action illustrates the diminishing control states have over agenda-setting in world politics. This paper singles out the particular role played by epistemic communities and presents a case study to illustrate their importance.

Introduction

Which ideas matter in world politics? There is a consensus forming between scholars of International Relations (IR) and Communications and around the power of ideas in contemporary world politics. While the study of power has been a mainstay of the principal paradigms of IR, it is only due to IR's relatively recent "ideational turn" that its discourses on power departed from strictly material interpretations to cover socially constructed forms.[1] Communications scholars often present the utility of ideas in the language of power, as Manual Castells recently wrote: "How people think about the institutions under which they live, and how they relate to the culture of their economy and society define whose power can be exercised and how it can be exercised."[2] An important determinant of the ideational power one can command on an international level can be found in a curious social creation called the "agenda". Often taken for granted in the research of both fields, the agenda constitutes a powerful tool for collecting issues of prevailing concern according to those endowed with the rare privilege to "set" it.

Agenda-setting, then, should be viewed as a procedural proving ground that restricts the field of ideas only to the most powerful. And it must follow that agenda-setters, at least in some significant measure, act as a bottleneck in the spreading of powerful ideas. This too yields a particular kind of power that is two-fold. In one aspect agenda-setting serves a selective function that nudges people towards "what to think" by delineating "what to think about".[3] In the search to make sense out of an overwhelming number of possible concerns, populations defer this selective power to agenda-setters, who by their own delineation subsequently shape that population's thinking by limiting to the possibilities to their selections. Another aspect deals with prioritization, which is distinct from selection in that it

[1] David Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?," *International Organization* 43, no. 3 (1989); Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory : Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); John Gerard Ruggie, "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis," *World Politics* 35, no. 2 (1983); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[2] Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[3] Robert M. Entman, "How the Media Affect What People Think: An Information Processing Approach," *The Journal of Politics* 51, no. 2 (1989). 349.

assigns value to issues that hold the imagination in the order of greatest to least importance. This side of agenda-setting has garnered more attention among political scientists and more recently certain subfields within IR, such as studies of human rights and transnational activist networks (TANs), who wish to solve the puzzle of why certain ideas come to matter more than others.[4] It is surprising that one other concentration at the intersection of politics and communications, public diplomacy, whose scholarship recognizes the power of ideas to inform, influence, and engage, has so little to say about agenda-setting. To be clear, the examination of public diplomacy for this paper will focus on diplomatic action outside of government by nonstate actors (NSAs), and one critical reason for the emergence of NSAs in diplomatic affairs can be attributed in part to "idea entrepreneurship" and the very agenda-setting initiatives that the scholarly literature has been remiss to explore. No one doubts the "paradox of plenty" as a defining feature of the contemporary information-sharing environment; a prerequisite of mastering the power of ideas means negotiating a plethora of access to information while dealing with limited attention from audiences.[5] It is time to take more seriously the contention that control over the agenda can reduce the danger of the paradox and increase soft power.

Today's public diplomats acting in a nonstate capacity (diplomacy *by* rather than *of* publics) can be singled out because they have proven adept at navigating the complex communications environment, and when successful they can alter the political landscape in a significant way. This ability to bring about change draws on a set of powers that extends our notions of diplomacy beyond the conventions of the institution and into the realm of action. While it may seem unsettling or even unrealistic that NSAs can assume diplomatic responsibilities, not everyone

---

[4] Amitav Acharya, "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism," *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (2004); R. Charli Carpenter, "Setting the Advocacy Agenda: Theorizing Issue Emergence and Nonemergence in Transnational Advocacy Networks," *International Studies Quarterly* 51, (2007); Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998); Ethan A. Nadelmann, "Global Prohibition Regimes: The Evolution of Norms in International Society," *International Organization* 44, no. 4 (1990).

