

THE TEMPLARS' STRATEGY TO OBTAIN POWER IN ASSASSIN'S CREED: RENAISSANCE NOVEL BY OLIVER BOWDEN: A HEGEMONIC STUDY

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Abstrak

Penelitian bertajuk "The Templar' Strategy to Obtain Power in Assassin's Creed: Renaissance Novel by Oliver Bowden: a Hegemonic Study" bertujuan untuk mengkaji strategi yang digunakan ordo templar untuk mendapatkan posisi lebih tinggi di Italia. Khususnya strategi yang berkaitan erat dengan hegemoni, akan dibahas tuntas dalam penelitian ini. Penelitian ini juga menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif interpretatif dan deskriptif. Selain itu, teori hegemoni Gramsci digunakan untuk memberikan penjelasan lebih lanjut terhadap penelitian tersebut. Peneliti menggunakan penelitian kepustakaan untuk mengumpulkan data, dan kemudian mencatat setiap informasi penting baik dari sumber data primer maupun sekunder. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa strategi para templar untuk memperoleh kekuasaan memang merupakan bentuk hegemoni. Beberapa jenis hegemoni dapat dilihat secara halus dari tindakan para templar seperti: hegemoni sebagai hard power, hegemoni sebagai soft power, dan hegemoni sebagai kekuatan struktural.

Kata Kunci: hegemoni, templar, strategi memperoleh kekuasaan, novel, *Assassin's Creed: Renaissance*

Abstract

Research titled "The Templars' Strategy to Obtain Power in Assassin's Creed: Renaissance Novel by Oliver Bowden: a Hegemonic Study" aims to examine the strategy used by the templar order to secure higher position over Italy. Especially, the strategy that closely related to hegemony, will be discussed thoroughly in this research. Also, this research use interpretative and descriptive qualitative research method. In addition, Gramsci's theory of hegemony is used to provide further explanation for the research. Researcher use library research to collect data, and then takes note of every important information from both primary and secondary data source. The result shows that the templars strategy to obtain power is indeed a form of hegemony. Several types of hegemony can be seen subtly from the templars' actions such as: hegemony as hard power, hegemony as soft power, and hegemony as structural power.

Keyword: hegemony, templar, strategy to obtain power, novel, *Assassin's Creed: Renaissance*

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Oxford Dictionary, hegemony means "leadership or dominance, especially by one country or social group over others." It comes from military threats, ideological dominance, or economic influence. For example, when a country imports goods from other countries, the exporter tries to prevent other country's production of the same thing by using agreements or contracts. If this is done smoothly, then the importer will always rely on the exporter. Eventually, the importer economy is indirectly dominated by the exporter country. Or simply when a country threatens to use military power to dominate other countries. Such an example can be called hegemony.

Oliver Bowden, a pen-name of Anton Gill, was born in Ilford, Great Britain on 22nd October 1946. He has been a full-time personal writer since 1984 and has published over 40 books. Gill won the H. H. Wingate Award in the non-fiction category for *The Journey Back from Hell*, an account of the living survivors of the Nazi concentration camp. Although Gill is not directly related to the issue of hegemony, he wrote a novel adapted from a video game titled *Assassin's Creed: Renaissance* that is filled with hegemony cases, since the time setting can be traced back into the renaissance era in Italy and at that time is where power is above all else.

The story began when young Ezio Auditore –the protagonist- caught his family was betrayed by other ruling families in his city of Florence, fortunately, he could escape from being arrested. Ezio's father and brothers who were captured were executed the next day. This series of incidents forced Ezio, along with his mother and sister, to leave the city to his uncle's villa in Monteriggioni. There, he is briefly informed why the ruling families in Florence betray his family. Turns out, Ezio's family is an assassin family, to bring freedom to the people. And those who betray Ezio's family are a templar family, to bring order by suppression.

Commentary about the work was varying. Some say that it is good work, and the rest, not so much. The overall rating from www.goodreads.com is 3.75 out of 5 stars. Some of the good ratings are, first, from Mimi who said that the novel is not bad, or rather not what I had been expecting. It's okay overall but could have been better. Then there is Hasham Rasool that he really enjoyed reading this book. And last but not least, Beatriz Lins said that it's a good way of learning Ezio Auditore's story, and reading an action-packed book.

