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## Fear and Loathing in the Cultural Hegemony

An analysis of Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* from the perspective of Antonio Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony

Master's thesis in English Literature

Supervisor: Eli Løfaldli

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Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
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### *Abstract*

This thesis will analyse Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* through the lens of Antonio Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony. More specifically, this thesis focuses on Duke's description of American society, and how this description can be analysed through Gramsci's theoretical framework. This thesis treats *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as a fictional work of literature and the protagonist, Raoul Duke, as a fictional character. This means that the description of American society found in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is not an objective account from Hunter S. Thompson. In his description of American society, Duke especially focuses on the rule of law, the media, the American Dream and the end of the hippie counter culture. So, this thesis will present how these aspects of American society are described and analyse them through Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony. The aim of the thesis is not to show whether or not Thompson wrote *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as a manifestation of Gramsci's theory. Rather, the thesis aims to see if Gramsci's theory can give a new way of understanding the novel.

### *Acknowledgements*

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Eli Løfaldli, for her tremendous guidance. I could not have asked for a more helpful, knowledgeable, hard working and understanding supervisor. I would also like to thank my friends and family for encouraging me to continue my work even though it has made me more absent from social gatherings in the recent months, something which I intend to remedy once this work is done.

Magnus McDonagh  
November 2021

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## 1.0 Introduction

The year is 1971: Charles Manson has been found guilty of murder, the Weather Underground assumes responsibility for planting a bomb in the U.S. Capitol, the threat of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union is looming, hundreds of thousands of people march on Washington D.C. as the Vietnam War still rages on, Jim Morrison is found dead, Richard Nixon holds office, and Hunter S. Thompson finishes *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (Thompson, 2005). Though very well known and still relevant, the novel has garnered relatively little attention from literary scholars (Vredenburg, 2012, p. 149). Indeed, Sickels notes that "Thompson has been largely critically ignored since his heyday in the mid-1970s" (Sickels, 2000, p. 62). The novel, usually referred to as *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, was originally published as a two-part segment in *Rolling Stone Magazine*, and it is a fictionalized retelling of two trips to Las Vegas undertaken by journalist Hunter S. Thompson and Chicano lawyer and civil rights activist Oszar Zeta Acosta in March and April 1971. The purpose of the first trip was to cover a desert motorcycle race called the "Mint 400" for *Sports Illustrated*, and the second trip was to cover the National District Attorneys Association's Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. The "Mint 400" and the NDAA Conference became the reasons for going to Las Vegas, but the main objective for undertaking this journey to Las Vegas was to discover the American Dream as the protagonist Raoul Duke argues (Thompson, 2005, p. 6). Throughout the novel, Duke laments the end of the sixties hippie counterculture and the death of the American Dream as he once knew it, in a city he sees as everything that is wrong with what American society has become, Las Vegas.

Since this novel is written from the perspective of Raoul Duke, it may offer us a different view on American society during the nineteen seventies. The temporality of the novel is, of course, important, as the nineteen sixties and seventies were decades of major social upheaval and civil unrest in American society, with DeKoven describing the novel as an "epitaph for the 1960s" (DeKoven, 2004, p.86). During this era, the U.S. was at war with Communism on several fronts, and countercultures were challenging the old and established social order. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a description of American society during this tumultuous era of American history written by a writer just as turbulent and controversial as the times he wrote about.

Antonio Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony remained largely unknown in Western discourse until John Cammett's *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (1967) and a series of articles published in the *New Left Review* (Ashbolt, 2007, p. 206). As the Vietnam War became a proxy war between Capitalism and Communism, and a way for America to spread its values across the globe, which in turn led to a duality between supporters and opponents of the war in American society. Moreover, Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony rose to prominence in the West a short time before Thompson wrote his seminal work *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, thereby simultaneously placing both texts at a crucial juncture in modern American history. This thesis does not argue that Thompson wrote his novel in support of Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony, nor that he had any knowledge of Gramsci's theory even existing. Instead, this thesis will argue that analyzing *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* through the lens of Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony will give a deeper understanding of both Gramsci's theory and the society Duke is describing in Thompson's seminal work *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.



The key question then becomes: can Antonio Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony offer up a new way of understanding Duke's description of American society in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*?

## 2.0 Gonzo Journalism

Before looking at Gramscian theories of cultural hegemony, this chapter will examine the importance of Gonzo journalism in the development of Thompson's work and the crucial social and cultural critique it offered to contemporary American society and culture. Furthermore, this chapter will examine whether *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a novel or Gonzo journalistic text. Moreover, in order to define how the text will be analyzed, this chapter will also examine the role of the protagonist in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and whether Duke should be seen as a fictional character or as a pseudonym for the author, Hunter S. Thompson.

### 2.1 Gonzo journalism as fiction

Gonzo is a term that has often been connected to Thompson's work, and is what distinguishes him from many other of his contemporary writers. Where the term Gonzo derives from is disputed, but it may have derived from New Orleans jazz slang, meaning to play unhinged (Wenner & Seymour, 2007, pp. 125-126). Playing unhinged implies a relaxed attitude towards following the rules. Furthermore, with regards to Gonzo journalism, it was developed by Thompson in the early 1970s to represent a participatory and subjective style of journalism, rejecting the objective and passive role the observer inhabits in more traditional journalistic writing (Vitullo, 2016, pp. 7-8). This means that the Gonzo journalist takes an active part in the story and does not merely portray the events in an objective manner as a flaneur (Stephenson, 2012, as cited in Vitullo, 2016, p. 8). One could perhaps argue that Gonzo journalism indeed blurs the line between journalism and fiction. One example of how Duke explains the different levels of involvement he would need to convey the events correctly comes when he comments on the differences between reporting on the "Mint 400" and the NDAA Conference. Duke states that the "Mint 400" "[H]ad been an *observer* gig," but that the NDAA Conference "would need *participation*" (Thompson, 2005, p. 109). Thompson, then, was more interested in conveying his subjective experiences of the unfolding events rather than documenting the facts, especially, it seems, while covering the NDAA Conference. According to Duke, the reason for a higher level of participation in covering the NDAA Conference is because his "very presence would be an outrage," and that the Conference was held "for the stated purpose of putting people like us in jail" (Thompson, 2005, p. 109). According to Duke, then, if a story he is covering is less in line with his own views, he will be more subjective, and in turn, less based on facts. This relaxed attitude towards detailing the events of the story being covered has also made it unpopular among certain literary critics, even prompting Winterowd to state that: "[t]he main problem with gonzo journalism as practiced by Thompson is its singular unformativeness: one learns a good deal about the author, very little about his subject" (Winterowd, 1990, p. 91).

Moreover, in his texts Thompson wanted to give his readers a deeper understanding of his internal literary processes. Hence, he was preoccupied with detailing this process of writing to his readers (Vitullo, 2016, p. 8), a type of journalism Chance and McKeen call "metajournalism" (Chance & McKeen, 2001, p.102). The subjectivity and the metajournalism Thompson applies to many of his texts may blur the lines between fact and fiction, as well as creating a narrative instability and tension between the text, the author and the fictional protagonist. For instance, Thompson and Acosta did go to Las Vegas for the "Mint 400" and the NDAA Conference but the events are seen from Thompson's subjective perspective and retold through a fictional character. Hence, many

literary scholars believe Thompson's methods of journalism share more in common with the traditional novel than it does to the objective and non-involving style of traditional journalism (Klinkowitz, 1977, pp. 33-34). As expressed by Thompson, Gonzo is: "a style of reporting based on William Faulkner's idea that the best fiction is far more *true* than any kind of journalism [...] Which is not to say that Fiction is necessarily 'more true' than Journalism, but that both 'fiction' and 'journalism' are artificial categories; and that both forms, at their best, are only two different means to the same end" (Thompson, 1979, p. 114). Thompson here comments on how he saw both journalism and fiction as two complimentary ways of achieving the same goal, namely conveying the truth as he saw it. Furthermore, Thompson is commenting upon how a journalistic text will somehow also be coloured by the subjective views of the journalist, however objective it may initially appear. Throughout his career Thompson would employ a wonderfully elusive narrative structure that existed in the liminal space between fact and fiction, as exemplified in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. For Thompson, the Machiavellian desire for truth outweighed the traditional boundaries between objective facts and subjective fiction.

Furthermore, Thompson saw *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as a "failed experiment in Gonzo journalism" (Thompson, 1979, p.114). This would not be the last time Thompson would set out with the goal of writing a genuine non-fictional work of journalism and eventually fail in this endeavour. For example, when writing about the Mariel boatlift in 1980, Thompson proclaimed that "[T]here was not enough room in a journalistic format for the characters I wanted. So I finally decided to write the story as a novel, told in the first person by a narrator who is also a main character and who speaks from a POV not unlike that of Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*" (Thompson, 1990, as cited in Vitullo, 2016, p. 263). Given that Thompson himself saw *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as a failed endeavour in Gonzo journalism, and since his methods of journalism, such as metajournalism and subjectivity have more in common with the traditional novel, the analysis will focus on the narrative as a fictional literary work, and not as an objective, journalistic retelling of events. Hence, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a subjective description of American society. This is important to note as this thesis does not claim that the description of American society in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* confirms Gramsci's theory on capitalist societies nor that it is a fair and balanced retelling of events.