[5] Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power : The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2004). 107

possesses the power to act. This particular argument I wish to make here derives from my own research on NSAs in public diplomacy, in which I offer typology of public diplomacy action. It consists of four types of action: *idea entrepreneurship, agenda setting*, *mobilizing*, and *gatekeeping*.   The latter two actions occur within what has been referred to as the "space of flows", or scaling up ideas to reach larger audiences (mobilizing) and regulating the flow of information by controlling a vital channels (gatekeeping).[6] These address the question of how ideas spread through diplomatic action. In this article, I shall concentrate on the question of which ideas matter by exploring the linkage between idea generation and the power of agenda setting as it happens in the context of public diplomacy.

But before launching into the interdisciplinary discourses on how the agenda selects and prioritizes certain ideas, and subsequently the cases, it is worth taking time to consider how we have come to know the agenda as a social construct and why it wields such power. One variant of critical theory in IR, the neo-Gramscian perspective, helps unravel these mysteries by highlighting three important structural features underwriting agenda power, and thereby substantiating nonstate action as a formidable and consequential route to political change.

Neo-Gramscian Perspectives on the "Agenda"

A casual reading of the literature on NSAs is often all it takes to find mentions of the "agenda" in some form. This makes perfect sense, because, as Josselin and Wallace point out in their excellent volume on NSAs, the body of work contains numerous arguments about their role in normative change, and setting the agenda is one path to achieving that change.[7] The revelation of these works is that there is not simply one agenda, but many, and seemingly placed at all levels of analysis from domestic to regional to global.[8] Taking things further, there is also the view that distinguishes

[6] John Robert Kelley, *Agency Change: Diplomatic Action Beyond the State* (forthcoming, 2012).

[7] Daphne Josselin and William Wallace, *Non-State Actors in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). 12

[8] Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992); Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders : Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998);

public, policy, and media agendas from one another.[9] In one sense there is nothing preventing claims of yet more agendas in existence because they are themselves social constructs that serve as putative to-do lists. It injects significant ambiguity into our recognition of them, and that ambiguity extends to matters of form, content, and even placement. It is not at all uncommon to see different modifiers used interchangeably to describe the same, and apparently amorphous, agenda[10]

Yet the one aspect of the agenda construct that is undeniable is its power. The "ideational turn" in IR research presented ideas, such as our regard for the agenda, as a powerful currency in world politics just as territory or resources granted a certain amount of material power to Realists.[11] We owe the successful application of this insight especially to international political economy (IPE) scholars, some of whom are also responsible for reviving the works of Antonio Gramsci. The "neo-Gramscians", as they have come to be called, adapted the late philosopher's perspectives on his domestic circumstances and put forward a way to interpret ideational power embedded in the structure of world politics.   The common narrative about the research program's origins details the story of Antonio Gramsci, an early-20th century Marxist intellectual and Communist party leader in his native Italy. Fate would deal Gramsci two devastating blows, the first when his Communist Party of Italy failed in the early 1920's to draw on the momentum of the recent Russian Revolution and form a united national movement. The second arrived in November 1926 when newly enacted laws by Benito Mussolini's Fascist government led to Gramsci's arrest, and subsequently an imprisonment that would hasten his demise. While in prison, the Sardinian puzzled over the reasons why Communism had not swept through the industrialized states of Western Europe as Marx had predicted. He painstakingly collected his reflections in the *Quaderni del*

Nadelmann; Thomas Risse, ""Let's Argue!": Communicative Action in World Politics," *International Organization* 54, no. 1 (2000).

[9] James W. Dearing and Everett M. Rogers, *Agenda-Setting*, Communication Concepts (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996).

[10] "Global", "international", and "public" are used in this way in Richard Price, "Transnational Civil Society and Advocacy in World Politics," *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (2003).

[11] Mark M. Blyth, ""Any More Bright Ideas?" The Ideational Turn of Comparative Political Economy," *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 2 (1997).

Carcere, or the "Prison Notebooks", the contents of which would secure his place in history as an elite philosopher and political theorist.

