

# International Gramsci Journal

---

Volume 1  
Issue 2 *International Gramsci Journal*

Article 1

---

2010

## Cover page and contents, International Gramsci Journal No.2 2010

Charles M. Hawksley  
*University of Wollongong*, [charlesh@uow.edu.au](mailto:charlesh@uow.edu.au)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hawksley, Charles M., Cover page and contents, International Gramsci Journal No.2 2010, *International Gramsci Journal*, 1(2), 2010, i-iii.  
Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci/vol1/iss2/1>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: [research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

---

## Cover page and contents, International Gramsci Journal No.2 2010

### Abstract

The International Gramsci Journal (IGJ) is produced in electronic format. It aims to publish scholarship on aspects of Antonio Gramsci's life and writings, and on contemporary applications of his theories to the modern world. IGJ aims to publish in Italian, Spanish and English. We publish both peer-reviewed articles and shorter "Gramsci notes". In the future we aim to publish book reviews of works that employ Gramscian concepts and theories. As a new journal IGJ relies on the efforts of a small group of colleagues in Australia, but we aim to be a global journal. To make IGJ work we need your help. If you have a piece of writing that you think would be suitable for IGJ, or have students who you could encourage to submit to IGJ, we would welcome the opportunity to review and publish new scholarship or shorter pieces in translation. IGJ No. 2 for the first time has original research in Italian, Spanish and English. On behalf of the editorial team I hope that you find something of interest to you in IGJ No. 2.

# INTERNATIONAL GRAMSCI JOURNAL



NO. 2 APRIL 2010

## **Editorial Board**

Derek Boothman, Italy  
Joseph Buttigieg, U.S.A  
Ben Fontana, U.S.A  
Marcus Green, U.S.A  
Renate Holub, U.S.A  
Peter Ives, Canada  
Domenico Jervolino, Italy  
Guido Ligouri, Italy  
Richard Howson, Australia  
Rita Medici, Italy  
Adam David Morton, United Kingdom  
Carlos Nelson Coutinho, Brazil  
Koichi O'Hara, Japan  
David F. Ruccio, U.S.A

## **Editorial Committee**

Charles Hawksley, Editor  
Susan Engel, Assistant Editor  
Kylie Smith, Assistant Editor  
Rene Leal, Book Editor  
Teresa Crosland, Production Editor

For **instructions on submission** to IGJ please refer to the website:

<http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/research/gramsci-journal/index.html>

**Cover:** Cartoon image of Antonio Gramsci.

(IGJ is attempting to locate the illustrator for appropriate attribution.)

**International Gramsci Journal No. 2**  
**April 2010**

**Contents**

<b>Message from the Editor</b>	ii
<b>Messaggio del curatore</b>	
<b>Mensaje del editor</b>	
<i>Charles Hawksley, University of Wollongong</i>	

**Gramsci Notes**

<b>Escritura trágica bajo el fascismo: Gramsci a los 70 años de su muerte</b>	1
<i>Manuel S. Almeida Rodríguez, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus</i>	
<b>Some Notes on the Tragic Writing of Antonio Gramsci</b>	8
<i>Manuel S. Almeida Rodríguez, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus</i>	
<b>The history of the subaltern groups: Rome and the Middle Ages in Italy</b>	14
<i>Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori, Università di Bologna</i>	
<b><i>Croce, Gentile e Gramsci sulla traduzione</i></b>	21
<i>Domenico Jervolino, Università di Napoli</i>	
<b>Croce, Gentile and Gramsci on Translation</b>	29
<i>Domenico Jervolino, Università di Napoli</i>	

**Refereed Articles**

<b>Gramsci at the margins: subjectivity and subalternity in a theory of hegemony</b>	39
<i>Kylie Smith, University of Wollongong</i>	
<b>New Phase of Development and Knowledge Capitalism: Gramsci's Historical Revenge?</b>	51
<i>Sergio Ordóñez, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México</i>	

## **Message from the Editor**

The International Gramsci Journal (IGJ) is produced in electronic format. It aims to publish scholarship on aspects of Antonio Gramsci's life and writings, and on contemporary applications of his theories to the modern world. IGJ aims to publish in Italian, Spanish and English. We publish both peer-reviewed articles and shorter "Gramsci notes". In the future we aim to publish book reviews of works that employ Gramscian concepts and theories.

As a new journal IGJ relies on the efforts of a small group of colleagues in Australia, but we aim to be a global journal. To make IGJ work we need your help.

If you have a piece of writing that you think would be suitable for IGJ, or have students who you could encourage to submit to IGJ, we would welcome the opportunity to review and publish new scholarship or shorter pieces in translation.

IGJ No. 2 for the first time has original research in Italian, Spanish and English. On behalf of the editorial team I hope that you find something of interest to you in IGJ No. 2.

With best wishes

Charles Hawksley  
Editor, International Gramsci Journal  
University of Wollongong, Australia

## **Messaggio del curatore**

L'International Gramsci Journal (IGJ) è edito in formato elettronico. L'intento di questa rivista è di pubblicare contributi sulla vita e gli scritti di Antonio Gramsci, ma anche sulle applicazioni odierne delle sue teorie al mondo moderno. IGJ si propone di mettere a disposizione del pubblico lavori in italiano, spagnolo e inglese. Si pubblicheranno sia lavori che saranno criticamente letti e rivisti da nostri collaboratori sia più brevi "note gramsciane". Per il futuro ci proponiamo anche di pubblicare recensioni di scritti che utilizzano concetti e teorie gramsciane.

Poiché IGJ è una nuova rivista, essa si appoggia su un piccolo numero di collaboratori in Australia. Si spera però che diventi una rivista di respiro globale. Ma a questo fine, cioè per far sì che IGJ vada in porto, abbiamo bisogno del vostro aiuto.

Se avete uno scritto che pensate faccia al caso di IGJ o avete studenti che vorreste incoraggiare a pubblicare su IGJ, noi accoglieremo ben volentieri: vostre recensioni, nuovi scritti o pezzi più brevi in traduzione.

Nel secondo numero di IGJ (IGJ n° 2) si pubblicheranno per la prima volta studi originali in italiano, spagnolo e inglese. A nome della squadra dei curatori spero che possiate trovare qualcosa di interessante nel secondo numero di IGJ.

Distinti saluti

Charles Hawksley  
Editor, International Gramsci Journal  
University of Wollongong, Australia

## **Mensaje del editor**

La revista Internacional Gramsci (IGJ) está realizada en formato electrónico. Su intención es publicar estudios sobre aspectos de la vida y obra de Antonio Gramsci así como de las aplicaciones de sus teorías en el mundo actual. Uno de los objetivos de IGJ es publicar en italiano, español e inglés. Publicamos artículos arbitrados por académicos así como escritos reducidos “Apuntes de Gramsci” (Gramsci notes). Más adelante planeamos publicar libros arbitrados así como trabajos que apliquen conceptos y teorías de Gramsci.

Como consecuencia de ser una revista nueva, IGJ depende del esfuerzo de un pequeño grupo de académicos de Australia, aunque nuestro objetivo es llegar a establecer una revista de alcance global. Para realizar este proyecto de IGJ, necesitamos su ayuda.

Si tiene un escrito que crea que sea adecuado para la revista, o tiene estudiantes a los que pueda animar a presentar su trabajo a IGJ, le agradecemos de antemano la oportunidad de revisarlo y publicar nuevos estudios o cortas traducciones.

El IGJ número 2, por primera vez, tiene trabajos realizados originariamente en italiano, español e inglés. De parte del equipo editorial le deseamos que encuentre algo que le interese en dicho número.

Un cordial saludo

Charles Hawksley  
Editor, International Gramsci Journal  
University of Wollongong, Australia

2010

## Escritura trágica bajo el fascismo: Gramsci a los 70 años de su muerte [Spanish]

Manuel S. Almeida Rodriguez

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci>

---

### Recommended Citation

Almeida Rodriguez, Manuel S., Escritura trágica bajo el fascismo: Gramsci a los 70 años de su muerte [Spanish], *International Gramsci Journal*, 1(2), 2010, 1-7.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci/vol1/iss2/2>



---

## Escritura trágica bajo el fascismo: Gramsci a los 70 años de su muerte [Spanish]

### Abstract

Debemos ser cuidadosos al interpretar las palabras de Romain Rolland que Gramsci repite numerosas veces en sus cuadernos carcelarios y que hace suyas como lema personal, 'pesimismo de la inteligencia, optimismo de la voluntad'. Hay que evitar caer en la entendible tentación de enfatizar la segunda parte (optimismo de la voluntad), como si hiciese todo el sentido del mundo darle mayor importancia al elemento de la voluntad porque Gramsci dió importancia al marxismo como una filosofía de la praxis. Aclarando de entrada, la interpretación del marxismo propuesta por Gramsci (1975: 435, 1434, entre otros ejemplos) es que éste es una concepción de mundo autónoma, comprensiva, totalizadora, capaz de interpretar el mundo con miras a una progresiva transformación de éste. En su interpretación del marxismo como una filosofía de la praxis el componente teórico no es por un lado reducido ni a un elemento instrumental y justificador de cualquier práctica (Gramsci 1975: 1386), ni por otro lado se reduce a especulación suprahistórica. Es por eso que la concepción de Gramsci del marxismo como una filosofía de la praxis se va hilvanando a través de una crítica paralela tanto al historicismo de Croce como al materialismo vulgar de Bujarín, presentes de forma más sostenida en los cuadernos 10 y 11. Crítica a Croce que se debe tomar muy en cuenta porque si bien Gramsci rechaza un marxismo determinista, no debe mover automáticamente al intérprete a ver en la posición gramsciana una postura voluntarista o subjetivista. Por eso Gramsci (por ej., 1975: 1579) repetidas veces en los Cuadernos, menciona el planteamiento de Marx a los efectos de que una sociedad no se plantea las tareas para las cuales no existen las condiciones objetivas para su solución, condiciones que a su vez deben ser 'educadas'. En última instancia, el pensamiento de Gramsci es abiertamente, históricamente, dialéctico. Su mayor énfasis a través de la totalidad de los Cuadernos es alrededor de una de las preocupaciones más centrales y más antiguas en el pensamiento político, las relaciones entre dirigentes y dirigidos o gobernantes y gobernados, y cómo éstas se expresan a través de todo el tejido social, inclusive en esas esferas sociales menos sospechadas

## Escritura trágica bajo el fascismo: Gramsci a los 70 años de su muerte<sup>1</sup>

Manuel S. Almeida Rodríguez

Debemos ser cuidadosos al interpretar las palabras de Romain Rolland que Gramsci repite numerosas veces en sus cuadernos carcelarios y que hace suyas como lema personal, ‘pesimismo de la inteligencia, optimismo de la voluntad’. Hay que evitar caer en la entendible tentación de enfatizar la segunda parte (optimismo de la voluntad), como si hiciese todo el sentido del mundo darle mayor importancia al elemento de la voluntad porque Gramsci dió importancia al marxismo como una filosofía de la praxis. Aclarando de entrada, la interpretación del marxismo propuesta por Gramsci (1975: 435, 1434, entre otros ejemplos) es que éste es una concepción de mundo autónoma, comprensiva, totalizadora, capaz de interpretar el mundo con miras a una progresiva transformación de éste. En su interpretación del marxismo como una filosofía de la praxis el componente teórico no es por un lado reducido ni a un elemento instrumental y justificador de cualquier práctica (Gramsci 1975: 1386), ni por otro lado se reduce a especulación suprahistórica. Es por eso que la concepción de Gramsci del marxismo como una filosofía de la praxis se va hilvanando a través de una crítica paralela tanto al historicismo de Croce como al materialismo vulgar de Bujarín, presentes de forma más sostenida en los cuadernos 10 y 11. Crítica a Croce que se debe tomar muy en cuenta porque si bien Gramsci rechaza un marxismo determinista, no debe mover automáticamente al intérprete a ver en la posición gramsciana una postura voluntarista o subjetivista. Por eso Gramsci (por ej., 1975: 1579) repetidas veces en los *Cuadernos*, menciona el planteamiento de Marx a los efectos de que una sociedad no se plantea las tareas para las cuales no existen las condiciones objetivas para su solución, condiciones que a su vez deben ser ‘educadas’. En última instancia, el pensamiento de Gramsci es abiertamente, históricamente, dialéctico. Su mayor énfasis a través de la totalidad de los *Cuadernos* es alrededor de una de las preocupaciones más centrales y más antiguas en el pensamiento político, las relaciones entre dirigentes y dirigidos o gobernantes y gobernados, y cómo éstas se expresan a través de todo el tejido social, inclusive en esas esferas sociales menos sospechadas.<sup>2</sup>

El uso de la expresión ‘pesimismo de la inteligencia, optimismo de la voluntad’ en su trabajo maduro expresa lo que leemos como una tensión dialéctica, realista y trágica que recorre su escritura carcelaria.

---

<sup>1</sup> Conferencia presentada originalmente en la actividad *Escritura trágica y poder bajo el fascismo: Antonio Gramsci a los 70 años de su muerte*, auspiciada por el Depto. de Ciencias Sociales de la Facultad de Estudios Generales, UPR- RP.

<sup>2</sup> Una lectura detallada del cuerpo entero de los *Cuadernos* a través del prisma de la preocupación por las relaciones entre dirigentes y dirigidos en sus diversas manifestaciones sociales, se encuentra en Almeida (2005).

### **Contexto histórico e inmediato detrás de la escritura trágica de Gramsci**

Permítasenos brevemente recordar que Gramsci fue finalmente arrestado el 8 de noviembre de 1926 como resultado de la eliminación general por parte de Mussolini de lo poco que quedaba de libertades políticas en Italia recién fascista, incluyendo el fin del derecho a la libre asociación (y por tanto la eliminación de los partidos no fascistas), la revocación de la inmunidad parlamentaria, etc.<sup>3</sup> La vida en cárcel no fue fácil para el político sardo. Duras condiciones carcelarias empeoraron lo que para Gramsci ya siempre había sido una débil y enfermiza constitución física desde niño.

En términos morales y emocionales, sufrió un doble o triple aislamiento. Aislado sentimentalmente, pues privado de su libertad nunca volvió a ver a su esposa Giulia, que padeciendo males nerviosos se encontró imposibilitada de viajar a Italia a verlo. Además, nunca volvió a ver a su hijo mayor Delio e incluso nunca logró ver en persona a su segundo hijo Giuliano. Fue su cuñada Tatiana quien, como una verdadera Antígona, mayormente atendió a las necesidades de Gramsci mientras vivió encarcelado. Tatiana le enviaba libros, revistas, medicinas, ropa, alimentos entre otras cosas. También lo visitó varias veces, y lo acompañó en sus últimos días cuando ya convalecía en la clínica Quisisana en Roma hasta su muerte en la mañana del 27 de abril de 1937, habiendo sufrido una hemorragia cerebral dos días antes. Esto hizo a Tatiana el interlocutor principal de Gramsci e intermediario entre éste y Piero Sraffa, el Partido Comunista y hasta con su esposa Giulia.<sup>4</sup> Por último, aunque no menos importante, fue Tatiana quien luego de muerto Gramsci, rescató los 33 cuadernos para la posteridad.

Un aislamiento adicional se suma en el ámbito político. Como si el aislamiento político inherente a su condición de encarcelado no fuese suficiente, fue doblemente aislado políticamente tan pronto la Internacional Comunista, en su sexto congreso a finales de la década del 1920, adoptara la línea del social fascismo, rechazando la búsqueda de alianzas estratégicas con los social-demócratas u otros grupos que podrían contribuir en la lucha anti-fascista. El Partido Comunista de Italia adoptó esa política, dejando atrás la agenda establecida en el Congreso de Lyon, ideada en gran medida por Gramsci y que reflejaban la estrategia leninista del frente único. Siendo realista y sufriendo en carne propia lo que en términos más generales fue una oleada de derrota para la izquierda Europea, Gramsci criticó esta nueva agenda del social-fascismo por ser extremadamente sectarista por un lado, y por otro supo leer en ella la auto-defensa del régimen soviético sin tomar en cuenta la situación real de otros países como Italia. En la situación concreta de la consolidación del fascismo en Italia, Gramsci pensaba que lo más prudente era lograr un frente unido anti-fascista que llevara a cabo una asamblea constituyente. Sabemos por compañeros que compartieron con Gramsci en prisión y por Tatiana que Gramsci identificaba la asamblea constituyente de fuerzas anti-fascistas como la traducción nacional del frente unido leninista que pretendía combatir la enfermedad infantil del izquierdismo según la cual se rechazaba la práctica de coaliciones estratégicas como cuestión a priori, de principios. Esta posición heterodoxa le costó a Gramsci, aún

---

<sup>3</sup> Para una descripción sumaria del fascismo italiano, ver Emilio Gentile (2002).

<sup>4</sup> Para un análisis detallado y comprensivo de la relación afectiva y comunicativa entre Gramsci y Giulia, ver el excelente ensayo de Francisco Fernández Buey contenido en su *Leyendo a Gramsci* (2001).

en cárcel, el rechazo y el aislamiento de compañeros de partido que estaban también encarcelados (Spriano 1979).

Era un ‘mundo grande y terrible’ como solía decir Gramsci, sentido de forma más terrible por estar desconectado de él. Sus pocas vías de conexión con el mundo fueron una intensa actividad epistolar y, luego de conseguir permiso en enero de 1929, la posibilidad de trabajar y escribir en su celda.

### **Las cartas y los cuadernos: Hacer algo *für ewig***

La escritura carcelaria de Gramsci se plasma paralelamente en sus cartas desde la cárcel y en sus cuadernos carcelarios. Aunque el tipo de escritura presente en un medio es diferente al otro, una lectura comprensiva de los cuadernos requiere una lectura paralela de las cartas. La lectura del *magnum opus* – fragmentaria y tosca como es – de Gramsci se completa de forma muy íntima con sus cartas. Esto es así en gran medida por las circunstancias excepcionales en lo que fueron escritos los cuadernos.

En las *Cartas de la cárcel* vemos a Gramsci comunicarse tiernamente con su mamá, pidiendo libros y revistas a Tatiana, comentando sobre alguna lectura, elaborando brevemente alguna idea, luchando por una comunicación efectiva con su esposa Giulia, proponiendo varios planes de trabajo y estudio, y otros asuntos. Las cartas presentan el lado más humano por así decir, que nos permite ver el proceso gradual de deterioro moral y psicológico de Gramsci. Vemos expresado en las cartas el sufrimiento de un individuo que se sabe sin salida y que está plenamente consciente de la posibilidad objetiva de su muerte. Escritura trágica en sus cartas por esto mismo.

Ya tan temprano como en una carta muy citada dirigida a Tatiana y fechada el 19 de marzo de 1927, vemos una referencia sutil a su preocupación o reconocimiento de la posibilidad de la muerte y de su situación precaria en general. Además, esta carta es importante ya que en ella Gramsci comunica uno de los primeros planes de estudio que se proponía emprender cuando obtuviera permiso para escribir en prisión. Previo a que le planteara a Tatiana un plan de trabajo que incluía un estudio sobre los intelectuales italianos, sobre lingüística comparada, sobre Pirandello, y sobre literatura popular, Gramsci comienza expresando lo siguiente:

Estoy atormentado (esto es, pienso, un fenómeno propio de prisioneros) por esta idea: que debo hacer algo “*für ewig*”, según una compleja concepción de Goethe que recuerdo atormentó mucho a nuestro Pascoli. En última instancia, quisiera, según un plan pre-establecido, ocuparme intensamente y sistemáticamente de algún tema que me absorba y centralice mi vida interior (1996: 55).<sup>5</sup>

Empecemos comentando esta cita notando que Gramsci se propone un plan de trabajo como modo de resistencia psicofísica y moral. Es decir, la escritura que veremos en los *Cuadernos de la cárcel* es una forma personal de resistencia molecular a su deterioro tanto físico como emocional y moral. Ahora notemos algunas cosas sobre el uso hecho por Gramsci de la expresión *für ewig*, ‘para siempre’.

---

<sup>5</sup> Esta y las subsiguientes citas provenientes del italiano han sido traducidas por el autor.

Lo primero a lo que Gramsci hace referencia con hacer algo *für ewig* es trabajar en algo que tenga un mayor grado de objetividad y permanencia, que le sobreviva por así decir, en contraste por ejemplo con sus escritos precarcelarios que respondían a necesidades y polémicas del día a día producidas por su militancia política.<sup>6</sup> Gramsci también va a llamar a esta perspectiva como una “desinteresada”. Los *Cuadernos de la cárcel* no son ciertamente ‘desinteresados’ en sentido de una toma de posición política, pero sí marcan un grado de objetividad y autonomía analítica relativa.

Segundo, y muy importante en nuestro énfasis en el motivo trágico de la escritura carcelaria gramsciana, como comentara hace ya un tiempo Valentino Gerratana (1975: XVII) y recordara recientemente Francisco Fernández Buey (2001: 149-150), el *für ewig* expresa el reconocimiento de Gramsci de la posibilidad real de su muerte en cárcel. Como incluye Fernández Buey en una nota al calce de su *Leyendo a Gramsci*, en los *Canti de Castelveccchio*, el texto al cual se refiere de pasada Gramsci en la carta, Pascoli escribe: “Eres niña y no sabes qué quiere decir *para siempre*. *Para siempre* significa morir...”. De entrada, pues, y muy temprano, mucho antes de sufrir los primeros ataques serios de salud, Gramsci se sabía asediado por la posibilidad misma de la muerte.

También vemos en las *Cartas de la cárcel* otras instancias donde se muestra de forma particular el elemento trágico. Por ejemplo, en algunas de sus cartas de febrero de 1933 a su cuñada Tatiana vemos el agrio y desesperado parecer de Gramsci al reflexionar sobre las posibilidades de que incluso su esposa Giulia se encuentra entre sus condenadores. Pensamientos que responden a su deterioro físico-mental. En una carta del 27 de febrero de 1933 Gramsci reacciona a la escasa comunicación por parte de su esposa:

Lo que me ha condenado es un organismo más vasto, del cual el Tribunal Especial no ha sido más que la indicación externa y material que ha compuesto el acto legal de la sentencia. Debería decir que también Giulia ha estado entre estos “condenadores”, pienso, aún más, estoy firmemente convencido, si bien inconcientemente, y hay una serie de personas menos inconcientemente (1996: 690).