Templars, also known as the Knights Templar or the Order of Solomon's Temple, were a Catholic military order recognized in 1139 by the papal bull *omne datum optimum* (Barber, 1994) The order was founded in 1119 and was active until 1312 when it was perpetually suppressed by Pope Clement V (Barber, 1995) Their role were mainly to protect Christian pilgrimage. The Templars became a favored charity throughout Christendom and grew rapidly in membership and power. They were prominent in Christian finance. Templar knights, in their distinctive white mantles with a red cross, were among the most skilled fighting units of the Crusades. Non-combatant members of the order, who formed as much as 90% of the order's members (Burman, 1990), managed a large economic infrastructure throughout Christendom (Selwood 2002), developing innovative financial techniques that were an early form of banking (Martin, 2005), building its own network of nearly 1,000 commandery and fortifications across Europe and the Holy Land, and arguably forming the world's first multinational corporation (Ralls, 2007). But in the novel, the Templars were still secretly active in the renaissance era and their purpose turned into pursuing order over mankind.

Generally, according to Oxford dictionary, hegemony is the political, economic, or military predominance or control of one state over others. In ancient Greece (8th century BC – 6th century AD), hegemony denoted the politico-military dominance of a city-state over other city-states (Chernow, 1994). The dominant state is known as the *hegemon*. The Marxist theory of cultural

hegemony, associated particularly with Antonio Gramsci, is the idea that the ruling class can manipulate the value system and mores of a society, so that their view becomes the world view. Eagleton (1991) stated, “Gramsci normally uses the word hegemony to mean the ways in which a governing power wins consent to its rule from those it subjugates.” Thus, we can say that hegemony is not only comes from a state over other state, but also from a group of a class of people who have power over other class.

What highly make researcher interested is how the Grand Master, the highest rank of the Templar, Rodrigo Borgia gain control over The Vatican as Pope Alexander VI. It is highly assuring that the Grand Master is using hegemony to pursue the Templar’s’ purpose. This greatly influence researcher to choose *THE TEMPLARS’ STRATEGY TO OBTAIN POWER IN ASSASSIN’S CREED: RENAISSANCE NOVEL BY OLIVER BOWDEN: A HEGEMONIC STUDY* as the title of this research.

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher and communist politician, provides a nuanced definition of power, particularly through his concepts of hegemony and the role of intellectuals in society. According to Gramsci, power is not merely exerted through coercive means (such as force or direct control), but also through ideological domination and cultural leadership.

Gramsci introduces the concept of cultural hegemony to explain how the ruling class maintains control. Hegemony refers to the dominance of one social class over others, not just through political and economic means but also through cultural and ideological leadership. The ruling class's ideas and values become the cultural norm, thus gaining the consent of the subordinate classes. This consent is critical for maintaining the status quo and avoiding the use of force.

Gramsci emphasizes the role of intellectuals in disseminating and perpetuating the ruling class's ideology. He distinguishes between traditional intellectuals, who see themselves as autonomous and independent from the ruling class, and organic intellectuals, who emerge from and are directly tied to the ruling class. These intellectuals play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining cultural hegemony by shaping and spreading the dominant ideology.

Gramsci's concept of power extends to the relationship between civil society and the state. He argues that power is exercised through both civil society (comprising institutions like the church, education system, media, etc.) and political society (comprising the government and legal apparatus). The state maintains power not only through coercive means but also by winning the consent of civil society, thereby legitimizing its rule.

Gramsci differentiates between two strategies for challenging and changing power structures. The war of maneuver involves direct, overt conflict and revolutionary action to seize power. In contrast, the war of position involves a gradual, sustained effort to build counter-hegemony within civil society. The latter is seen as more crucial in advanced capitalist societies where the ruling class's ideological dominance is deeply entrenched.

In summary, Antonio Gramsci's definition of power highlights the importance of ideological and cultural dominance in maintaining the authority of the ruling class. Power, according to Gramsci, is as much about gaining consent and cultural leadership as it is about direct political or economic control.

Materialist Marxism was introduced to the ideological realm by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian intellectual who developed a theory of cultural hegemony. This theory is widely recognized. Gramsci (1971), who was being oppressed by the fascist regime in his homeland and writing from prison, highlighted the “superstructure” of society as the source of its ideology in the struggle for identity and influence. Gramsci looks at the social differences from a different perspective. He shifted the foundation of capitalist society (economy) towards the dominant dispensaries of ideas. According to Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony, mass media are tools that ruling elites use to “perpetuate their power, wealth, and status [by popularizing] their own philosophy, culture and morality” (Boggs, 1976).