Gramsci's posthumous revival beginning in the late 1960's soon drew the attention of IR theorists in search of critiques for what they regarded as reductionist explanations of a highly complex world.   The strictly rationalist narrative ascribing all power to the state or state-based institutions, and the sources of that power to be material in nature, largely dismisses ideational bases of power as "unimportant or epiphenomenal".[12] Introduced to IR at a time when social constructivism as a school of thought had not yet hit its stride, neo-Gramscian theory offered alternative interpretations of once-settled debates about social relations and the structural forces that shape them.[13] It was Robert Cox who identified Gramsci's insights on hegemony as the first of several useful connections between Gramsci's highly contextualized political theory in the 1920's and 30's and Cox's reading of world order in the 1980's. According to Morton, Cox adopted the Gramscian observation that hegemonic power grew not from coercion by a powerful few but the ability of a ruling class to acquire the consent of lower classes to abide by the norms and rules in a particular order. In effect, Cox broadened "the domain of hegemony…manifested in the acceptance of ideas *and* supported by material resources and institutions." (emphasis added)[14] With ideas part of the equation, the revised concept of hegemony unsettled IR orthodoxy about the means to maintaining social order. As Cox has said elsewhere, "there can be dominance without hegemony…[and] hegemony is one possible form dominance may take."[15] For Gramsci's own understanding, this logic helped explain the failure of social revolution in early 20th century western Europe: the governing principle of

---

[12] The oft-cited rational choice model is attributed to Kenneth Waltz and in IPE to Stephen Krasner and Robert Gilpin. Critique of rational choice quoted here comes from Judith Goldstein, Robert O. Keohane, and Social Science Research Council (U.S.). Committee on Foreign Policy Studies., *Ideas and Foreign Policy : Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, Cornell Studies in Political Economy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
[13] Robert Cox, Stephen Gill, Mark Rupert, Kees van der Pijl, Enrico Augelli and Craig Murphy represented the first wave of neo-Gramscians in IR in the early 1980's.
[14] Adam David Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci : Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy* (London ; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007). 113
[15] Ibid. 114

capitalism had become so entrenched in social life that the need for alternatives did not exist.

In addition to revising the concept of hegemony, Gramsci's work instigated further ideas about the true locus of power within society and the methods of promoting new social and political ideas. His Marxist orientation shaped a view of social relations depicting constant class struggle between those at the "base" and those within the "superstructure". The goal of subordinate classes at the base is to prevail in their ideological challenge of the dominant and hegemonic class. Gramsci called this vehicle for new ideas the "historic bloc", the purpose of which aims to do more than create alliances of subordinate classes towards a new kind of hegemony. In Rupert's view, which reflects the general neo-Gramscian one, an historic bloc "articulates a world view…which lends substance and ideological coherence to its social power".[16] What gives this entity its "historic" quality relates to Gramsci's anti-positivist argument that social relations exist in a state of constant change, because blocs tend to form and enlarge organically to supplant the superstructure. And while agency and structure are not unimportant in this worldview, they are inevitably products of the social milieu – an "ensemble", or situation characterized by unique events and circulating ideas. Gramsci asserted the necessary coexistence of the hegemonic class and the historic bloc; to separate agents, structures and contexts from each other would render them meaningless.[17]

For our purposes, among the most important contributions derived from Gramsci's writings is the separation of civil society, which he regarded as "the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private'", from 'political society' or, in other words, the state.[18] The basis for this determination includes a necessary spatial decoupling of the locus of civil society from the territorial state. But more essential than this is a distinction of justification. Whereas the state binds social relations through its institutions, civil society consists of voluntary associations

[16] Mark Rupert, "Alienation, Capitalism and the Interstate System: Towards a Marxian/Gramscian Critique," in *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, ed. Stephen Gill(Cambridge England ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993). 81

[17] Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London,: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971). 366

[18] Ibid. 12

bound by shared interests. The effect of this release of civil society from the state enables the transformation of these interests into something that may broaden in parallel with the expansion of historic blocs, thus removing any institutional or spatial obstacles to elevating these interests to the global level.[19] Gramsci knew this well based on his participation in the Third International, and Van der Pijl further examined the formation of "international political parties" using the cases of Freemasonry in the early 20th century, and later transatlantic policy planning 's effect in the growth of liberal institutionalism in the postwar period.[20]

