Gramsci in Action: Cultural Hegemony and Schooling in the Arab Israeli Conflict

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Abstract

Cultural hegemony is placed in relation to Kurt Lewin's action research and the psychological theories of social conflict by Lewin himself, Carolyn Wood Sherif and Muzafer Sherif, and Henri Tajfel. Consonances between Gramsci's ideas and these psychological theories are brought to the fore. Assuming this theoretical perspective, the results of an action research conducted in Arab Israeli schools to reduce dispersion highlight the heuristic value of Gramsci's ideas in the Israeli Arab conflict context. Thus the contradictions of that conflict emerge and, together with them, the possibility of a solution.

Gramsci in Action: Cultural Hegemony and Schooling in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

Francesco P. Colucci

1) Introduction

The contribution that Gramsci's ideas can make to the problems of the Middle East – and to the specific case of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict considered here – extend well beyond the pages of the *Notebooks*[1] about Islam and the Arabs.[2] Indeed, since Gramsci is a classic, his ideas are still timely and can serve to deal with current problems. As the Palestinian Edward Said clarified, the contribution Gramsci can offer to the problem of Western imperialism – colonialism in Arab countries and, in particular, in the Middle East – is currently important (Said 1993).

In other words, Gramsci, like all classics, is alive and in this sense, still "in action".

More specifically, "Gramsci in action" here is used to emphasise that his ideas about cultural hegemony have been implemented in an action research conducted in a number of Arab Israeli[3] schools in Galilee; with the aim of changing the way the subjects involved,

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[1] In the quotations from the *Quaderni del carcere - Prison Notebooks*, "Q" followed by the number of the Notebook quoted refers to the Critical Edition (*Quaderni del carcere*, Torino, Einaudi, 1975) of the *Notebooks* and " *QC*" refers to the page number References follow to the English translations *PN* 1 (*Notebooks* 1-2), *PN* 2 (*Notebooks* 3-5) and *PN* 3 (*Notebooks* 6-8) by J. A. Buttigieg, Columbia University Press, 1992, 1996 and 2007 respectively. Translations from later Notebooks, which Buttigieg could not translate, are in *SPN* (Gramsci 1971), *FSPN* (Gramsci 1995) or *SCW* (Gramsci 1985). Some wordings in translations of the *Notebooks* are mine.

[2] Gramsci refers to the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa and to Islam in various brief pages in different parts of the *Notebooks* – generally when commenting on articles from Italian or English journals. These pages reveal an Enlightenment faith in the possibility of an evolution of Islam toward modernity: 'It seems to me, rather, that the absence of a massive ecclesiastical organization of the Christian Catholic kind should make the change easier' (Q 2 §90: *QC*, 247; *PN* 1: 333). Gramsci underlines the contribution of Arab culture to civilization in Europe in the Middle Ages (Q 4 §92: *QC*, 533; *PN* 2: 261); examines the problem – that is related to the concept of cultural hegemony – of the relationship between intellectuals and the masses in Islam (Q 5 §90: *QC*, 621-623; *PN* 2: 344-346); refers to the difficult relationships between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, that were clearly already ongoing by the beginning of the 1930s (Q2 § 30: *QC* 186-188; *PN* 1: 278-280).

[3] The Palestinian citizens of the State of Israel *must* be called *Israeli Arabs* – "so in official documents and consequently in the language currently used" - to distinguish them from Palestinians living in the Territories of West Bank and Gaza, and so to deny their Palestinian identity.

first of all the scholar psychologists, feel, think and act (their practices) for reducing the extent of malaise and dropouts.

The article addresses the problem of verifying, in the historical context taken into consideration and in relation to the role of the school, the heuristic validity of Gramsci's ideas on cultural hegemony and of certain classical theories of psychology with which cultural hegemony is related.

Reference will be made in the following section to the underlying psychological theories: Kurt Lewin's action research model, to which we also return later in the article, and the social conflict theories of Lewin himself, the Sherifs, and Tajfel. The third section is intended to explain how cultural hegemony is understood in the context considered here, referring in particular to school and educational relations, and the relationship of this Gramscian concept with psychological theories to which reference is made, primarily Lewin's action research model. In the fourth section the action research conducted in some Arab Israeli schools in Galilee is briefly described. In the fifth the results of the action research are highlighted, confirming the heuristic validity of cultural hegemony in the case of Arab Israeli schools, as seen from the perspective of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and, in particular, of the internal conflict in the State of Israel. In the Discussion section, cultural hegemony and the main theoretical and empirical problems are discussed by considering the conflict that has worsened since 7 October 2023 and envisaging the possibility of a solution.