Probablemente Gramsci se refería a un posible acoso que pudiera estar sufriendo Giulia en su hogar en Moscú por parte de su familia y particularmente por su hermana Eugenia, que era una funcionaria del gobierno soviético y no estimaba mucho a Gramsci. Ciertamente o no, la realidad era que entre Gramsci y Giulia la comunicación era cada vez más tosca, menos fluida, y más escasa, ‘condenándolo’ a un mayor aislamiento y soledad. Además, en el texto citado ve como se va mezclando el lado trágico personal de Gramsci con su lado político-público, al confundir la instancia del Tribunal Especial con su situación afectiva personal.

Esto es importante para nosotros porque veremos que el elemento trágico personal de Gramsci irrumpe en ciertas ocasiones en la escritura pretendidamente *für ewig*, más objetiva, de sus *Cuadernos de la cárcel*. Irrupción que confunde en la escritura trastorno personal con derrota política, donde se hace imposible una línea divisoria entre tragedia

---

<sup>6</sup> Aún tomando en cuenta la crítica hecha por Aldo Natoli (1997: XXII-XXIII) en su introducción a la correspondencia entre Gramsci y Tatiana de que el énfasis dado a la expresión *für ewig* ha sido exagerado, no puede haber duda de la diferencia cualitativa que denota entre la escritura de Gramsci presente en los *Cuadernos de la cárcel* y aquella plasmada en sus escritos pre-carcelarios.

individual y tragedia colectiva. Irrupción que impide, de nuevo, el carácter de ‘para la eternidad’ que Gramsci le quiso imprimir desde muy temprano a su trabajo que culminaría plasmado en los *Cuadernos*. Acaso la mención repetida e insistente en los *Cuadernos* del lema ‘pesimismo de la inteligencia, optimismo de la voluntad’ apunta a esta tensión que deshace el carácter *für ewig*.

### Estiércol de la historia

Con estos elementos tentativamente presentados, así como con otros, pensamos que, al contrario de lo que pudiera pretender una lectura que busque energía moral inmediata, el peso en la indicación recae en la parte del ‘pesimismo de la inteligencia’. En contraste con el pesimismo que aún delata fortaleza y plenitud y del cual habla Nietzsche en su *El nacimiento de la tragedia*, el pesimismo de Gramsci refleja el sobrio e irremediable reconocimiento de la derrota política y personal. Es un pesimismo del subalterno.

Ahora, es un pesimismo inteligente, que aunque reconoce la propia subalternidad, sabe concebir a la historia como un proceso abierto, como una continua correlación de fuerzas, de hegemonías y contra hegemonías, y que como tal, sabe que el final de la historia no se ha escrito, es decir, que no se puede escribir ni plantear. Es un pesimismo de la inteligencia que no renuncia sino que al contrario es llevado por el impulso ético-político a reclamar un optimismo de la voluntad. Optimismo de la voluntad que por otro lado no es voluntarista ni idealista. Optimismo de la voluntad que tampoco es determinista pues no se basa en la creencia de que la victoria eventual se producirá por efecto lógico de las dinámicas sociales objetivas. Ante la posible postura de un optimismo irreal, esperanzador, Gramsci, reconociendo la realidad de la derrota, propone un optimismo sobrio, realista, y que expresa en sus *Cuadernos* a través del contraste de las figuras del estiércol y el labrador. Así en uno de sus peores momentos de salud en 1932, Gramsci escribe en el cuaderno 9 sobre la necesidad de aprender a ser “estiércol [*concio*] de la historia”. Escribe:

Antes todos querían ser labradores de la historia, tener roles activos, cada uno tener un rol activo. Nadie quería ser el “estiércol” de la historia. Pero, ¿puede uno labrar la tierra antes de fertilizarla? Por lo tanto, tiene que haber labradores y estiércol. [...] Algo ha cambiado, porque hay quien se adapta “filosóficamente” a ser “estiércol”, que sabe que debe serlo, y se adapta (1975: 1128).

La expresión “estiércol de la historia” está preñada de significado y creemos expresa la tensión que tratamos de venir realizando. Por un lado, manifiesta el claro reconocimiento de la derrota política presente, de que no es momento de ser labradores, sino de adaptarnos a ser estiércol. Por otro lado, ser estiércol aquí no equivale a resignación, sino que al contrario apunta al rechazo de la resignación y al rechazo a la renuncia del deber ético-político a fertilizar el terreno social para ir creando ‘molecularmente’ mejores condiciones de potencialidad política para el futuro. Estoy de acuerdo con Fernández Buey (2001: 204) en que esta nota expresa la búsqueda por una transición de la política a la crítica de la política, es decir, de la política a la pedagogía política. Además este fragmento muestra también, y continuando con el tema que hemos ido tratando de hilvanar desde el comienzo, como la tragedia política y personal de Gramsci se desborda e irrumpe en sus *Cuadernos*, y se confunde la derrota individual con la derrota del colectivo y de los movimientos radicales y progresistas de la época. En este sentido,

siguiendo el pasaje que acabamos de citar, Gramsci añade: “Es como la cuestión del hombre que está por morir, como dicen”. Con una gran diferencia entre la tragedia personal y la colectiva que Gramsci nota:

Pero hay una gran diferencia, porque justo antes de morir uno está en un acto decisivo que dura por un instante; en vez, en relación con la cuestión del estiércol, los asuntos duran mucho tiempo, y se presentan nuevamente en cada momento. Se vive sólo una vez, como dicen; la personalidad propia es irremplazable (1975: 1128).

Es esta una comparación trágica que se plasma en el planteo de que debemos contribuir a fertilizar el terreno para una lucha futura consciente de la impotencia presente y de la propia mortalidad que imposibilitará nuestra participación en ese futuro.

Todo esto hace de la escritura gramsciana, presente en los *Cuadernos de la cárcel*, una trágica, pues Gramsci se plantea en prisión toda una perspectiva de querer contribuir a una presente y futura pedagogía política o prepolítica mientras que ni tan siquiera sabe si va a ser leído. Giorgio Baratta (2000) ha comentado sobre el carácter dialógico y abierto de la escritura gramsciana en su importante libro *Las rosas y los cuadernos*. Habría que añadir que se realiza en unas circunstancias dentro de las cuales era imprevisible si iba a haber en efecto alguien al otro lado de ese diálogo. ¿Acaso no es en parte este carácter abierto y dialógico de su obra y su pensamiento lo que hace que aún a los 70 años de su muerte, Gramsci siga atrayendo tanta lectura y relectura, y siga funcionando para muchos como farola de irradiación moral e intelectual?

La fragmentariedad de la escritura carcelaria gramsciana, su apertura, su dialogismo, es lo que hace que se preste para que se siga asumiendo en la discusión teórico-política, ideológico-política, aún contemporánea. No es una obra cerrada ni sistemática en donde todo está dicho, sino que al contrario es una obra que incluso por la repetida admisión del mismo autor no pretende más que ser un trabajo provisional (Gramsci 1975: 438, 935, 1365), ‘en elaboración’, que va sugiriendo proposiciones tentativas para poner a prueba en análisis concretos y en la práctica. ¿Y la tragedia que vivía Gramsci? ¿Acaso muchos no nos reconocemos, no nos identificamos con ella? No se nos malinterprete, no es que se esté planteando la persistencia de lo mismo; pero, ¿acaso la tragedia que abre con la gran guerra y que en parte crea las condiciones para los totalitarismos, no se ha terminado todavía?

Gramsci fue un político que vivió un momento histórico donde, para decir con él, ‘lo viejo se está muriendo pero lo nuevo no puede aún nacer’, que en su contexto inmediato apuntaba a la situación de un régimen liberal y parlamentario que apenas se había consolidado cuando se ve envuelto en una crisis política y social grave, crisis que se ve ‘superada’ por el fascismo. Contexto en el cual con los desarrollos históricos, la progresiva complejización de la sociedad política y civil, le permite adelantar un vocabulario con el cual entender estos múltiples desarrollos, y particularmente el funcionamiento del poder en las sociedades modernas. Basta pensar en sus palabras y temas claves, como hegemonía, revolución pasiva, transformismo, voluntad colectiva y nacional-popular, estado en sentido ampliado o integral, guerra de posiciones, su trabajo sobre el sentido común, la traducibilidad, los intelectuales, etc. Muchos de estos temas continúan siendo asumidos en la teoría política contemporánea. Herramientas teóricas

que en parte nos ayudan a fertilizar el terreno social, a potenciarlo, para una vida futura más justa, más democrática. Pasado y presente,... y futuro. Pesimismo de la inteligencia, optimismo de la voluntad.

## Bibliografía

- Almeida Rodríguez, Manuel S. 2006. *Reading the "Quaderni del carcere": The Political Project of Antonio Gramsci*. Tesis Doctoral. Universidad de Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Baratta, Giorgio. 2000. *Le rose e i quaderni: Saggio sul pensiero dialogico di Antonio Gramsci*. Roma: Gamberetti Editrice.
- Fernández Buey, Francisco. 2001. *Leyendo a Gramsci*. Barcelona: El Viejo Topo.
- Gerratana, Valentino. 1975. Prefacio, en A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*. Turín: Einaudi.
- Gentile, Emilio. 2002. Fascism in Power: The Totalitarian Experiment, en Adrian Lyttleton (ed.), *Liberal and Fascist Italy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1975. *Quaderni del carcere*. Editado por Valentino Gerratana. Turín: Einaudi.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. *Lettere dal carcere*. Editado por Antonio Santucci. Palermo: Sellerio.
- Natoli, Aldo. 1997. Introducción, en A. Gramsci y T. Schucht, *Lettere 1926-1935*. Turín: Einaudi.
- Spriano, Paolo. 1979. *Gramsci and the Party: The Prison Years*. Londres: Lawrence and Wishart.



# International Gramsci Journal

---

Volume 1  
Issue 2 *International Gramsci Journal*

Article 3

---

2010

## Some Notes on the Tragic Writing of Antonio Gramsci [English]

Manuel S. Almeida Rodriguez

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci>

---

### Recommended Citation

Almeida Rodriguez, Manuel S., Some Notes on the Tragic Writing of Antonio Gramsci [English], *International Gramsci Journal*, 1(2), 2010, 8-13.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci/vol1/iss2/3>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: [research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

---

## Some Notes on the Tragic Writing of Antonio Gramsci [English]

### Abstract

Abstract This essay considers the tragic elements present in Gramsci's prison writings, including both the Prison Notebooks and the Prison Letters. It highlights specific moments in both the notebooks and the letters in which this tragic element presents itself. These include the interpretation of the often cited motto of 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will' present in the notebooks, of the *für ewig* character of the notebooks as expressed in an important prison letter, and of other important passages. Also, it shows how the tragic element expresses at the same time the fusion of Gramsci's personal tragedy with the political tragedy of the Left in general. Finally, the essay treats on how this tragic element transcends itself in the claim for the fertilizing of the social terrain for a better future.

## Some Notes on the Tragic Writing of Antonio Gramsci

Manuel S. Almeida Rodríguez

### Abstract

This essay considers the tragic elements present in Gramsci's prison writings, including both the Prison Notebooks and the Prison Letters. It highlights specific moments in both the notebooks and the letters in which this tragic element presents itself. These include the interpretation of the often cited motto of 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will' present in the notebooks, of the *für ewig* character of the notebooks as expressed in an important prison letter, and of other important passages. Also, it shows how the tragic element expresses at the same time the fusion of Gramsci's personal tragedy with the political tragedy of the Left in general. Finally, the essay treats on how this tragic element transcends itself in the claim for the fertilizing of the social terrain for a better future.

**Key Words:** Antonio Gramsci, Critical Theory, Political Theory, Tragic Writing

*Murio mi eternidad y estoy velándola.*  
(César Vallejo, *La violencia de las horas*)

We have to be careful when interpreting the words mentioned repeatedly by Gramsci in his prison notebooks, attributed to Romain Rolland, 'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'. We have to prevent ourselves from falling into the easy temptation of emphasizing the second part, as if it made all the sense emphasizing the element of the will given Gramsci's interpretation of Marxism as a 'philosophy of praxis'. Let us be clear, the interpretation of Marxism provided by Gramsci (1975: 435, 1434) is one of an autonomous, comprehensive, and totalizing conception of the world capable of interpreting the social totality with the aim of progressively transforming it. In his conception of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis, the theoretical component is not in any way reduced to an instrumental one in which theory ends up being a slave to political practice (Gramsci 1975: 1386). The fact that his conception is not on the one side mechanistic and deterministic should not lead the reader on the other hand to read in Gramsci an idealist and subjectivist interpretation of Marxism. Gramsci (1975: 1579) showed in his prison notebooks that he took to heart Marx's dialectical claim that a society does not pose for itself those tasks for which the necessary conditions for their solution do not yet exist, conditions which are themselves at the same time 'educated'.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, Gramsci's thought is one that is open-endedly dialectical and that always attempts to grasp the whole of the complex of social relations; to read every different social sphere in their integrality forming what he calls a historical bloc. If there is a definite emphasis throughout and underneath the different notes contained in his *Quaderni* is in his concern – central in the general history of political thought - over the relationship between leaders and led, governing and governed (Gramsci 1975: 1752). The use of the motto 'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will' in his mature work expresses what we read as a dialectical and realist tension in his writing while in prison,

---

<sup>1</sup> Gramsci's dialectical approach to Marxism also shows in his discussion and critique of what he read as two opposed conceptions, Benedetto Croce's idealist historicism and Bukharin's positivist understanding of historical materialism. His most consistent engagement with Croce is present in notebook 10 while the most consistent one with Bukharin is present in notebook 11.

tension which lies behind what we read as a tragic mode of writing both in Gramsci's prison letters and in his notebooks.

### **The Material and Historical Basis Behind Gramsci's Tragic Writing**

Let us briefly remember that Gramsci was finally arrested on 8 November 1926, as a result of the general elimination in the part of Mussolini of what was left of political democratic liberties in Italy, including the elimination of parliament and of all the non-fascist parties. Life in prison was not easy for the Sardinian Marxist. Harsh prison conditions worsened Gramsci's weak physical and sickly constitution that he had endured ever since he was a child.

Morally and emotionally speaking, he suffered a double or triple isolation. Sentimentally isolated since he was robbed of his liberty, he never got to see in person his second son Giuliano, nor was he ever to see again his other son Delio nor his wife Giulia. The latter, suffering from nervous illnesses, was unable to travel to Italy to visit him. It was only his sister-in-law, Tatiana, who like a true Antigone mostly tended to Gramsci's needs while in prison. She sent him books, journals, medicines, clothes, visited him at various times, and more importantly was Gramsci's main personal interlocutor throughout his entire prison life. She also served as an important intermediary between Gramsci and his friend Piero Sraffa, the Communist Party, and even with his wife Giulia.<sup>2</sup> In addition, it was Tatiana who after Gramsci died rescued the 33 notebooks for posterity.

A further isolation is registered in the political realm. To add to the inherent political isolation brought about by being imprisoned, he was doubly politically isolated once the Communist International adopted in its sixth congress the line of social fascism, which rejected from the outset any form of alliance with social-democrats or other non-communist anti-fascist sectors. The Italian party adopted such a line, leaving behind the agenda established in the Lyon Congress which had been thought out in great measure by Gramsci. Being realistic and suffering in the flesh what was in general terms a general wave of defeat for the left in Western Europe, Gramsci, saw such a polarizing political agenda as ultra-leftist childishness and stupidity, and saw in it the self-defense of the Soviet regime. In the concrete situation of the relative consolidation of fascism in Italy, Gramsci thought that the political strategy to follow was the proposition of a wide anti-fascist constituent assembly. We know because of Tatiana that in prison Gramsci identified the constituent assembly as the Italian translation of the Leninist strategy of the united front. This heterodox position cost Gramsci the friendship, even within prison, of fellow imprisoned party comrades (Spriano 1979).

It was a 'big and terrible world' as Gramsci used to say, felt by him as even more horrible by being greatly disconnected from it. The few avenues of connection with it were an intense epistolar activity and, after finally getting the permission in January of 1929, the possibility to work and write in his cell.

---

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed account of the complex affective and communicative relationship between Gramsci and Giulia, see the work of Francisco Fernández Buey (2001).

### The Letters and the Notebooks: Again the *Für Ewig*

The Gramscian writing present in his prison letters can stand alone in regards to his writings in the prison notebooks. Nevertheless, an appropriately comprehensive reading of the notebooks requires the parallel reading of the letters. The reading of Gramsci's posthumous *magnum opus* – fragmentary and rough as it may be – is completed along with his epistolar activity. Obviously, it is in great measure because of the exceptional circumstances in which the *Quaderni* were written. In his letters from prison, we see Gramsci communicating tenderly with his mother, asking for books and journals, commenting on some reading, elaborating briefly some idea, proposing various plans for study, struggling for an effective and affective communication with his wife Giulia, dialoguing or arguing with his sister-in-law Tatiana, etc. We see the more human side of him, in a sense, and we see him in a descending curve of progressive physical and moral degeneration. We see in the letters all of the suffering of a man that knows himself without a probable escape and that is fully aware of his own degeneration and of the possibility of death.

Already as early as in an often quoted letter to Tatiana, dated March 19, 1927, there is a subtle reference to his concern or acknowledgement of the possibility of death and of his precarious situation in general. In addition, the letter is important since in it Gramsci communicates what is the second plan of study he proposes for himself for when he receives permission to write in his cell. Prior to expressing his work plan to Tatiana which consisted in a group of studies on the formation of intellectuals in Italy, on comparative linguistics, on Pirandello, and on popular literature, Gramsci expresses the following:

I am tormented (this is, I think, a phenomenon proper of prisoners) by this idea: that I should do something "*für ewig*", according to the complex conception of Goethe, that I remember tormented our Pascoli very much. Ultimately, I would like, according to a pre-established plan, to occupy myself intensely and systematically with some topic that absorbs me and centralizes my interior life (1996: 55).<sup>3</sup>

Let us note some of the uses made by Gramsci of the expression *für ewig* — "for ever". The first thing to note is that Gramsci proposes a plan of study and work as a mode of psychological and moral resistance. That is, the act of writing itself found in the *Quaderni* is a form of personal and 'molecular' resistance to his personal deterioration within prison, again deterioration which is not only related to his physical health but also to his moral capacity including as recently remembered by Fernández Buey (2001: 168), his problematic communication with Giulia.

Second, the *für ewig* means for Gramsci a perspective which partakes of a greater degree of objectivity and permanence than his pre-prison writings, for example, in great part dedicated to the polemics of the everyday and to necessities dictated by the active militancy in the party. A 'disinterested' perspective he will state in the letter of 19 March 1927 to refer to this degree of relative objectivity, to this greater sense of permanence to his writings in prison. Even taking into account the criticism made by Aldo Natoli (1997:

---

<sup>3</sup> The author is responsible for all the translations from the Italian.

XXII-XXIII) in his introduction to Gramsci and Tatiana's correspondence to the effect that the emphasis on the expression *für ewig* has been overplayed, there is no doubt of the qualitative difference between the writing found in the *Quaderni* and the one found in his pre-prison writings. The *Quaderni* were certainly not 'disinterested' maybe in a literal sense, but what it suggests is a greater degree of objectivity and analytical autonomy.

Third, as commented by Gerratana (1975: XVII) and again recently by Fernández Buey (2001: 149-150), and very important to our present subject of Gramsci's tragic writing, this *für ewig* expresses implicitly Gramsci's own thoughts on his mortality and also expresses his self-consciousness of the real possibility of his death in prison. As Fernández Buey (2001: 150fn) includes in a footnote of his *Leyendo a Gramsci*, in the *Canti de Castelvecchio*, the text to which Gramsci makes reference to in his letter, Pascoli writes: "You are a girl and you do not know what *for ever* means. *For ever* means dying...". Thus, from very early on, even prior to his grave health crises, Gramsci knows himself to be facing the very real possibility of his death.

In the prison letters, Gramsci's writing turns particularly tragic in specific moments. For example, some of his letters of February of 1933 to his sister-in-law Tatiana are really gut-wrenching in that they include Gramsci's reflections on his overall general degeneration and also in which he accuses even Giulia as one of his condemners. Thus we see in a letter of 27 February 1933, in a reaction to Giulia's scarce communication, Gramsci (1996: 690) writes:

What has condemned me is an organism much vaster, of which the Special Tribunal has been but the external and material indication that has composed the legal act of the sentence. I should say that even Giulia has been among these "condemners", I think, even more, I'm firmly persuaded, if unconsciously, and there are a series of people less unconsciously.

Probably, and very bitterly, Gramsci was referring to the possible harassment Giulia might have been experiencing in her home in Moscow, from her family and particularly according to Gramsci from her sister Eugenia, who was a functionary of the Soviet government and did not think much of Gramsci. True or not, Gramsci thought this was part of the reasons for not having an effective communication with Giulia, condemning Gramsci to further isolation and loneliness. In summary, the reader can trace Gramsci's progressive physical and moral deterioration throughout the letters.

Now, Gramsci's tragic writing does not limit itself to the prison letters. In spite of Gramsci's attempt to give his writings in the *Quaderni* a greater objective quality, 'for eternity', these do not achieve to evade the tragic mode completely. The various reflections over life in prison found in the *Quaderni*, as well as the repetition of the motto 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will', point to how Gramsci's real personal tragedy broke the intended *für ewig* character of the notebooks.

With this in mind, the weight in the motto lies on the part of the 'pessimism of the intellect'. In contrast to that pessimism of the strong and of the plenty of which Nietzsche talks about in his *The Birth of Tragedy*, Gramsci's pessimism of the intellect points to the realistic pessimism of the momentarily vanquished, of the subaltern. It is an intelligent

pessimism that, although conscious of the present condition of subalternity, knows that history is an open-ended process, a constant correlation of forces, of hegemonies and counter-hegemonies, and that it cannot have a final conclusion. That is, it is a pessimism of the intellect which does not renounce but claims an optimism of the will.

Gramsci maintains an optimism of the will, although in the minimal form in which it can be exercised in defeat. It is in this militant, though realist, sense that in one of his worst moments in terms of personal health in 1932 Gramsci writes on the necessity of knowing how to be “the manure [*concio*] of history”. In notebook 9 Gramsci (1975: 1128) writes: Before everybody wanted to be ploughmen of history, to have active roles, each one to have an active role. Nobody wanted to be the “manure” of history. But, can one plough the earth without first fertilizing it? Thus, there has to be the ploughman and the “manure”. [...] Something has changed, because there is he who adapts “philosophically” to being “manure”, who knows he should be it, and adapts.