Hegemony is the dominance or power of a social group that holds over others. It has the potential to indicate variations within and among the social classes of a country. Stuart Hall (1985) defined hegemony as the practice of domination and subordination in the context of organized power systems. On the other hand, it was characterized by Straubhaar (1991) as the unbalanced mutualization of economic, cultural, and political associations among individual states. However, hegemony is not the social power itself; it is more of a method to gain and maintain power.

In classical Marxist theory, economy is pointed as the strongest factor for social differences. It mentioned about capitalist exploitation of the working class. Nowadays, technological advances have made its reputation to be a strong factor of social differences. Technological advances in twentieth century have become a much more complex social domination than before. Amidst of the two factors, there is another factor that become crucial factor of social differences, the ideology.

According to Nordenstreng (2000), mass media is a crucial tool for spreading influences. It is directly affecting mass' consciousness since managers of media industries can produce tons of content favorable to them far more easily than other social groups. Mass-mediated ideologies are corroborated and strengthened by an interlocking system of efficacious information-distributing agencies and taken-for-granted social practices that permeate every aspect of social and cultural reality. Messages supportive of the status quo emanating from schools, businesses, political organizations, trade unions, religious groups, the military, and the mass media all dovetail together ideologically. This inter-articulating, mutually reinforcing process of ideological influence is the essence of hegemony. Society's most entrenched and powerful institutions which all depend in one way or another on the same sources for economic support fundamentally agree with each other ideologically.

The hegemony, as Stuart Hall (1977: 333) puts it, is not due to the direct influence of thought or action, but rather through the creation of all conflicted understandings of reality in the realm of the ruling class, which encompasses all possible alternatives within their realm. The ruling

class sets the mental and structural boundaries within which the lower classes “live” and understand their subjugation in such a way as to maintain the supremacy of the rulers over them. According to Philip Elliott (1974: 262), a British social theorist, mass media’s most potent effect is subtle changes in viewers’ perception of routine personal activities and social roles. Through the mass media, the dominant economic forces provide the rhetoric for labeling, evaluating, and explaining these “concepts” in society. Gitlin (1979: 255) suggests that television commercials promote the idea of viewing individuals as consumers rather than citizens, promoting market access and consumer rights. In general, hegemony can be classified as hard power, soft power, and structural power.

2. METHOD

This research was descriptive qualitative. It was conducted by using literary research and aimed to find out the relation between *Assassin’s Creed: Renaissance* novel by Oliver Bowden and society.

There were two objects in this study, formal objects and material objects. Formal Object was the templar’s strategy to obtain power that was analyzed in this research. Second, the material object was Oliver Bowden’s *Assassin’s Creed: Renaissance* novel. This study used two data sources to conduct, namely primary data source that was *Assassin’s Creed: Renaissance*, a novel by Oliver Bowden is the primary data source as it is the subject of the study which will be analyzed and described in this research. The secondary data source that was related to studies can be utilized to support the researcher’s theory to analyze the primary data source. It could be in the form of journals, books, biographies, essays, articles, the internet, etc.

The researcher used library research to collect data. It was a technique of collecting data by collecting and selecting notes from both primary and secondary data sources that were suitable for the problem statement. Collecting data by library research means that the researcher must read *Assassin’s Creed: Renaissance* novel by Oliver Bowden as the primary data source. And then takes note of every important information from both primary and secondary data sources.

In this study, the researcher used hermeneutics method to analyze the data. Hermeneutics is the philosophical foundation and a data analysis method. As philosophy in human comprehension, it provides a philosophical base for interpretive knowledge. As in data analysis, it is related to the definition of textual data. Hermeneutics is mainly related to interpretations of analog texts. It aims to clarify what is unclear in a meaningful comprehension.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The novel shows how the Templars obtain and maintain their position as the ruling class through various methods. One of the clearest examples is the accusation of the Auditore family. As arch-enemies, both factions have fought in various forms of battle. One of them is politics. In the novel, the templars understood that their position is threatened by the Auditore, thus, the grand master threatened the Gonfaloniere (judge at the time) to help him accuse the Auditores as below:

“Stop!” He (Gonfaloniere) cried in a stifled. “You would have done the same if you have been in my situation, you’d protect your loved ones. Forgive me Ezio... I had no other choice”

From this alone, we can see the form of hegemony in the scene, hegemony is a hard power and it is used to rule in politics, hence a political hegemony. The grand master of the templar order used military force to threaten the life of Gonfaloniere’s family to make him obey what the grand master wants, which is to betray the Auditore to the gallows.