Structuralism is the root assumption of neo-Gramscian theory because the absence of structures eliminates a framework for understanding the social forces promoting change. Contrary to positivist thinkers, neo-Gramscians strongly favor "absolute historicism" and interpreting ideas within the contextualized relationship between subordinate and dominant groups. Hegemons and counter-hegemonic movements in the form of historic blocs comprise the 'ensemble' locked in struggle for power.   In the final analysis, as central as they may be to neo-Gramscian thought, it is neither with structure, nor with actors, but with ideas that power rests. Control of the agenda and agenda setting are highly contested in world politics because those that succeed set the parameters of our vision, that is, until a competing entity displaces old ideas with new ones. With those new ideas come new and influential thought leaders, a cadre of intellectuals, religious figureheads, top executives from private-sector, transnational activists, and of course, political elites. A Gramscian explanation of agenda-setting assigns power to those ideas that attract sufficient voluntary consent to dominate our attention.

Agenda-Setting Power in Politics

---

[19] Enrico and Craig N. Murphy Augelli, "Gramsci and International Relations: A General Perspective and Example from Recent U.S. Policy toward the Third World," in *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, ed. Stephen Gill(Cambridge England ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Craig N. Murphy "Understanding Ir: Understanding Gramsci," *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 03 (1998).

[20] Kees van der Pijl, "Transnational Class Formation and State Forms," in *Innovation and Transformation in International Studies*, ed. Stephen Gill and James H. Mittelman(Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Those who study the realm of ideas have long scrutinized the path ideas take from the moment they are introduced to the point at which they are widely adopted. While individual cases might offer convincing evidence of a discernable path, the problem is quite challenging to examine empirically, which leaves scholars light on answers and heavy with disappointment.[21] Nevertheless, enough research has surfaced to suggest a certain lifecycle of an idea as a scalable intellectual product. Public policy research is credited with formulating early understandings of the path of ideas and wrestling with the question of why certain ideas prevail over others in the public consciousness.[22] Kingdon and Polsby were among the first to consider the impact of actors outside of government on the policy-making process.[23] Invoking the work of economist Joseph Schumpeter, these particular actors came to be known as "policy entrepreneurs" reflecting their potential for innovation and "creative destruction" in the public policy context.[24] The limited yet illuminating case studies documenting their activities reduced any notions of serendipity when issues rose to prominence. Policy entrepreneurs made sure this was no accident. In the ensuing years and with the concomitant rise of the constructivist research program, interest in the spread of ideas at the level of international society gradually increased.[25] The promotion of human rights and more broadly the activities of transnational activist networks (TANs) provided fertile ground for investigating the spread of norms and the exploits of aptly-named "norm entrepreneurs". Once an issue becomes known - a step that will warrant closer inspection shortly - there are three discernable phases of this norm economy. First on the production line comes "emergence", the point in time when an issue attains sufficient importance amongst a population that the population is motivated to act

---

[21] Carpenter. 100. Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*, American Politics and Political Economy Series (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). 39.

[22] John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984).

[23] Ibid; Nelson W. Polsby, *Political Innovation in America : The Politics of Policy Initiation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

[24] Nancy C. Roberts and Paula J. King, "Policy Entrepreneurs: Their Activity Structure and Function in the Policy Process," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory: J-PART* 1, no. 2 (1991).

