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Introduction

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Introduction

Abstract

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Introduction

Giuseppe Cospito-Fabio Frosini

1. With this number of the “International Gramsci Journal” the *Ghilarza Summer School* begins a collaboration with the journal of the *International Gramsci Society*. Through this agreement, we intend to create a link between two of the most important realities of Gramscian research today, two realities which have in common the dual relationship that they share with the Italian “historico-philological” approach and the “theoretical” one that today prevails in the English-speaking world. One of the aims of the *Ghilarza Summer School* is precisely to bridge the gap between these two worlds by promoting a dialogue based on the mutual understanding of the points of force and of weakness that characterize each of these two ways of studying Gramsci.

Our conviction is indeed that this “dialogue” – to use here an expression that was dear to a person, Giorgio Baratta, who left an indelible mark on the life of the *International Gramsci Society*¹ – is of vital importance not only to place Gramsci correctly “in his own time”², but also to appreciate the whole force of *actuality* in order to understand the historico-political processes at work in today’s world. It should be noted that when we speak of dialogue, we do so – in so far as it is within our subjective possibilities and our objective mode of procedure – abstracting from any allusion of an all-embracing or, worse still, eclectic nature. For us, dialogue cannot be separated from a dialectic – even a harsh dialectic – of positions that confront and conflict with one another, in other words it is inseparable from politics.

In this sense – a “dialogue” containing within itself all the vigour of real politics and history – what we propose as a juxtaposition between

¹ Cf. G. Baratta, *Le rose e i quaderni: il pensiero dialogico di Antonio Gramsci* (*The Roses and the Notebooks: the dialogical thought of Antonio Gramsci*), Rome, Carocci, 2003. See also Id., *Antonio Gramsci in contrappunto: dialoghi col presente* (*Antonio Gramsci in counterpoint: dialogues with the present*), Rome, Carocci, 2007.

² Cf. F. Giasi (ed.), *Gramsci nel suo tempo* (*Gramsci in his own time*), Roma, Carocci, 2008.

the “Italian” and the “Anglophone” approaches to the study of Gramsci is for us inseparable from a reflection on the relationships of force that currently characterize the international university world; and neither can it be detached from the concrete contents which circulate within this world. It was not therefore at all by chance that the coupling *Hegemonic/Subaltern* was chosen as the theme of the first Ghilarza Summer School. In this way, through exploring Gramsci’s writings and measuring them up against today’s world – we have wished right from the start to single out two points that we maintain are crucial and indispensable. These are the necessity to investigate the forms in which hegemony and, in specular fashion, subalternity are found in Gramsci’s and in the contemporary world, and closely connected with this, the unity of method and content in the approach to Gramsci, in whatever approach to Gramsci.

Gramsci was a political combatant whose chef d’oeuvre, the *Prison Notebooks*, was written because he was forced to give up any form of active presence in the political life of his time. His writing is consequently a form of intervention, and the *method* itself that he developed is a critique of the hegemonic episteme³. To turn him into a cultural theoretician risks losing sight of this essential point, unless by “culture” one understands something radically different from its traditional meaning, unless the very expression “culture” is transformed into a battlefield on which the outcome of the battle for hegemony is decided, and from one time to the next the forms of “subalternity” are constructed.

2. This number of the “International Gramsci Journal” brings together one part of the lectures – appropriately reworked and rewritten – that were held at the September 2014 *Ghilarza Summer School*, devoted to the *Hegemonic/Subaltern* theme. This formula therefore lends a title to this special issue of the “International Gramsci Journal”, enriched by

³ See above all R. Mordenti. *Quaderni del carcere di Antonio Gramsci* (*Antonio Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks*) in *Letteratura italiana. Le opere*, Vol. IV: *Il Novecento*, II: *La ricerca letteraria* (*Italian Literature. The Works*, Vol. IV: *The Twentieth Century*, II: *Literary Research*), Turin, Einaudi, 1996, pp. 553-629.

the inclusion of a number of contributions from the students at the *Summer School*.

The issue opens with Gianni Francioni's contribution, *Un labirinto di carta* (*A labyrinth of paper*) which, as its subtitle indicates, is a veritable nutshell *Introduzione alla filologia gramsciana* (*Introduction to Gramscian philology*). In this sense it traces out the overall framework defining the work of the school. The meticulous reconstruction of the ways in which the *Notebooks* were composed, starting from the slight indications scattered throughout the prison manuscripts, and thence to the establishment of an ever more reliable chronology for the single blocks of notes that comprise the manuscripts, is in actual fact the indispensable condition for capturing Gramsci's "rhythm of thought" in its ongoing "movement".