The expression “manure of history” is pregnant with meaning. On the one hand it expresses the clear recognition of present political defeat, thus we have to realize that it is not time to unrealistically try to act as full ploughmen but as manure. On the other hand, as ‘manure’, we should not renounce, even in defeat, our ethico-political duty to fertilize the social terrain for better conditions of political possibility in the future. For Fernández Buey (2001: 204), this note expresses the transition of politics to the critique of politics, that is, from politics to pedagogy. Moreover, this note shows again the overflow of Gramsci’s personal and political tragedy into his notebooks, and this conflates itself with the tragedy of general defeat of the international communist movement during these times. It is in this sense that Gramsci (1975: 1128) adds, “It’s like the question of the man about to die, as they say”, yet as he observes:

But there is one great difference, because just before dying one is in a decisive act that lasts for an instant; instead, regarding the question of the manure, this affair lasts a long time, and is presented once again in each moment. We live only once, as they say; one’s own personality is irreplaceable.

The comparison is tragic: to contribute to fertilize for a future struggle conscious of the present impotence and mortality. In this sense, the work in the *Quaderni* becomes a tragic but also a heroic effort, since Gramsci writes in prison with the perspective of wanting to contribute to this pre-political pedagogy while at the same time being uncertain as to whether his work will ever be read. That is also why the *Quaderni* are an open work, since it intends to open up a dialogue without knowing if there is going to be somebody on the other side of that dialogue. It is a body of work that in a sense – besides its obvious incomplete and fragmentary nature – can only be completed with the work of an active interpretation, or better still, with the work of an active political interpretation.

## Conclusion

Gramsci was one of those political theorists who lived in a particular historical moment in which ‘the old was dying but the new was yet to be born’. As such, he was in a position of having to necessarily rethink new social and political realities in great measure with concepts inherited from the past but reworking them in the present in order to think about new articulations for a political project for the future. Past and present, and

future. Those who wish and struggle for a better present recognize in Gramsci's tragic yet untamed writing the expression of his own tragedy, and see in his defeat our own. In his prison writings, the tragedy of Gramsci the man is fused and confused with the general tragedy of the subaltern. This is one of the reasons why personal motives and feelings break into the *Quaderni* and their supposed *für ewig* character. Have we learned ourselves to know how to be 'the manure of history'? Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.

### **References**

- Fernández Buey, Francisco. 2001. *Leyendo a Gramsci*. Barcelona: El Viejo Topo.
- Gerratana, Valentino. 1975. Preface, in A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, 4 vols. Turin: Einaudi.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1975. *Quaderni del carcere*. 4 vols. ed. V. Gerratana. Turin: Einaudi.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. *Lettere dal carcere*. 2 vols. ed. A. Santucci. Palermo: Sellerio.
- Natoli, Aldo. 1997. Introduction, in A. Gramsci and T. Schuch, *Lettere 1926-1935*. Turin: Einaudi.
- Spriano, Paolo. 1979. *Antonio Gramsci and the Party. The Prison Years*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.



2010

## The history of the subaltern groups: Rome and the Middle Ages in Italy

Camilla Bellina  
*Università di Bologna, Italy*

Erica Bianchi  
*Università di Bologna, Italy*

Derek Boothman  
*Università di Bologna, Italy*

Monica D'Alessandro  
*Università di Bologna, Italy*

Adriano Ferraresi  
*Università di Bologna, Italy*

*See next page for additional authors*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci>

---

### Recommended Citation

Bellina, Camilla; Bianchi, Erica; Boothman, Derek; D'Alessandro, Monica; Ferraresi, Adriano; Foschi, Maria Lucia; Guerrieri, Manuel; Locatelli, Marco; Malaguti, Luna; Palmeri, Frederica; Romolo, Angela; and Tassinari, Caterina, The history of the subaltern groups: Rome and the Middle Ages in Italy, *International Gramsci Journal*, 1(2), 2010, 14-20.  
Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci/vol1/iss2/4>

---

## The history of the subaltern groups: Rome and the Middle Ages in Italy

### Abstract

Given the international interest, debate and controversy on questions of the subaltern classes and of relationships of hegemony, it has been thought useful to present here a number of sections (conventionally called paragraphs) from the Prison Notebooks that are as yet awaiting publication in an English translation. They will of course come out in Joseph Buttigieg's ongoing project of the translation in their entirety of the Gerratana edition of the Notebooks, and publication of some of Gramsci's first drafts of the pieces here included are imminent. In other cases, however, the first drafts by Gramsci, especially the paragraphs discussing Ettore Ciccotti's articles, have actually been published in the second volume of the Buttigieg edition,<sup>1</sup> not to mention of course editions in languages other than English. Apart from Gramsci's general discussion of the emergence of the subaltern classes and their struggle for recognition and even some sort of hegemony, what readers may find of further interest is the way in which he reworks and elaborates his arguments either in detail or at the level of what often appear relatively minor specifications.

### Authors

Camilla Bellina, Erica Bianchi, Derek Boothman, Monica D'Alessandro, Adriano Ferraresi, Maria Lucia Foschi, Manuel Guerrieri, Marco Locatelli, Luna Malaguti, Frederica Palmeri, Angela Romolo, and Caterina Tassinari

## **The history of the subaltern groups: Rome and the Middle Ages in Italy**

Camilla Bellini, Erica Bianchi, Derek Boothman,\* Monica D'Alessandro, Adriano Ferraresi,  
Maria Lucia Foschi, Manuel Guerrieri, Marco Locatelli, Luna Malaguti,  
Federica Palmieri, Angela Romolo, Caterina Tassinari.

**Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori  
(Università di Bologna), corso della Repubblica 136, 47100 Forlì, Italy**

\* Address for communication boothman@sslmit.unibo.it

### **Introduction**

Given the international interest, debate and controversy on questions of the subaltern classes and of relationships of hegemony, it has been thought useful to present here a number of sections (conventionally called paragraphs) from the *Prison Notebooks* that are as yet awaiting publication in an English translation. They will of course come out in Joseph Buttigieg's ongoing project of the translation in their entirety of the Gerratana edition of the Notebooks, and publication of some of Gramsci's first drafts of the pieces here included are imminent. In other cases, however, the first drafts by Gramsci, especially the paragraphs discussing Ettore Ciccotti's articles, have actually been published in the second volume of the Buttigieg edition,<sup>1</sup> not to mention of course editions in languages other than English. Apart from Gramsci's general discussion of the emergence of the subaltern classes and their struggle for recognition and even some sort of hegemony, what readers may find of further interest is the way in which he reworks and elaborates his arguments either in detail or at the level of what often appear relatively minor specifications.

The translated texts we present here are the result of a translation workshop coordinated by Derek Boothman at the Advanced School of Modern Languages for Interpreters and Translators (SSLMIT) at the Forlì campus of the University of Bologna, as part of the requirements for a first year course for a Master's degree in translation. To the best of our knowledge, the texts have not yet been translated. Since they are taken from different *Notebooks* and do not follow a chronological order of writing, other criteria have been established to present them.

After a methodological preface (see below), the other paragraphs chosen represent a reflection on different historical periods in Italy. The discussion deals with the question of the presence and role of intellectuals in Rome and their historical importance for the peninsula, commenting marginally on what the term "Italy" actually has meant historically. It then moves on to comment more in general on the notion of "Great Power" and the importance of catholic Christianity in strengthening the nation. Different social groups are taken into consideration, from the highest level of the social hierarchy, such as intellectuals — with reference to their role in ancient times — to subaltern social groups, that is to say slaves (in Rome), the "people", and the "commoners" of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

As noted above, the historical paragraphs are preceded by two methodological comments from the short but highly important Notebook 25, one of the last (mid to late 1934) that Gramsci was able to write, and entitled by him "*Ai margini della storia. (Storia dei gruppi sociali subalterni)*" ["On the margins of history. (History of the subaltern social groups)"]. One paragraph (Notebook 25, paragraph 5: Q25§5), dealing with the importance of the subaltern social groups and classes and

---

<sup>1</sup> Antonio Gramsci. *Prison Notebooks* (1996). New York: Columbia University Press, Vol. II, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg.

consequentially of the need to study them, is specific to the subject matter here, while the other (Q25§2), of a more general nature, is available in a first draft (Q3§14) in Vol. II of Buttigieg's edition.<sup>2</sup> The reason for including here the alternative, later, version is that, in a few extra lines, it adds considerably to the original,<sup>3</sup> by comparing the version here and Joseph Buttigieg's translation, one sees how Gramsci re-thought, re-worked and enriched his notes. A couple of additional things should be noted about Q25§2. This final version uses the wording "subaltern social groups" (for purposes either of generalization or to avoid censorship problems) instead of the earlier "subaltern classes" (as also does Q25§4, see below), and the "dominant class" of the original version is replaced by "dominant groups" in Q25§2. The heading is likewise modified from Gramsci's original "History of the dominant class and history of the subaltern classes" to his more general "Methodological criteria". As regards the relatively long Q25§4 and its first drafts, Q3§16 and Q3§18, there are two significant differences and one added sentence, all commented in the footnotes, but the rest is almost word-for-word the same, except for an added final part of the Q25 version, summarised in a footnote. Square brackets in the translations indicate translators' glosses and other interventions, whereas angled brackets are used to indicate later additions that Gramsci made to his own notes.

## The Translated Texts

### Q25§2

#### *Methodological Criteria.*

The history of the subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. It is undoubtedly the case that in the historical activity of these classes there is a tendency toward unification albeit in the provisional stages, but this tendency is continually broken up through the initiative of the dominant groups, and therefore can be demonstrated only at the termination of a historical cycle, if this cycle ends in success. The subaltern groups are subject to the initiative of the dominant groups, even when they rebel and are in revolt; only "permanent" victory breaks their subordination,<sup>4</sup> and this does not happen immediately. In actual fact, even when they seem to be triumphant, the subaltern groups are only in a state of anxious defense (this truth may be demonstrated by the example of the French Revolution at least up until 1830). Every trace of autonomous initiative is therefore of inestimable value for the integral historian; the consequence is thus such a history may be dealt with only by monographs and that every monograph requires a very large accumulation of materials often difficult to assemble.

### Q25§5

#### *Methodological Criteria.*

The historical unity of the leading classes comes about in the State and their history is essentially the history of States and of groups of States. But one must not believe that this unity is

<sup>2</sup> Of the other paragraphs in Notebook 25, not included here, the justly famous one on David Lazzaretti and his sect-cum-movement (Q25§1) is in *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1996), edited and trans. by Derek Boothman, London: Lawrence and Wishart and Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, pp. 50-55 while Q25§3 is a mere bibliographical reference and the final paragraph (Q25§6) deals with the positivist criminologist Cesare Lombroso.

<sup>3</sup> Q25§4, which we also include here, is on the other hand to all intents and purposes the same as its first draft, Q3§16, except for a small but significant addition in the final version of one phrase (see the text and footnote 12).

<sup>4</sup> The noun "*subordinazione*" ("subordination") occurs 21 times in the Notebooks, while "*subalternità*" ("subalternity") occurs just once. Doubt might therefore be expressed about whether apparently equivalent concepts such as "subordinate" and "subaltern" in Gramsci are in fact synonymous; against this, the situation as regards the corresponding adjectives is far less asymmetrical. In contrast to the conditions of being subaltern/subordinate the nouns "*egemonia*"/"*egemonie*" ("hegemony"/"hegemonies") occur 287 times for the singular and 10 times for the plural. The fundamental asymmetry between hegemony (exercised) and subalternity (undergone) is thus reflected even at the linguistic level.

purely juridical and political, even though this form of unity has its importance and is not merely formal in nature: the basic historical unity, through its concrete nature, is the result of the organic relationships between State or political society and “civil society”. The subaltern classes by definition are not unified and cannot unify until they become a “State”; their history is therefore interwoven with civil society, it is a “disaggregated” and discontinuous function of the history of civil society and, by way of this, of the history of States and of groups of States. One must therefore study: 1) the objective formation of the subaltern social groups, through the development and upheavals that take place in the world of economic production, their quantitative expansion and their origin in pre-existing social groups, whose mentality, ideology and goals for a certain length of time they continue to conserve; 2) their active or passive adherence to the dominant political formations, the attempts to influence the programs of these formations in order to impose their own demands and the consequences that these attempts have in determining the processes of decomposition and renewal or of giving rise to a new formation; 3) the birth of new parties of the dominant groups in order to maintain the consent of and control over the subaltern groups; 4) the formation itself of the subaltern groups for demands of a restricted and partial nature; 5) the new formations that assert the autonomy of the subaltern groups albeit within the old frameworks; 6) the formations that assert integral autonomy etc.

Q8§22. *History of the intellectuals. Points for research.*

Plato's *Republic*. When it is said that Plato favoured a “republic of philosophers”, the term philosophers should be interpreted “historically”, that is to say it should be translated “intellectuals” (obviously Plato referred to the “great intellectuals”, who were moreover the type of intellectuals of his time, besides giving importance to the specific content of intellectuality, which in concrete terms could be called “religiosity”: in other words the intellectuals in government were those closest to religion, whose activity had a religious character, which is to be meant both in its general meaning of that time and in Plato's special meaning, and thus, in a certain sense, a “social” activity of elevation and education of the polis <and of intellectual direction, and therefore of a hegemonic function> of the polis). It might therefore be argued that Plato's “utopia” is a forerunner of Medieval feudalism, with the function that in that system is performed by the Church and the ecclesiastics, who represented the intellectual category during that phase of socio-historical development. Plato's aversion to “artists” is thus to be understood as an aversion to “individualistic” spiritual activities which tend to the “particular” and are thus “a-religious” and “a-social”.

*The intellectuals in the Roman Empire*. The mutation in the condition of the social position of the intellectuals in Rome from the time of the Republic to the Empire (from an aristocratic-corporate regime to a democratic-bureaucratic one), is linked to Caesar who granted citizenship to physicians and teachers of the liberal arts to encourage them to be more willing to live in Rome and to persuade others to come there: *Omnesque medicinam Romae professos et liberalium artium doctores, quo libentius et ipsi urbem incoherent et coeteri appeterent civitate donavit* [“He conferred citizenship on all who practised medicine in Rome, and on all teachers of the liberal arts, to make them more desirous of living in the city and to induce others to resort to it”]: Suetonius, *Life of Caesar*, XLII.<sup>5</sup> Caesar therefore proposed: 1) to have the intellectuals who already lived in Rome settle there, in order to create a permanent category of intellectuals, as without their permanence no cultural organization could be created. Prior to this, there must have been a fluctuation which had to be stopped etc.; 2) to attract to Rome the best intellectuals of the entire Roman Empire, thus promoting a centralisation of great importance. This is how the category of

---

<sup>5</sup> The English is quoted from Suetonius's *The Lives of the Caesars, Book I. The Deified Julius*, Vol. 1. London and Cambridge (Mass.): Heinemann (Loeb Classical Library), 1964 (first published 1913), paragraph XLII, p.58 and 59 for the original and translation respectively. Different editions of the Latin text may give different spellings of a number of words, according to whether the quotation is reproduced in classical, or in late, Latin.

“imperial” intellectuals was created in Rome, which was to be continued in the catholic clergy and to leave many traces in the entire history of Italian intellectuals, with their characteristic “cosmopolitanism”, up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Q13§15.

In the notion of great power, we have also to consider the element of “internal calm”, meaning the degree and intensity of the hegemonic function of the leading social group (This element is to be sought when assessing the power of each single State, but it gains even more importance when considering the great powers. Nor is it necessary to recall the history of Ancient Rome and its internecine struggles which did not stop its victorious expansion, etc. In addition to the other differential elements, suffice it to consider this factor: Rome was the only great power of the time and, after the destruction of Carthage, it had no need to fear the competition of powerful rivals). Thus, it could be said that the stronger the police apparatus, the weaker the army, and that the weaker (i.e. relatively useless) the police, the stronger the army (when faced with the prospect of an international conflict).

Q25§4. *Some general notes on the historical development of the subaltern social groups in the Middle Ages and in Rome.*

In the essay by Ettore Ciccotti *Elementi di “verità” e di “certezza” nella tradizione storica romana* [“Elements of ‘truth’ and ‘certainty’ in Roman historical tradition”]<sup>6</sup> (in the volume *Confronti storici* [Historical comparisons]) there are a number of comments on the historical development of the popular classes in the Italian Communes,<sup>7</sup> which are particularly noteworthy and deserve a separate treatment. The wars among the rival Communes and consequently the necessity to recruit a more vigorous and numerous military force by arming the greatest number possible, gave the commoners [*popolani*]<sup>8</sup> consciousness of their power and at the same time these factors consolidated the commoners’ ranks (in functioning as a stimulus to the compact and united, solidaristic formation of group and party). The combatants stayed united even in peace, both to make their services available and, subsequently, with increasing solidarity, for purposes of particular utility. The characteristics of their union and the way in which they were constituted emerge from the statutes of the “*Società d’armi*” [“Armed Societies”], which developed in Bologna, as it seems, around 1230. Towards the middle of the XIII century there were already twenty-four such societies, distributed according to the city district where their members lived (the components). In addition to their political duty of external defense of the Commune, their purpose was to assure every commoner the necessary protection against the aggressions of the nobles and the powerful. The chapters of their statutes – for example the one of the “*Società detta dei Leoni*” [“the so-called Lions’ Society”] — have as their heading titles such as: «*De adiutorio dando hominibus dicte societatis...*» [“On the aid to be given to the men of this society ...”]; «*Quod molestati iniuste debeant adiuvari ab hominibus dicte societatis*» [“Regarding their unjust treatment, aid should be given to the men of this society ...”]. And in addition to civil and social

<sup>6</sup> The distinction between the true and the certain comes from Vico: truth “is the object of knowledge (*scienza*) since it is universal and eternal, whereas [the certain], related as it is to human consciousness (*coscienza*), is particular and individuated. This produces two pairs of terms – *il vero/scienza* and *il certo/coscienza* – which constitute, in turn, the explananda of philosophy and philology (‘history’ broadly conceived), respectively. As Vico says, ‘philosophy contemplates reason, whence comes knowledge of the true; philology observes that of which human choice is author, whence comes consciousness of the certain’ (Element X, §138, p.63)” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/vico/>).

<sup>7</sup> Between “Commune” and “city state”, as readers will probably be aware, there is no difference; for consistency we have chosen “Commune”.

<sup>8</sup> Here we follow Joseph Buttigieg in choosing “commoners” as a translation of “*popolani*” since just “people”, as found, for instance, in some translations of Machiavelli’s *History of Florence* seems too generic for Gramsci’s conceptual terms. One must then examine the specific situation to see how far “down” in the social structure the “*popolani*” stretch – artisan companies or lower.

sanctions, as well as the oath, a religious sanction was also added, implying a common hearing of the mass and celebrating the divine offices, while other common duties, shared by pious confraternities,<sup>9</sup> such as assisting poor members, burying the dead etc., made the union more and more long-lasting and closely-bound. As far as the functions themselves of the societies were concerned, official positions and councils were formed – in Bologna, for example, there were four or eight «*ministeriales*» modelled on the Orders of the *Società delle Arti*<sup>10</sup> or on the more ancient ones of the Commune – that eventually assumed a value beyond the terms of the society and found their place in the constitution of the Commune.

Originally, *milites* on a par with *pedites*, nobles and commoners, although the former were less numerous, entered these societies. But gradually the *milites*, that is the nobility, tended to move away from them, as happened in Siena, or, sometimes, they could be expelled from them, as happened in 1270 in Bologna. As the movement for emancipation gained ground, going beyond the limits and form of these societies, the popular element demanded to take part in the most important public offices and succeeded in so doing. The people organized themselves more and more into an actual political party and, in order to make its action more efficient and more centralized, designated a leader, the «*Capitano del popolo*»,<sup>11</sup> an office that it seems Siena established following the model of Pisa, and that in its name just as in its role, revealed both its military and its political origins and functions. The people who had already at times, albeit sporadically, armed themselves<sup>12</sup> and had constituted themselves as a people and taken their own separate decisions, constituted themselves as an autonomous body with even the power of legislating for themselves. They had their own bell for convening meetings “*cum campana Communis non bene audiat*” [“the bell of the Commune not being well heard”].<sup>13</sup> They came into conflict with the Podestà,<sup>14</sup> whose right to make proclamations they contested and with whom the *capitano del popolo* stipulated “peace treaties”. When the people did not manage to obtain the desired reforms from the Communal authorities, they declared their secession, supported by some of the leading figures of the Commune. After setting up an independent assembly, they started creating their own magistracies, modelled on the general ones of the Commune. Moreover they gave jurisdictional powers to the *capitano del popolo*, and deliberated through his authority, and so in this way (as from 1255) a whole new legislative process was initiated. (These data come from the Commune of Siena.) The people succeeded, first in practice and then even formally, in having introduced into the General Statutes of the Commune, their dispositions which before were of internal use only in order to bind the formally registered members to the “People”. As a result, the people obtained control of the Commune, overcoming and overturning the previous ruling class, as happened in Siena after 1270, in Bologna with the “Sacred” and “Most Sacred” Orders, and in Florence with the “Orders of justice” (in Siena Provenzan Salvani was a noble who became the people’s leader.)

---

<sup>9</sup> “A society of body of men united for some purpose, or in some profession; a brotherhood”.

<http://www.hyperdictionary.com/dictionary/confraternity>.

<sup>10</sup> The *Società delle Arti* were born spontaneously and freely on the initiative of traders and craftsmen with the aim of protecting their own interests and establishing prices and wages. <http://kidslink.bo.cnr.it/francia/3canali/seta/arti.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> In the medieval Communes, the government of the people was born in opposition to the oligarchy of the nobles and had the *Capitano del popolo* as its leader. <http://www.educational.rai.it/lemma/testi/cultura/popolo.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> The introduction of this phrase about the people arming itself is the only modification up to this point as compared with the first draft (Q3§16), which makes no mention at this point of bearing arms.

<sup>13</sup> The Latin is not without ambiguity and the translation suggested here is obviously to be understood figuratively, meaning the people had no wish to follow the decisions and dictates of the Commune.

<sup>14</sup> The Podestà was the executive officer who held full and complete administrative powers on a temporary basis.

Typically an educated citizen or noble brought from another city as a temporary substitute for the civic consultative assemblies during times of crisis, many were highly effective civic administrators that moved from town to town as their services were required.

Apart from those deriving from the impossibility of verifying the truth of “personal” episodes, such as that of Tanaquilla etc.,<sup>15</sup> most of the problems related to the history of Rome that Ciccotti analyses in his above-mentioned study refer to events and institutions of subaltern groups (tribune of the plebs, etc.). The method based on “analogy” theorized and argued by Ciccotti, therefore, can give us only some “indirect” results: the subaltern groups do not have political autonomy and their defensive initiatives are constrained by their own laws of necessity which are simpler,<sup>16</sup> more limited and politically more restrictive than those laws of historical necessity that lead and influence the initiatives of the dominant class. The subaltern groups often turn out to belong originally to a different race (another culture and another religion) from the dominant ones, and are often a mixture of different races, as in the case of the slaves.<sup>17</sup> The question of the importance of women in the history of Rome is similar to that of the subaltern groups, but with some differences: male supremacy can only in a certain sense be compared with the rule of a class and is, therefore, more important in the history of customs rather than in political and social history. [...]<sup>18</sup>

Q19§1. [Q19 is widely known as the Notebook on *The Italian Risorgimento*, but the heading is editorial, not that of Gramsci, who left it without a title, as he also did for its first paragraph.]