2) Underlying Psychological Theories

Action research is currently seen in many different ways, as regards both practice and theory (Dubost and Lévy 2002). The action research to which the present contribution refers is based on Lewin's original model as defined in the research on 'minority or disadvantaged groups' (Lewin, 1946); the model is adapted to the historical context in which the research took place. The following elements constituting Lewin's model (Lewin 1943; 1944; 1946) may be considered particularly relevant:

the Training ↔ Research ↔ Action triangulation; the research planning procedure involving a succession of verification phases that can modify the plan and detail the objective more precisely;

"psychological ecology" and the consequent relationships among the different disciplines that deal with "non-psychological factors" and the "psychological factors"; the relationships among the different skills and experiences involved; the determinant role of group discussion and decision making to bring about a persistent change.

The congruence between the Lewinian model of action research and Gramsci's cultural hegemony will be explained below, a congruence that concerns in particular the relationships among the different skills and experiences involved.

Since this action research dealt with the problem of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, reference was made also to Lewin's theories of social conflict (Lewin 1948). Lewin wrote the article *Action Research and Minority Problems* as part of an endeavour to improve intergroup relations in several American communities:

> For most of his life, Lewin's main preoccupation was the resolution of social conflict and, in particular, the problems of minority groups. Underpinning this preoccupation was a strong belief that only the permeation of democratic values into all facets of society could prevent the worst extremes of social conflict (Burnes 2004: 979).

It must, however, be clarified that in Lewin's conception social conflicts must not be considered harmful in all senses, as a disease that must be "resolved" in the sense of eradication. On the contrary, conflict is a must in historical dialectics. Thus, for "minority groups", conflict may be necessary to end the conditions of subordination and disadvantage. Lewin does not explicitly and organically set out this conception of conflict, which is nevertheless evident in the writings he devotes to this problem (Lewin 1948). Having studied philosophy in Berlin, he was presumably influenced by Hegel's conception and more directly by Marx, having lived through the Weimar Republic (Marrow 1969). Indeed, in those years, he undertook social involvement, researching the Taylor system viewed from a socialist standpoint (Lewin 1920) and entering into collaboration with the philosopher and politician Karl Korsch, a member of the social democratic party, who later joined the Trotskyist Spartacist League in the United States. Their dialogue was not purely chance and continued after both were forced to emigrate to the U.S. (Lewin and Korsch 1939). The relationship between Lewin and Marxism

has been generally removed, or forgotten, since the years following his death, probably also because of McCarthyism.

In addition to Lewin, social conflict, as it is understood here, is also inspired by Carolyn Wood Sherif and Muzafer Sherif's theory of 'real or realistic conflict', generated by the competition for resources (Sherif and Wood Sherif 1953). So explained in its origins, social conflict then develops and is represented as religious, ideological, ethnic, and cultural. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict emblemtically represents this theory of 'realistic conflict': in the beginning the primary resources to be shared were land and water; they are still land and water but now, above all, energy resources: in front of Gaza and on the border between Israel and Lebanon lie marine natural gas reserves. At the same time, this conflict incorporates historical, religious, ideological and social dimensions (Alghafli 2019) to the point of being seen as a clash of civilizations. If one refers to the specific problem of the Arab Israeli schools, these are discriminated against in the distribution of economic resources; and it is on this discrimination that the Jewish State's control is based, a control which also concerns sensitive topics such as history and literature programmes; thus the conflict becomes cultural and ideological.

Henry Tajfel's theory is also primarily considered for his 'individual behaviour → social mobility ↔ intergroup behaviour → social change' continuum (Tajfel 1970; Tajfel, Flament, Billig and Bundy 1971). Apart from having a general relevance, Tajfel's theory takes on clear heuristic value in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in which particularly adolescents oscillate between social mobility and social change, as will be noted in what follows.

3) The relationship of cultural hegemony to action research and psychological theories of social conflict

As regards Lewin, the Sherifs and Tajfel, referring to papers already published (Colucci and Colombo 2018; Said, Dakduki and Colucci 2020), in the present contribution *Gramsci's ideas* regarding cultural hegemony and the struggle for cultural hegemony, abundantly debated in the literature, are schematically discussed to highlight their relationship with the psychological theories considered and with the action research conducted.

Gramsci understood cultural hegemony in its original and most authentic meaning derived from the Greek verb *hegéomai*, to lead –

meaning related to the psychological concept of leadership. As such it is aimed at consent not domination imposed by force: '…the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as "domination" and as "intellectual and moral leadership"' (Q19 § 24: *QC*, 2010; *SPN*: 45). Domination always requires consent, that prepares and conserves this domination.

Cultural hegemony – "cultural" in the broadest sense, so much so that it includes all manifestations of culture, starting from folklore[4] – has its "foundation" in economic activities (Q13 § 18: *QC*, 1591; *SPN*: 161). The superstructures, culture, are founded upon the structure, the economy. Gramsci is perhaps a heterodox Marxist (heterodox in regard to what orthodoxy?) but he is surely a Marxist.