[25] Robert Axelrod, "An Evolutionary Approach to Norms," *The American Political Science Review* 80, no. 4 (1986)., Nadelmann.

upon it. Finnemore and Sikkink, in their work on norm evolution, refer to this phase as "norm emergence".[26] Carpenter's sequence grounded in TAN research locates emergence after the point where the issue has been defined and then adopted on a small scale.[27] And lastly Bob's examination of human rights draws heavily on Kingdon's model; he characterizes emergence in this context as the "formulation of a new rights claim".[28]

The second step is what has been described as "diffusion" or "cascading" in both IR and Communications literature. I cite Finnemore and Sikkink as representative of the former, and in the latter case Entman assigns discreet roles to social echelons (elites-media-general public) to describe linear, but sometimes the cyclical passage of issues between groups.[29] Bob observed in the case human rights claims the necessity of a "gatekeeper", an intermediary on the order of Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International who would "adopt" an issue as their own and promote it.[30] The literature on TNAs also cites the importance of issue adoption as a necessary precondition for campaigning across the network.[31]

The final stage marks the maturing of the issue into a new norm, which may be enshrined in a law or regime, but only after a successful campaign to achieve widespread acceptance of the norm. Gramsci would characterize this as the passage of an historic bloc into hegemony, in which case society consents to subjecting itself to the new rules. Changes in the affect of a population present a sure sign of norm adherence. Such signals of consent and acceptance reflect what Finnemore and Sikkink call "internalization", which can be achieved through socialization. The indoctrination of habits surrounding the norm can instill regular reinforcement at an unconscious level. This can be seen, for example, in the number of democratic transitions that trigger a gradual shift in political participation. Research in

---

[26] Finnemore and Sikkink.
[27] Carpenter.
[28] Clifford Bob, "Rights on the Rise: International Mobilization for New Human Rights," in *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association* (Washington, D.C.: 2005). 7
[29] Robert M. Entman, "Theorizing Mediated Public Diplomacy: The U.S. Case," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13, no. 2 (2008); Finnemore and Sikkink.
[30] Bob. This "gatekeeper" differs from the concept I adopt that is prevalent in communications literature.
[31] Carpenter; Keck and Sikkink.

democratization studies the sequence of the process, especially one that prevents backsliding into despotism or war.[32] The creation of the rule-of-law state depends wholly on freely-elected representatives, who then run the institutions that support it. Political reform enables the refinement of the economic system. Once democratic institutions have proven their ability to preserve a peaceful and prosperous order, doubts disappear and popular support grows. Other interpretations of norm acceptance look less favorably upon universalization. Acharya argues that the norms must go through a process of "localization" so that they may be congruent with discrete value systems.[33]

These examples remind us of the ample opportunities to clarify how the norm selection process works. However, an interdisciplinary consensus seems to have formed around ideas and their essential path toward political change. Beyond tracking an idea to its maturity, the three phases of *emergence*, *diffusion* and *internalization* together highlight the need for a gathering place of ideas to sustain the necessary attention at both the elite and the popular level and to help ideas run the course. With its power to organize and filter ideas, the agenda serves an invaluable function in their legitimation and adoption.

Agenda-setting Power of Epistemic Communities in Public Diplomacy

However, ideas are slippery subjects – they do not "fall from heaven" nor "float freely", and that is why there is a long-running fascination in the social sciences with the formulation of ideas as responses to the realities in which they are produced.[34] Politics, in its purest form, is a problem-solving pursuit, and in today's world politics the problem-solving space is hotly contested by a variety of interests. At one point in time public diplomacy was seen as a marginal player in the problem-solving space, an accessory to be deployed by policymaking elites to inform and

---

[32] Edward D. Mansfield and Jack L. Snyder, *Electing to Fight : Why Emerging Democracies Go to War*, Bcsia Studies in International Security (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).
[33] Acharya.
[34] Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational Coalitions, Domestic Structures, and the End of the Cold War," *International Organization* 48, no. 2 (1994). Joseph V. Femia, "An Historicist Critique of "Revisionist" Methods for Studying the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 20, no. 2 (1981).