A double series of researches: one on the era of the Risorgimento and a second one regarding the preceding history that took place in the Italian peninsula, in that it produced the cultural elements that had their repercussion on the Risorgimento (both positive and negative repercussions) and still continue to function (albeit only as ideological elements of propaganda) even in Italian national life as it has been shaped by the Risorgimento itself. This second research should consist of a series of essays about the periods of European and world history that have had an affect on the peninsula. For example:

1) The different meanings of the word “Italy” throughout the different periods, inspired by the well-known essay by Prof. Carlo Cipolla (which should be completed and updated).

2) The period in Roman history which marks the shift from the Republic towards the Empire, in that it created the general framework of a number of ideological tendencies of the future Italian nation. It appears not to be clearly understood that it was actually Caesar and Augustus who actually changed radically the relative position of Rome and of the peninsula in the equilibrium of the classical world, taking “territorial” hegemony away from Italy and shifting power towards an “imperial”, in other words a supranational, class. And if it is true that Caesar continued and completed the democratic movement of the Gracchi, Marius and Catiline, it is also true that he won

---

<sup>15</sup> Tanaquilla was the wife of Lucius Tarquinius Priscus, one of the Etruscan kings of Rome, and instrumental, it seems, in first encouraging him to aim at obtaining the kingship and then, after his death, ensuring that his son succeeded him; thus, for the first time, the Senate was by-passed in the institutional process.

<sup>16</sup> Gramsci seems to have had second thoughts here, since he changes his view from “more complex” to “simpler” laws in going from the first to the final draft. The next sentence, about subaltern groups often being of “another race” and culture appears in the final draft but not the initial one.

<sup>17</sup> A couple of paragraphs after the present one, i.e. in Q25§6, Gramsci says that the Roman Senate voted down a proposal to have slaves wear a uniform, since they would then begin to recognize themselves as such and thus be conscious of their numerical and hence potentially political strength (Seneca, *De clem.*, I, 24 and Tacitus, *Annali*, 4, 27). In a somewhat abbreviated form Q25§6 appears as Q3§98 and Q3§99, translated by J.A. Buttigieg, op. cit. pp. 95-6.

<sup>18</sup> The paragraph continues, but changes subject somewhat and deals with the dangers inherent in the method of arguing by historical analogy, going on more to discuss States, from which the slaves (and non-slave proletarians) in the classical (Western) world were excluded socio-politically, as were classes such as proletarians, glebe serfs and peasants in the mediaeval world. In the revolt of the Ciompi (wool carders) in mediaeval Florence, the demand they made to be assumed into the government of the Commune could not have been made for example by Spartacus in the slaves’ revolt in Rome. At this point, Gramsci goes into a brief discussion of social alliances between proletarians and “people”, or the people supporting the dictatorship of a Prince, completely different once again from anything that could have happened in the case of slaves in the classical world. He concludes with the words “the contemporary dictatorships abolish legally even these new forms of autonomy [of the subaltern classes] and attempt to incorporate them into state activity: the legal concentration of the whole of the life of the nation in the hands of the dominant group becomes ‘totalitarian’”.



because the problem that for Gracchi, for Marius and for Catiline was posed as one to be solved in the peninsula, in Rome, was posed by Caesar in the framework of the entire empire, of which the peninsula was one part and Rome its “bureaucratic” capital; and this was true only to a certain extent. This historical nexus is of the greatest importance for the history of the peninsula and of Rome since it is the beginning of their process of “denationalization” and of their becoming a “cosmopolitan terrain”. The Roman aristocracy which had unified the peninsula in the ways and with the means appropriate to the period, and created the basis for a national development, was overwhelmed by the imperial power and the problem that the aristocracy itself had created. The politico-historical knot was cut by Caesar with the sword and a new age began, in which the East had such a great weight that in the end it overwhelmed the West and brought about a rupture between the two parts of the Empire.

3) The Middle Ages, or Age of the Communes, when new social groups were formed molecularly in the cities without this process, however, reaching <in Italy> the highest phase of incubation such as it did in France, in Spain etc.

4) The age of mercantilism and of the absolute monarchies. In Italy the manifestations of this were of little national importance, as the country was under foreign influence. In the great European countries, instead, the new social groups in the cities, by entering powerfully into the national structure characterised by a unitary tendency, reinforced the structure itself and the Unitarian process. They also introduced a new equilibrium among the social forces and the conditions for a rapidly progressive development were created.

These essays must be conceived for a given public, with the aim of destroying antiquated, scholastic and rhetorical concepts, which have been passively absorbed from the prevailing ideas in a certain environment of popular<sup>19</sup> culture. They have, then, the task of arousing scientific interest in the issues treated, which will therefore be presented as living questions that also operate in the present, as forces in movement that are always actual.

---

## Acknowledgements

The translators would like to thank two members of the teaching staff, Dr Francesca Gatta and Dr Francesco Giardinazzo for advice on Latin expressions in the texts.

---

<sup>19</sup> The adjective here is “*popolaresca*” not the normal “*popolare*”; it tends more than “*popolare*” to convey an atmosphere of non-self reflecting culture, tending almost to a “folkloristic” approach.

2010

## Croce, Gentile e Gramsci sulla traduzione [Italian]

Domenico Jervolino  
*Università di Napoli, Italy*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci>

---

### Recommended Citation

Jervolino, Domenico, Croce, Gentile e Gramsci sulla traduzione [Italian], *International Gramsci Journal*, 1(2), 2010, 21-28.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci/vol1/iss2/5>

---

## Croce, Gentile e Gramsci sulla traduzione [Italian]

### Abstract

L'attività del tradurre è tanto antica quanto la storia della civiltà umana nel suo complesso, ma il tema della traduzione solo nella seconda metà del secolo ventesimo è diventato oggetto di una disciplina specifica, secondo alcuni, o meglio di un ampio campo di studi interdisciplinari, dalla linguistica alla semiotica, dalla critica letteraria alla letteratura comparata, alla stessa filosofia in anni più recenti, sino al punto che si è potuto parlare di un *tournant philosophique de la traduction* da parte di uno dei primi studiosi di traduzione in Francia<sup>1</sup>. Comunque, una volta impostosi a vario titolo il tema della traduzione nella cultura contemporanea, è stato naturale guardarsi indietro e cercare di delineare una storia delle idee sulla traduzione nel passato remoto e prossimo, trovando in questo modo precursori o antenati illustri, anche se spesso il loro contributo si è limitato a frammenti o ad opinioni espresse in margine ad opere dedicate ad altri argomenti, oppure come chiose dei propri lavori di traduzione.

## ***Croce, Gentile e Gramsci sulla traduzione***

Domenico Jervolino (Università di Napoli)

**in *Croce filosofo*, a cura di G. Cacciatore, G. Cotroneo, R. Viti Cavaliere,  
2 voll., Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli 2003 (ma 2005), vol. 2, pp. 431-441.**

L'attività del tradurre è tanto antica quanto la storia della civiltà umana nel suo complesso, ma il tema della traduzione solo nella seconda metà del secolo ventesimo è diventato oggetto di una disciplina specifica, secondo alcuni, o meglio di un ampio campo di studi interdisciplinari, dalla linguistica alla semiotica, dalla critica letteraria alla letteratura comparata, alla stessa filosofia in anni più recenti, sino al punto che si è potuto parlare di un *tournant philosophique de la traduction* da parte di uno dei primi studiosi di traduzione in Francia<sup>1</sup>. Comunque, una volta impostosi a vario titolo il tema della traduzione nella cultura contemporanea, è stato naturale guardarsi indietro e cercare di delineare una storia delle idee sulla traduzione nel passato remoto e prossimo, trovando in questo modo precursori o antenati illustri, anche se spesso il loro contributo si è limitato a frammenti o ad opinioni espresse in margine ad opere dedicate ad altri argomenti, oppure come chiose dei propri lavori di traduzione.

Questa storia che, per quel che riguarda la civiltà occidentale, parte almeno dagli antichi Romani, più attenti dei Greci alla necessità e all'importanza del tradurre, giunge fino al primo Novecento, alla vigilia dell'esplosione del tema della traduzione, di cui abbiamo fatto cenno. Esso coinvolge con brevi scritti, ma in modo significativo, i due maggiori filosofi "ufficiali" del periodo, i due dioscuri del neoidealismo italiano, Croce e Gentile, ma in un modo tutto particolare anche quel filosofo di genere molto speciale, che divenne tale operando in un contesto del tutto eccezionale, nell'accademia delle lotte politiche e delle patrie galere, cioè Antonio Gramsci.

1. Croce appartiene a quel ristretto numero di personalità che abbiano detto qualcosa di rilevante sulla traduzione nel periodo che precede gli studi contemporanei, secondo l'autore di uno dei libri più significativi e fortunati sul tema pubblicati nella seconda metà del secolo, George Steiner<sup>2</sup>. Quest'ultimo distingue un primo, lungo periodo che va dagli Antichi fino ai primi dell'Ottocento, caratterizzato da un approccio sostanzialmente empirico al problema della traduzione, da un secondo che va da Schleiermacher fino alla metà del Novecento, dove le considerazioni sulla traduzione sono inserite in un contesto più ampio di idee sul linguaggio e l'interpretazione.

Il tema con cui Croce è entrato con forza nella galleria degli antenati illustri della fase attuale (che costituirebbe per Steiner un terzo periodo) è quello della *intraducibilità* (che come i lettori dell'opera di Steiner sanno, è addirittura citata in italiano) delle opere d'arte. L'"intraducibile" è del resto un elemento dialettico che appartiene di diritto al campo della teoria della traduzione.

L'intraducibilità di principio delle opere d'arte è una tesi ben nota della *Estetica* crociana, che sviluppa la concezione dell'arte come intuizione-espressione, attività teoretica peculiare dello spirito distinta da quella logica (e in quanto gradino inferiore della attività conoscitiva, distinta, insieme alla logica, dalla pratica, a sua volta articolata in economica ed etica).

---

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. J.-R. Ladmiral, *Traduire. Théorèmes pour la traduction*, Gallimard, Paris 1994<sup>2</sup>, p. XIII.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. G. Steiner, *Dopo Babele*, tr. it. di R. Bianchi e C. Béguin, Garzanti, Milano 1994<sup>2</sup>, p. 288.

L'intuizione-espressione artistica è irripetibile nella sua creatività ogni volta rinnovata. "Ogni vera intuizione o rappresentazione è, insieme, espressione. Ciò che non si oggettiva in un'espressione non è intuizione o rappresentazione, ma sensazione e naturalità. Lo spirito non intuisce se non facendo, formando, esprimendo. Chi separa intuizione da espressione, non riesce mai più a congiungerle"<sup>3</sup>. Il fatto estetico, in quanto tale, esaurendosi tutto nell'elaborazione espressiva delle impressioni, non ha nulla a che fare con qualsiasi elemento pratico, sino al punto che diventa qualcosa di inessenziale anche l'esteriorizzazione in un'opera sussistente nel mondo materiale (quadro, statua ecc.) di ciò che è interiormente intuito.

Peraltro, l'espressione non è divisibile in modi o gradi. Tutto il patrimonio tradizionale delle partizioni retoriche viene in questo modo relegato nel campo di ciò che è privo di valore dal punto di vista di un'estetica filosofica. "I singoli fatti espressivi sono altrettanti individui, l'uno non ragguagliabile con l'altro, se non nella comune qualità di espressione. Per adoperare il linguaggio delle scuole, l'espressione è una specie che non può fungere a sua volta da genere. Variano le impressioni ossia i contenuti; ogni contenuto è diverso da ogni altro, perché niente si ripete nella vita; e al variare continuo dei contenuti corrisponde la varietà irriducibile delle forme espressive, sintesi estetiche delle impressioni"<sup>4</sup>. Qui il Croce inserisce come corollario la tesi dell'intraducibilità delle opere d'arte.

Ogni traduzione, infatti, come tentativo di nuova espressione di ciò che già ha trovato la sua singolare espressione nell'originale, o crea una diversa opera d'arte o è espressione deficitaria rispetto all'originale, risultando priva di valore estetico e quindi avendo solo il carattere di un commento, di una parafrasi, di un'approssimazione più o meno riuscita all'originale.

La tesi non è nuova, anzi ha precedenti illustri: per restare nell'ambito delle patrie lettere basterebbe ricordare il Dante del *Convivio*. In effetti, la traduzione del linguaggio poetico incontra limiti e difficoltà che tutti gli studiosi hanno rilevato, fornendo varie risposte (il che non ha impedito che si continuasse a tradurre e che si traducessero anche le opere poetiche). Ma in Croce la tesi dell'impossibilità della traduzione diventa un elemento necessario per la coerenza del sistema. Il fatto empirico dell'attività traduttrice e dell'esistenza di traduzioni conta poco in una filosofia che esclude dalla rilevanza estetica tutto ciò che risulta esteriore rispetto all'intuizione-espressione spirituale.

"Ogni traduzione [...] o sminuisce e guasta, ovvero crea una nuova espressione, rimettendo la prima nel crogiuolo e mescolandola con le impressioni personali di colui che si chiama traduttore. Nel primo caso l'espressione resta sempre una, quella dell'originale, essendo l'altra più o meno deficiente, cioè non propriamente espressione: nell'altro saranno sì due, ma di due contenuti diversi. 'Brutte fedeli o belle infedeli'".<sup>5</sup>

Il Croce dell'*Estetica* svolge con rigore la sua tesi, attenuandone solo le conseguenze più radicali, nel momento in cui afferma che, come gli individui possono assomigliarsi tra di loro, pur restando diversi l'uno dall'altro, si può pensare di fondare in tale somiglianza la "possibilità relativa delle traduzioni". "La traduzione, che si dice buona, è un'approssimazione, che ha valore originario di opera d'arte e può stare da sé".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> B. Croce, *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale. Teoria e storia*, a cura di G. Galasso, Adelphi, Milano 1990, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>5</sup> *Estetica*, p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 94. Più avanti, nella stessa *Estetica*, nel capitolo sul "bello fisico" di natura e di arte, ricorre il verbo "tradurre" in un senso che vale la pena di notare: "Il processo completo della produzione estetica

Questo impianto, che si focalizza evidentemente sulla necessità di sottolineare il carattere unico e singolare di ogni autentico fatto espressivo, viene ribadito dal Croce anche a distanza di anni. In un altro testo crociano importante, nel volume *La Poesia* del 1936, il mantenimento della tesi dell'*Estetica* si accompagna con la disponibilità a concedere, senza riserve, la traducibilità dal punto di vista teoretico: “Non v’ha dubbio che la sfera in cui ha luogo il tradurre sia quella dell’espressione prosastica, che si adempie per simboli e segni. Questi segni sono permutabili, secondo che torna comodo; e non solo quelli della matematica, della fisica e delle altre scienze, ma anche quelli della filosofia e della storia”.<sup>7</sup> Del tradurre qui viene data una definizione limpidamente legata a “l’equivalenza dei segni per la reciproca comprensione e intelligenza”, soltanto questo “stabilire l’equivalenza dei segni” è veramente tradurre.

Solo la prosa, allora, si può tradurre, intendendo per prosa rigorosamente ciò che è privo di qualsiasi pretesa a un valore estetico, “la prosa che sia meramente prosa”<sup>8</sup>, la prosa nella sua “prosasticità”, che può ben avere invece uno scopo filosofico o scientifico o storico o morale, laddove possono essere stabilite delle equivalenze di senso fra espressioni diverse considerate nel loro contenuto conoscitivo. E questo è possibile non solo fra lingue diverse, ma anche nel nostro rapportarci a forme antiche della nostra stessa lingua, che richiedono – per essere comprese – una sorta di traduzione.

Intraducibilità della poesia, dunque, ma necessità della traduzione nel campo della filosofia, della scienza, della tecnica e di tutto ciò che si esprime in prosa. Necessità della traduzione, ancora, per ragioni pedagogiche, nella pratica degli *studia humanitatis*, allorché, non essendosi potuto o non avendo voluto apprendere la lingua originale in cui è scritto questo o quel testo poetico, diventa necessario ricorrere ad alcunché che funzioni come un’approssimazione alla vera poesia. In qualche caso queste approssimazioni acquistano vita e rilievo proprio, e diventano a loro volta opere d’arte: sono appunto quelle “belle infedeli” che sono nuove opere d’arte.

L’individualità irripetibile dell’espressione fa sì che Croce consideri come altra cosa dal “poetico” autentico che risuona nell’anima la declamazione dei versi di una poesia, oppure l’interpretazione teatrale di un dramma: in questi casi, si dà luogo magari, quando il risultato è esteticamente rilevante, ad una diversa opera d’arte, di cui sono soggetti gli attori ma non l’autore rappresentato o interpretato. La radicalità del filosofo non teme il paradosso, se si considera che la parola della poesia epica o di quella tragica era per sua natura destinata alla proclamazione. Ma quest’osservazione introdurrebbe la tematica dei generi letterari e quindi dei modi diversi dell’espressione, già condannati e ricondotti al dominio dell’esteriorità. Del resto, come sappiamo, per Croce ciò che veramente conta è la pura parola interiore: anche nelle arti visive, la realizzazione esterna dell’opera in un supporto materiale è inessenziale. Se si vede bene, in questo modo il linguaggio viene fatto vivere nel silenzio: riduzione suggestiva se si trattasse del silenzio da cui ogni parola si distacca. Qui pare, invece, un silenzio che è la pura proiezione della pratica della lettura silenziosa dei dotti, pratica che s’impone nella nostra civiltà letteraria solo a un certo punto (ricordiamo la notazione di

---

può essere simboleggiato in quattro stadi, che sono: *a*, impressioni; *b*, espressione o sintesi spirituale estetica; *c*, accompagnamento edonistico o piacere del bello (piacere estetico); *d*, traduzione del fatto estetico in fenomeni fisici (suoni, toni, movimenti, combinazioni di linee e di colori, ecc.). Ognun vede che il punto essenziale, il solo che sia propriamente estetico e davvero reale, è quel *b*, che manca alla mera manifestazione o costruzione naturalistica, detta anch’essa, per metafora, espressione” (p. 121).

<sup>7</sup> *La Poesia*, Laterza, Bari 1953<sup>5</sup>, p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

Agostino nelle *Confessioni* a proposito del leggere silenzioso di Ambrogio<sup>9</sup>) e che invece assume un valore normativo assoluto nell'idealismo crociano.

Non meno istruttiva è un'altra osservazione del Croce, che commenta l'affermazione (che come vedremo è del Gentile del 1920, non esplicitamente menzionato) secondo la quale “noi non leggiamo mai una poesia senza tradurla nel nostro linguaggio, né intendiamo o parliamo una lingua straniera senza, nell'atto stesso, tradurla nella nostra”. “Qui, osserva l'autore, lo stesso appello al fatto attesta il contrario”<sup>10</sup>. E questo accade perché il leggere o il parlare veramente una lingua straniera comporta il rivivere quei suoni e nei suoni le immagini e i concetti. Tradurre significherà invece sempre introdurre altri suoni, altre immagini, altre espressioni, insomma creare un altro linguaggio. Tradurre da un linguaggio ad un altro è detto per metafora. Tradurre significa, in effetti, includere un pensiero altrui nel nostro pensiero. Grazie al tradurre, così inteso, noi possiamo pensare quello stesso concetto che è stato pensato da Platone e da Aristotele: allora, presente e passato si identificano come “momenti eterni della storia del pensiero”<sup>11</sup>.

Due tesi, dunque, caratterizzano la posizione crociana: la prima è quella dell'intraducibilità della poesia, la seconda (meno nota, ma quasi speculare alla prima) quella della traducibilità perfetta del pensiero.

Due tesi che, lo diciamo francamente, ci paiono entrambe inaccettabili: il tradurre, che comporta il riconoscimento dell'alterità e la sua accoglienza da parte della finitudine di un'altra esistenza, è negato a livello dell'intuizione-espressione in nome dell'alterità irriducibile di ogni individualità ed è negato a livello del pensiero in quanto riassorbito nell'unità dello spirito che identifica nell'eternità dell'universale ogni particolarità. In un modo che può anche essere suggestivo, la duplice negazione rende impossibile un tradurre che sia tale nel regime della contingenza esistenziale. E' il fantasma dell'identità perfetta che compare due volte e schiaccia coi suoi paradossi l'imperfezione costitutiva del tradurre, la sola che sia veramente accessibile agli umani.

2. La distinzione fra poesia e prosa, fra arte e filosofia che finiva per permettere una sorta di coesistenza pacifica nel sistema crociano dei distinti fra impossibilità e possibilità della traduzione, non poteva non essere messa in discussione dal Gentile. Quest'ultimo dedica al problema della traduzione un articolo del 1920, *Il torto e il diritto delle traduzioni*, pubblicato sul primo numero della nuova “Rivista di cultura”, e quindi successivo di quasi vent'anni all'*Estetica* ma precedente il volume crociano del 1936. Senonché l'impianto complessivo dei due sistemi era ormai consolidato e i punti di convergenza e di divergenza col Croce sono limpidamente espressi.

Gentile parte da una radicalizzazione della posizione crociana dell'*Estetica*: è impossibile tradurre non solo le opere d'arte, ma anche le opere di scienza o di filosofia, perché non c'è pensiero senza linguaggio, “non c'è pensiero che sia pensiero, senz'essere la poesia del pensatore”<sup>12</sup>. E poco dopo troviamo un'affermazione che ritroveremo nella letteratura fenomenologica: il linguaggio non è rivestimento esteriore, “non veste, ma corpo del pensiero”<sup>13</sup>: questo viene detto a proposito della terminologia filosofica, ma ha nel contesto anche un valore generale. Infatti, citando Humboldt, la lingua non è *ergon* ma *enérgeia*, Gentile sottolinea che la lingua, in quanto nella sua concretezza è il parlare, non è fatto (oggetto della conoscenza del grammatico e del

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. *Conf.* VI, 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>12</sup> Rist. in G. Gentile, *Frammenti di estetica e di letteratura*, Carabba, Lanciano s.d., ma l'*Avvertenza* reca la data 20 novembre 1920, vedi p. 369.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370.

glottologo), ma è atto, come qualsiasi forma di vita dello spirito. Intesa la lingua in questo modo, essa è una sola, sicché si può arrivare a due conclusioni opposte che sono come le facce di una medaglia: noi non traduciamo mai, perché l'unica lingua è quella vivente; noi traduciamo sempre, perché "la lingua vera, sonante nell'animo umano, non è mai la stessa, né anche in due istanti consecutivi; ed esiste a condizione di trasformarsi, continuamente inquieta, viva"<sup>14</sup>.