Since Gramsci as a Marxist attributed a foundational role to economic factors, and thus to "competition for resources", Carolyn and Muzafer Sherif's concept of "realistic conflict" appears to be congruent with Gramsci's ideas; and this is particularly evident in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

As Gramsci reiterates: "There is a struggle between two hegemonies – always" (Q 8 §227: *QC* 1084; *PN* 3: 373). The cultural hegemony of dominant groups is aimed at forming and confirming a *consent* around the prejudices and ideologies[5] that justify the preservation of the status quo, and its privileges and inequalities (Q11 §§ 53 and 63: *QC*, 1481-2 and 1491-2 respectively; *SPN*: 370 and 375-6 respectively). On the contrary, cultural hegemony – focused on changing the status quo, to alter the cultural hegemony of dominant groups, and on the emancipation of the dominated or "minority" groups – is aimed at forming a *consensus* that Gramsci envisages as the formation of a "*new common sense*" both rational and critical (Colucci 1999).[6]

In cultural hegemony focused on emancipation, "philosophical industriousness" will have to be conceived especially as a cultural struggle to transform common sense or "popular 'mentality'" (Q 10 II §44: 1330; *SPN*, p. 348). The "popular mentality" should be taken to include the ways that all "subordinate" or "minority" groups feel and think: the subordinate working classes for whom

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[4] "Folklore should not be conceived of as an eccentricity, an oddity, or a picturesque element, but as something very serious and is to be taken seriously" (Q27 § 1: 2314; *SCW*: 191).

[5] For example, racial, sexual, ethnic prejudices or ideologies based on social Darwinism.

[6] On the question of the struggle between hegemonies, see also below.

the Communist Gramsci was fighting, but also the colonized peoples included in his reflections. In the case of colonized peoples the importance of language is immediately apparent:

> importance is assumed by the general question of language, that is, the question of collectively attaining a single cultural "climate" […] . Language also means culture and philosophy (if only at the level of common sense) and therefore the fact of 'language' is in reality a multiplicity of facts more or less organically coherent and co-ordinatcd. (Q 10 II § 44: 1331; *SPN*, pp. 349. [To maintain coherence of argument, the order of sentence quotations is here reversed as compared with Gramsci's original]).

In the case considered here, the study of Hebrew, which tends to predominate over Arabic in Arab Israeli schools, is just one example of the hegemonic use of language by the dominant group. The fact that Arabs use more and more Hebrew words and expressions demonstrates the success of this hegemony: it happens that one hears Israeli Arab women and men, even not young ones, using Hebrew terms even while talking to each other. The use of the term "Israeli Arabs" rather than "Palestinians" (see note 3) is yet another example of the hegemonic use of language, and is indeed fundamental because it is upon language that the ethnic identity is built.

Thus it can be deduced that "struggle for hegemony" of dominated groups must take over the tools of knowledge, starting from language, in order to emerge from their subordinate state and gain emancipation.

To avoid misunderstandings it must be remembered that according to Gramsci, in order to emerge from a subordinate state, cultural struggle does not exclude, in certain situations, the possible necessity of an armed struggle. In the same way, an armed struggle does not exclude the struggle for cultural hegemony; on the contrary, it makes use of it. War propaganda, a particular form of cultural hegemony, has always had an important role in the struggle, in direct proportion to the development of "communication tools". In the case considered here, the struggle for cultural hegemony and armed struggle are in a continuous and molecular interaction. However, the experience reported here illustrates, as will be seen, some contradictions in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: Arab Israeli schools are a place of hegemonic conflict and, at the same time, of exchange

and progress. This shows that it may be possible to achieve an out-come that avoids the persistence of armed struggle and violence.

School is for Gramsci the emblematic field of the struggle for cultural hegemony, since:

This problem [of the struggle to transform the popular mentality, that is of the formation of a new common sense] can and must be approached in the light of the *modern approach to pedagogical doctrine and practice*, according to which the relationship between teacher and student is an active one, one of reciprocal relations, and therefore every teacher is always a student and every student a teacher (Q 10 II § 44: *QC*, 1331, italics and translation mine; cf. *SPN*: 349-50).

It cannot be entirely ascertained what Gramsci meant by "modern approach to pedagogical doctrine and practice". He posed the problem of searching for "the precise historical origin of certain principles of modern pedagogy: the active school, or the friendly collaboration between teacher and student ...", recognizing that "Switzerland has made a great contribution to modern pedagogy (Pestalozzi etc.) through the tradition of Rousseau ... [but] in reality, this pedagogy is a confused form of philosophy connected to a series of empirical rules" (Q 1 §123: *QC*, 114; cf. *FSPN*, p. 139, whose translation is here modified). Probably, Gramsci was refer-ring also to the anti-authoritarian schools that had spread around Europe in the 1920s, of which he had a third-hand knowledge.[7]

Instead, the negative assessment of naturalistic "spontaneity" as an "involution" of Rousseau's ideas is explicit: "'Spontaneity' is one of these involutions: one almost imagines that a child's brain is like a skein which the teacher helps to unravel. In reality [...] education is *a struggle against the instincts [...] a struggle against nature*' (Q 1 §123: *QC*, 114 italics mine; cf. *FSPN* p. 140, with modifications). The formation itself of the new common sense as a pedagogic relationship is "a struggle against nature".