## 2.2 Duke as a fictional character in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

As mentioned, the narrative of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is told through a protagonist by the name of Raoul Duke. This is not the only time Duke appears in Thompson's written works. Throughout Thompson's career, he would reuse many of his protagonists, characters, and also his fictional alter ego Duke in different stories (Vitullo, 2016, p. 263). One example of Thompson putting his characters in different narratives is the fictional character of Yail Bloor. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Bloor was a police officer: "Call Inspector Bloor. He knows about food. I think he has a list" (Thompson, 2005, p. 134), while in *The Great Shark Hunt*, Bloor is a drug smuggler (Thompson, 1979, pp. 421-452). This means that Thompson regularly included characters in different fictional contexts, thereby further blurring the lines between traditional and experimental fiction. In the same way, it can be argued that Duke is a fictional alter ego of Thompson and the plot and setting of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* are seen from and experienced through Duke's perspective.

Indeed, the distinction between Duke and Thompson may sometimes be hard to see, even for Thompson himself. For instance, while engaged in public speaking during the 1970s, Thompson often assumed the role of Duke in order to live up to the expectations his fans had of him from reading his books. His public speaking was chaotic and even incoherent at times and Thompson would often drink Wild Turkey and call politicians “communist buttfuckers” or “cocksuckers,” to which the crowd would cheer (McKeen, 2008, as cited in Vitullo, 2016). Furthermore, Thompson’s private persona was indeed very different from his public persona. In private life, Thompson was a shy recluse, not the chaotic and confrontational “wild man of political journalism” personified in the figure of Raoul Duke (McKeen, 2008, as cited in Vitullo, 2016). Since Thompson would do public speaking in the role of Duke, it is certainly reasonable to assume that Duke was indeed an alter ego of Thompson. This authorial instability and uncertainty only added to the literary mystique that Thompson was only too happy to engender.

Although Duke can be seen as Thompson’s alter ego, the narrative in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is more directed to the exploits of Duke than it is about Thompson and his descriptions of the unfolding events (Vitullo, 2016, p. 164). Duke’s earliest literary appearance came in 1967 in *Hell’s Angels* where he appeared on Thompson’s list of notorious outlaws (Thompson, 1967, p. 263). Another example of Duke as a fictional character is in the 1979 book *The Great Shark Hunt*, where Duke acts as Thompson’s interpreter, who works at *Rolling Stone*. In *The Great Shark Hunt*, Duke is a separate person from Thompson, so it is possible that Thompson also saw Duke as a separate person from himself in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Duke even addresses concern over Thompson’s state of mind during his escapades in Miami (Thompson, 1979, p. 242). Furthermore, in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, there is a passage where Thompson writes about Duke appearing to “have broken down completely,” and that every attempt to contact him to check on his progress “had proved futile” (Thompson, 2005, p. 161). This is another example of Thompson treating Duke as a character who exists in the liminal spaces between Thompson’s temporal reality and fictional creations. Hellman sees Duke as being “defined by the title phrase ‘fear and loathing,’ for it embodies both the paranoia with which the persona perceives the ominous forces pervading actuality, and the aggression with which he seeks to survive it” (Hellman, 1981, p. 71). In other words, Thompson has created an alter ego that allows him to explore the cultural, political and social dystopia that was Las Vegas in the 1960s and 70s.

In light of this, this thesis will analyze *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as a fictitious text and the events depicted as a subjective account from Thompson’s protagonist Raoul Duke. This thesis does not argue that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is an objective description of American society, nor that it confirms that Gramsci’s theory is correct with regards to American society during the 1970s. The description of American society in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is from Thompson’s alter ego and fictitious character Raoul Duke who, as mentioned above, was even more opposed to the status quo of American society than Thompson was. Hence, the description of American society found in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is even more countercultural since it represents the perspective of Raoul Duke and it does not give a fully accurate description of a Capitalist society. Having laid the theoretical framework for how this thesis will analyze *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, this thesis will now look at Gramsci’s theory on cultural hegemony.

### 3.0 Gramsci and cultural hegemony

The term hegemony stems from classical Greece, where the term *hegemon* was used to refer to a city state that had political and military dominance over others (Wilkinson, 2008, p 120). The term has been used to describe a form of physical and geopolitical control that can be achieved without the consent of the controlled. In contemporary society, however, the term has been broadened to envelop more than just military and political control such as control through cultural means.

One such theoretical framework that has broadened our concept of how a state excerpts power is the theory of cultural hegemony, developed by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). Gramsci was imprisoned for eleven years during Mussolini's Fascist rule of Italy, and between 1929 and 1935 he wrote the *Prison Notebooks* (1999). These writings became the basis for Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony, for which he is most known. His theory explores the idea that in Capitalist societies dominant groups assert their dominance by using culture as a tool to control subordinate groups. More specifically, dominant groups achieve this control over subordinate groups through consent which is brought about through consciousness and legitimating symbols such as the media and public intellectuals (Lears, 1985, p. 568-569). In the Gramscian model of cultural hegemony, the subordinate groups are being controlled by the dominant groups without them being aware of it.

In order to discuss the extent to which there are elements of a cultural hegemony in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, this chapter will look at what Gramsci believed constitutes a cultural hegemony and how this theory manifests itself in a Capitalist society. The chapter will focus on how Gramsci theorized that in order to achieve consent to cultural hegemony, consciousness and legitimating symbols are used as tools by the dominant groups to control subordinate groups. Furthermore, this chapter will examine how countercultures may arise in a Capitalist society, according to Gramsci.

### 3.1 Consent and consciousness in a cultural hegemony

There is no clear and concise definition of the term cultural hegemony in Gramsci's translated *Prison Notebooks*. The closest we come to a definition is when he writes that hegemony is: "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production." (Gramsci, 1999, p. 145). According to Gramsci, then, cultural hegemony differs from the archaic forms of hegemony found in, for example, classical Greece. This is because cultural hegemony is possible only through the consent given by the subordinate groups to the rule of the dominant groups. Without this consent from the subordinate groups, the dominant groups do not have hegemony in a Capitalist society (Artz & Ortega Murphy, 2000, pp. 3-4).

Furthermore, with regards to historiography, Gramsci, unlike many of his Marxist peers, believed that a class-based interpretation of history was not a mere fight between the oppressors and oppressed, but rather a process where the ruling classes effectively avoided such confrontations through cultural hegemony (Lears, 1985, p. 572). Something which he comments upon when stating that the consent is "historically" caused by the dominant group's position in a society which they have built to their

advantage and in order for them to maintain their position as the dominant group (Gramsci, 1999, p. 145). Moreover, Gramsci writes that the consent is "spontaneous," which implies that the subordinate groups are conditioned to give consent to the rule of the dominant groups without questioning it, making it a subconscious act, or an inherited consciousness. In a Capitalist society, this consent is often brought about through the media and legitimating symbols (ideas and values legitimating the dominant group's position of power in society) that emphasize the dominant groups' values, which the dominant groups produce and control.

With regards to the nature of the consent of subordinate groups, Gramsci focused on the ambiguities of consent. This ambiguity is between cultural hegemony's influence on consciousness, which he calls the inherited consciousness, and an individual's real experience of the world, the implicit consciousness (Lears, 1985, p. 569). The inherited consciousness is what defines the power a cultural hegemony has over a person and is the consciousness that lends consent to cultural hegemony. The power the hegemonic culture has over members of the subordinate groups is explicit, and has influence over a person's morality and will, which in turn makes it more capable of becoming the dominant consciousness in the working class person's experience and understanding of the world around them. Furthermore, because the inherited consciousness is dominant and uncritically absorbed by the subordinate groups it can lead to a state of both moral and political passivity (Gramsci, 1999, p. 641). This, in turn, can lead to a state of affairs where the subordinate groups accept, and even support, policies and inequalities that directly affect their social group negatively without them being aware of it (Gramsci, 1999, p. 641). When it comes to the components of a dominant culture that need consent from the subordinate groups, also known as legitimating symbols, Gramsci points to the values, norms, perceptions, beliefs, sentiments and prejudices that support and define the existing economic differences between the classes, the institutions that decide that these differences occur, and the range of agreements responsible for these differences (Lears, 1985, p. 569). In other words, the subordinate groups need to give consent to the validity of cultural hegemony, and accept that there are economic differences between the social classes.

According to Gramsci, the consent of the subordinate groups and the force of the dominant groups always coexist, but one of them is dominant (Lears, 1985, p. 568). For instance, Mussolini's Republican Fascist Party ruled mainly through coercion and the threat of violence, whereas in cultural hegemonies, the threat of officially sanctioned force remains implicit within the laws of the state, which are made by the dominant group (Gramsci, 1999, p. 532). Only weak states would rely on the use of force, or the threat thereof, while strong states rule through hegemony (Adamson, 1980, p. 170). In a cultural hegemony, the ruling groups do not keep their control simply through legitimating symbols such as the media and public intellectuals, but they also need the consent of subordinate groups to maintain the status quo of the social order (Lears, 1985, p. 569). Consent, then, becomes important for the dominant groups as they seek to avoid using violence against subordinate groups and to maintain their cultural hegemony through the use of legitimating symbols.