““That explains why I was looking forward to Rodrigo’s conversion,” said Mario. “Take eleven years ruling the Santa headquarters, but still lacks the means to uncover the dark secret, although clearly must know where that is.””

From the text above, it is shown that Mario Auditore suddenly understands what goes in Rodrigo Borgia’s head. This is further supported by Machiavelli’s words as below.

“Of course! In a sense, it’s admirable. Not only has he succeeded in locating the vault, moreover, by becoming the fault, he also controls the staff.””

Rodrigo Borgia is a powerful and resourceful person from the beginning. He controls his order from economic to military power. Even more so by becoming the pope. He easily gathers loyal followers to bring him closer to his goals.

The templars use any methods possible to grasp power in order to seek an artifact called the Pieces of Eden, two powerful relics from the past with the power to control minds. One of which is the papal staff located in St. Peter’s Basilica and the other is called Apple of Eden. They use bribery, intimidation, persuasion, etc. to eliminate those who stand in their way from reaching that goal.

Later in the novel shows that the templars eventually achieve what they always wanted, having control over the citizens, especially the Grand Master as he becomes the Pope in Vatican. He began his preach to his followers to further spread the ideals of the templar order. Those who do not follow his order would have their minds controlled using the power of the Papal Staff, which is another Piece of Eden.

In the novel, Rodrigo Borgia—the Grand Master of the templars—use hegemony as hard power to convince Uberto Alberti—the Gonfaloniere—to side with him, eventually betraying the Auditore family that leads to their public execution. Rodrigo Borgia threatened Uberto that the safety of Uberto’s family is in his hand, forcing Uberto to side with the templars.

Rodrigo Borgia and his templar allies also have the connection with the ruling families of a region under their rule. He would label Ezio Auditore—the Assassin—as their enemy of that

region to cripple the movement of the assassins. Such influence of the templars can be classified as hegemony as soft power.

Hegemony as structural power is shown in the later chapters of the novel. Rodrigo Borgia took advantages of his family in the cardinals to spread influence among them. This tactic proves to be successful as he later obtains the title of Pope Alexander VI and become the leader of the Catholics. As the Pope, his voice speaks louder and spread wider to strengthen his position to reach his goal.

The Templars often place their members or allies in positions of power to influence political decisions. For instance, Rodrigo Borgia, who is secretly the Templar Grand Master, uses his position in the Catholic Church to gain political leverage. His ascent to the papacy as Pope Alexander VI represents a significant consolidation of power, allowing the Templars to manipulate religious and political affairs across Europe.

“Rodrigo Borgia had schemed his way into the papacy, and with it, the Templars gained unprecedented power over the political and religious spheres of Europe.”

The Templars exert control over various economic resources to strengthen their influence. In the novel, they engage in the banking sector and trade, using their financial power to support their operations and weaken their enemies. By controlling key economic assets, they can manipulate markets and finance their broader agenda of control.

“With control over the Medici Bank, the Templars could finance their operations, ensuring their plans could proceed without hindrance.”

The Templars use their influence to shape societal norms and values in ways that align with their goals. This includes spreading propaganda and misinformation to undermine the Assassins and to justify their own actions. They also engage in acts of patronage, supporting artists, scholars, and architects to propagate their ideology and reinforce their cultural dominance.

“Through patronage of artists and scholars, the Templars subtly disseminated their ideas, weaving their beliefs into the very fabric of society.”

While the Templars prefer to work through subtle means of control, they do not hesitate to use violence and coercion when necessary. Assassinations, threats, and military force are employed to eliminate opposition and instill fear. For example, Ezio’s family is targeted and executed as part of a Templar plot, aiming to destroy his family’s influence and deter others from opposing Templar rule.

“The Templars had orchestrated the execution of Ezio’s father and brothers, a brutal warning to all who dared oppose their rule.”

These examples from *Assassin’s Creed: Renaissance* illustrate the Templars’ multifaceted approach to achieving hegemony, combining political manipulation, economic control, cultural influence, and outright violence to impose their vision of order and stability on society.

In *Assassin's Creed: Renaissance* by Oliver Bowden, the Templars' primary goal is to obtain powerful artifacts known as the Pieces of Eden. These ancient and technologically advanced objects hold immense power and have the ability to control and influence human minds and behavior. The Templars believe that by possessing these artifacts, they can establish a new world order based on their principles of control, order, and stability.