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[7] Gramsci is commenting (Q 9 § 119: *QC*, 1183-5; *FSPN*: 140-143) on an article published in 1931 in an Italian journal, that examined the work of a pedagogue from the United States, Carleton Washburne, who had come to Europe to see how the "workings of the new progressive schools which draw their inspiration from the principal of the pupils' own autonomy", among others the Summerhill School founded in Great Britain and in Austria (1921-1924) by Alexander Neill. These pages also contain the only reference in the *Prison Notebooks* to Montessori (Q 9 § 119: *QC*, 1184; *FSPN*: 141) "the figure probably inspiring these experiences". Dewey is cited in a generic manner only in a brief note where he criticises the superficiality of an Italian article about US culture and Pragmatism (Q 4 § 76: *QC*, 516; *PN* 2: 244).

For this reason, his perplexity about the "attempts" at anti-authoritarian schools (whose inspiring ideology is spontaneity) is explicit: "It would be of use to follow up all these attempts […] more than anything else to see what should not be done" (Q 9 § 119: QC, 1185; *FSPN*: 143 [the literal 'attempts' here replaces *FSPN*'s "experiments – ed. note]). Being in a sense a form of strife, education can require teachers to exert their authority, in the sense of an authoritativeness whose purpose is rationally justified and explained to the students.

The "reciprocal relations" – that could be defined as dialectic in the sense that they are continuous, dynamic two way relations – where "every teacher is always a student and every student a teacher" should not be taken to signify parity or lack of differentiation. Teachers and students have different experiences. The teacher must learn from the students' experiences, know how to listen to them and to understand their needs, but has a greater knowledge and so a greater responsibility.

The teacher-student relationship thus understood has essential significance for Gramsci as a paradigm or model of every progressive hegemonic relationship. This relationship

> exists throughout society as a whole and for every individual relative other individuals. It exists between intellectual and non-intellectual sections of the population, between rulers and ruled, elites and followers, leaders and led … (Q 10 II §44: QC, 1331; *SPN* p. 350).

The action research process referred to here is based on this same Gramscian relationship between the different experiences and knowledge of the subjects involved, where those with greater knowledge and experience in a field have a greater responsibility. This is what Lewin's action research envisages, where the participants' different roles, experiences, and knowledge were maintained, unlike in post-Lewin action research, which tends towards a generic egalitarianism, considering it necessary to maximise participation (Reason and Bradbury 2008). Indeed, given their cultural characteristics, it was considered wise in the particular context of Arab Israeli schools to keep action research within more directive lines in the early stages and then gradually allow for more initiative as the participants acquired a greater degree of autonomy.

In critiquing the pedagogical concept of spontaneity, Gramsci observes: 'Moreover 'school', i.e. direct educational activity, is only a fraction of the life of the student who comes into contact with both human society and the *societas rerum* and forms much more important criteria from these "extra-scholastic" sources than is commonly believed' (Q 1 § 123; *QC*, 114; *FSPN* p. 140, translation modified). However, Gramsci attaches the utmost importance to this "fraction", posing in fact the question of "creating a type of school that will educate the instrumental and subordinate classes to a leadership role in society *as a whole and not as single individuals*" (Q 9 § 119; *QC* 1183: italics mine; *FSPN* p. 141). In Tajfel's terms this would mean 'for social change' and not for individual social mobility. In the case considered here, the aim is the emancipation of the Israeli Arab minority group, not the social mobility of some Israeli Arabs. It should however be noted that individual social mobility can foster social change – especially when the minority or dominated group is an ethnic group, as in our case but also in those of Afro-Americans and, generally speaking, of colonized peoples.

Gramsci's conception of cultural hegemony must be reconsidered in the light of the radical changes that have occurred in society and in the "communication tools" as compared to those in the 1930s, nearly a century ago. These changes have had a particularly dramatic impact on Arab Israeli schools. In these, as from early adolescence the students, because they live in a Western State even if it is geographically Middle Eastern, are strongly attracted by the new media of all types and know how to use them, unlike most of their parents, especially those from less privileged classes, and even some teachers. This has, in practice, widened the divide between young people and adults, who are often against the new media, and see them as the expression of a foreign, enemy culture. Adolescents attending middle and high schools were defined in some interviews as the "mute generation" because, attracted by the "Western culture represented by Jewish society", they do not communicate with adults, teachers and parents.

Meanwhile school, in Israel too, has become a "fraction" that has a declining importance in society and indeed is even considered by some as irrelevant.

In any case, the concept of cultural hegemony in relation to the school needs to be reconsidered, not abandoned. This concept

continues to have a heuristic validity that supports a better understanding of the changes in course. For example, it can contribute to a better understanding of the divide that has developed between young people and adults, and indicate ways to reduce it. If adults, the "teachers", can succeed in understanding the new needs and culture of the young, learning from them, they can use these new "communication tools" to promote dialogue.