### 3.2 Legitimizing symbols in a cultural hegemony

Gramsci wrote that in order for the subordinate groups to become fully aware of their own life situation and revolt against a cultural hegemony, they needed to undergo political education (Gramsci, 1999, p. 384). In other words, the subordinate groups need political education to see how their acceptance of cultural hegemony works against their best interests. Furthermore, the development of consciousness within the subordinate groups can only be achieved by self-governance and scepticism towards the state. Gramsci calls this form of consciousness implicit (Gramsci, 1999, p. 641). In order to achieve political education the members of the subordinate groups have to abandon the inherited consciousness passed down from the dominant groups in a Capitalist society (Adamson, 1980, p. 140). This can, for instance, be achieved by what Gramsci called organic intellectuals. As an example to understand Gramsci's thoughts on the political education of the subordinate groups, it is important to understand that he saw all of society as a vast school where the teacher-pupil relationship existed between "intellectual and non-intellectual sections of the population, between the rulers and the ruled, elites and their followers, leaders and led, the vanguard and the body of the army" (Gramsci, 1999, p. 666). This points to how the dominant groups in society control the information and education that the subordinate groups will receive, and that this information is controlled by the dominant groups. The people who control this information are traditional intellectuals, and Gramsci points to how these public intellectuals act as legitimating symbols of cultural hegemony, and how other, opposing thoughts and ideas are not seen as relevant and seldom get any attention in the public debate. Moreover, these legitimating symbols are not restricted to intellectuals in the traditional sense, but the term intellectual includes both scholars, social observers, and anyone who acts as a conveyer of ideas within society and between cultural hegemony and the masses, and anyone who is involved in the media (Adamson, 1980, p. 143).

Furthermore, Gramsci made a distinction between traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. As a new culture emerges, it tends to create intellectuals that give the group uniformity and awareness in both the economic and political sphere, he argued (Gramsci, 1999, p. 134-5). The organic intellectuals under Capitalism are all those who strive to create a new culture based on the values of the subordinate groups by giving them confidence through social, cultural, and political leadership (Adamson, 1980, p. 143). Before these organic intellectuals can reach a status as leaders, however, this role will be filled by traditional intellectuals. Gramsci describes this group of intellectuals as being highly arrogant and self-assured because of their standing in society as thought leaders and the driving force behind the public discourse. Because of this, they see themselves as "autonomous and independent from the dominant social group" (Gramsci, 1999, p. 138). Gramsci, then, believed that traditional intellectuals saw themselves as individual and autonomous thinkers who were not reinforcing the ideas and values of the dominant groups in society. Because the inherited consciousness is the more prevalent of the two consciousnesses (inherited and implicit), the traditional intellectual's education and thoughts are also controlled by cultural hegemony. Which, in turn, means that traditional intellectuals are maintaining cultural hegemony's legitimating symbols and the inherited consciousness. According to Gramsci, the traditional intellectuals are unaware of, or at least don't recognize, the other consciousness which is the people's real experience of the world. The traditional intellectual is hence removed from the subordinate groups in society because they do not inhabit the same social circles and socioeconomic status they do, which in turn

makes them unaware of their implicit consciousness (Jones, 2006, p. 87). Furthermore, since traditional intellectuals earn money and get recognition as thought leaders this may perpetuate their belief in themselves and the thoughts they convey to society. This again, may lead to the subordinate groups accepting certain aspects of the dominant culture that work directly against their best interests (Lears, 1985, p. 573). Capitalism, and the cultural components such as ideas, values and norms implicit within this political system, then becomes an inherited consciousness.

### 3.3 Countercultures in a cultural hegemony

However bleak a picture Gramsci paints of a cultural hegemony in a Capitalist society, there are ways to combat this prison of consciousness he describes, and create a culture based on their implicit consciousness. However, members of the subordinate groups will find this resistance almost impossible to carry out, because of the ingrained belief in the cultural hegemony through the inherited consciousness and lack of organic intellectuals (Lears, 1985, p. 359). Furthermore, for Gramsci, consent involves a "contradictory consciousness," one of both approval and indifference and one of opposition to the hegemonic culture (Gramsci, 1999, p. 641). Furthermore, the consciousness of approval and indifference is more prevalent among the subordinate groups because it controls their morality and will, which in turn makes it harder for them to act out their implicit consciousness. Hence, the subordinate groups are more likely to accept the existing social order because their inherited consciousness controls their moral compass and their will to act out on things that contradict their implicit consciousness (Gramsci, 1999, p. 641). However, Gramsci further argues that subordinate groups and their implicit interpretation of the world around them could "manifest itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes" (Gramsci, 1999, p. 632). This shared consciousness can create a strong bond within subordinate groups and make them a counterculture, but only if they work for a common goal as an "organic totality" (Gramsci, 1999, p. 632). If a person is able to translate the outlook through their experience of the world into a conception of the world that directly challenges the hegemonic culture, countercultures may be created. Gramsci's theory opens up for the cultural hegemony to be challenged by such countercultures, and he did not see his theory as a fixed concept, but argued that cultural hegemonies would differ in the degree of legitimacy they have, hence giving room for countercultures to develop (Adamson, 1980, p. 174). Without strong legitimacy, the consent of the subordinate groups to the existing social order may be withdrawn, sometimes resulting in an uprising. In order for a countercultural group to become a dominant group, it must appeal to other groups within a society, and they must be able to show how their interests should be the main interest of society at large, including the hegemonic culture (Lears, 1985, p. 571). This is also done through legitimating symbols and organic intellectuals, not only via traditional intellectuals.

In order to maintain a cultural hegemony then, the dominant groups in a Capitalist society need consent from the subordinate groups. The inherited consciousness plays a major role in perpetuating the status quo between the social classes. It remains so because of legitimating symbols perpetuated by traditional intellectuals. Often, these legitimating symbols might work against the subordinate group's best interests, but the inherited consciousness makes the subordinate groups unaware of this and may even make them support the underlying ideas and values which perpetuate the economic differences between the groups. If the legitimating symbols and the traditional



intellectuals fail, a counterculture may be formed, and a weak state might potentially be driven to use violence against subordinate groups or countercultures. This, then, becomes a sign that the cultural hegemony is failing in achieving the consent brought about through the inherited consciousness and perpetuated by legitimating symbols, and the individual's real experience of the world becomes the dominant consciousness and people might lose their trust in the cultural hegemony and the inherited consciousness.

#### 4.0 Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

One literary work that deals with the darker side of Capitalism is Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Hunter S. Thompson (1937-2005) was born in Louisville, Kentucky. Kentucky during the 1940s and 1950s was a class conscious society, and Thompson was born into the lower socioeconomic groups of this society (Vitullo, 2016, pp. 51-53). Part of the family's economic misfortune was that Jack Thompson passed away when Thompson was in his early adolescence, leaving his mother with the sole responsibility to provide for Thompson and his two younger siblings (Vitullo, 2016, p. 54).

During his adolescence, Thompson had several brushes with the law, and missed his graduation because he was sentenced to sixty days in a juvenile detention facility after a failed robbery. However, his cohorts had been set free and went to college, because they came from wealthier families and were able to pay their bail (Carroll, 2010, p. 58). Furthermore, Thompson was concerned with politics, and he wrote several books and articles on the subject, including articles such as *Fear and Loathing: on the Campaign Trail '72* (Thompson, 2012). In these articles and books he would vehemently attack what he saw as Fascism in the figure of Richard Nixon and defend Democratic candidates such as George McGovern. Thompson, then, was no novice regarding political matters, and he had a staunch stance on what he saw as right and wrong. Though not an outright political novel, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is written by a political journalist and conveyed through the eyes of Thompson's alter ego, Raoul Duke. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is hence a subjective view on contemporary American society, especially the role of the American Dream. Thompson's preoccupation with the American Dream became a theme in all of his writings, and he often expressed his worries about the future of the United States, a future he saw as linked to the death of the American Dream (Nuttall, 2012, pp. 103-106). Thompson became a famous countercultural figure after publishing *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and his drug-fueled life has become part of the infamous mythology surrounding him. Hunter S. Thompson took his own life in 2005, at the age of 67, at his ranch in Woody Creek, Colorado.

This chapter will look at the aspects of American society described by Duke in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. The chapter will specifically focus on the American Dream and the rule of law within the society Duke is describing before analyzing each aspect from the perspective of Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony.

##### 4.1.1 Duke's American Dream

One aspect of American society described by Duke is the American Dream. The term "the American Dream" was first coined during the Great Depression by James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book *The Epic of America* as a "dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with the opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement" (Adams, 1931, p. 404). Long before Adams, however, this set of ideals was already firmly rooted in the American psyche through the Declaration of Independence which states that "all Men are created equal" with the right to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (Jefferson, 1776, p. 1). Truslow Adams' definition of the American Dream and the Declaration of Independence can be criticized for failing to mention certain irrefutable factors, such as the significance of one's socioeconomic background and the fact that slavery was still legal while proclaiming that "all Men are created equal," but it is nonetheless still a major part of American society.