A questo punto il Gentile si lancia in una vera e propria apoteosi del tradurre, con accenti che potrebbero piacere allo Steiner (che in effetti ne cita qualche rigo): "Tradurre, in verità, è la condizione d'ogni pensare e d'ogni apprendere; e non si traduce soltanto, come si dice empiricamente parlando e presupponendo così lingue diverse, da una lingua straniera nella nostra, ma si traduce altresì dalla **nostra, sempre: e non soltanto dalla nostra dei secoli remoti e degli scrittori di cui siamo lettori, ma anche dalla nostra più recente [...]. Ma che cos'è il tradurre, non in astratto ma in concreto, quando c'è chi traduce e quando si bada a quel che egli fa, se non un'interpretazione, in cui da una lingua si passa ad un'altra perché sono entrambe note al traduttore, e cioè il traduttore le ha messe entrambe in rapporto nel suo spirito, e può passare dall'una all'altra, come da una parte all'altra della stessa lingua: di quell'unica lingua, che per lui veramente ci sia: la quale non è né l'una né l'altra, ma l'insieme delle due nella loro relazione od unità? Chi traduce comincia a pensare in un modo, al quale non si arresta; ma lo trasforma, continuando a svolgere, a chiarificare, a rendere sempre più intimo e soggettivo quello che ha cominciato a pensare: e in questo passaggio da un momento all'altro del proprio pensiero, nella sua unica lingua, ha luogo quello che, empiricamente considerando, si dice tradurre, come un passare da una lingua ad un'altra. E non avviene forse il medesimo quando noi leggiamo ciò che è scritto nella nostra stessa lingua, da altri o da noi medesimi?"<sup>15</sup>.**

La possibilità, anzi la necessità del tradurre (senza distinzione di poesia e di prosa, di arte e di filosofia) viene così fondata. Anzi, come dice il Gentile, il "diritto" del traduttore, il cui torto nasce invece dal pregiudizio di considerare l'opera dello spirito come una cosa, un fatto. Noi leggiamo Dante e Goethe, e li facciamo rivivere in noi, non il Dante morto nel 1321, ma il Dante che vive in noi, così come il Goethe da noi letto, in tedesco, è il "nostro Goethe".

L'articolo del 1920 viene ripreso dal Gentile nella *Filosofia dell'arte*, la cui prima edizione risale al 1931, e ne viene riproposta la conclusione: "Anche un lettore italiano, dunque, deve tradurre nella sua propria lingua (e nella sua lingua d'oggi!) il poema scritto in italiano, ma da un altro e sei secoli fa. Che più? Ognuno di noi ha bisogno di tradurre a se stesso quello che scrisse ieri"<sup>16</sup>. Questa volta è esplicita la polemica con Benedetto Croce, che viene accusato di non essersi liberato dall' "incubo di una realtà estetica estrasoggettiva, chiusa e sigillata nel passato"<sup>17</sup>.

Come si vede, in entrambi i filosofi la soluzione all'aporia del tradurre ripropone l'ispirazione di fondo del sistema filosofico: da una parte la filosofia dei distinti, dall'altra l'unità dell'atto spirituale. Questo conferma la rilevanza teoretica della questione, apparentemente marginale, della traduzione.

Per quel che concerne, in particolare, la soluzione gentiliana, si può dire che essa, nel tentativo di dare un fondamento all'umana attività del tradurre, finisca per dissolvere, più che risolvere il problema: ciò che si perde è proprio quella diversità delle

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 373.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 373-374. Per la citazione di Gentile da parte di Steiner, vedi G. Steiner, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

<sup>16</sup> G. Gentile, *La filosofia dell'arte*, Sansoni, Firenze 1975, p. 241.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 241, nota.



lingue su cui Humboldt meditava, nel fluire eracliteo dell'unica vita spirituale. E così si neutralizza anche l'acquisizione implicita nella nozione del linguaggio come corpo del pensiero. La vita che viene evocata è una vita più che umana (la vita concreta, non fatta solo di vivacità inestinguibile e multiforme, conosce anche la passività, la pesantezza, l'opacità, la ripetizione), che alla fine rischia di diventare evanescente, se non addirittura disumana. Eppure, anche se avvolto nell'involucro speculativo dell'idealismo attuale, qualcosa di effettivo viene colto.

Ancora una volta, nei confronti delle scoperte così come delle aporie e dei disorientamenti del pensiero idealistico, occorrerà un rovesciamento che riporti nella concretezza della condizione umana il movimento della dialettica.

3. Sarà appunto nel pensiero di Antonio Gramsci che cercheremo questo rovesciamento. Anche nel caso di Gramsci solo di recente l'attenzione degli studiosi ha messo a fuoco il tema della traduzione<sup>18</sup>, che ora ci appare come uno dei motivi più originali della sua meditazione e una delle ragioni di una sua nuova attualità, al di là degli stereotipi che hanno a lungo offuscato la sua figura di pensatore, ben più ricca dell'icona pur veneranda che una certa tradizione ci ha trasmesso.

Formato agli studi linguistici alla scuola del Bartoli, che sperava per il suo allievo un brillante destino di studioso di quella scienza nuova che era, agli inizi del secolo, la linguistica, Gramsci è lettore attento e critico perspicace, ancorché irregolare per la sua collocazione anomala – o dovremmo dire, per la sua mancanza di collocazione nel mondo intellettuale, della cultura varia e inquieta del suo tempo, e in particolare della grande filosofia italiana del primo Novecento. Antonio Gramsci elabora nella sua opera, per forza di cose, frammentaria e incompiuta, una originale ripresa del marxismo, liberato dai dogmatismi naturalistici ed economicistici e ricollocato nella grande corrente della vita storica e della lotta per un problematico, difficilissimo, eppur irrinunciabile processo di liberazione dell'umano.

La denominazione di "filosofia della prassi" in questo quadro non assume il senso di una semplice formulazione verbale suggerita dalla prudenza del prigioniero, ma ha, come ormai si dovrebbe considerare acquisito, dopo puntuali indagini filologicamente documentate, un suo peculiare significato teorico. La prassi è la verità di Marx e del marxismo. Il pensiero di Marx è filosofia, anche se rompe radicalmente con la filosofia del passato, e non mera metodologia; in questo Gentile aveva avuto ragione rispetto a Croce. Non dimentichiamo che se c'è un debito di Gramsci nei confronti della filosofia neoidealista, quest'ultima, a sua volta, negli esordi giovanili di entrambi i suoi maggiori esponenti, si era misurata con Marx e aveva contratto un debito teoretico col suo pensiero.

Ora c'è un legame strettissimo fra prassi e traduzione, così come l'intende Gramsci. Egli in effetti sembra trascurare la questione crociana della traduzione dell'opera d'arte, e anche quella della traduzione interlinguistica (per usare la terminologia di Jakobson), anche se non dobbiamo dimenticare che alcuni dei *Quaderni* sono occupati da esercizi di traduzione.

Ma in effetti Gramsci affronta il problema a un livello diverso, quello della "traducibilità" dei linguaggi, non tanto delle lingue storicamente definite, ma di

<sup>18</sup> Ricordo a questo proposito i contributi di André Tosel, del quale si veda in particolare *Marx en italiques. Aux sources de la philosophie italienne contemporaine*, Trans Europe Repress, Mauvezin 1991. Più recentemente si veda di Giorgio Baratta, *Le rose e i quaderni*, Gamberetti, Roma 2000 e di Fabio Frosini, *Gramsci e la filosofia*, Carocci, Roma 2003, pp. 98-102. Su Gramsci e la filosofia del linguaggio non può essere dimenticato lo studio di Franco Lo Piparo, *Lingua intellettuali egemonia in Gramsci*, pref. di Tullio De Mauro, Laterza, Bari 1979.

quegli insiemi linguistico-culturali che sono propri a una disciplina, a una visione del mondo, a un universo conoscitivo particolare: in questo modo egli riprende il problema che nella tradizione marxista corrisponde alle cosiddette “sovrastrutture”, un tema che del resto era stato centrale nel marxismo italiano e nell’impatto che aveva avuto colla nuova generazione di intellettuali borghesi alla fine dell’Ottocento. Gramsci si colloca non dal lato dell’impossibilità di tradurre (la poesia) ma da quello del “noi traduciamo sempre, quando parliamo, quando pensiamo” (da quel tradurre che Croce riserva alla filosofia e che Gentile estende all’intera vita spirituale). Solo che la chiave di questo tradurre-interpretare universale non è, non può più essere per Gramsci una filosofia dello spirito o dell’atto col quale lo spirito perennemente si crea, ma la nuova filosofia della prassi. E’ la prassi storica e sociale che contiene il segreto di tutte le produzioni culturali ed è la filosofia marxiana della prassi che ne sa leggere la verità storica.

In questo modo, Gramsci va oltre Croce e Gentile e si avvicina a quella riscoperta novecentesca dell’ermeneutica che si realizzava negli anni Venti nell’ambito delle filosofie dell’esistenza e che anche il marxismo rivoluzionario russo avrebbe potuto fare suo se, invece di chiudersi in una dogmatica naturalistica e positivisticggiante, fosse stato attento alle avanguardie culturali che nella stessa Russia si erano schierate con la Rivoluzione e che invece da questa furono respinte, guardate con diffidenza e poi addirittura perseguitate fino all’eliminazione fisica durante il periodo staliniano.

Penso per esempio, nel campo della filosofia, alla promettente scuola fenomenologica di Mosca, attorno al giovane professore Gustav Špet, che aveva fra i suoi discepoli giovani come Roman Jakobson e Boris Pasternak<sup>19</sup>. Penso all’esperienza delle avanguardie letterarie e artistiche di quegli anni.

Di tutto ciò poco o nulla poteva sapere il Gramsci detenuto nelle carceri fasciste: è perciò straordinario che egli sia giunto, per vie sue originali, a una sorta di scoperta personale dell’ermeneutica, attraverso un rovesciamento della nuova filosofia idealistica italiana.

Gramsci ha, invece, una conoscenza di prima mano degli studi contemporanei sul linguaggio, che risale agli anni universitari: siamo alla vigilia della svolta linguistica nella filosofia del Novecento, che si compiva negli anni della detenzione e continuerà per gran parte del secolo. I cenni su questo tema che troviamo nell’opera gramsciana, su Bréal, su Vailati, su Russell, su Peano (quest’ultimo docente a Torino durante gli anni di studio del giovane sardo) hanno la freschezza e il fascino di una fase aurorale, in cui per così dire i giochi non sono ancora fatti.

Il linguaggio è inteso in un senso molto ampio che diviene fondante per la concezione della storia: “Pare si possa dire che ‘linguaggio’ è essenzialmente un nome collettivo, che non presuppone una cosa unica né nel tempo né nello spazio. Linguaggio significa anche cultura e filosofia [...] : al limite si può dire che ogni essere parlante ha un proprio linguaggio personale, cioè un proprio modo di pensare e di sentire”<sup>20</sup>.

Traducibilità dei linguaggi significa, allora, capacità di stabilire una rete di connessioni e di rapporti di comprensione fra culture diverse, saper o non saper tradurre diventa decisivo per il nuovo tipo di intellettuale che Gramsci auspica. Pertanto non stupisce che egli tenda a concludere con l’affermazione, sia pure mitigata da un “pare”,

---

<sup>19</sup> Su questo punto rinvio al mio articolo *Phénoménologie herméneutique et marxisme critique*, “Actuel Marx”, n. 25, 1999, pp. 57-67.

<sup>20</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, 4 voll., a cura di V. Gerratana, Einaudi, Torino 1975, p. 1330.

di un primato o di un compito peculiare della filosofia della prassi rispetto alla traducibilità dei linguaggi: “E’ da risolvere il problema: se la traducibilità dei vari linguaggi filosofici e scientifici sia un elemento ‘critico’ proprio di ogni concezione del mondo o solamente proprio della filosofia della prassi (in modo organico) e solo parzialmente appropriabile da altre filosofie. [...] Pare si possa dire appunto che solo nella filosofia della prassi la ‘traduzione’ è organica e profonda, mentre da altri punti di vista spesso è un semplice gioco di ‘schematismi’ generici”<sup>21</sup>.

Comunque questa funzione di “traduttore” universale assegnata alla filosofia della prassi è per Gramsci storicamente determinata. La filosofia della prassi è essa stessa storica, quindi destinata al superamento, mentre alcuni aspetti delle filosofie idealistiche oggi criticate, **per sua esplicita affermazione**, potrebbero rivelarsi in futuro validi in una società diversa da quella attuale. In ogni caso, non possiamo dimenticare il carattere precario e provvisorio della ricerca gramsciana, proprio per le condizioni precarie e penose nella quali essa dovette svolgersi. Di essa riteniamo innanzitutto l’idea feconda di una traducibilità da perseguire nel contesto accidentato e difficile di una prassi impegnata, senza certezze di successo, nella costruzione di una comunità inter-umana, degna di tale nome. Quest’idea, dialetticamente connessa all’eredità dell’idealismo, nelle sue varie forme, ma tale da dover essa stessa essere continuamente tradotta e ri-tradotta a misura della finitudine dell’essere, resta ancora per noi un oggetto teorico degno di essere pensato e un compito etico-pratico per il mondo “grande e terribile” nel quale ci è dato di vivere e operare.

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 1468.

2010

## Croce, Gentile and Gramsci on Translation [English]

Domenico Jervolino

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci>

---

### Recommended Citation

Jervolino, Domenico, Croce, Gentile and Gramsci on Translation [English], *International Gramsci Journal*, 1(2), 2010, 29-38.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci/vol1/iss2/6>

---

## Croce, Gentile and Gramsci on Translation [English]

### Abstract

The activity of translating is as old as the entire history of human civilization. Yet, according to some, it is only in the second half of the twentieth century that translation became the subject of a specific discipline, or, more correctly, that it became the subject of a broad field of interdisciplinary studies, from linguistics to semantics, from literary criticism to comparative literature, and, more recently, even philosophy itself. This is so to the extent that the first scholars of translation in France have even spoken of a *tournant philosophique de la traduction* [philosophical turn of translation].<sup>1</sup> It is natural to look back and attempt to delineate a history of the ideas about translation elaborated in the remote and in the near past once the theme of translation has imposed itself in various ways in the arena of contemporary culture, and therefore to find important precursors and ancestors, even though their contribution was limited often either to fragments or to opinions expressed in the margins of works devoted to other subjects or to comments about their translations.

## Croce, Gentile and Gramsci on Translation

Domenico Jervolino

The activity of translating is as old as the entire history of human civilization. Yet, according to some, it is only in the second half of the twentieth century that translation became the subject of a specific discipline, or, more correctly, that it became the subject of a broad field of interdisciplinary studies, from linguistics to semantics, from literary criticism to comparative literature, and, more recently, even philosophy itself. This is so to the extent that the first scholars of translation in France have even spoken of a *tournant philosophique de la traduction* [philosophical turn of translation].<sup>1</sup> It is natural to look back and attempt to delineate a history of the ideas about translation elaborated in the remote and in the near past once the theme of translation has imposed itself in various ways in the arena of contemporary culture, and therefore to find important precursors and ancestors, even though their contribution was limited often either to fragments or to opinions expressed in the margins of works devoted to other subjects or to comments about their translations.

The beginnings of the history of ideas on translation in Western civilization date at least from the time of the ancient Romans, who were more attentive to the necessity and importance of translating than the Greeks. This history brings us to the early twentieth century, that is, when the subject of translation mentioned above ‘explodes.’ Two main ‘official’ philosophers at that time, the two Dioscuric figures of Italian neo-idealism, Croce and Gentile, deal with the subject of translation in their short writings, though in a significant way. But there is another special philosopher who approaches translation in a very particular way, having become a philosopher in the exceptional context of the academia of political fights and Italian prisons, that is, Antonio Gramsci.

1. According to George Steiner, author of one of the most significant and successful books on translation published in the second half of the Twentieth Century, Croce belongs to that small number of personalities who said something relevant on translation prior to the most recent period.<sup>2</sup> Steiner distinguishes between a first, long period that goes from the Ancients to the early nineteenth century and which is characterized by an empirical approach to the problem of translation, and a second period that goes from Schleiermacher to the first half of the Twentieth Century, where considerations on translation are inserted in a wider context and include ideas on language [*linguaggio*] and on interpretation.

---

<sup>1</sup>J.-R. Ladmiral, *Traduire. Théorèmes pour la traduction*. Paris: Gallimard, 1994, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p.XIII.

<sup>2</sup>George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, 2nd edition, p.249.

The theme of the untranslatability of works of art, as readers of Steiner will know since he uses the Italian *intraducibilità*, is what procured Croce a place in the gallery of these famous figures (which constitutes for Steiner the third period). These are the precursors of the current phase of the history of translation. However, the 'untranslatable' is a dialectical element pertaining rightfully to the field of translation theory.

The untranslatability in principle of works of art is a very well known thesis of Croce's *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*, where he develops his conception of art as intuition-expression, that is, as theoretical activity peculiar to the spirit. He distinguishes theoretical from logical activity and, to the extent that intuition-expression constitutes an inferior degree of cognitive activity. He distinguishes it, together with logic, from praxis, which, in turn, articulates itself also as economics and ethics.

Artistic intuition-expression is unrepeatable in its continuously renewed creativity:

Everything that is truly intuition or representation is also expression. That which is not brought before the mind as an object by expression is not intuition or representation, but sensation or something merely natural. The spirit only intuits by making, forming, expressing. Anyone who separates intuition from expression will never be able to put them together again.<sup>3</sup>

Since the aesthetic fact as such exhausts itself entirely in the expressive elaboration of impressions, it does not have anything to do with any practical element. Croce takes this to the extent that even exteriorization of what is perceived by intuition as interior to a work of art subsisting in the material world (picture, statue, etc.) becomes something inessential.

Moreover, expression is not divisible into modes and degrees. Accordingly, the whole traditional patrimony of rhetorical partitions is relegated to the arena of what is worthless under the viewpoint of philosophical aesthetics:

[I]ndividual expressions are so many individuals, no one of which is comparable to any other save in that they all share the property of being expressions. To use the language [*linguaggio*] of the schools, expression is a species that does not act in its turn as a genus. What alters is impressions, the contents of expressions; each content is different from every other, because nothing repeats itself in the flow of life; and to the continual variation of these contents corresponds the irreducible variety of expressive forms, the aesthetic syntheses of impressions.<sup>4</sup>

Croce is inserting as a corollary his thesis on the untranslatability of works of art.

Every translation, in fact, insofar as it attempts to express anew what its singular expression has already found in the original, either creates a diverse work of art or is an imperfect expression of the original, resulting in something without aesthetic value and

---

<sup>3</sup>Benedetto Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*, trans. Colin Lyas, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp.8-9.

<sup>4</sup>Croce, *The Aesthetic*, pp.75-6.

therefore having just the features of a comment, of a paraphrase, with more or less successful approximation of the original.

This thesis is not new. It has famous predecessors. Staying within the Italian literary sphere, it would be enough to recall Dante's *Convivio*. Translation of poetic language [*linguaggio*] shows the limits and difficulties that all the scholars have recognized and they have supplied various responses (still, this has not stopped anyone from translating, even from translating poetic works). Yet, Croce's thesis of the impossibility of translation becomes a necessary element for the coherence of his philosophical system. The activity of translation as an empirical fact and the existence of translations count little in Croce's philosophy which excludes as irrelevant to the aesthetic arena all that is exterior to spiritual intuition-expression:

Every translation, in fact, either diminishes or spoils the original, or the translation creates an entirely new expression by putting the original expression back into the crucible and mixing it with the personal impressions of the one who calls himself the translator. In the former case the expression stays that same as it was originally, the other version being more or less inadequate, that is to say, not properly expression: in the latter case there will indeed be two expressions, but with two different contents. Ugly but faithful, or beautiful but faithless.<sup>5</sup>

The Croce of *The Aesthetic* unfolds his thesis rigorously, attenuating only its most radical consequences when he affirms that: since individuals resembling each other are still different from each other, one may think of establishing in their resemblance the "relative possibility of translations." "What one calls a good translation is an approximation, which has the value of an original work of art and which can stand on its own two feet."<sup>6</sup>

This Crocean framework focuses evidently on the necessity of stressing the uniqueness and singularity of every authentic expression. Croce confirms this assumption in the future. In another of his important texts – *La Poesia* (1936)<sup>7</sup> – Croce, while holding on to the thesis maintained in his previous *The Aesthetic*, simultaneously grants the possibility of translatability under an aesthetic viewpoint without any reserve: "There is no doubt that the sphere in which translation takes place is that of prose expression, which is accomplished with symbols and signs. These signs, not only those used in mathematics, physics, and the other sciences, but also those used in philosophy and history, are interchangeable according to need." Here Croce gives a definition of what translating means and links it clearly to the "equivalence of signs for reciprocal comprehension and

---

<sup>5</sup>Croce, *The Aesthetic*, p.76.

<sup>6</sup>Croce, *The Aesthetic*, p.81. Later in the text of *The Aesthetic*, in the chapter on 'physical beauty' of nature and art the verb 'to translate' recurs in a sense which is worthy noticing: 'The complete process of aesthetic production can be symbolized in four stages, which are: *a*, impressions; *b*, expression or aesthetic spiritual synthesis; *c*, the hedonistic accompaniment or pleasure in the beautiful; *d*, translation of the aesthetic object into physical phenomena (sounds, tones, movements, combinations of colours and lines, etc.) Anyone can see that the essence of the matter, the only thing that is properly aesthetic, and therefore real is *b*, which is nothing like any mere natural manifestation or construction which can be metaphorically called 'expression.' (p.107).

<sup>7</sup> Translated into English as Benedetto Croce, *Poetry and Literature*, trans. Giovanni Gullace, Carbondale, Il.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981.



understanding.” True translation consists, in fact, only in “establishing equivalences among signs.”<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, only prose can be translated. Prose means here, for Croce, what does not pretend to have aesthetic value. That is, “prose which is merely prose” or prose taken according to its ‘prosaism’ but which can have philosophical, scientific, historical or moral goals.<sup>9</sup> When one can draw equivalences among different prosaic expressions considered according to their gnoseological content. This is possible not only between different languages [*lingue*] but also when we relate to ancient forms of our own language, which, in order to be understood, require a sort of translation.