At the same time, the view of schools as irrelevant runs the risk of becoming an ideological justification for not engaging in a field of work and struggle that continues to be an important "fraction" of society. In the specific case of Arab Israeli schools, the heuristic validity of cultural hegemony is confirmed, as will be shown below.

4) Research Description

The *first phase* of the research consisted in a training course for psychologists from the Nazareth, Iksal and Kana School Psychology Centres, with an Italian Professor on Social Psychology as a trainer, which took place in the summer of 2009 (five and a half days). In this training course, Lewin's action research aroused the participants' interest. At the same time, dropout in its various forms had emerged as a significant, serious problem due to its social repercussions. Hence the request and decision on the part of the course participants to start an action research aimed at reducing dropout, with the trainer acting as scientific supervisor and coordinator (Said, Dakduki and Colucci 2020).

The school psychologists' training continued with the coordinator during frequent formal and informal meetings along the action research course, which can be considered a continuous training process. Thus the "triangulation" between Training ↔ Research ↔ Action indicated by Lewin's model was realized.

The *second phase* dealt with preliminary planning in which the research coordinator, the directors of Iksal and Kana School Psychology Centres and the school psychologists were involved, with the advice of external experts. Planning was discussed with the school heads and the town council officials: the Municipal School Inspectors and the *Kabas*.[8] Topics of this preliminary planning were: the discussion and clarification of the theoretical background, goals, methodology, and procedures to be adopted in data

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[8] Ministry officials charged with monitoring regular school attendance.

collection - the definition of the empirical field; i.e. three schools in Iksal (a primary, a middle and a high school) and two schools in Kana (a primary and a middle school).

As inevitably occurs in action research, the definition of the empirical field did not follow a pre-established experimental plan but depended on contingent factors such as the relationship between the people involved. In our case, the research was undertaken thanks to the two directors of the School Psychology Centres in Iksal and Kana, who had graduated in Psychology in Italy. Regarding the choice of the schools involved, like all organizations, they tend to be somewhat reluctant to get involved in research, and resistance is even greater towards action research as it tends to be more invasive. To overcome this reluctance, the atmosphere inside the school, the attitude and the receptiveness of the heads, as well as their relations with the researchers, were taken into account. However, it must be stressed that Iksal and Kana and their schools are representative of other Arab Israeli municipalities and schools, as the mapping of territory showed (see below, *the fourth phase*).

The *third phase* was devoted in the beginning to studying the history of education and culture in Palestine under the British Mandate – based on archival material and research by Palestinian scholars.

The Israeli school system was also analysed from a regulatory and statistical perspective. The purpose of this was to outline the general framework of the action research focusing on the main consequences of the Israeli State policy on school attendance among the Israeli Arab population. It has to be remembered, in this respect, that the organization of the education system in Israel is highly complex. Indeed, alongside the State schools with the Arab Israeli schools, clearly separate from the Jewish ones,[9] there are Jewish Orthodox and Lay private schools; there are also the Christian schools, traditionally present in centres such as Nazareth or Kana, which are open to Palestinians including Muslims.

Drawing on Lewin's concept of 'psychological ecology' (Lewin 1943; 1944) in the *fourth phase*, the Iksal and Kana territory was mapped, collecting socio-demographic data (M. Said et al. 2020).

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[9] Separation decided by the State and generally accepted by the Arabs to preserve their cultural identity.

In *the fifth phase* the school psychologists conducted 22 semi-directive individual interviews and 4 group interviews (a total of 26 subjects participated) with the school staff: heads, teachers, educators, and counselors. A further ten interviews were conducted by the research coordinator with privileged witnesses: the Director of the Arab Israeli School Psychology Centres of Galilee, the Director of the School Psychology Centre of Nazareth, school heads, executives and politicians in Nazareth, Iksal and Kana.

All the individual and group interviews were recorded, translated (from Arabic to Italian) and submitted to thematic content analysis (Ghiglione and Blanchet 1991) conducted separately by three researchers, one of them Palestinian, a graduate in psychology in Italy. The transcripts of 22 individual and 4 group interviews with the school staff, of primary relevance for this research, were submitted – in addition to content analysis - to a computer assisted thematic analysis with the Italian T-LAB software (Lancia 2004) that relies on the same methodological principles as the ALCESTE method (Reinert 1990).

The main results emerging from the analyses conducted are summarized below:

- the different forms of dropout; essentially, the difference between evident dropouts and covert dropouts, an insidious problem concerning students who are not attentive in class and do not actively participate in school activities: 'present absentees', as defined by teachers.