In the beginning of the novel Duke's explicit main concern is in fact not to cover a story on "The Mint 400," rather it is to explore and articulate the great myth that is the American Dream. When picking up a hitchhiker, Duke states that "I want you to know that we're on our way to Las Vegas to find the American Dream." (Thompson, 2005, p. 6). Duke does not explicitly mention what he believes the American Dream constitutes. However, in order to understand how he defines it, it may be relevant to consider the fact that he compares himself to Horatio Alger several times during the novel, even writing that he is "Horatio Alger gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas" (Thompson, 2005, p. 12). Alger wrote Bildungsromans based on the American Dream, centering around the idea that anyone could have upward mobility through hard work and perseverance even in difficult circumstances (McGlenn, 2004, p. 11). Alger's novels were mostly based on the classic interpretation of the American Dream, namely that hard work and perseverance equals upward mobility. This sentiment is exemplified through the titles of some of Alger's novels. Titles such as, including but not limited to: *Strive and Succeed* (1872), *Struggling Upward* (1890) and *Risen from the Ranks* (1874), all point to the sentiment that hard work and perseverance is the key to obtaining the American Dream. Nonetheless, finding the American Dream turns out to be more difficult than Duke and Gonzo imagined, partly because their extensive use of illegal drugs hampers their progress, and partly because they are searching for a concept. Moreover, Gonzo admits that perhaps searching for the American Dream is a "wild goose chase" (Thompson, 2005, p. 165). This is a further sign that even Duke and Gonzo are starting to believe that the American Dream can no longer be found nor achieved, and that it has ceased to be an obtainable dream for most Americans. Furthermore, in a passage where Duke and Gonzo are actively searching for it, and which illustrates their difficulties, they stop at a diner to ask around for the seemingly elusive American Dream: "We're looking for the American Dream, and we were told it was somewhere in this area [...] That's why they gave us this white Cadillac, they figure that we could catch up with it in that" (Thompson, 2005, p. 164). The waitress then proceeds to ask the diner's cook: "Do you know where the American Dream is?" to which the cook replies: "What's that? What is it?" (Thompson, 2005, p. 164). This passage highlights the fundamentally mythological status of the elusive American Dream since neither the cook nor the waitress have heard of it. Furthermore, the fact that the white Cadillac would help Duke and Gonzo find the American Dream might allude to its fundamentally materialistic nature. This obtainable version of the American Dream entails owning a car, especially an American car, and a house. Cullen writes that this notion of the American Dream had the "broader appeal, and no American Dream has been quite so widely realized" (Cullen, 2003, p. 136). The Cadillac is not theirs, however, it has been rented (Thompson, 2005, p. 95). This means that this symbol of the American Dream is in fact only his for a set amount of time, and not something Duke has obtained permanently himself through hard work and perseverance. Moreover, the Cadillac, as a result of the treatment it has received from Duke and Gonzo, is later described as being "finished, a wreck, totaled out" (Thompson, 2005, p. 197). The Cadillac becomes a metaphor for how Duke wants to tear down the old symbols representing the American Dream by actively destroying them, and that his notion of what the American Dream once was is regarded by him to be dead. Moreover, it soon turns out that the waitress and the cook have heard of a place called the "American Dream," and that it is the name of a bar which has been converted into a "mental asylum" where all the drug dealers and drug addicts congregate on Paradise Road (Thompson, 2005, p. 166). Situating the "American Dream" on Paradise Road becomes a metaphor for how dilapidated and miserable the cook and the waitress describe the

place, and further pushes the idea of the American Dream as being unattainable, or in this case, a paradise lost. When Duke finds the bar, it turns out that, symbolically enough, it burned down “about three years ago” (Thompson, 2005, p. 168). Though highly allegorical, it paints a picture of how Duke saw the ultimate death of the American Dream, and both the Cadillac and the bar become symbols for Duke’s lament of what the American Dream has become.

When analysing *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* from the perspective of Gramsci’s theory on cultural hegemony, the American Dream could be interpreted as an inherited consciousness. This is because it is an ethos passed down through generations, and Duke believes it has changed into something that affects the subordinate groups negatively without them being aware of it. According to Gramsci, the people who find themselves in the subordinate groups in a Capitalist society will accept policies that perpetuate the economic differences between the social groups, to some degree, even though it works against their own best interests (Lears, 1985, p. 573). Hence, the subordinate groups in society are doing it subconsciously. If indeed the American Dream can be classified as an inherited consciousness, the cultural hegemony has lost its validity to some degree since members of the subordinate groups in society, like the waitress and the cook, are unaware of its existence. Furthermore, members of the subordinate groups increasing their implicit consciousness would weaken the cultural hegemony and it might lead to political education and a society based on people’s real experience of the world. This in turn could lead to the subordinate groups realizing how their participation in the inherited consciousness will affect them negatively, and rather be based on subordinate groups rejecting the ideas, values and norms the cultural hegemony represents. However, the majority of the population do not question the legitimacy of the cultural hegemony, like Gramsci theorized. Moreover, Duke compares himself to Alger several times during the novel. By Alger’s logic, anyone in America who has experienced upwards mobility, deserves their place in the upper social classes, and eventually participation in what Gramsci would describe as the dominant groups in a cultural hegemony. The older version of the American Dream, that Duke believes exists during the novel, did not affect the subordinate groups negatively. In fact, working hard and persevering would give you a better life. For instance, you could own a house and an American car. Duke also has a positive attitude towards the American Dream in the beginning of the novel, when he receives three hundred dollars for covering the “Mint 400” and proclaiming that “this is the American Dream in action!” (Thompson, 2005, p. 11). However, in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, the American Dream is not a fixed concept that is unchanging from its original ethos, and soon Duke realizes what he believes the American Dream has become.

#### 4.1.2 Duke’s American Nightmare

One of the reasons why Duke states that he believes the heart of the American Dream is in Las Vegas could be because this is the city most people associate with gambling across the United States, and the city that Banco called “the glitz and glamour destination for the middle-class parents of the ‘dope generation,’ hoping to strike it rich and fulfil the American Dream” (Banco, 2007, p. 136). However, gambling is not the safest and most predictable way of earning money. According to the Nevada Gaming Control Board, the win percentage across all gambling locations and games from January 2019 until March 2020 is seven (2020, p. 4). This means that ninety three percent of the people who gamble in Las Vegas, and try to achieve the American Dream, leave Las Vegas

economically poorer than when they arrived. Subsequently, they make the casinos wealthier in the process. Yet, people still go to Las Vegas to gamble in the hopes that they will win the big prize, and people still believe that their family will have upward mobility in society. As an example of this, Duke states in a later passage that people are "Still humping the American Dream, that vision of the Big Winner somehow emerging from the last-minute pre-dawn chaos of a stale Vegas casino [...] But no. Just another two bucks down the tube. You bastards!" (Thompson, 2005, p. 57). Duke here comments upon how gambling can make you the "Big Winner" in the context of the notion of the American Dream. However, he states that the money usually goes "down the tube." This is in line with the fact that most of the people who gamble lose their money, and the money goes to the owners of the establishment. Furthermore, Duke states that they are "still humping" the American Dream, which, even though Duke believes his version of the American Dream is dead, the vast majority of the society he describes still believe in its validity and existence. Furthermore, the use of the word "humping" has negative connotations to it, which further solidifies Duke's negative view on what he believes the American Dream has become.

Duke's negative attitude towards gambling is further emphasised in a later passage, where he states that: "Mainline gambling is a very heavy business - and Las Vegas makes Reno seem like your friendly neighborhood grocery store. For a loser, Vegas is the meanest town on earth" (Thompson, 2005, p. 42). In the excerpt Duke uses the term "mainline" to describe gambling, a term which may also refer to a way of injecting drugs into one's body, which points to it being addictive and dangerous for the individual. Interestingly, Duke does not describe the drugs he uses as especially dangerous, but he does describe gambling as being so, which contributes to the harsh criticism that gambling is subjected to in the novel. Furthermore, Duke has already connected the American Dream with the use of narcotics when he learns that the bar "the American Dream" is now where drug addicts congregate (Thompson, 2005, p. 168). So, Duke is here stating that there is a connection between addiction and gambling and that people become addicted to chasing the American Dream. Furthering Duke's negative attitude towards gambling and how it can affect people negatively, Duke describes how his neighbor lost all his money, and his business, through gambling, and in turn experienced downward mobility (Thompson, 2005, p. 41).

What seems to be Duke's conclusion on what the American Dream has become, then, is gambling and consumerism which positively affect the owners of the establishments, while negatively affecting the players. This new version of the American Dream is giving rich people a way in which to steal from the masses, and they are not being punished for it. What the American Dream has become, according to Duke, is eventually found when Duke and his friend Bruce visit a casino. While visiting the casino named Circus-Circus, and when referencing the American Dream, Duke proclaims that "We're sitting on the main nerve right now" (Thompson, 2005, p. 191). The owner of the Circus-Circus, it turns out, has a rags-to-riches story which is similar those found in Alger's *Bildungsromans*, meaning that he started as a poor person and ended up having upwards mobility: "You remember that story about [...] the owner of this place? How he always wanted to run away and join the circus when he was a kid? [...] Now the bastard has his *own* circus, and a license to steal too," to which Bruce responds: "You're right, he's the model" (Thompson, 2005, p. 191). In this passage, Duke is commenting on how the American Dream entails starting from a low socioeconomic level and ending up owning property and having financial success, much like the narratives in Alger's *Bildungsromans*. However, the difference between these two versions of the American

Dream is how they see a connection between the American Dream and "stealing" from other members of society. This means that in order to achieve what Duke sees as the new American Dream, you have to effectively stagnate someone else's hope of achieving it. Moreover, they claim that the owner of the Circus-Circus is the model for the American Dream because he can "steal" from other people, so Duke puts a lot of emphasis on this part of his interpretation of what the American Dream has become. According to Duke, then, the Circus-Circus is not the American Dream for the people visiting it, rather it is the American Dream for the owner.