Although, for Croce, poetry is untranslatable, translation becomes necessary within the field of philosophy, of science, of technology, and of everything expressed through prose. Translating is further necessary for pedagogical reasons for anyone who studies the humanities and has not had the possibility or the will to learn the original language [*lingua*] in which the various texts have been written. In this specific case, it is necessary to have recourse to something which approximates true poetry. In some cases, these approximations acquire their own life and importance and turn into real works of art: They are precisely those ‘beautiful unfaithful’ translations which are new works of art.

It is because of the unrepeatable individuality of expression that Croce considers reciting lines of a poem and interpreting theatrical drama as something other than authentic ‘poetry’ that resonates in the soul. In these cases, when the results are aesthetically relevant, a different work of art may come to light whose subjects are the actors, but it is not the author who is being represented or interpreted. Croce’s radicalism is not afraid of creating paradox, if one considers that the words of epic or tragic poetry were designed to be recited, but this would introduce the theme of literary genres and therefore of the different forms of expression, which Croce has already condemned and pushed back to the dominion of exteriority. Moreover, as we know, what counts for Croce is the pure interior word: the external realization of a work in its material form is inessential, even in visual arts. In this way, Croce makes language [*linguaggio*] live in the arena of silence. Croce would be offering a suggestive reduction if he were dealing with a kind of silence from which every word moves away. But instead, this silence is the pure projection of the learned person’s silent reading practice which imposes itself on our literary civilization only at a certain moment (one may recall here Augustine’s observation in his *Confessions* regarding Ambrogio’s silent reading),<sup>10</sup> although it assumes absolute normative value in Crocean idealism.

It is worth noting another instructive Crocean observation, the comment on the statement according to which: “...we never read a poem without translating it into our own language [*linguaggio*]; nor do we understand and speak a foreign language [*lingua*] without by this

---

<sup>8</sup>Croce, *Poetry and Literature*, p.114.

<sup>9</sup>Croce, *Poetry and Literature*, p.115.

<sup>10</sup>Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp.92-3.

very act, translating it into our own. But the facts attest to the contrary...”<sup>11</sup> This happens because truly reading or speaking a foreign language implies the revival of its sounds and, within those sounds, of the images and concepts tied to them. To translate, instead, means always to introduce other sounds, other images, and other expressions, in other words, it means to create another language [*linguaggio*]. To translate from one language to another is a metaphorical way of speaking. To translate actually means to include the other’s thought in one’s own. Thanks to translating, understood in this way, one can think the same concept which has been previously thought by Plato or Aristotle: Thus, the present and the past identify each other as “eternal moments in the history of thought.”<sup>12</sup>

Two theses, then, characterize Croce’s position: the first concerns the un-translatability of poetry, and the second concerns the perfect translatability of thought. The latter is less known but almost mirrors the first.

Frankly, I have to say that these two theses are unacceptable: translation that implies the recognition of the otherness and its acceptance by the finitude of another existence is both negated at the level of intuition-expression, in the name of the irreducible otherness of every individuality, and negated at the level of thought to the extent that it is reabsorbed in the unity of the spirit, which identifies every particularity in the eternity of the universal. In a way that could also be suggestive, the double negation makes impossible a translating that operates in the arena of existential contingency. The phantom of perfect identity appears twice and with its paradoxes crushes the constitutive imperfection of translation — the only notion of translation that is truly accessible to humans.

2. Croce’s distinction between poetry and prose — as well as art and philosophy — necessarily lead to Gentile’s criticism of it insofar as it ended up allowing a sort of pacific coexistence between the possibility and impossibility of translation within the Crocean system of the ‘distincts.’ Gentile devotes the article, *Il torto e il diritto delle traduzioni* [*The right and wrong of translations*] (1920), published in the first issue of the new magazine, *Rivista di Cultura*, to the problem of translation. It came out almost twenty years after Croce’s *The Aesthetic* but before Croce’s volume of 1936. By that time, the whole framework of Croce and Gentile’s systems was consolidated so that Gentile’s points of agreement and disagreement are clearly expressed.

Gentile’s thesis stems from the radicalization of the position expressed in Croce’s *The Aesthetic*, according to which not only it is impossible to translate works of art but also scientific and philosophical works, because there is no thought without language [*linguaggio*]: “no thought could be such without being the poetry of the thinker.”<sup>13</sup> Shortly after this, one can find a statement that comes back later in phenomenological writings: language is not an external dress, “it is not the dress but the body of thought.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup>Croce, *Poetry and Literature*, p.117. [Jervolino notes that Gentile had made this same proposition in 1920, but Croce ignores it here].

<sup>12</sup>Croce, *Poetry and Literature*, p.118.

<sup>13</sup>Reprinted in Giovanni Gentile, *Frammenti di estetica e di letteratura*, Lanciano: Carabba, but the *Avvertenza* is dated 20 November, 1920, see p.369.

<sup>14</sup>Gentile, *Frammenti*, p.370.

Even though Gentile says this referring to philosophical terminology, he also refers to something which has more general value in relation to the whole context of his discussion. Gentile, in fact, quotes Humboldt, for whom language [*lingua*] is not *ergon* but *energeia*, and underlines the extent to which language's concreteness is speaking. Language is not fact (i.e. an object of knowledge of the grammarian and glottologist) but action, like any spiritual form of life. Understood this way, language [*lingua*] is only singular. Therefore one can reach two opposed conclusions, which are like the two sides of a coin: we never translate because the only really existing thing is living language; we always translate because "true language, which resonates in the human soul, is never the same, not even when it occurs in two consecutive instances. It exists on condition that it transforms itself and as something continuously restless and alive."<sup>15</sup>

At this point, Gentile launches into a great apotheosis of translation and stresses something that Steiner would certainly appreciate (indeed, he cites the first line):

Since, to translate is the condition of all thinking and learning... Still, one does not only translate — as it is said empirically speaking and so presupposing different languages [*lingue*] — from foreign into his own language, but one always translates even from his own into his own language; yet, not only from the language of past centuries and from those writers we read, but also from our most recent language... What is translating, concretely and not abstractly, when the translator is present and one can check what he does, if not an interpretation through which one shifts from one language to another because the translator knows both, that is, he has connected both in his spirit, and can shift from one to the other, like shifting from one side to the other of the same language: the one and only language truly existing for him; which is neither the first nor the second, but the ensemble of both in their relation and unity? Whoever translates starts thinking in a way in which the very way he thinks does not represent a stop, but is transformed itself, so that the translator keeps unfolding, clarifying and rendering more intimate and subjective what he started to think about at the beginning. Within this shift from one side to the other of his own thought, within his one and only language, takes place what, empirically speaking, is called translating, which is like shifting from one language to the other. Is not this what happens when we read what has been written in our own language either by someone else or by us?<sup>16</sup>

In this way, the possibility or rather the necessity of translating without distinguishing poetry and prose, art and philosophy, is established. Or, as Gentile himself would rather say, the 'right' of the translator is established. The translator's wrong stems, instead, from the prejudice of considering the work of the spirit like a thing or a fact. We read Dante and Goethe, and make them live again in ourselves. This does not concern the Dante who died in 1321, but the Dante living in us. The same goes for Goethe: the Goethe we read in German is 'our Goethe.'

Gentile's *Philosophy of Art*, the first edition of which dates back to 1931, develops what he had already said in his article of 1920 and proposes again its conclusion: "An Italian reader, too, must translate into his own language (the language he speaks today!) a poem written by another Italian six centuries ago. In addition, each of us must translate for

---

<sup>15</sup>Gentile, *Frammenti*, p.373.

<sup>16</sup>Gentile, *Frammenti*, pp.373-4. Regarding Steiner's quotation of Gentile, see Steiner, p. 264.

ourselves the words we wrote yesterday.”<sup>17</sup> This time the controversy with Benedetto Croce is made explicit: Gentile accuses Croce of not having freed himself from “the obsession of an esthetic reality outside the subject, which has been enclosed and sealed in the past.”<sup>18</sup>

As one can see, Croce and Gentile’s solution to the aporia of translation proposes again the fundamental inspiration proper to their philosophical systems: on the one hand, Croce’s ‘philosophy of the distincts,’ on the other, Gentile’s unity of spiritual act. This confirms the theoretical relevance of the question of translation has for both, despite its apparent marginality.

Particularly regarding Gentile’s solution, one can say that while attempting to provide the foundation for human translating activity, it ends up dissolving more than resolving this problem. The diversity of languages about which Humboldt was meditating is precisely what is lost in the Eraclitean flow of unique spiritual life. In this way, Gentile’s acquisition, which is implicit in the notion of language as the body of thought, is neutralized. The life Gentile evokes is more than human, and at the end it risks vanishing if it does not become even inhuman. Concrete life, in fact, is not only made of inextinguishable and multiform vivacity, it is also characterized by passivity, heaviness, opaqueness and repetition. Nonetheless, Gentile grasps something real, even though it is dressed in speculative wraps of actual idealism.

Once again, the discoveries as well as the aporias and confusions of idealistic thought must be overturned in order to bring the dialectical movement back to the concreteness of the human condition.

3. One can look for this overturning precisely in Gramsci’s thought. In Gramsci’s case as well, scholars have only recently clearly grasped the importance of the subject of translation.<sup>19</sup> This appears now one of the most original motifs of his reflections and one of the reasons for his new relevance beyond the stereotypes which have obscured him as a thinker for a long time. He is much richer than the icon, though honored, that a certain tradition has transmitted to us.

Gramsci was formed as a linguist in the school of Bartoli (who hoped that Gramsci would pursue a brilliant career as a scholar of the new linguistic science emerging at the beginnings of the Twentieth Century). He was an attentive and acute reader, though irregular because of his anomalous position – or, one should say, because he lacked a place in the world of intellectuals, of the varied and uneasy culture of his time, and particularly of the great Italian philosophy of the early Twentieth Century. In his

---

<sup>17</sup> Giovanni Gentile, *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. and ed. by Giovanni Gullace (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), pp. 217, translation altered.

<sup>18</sup> Gentile, *The Philosophy of Art*, p. 217, n.2. Translation altered.

<sup>19</sup> See André Tosel, *Marx en italiques. Aux sources de la philosophie italienne contemporaine*, Mauvezin: Trans Europe Repress, 1991. See also the more recent Giorgio Baratta, *Le rose e i quaderni*, Rome: Gamberetti, 2000, and Fabio Frosini, *Gramsci e la filosofia*, Rome: Carocci, 2003, pp. 98-102. On Gramsci and philosophy of language one cannot forget the study by Franco Lo Piparo, *Lingua intellettuale egemonia in Gramsci*, Bari: Laterza, 1979.

necessarily fragmented and unfinished work, Gramsci elaborates an original recovery of Marxism, which he frees from naturalistic and economistic dogmatism, and places again in the grand currents of historical life and struggle for the problematic, very difficult, though irrevocable, process of human liberation.

In this context, Gramsci is not just using the phrase the ‘philosophy of praxis’ simply due to the caution of a prisoner [worried about fascist censors]. It has, instead, a peculiar theoretical meaning as documented by detailed philological inquiries. Praxis is the truth of Marx and Marxism. Marx’s thought is philosophy even though it breaks radically from past philosophy. It is not mere methodology. Regarding this point Gentile was right with respect to Croce’s position. One should not forget, in fact, that whereas Gramsci has debts towards neo-idealistic philosophy, the latter, in turn, especially with reference to its main representatives’ juvenile exordium, confronted Marx and had also its theoretical debts towards his thought.

Now, there is a very strict tie between praxis and translation as Gramsci conceives it. He seems to overlook the Crocean question about the translation of works of art and also that of inter-linguistic translation (to use Jacobson’s terminology), even though one should not forget that some of his *Prison Notebooks* were devoted to translation exercises.

However, Gramsci deals with this problem at a different level, that of the ‘translatability’ of languages [*linguaggi*]. He deals not much with historically defined languages [*lingue*], but rather with those linguistic-cultural ensembles proper to specific disciplines, to world-views, and to particular cognitive universes. In this way, he recovers a problem which in the Marxist tradition corresponds to that of the so-called ‘superstructures.’ The theme of superstructures had been central to Italian Marxism and to the impact it had on the new generation of bourgeois intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century. Gramsci’s position is not that of the impossibility of translating (poetry) but that “we always translate, when we talk, when we think” (and that for Croce is limited to philosophy and for Gentile is extended to all of spiritual life). Still, the key of this universal interpreting-translating is not and cannot any longer be, for Gramsci, the philosophy of the spirit or of the act through which the spirit eternally recreates itself, but the new philosophy of praxis. All the secrets of cultural production are in historical and social praxis, and the Marxian philosophy of praxis is the one which knows how to read its own historical truth.

In this way, Gramsci goes beyond Croce and Gentile and gets close to that rediscovery of hermeneutics realized in the 1920s in the arena of existentialist philosophies. This also could have been absorbed by Russian revolutionary Marxism had it paid attention to the cultural vanguards which sided with the Revolution. But instead Marxism closed itself by accepting a sort of naturalistic and positivistic dogmatism that rejected, was suspicious of and even persecuted these cultural movements including eliminating them physically during Stalin’s period.

Concerning the philosophical field, I am thinking of the promising phenomenological school of Moscow, revolving around the activity of the young Professor Gustav Špet,

among whose young disciples were Roman Jakobson and Boris Pasternak.<sup>20</sup> I also have in mind the experience of literary and artistic vanguards' activity taking place in those years.

About all this, Gramsci, who was a detainee in fascist prisons, could know little or nothing. It is therefore extraordinary that he discovered hermeneutics, in his own original way, through overturning neo-idealistic Italian philosophy. Gramsci had a first hand knowledge of contemporary studies on language, which dates back to when he was a university student. This was around the eve of the linguistic turn of twentieth century philosophy, which fully came to be during Gramsci's incarceration, and lasted throughout much of the century.

The hints one can find in Gramsci's work of Bréal, Vailati, Russell, and Peano (the latter was teaching in Turin while Gramsci was university student there) have all the vivacity and fascination of a period in which — so to say — the game was not over yet.

Gramsci conceives language [*linguaggio*] in a very broad sense, which becomes fundamental to his conception of history:

It seems that one can say 'language' is essentially a collective term which does not presuppose any 'unique' thing neither in time nor in space. Language also means (even though at the level of common sense) culture and philosophy ... it may be said that every speaking being has her own personal language, at the least, i.e. her own way to think and feel.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, translatability of languages means capability of establishing networks of connections and comprehension's relationships between different cultures. Therefore, to know or not to know how to translate becomes decisive for the new type of intellectual promoted by Gramsci. It is no surprise that he tends to affirm — even if mitigated with a cautionary 'it seems' — that the primary or specific task of the philosophy of praxis is the accomplishment of the translatability of languages:

The following problem must be resolved: whether the reciprocal translatability of the various philosophical and scientific languages is a 'critical' element that belongs to every conception of the world or whether it belongs (in an organic way) only to the philosophy of praxis, being appropriable only in part by other philosophies? [...] It seems that one may in fact say that only in the philosophy of praxis is the 'translation' organic and thoroughgoing, whilst from other standpoints it is often a simple game of generic 'schematisms.'"<sup>22</sup>

However, this function of universal 'translator' is, for Gramsci, historically determined. The philosophy of praxis is historical itself and therefore destined to be overcome, whereas — as Gramsci himself explicates — some aspects of idealistic philosophies currently criticized could reveal their validity in the future, i.e., in a society different from

---

<sup>20</sup>On this specific point I refer back to my article, "Phénoménologie herméneutique et marxisme critique," *Actuel Marx* 25 (1999), pp.57-67.

<sup>21</sup>Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*. 4 vols., ed. Gerratana, Turin: Einaudi, 1975, p.1330. Q10§44, p. 1330. English translation in Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, New York: International Publishers, 1971, pp.348-9.

<sup>22</sup>Gramsci, p.1468, Q11§47. For translation see Antonio Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Derek Boothman, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, p. 307.

the present one. In any case, we cannot forget the precarious and provisional character of Gramsci's research, precisely because of the precarious and painful living conditions in which he unfolded it. What one has to keep of Gramsci's research is, above all, the fruitful idea of a translatability that has to be pursued on the dangerous and difficult terrain of a praxis engaged in the construction of inter-human community worth its name, without any assurance of success.

This idea, in its various forms dialectically connected to the idealist heritage, although it needs indeed to be translated again and again because of the finitude of existence, still remains for us a theoretical subject worthy of thinking about and an ethical-practical task in the 'great and terrible' world in which we happen to live and work.



### **Acknowledgements:**

Translated by Rocco Lacorte (University of Chicago) with assistance from Peter Ives (University of Winnipeg)

# International Gramsci Journal

---

Volume 1  
Issue 2 *International Gramsci Journal*

Article 7

---

2010

## Gramsci at the margins: subjectivity and subalternity in a theory of hegemony

Kylie Smith

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci>

---

### Recommended Citation

Smith, Kylie, Gramsci at the margins: subjectivity and subalternity in a theory of hegemony, *International Gramsci Journal*, 1(2), 2010, 39-50.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci/vol1/iss2/7>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: [research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)



---

## Gramsci at the margins: subjectivity and subalternity in a theory of hegemony

### Abstract

In strictly political terms, the Gramscian concept of subalternity applies to those groups in society who are lacking autonomous political power. In Gramsci's time these groups were easily identified, and much of the work around the concept of subalternity has centred on groups like peasants and the proletariat. But Gramsci also argued that subalternity existed on a broader scale than this, including people from different religions or cultures, or those existing at the margins of society. This aspect of Gramsci's work is often overlooked, because many writers are interested in Gramsci's political theory, which they use to analyse the way in which capitalism, as a structural system, has become hegemonic over time. The focus here is on the history of organised groups and their organised struggle. Hence, the emphasis is largely on white, male-oriented institutions of power. But Gramsci argued that hegemony did not exist merely at this level. Rather, he argued that hegemony comes from below, originating in the thoughts, beliefs and actions of everyday people who may or may not see themselves as part of organised groups. Hence, Gramsci was intensely aware of the way hegemony operated at a personal level. Capitalist hegemony was not, is not, possible, without a complete identification at the level of the self. This paper seeks to expand on some of Gramsci's thinking in this area, in an attempt to understand the connections between the self and society in a theory of hegemony, where hegemony is considered a process based on leadership, rather than a state built on domination. It is through an analysis of what hegemonic processes exclude (or make subaltern), that we can expand our understanding of how hegemony works, and of how it may be resisted.

## **Gramsci at the margins: subjectivity and subalternity in a theory of hegemony**

Kylie Smith<sup>1</sup>

**Peer-reviewed and accepted for publication by IGJ February 2010**

In strictly political terms, the Gramscian concept of subalternity applies to those groups in society who are lacking autonomous political power. In Gramsci's time these groups were easily identified, and much of the work around the concept of subalternity has centred on groups like peasants and the proletariat. But Gramsci also argued that subalternity existed on a broader scale than this, including people from different religions or cultures, or those existing at the margins of society. This aspect of Gramsci's work is often overlooked, because many writers are interested in Gramsci's political theory, which they use to analyse the way in which capitalism, as a structural system, has become hegemonic over time. The focus here is on the history of organised groups and their organised struggle. Hence, the emphasis is largely on white, male-oriented institutions of power. But Gramsci argued that hegemony did not exist merely at this level. Rather, he argued that hegemony comes from below, originating in the thoughts, beliefs and actions of everyday people who may or may not see themselves as part of organised groups. Hence, Gramsci was intensely aware of the way hegemony operated at a personal level. Capitalist hegemony was not, is not, possible, without a complete identification at the level of the self. This paper seeks to expand on some of Gramsci's thinking in this area, in an attempt to understand the connections between the self and society in a theory of hegemony, where hegemony is considered a process based on leadership, rather than a state built on domination. It is through an analysis of what hegemonic processes exclude (or make subaltern), that we can expand our understanding of how hegemony works, and of how it may be resisted.

### **Hegemony as process**

The term hegemony has recently come to be synonymous with the idea of the domination of one group over another, especially in the field of international relations.<sup>2</sup> It is also most frequently linked to Gramsci's work on the political relations emerging out of the revolutionary ferment of early twentieth century Europe.<sup>3</sup> Yet these are not the only contexts

---

<sup>1</sup> The author gratefully acknowledges the helpful comments of the anonymous reviewers which provided much food for thought.

<sup>2</sup> The amount of work in this field is large – some examples include Cox R. W. (1993). "Gramsci, hegemony and international relations: an essay in method." *Cambridge Studies in International Relations* 26, Gill S., Ed. (1993). *Gramsci, historical materialism and International Relations*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Chomsky N. (2003). *Hegemony or survival: America's quest for global dominance*. Allen and Unwin, Sydney, Agnew J. A. (2005). *Hegemony: the new shape of global power*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia.

<sup>3</sup> Some examples of this work include Anderson P. (1976). "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci." *New Left Review* 1(100): 5-78, Mouffe C., Ed. (1979). *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London,

in which Gramsci deployed the term, and more often than not it is now used in ways that are far removed from the original complexity with which Gramsci developed the concept. While it is true that there is no one place in which Gramsci defined and developed the term, nor is there one articulation of a 'theory of hegemony' as a coherent whole, it is the case that the concept informs most of Gramsci's wide-ranging philosophical, political and cultural prison writings. Early in the Prison Notebooks he gives a clear indication of how he understands hegemony operating:

The politico-historical criterion on which our own inquiries must be grounded is this: that a class is dominant in two ways, namely it is leading and dominant. It leads the allied classes, it dominates the opposing classes. Therefore, a class can (and must) lead even before assuming power; when it is in power it becomes dominant but it also continues to lead (Gramsci 1992: 136-137. Q1§44).

This emphasis on leadership stems from the term's original meaning of which Gramsci was clearly aware (Fontana 2000: 304-306). Fontana suggests that the key to understanding Gramsci's conception of hegemony lies in the use of the Ancient Greek 'hēgemoniā' (or 'egemonia' in Italian) meaning leadership<sup>4</sup>, as different and distinct from domination (Williams 1960; Fontana 2000: 308-309). This does not mean that Gramsci used one definition of the term consistently; in fact he appears to use it in several different ways and on several different levels which sometimes appear to contradict each other (Fontana 2000: 307-8, 315). Given this, it is an almost pointless task to attempt to unravel this complexity and come up with one categorical definition. However, for the purposes of this paper a particular conception of hegemony is necessary if we wish to more deeply understand the connection between the individual and society. In this sense, a conception of hegemony that provides a framework of analysis that does not depend on deterministic categories, especially when it comes to the problematic of consciousness and subjectivity, is essential. Gramsci's theory of hegemony makes this possible when we conceive of it as a process, and based in civil society.