- the causes of dropouts, attributed primarily to difficult social and economic situations of families and the lack of interest in school shown by many parents;

- the low dropout rate in primary schools does not mean that there are no problems, bearing in mind the numerous pupils with severe learning difficulties or behavioral problems;

- the "bureaucratic control" of dropout entrusted to Kabas, perceived "almost like policing" and its negative consequences: since schools are evaluated according to drop-out rates, these control methods lead to sweeping the phenomenon "under the carpet";

- the diagnosis of Learning Disabilities and A.D.H.D. ("Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder") often used cover up other problems: some teachers were used to report several cases to

the school psychologists in an attempt to shrug off responsibility for these "problematic" or "difficult" children;

- the difficult and often hostile relations between teachers and pupils. As several teachers observe: "they look at us and do not greet us";

- parents' behaviours which often exacerbate these relational difficulties as they tend to ally themselves with the students entering into conflict with teachers;

- the widespread violence in society and within families that is reflected in school and juvenile behaviors;

- the condition of the school buildings which are described as "unwelcoming" or "rejecting".

The *sixth phase* consisted of group discussions with teachers and other school personnel on the main results from the previous phase: at least one group discussion was conducted in each of the schools involved with the participation of almost all the subjects interviewed individually or in groups (see above *the fifth phase*). The main aim of this phase was to set up group discussions and a shared decision-making process, following Lewin's theory (Lewin 1947) regarding the relation between group decision and motivation to action; in our case actions or best practices aimed to prevent school dropouts and malaise.

The following best practices were agreed upon and undertaken:

- changing interpersonal relationships between teachers and students by adopting the "smile policy" and being the first to greet the latter;

- increasing visits by teachers, psychologists and *kabas* to families, as well as informal contacts with the parents of students at risk, to eliminate or mitigate the bureaucratic procedures of dropout rates control;

- involving parents, and especially mothers, in school activities;

- making the school buildings more welcoming, also creating spaces for informal meetings, thanks to the collaboration of students and parents;

- increase extracurricular educational activities.

5) Cultural hegemony in action: empirical evidence

Reference will be made to the main empirical evidence that emerged from the action research conducted. The reader should

refer, for a more complete description of the results of the research to the published article (Said, Dakduki and Colucci 2020).

The history of school in Palestine in the period of the British Mandate, and the evolution of Arab Israeli schools after the creation of the State of Israel (see above: *third phase*) may be considered to confirm, in this context, Gramsci's idea of school as a paradigmatic field in the struggle for cultural hegemony: the "dominated" or "minority" Palestinian group was committed to obtaining greater resources for schools and a greater autonomy in the educational choices made.

During the British Mandate – in a period of overall development of Palestinian culture after the end of the Ottoman dominion – a conflict arose between the Palestinians, who demanded more schools even supported by self-taxation, and the colonial authorities which stifled educational development. In this conflict the teachers were in the front line in spreading national independence ideals, risking dismissal and imprisonment.

In the State of Israel, the Israeli Arabs were engaged – with their local and national political representatives, the school authorities, the heads and teachers in the front line – in a continual conflict with the State authorities to reduce the deep discrimination that arose when allocating economic resources and to obtain a greater autonomy. In 1952, a Department for Arab Education was created within the Ministry of Education, including some Arab staff, but still run by an Israeli. From the early 1970s, Israeli Arab politicians were opposed to this Department due to the scarcity of the available funds and, above all, because it sanctioned discrimination against the Arab populations. Thanks to this political struggle, at the end of the 1970s the Department was given a greater autonomy, more financial resources and, for the first time, an Arab was put in charge (Al-Haj 2002; Rinawi 1999). Nevertheless, a Ministerial commission continued to be responsible for the educational objectives and programs in Arab Israeli schools, a critical and conflictual issue. Hence, the 'realistic conflict' was accompanied by an evident cultural conflict, particularly in regard to the programmes for history and literature, since these did not assign sufficient importance to Arab culture.

In this conflictual situation, however, right from the early years of the State of Israel, an exponential growth of schooling for

Israeli Arabs occurred. This growth was particularly evident in the case of female schooling, which was practically non-existent before 1948. In recent years, instead, Israeli Arab girls' schooling has reached not only the same rates as their male peers, but also that of the Jewish female population.

There were various causes of this remarkable development. On one hand, the primary importance attributed by the Jewish culture to education, which explains the major funding allocated to schools,[10] and on the other, the commitment and continual struggle of Israeli Arab citizens – the school and political authorities representing them – to obtain what was their due in this funding, also in view of the fact that their taxes, too, contribute to the State budget.

Arab Israeli schooling has some limits and even some negative aspects. Even if the situation has tended to improve in recent years, the school performance of Israeli Arab students continues to be lower, and school dropout higher than among Jewish boys and girls, especially at high school level (Shoshana 2020; Yanay and Blass 2019). Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, many Israeli Arab students reach the end of secondary school and obtain certificates that allow them to enter a good work sphere (for example school, as teachers, counselors etc.). Others (but even now mainly males) go on to University and obtain degrees in Engineering, Medicine, Psychology etc., generally at foreign Universities, since it is difficult for an Israeli Arab to gain admission to a Jewish University.

School thus favours – taking up Tajfel's concepts – "individual social mobility"; nevertheless, this can also favour "social change" or the emancipation of the "minority group": "as a whole and not as individuals" to use Gramsci's words. In addition, it can be hypothesized that a higher level of education among Israeli Arabs could in any case favour a social change.