Furthermore, during a previous visit to the Circus-Circus, the casino is described as an extremely loud and bizarre place, a place where someone like Gonzo and Duke will never be harassed (Thompson, 2005, p. 45). In this passage Duke describes himself as being incredibly intoxicated on ether, and he describes the effects when he says that he has "total loss of all basic motor skills: blurred vision, no balance, numb tongue, severance of all connection between the body and the brain" (Thompson, 2005, p. 45). However horrific this may sound, at the Circus-Circus they still get in as long as they spend money (Thompson, 2005, p. 45). The reason they are let in, Duke continues, is because the ether is the perfect drug for Las Vegas, because it makes you act like a drunk, and "[i]n this town they love a drunk. Fresh meat." (Thompson, 2005, p. 46). This could be Duke's idea of the new American Dream as he is still allowed to participate since he is then more likely to spend more money, and hence contribute to the growing wealth of the owner of the Circus-Circus. This same sentiment was also brought up by the waitress when she speaks about the bar called "The American Dream" when she says that it is a place where "all the kids are potted when they go in" (Thompson, 2005, p. 166). Moreover, Duke takes this notion to absurd heights when he comments that all they care about in Las Vegas is money when stating that "If Charlie Manson checked into the Sahara tomorrow morning, nobody would hassle him as long as he tipped big" (Thompson, 2005, p. 106). Nuttall describes the American Dream as only being possible if it exists in a "moral landscape" (Nuttall, 2012, p. 105). Duke's description of what the American Dream has become, seems to be one that is lacking in morality, and that only focuses on economic gains.

A 2009 national survey conducted by the Pew Research Center shows that 85 percent of African Americans believe their economic circumstances will be better in the coming ten years, while Hispanics are at 77 percent, and whites at 71 percent (Pew Research Center, 2009). The consent given to the American Dream remains strong in contemporary America. However, in contrast research conducted by the OECD suggests that upward mobility is actually harder in America than in most other advanced nations (2011, p. 40). It may seem like the old version of the American Dream, which Alger wrote about, still existed in America until recently, even though Duke believed it to be "burned down" in the late nineteen sixties (Thompson, 2005, p. 168).

In a cultural hegemony, an inherited consciousness needs consent from the majority of the subordinate groups in order to have validity. The American Dream has lost its validity from certain members of subordinate groups in society, such as Duke, Gonzo, the waitress and the cook, but in Duke's description it seems to have validity among the vast majority of the population. Without the recognition from the vast majority of American society that the American Dream is still possible, it will cease to exist as a concept because it no longer has the validity it needs, and this in turn will negatively affect the validity of the cultural hegemony. Even though gambling affects the subordinate groups negatively, Duke sees that the vast majority of the population still believe in gambling as a tool for achieving upward mobility and ultimately achieving the American Dream. The

American public still gives validity to the American Dream as an achievable concept, and in *Fear and Loathing*, Duke describes how the American Dream is still alive for parts of the subordinate groups in American society saying that they are “still humping the American Dream,” even though Duke believes it to be dead (Thompson, 2005, p. 57).

However, not everyone in the subordinate groups will be affected negatively, as the owner of the Circus-Circus has benefited from the American Dream. Nonetheless, Duke believes he has done it at the expense of others, by “stealing” from them. When seen in light of Gramsci’s theory, the subordinate groups in this scenario in fact actively participate in the owner achieving the American Dream because they partake in the economic growth of the owner through losing their own money, which affects them negatively, which in turn they support because they do it voluntarily. Because of this, the Circus-Circus also maintains the economic differences between the classes. In terms of Gramsci’s theory, the people who have achieved the American Dream are now part of the dominant groups in society, and hence may start taking advantage of the subordinate groups through their participation in the cultural hegemony and by giving validity to the American Dream. Furthermore, Gramsci theorized that the inherited consciousness could lead to moral passivity (Gramsci, 1999, p. 641). Duke’s description of how he is allowed to enter the Circus-Circus and how he envisions Charles Manson being treated, indicates that the American Dream is leading to moral passivity. Morality hence becomes less important than economic growth in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

In the theory of cultural hegemony this could be another example of how the American Dream is an inherited consciousness that works against the subordinate groups’ best interests. In other words, the new American Dream, one which does not entail hard work and perseverance, but focuses on decadence and earning money, and which works against the subordinate groups’ best interests is exemplified through gambling in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Furthermore, it also perpetuates the economic differences between the social groups because the money usually goes “down the tube,” or to the owners of the casinos (Thompson, 2005, p. 57). Gambling then becomes a way of monetizing the American Dream, a way for the dominant groups to earn money off the subordinate groups’ idea of achieving the American Dream which could be classified as an inherited consciousness. Moreover, Duke describes American society as lacking a certain moral fibre.

#### 4.1.3 Consent and the rule of law in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Duke is aware of, and acknowledges the authority of the police officers, laws, values and norms of contemporary American society. However, he routinely decides to rebel against them, even though he is aware of their existence. One example of this is when he proclaims that he knows the law, but he decided to break it anyway (Thompson, 2005, p. 92). Furthermore, Duke’s continuous use of illegal drugs is another example of how he does not give consent to the laws of society. Rather, he feels pity for those who do not partake in his choice of lifestyle (Thompson, 2005, p. 66). So, from Duke’s perspective, some of the laws, especially laws surrounding the use of illegal drugs, seem unjust to him, and are not to be followed. As an example of this, in one passage he explains the amount of illegal drugs Duke and Gonzo bring on their trip to Las Vegas: “We had two bags of grass, seventy-five pellets of mescaline, five sheets of high-powered blotter acid, a salt shaker half full of cocaine, and a whole galaxy of multi-colored uppers, downers, screamers, laughers” (Thompson, 2005, p. 4). This passage

from the book illustrates the severity of his drug abuse, but also his experience with the use of drugs and laissez faire attitude towards the law. These drugs also serve a purpose in the narrative of the story as they alter Duke's already alternative view on American society even further, and makes him negative towards the subordinate groups' stance on illegal drugs. However, Duke is constantly aware of the fact that his illegal actions will have severe consequences, and in several passages he states that he is afraid of ending up in prison. One example of this, which is again connected to his use of illegal drugs, is when Duke and Gonzo meet a young girl named Lucy, and they are nervous that she will send them to jail for giving her LSD, stating that "[t]hey would track us down and probably castrate us both, prior to booking" (Thompson, 2005, p. 116). Another example of the violence Duke and Gonzo imagine the dominant groups will use on them if captured is when they are speaking about stealing priest robes to wear and Gonzo states that: "Can you imagine what those bastards would do to us if we got busted all drugged-up and drunk in stolen vestments? Jesus, they'd castrate us!" (Thompson, 2005, p. 14). Vredenburg has theorized that in *Fear and Loathing in America*, American society is moving towards a state of affairs where the state can suspend laws in order to punish anyone they deem guilty, no matter the circumstances (Vredenburg, 2012, p. 152). As an example of this, Duke comments upon how he feels the laws in America work against him: "Sympathy? Not for me. No mercy for a criminal freak in Las Vegas [...] In a closed society where everybody's guilty, the only crime is getting caught. In a world of thieves, the only final sin is stupidity" (Thompson, 2005, p. 72). In this passage Duke calls himself a "criminal freak," yet he proclaims that everyone is in fact guilty, such as the owner of the Circus-Circus who "steals" from the subordinate groups. By doing so, he again shows the reader that he feels there is a disparity between what the laws of society punish people for and what they deem to be legal. Where he believes he will be "castrated" (Thompson, 2005, pp. 14-116) for the crimes he has done, other members of society will not be punished for equally unlawful crimes. Another example of this example of this, which is also used by Vredenburg (2012, p. 161) to show how the law is different for people who are associated with drug use, is when Duke is recounting something that happened to his "totally harmless" hippie neighbour who was standing near the Circus-Circus when he was apprehended by the police and taken "straight to jail. No phone call, no lawyer, no charge" (Thompson, 2005, p. 173). Duke is describing how members of his subordinate group are subjects to the whim of the police in Las Vegas simply because of their appearance and alleged connection to the counter cultural movement.

By analyzing Duke's attitude towards the law and his use of illegal drugs from the perspective of Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony, Duke is rejecting many of the ideas passed down from the dominant groups in society. This can be seen as an indication that Duke is in direct opposition to the laws and expectations that the dominant groups in society have towards him, and that he rejects the inherited consciousness and legitimating symbols passed down from the dominant groups in society with regards to the use of illegal drugs. Furthermore, this may be regarded as an act of a person who has developed his real experience of the world through his implicit consciousness, in this case through his use of and subsequent attitude towards illegal drugs. Duke does not give consent to the laws of society, which could be seen as an inherited consciousness passed down from the dominant groups.

Furthermore, Gramsci argues that only weak states rely on the use or threat of violence (Gramsci, 1999, p. 532). Hence, in Duke's description, America is painted as a weak state because Duke sees violence as an implicit part of the laws of the state. Moreover,



Gramsci theorized that the consent of the subordinate groups and the force of the dominant groups always coexist, but one of them is dominant (Lears, 1985, p. 568). However, because of the severity of the punishment Duke envisions receiving, the force of the dominant groups is more prevalent than the consent Duke gives. This means that with regards to the consent Duke gives to the dominant groups, the society he is describing is not a cultural hegemony for members of his subordinate group because the state relies on the threat of violence and not coercion when dealing with users of illegal drugs. And in this scenario, the society Duke is describing resembles a traditional hegemony, which relies on the use of force, rather than a cultural one. However, Duke does describe a society where most people follow the rule of law. In other words, a cultural hegemony could maintain its legitimacy as long as the vast majority of the population gives its consent to- and abide by the rule of law, and this seems to be the case in Duke's description of American society in Las Vegas. However, the threat of force is, according to Duke, explicit towards those who do not follow the rule of law, meaning that the validity of the cultural hegemony has diminished within certain subordinate groups.