The idea that the theory of hegemony is process-oriented is implicit in the dialectic approach which pervades the *Prison Notebooks* in both its method and content. The exact nature of Gramsci's dialectical method is a matter of debate (Finocchiaro 1988) however it is most evident in his insistence on understanding the *relationships* between objects of analysis to critique the basis of knowledge (Howson 2005: 15). The notion of hegemony as a process is also implicit in his rejection of deterministic economism; if lived experience is not simply determined by the categories of social analysis as imposed by abstract and idealist theorising,

---

Adamson W. (1980). *Hegemony and revolution: a study of Antonio Gramsci's political and cultural theory*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Sassoon A. S. (1980). *Gramsci's Politics*. Croom Helm, London, Femia J. V. (1981). *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, Holub R. (1992). *Antonio Gramsci: Beyond Marxism and Postmodernism*. Routledge, London: New York.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that most dictionaries do still use 'leadership' as the definition of hegemony, while others use dominance, or influence, especially of one state over another. Regardless, all dictionary entries consulted here refer the root of the word back to the Greek hegemonia, meaning leadership. Dictionaries consulted: *Macquarie Concise Dictionary*, the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Compact Oxford English Dictionary Online*, which interestingly defines hegemony simply as dominance.

then the theory of hegemony necessarily implies a conception of ‘reality’ constructed through multiplicity and indeterminacy.

For Gramsci, the practice of hegemony is nothing other than the waging of a war of position (Howson 2005: 129). If Gramsci’s main thematic concern was an understanding of the philosophy of praxis, then the conception of hegemony developed in the *Prison Notebooks* stems from his consideration of the failures of revolutionary Marxism. He saw clearly that a frontal assault on the state brought only disaster, in fact it served only to reinforce and strengthen the repressive apparatus (Gramsci 1971: 229-246; Gramsci 1992: 217-220 Q1 §133, 134). The war of position, in contrast to the frontal assault or ‘war of manoeuvre’, is “the whole organisational and industrial system of the territory which lies to the rear of the army in the field” (Gramsci 1971: 234, Q13 §24). A war of position, must be carefully considered, carefully planned. It is “concentrated, difficult, and requires exceptional qualities of patience and inventiveness” (Gramsci 1971: 239, Q6 §117). And, as Howson argues, it is never really complete. If a war of position leads to a situation of ethico-political hegemony, then the maintenance of this hegemony is an on-going process, an ‘organic becoming’ (Howson 2005: 129). If aspirational hegemony, or ethico-political leadership, occurs through consensus, then this is a consensus won in the realm of ideas as much as through material practice. In this sense then, hegemony can not be separated from civil society.

Like all Gramscian concepts, ‘civil society’ and its relationship to a theory and practice of hegemony is a contested notion (Bobbio 1979; Buttigieg 1995). In many cases, the focus on the relationship between civil society and power at a formal state level has resulted in an abstraction of the concept out from the theory of hegemony as a whole. In the worst case, the tendency to theorise civil society as a separate sphere from the state results in the valorisation of neo-liberal conceptions of freedom (Buttigieg 1995: 4-6). In Gramsci’s notion of the ‘integral state’ however, civil society does not sit separately from political society, but is rather an essential component of the making of power, and thus, the challenging of that power – the institution of a new, alternative ‘power’ (Howson 2005: 17). If hegemony is the result of ethico-political leadership, then civil society is the site of that hegemony. Gramsci’s concern then is to expand the terrain of civil society, to “develop a revolutionary strategy (a ‘war of position’) that would be employed precisely in the arena of civil society, with the aim of disabling the coercive apparatus of the state, gaining access to political power, and creating the conditions that would give rise to a consensual society wherein no individual or group is reduced to a subaltern status” (Buttigieg 1995: 7).

The major innovation that Gramsci makes to our understanding of civil society, which make it so important for a theory of hegemony, is the way in which he reconfigures the concept of the ‘superstructural’ (Texier 1979). Whereas Marx posited a base/structure conception, with civil society being the ‘superstructural’ site of historical development (but ultimately ‘determined’ by the base), Gramsci extends the distinction to argue that civil society is more than just superstructural, but is the essential terrain of historical development. Instead of justifying ideologies emerging from the base into the realm of civil society, for Gramsci the ‘ideas’ are contemporaneous, emerging in civil society, so that man acts on structures rather than structures acting deterministically on man. Bobbio argues that “it is the active subject

who recognises and pursues the end, and who operates within the superstructural phase using the structure itself as an instrument. Therefore the structure is no longer the subordinating moment of history, but it becomes the subordinate one” (Bobbio 1979: 34). In Gramsci’s words: “Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to himself and make him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives. To establish the ‘cathartic’ moment becomes therefore, it seems to me, the starting point for all the philosophy of praxis” (Gramsci 1971: 367, Q10II §6i). This is the practice of hegemony, a hegemony that occurs in the realm of ideas, in the “minds of men” (Gramsci 1971: 367, Q10II §6i). Thus, man is an active subject, and the structures of human life do not exist separately from the thinking of them, and so the question of consciousness, the nature of human subjectivity, is essential to understanding society as it is, and what it can become.

If hegemony is constituted in civil society, and if civil society is superstructural, then the means of civil society is language. Peter Ives’s recent work on language and hegemony has shown the complexity of Gramsci’s thought on the topic of language, on linguistics, on its relation to social practices and to the creation of a national-popular ‘sentiment’ (Ives 2004a; Ives 2004b; Ives 2005). This paper can not be a comprehensive analysis of Gramsci’s varied approaches to the ‘*questione della lingua*’ but it does seek to make particular connections between language and hegemony, linking language back to civil society and its role in the construction of subjectivity. In a way, Gramsci makes this link himself:

We have established that philosophy is a conception of the world, and that philosophical activity is not to be conceived solely as the ‘individual’ elaboration of systematically coherent concepts, but also and above all as a cultural battle to transform the popular ‘mentality’ and to diffuse the philosophical innovations which will demonstrate themselves to be ‘historically true’ to the extent that they become concretely – i.e. historically and socially – universal. Given this, the question of language in general and of languages in the technical sense must be put in the forefront of our enquiry.<sup>5</sup>

Three themes emerge from this paragraph. Firstly, that seemingly incoherent and non-rational conceptions of the world are not to be dismissed in the analysis of society and history. Secondly that these conceptions of the world, including the nature of self-identity, are constructed and contested on the terrain of civil society, through language, in all its forms. And thirdly, that this is the essence of the hegemonic process – the struggle over meaning, over conceptions of the world, over what is normal, acceptable, truthful, ‘universal’ in social relations. Of course, in an ethico-political hegemony, this ‘truth’ exists in the form of unstable equilibria, where meaning is never settled, nor even universal, but firmly grounded in the specific and particular conceptions of the world. In the philosophy of praxis, where the aim is the ‘hegemony of the proletariat’ this is the process of ‘war of position’: the careful and patient articulation of a conception of the world which does not disconnect groups or

---

<sup>5</sup> Gramsci A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. ed Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith. London, Lawrence and Wishart, p. 348. Q10II §44. The editors of the SPN have noted that ‘language’ for Gramsci here has two meanings, lost in the English translation, which is the differentiation between language as a system of verbal signs and language as the ‘faculty to transmit messages, verbal or otherwise, by means of a common code’. Note 32, p. 348.

individuals from power, where interests can be expressed and commonalities uncovered, without the imposition of one corporate interest over all.

This issue of language is bound up with Gramsci's thinking about the nature of philosophy and its relation to what he called 'common sense', and the problem of how people made sense of themselves, and their place in the world. In this sense then, there is a 'subjective' element to the theory of hegemony which often gets overlooked, but with which Gramsci was intensely concerned. Gramsci saw clearly the potential for capitalism to reach right into the heart of the human self, and his emphasis on the importance of understanding hegemony through civil society is because he recognised the implications of hegemony for personal, social and political life.

In his note on the "Problem of Collective Man", for example, Gramsci wrote that the aim of the state "is always that of creating new and higher types of civilization: of adapting the civilization and the morality of the broadest popular masses to the necessities of the continuous development of the economic apparatus of production: hence of evolving even physically new types of humanity" (Gramsci 1971: 242, Q13 §7). This was not a simple process, firstly because Gramsci saw quite clearly that people were not determined simply by the economic circumstances into which they were born, rather people were made at the intersection of many different influences on thought and action: "man cannot be conceived of except as historically determined man – i.e., man who has developed, and who lives, in certain conditions, in a particular social complex or totality of social relations" (Gramsci 1971: 244, Q15 §10) and that this social totality consists of the variety of influences and associations which are sometimes contradictory (Gramsci 1971: 265, Q14 §13) but which all contribute to the formulation of a particular conception of the world (Gramsci 1971: 324, Q11 §12). Secondly he argued that people were still free to choose their way of being in the world and that this complicated the matter further, that is "the will and initiative of men themselves can not be left out of account" (Gramsci 1971: 244, Q15 §10). In the same way that Marx argued that men made themselves but not in circumstances of their own choosing, so Gramsci was aware of the tension between structures and human agency. But for Gramsci, the situation is more complex because of the importance he gave to the dialectic in hegemony. While it may be the case that a particular hegemony may require a particular kind of person, it is also true that people themselves shape hegemony: "Every man, in as much as he is active, i.e. living, contributes to modify the social environment in which he develops (to modifying certain of its characteristics or to preserving others); in other words, he tends to establish "norms", rules of living and of behaviour" (Gramsci 1971: 265, Q14 §13) and in so doing "reacts upon the State and the party, compelling them to reorganize continually and confronting them with new and original problems to solve" (Gramsci 1971: 267, Q17 §51).

In some notes on "The Study of Philosophy", Gramsci differentiates however, between ways of thinking and being which he classifies as common sense as opposed to philosophy. If common sense is the world view which a person takes uncritically from their environment, philosophy is the ability to be self-reflective, self-critical:

is it better to think, without having a critical awareness, in a disjointed and episodic way?...to take part in a conception of the world mechanically imposed by some external environment, i.e., by the many social groups in which everyone is automatically involved from the moment of his entry into the conscious world...or...is it better to work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world and thus, in connection with the labours of one's own brain, choose one's sphere of activity, be one's own guide, refusing to accept passively and supinely from outside the moulding of one's personality? (Gramsci 1971: 323-324, Q11 §12)

Gramsci shows here an understanding of the complex forces that go into the making of human subjectivity. More than this, he recognises that subjectivity, consciousness, is key to action. Through questioning the range of possible identifications presented to individuals from the outside, Gramsci sees here the potentials for the questioning of normativity, and for a radical re-energising of the human self. The individual must start from this level of self-knowledge, self-awareness, and move outwards in ways that challenge neat categorisations. In a detached or dominative hegemonic situation, challenges to meaning are always closed down – transformed or eradicated. Conceptions of the world are restricted and limited by the grammar of the dominant group, creating exclusion and subalternity. For this reason, Gramsci was intensely interested in groups that were considered problematic for the dominant, or mainstream, society, and this emphasis on collective alternative subjectivity formed the basis of his work on subalternity.

### Subalternity and subjectivity

Like the other Gramscian concepts explored here, the concept of subalternity is a contested and appropriated one (Green 2000), for some authors coming to be synonymous with either the peasantry or the proletariat.<sup>6</sup> While it is true that Gramsci did refer to the proletariat as 'subaltern' this was not the only group he analysed under this rubric. His most famous analysis of subalternity is the millenarian sect of Davide Lazzaretti and the way in which bourgeois journalists like Bulferetti and the criminologist Lombroso dealt with this group, which he saw as the epitome of 'intellectual' attitudes towards subalternity. That is:

instead of studying the origins of a collective event and the reasons why it spread, the reasons why it was collective, the protagonist was singled out and one limited oneself to writing a pathological biography, all too often starting off from motives that had not been confirmed or that could be interpreted differently. For a social elite, the members of subaltern groups always have something of a barbaric or pathological nature about them.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Examples of each include Spivak G. C. (1988). *Can the subaltern speak? Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana, University of Illinois Press: 271-313. and Guha R. (1982). *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian history and society*. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

<sup>7</sup> Gramsci A. (1996). *Prison Notebooks Volume II*. trans and ed Joseph Buttigieg. New York, Columbia University Press. Q3 §12. See also Gramsci A. (1975). *Quaderni del Carcere*. ed. Valentino Gerratana. Torino, G. Einaudi. Q25 §1. A detailed socio-political analysis of Lazzaretti can be found in Hobsbawm E. (1965). *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. W.W. Norton & Co., New York. pp. 65-73.

Particularly annoying to Gramsci is Lombroso's 'scientism', or the biological determinism with which he analysed 'criminality'. This is particularly disturbing considering Lombroso's "leftist" orientation, which is indicative to Gramsci, and should be for us, of the state of leftist intellectuals whose valorisation of reason, rationality and science contribute to the construction of subalternity.<sup>8</sup> This is an important point – in a hegemonic process that is based on consent, the 'reformist' attitude of left social and political groups can make them actively complicit with a hegemony operating through civil society, thus closing down avenues for the expression of alternative hegemonies that are articulated in subalternity.

When it comes to the representation of subalternity, Green argues, "Gramsci was concerned with how literary representations of the subaltern reinforced the subaltern's subordinated position...In historical or literary documents, the subaltern may be presented as humble, passive or ignorant, but their actual lived experience may prove the contrary. Hence, the integral historian has to analyse critically the way in which intellectuals represent the conditions and aspirations of the subaltern" (Green 2000: 15). It is for this reason that the study of subaltern groups, in all their particularity, is of such importance for Gramsci. Thus, his interest in them is threefold: "he was interested in producing a methodology of subaltern historiography, a history of the subaltern classes, and a political strategy of transformation based upon the historical development and existence of the subaltern" (Green 2000: 3). In concrete historical situations, most hegemonies create and maintain subalternity, especially in the protection of hegemonic principles. Yet there is no possibility of an alternative hegemony without the involvement of subaltern groups. If Gramsci's project was to involve subaltern groups in a war of position on the terrain of civil society, then he was particularly concerned as to how subalternity was created through civil society in the first place.

Gramsci's concept of subalternity is most often used for an analysis of a group's position, and in these analyses subalternity is usually assumed to be a negative condition, based on a lack, that needs to be overcome by a confrontation with the structures of power. Yet this paper has argued that there is more to subalternity, and to a Gramscian conceptualisation of relations of power more generally, than this. Gramsci was keenly aware of the ways in which people were made, and made themselves, in relation to the circumstances in which they were born, and that in so doing they immediately affected those circumstances. Subalternity was not always a state of victimhood but was made so more often by historians or theorists who sought to impose pre-existing categories of analysis onto situations. In this scenario, subaltern groups are depoliticised or decontextualised. This way of thinking overlooks the subtleties in Gramsci's theory of hegemony, in which, if real social change is to occur, subalternity must be understood in its specific historical context, and the processes by which it is produced and reproduced exposed. To do so, it is essential to understand the ways in which people come to see themselves as subaltern, and to look for the ways in which they resist these sorts of power

---

<sup>8</sup> Gramsci A. (1992). *Prison Notebooks Volume I*. trans J. Buttigieg and A. Callarri. Ed Joseph Buttigieg. New York, Columbia University Press. pp. 116-117, Q1 §27. See also Gramsci A. (1975). *Quaderni del Carcere*. ed. Valentino Gerratana. Torino, G. Einaudi. Q25, §8 and Buttigieg J. A. (1992). Introduction. *Prison Notebooks Vol I*. New York, Columbia University Press. pp. 46-49. and Green M. (2000). "Gramsci Cannot Speak: Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci's Concept of the Subaltern." *Rethinking Marxism* 14(3): 1-24. pp. 14-15.



relations in everyday life. It can be argued then, that there is a strong link between subalternity and subjectivity, and this is particularly evident when we study in detail the way in which subaltern groups are classified and analysed in their own time. While Gramsci warned against making subaltern groups into individual pathologies, he was also aware of the ways in which subalternity could be constructed around particular personality traits and that values, or morality, were strongly related to changing social and economic circumstances. Gramsci made some headway in this line of thinking with his ideas about common sense, philosophy and personality formation, but there are limits to how far he could, and would, push his theories in this direction.

As is the case in a lot of historical and political writing on the left, there are some issues with the way in which Gramsci theorised alternative ways of being in the world. The traditional Marxist way of theorising marginality has been to categorise the ‘deviant’ as ‘lumpenproletariat’, to see them as somehow less than human, the refuse thrown up class struggle. The tendency to demonise such people comes from an intellectual preference for the recognisably political.<sup>9</sup> People who do not organise themselves, who do not actively seek to change their circumstances, or seem to prefer a life on the margins, are often accused of ‘false consciousness’ or dismissed for their alleged stupidity and passivity. In his writings about subalternity, Gramsci makes some very good points about the intellectual errors that can be made by judging some forms of social organisation by their appearances, rather than by attempting to discover their root cause, but it is still the case that he saw subalternity as a position to be overcome. As sensitive and nuanced a thinker as he was, he still privileged the rational over the non-rational. As the American academic Frank Wilderson notes, the Gramscian subject is, by and large, the white male worker. Relations of oppression are seen to happen largely within the paradigm of the capital-labour relation, and thus forms of resistance which occur within this paradigm are automatically privileged. He suggests “exploitation (wage slavery) is the only category of oppression which concerns Gramsci: society, Western society, thrives on the exploitation of the Gramscian subject. Full stop.” (Wilderson 2003: 231). While we can not exactly chastise Gramsci for what he did not write about, Wilderson’s point is a valid one to the extent that it points out that there is an absence in the theory of hegemony as resistance because not only is it based on white rationality (the articulation or organisation of consent) but it does not account for the silent, or non rational forms of resistance. Given the immediate historical and political situation with which Gramsci was confronted, the focus on class struggle means that there is a limit in Gramsci as to what might constitute human freedom.

---

<sup>9</sup> For an extensive analysis of the concept of the lumpenproletariat in Marxist thinking see, for example, Fanon F. (1965). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, New York, Draper H. (1972). "The Concept of the Lumpenproletariat in Marx and Engels." *Economies et Societies* 15(Dec): 2285-2312, Bovenkerk F. (1984). "The Rehabilitation of the Rabble: How and why Marx and Engels wrongly depicted the lumpenproletariat as a reactionary force." *Netherlands Journal of Sociology* 20(April): 13-41, Bussard R. L. (1987). "The 'Dangerous Class' of Marx and Engels" The rise of the idea of the lumpenproletariat." *History of European Ideas* 8(6): 675-692, Hayes P. (1988). "Utopia and the lumpenproletariat: Marx's reasoning in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*." *Review of Politics* 50(3): 445-465, Stallybrass P. (1990). "Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat." *Representations* 31(Summer): 69-95.

While it is the case that the idea of resistance is implicit in the theory of hegemony, it is still also the case that Gramsci, and many contemporary theorists, privilege certain types of resistance over others. In historical and political writing in particular, the emphasis on organised political collectives has resulted in these coming to be taken as the only legitimate form of resistance, and that those who do not resist in this way are not seen as resisting at all, or are seen as taking energy away from a 'true' revolutionary cause. It is a valid point to argue that real social change seems only possible where there is collective action, but this should not negate the power of the individual, who is ultimately the first site of resistance, nor should it negate actions that do not fit in with a predetermined idea of what resistance looks like. If hegemony operates at many levels of personal life, then it is important that we consider that resistance can take place here as well. In this sense, we need to deepen and reconfigure what we mean by resistance and to broaden our understanding of the possible forms of human agency.

Rather than relying on the structures and institutions of economic relations to tell us how people are 'made' in the world, a consideration of the 'subjective' adds depth and complexity to the 'problem' of identity. The point here is to see what we can learn about capitalist hegemony, by shifting the lens slightly from an emphasis on the politics of collective action to that of the personal. Subjectivity as an object of analysis can be related to broader issues of social formation through a theory of hegemony which does not consider hegemony as mere domination, but explores the multiple influences on human thought and action, as Gramsci suggested. That is, human beings are made at the intersection of various social relations which include family, location, religion, work and culture. In more recent times this can be expanded to include relations along axes such as sexuality, gender, ethnicity, race, age and subcultures, or specific cultural interests or identifications. In this sense then, people are not determined by a particular set of social relations, but are overdetermined by a number of causes, none of which can be separated from each other, nor can one be pinpointed as decisive. While at certain points in history, the range of identifications may have been smaller, or more limited, and 'decisive' points perhaps easier to identify, we should be careful about assuming that people in the past were more 'simple' than we are, or did not struggle about a sense of self in the way that we do. The forms in which they did so may have been different, but it is not necessarily the case that the processes were vastly different, that is, it is not simply the case that people were more easily determined by ideology in the past than they are today. Historical 'evidence' itself tells us that hegemony has always been a process of conflict and struggle, and that this conflict often took place at the level of the subjective. Human nature, the human self, has always been the terrain of conflict because it is first and foremost human beings who constitute social relations – these relations are not made by some invisible hand of god, or even of capitalists, without either the consensus or coercion of people themselves.

In this sense then, the greatest battle of hegemony has been on the terrain of consciousness, and it is because of this that Gramsci spent so much of his intellectual energy on attempting to understand language, culture and common sense. It is only possible for a system of social relations to become truly hegemonic, not merely dominative, if it has been successful in winning the hearts and minds of people at an everyday level. This is not simply the determinism of the means of production which people do not understand, or the determinism of ideology operating as false consciousness. If this were the case, there would be no conflict and marginalised groups would not exist. The fact that there is always resistance points to the capacity of humans to see clearly the choices with which they were faced, and to act accordingly.

Gramsci argues that 'true' hegemony resides in the process of a war of position. The idea that revolution lies in a war of movement has been proven false in theory and in practice, not least because a war of movement, in a frontal attack on the state, does not have a basis in leadership and consent through which power is maintained, but also because a war of movement does little more than ape the tactics of the enemy. If capitalist social relations seek to act on the heart of the self, and to exclude from political engagement those groups who do not conform to the new hegemonic principles, then to dismiss or overlook groups who resist at this particular level is to dismiss and overlook potentials for a truly organic hegemony. More than this, it is to overlook the fact that capitalist social relations have brought about a complete transformation in ways of thinking and being in the world to the extent that alternatives become unthinkable, and reformism remains the norm. Many of us are wary of individualism and identity politics, and sometimes for good reason, but if we continue to ignore the way in which capitalism seeks to transform human nature itself, we will continue to ignore possibilities for real social change.