influence audiences toward a desired political end.[35] New thinking on this issue launches the public diplomat to a position of greater consequence. Berman and Johnson were among the first to comprehensively examine the "unofficial" diplomat. They, along with other contributors to their edited volume of the same name, shed light on increasing capabilities of NSA's to influence governments and alter the course of world politics two decades before Keck and Sikkink's seminal *Activists Beyond Borders*.[36] Moving closer to the present, Minear and Smith offered perspectives on humanitarian action that ultimately underscored the similarity of their skill set with diplomats as they are traditionally defined. "Humanitarian officials have functions in common with state diplomats in that they must rely on negotiation, persuasion and dialogue to try to reach agreements with those with whom they may not share values and interests."[37] Lastly, Andrew Cooper's research on celebrities in world politics cites the multiple examples of "goodwill" and "global" ambassadors. They are usually appointed to advocate and mobilize political action on a certain issue or several issues surrounding a particular theme (as Bono does on HIV prevention, poverty reduction and debt relief within Africa). "Celebrity diplomacy," Cooper writes, "emphasizes global reach in terms of problem solving, pushing for activity when and where it is needed."[38]

One striking feature that each of these examples has in common can be found in the explicitness with which they distinguish their subjects from the state. Berman and Johnson make clear that their unofficial diplomats in no way should be viewed as perfect substitutes. Meanwhile Smith et al. and Cooper define the scope of humanitarian and celebrity interests by issue areas, as opposed to their state counterparts acting on behalf of national interests.

---

[35] One stated reason why John Foster Dulles preferred the separation of USIA from the State Department was that, in his view, the former dealt with "programs" while the latter, "policy".
[36] Maureen R. Berman and Joseph E. Johnson, *Unofficial Diplomats* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).
[37] Larry Minear and Hazel Smith, *Humanitarian Diplomacy : Practitioners and Their Craft* (Tokyo ; New York: United Nations University Press, 2007). 50
[38] Andrew Fenton Cooper, *Celebrity Diplomacy*, International Studies Intensives (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008). 3

So who sets the agenda? We have already seen some seminal work on idea generators in world politics, or "epistemic communities", and more recently the role of epistemic communities in diplomatic affairs.[39] In my forthcoming work on the power of NSAs in public diplomacy, I argue one portion of their agency to be located within the epistemic community. According to Haas, are "a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area."[40]   Epistemic communities are the generators of ideas and reside at the vanguard of knowledge creation, and it is Haas's contention that their control over knowledge and information endows them with power over the subsequent phases of diffusion and internalization. Neo-Gramscians focus on "the social relations of production" is instructive here: once ideas leave the 'factory' they are handed off to the 'sales team' – the gatekeepers and agenda setters "who represent the public's interest in the construction of political and social reality."[41] Thinking about the element of change in world politics, the advent of epistemic communities provides form to the origins of *transformismo*, or the process by which the counter-hegemonic "historic bloc" supplants the pre-existing order. And so it is not mere coincidence that Haas's presentation of the epistemic community echoes Cox's reading of Gramsci. For example, intellectuals in the neo-Gramscian view serve as important authority figures for the advancement of the historic bloc: "They performs the function of developing and sustaining the mental images, technologies and organizations which bind together the members of a class and an historic bloc into a common identity."[42]   Given the congruence these definitions, it seems plausible that epistemic communities possess such powers that grant them a high degree of control over the agenda, based on three qualities:

---

[39] For a primer on epistemic communities see Haas., and with respect to diplomacy see Mai'a K. Davis Cross, *Security Integration in Europe : How Knowledge-Based Networks Are Transforming the European Union* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

[40] Haas. 3

[41] Bruce A. Williams and Michael X. Delli Carpini, "Monica and Bill All the Time and Everywhere," *American Behavioral Scientist* 47, no. 9 (2004).