When analyzing how the rule of law is portrayed in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* in light of Gramsci's theory, Duke seems to be identifying that certain members of his subordinate group are being treated differently than people who are in the dominant groups in society. Even though the members of the dominant groups are, according to Duke, just as guilty, but simply because they have money they are being treated favourably in the eyes of the law. This could be interpreted as an element of how Gramsci saw the dominant groups controlling the subordinate groups in society through coercion and force. Furthermore, Duke comments upon how Las Vegas is a "world of thieves," where "the only final sin is stupidity". Since casinos earn money from the gamblers, and that the people who gamble should understand this and in fact not commit the "final sin" and stay away from gambling. In a Gramscian perspective, this could be interpreted as another instance where Duke has achieved some form of political education through development of his implicit consciousness where he sees faults in a system that punishes certain forms of activities and not others which should also be viewed as illegal. Furthermore, in order to participate in gambling, Duke claims you have to be "stupid." People know they probably will not win when gambling, but they do it anyway in order to achieve the American Dream. From a Gramscian perspective this could be interpreted as an underdevelopment of the implicit consciousness derived from their real experience of the world, and a scenario where the inherited consciousness prevails. Furthermore, Gramsci predicted that subordinate groups could support aspects of the Capitalist society even though it affects them negatively. Through Duke's description of gambling as a last bastion of what was once the American Dream, it can be read in this light. Moreover, by commenting on how gambling negatively affects the subordinate groups, Duke at least shows that he is aware of it and hence has shown some political education through his real experience of the world.

## 4.2 Legitimizing symbols in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

By analysing *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* from the perspective of Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony, Duke's description of the new American Dream could be seen as an inherited consciousness that works against the subordinate groups' best interests.

According to Gramsci, in order to gain consciousness of their situation and realize that the inherited consciousness works against their best interests, and in turn be able to create a legitimate counterculture, the subordinate groups need to undergo political education. One of the ways to achieve political education is through public intellectuals and the media. Gramsci divides these public intellectuals between traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. This section will analyze Duke's description of intellectuals, the role of the media and countercultures in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

The chapter will specifically focus on public intellectuals, the media and the hippie counter culture within the society Duke is describing before analyzing each aspect on the basis of Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony.

### 4.2.1 Intellectuals and the media in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

Dr. Bloomquist is arguably the most prominent example of what Gramsci would term a public intellectual in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. As mentioned, this section of the novel is even more in the style of gonzo, hence, it is even more removed from actual reality than Duke's covering of other events in the novel (Thompson, 2005, p. 109). Dr. Bloomquist is the keynote speaker at the conference, holding a lecture on the dangers surrounding the use of illegal drugs. Duke's highly subjective and fictitious description of the NDAA Conference starts off by noting that a successful GOP businessman was responsible for the opening remarks and that the general setting felt "ominous and authoritarian" (Thompson, 2005, p. 137). The use of the word "authoritarian" conjures up an image of the conference as a representation of the state, or an institution, and that law enforcement has control over what Duke sees as his personal freedom to use illegal drugs. Dr. Bloomquist has, amongst his other research projects, written a book on the dangers of marijuana. This book is criticized by Duke for showing a lack of knowledge on the subject of narcotics, even to the point where the book is called "a compendium of state bullshit" and "dangerous gibberish" (Thompson, 2005, p. 139). Duke's description is connecting Dr. Bloomquist's statements to the state, because Duke sees him as a tool for the state's stance on illegal drugs. Later, all of Dr. Bloomquist's achievements are listed, such as appearing on "national network television panels, serving as a consultant for government agencies, being a member of the Committee on Narcotics Addiction and Alcoholism of the Council of Mental Health of the American Medical Association" (Thompson, 2005, pp. 138-9). Furthermore, this implies that intellectuals like Dr. Bloomquist's ideas, values and norms dominate the public debate and the media. As an example of how Dr. Bloomquist's views on illegal drugs also align with the media, Duke mentions the sign standing on the outskirts of Las Vegas which reads: "DON'T GAMBLE WITH MARIJUANA! IN NEVADA: POSSESSION- 20 YEARS. SALE- LIFE!" (Thompson, 2005, p. 42). The sign shares Dr. Bloomquist's stance on narcotics, and there seems to be a similarity between the ideas, values and norms shared by Dr. Bloomquist and the media. As a further connection between the dominant ideas, values and norms regarding illegal drugs and public intellectuals, another mass media that is being scrutinized by Duke is television. When writing about a news coverage on the TV, Duke states that

Pentagon generals are “babbling insane lies” (Thompson, 2005, p. 29), something which again tells us that Duke is negative towards the mainstream media and sees it as a mouthpiece for the Government he distrusts, both with regards to the Vietnam war and their stance on the topic of drugs. Another example of this media bias is when Duke is reading the newspaper and he points out that the articles are focused on how American GIs are dying of drug overdoses, while nothing is mentioned of how many are dying in battle in the Vietnam war (Thompson, 2005, p. 73). Dr. Bloomquist is further represented by Duke as benefiting from maintaining the status quo by virtue of his status as one of those “second-rate academic hustlers who get paid anywhere from \$500 to \$1000 a hit for lecturing to cop-crowds” (Thompson, 2005, p. 138). In this description he ironically uses the word “hit,” a word which is often used when taking drugs. Duke’s view of Dr. Bloomquist as someone who earns money by maintaining the status quo between the social groups in society, and how he connects him to drug culture through the word “hit,” might hark back to Duke describing a society where everyone is a thief, and the only crime is getting caught (Thompson, 2005, p. 72). It can be argued that Duke sees Dr. Bloomquist as someone who is guilty but has not been caught, which further emphasizes the negative view Duke shows towards the existing social order in American society at that time with regards to the ideas, values and norms and the legitimating symbols the dominant groups represent. Furthermore, he recognises that something that is rewarded in one society could be illegal in others, depending on the existing ideas, values and norms that are dominant in society. In a later passage, Duke further comments on how he sees these flaws in American society when he comments on Muhammed Ali’s five year prison sentence for “*refusing* to kill ‘slopes’” (Thompson, 2005, p. 74), and how the state can punish people for not wanting to kill someone.

By analyzing Duke’s description of Bloomquist through the lens of Gramsci’s theory, his achievements point to him serving as a producer of media, and in a cultural hegemony, the media is largely controlled by the dominant groups in society and they reflect the values the cultural hegemony holds. From a perspective of the cultural hegemony, Duke’s subjective description would make Dr. Bloomquist a legitimating symbol for the cultural hegemony as he perpetuates the status quo and the ideas, values and norms of the dominant groups in society. Gramsci theorized that traditional intellectuals lack experience from the material world and the subordinate groups’ implicit consciousness. This resembles what happens when Dr. Bloomquist explains that the term “roach”, meaning a marijuana cigarette, comes from the word cockroach. To which Gonzo proclaims that “you’d have to be crazy on acid to think a joint looked like a goddamn cockroach!” (Thompson, 2005, p. 138). Here we see the gulf between Dr. Bloomquist and Duke and Gonzo’s perceived experience surrounding illegal drugs. This could be seen as an example of how traditional intellectuals are aloof and lack experience from the subordinate groups’ implicit consciousness. And hence this will make it harder for members of the subordinate groups to achieve political education. Furthermore, in Gramsci’s theory, within a Capitalist society the subordinate groups are less likely to learn of the merits of other political systems when the public debate is controlled by traditional intellectuals who benefit from maintaining the status quo and when other, opposing views are not seen as relevant (Gramsci, 1999, p. 666). By delegitimizing the ideas, values and norms of the hippie counterculture, the legitimacy of the dominant culture will get greater consent from the subordinate groups, and in turn make it harder for a counterculture to emerge. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Duke comments upon how opposing views to his, with regards to the debate on narcotics, are not seen as relevant or legitimate. One example of this is when Gonzo and Duke are

sitting in the conference hall at the NDAA Conference where the police officers are trying to learn how to identify drug users, while Duke and Gonzo are sitting among them high on mescaline. Duke and Gonzo have valuable information on how to identify drug users, but Duke states that: "it was clear from the start that we weren't going to Learn Anything and it was equally clear that we'd be crazy to try any Teaching" (Thompson, 2005, p. 143). Furthermore, he calls the subjects they are talking about "irrelevant gibberish," and that "[t]hese poor bastards didn't know mescaline from macaroni" (Thompson, 2005, p. 143). This comment further shows how Duke sees the education in society, with regards to narcotics, as being flawed and based on a set of ideas, values and norms he does not identify with. Hence, in the society Duke is describing, and from his perspective, intellectuals like Dr. Bloomquist ensure that views that are in opposition to theirs are kept away from the public discourse by delegitimizing their thoughts surrounding a topic. The public is then not exposed to the opposing views Duke is a proponent for. Furthermore, from a Gramscian perspective, the NDAA Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs becomes a metaphor for education in a cultural hegemony. According to Gramsci's theory, education in a Capitalist society happened by public intellectuals, who acted as leaders of the public debate. The subordinate groups are educated by public intellectuals, and if a traditional intellectual does not give the correct information, then the subordinate groups will not be able to achieve political education or develop their implicit consciousness. Hence, in Gramscian terms, they will not be able to understand how the ideas, values and norms of the dominant culture affect them negatively. And they will continue to support policies and traditions that maintain the economic differences between the social groups.