Giuseppe Cospito's essay *Egemonia/egemonico nei "Quaderni del carcere" (e prima)* (*Hegemony/hegemonic in the "Prison Notebooks" (and before)*) seeks to apply a diachronic reading method to the terminological galaxy of hegemony: after a brief reconstruction of the previous uses made of the term, from its Greek origin to Gramsci's pre-prison writings, passing through the debates among Marxists and in particular among the Bolsheviks, Cospito pauses over the use – exclusive to the *Notebooks* – of "political hegemony" and "civil hegemony", which at one and the same time renders its sense precise and also widens its field of application. What in some ways is a mirror image of Cospito's essay is the one by Guido Liguori on *Subalterno e subalterni nei "Quaderni del carcere"* (*Subaltern and subalterns in the "Prison Notebooks"*). As compared with the current usage, derived from the military vocabulary, in the course of the prison reflections this family of terms, too, is subject to Gramsci's notable semantic enlargement, leading to the constitution of a sort of negative pole contraposed to the positive pole of the hegemonic field.

Fabio Frosini deals with the nexus between *L'egemonia e i "subalterni": utopia, religione, democrazia* (*Hegemony and the "subalterns": utopia, religion, democracy*) starting from the definition of a "post-Jacobin" notion of hegemony which was asserting itself in the mass society of Gramsci's times. Here, progressive and regressive elements are indissolubly intertwined (as vividly exemplified in the formula of "passive revolution"). In such societies the rulers and the ruled are in a "reciprocal" siege,

testing out new ideological forms of struggle in which religion and “myth” take on a decisive role. Another category able to capture basic aspects of the transformations through which European society was passing at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth is that of Caesarism, dealt with in Francesca Antonini’s contribution, *“Il vecchio muore e il nuovo non può nascere”: cesarismo ed egemonia nel contesto della crisi organica* (“The old is dying and the new cannot be born”: caesarism and hegemony in the context of the organic crisis), together with a series of theoretico-political concepts linked to this category. And in relation to these movements, particular importance is assumed by what Gramsci calls the “language question” (a subject of interest for him from his university days right up to the last of his “special” notebooks), and which, in her essay *Lingua/linguaggio, senso comune e gruppi sociali subalterni* (Language/discourse, common sense and subaltern social groups), Natalia Gaboardi reads within Gramsci’s “translation” of Marxism into the terms of the “philosophy of praxis”. The largely passive nature of the subalterns and of their cultural manifestations may be understood effectively through an analysis of the semantic field covered in Gramsci’s writings by the verb “mummify” and its derivatives. This subject, up to now almost totally ignored by scholars, is here dealt with in an original fashion by Robert Jackson (*Passivity, subalternity and the mummification of culture in Gramsci’s “Prison Notebooks”*). A decisive role in the project aiming at overcoming these elements of backwardness, in order to make hegemonic what today is subaltern, is played by education as understood in the widest possible sense. This is the aspect focused on in Deise Rosalio Silva’s article, *Hegemonia e educação: proposta gramsciana de superação da subalternidade* (Hegemony and education: Gramsci’s proposal for overcoming subalternity).

The rich and polysemous nature of the conceptual coupling hegemonic/subaltern has contributed decisively to Gramsci’s extraordinary international success, by authorizing a use of his thought in contexts that are sometimes even far removed from the one in which and for which he shaped his thought. In this respect, Giovanni Semeraro goes in depth into the subject of *I subalterni e la religione in Gramsci: una lettura dall’America Latina* (The Subalterns and religion in Gramsci: an interpretation from Latin America). The author lays stress, on the one hand, on the

contradiction between the progressive dimension of the Christian message and the conservative role played by the catholic church, and, on the other, on the new and unsuspected analogies between Gramsci's considerations on religion and a number of the demands of liberation theology in Latin America. The success of the concept of hegemony in the English-speaking world, with special regard to Britain and to India (through the writings of Raymond Williams and Ranajit Guha, respectively) is the subject of Daniela Mussi and Camila Goés's contribution, *Antonio Gramsci no centro e na periferia: notas sobre hegemonia e subalternidade* (*Antonio Gramsci at the centre and at the periphery: notes on hegemony and subalternity*). The forms and modes in which this keyword of Gramsci's thought were absorbed in Argentina in the 1960s and 1970s are the object of study in Cecilia Pato's essay *Pasado, presente, hegemonía* (*Past, present, hegemony*), which centres on the review "Pasado y Presente" and its two major exponents, José Aricó and Juan Antonio Portantiero.

Last, as Giuseppe Vacca writes in the closing essay of this number, *Dal materialismo storico alla filosofia della praxis* (*From historical materialism to the philosophy of praxis*), Gramsci's reconsideration in prison of the concept of hegemony in relation to that of the Leninist tradition, and to the use that he himself made of it in his writings before 1926, can be fully understood only within the far broader revision of Marxism carried out in the *Notebooks*. This revision passes through a re-reading of the work of Marx and a re-foundation of that new subject of the modern world represented by the political party.