From this point of view, the development of women's education is essential: not only because it forms educated mothers on whom the education and the future of their children depends, but because of the opportunities for work and social integration, for the emancipation of women who can play a decisive role in the emancipation of Palestinian society.

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[10] The Ministry of Education's budget is lower only than that for the Ministry of War and public expenditure for education in Israel is greater than the average of the OECD countries.

Moreover, the heuristic validity of the concept of cultural hegemony was confirmed in and by the action research process itself. The very fact that it was possible to conduct the intervention for years in Arab Israeli schools suggests that these have succeeded in conquering a certain degree of autonomy.

The entire process was aimed at achieving, among the various knowledges and experiences of the subjects involved in the action research, the paradigmatic teacher ↔ student relationship to which Gramsci referred. This was intended to lead the subjects toward a change in their way of feeling, thinking and hence of their practices, that could help to reduce school malaise.

The intervention was focused on the teachers and the other school operators. The best practices decided in the group discussions (see above *sixth phase*) led to a change in the teachers' ways of relating to students and their families, first of all their mothers, in order to overcome or attenuate conflict and tensions.

The teachers adopted the "smile policy", greeting students of the middle and high schools first, as soon as they saw them. Relations with parents were no longer limited to reports of school performance and behaviour in class. The school heads and the teachers, following the indications of the school psychologists, started to involve the mothers in extra-curricular activities, such as sewing or gardening. Above all, these 'active mothers' collaborated with the school operators (including the cleaning staff and custodians, who also decided to become engaged in the ongoing changes) to make the spaces "more homely", in the sense of warm and welcoming (http://algaleel.com/index.php?todo=albumpics&id=78&lang=en).

These particular practices, even if not continuous over the years, may have contributed to the improvements in the "school climate", as revealed by a Ministry survey conducted also in the Iksal middle school that took part in the action research (http://meyda.education.gov.il/rama-mbareshet/).

The Kabas and the Municipality inspectors became committed too. The Municipal Inspector at Iksal followed the action research with interest, and favoured it. The Kabas, who did not limit their activities to bureaucratic controls, increased their visits, together with the teachers, to families with students at risk of dropout, to try to understand the causes of the malaise.

The Director of the School Psychology Centre at Iksal played an important role, involving Municipal executives and authorities in the research. A *tangible* result of this involvement was the opening of a new middle school in Iksal. This was also due to pressure from teachers, who complained of the conditions of the old middle school and of overcrowded classes, as the interviews show. (see above *fifth phase*).

It should be noted that especially the quantitative results must be considered as *possible* results of the intervention, because it can be difficult to identify which outcomes are attributable to the intervention rather than to *other factors* which occurred after the start of the research. This difficulty is particularly significant in our case due to the complexity of the research context. Indeed, among the *other factors*, we must first consider the instability of the conflict between Arabs and within the State of Israel, which affects institutions like schools.

More specifically, it is necessary to consider the possible effectiveness of Ministerial projects to improve the students' well-being and prevent dropouts or other forms of youth deviance; with their significant funding mainly derived from the United States Jewish Foundations, and based on theories and practices of Western conception largely extraneous to Arab culture.

In this context, where several factors interact, an important result achieved – a relevant (Holzkamp, 1972) aim of the action research (see above Introduction) – is the change in the practices of the school psychologists who participated in the different research phases, starting from the training course held in 2009. These psychologists moved away from mainly diagnostic activities toward psychosocial forms of intervention, interacting in an organic and stable way with teachers and parents groups. The meetings with school staff evolved from bureaucratic formalities to regular group discussions. The psychologists now take greater account of the various social causes that could explain the restlessness of many students, such as the violence witnessed by young people in their daily lives, and also within the family, the overcrowded homes that restrict free movement, and some habits that are spreading among teenagers, such as the consumption of energy drinks that can induce hyper-excitement. By making a kind of pact with teachers and parents to explain the causes of the restlessness, psychologists

are now trying to "contain" A.D.H.D. diagnoses, diagnoses involving the administration of psychoactive drugs such as Ritalin. Thanks to the new approach, in both Iksal and Kana – according to statements by various psychologists interviewed separately in 2019 – on average, of ten requests for diagnosis (reports made by the teachers to the psychologists) only two or three lead on to the procedure whose outcome may be a diagnosis of A.D.H.D..

What is most important, the school psychologists demonstrated a greater capacity to take the initiative in the ongoing action research process, as evidenced by observations and interviews conducted in 2019, 10 years after the start of the research, also with local politicians, administrators and directors of cultural centres.

This change in the practices or praxis of the psychologists, who had been among the promoters of the research and were continual participants, can be considered as the result of a synergy between the continual training process that Lewin (1946) considered to be the main axis of action research and Gramsci's idea of the teacher ↔ student relationship as a paradigm of cultural hegemony. This synergy, in general, successfully changed the practices of all the subjects involved in the research.