When analyzing Duke's description of Dr. Bloomquist and the media, we can see that although Duke disagrees with Dr. Bloomquist's ideas surrounding the dangers of narcotics, his description points to a highly subjective narration of the events. For instance, Dr. Bloomquist is described as someone who does not have the basic understanding of how narcotics work and the culture surrounding them, yet his rather impressive experience within the field of narcotics would suggest otherwise. Hence, from a different perspective, Duke's description of the NDAA Conference could also be seen as misleading the readership with regards to spreading information that is false surrounding the frivolity at which people should consume dangerous narcotics. Duke, who is a journalist, is also what Gramsci would call a public intellectual since his ideas, norms and values are printed in the media through, for instance, *Rolling Stone Magazine*, something which he financially benefits from as well (Thompson, 2005, p. 11). Furthermore, the public are also exposed to his ideas, values and norms. As mentioned, Thompson's alter ego Duke, became a powerful symbol of opposition to the status quo within his countercultural group (McKeen, 2008, as cited in Vitullo, 2016). And Thompson would often perform as him for crowds of people, so he was definitely a conveyer of ideas and culture within society. Therefore, Duke's description of Dr. Bloomquist as someone who is dangerous for society, could also be said of Duke from an opposing view with regards to the use of illegal drugs. And Duke could also be said to misleading his readership by actively focusing on his experience rather than informing them on the truth and hindering them from achieving political education.

#### 4.2.2 Intellectuals and the hippie counterculture in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

Another public intellectual who is mentioned several times, and used as a foil to Dr. Bloomquist, is Timothy Leary. Duke even jokingly refers to Leary having given false information to Dr. Bloomquist in order to give his claims less validity (Thompson, 2005, p. 139). Leary was a self-proclaimed philosopher and an avid user of psychotropic substances, much like Duke. Among other things, Leary was famous for the phrase "turn on, tune in, drop out," arguing that societal change could only happen by acknowledging that society is inherently flawed, and in order to be able to understand this an individual should "turn on, tune in" (by taking LSD) before making a conscious decision to reject modern society and "drop out" (Shipley, 2013, p. 245). By dropping out, the hippies would refuse to take part in the public discourse, rather they wanted society to take on communal values (Shipley, 2013, p. 245). Duke alludes to Leary when he gives his own interpretation of the famous phrase when he says: "tune in, freak out, get eaten", when talking about the "forced consciousness expansion" Duke claims Leary was a proponent for (Thompson, 2005, p. 89). The term "forced consciousness expansion" refers to psychotropic substances such as LSD which other hippies, such as Allen Ginsberg, who is also mentioned by Duke (Thompson, 2005, p. 65) saw as a tool to break free from his "false consciousness" (Shipley, 2013, p. 233). However, Duke also understands the dangers surrounding LSD, and he refers to it as "temporary insanity" (Thompson, 2005, p. 117). Consequently, Duke distances himself from the ideas surrounding many of the intellectuals associated with the hippie movement, including Leary and Ginsberg. At one point stating that Leary travelled around America "selling 'consciousness expansion'" (Thompson, 2005, p. 178). Moreover, Duke's description of Leary points to how his methods were too extreme for the vast majority of the American population, hence, he was not able to convince the masses that his ideas, values and norms should be the dominant cultural pillars in American society. This approach to rebellion was also criticised by conservative ideologues such as Boorstin who saw the hippie counterculture lacking focus on long term plans, and rather focusing on instant gratification (Boorstin, 1968, pp. 121-34).

Furthermore, Vredenburg writes that Duke is "rejecting the approach to drugs as a transcendent experience, in their frenzied, drug-fueled behaviour they seek to productively destruct the established order" (Vredenburg, 2012, p. 11). Furthermore, Duke continues by saying that Leary was egoistic and that his mission to bring about a new social order based on the values of the counter cultural group failed, even calling his followers "permanent cripples, failed seekers" because they had to align themselves with religion, which is something Duke rejects (Thompson, 2005, p. 179). Duke further critiques religion with regards to counter cultural figures when saying that "one of the crucial moments of the Sixties came on that day when the Beatles cast their lot with the Maharishi. It was like Dylan going to the Vatican to kiss the Pope's ring. First "gurus." Then, when that didn't work, back to Jesus" (Thompson, 2005, p. 179).

Moreover, Duke connects several others of these public intellectuals to the hippie movement, and sees their failure as the end of their countercultural movement calling it a: "A very painful experience in every way, a proper end to the sixties. Tim Leary a prisoner of Eldridge Cleaver in Algeria, Bob Dylan clipping coupons in Greenwich Village, both Kennedys murdered by mutants, Owsley folding napkins on Terminal Island, and finally Cassius/Ali belted incredibly off his pedestal by a human hamburger" (Thompson, 2005, pp. 22-23). Duke further comments on the death of the sixties and the hippie movement when he states that: "The radio was screaming: "Power to the People - Right On!" John Lennon's political song, ten years too late" (Thompson, 2005, p. 21). Duke is

here stating that singing about empowering people is too late, and that it will have no effect during this era of American history. Also this is an example of how the hippie counter cultural movement was commodified and swallowed up by the dominant reach and power of the cultural hegemony. The hippie counterculture even became an important asset within the world of marketing and advertising during the nineteen seventies further showing how the dominant culture took advantage of the counterculture (Frank, 1997, as cited in Ashbolt, 2007). Another example of this is found in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* when Duke says that Debbie Reynolds is covering The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's lonely hearts club band* (Thompson, 2005, p. 44). While at the same time saying this is Spiro Agnew's "turf" and a place for big spenders (Thompson, 2005, p. 44). These people Duke describes were all intellectuals, and he describes them as having failed in leaving a lasting impression on society, and sees a connection between the ending of the counterculture with the ending validity of these intellectuals. Moreover, Duke does not fully align himself with the tenets the hippie culture introduced to the wider society. For instance, Duke situates himself somewhere between Dr. Bloomquist and Leary with regards to the use of illegal drugs.

Gramsci theorized that as a counter culture emerged, it would bring with it organic intellectuals who would give the subordinate group uniformity in a political and economic sense (Gramsci, 1999, p. 134-5). At first glance, Leary does seem like an organic intellectual that speaks for subsets of the subordinate group and gives them uniformity and political education. As an example of this, Leary's phrase "turn on, tune in, drop out" directly speaks of rebellion against the dominant groups in society. However, because many of the counter cultural intellectuals aligned themselves with religion, they failed. In Gramsci's theory, social institutions maintain the economic differences between the social classes in a Capitalist society, and religion is a social institution in this sense which Gramsci sees as a legitimating symbol for the dominant groups in society (Jones, 2006, p.32). What that means when seen from a Gramscian perspective is that the hippie movement was not able to enact their social change without their intellectuals connecting it to a part of the social institutions of the cultural hegemony. As a further example of this, Duke also comments upon how cultural expressions of the hippie counter culture had become part of the dominant culture within the United States (Thompson, 2005, p. 44). Cultural expressions such as movies, music acts and literature with hippie sentiments, had become part of the larger culture within the United States. This makes the counter culture part of the dominant culture in society, which means that it is no longer counter to the culture, it has been absorbed. This in turn makes it a part of the dominant culture and the ideas, norms and values this represents (Ashbolt, 2007, p. 210). In other words, the ideas, values and norms of the hippie counterculture were no longer at odds with parts of the dominant culture, rather they had been accepted into the cultural landscape and become a part of the dominant culture. When read from a Gramscian framework, this could exemplify how certain aspects of the subordinate groups will be taken by the dominant groups and made into a part of the dominant culture, showing that culture is an ever changing and non-stagnant set of ideas, values and norms.

According to Gramsci, a shared consciousness based on their real experience of the world between the members of a subordinate group may construct a strong bond that may lead to a counterculture being created (Gramsci, 1999, p. 632). One example from *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* of how an implicit consciousness could be seen to create a bond between the subordinate groups is when Duke checks into a hotel and the clerk is being

berated by a police officer (Thompson, 2005, pp. 107-108). Duke states that with regards to being berated by police officers, he "had been there [...] and so, I sensed, had the desk clerk" (Thompson, 2005, p. 107). The clerk and Duke both share a dislike of the police force, which, according to Duke, is often seen to act as a tool for the state, as seen in his description of the NDAA Conference. This dislike of the police force comes from their shared experience with them. Duke states that they share having encountered "a fairly good cross-section of mean-tempered rule-crazy cops" (Thompson, 2005, p. 107). In the theory of the cultural hegemony, this would be an indication of a shared consciousness between Duke and the desk clerk derived from their real experience of the world. This consciousness creates a bond between Duke and the desk clerk, as Duke is treated better than the police officers who are awaiting confirmation on their booked hotel rooms. As a juxtaposition to how Duke described how the police officers treat members of his subordinate group, Duke's dishevelled appearance is a positive in this setting and he is politely shown to his room, leaving the police officers "stupid with shock" (Thompson, 2005, p. 108). This bond between Duke and the desk clerk, however, is not enough to warrant an uprising against the dominant groups in society as Gramscian theory might dictate, and is rather a result of a shared dislike of the police rather than a confirmation of an uprising within the subordinate groups. Moreover, a counter culture needs organic intellectuals to give them uniformity and to give them a common goal to strive towards.