[42] Robert W. Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations : An Essay in Method," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 12, no. 2 (1983). 57

1. Epistemic communities are elites who exist primarily outside government and within civil society
2. Their outsider status permits them to be enmeshed in processes of change
3. Because of their recognized "expertise and competence" in certain areas, they command authority over issues of concern to shape and influence the course of that change

Effecting political change has become the justification for the new public diplomat because they too are enmeshed in processes of change. Circumstances have indeed changed since the days of Wicquefort, Callières, Satow, Nicolson and other standard-bearers of the diplomatic profession. While the core competencies of "communicate, negotiate and persuade" remain, the latitude for international action, the composition of the global political structure, and the evolution of ideas all require public diplomats to be masters in the realm of change.[43] A more recent treatment of the practice in Daryl Copeland's *Guerilla Diplomacy* (2009) adds "network builder" and "knowledge worker" to the job description. Copeland's "guerilla" is "an agile agent with access to critical information sources, connecting directly with populations and navigating pathways of influence others can't chart or maneuver through."[44] In these changed circumstances, communication ("connecting directly with populations") and persuasion (navigating pathways of influence") remain in their essential forms, and yet "negotiation" means something quite different: rather than negotiating between sovereigns, he is negotiating through the wilderness of public space and a world of constant change. Two strong but under-researched candidates are currently operating as epistemic communities with agenda-setting power in the public diplomacy context. The World Economic Forum (WEF) assembles top-level talent from primarily the business community, but other sectors as well, "to shape global, regional and industry agendas" for the improvement of the state of the world.[45] Another example is the Clinton Global

---

[43] Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy : Its Evolution, Theory, and Administration*, 2nd ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2011). 258
[44] Daryl Copeland, *Guerrilla Diplomacy : Rethinking International Relations* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009). 10
[45] World Economic Forum website.

Initiative (CGI), which assembles a membership of public, private and civil society actors to "maximize their efforts to alleviate poverty, create a cleaner environment, and increase access to health care and education."[46] Both organizations, operating in a similar fashion but concentrating on separate issues, meet annually to seize control of the world stage with their high-profile slate of speakers (the legendary WEF meetings during the winter in the secluded Swiss resort town of Davos, and CGI in September, just before the UN General Assembly meets). Their respective agendas run the gamut of ambitious goals, and it is through their influential attendees they propagate these priorities.

Conclusion

There is much important scholarship yet to emerge on the power of ideas in world politics. Thus far, we have sufficient research to trace the path of ideas in general terms. Thanks to the advent of the epistemic community concept, we are gaining insight into the origins of ideas that materialize on the world stage. Gramscian theory's explanatory power remains untapped in many respects, not least among them the post-modern perspectives of hegemonic power, and in this arena one discovers the same structural elements that help make sense of those elusive levers of power, one of those being the power of ideas. The consensus to which I referred at the start appears to have settled on a certain pattern of idea entrepreneurship with respect to the agenda: ideas are organic social products that require nurturing by informed elites to give them visibility. It extends to these well-positioned groups the vastly influential agenda-setting powers of organizing and filtering. The main contribution of this paper is the application of public diplomacy to these puzzles. This form of nonstate action, freshly conceived and still gaining traction in both IR and Communications research, has the potential to draw these ideas together in a material way.

---

[46] Clinton Global Initiative website.

Acharya, Amitav. "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism." *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (2004): 239-275.

Augelli, Enrico and Craig N. Murphy. "Gramsci and International Relations: A General Perspective and Example from Recent U.S. Policy toward the Third World." In *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, edited by Stephen Gill, xii, 320 p. Cambridge England ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Axelrod, Robert. "An Evolutionary Approach to Norms." *The American Political Science Review* 80, no. 4 (1986): 1095-1111.

Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* American Politics and Political Economy Series. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Berman, Maureen R., and Joseph E. Johnson. *Unofficial Diplomats*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.

Blyth, Mark M. ""Any More Bright Ideas?" The Ideational Turn of Comparative Political Economy." *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 2 (1997): 229-250.

Bob, Clifford. "Rights on the Rise: International Mobilization for New Human Rights." In *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*. Washington, D.C., 2005.

Carpenter, R. Charli. "Setting the Advocacy Agenda: Theorizing Issue Emergence and Nonemergence in Transnational Advocacy Networks." *International Studies Quarterly* 51, (2007): 100.

Castells, Manuel. *Communication Power*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Cooper, Andrew Fenton. *Celebrity Diplomacy* International Studies Intensives. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008.