Change in practices, or "praxis", depends on change in the ways of thinking and feeling, in "common sense" as Gramsci saw it, of the subjects involved within this limited but important context, the "fraction", of Arab Israeli schools. Therefore, on the basis of these considerations, this action research can be seen as the practice or implementation of the struggle for cultural hegemony: a case of Gramsci in action in schools in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

6) Discussion

Although not taken as the problem to be addressed, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict profoundly influenced the research process; ever-present, both explicitly or implicitly, as emerged in the interviews.

This conflict and continual tension is reflected by a high level of violence among the Israeli Arabs themselves, in the community, between families and within families. This situation of tension and violence involves schools and adolescents. The "mute generation" – as these young people have been defined – seems to be torn

between "individual mobility" and "social change", between the Internet and the *intifada*, consisting of acts of rebellion of a more or less violent nature against the State of Israel.

The settlements on the West Bank with the frequent outbreaks of violence – which have now escalated and become unbearable – against the Palestinians; the periodical bombardments of Gaza, which have become a continuous and indiscriminate massacre since 7 October, have increased internal tensions in the State of Israel. In this multifaceted conflictual context one framework which helps to understand the application of the concept of cultural hegemony is the Arab Israeli schools.

Taking all this into account, it can be seen that this action research has highlighted a contradictory situation: on the one hand, the discrimination and control imposed on Arab Israeli schools; on the other, the developments in schooling and a greater autonomy conquered in the struggle for hegemony that can lead to a "social change" in the sense of an emancipation of the "minority" or subordinate group. Indeed, the Ministerial projects aimed at reducing school malaise (see above) reveal a further contradiction, in the form of the emblematic struggle for cultural hegemony between the dominant group, that aims at transmitting or imposing its own culture, backed up by economic resources, and the dominated or minority group that attempts to gain advantages by exploiting the resources made available by these programs.

These contradictions highlighted in schools – an important and paradigmatic "fraction" – shed a glimmer of light on the situation, outlining the possibility that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict may not be an "intractable conflict" (Bar Tal, Halperin and Oren 2010) expected to have no foreseen solutions. In short, they foresee the possibility that the armed struggle that began in 1948 may ultimately come to an end. This might seem naively illusory after what happened on 7 October 2023, and following what happened that day; but these events highlight the need to believe in such a possibility.

For this to happen, some preconditions are essential: changes that are not utopian, but rationally possible, i.e. achievable if reason is used. In the first place, Israel should refuse the role of outpost of Western colonialism in the Middle East (Edward Said 1993). It would also be important to award trust and support to the "active

minority" (Moscovici 1980) of Israeli citizens that are fighting to bring an end to the conflict: a case of hegemonic struggle by a dissident group within the dominant group. The opposition, before 7 October, of so many Israeli citizens, including military ones, to the reform of justice wanted by the Netanyahu government in defence of Democracy; and the current opposition to this criminal government shows that this 'active minority' is not so minor, it is not condemned to marginality and indeed could prevail, as has happened other times in history in the case of other active minorities. It would be necessary for a new, desirable and possible, Israeli government to limit settlements in the West Bank and, above all, to force settlers to respect the law. It would be necessary not to identify Palestinians with Hamas and instead value the active minority and those Palestinian leaderships who are able to oppose Hamas – instead of persecuting and imprisoning them. We should not continue to propose the false two States solution, which could only perpetuate and worsen the conflict: to highlight the false illusory nature of this solution – if one does not want to believe in the possibility, the first case in the world, of two equal States in a single territory – it would be enough to give those proposing it a map of Israel and a pencil and ask them to draw the borders of the two States. And where would the Israeli Arabs end up, including the psychologists and teachers who participated in this action research?!

Once granted the prospect of cultural hegemony, the possibility could emerge that those currently constituting Israel and the Palestinian Territories could become an example of coexistence among the different human groups[11] that live on this strip of land, a small great land called the Holy Land. This is not an illusionary utopia but a rational opportunity. Rational because it is based on preconditions that are rationally possible, and above all because it would be advantageous to all the human groups involved.

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[11] Israeli citizens themselves belong to different groups: Ashkenazis and Sephardim, of the most diverse origins (i.e. the various European countries, North Africa, South America, North America…), Ethiopian Jews, Yemenite Jews, etc.; Secular and Orthodox Jews of the various Orthodoxies. In addition to these different Jewish groups, in Israel, other groups with different ethnicities and religions coexist: Islamic Palestinians and Christian Palestinians; Bedouins – the most marginalised – often forced to reside in dilapidated urban centres; Karmel Druze, the most integrated in the Israeli State – in fact they do their military service and several have military careers – and Golan Druze who instead live in a sort of uncertain Limbo, almost non-existent as citizens; a community of Kalmyks deported from the Caucasus at the time of the Ottoman Empire; and to all these were added Ukrainians and Russians who emigrated to Israel, mainly to Galilee, at the end of last century.

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