Duke does not conform to any of the leading views on the use of illegal drugs within the society he is describing, which again may be seen as a sign of the lack of uniformity and common goal within a counterculture. The lack of organic intellectuals is what finally ruined the counter culture, and in what is perhaps the novel's most famous passage he laments the failure of, what Gramsci would call the public intellectuals, and the hippie movement in the wave speech: "History is hard to know, because of all the hired bullshit, but even without being sure of "history" it seems entirely reasonable to think that every now and then the energy of a whole generation comes to a head in a long fine flash." (Thompson, 2005, p. 67). In this excerpt from the "wave speech" Duke is commenting on how he sees history as written by the winners, or those who are in power. By calling history "hired bullshit," it is reasonable to infer that Duke saw history as a result of what Gramsci would call the cultural hegemony, since the dominant groups control the media and the public debate. Furthermore, Duke shares the same sentiment between history and Dr. Bloomquist, and one could infer that he sees history as being written by intellectuals like Dr. Bloomquist since they control the public debate. In light of Gramsci's theory, Duke may be seen to present historians as a form of traditional intellectuals that maintained the status quo of cultural hegemony, and that history is written by the dominant groups in society. Therefore, Duke writes that "history is hard to know" because real history is not reflected in the writings of the traditional intellectuals. Moreover, Duke is able to break free from his inherited consciousness surrounding the idea of history, and rather interprets his real and implicit experience of the world when describing the history he lived through himself. In Gramscian terms, this could be regarded as a sign of Duke having developed his implicit consciousness, as he rejects the legitimating symbols of the dominant groups in society such as history written by traditional intellectuals, and also what he saw as false prophets within the counterculture who did not give them uniformity and a common goal. Duke sees himself as a more credible witness to what transpired than the scholars who Duke sees as representatives of the state. In Gramsci's theory, public intellectuals like historians represent the cultural

hegemony and work towards legitimating their position as the dominant groups in a capitalist society.

As mentioned, Gramsci's theory comments on how a counterculture's interpretation of the world could "manifest itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes, when, that is, the group is acting as an organic totality" (Gramsci, 1999, p. 632). Duke comments on how the hippie movement as a counterculture had the momentum of becoming, what Gramsci theorized as a dominant culture, when stating that "the energy of a generation comes to a head in a long fine flash," and that they were "riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave," but that eventually the "wave finally broke and rolled back" (Thompson, 2005, pp. 67-68). In the wave speech Duke laments the end of the hippie era, and how they were not able to bring forth real change "in the long run" (Thompson, 2005, p. 66) because Duke is arguably describing a counterculture that is not "acting as an organic totality" (Gramsci, 1999, p. 632). In this sense, both Gramsci and Duke share a similar view on how countercultures rise and fall in a cultural hegemony, and that the end of the hippie era came with the loss of a common goal for change, and Duke's negative attitude towards both sides of the debate, here represented by Dr. Bloomquist and Leary, would suggest that there was a disparity between which goals the hippie counterculture should aim for. Because of this, the hippie culture was not able to become the dominant culture in American society, because it did not have a common goal.



## 5.0 Conclusion

This thesis has explored Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* through the lens of Antonio Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony in order to tease out some fresh perspectives. This thesis has identified that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* was not written as an objective journalistic text by Hunter S. Thompson, but as a fictional novel where the narrative voice is Raoul Duke's. Furthermore, this thesis has analyzed the American society in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as a fictitious depiction of American society during 1971.

There are of course certain similarities between Duke's description of American society and Gramsci's description of the cultural hegemony in capitalist societies. However, this is a subjective account from Duke, and the thesis does not confirm that America was a cultural hegemony during this time. Rather, Gramsci's theory has given us a new way of analyzing how Duke saw his contemporary society and the connection between consent, legitimating symbols such as the media and the role of intellectuals in the society he describes.

One aspect of American society Duke seems to reject is the American Dream. Duke is searching for the American Dream, and compares himself to Horatio Alger several times during the novel. However, Duke struggles to find the American Dream, and when he does, it turns out that it has gone from hard work and perseverance to consumerism in the form of gambling. When seen in light of Gramsci's theory, the American Dream can be understood as an inherited consciousness which needs consent from the subordinate groups in order to have any validity. Furthermore, Duke uses the owner of a casino named the Circus-Circus as the ultimate example of what he believes the American Dream has become when he says that he is stealing from the visitors of his casino. Seen from Gramsci's perspective, this can exemplify how subordinate groups in society can support and participate in policies that perpetuate the economic differences between the social groups. Moreover, if the American Dream can be classified as an inherited consciousness from Gramsci's perspective, the lack of morality shown by the inhabitants of American society in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* could indicate that it may lead to moral passivity.

When it comes to consent, Duke does not give consent to laws he disagrees with. He does so by breaking the law and constantly challenging it by seeing what he can get away with. However, he is aware of the punishment he will receive if caught, even though he embellishes the harshness of the punishment. Through Gramsci's theory, this could be analyzed as the act of someone who has developed their implicit consciousness with regards to the laws surrounding his actions. Furthermore, it can be analyzed as a society where the force of the cultural hegemony is implicit within the laws of the state.

With regards to the role of legitimating symbols such as intellectuals and the media in Duke's description of society, there are some elements of a cultural hegemony to be found. When visiting the NDAA Conference, Duke describes an intellectual who shares some similarities with Gramsci's description of a traditional intellectual. Duke's description of Dr. Bloomquist is of course highly subjective, but it does show how Duke sees a connection between the laws in society he disagrees with, the ideas and values Dr. Bloomquist is lecturing on and how these are reflected in the media. Since Dr. Bloomquist, at least in Duke's description of him, benefits financially from lecturing, he

will continue to be disengaged from Duke's implicit consciousness surrounding the use of illegal drugs, and he will continue to push this narrative. When analysed from the framework of Gramsci's theory, this makes Dr. Bloomquist a traditional intellectual. However, finding a representation of an organic intellectual in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, was more difficult, as Duke's description of other opposing ideas to Dr. Blomquist's had ceased to be relevant. They, according to Duke, faded into obscurity, or were commodified into the dominant culture, and Duke saw this as another example of the end of the hippie counterculture. In the theory of cultural hegemony, this could be because they did not have uniformity and a common goal.

According to Gramsci, countercultures may arise together with organic intellectuals if they can convince the vast majority of the population that their ideas, values and norms should be the dominant cultural force within society. However, the hippie culture did not achieve this, according to Duke, partly because they aligned themselves with religion, which is a social institution. According to Gramsci, social institutions will maintain the ideas of the dominant culture in society, and are hence perpetuated by the dominant groups in society. The hippie culture, then, could not achieve becoming the dominant culture because it had to align itself with religion. Duke almost eulogizes the hippie counter cultural movement in the "wave speech," and expresses sorrow over the fact that their movement ended without having made any real change.

To conclude, this thesis has identified some similarities between Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony and Duke's description of American society especially with regards to consent, consciousness and legitimating symbols in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. However, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is not written in support of Gramsci's theory, rather, the theoretical framework has given us a new insight into understanding some of the cultural aspects surrounding Duke's description of American society. It has given us a new way of understanding why Duke believes the hippie counterculture failed and how the American Dream has become something negative according to Duke. Furthermore, Gramsci's theory has also opened up a new way of understanding Duke's strained relationship with several cultural aspects of American society. Furthermore, since *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a fictional novel written from the perspective of a highly subjective protagonist, the novel can not be said to give an accurate account of American society during the nineteen seventies.

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#### Appendix: Relevance for the Teaching Profession

This thesis is written as a part of the Language Studies with Teacher Education. Because of this, it is important that my thesis has some further relevance to my later work as a teacher in the Norwegian educational system.

Literature can play a major part in teaching students English. Not only will they learn how to read English, but they may also gain a deeper understanding of different perspectives surrounding the topics the text is about. Though *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* would not necessarily be the first novel I would give to my students, it may give them a different perspective on life in the United States during that tumultuous period of the country's history. Instead of reading about countercultures in American society, the students could read a novel written by someone who represents that counterculture. As an example of this, two of the competence aims after Vg1 for general studies states that the students should be able to "read, discuss and reflect on the content and language features and literary devices in various types texts, including self-chosen texts" and to "read, analyse and interpret fictional texts in English" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2021). These competence aims are directly focused on literary analysis, and in order to understand how to teach this to the students, it is important that the teacher has some experience with analyzing texts. Furthermore, another competence aim seeks to have the students "explore and reflect on diversity and social conditions in the English-speaking world based on historical contexts" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2021). With regards to this competence aim, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* could be used as a way for the students to contrast and compare the society Duke describes to contemporary America. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* could be used as a tool to get a deeper understanding of different perspectives surrounding American culture as it is steeped with cultural references.

From a broader perspective, in a technologically advanced society, the mere act of sitting down and reading a novel, and focusing solely on this, could be of major benefit for a group of students who are more and more connected to their smartphones and computers.

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