Copeland, Daryl. *Guerrilla Diplomacy : Rethinking International Relations*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009.

Cox, Robert W. "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations : An Essay in Method." *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 12, no. 2 (1983): 162-175.

Cross, Mai'a K. Davis. *Security Integration in Europe : How Knowledge-Based Networks Are Transforming the European Union*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011.

Dearing, James W., and Everett M. Rogers. *Agenda-Setting* Communication Concepts. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996.

Dessler, David. "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" *International Organization* 43, no. 3 (1989): 441-473.

Entman, Robert M. "How the Media Affect What People Think: An Information Processing Approach." *The Journal of Politics* 51, no. 2 (1989): 347-370.

_____. "Theorizing Mediated Public Diplomacy: The U.S. Case." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13, no. 2 (2008): 87-102.

Femia, Joseph V. "An Historicist Critique of "Revisionist" Methods for Studying the History of Ideas." *History and Theory* 20, no. 2 (1981): 113-134.

Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887-917.

Giddens, Anthony. *Central Problems in Social Theory : Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.

Goldstein, Judith, Robert O. Keohane, and Social Science Research Council (U.S.). Committee on Foreign Policy Studies. *Ideas and Foreign Policy : Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* Cornell Studies in Political Economy. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Gramsci, Antonio, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. London,: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971.

Haas, Peter M. "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination." *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992): 1-35.

Hamilton, Keith, and Richard Langhorne. *The Practice of Diplomacy : Its Evolution, Theory, and Administration*. 2nd ed. London ; New York: Routledge, 2011.

Josselin, Daphne, and William Wallace. *Non-State Actors in World Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001.

Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn Sikkink. *Activists Beyond Borders : Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Kelley, John Robert. *Agency Change: Diplomatic Action Beyond the State* forthcoming, 2012.

Kingdon, John W. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1984.

Mansfield, Edward D., and Jack L. Snyder. *Electing to Fight : Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* Bcsia Studies in International Security. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005.

Minear, Larry, and Hazel Smith. *Humanitarian Diplomacy : Practitioners and Their Craft*. Tokyo ; New York: United Nations University Press, 2007.

Morton, Adam David. *Unravelling Gramsci : Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy*. London ; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007.

Murphy , Craig N. "Understanding Ir: Understanding Gramsci." *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 03 (1998): 417-425.

Nadelmann, Ethan A. "Global Prohibition Regimes: The Evolution of Norms in International Society." *International Organization* 44, no. 4 (1990): 479-526.

Nye, Joseph S. *Soft Power : The Means to Success in World Politics*. 1st ed. New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

Polsby, Nelson W. *Political Innovation in America : The Politics of Policy Initiation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.

Price, Richard. "Transnational Civil Society and Advocacy in World Politics." *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (2003): 579-606.

Risse, Thomas. ""Let's Argue!": Communicative Action in World Politics." *International Organization* 54, no. 1 (2000): 1-39.

Risse-Kappen, Thomas. "Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational Coalitions, Domestic Structures, and the End of the Cold War." *International Organization* 48, no. 2 (1994): 185-214.

Roberts, Nancy C., and Paula J. King. "Policy Entrepreneurs: Their Activity Structure and Function in the Policy Process." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory: J-PART* 1, no. 2 (1991): 147-175.

Ruggie, John Gerard. "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis." *World Politics* 35, no. 2 (1983): 261-285.

Rupert, Mark. "Alienation, Capitalism and the Interstate System: Towards a Marxian/Gramscian Critique." In *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, edited by Stephen Gill, 81. Cambridge England ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

van der Pijl, Kees. "Transnational Class Formation and State Forms." In *Innovation and Transformation in International Studies*, edited by Stephen Gill and James H. Mittelman, 118-133. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Politics* Cambridge Studies in International Relations. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Williams, Bruce A., and Michael X. Delli Carpini. "Monica and Bill All the Time and Everywhere." *American Behavioral Scientist* 47, no. 9 (2004): 1208-1230.