Throughout the novel, which is set during the Italian Renaissance, the Templars are depicted as manipulating political and social events to further their agenda. They seek to undermine and eliminate the Assassin Brotherhood, who oppose their vision and strive to promote free will and individual freedom. The Templars' actions are driven by their belief that humanity can only achieve true peace and prosperity under their strict guidance and rule.

The novel follows the protagonist, Ezio Auditore, as he uncovers the Templars' schemes and works to thwart their plans, ultimately seeking to protect humanity from the misuse of the Pieces of Eden and to uphold the *Assassin's Creed* of fighting for freedom and against tyranny.

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In Oliver Bowden's *Assassin's Creed: Renaissance*, the Templars are depicted as a clandestine organization composed of high-ranking individuals dedicated to imposing their vision

of order on a chaotic world. Their strategy aligns closely with Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, which emphasizes the combination of coercion and ideological dominance to maintain control.

The Templars understand the necessity of being at the top of the hierarchy to effectively influence society. This is demonstrated through their manipulation of political figures and structures. A pivotal example is the execution of the Auditore family, orchestrated through coercion of Gonfaloniere Uberto Alberti. The Templars also exert significant control over economic resources. Their influence extends into the banking sector, particularly through control of the Medici Bank, which enables them to finance their operations and weaken their enemies. This economic power is crucial for maintaining their hegemony, as it allows the Templars to manipulate markets and finance their broader agenda.

The Templars use cultural influence to shape societal norms and values in ways that align with their goals. They engage in acts of patronage, supporting artists, scholars, and architects to propagate their ideology and reinforce their cultural dominance by embedding their ideology within the cultural fabric, the Templars create a societal environment that supports their vision of order and stability.

While the Templars prefer to use subtle means of control, they do not hesitate to employ violence and coercion when necessary. Assassinations, threats, and military force are common tactics to eliminate opposition and instill fear. This is seen in the targeted execution of Ezio's family. This use of violence ensures that any challenge to their authority is met with swift and decisive retaliation, reinforcing their dominance.

The Templars' primary goal in *Assassin's Creed: Renaissance* is to obtain the Pieces of Eden, powerful artifacts capable of controlling human minds and behavior. They believe that possessing these artifacts will allow them to establish a new world order based on their principles of control, order, and stability. This goal is driven by their belief that humanity can only achieve true peace under their strict guidance.

Rodrigo Borgia's rise to power exemplifies the Templars' strategic use of political manipulation to achieve their goals. His ascent to the papacy as Pope Alexander VI consolidates Templar influence over both religious and political spheres. By becoming Pope, Rodrigo not only secures a powerful position but also gains access to the resources and influence necessary to pursue the Templars' ultimate goal.

Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the Templars' strategy in *Assassin's Creed: Renaissance*. Gramsci posited that the ruling class maintains control through a combination of coercion and ideological dominance, ensuring that their worldview becomes the accepted norm.

The Templars' manipulation of political figures, exemplified by Rodrigo Borgia's ascent to the papacy, aligns with Gramsci's notion of securing control over key societal institutions to propagate ruling class ideology. By dominating the banking sector and other economic resources,

the Templars ensure they have the financial means to support their operations and enforce their hegemony, reflecting Gramsci's emphasis on the economic base as fundamental to maintaining power.

The Templars' patronage of artists and scholars demonstrates their use of cultural institutions to disseminate their ideology, reinforcing Gramsci's idea that control over cultural production is crucial for maintaining hegemony. The Templars' readiness to use violence and coercion to eliminate opposition is consistent with Gramsci's recognition that hegemonic control also relies on the capacity to exert force when necessary.

4. CLOSING

The researcher analyzed this novel and arrived at several points of conclusions. First, the hegemonies used by the templar grandmaster are various and subtle. But probably, the clearest one is using the hard power kind of hegemony, in which the grandmaster often used military threats to get people to behave the way he desired to achieve his goal.

Second, not only military threats used in hegemony, but the templar grandmaster also uses religious hegemony to secure his goals. He became Pope Alexander VI and gained the catholic believers' trust which led to his ultimate goal; to enter the vault inside The Vatican.

Third, the templar grandmaster's actions eventually led to catastrophic incidents in the Vatican. Not to mention that several murder plots were planned against the duke (leader) of some regions throughout Italy.

The fourth and the conclusion, the templar's goal is to unite all of the world under the feet of templar's rule. Although the purpose is order, the way that the templars use is oppression.

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