## References

- Adamson W. (1980). *Hegemony and revolution: a study of Antonio Gramsci's political and cultural theory*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Agnew J. A. (2005). *Hegemony: the new shape of global power*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
- Anderson P. (1976). "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci." *New Left Review* 1(100): 5-78.
- Bobbio N. (1979). Gramsci and the conception of civil society. *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*. Chantal Mouffe (ed). London, Routledge and Kegan Paul: 21-47.
- Bovenkerk F. (1984). "The Rehabilitation of the Rabble: How and why Marx and Engels wrongly depicted the lumpenproletariat as a reactionary force." *Netherlands Journal of Sociology* 20(April): 13-41.
- Bussard R. L. (1987). "The 'Dangerous Class' of Marx and Engels" The rise of the idea of the lumpenproletariat." *History of European Ideas* 8(6): 675-692.
- Buttigieg J. A. (1992). Introduction. *Prison Notebooks Vol I*. New York, Columbia University Press.

- Buttigieg J. A. (1995). "Gramsci on Civil Society." *boundary 2* 22(3): 1-32.
- Chomsky N. (2003). *Hegemony or survival: America's quest for global dominance*. Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
- Cox R. W. (1993). "Gramsci, hegemony and international relations: an essay in method." *Cambridge Studies in International Relations* 26.
- Draper H. (1972). "The Concept of the Lumpenproletariat in Marx and Engels." *Economies et Societies* 15(Dec): 2285-2312.
- Fanon F. (1965). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, New York.
- Femia J. V. (1981). *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Finocchiaro M. A. (1988). *Gramsci and the history of dialectical thought*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Fontana B. (2000). "Logos and Kratos: Gramsci and the Ancients on hegemony." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61(2): 305-326.
- Gill S., Ed. (1993). *Gramsci, historical materialism and International Relations*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Gramsci A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. ed Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Gramsci A. (1975). *Quaderni del Carcere*. ed. Valentino Gerratana. Torino, G. Einaudi.
- Gramsci A. (1992). *Prison Notebooks Volume I*. trans J. Buttigieg and A. Callarri. Ed Joseph Buttigieg. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Gramsci A. (1996). *Prison Notebooks Volume II*. trans and ed Joseph Buttigieg. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Green M. (2000). "Gramsci Cannot Speak: Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci's Concept of the Subaltern." *Rethinking Marxism* 14(3): 1-24.
- Guha R. (1982). *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian history and society*. Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- Hayes P. (1988). "Utopia and the lumpenproletariat: Marx's reasoning in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*." *Review of Politics* 50(3): 445-465.
- Hobsbawm E. (1965). *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. W.W. Norton & Co., New York.
- Holub R. (1992). *Antonio Gramsci: Beyond Marxism and Postmodernism*. Routledge, London: New York.
- Howson R. (2005). *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity*. Routledge, London.
- Ives P. (2004a). *Gramsci's Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto.

- Ives P. (2004b). *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*. Pluto, London.
- Ives P. (2005). "Language, agency and hegemony: A Gramscian response to Post-marxism." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 8(4): 455-468.
- Mouffe C., Ed. (1979). *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Sassoon A. S. (1980). *Gramsci's Politics*. Croom Helm, London.
- Spivak G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana, University of Illinois Press: 271-313.
- Stallybrass P. (1990). "Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat." *Representations* 31(Summer): 69-95.
- Texier J. (1979). Gramsci, theoretician of the superstructures: on the concept of civil society. *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*. Chantal Mouffe (ed). London, Routledge and Kegan Paul: 48-79.
- Wilderson F. (2003). "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?" *Social Identities* 9(2): 225-240.
- Williams G. A. (1960). "The Concept of 'Egemonia' in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci: Some Notes on Interpretation." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21(4): 586-599.

2010

## New phase of development and knowledge capitalism: Gramsci's historical revenge

Sergio Ordonez

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci>

---

### Recommended Citation

Ordonez, Sergio, New phase of development and knowledge capitalism: Gramsci's historical revenge, *International Gramsci Journal*, 1(2), 2010, 51-66.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci/vol1/iss2/8>

---

## New phase of development and knowledge capitalism: Gramsci's historical revenge

### Abstract

This article argues that the tremendous timeliness of Gramscian thought resides in the appreciation that, at the current time, just as in the 1930s, the transition to a new phase of the development of capitalism, for which the term knowledge capitalism is proposed, is verifiable, for which the technological-productive fundamentals have thus far been developed without its projection having yet taken place in the superstructure. From this flows a double historical revenge of Gramscian thought, since, on the one hand, it provides a valuable theoretical instrument for understanding and taking advantage of historical change, and, on the other, it offers major political strategic principles that at the current time, based on forms of production and autonomous social organization of the subaltern groups and classes within knowledge capitalism, have the historical-social space to contribute to the construction of an alternative hegemony characteristic of these classes and groups. To delve into this question, the article has been divided in three sections. The first section presents Gramscian theoretical tools for understanding historical change; the second synthetically explains the distinctive features of the new phase of development and characterizes the moment of its current unfolding in light of the previously mentioned theoretical instruments, and the third section discusses postcapitalist forms of production and social organization that could lead to the formation of alternative hegemonic social blocs in the framework of the emergence of the new phase of development that is becoming a historical epoch.

## **NEW PHASE OF DEVELOPMENT AND KNOWLEDGE CAPITALISM: GRAMSCI'S HISTORICAL REVENGE?**

Sergio Ordóñez

### **Introduction**

Gramsci's contribution to Marxism is based on the understanding of the historicity of capitalism, not only as a mode of production that prepares the historical-material conditions for scientific socialism (which is Marx's contribution), but as changing (historical) unities between economy, politics, ideology, and culture that represent historical phases of development within the mode of production. It is, in fact, this understanding that distinguishes Gramsci from the rest of the early Marxist theoreticians after Marx.

In this sense, the problem that Gramsci poses in Prison Notebooks is how to explain, based on the Marxist theoretical framework, the emergence and decline of the historical phases of development of capitalism, without the (historical) crises that intervene in this transition resulting in a process of social revolution that leads to the scientific socialism foreseen by Marx. This unfolding of these developments was already evident at the time in which the Notebooks were written with the emergence of americanism and fascism.

This article argues that the tremendous timeliness of Gramscian thought resides in the appreciation that, at the current time, just as in the 1930s, the transition to a new phase of the development of capitalism, for which the term knowledge capitalism is proposed, is verifiable, for which the technological-productive fundamentals have thus far been developed without its projection having yet taken place in the superstructure. From this flows a double historical revenge of Gramscian thought, since, on the one hand, it provides a valuable theoretical instrument for understanding and taking advantage of historical change, and, on the other, it offers major political strategic principles that at the current time, based on forms of production and autonomous social organization of the subaltern groups and classes within knowledge capitalism, have the historical-social space to contribute to the construction of an alternative hegemony characteristic of these classes and groups. To delve into this question, the article has been divided in three sections. The first section presents Gramscian theoretical tools for understanding historical change; the second synthetically explains the distinctive features of the new phase of development and characterizes the moment of its current unfolding in light of the previously mentioned theoretical instruments, and the third section discusses post-capitalist forms of production and social organization that could lead to the formation of alternative hegemonic social blocs in the framework of the emergence of the new phase of development that is becoming a historical epoch.



## **1. The Gramscian theoretical tools for understanding and taking advantage of current historical change**

Gramsci's contribution consists of the formulation of a series of articulated concepts that can be considered methodological mediation concepts in a double sense: 1) in between the dual historical dimension of capitalism, either understood as a mode of production, or as a succession of historical phases of development; and 2) in that perspective, in between the economic structure and classes and social groups and their possibilities of engaging in action. These concepts are hegemony, passive revolution, historical bloc, system of hegemony of states, and others that are derived from them, with hegemony being the fundamental concept, since the others are the result of elaborations constructed and based on the concept of hegemony. We will now develop these general concepts in light of the transition from one historical phase of development to another, based on the previously explained reasons.

Historical crisis of capitalism are understood as the moments in which, with insurmountable contradictions having arisen in the economy, the political forces that operate in favor of the latter's preservation attempt to resolve such contradictions within the limits of its current configuration, while other forces organize, seeking to demonstrate (with their own victory) that the necessary and sufficient conditions already exist to provide for their solution in a new phase of the development of capitalism (Gramsci, 1930-1932, N.4: 455 and N.13: 1578. The quotes from Gramsci referred to here are from a critical Italian edition of the Prison Notebooks of V. Gerratana [1977]: " N.4" indicates that it is notebook no. 4). That is, within a new combination between economy, politics, ideology and culture. With this, the progressive political forces promote the transition from one historical phase of capitalism to another.

If we consider that, according to Marx, the fundamental contradiction of capitalism (which determines its historical character as a mode of production) is between the development of the productive forces and the social relations of production - a contradiction which implies that an increasingly private appropriation of the (social) product goes hand in hand with the increasingly social character of production- the solution to a historical crisis poses for capitalism the need to take a further step toward the socialization of production, which would allow for the subsequent development of the productive forces, even conserving the private character of the appropriation of the product. In this sense, the historical mission of capitalism is to incorporate technological progress in its development, which represents the indispensable condition so that the progressive dominant groups and classes can constitute a new hegemony over the subordinate classes and groups, that is, they can continue exercising a capacity for domination (through means of coercion) over them, playing, at the same time, a leading historical role, by means of consensus or the capacity to convince others of their historical aims. This implies the ability of creating a new social commun and integrating philosophical conception of reality according to the solution of the precedent contradictions, with a corresponding new form of social acting by the individual subject, which includes a new commun sense. Dialectically (but not historically) the hegemonic function arises from the productive structure, and, particularly, from the leading role of the hegemonic group or class in

the production process, and subsequently, this is extended and generalized in the complex superstructures, thus sealing a unity in the concrete historical construction, among economics, politics, ideology, and culture (Donzelli, 1981: LXXXI-LXXXII).

But to the extent that the process implies taking a step toward the socialization of production that facilitates a subsequent development of the productive forces, the dominant groups and classes need to develop and integrate as their own other outside and even opposing historical-political-cultural elements, but that are necessary for incorporating technological development and preserving their hegemony. That is, they must sustain their hegemony in a process of passive revolution or restoration-revolution that makes it possible that it is only these dominant groups and classes that are able to develop all their possibilities for action, so as not to allow themselves to be overtaken historically by the subordinate classes (Gramsci, 1933, N. 15: 1768). Consequently, through passive revolution, the dominant groups and classes, either directly or through the state –with the latter being the most common variant- assume the historical requirements of social development and other and even contrary elements, pertaining to the subordinate groups and classes, within their own historical project.

In conclusion, in order for the passive revolution and the hegemonic project as a whole to triumph, the dominant groups and classes that seek to demonstrate the need for a new historical unity of capitalism should recognize and base themselves on effective innovations in the field of production and, in addition, be able to project themselves in a new proactive social utopia or "catharsis", capable of unleashing the political energy of society (Gramsci, 1932-1935, N.10: 1221).

The concrete historical unity is synthesized in the concept of historical bloc, which represents an organic unity between the political-economic structure and the complex superstructures, this is, the elaborate series of theoretical-practical activities of the classes and social groups, as well as individuals, around a common historical project that implies, therefore, a unity of contrary and diverse elements (Gramsci [1931-1932], N.8: 182, [1932-1935] N.10: 1237-1238 and 1337-1338 and [1932-1934] N.13::: 1569-1570) with the political-economic structure being the reference point and dialectical origin of the superstructures. This implies that politics and the rest of the superstructures have their specificity and an active function in historical change, not being limited to being a mere reflection of the economic structure (Gramsci, 1932-1934, N.13: 1577-1578).

But if the historical bloc consists of the diverse and complex series of social and individual theoretical-practical activities (political, cultural, ideological, etc) around a common historical project, the institutions represent the crystallization of these theoretical-practical activities in formal and informal organizations, which become, in turn, reference points for new social and individual actions. Consequently, the character of agglutination and cohesion of the social action of the institutions is related to their role in the realization of this common historical project, and, therefore, in the more or less direct realization of the hegemonic function that sustains it.

In the building of institutions, as well as the historical bloc as a whole, the role of intellectuals is key, since, based on their technical-formative and leadership capacity, they differ from “simple” individuals of their social group or class, and they have the possibility to generalize and project the interests and theoretical-practical actions characteristic of that class or social group, and, in that sense, contribute to generating a class or social group identity. In a historical-social perspective, intellectuals represent the “glue” that articulates the different classes and social groups -as well as their institutions- that converge in the historical bloc, being, therefore, the “officials” in charge of exercising the hegemonic function (Gramsci, 1932-1935, N.12: 1518-1519).

In this perspective, it is possible to distinguish between different degrees of contribution to the realization of the hegemonic function and the scope of the capacity of agglutination and cohesion of social and individual action on the part of the institutions that correspond to the different types of intellectuals due to the scope and dimension of their activity, with, in this sense, the state being the most developed institution: 1) the institutions that bring together and cohere a social class with other classes and social groups around the historical bloc, to which the organizational and connective action of organic intellectuals correspond; 2) the institutions that agglutinate and cohere a social class around itself; and 3) the institutions that agglutinate and cohere a social group, beyond the determining factors of class of the individuals that comprise it, with the organizational and connective action of traditional intellectuals' corresponding to points 2 and 3. Organic intellectuals being those capable of projecting the interests and activities of a class or social group in a historical project that articulates the class or social group to the rest of society from a hegemonic position, thus, they can belong even by their material conditions of living and/or ideologically to either of the antagonistic classes only, meanwhile traditional intellectuals are those that generalize and project the interests and activities of a class or social group, contributing to the creation of a specific identity (Gramsci, 1932-1935, N. 12: 1513-14, 1550-51).

The historical bloc crystallizes in the state, which is the entity that synthesizes the political relations of society. Such an entity should allow for the maximum development and maximum expansion of the hegemonic group, presenting it as the development and expansion of society as a whole.

The concepts that have thus far been developed are limited to the realm of political organization in the nation-state. However, in order that hegemony can emerge in a historical epoch, its crystallization in a national historical bloc is not sufficient. Also necessary is the international projection of the bloc in a system of hegemony of states. So that this can occur, it is necessary that the national historical bloc be constituted in a country with the sufficient international drawing power and influence, that is, sufficient capacity to direct and dominate other nations in terms of the international and national objectives that it proposes. In this sense, a great power is a hegemonic power, as head and guide of a more or less extended system of alliances and agreements among states (Gramsci, 1932-1934, N.13: 1598), which comprises a system of hegemony of states.

However, the development of a hegemonic system in an international sense should take place, and can only do so, on the basis of specifically national premises (Donzelli, 1981: XLIV-XLVIII). There should, therefore, be a unity and a correspondence between the historical bloc of the state transformed into a great power (hegemonic) and its system of international hegemony (or of states), which should allow for the full realization of the former, and satisfy the interests of the leading groups of the states that decisively converge in the system.

The form of independence or national sovereignty, implicit or explicit in the system, determines the relationships among the states, which is decisive for the position and the possibilities of development of the medium and small powers (Gramsci, 1932-1939, N. 13: 1562).

## **2. Knowledge capitalism: new historical phase of development?**

A phase of capitalist development occurs when a technological revolution translates into a new productive base and a new form of production, which is accompanied by the emergence of new products, services and, branches of activity, which become the sectors that tend to articulate the rest of the economic activity and to dynamize its growth.

However, according to the Gramscian contribution, this process cannot be consummated if the transformations underway in the economy do not culminate in a new organic unity that articulates the economy with politics, ideology, and culture, a process in which, even though the changes begin in the economy (specifically in the form of production) and, therefore, precede the others, they cannot be concluded without the transformations in politics, ideology, and culture that have their own conditioning factors and might not be concretized, historically aborting the entire process (Gramsci 1932-1934, N.13: 1569-1570 and Ordóñez, 2004: 5).

Knowledge capitalism has been developed in its key technological-productive aspects, without the emergence on a world scale of the “model of society” or the organic correspondence between changes in the economy with politics, ideology, and culture that transforms the new phase of development of capitalism into a new historical phase of development.

The distinctive theoretical elements characteristic of knowledge capitalism can be synthesized as follows. The new phase of development arises from a new articulation between the scientific-educational sector and social production as a whole. Therefore, the production, circulation, and accumulation of knowledge tends to affect and involve all the spheres of economic and social reproduction, which transcends the scientific-educational institutions and firms and includes new de facto formal and informal socio-economic institutions, such as epistemic communities.

The secular trend of capitalism to apply science and knowledge in social production took a qualitative leap forward with the technological revolution of informatics and communications (Foray, 2000: 18-19), particularly with software as a new form of knowledge existence consisting of codified knowledge which has been objectified in a program, permitting knowledge immediate application. This thus facilitates the

immediate and interactive articulation of the scientific-educational sector with the economy, which translates into the emergence of a new productive force, based on the narrowing of the links between science and knowledge on the one hand, and social production on the other.

Simultaneously, the unfolding of the technological revolution of informatics and communications, and its conversion into a new technological-productive base, is articulated with Toyotism, as a new form of leadership and organization of the work process that incorporates quality in the productive processes and in the social product, and, through it, knowledge, particularly the tacit knowledge of the workers. Thus, Toyotism pursues objectives that are at odds with Fordism, since it aims to produce small series of differentiated and varied products, incorporating proposals of improvement of the work process and the product on the part of the workers (Coriat, 1991: 19).

Therefore, the formation of a cycle of knowledge (production, circulation, and accumulation) occurs involving the scientific-educational sector and social production, circulation, and consumption, in which the great historical challenge is the valorisation of knowledge (creation of new value based on knowledge), which presupposes a dilation and autonomization of the activities of the conception and design of the social product in relation to manufacturing activities. This, in turn, allows for a differentiation in the composition of the costs of production between both activities, in the following terms: a) the phase of conception and design is intensive in variable capital and not very intensive in constant capital, with variable capital consisting in highly skilled complex intellectual work; and b) the manufacturing phase tends to involve a greater percentage of constant capital in relation to variable capital (as well as the composition of capital as a whole), even when the specific proportion of each depends on the specific type of product and its place within its respective chain of value.

The cost composition specific to the conception and design phase is accompanied by its process of reproduction being carried out in a specific fashion, because: a) it presupposes major production costs, derived from a highly intensive process of the creation of knowledge due to the highly skilled intellectual work and its objectification in the first unit of the product; and b) its reproduction costs are minimum, since once the knowledge is objectified in the first unit of the product, the successive costs only consist in the reproduction of the material aspects of the product or in the production of successive copies of the first unit of the product, in which knowledge has already been objectified.

This implies that the specific cost composition of products intensive in knowledge, or products partially derived from the conception and design phase, represent a specific capital composition that counteracts the increase in the organic composition of capital –by being intensive in variable capital and not very intensive in constant capital- and therefore the valorisation of knowledge constitutes a new counter-trend to the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, based on the increase in the organic composition of capital. In complementarily fashion, from the point of view of circulation, we are dealing with products whose production presupposes a profit or

growing gains on the scale of production, since by concentrating the substantial part of the investment in the first unit of the product, the more copies that are sold, the greater will be the profits. This represents the other side of the coin of the valorisation of knowledge as a counter-trend to the decline in the rate of profit.

At the same time, products that are not very intensive in knowledge or products partially based on the manufacturing phase, are not characterized for being the result of highly skilled intellectual labor, and therefore their costs of production are comparable with their costs of reproduction, which translates into declining profits or returns due to their output scale.

In general, the law on the tendency of the rate of profit to decline continues operating, but with a new counter-trend that will have effects on the division of labor among firms in the context of the chains of value, and on a new international division of labor based on knowledge processes (Ordóñez, 2009A: 394-395).

On a macroeconomic level, the unfolding of the informatics and communications revolution brings along with it the integration of a new technological-productive complex, formed by industrial and service activities as a whole articulated by the basic integrated circuit technologies, software, digitization, which will be known as the informatics-electronics sector (Dabat and Ordóñez, 2009: 29-44).

The informatics-electronics sector becomes the new articulation and dynamizing nucleus of production, growth, and world trade, replacing the auto-metal/steel-petrochemical complex, characteristic of the Fordist-Keynesian phase of development. This translates into a new economic dynamism or industrial cycle, with longer expansive phases marked by higher growth and less pronounced and shorter recessive phases. The informatics-electronics sector energized the expansive phase of the 1990s, determined the world crisis of 2001 and 2002, and drove the subsequent recovery.

But at the present time, the transition from the merely economic moment of the process to the complex elaboration of the superstructure that provides historical viability to the new phase of development has still not been verified. This represents, in the final analysis, the fundamental cause of the current global financial crisis, to the extent that its essential determining factors reside in the autonomization and the extreme growth of financial capital in comparison with productive capital, which is very close related to the informatization and the resulting automatization and unprecedented growth in the velocity at which money circulates. This leads to the existence of an enormous plethora of global financial capital, the result, to a large extent, of the expansion of the sphere of financial valorisation that has brought along with it the diversification and the more complex character of the new financial agents and instruments, which implies an enormous spread of financial risk without the agents, particularly individual investors, having enough information to face the situation (Ordóñez, 2009: 60-62).

In this framework, the current global financial crisis determines the exhaustion of a first stage of the unfolding of the new phase of development, dominated by

international financial capital. This stage has been marked by the most important and far reaching superstructural development thus far achieved, neoliberalism. As superstructural development, neoliberalism seeks to provide an outlet for the unfolding of the technological-productive foundations of the new phase of development and to restore the dominance of the ruling classes that had been strongly questioned toward the end of the 1970s (Harvey, 2005: 39-63). At the same time, it seeks to essentially avoid the complex and extremely dangerous problem of the passive revolution as a foundation of a new hegemony over subaltern classes and groups, based on the following political-economic guidelines of superstructural scope: 1) the “end of history” as ideological and class struggle, and the victory of capitalism and political liberalism with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, as a system of international hegemony and competitor in the bipolar world order of the post-World War II period; 2) the quest for recognition and individualism due to liberalism, which can occur because of the free market, (private) property rights, and the material prosperity that reciprocally strengthen each other with a universal culture of consumption; 3) a transfer toward civil society of the state’s traditional responsibility to attend to the basic needs of survival of the marginalized sectors through providing social services and investment in infrastructure; 4) subjugation of politics to the democracy of the market and property rights, and the emergence of community survival networks to address the social needs that previously were the responsibility of the state (Bueno-Hansen, undated: 61-67); and 5) basically containing the entire superstructural projection on the internal institutional-social framework inherited from countries’ preceding phase of development, even when reformed in terms of the reduction of the role of the state as “neutral” guarantor of socio-economic reproduction -without active interventionism-, and, in the international framework, contained on the system of hegemony of states formed at the end of the Second World War, that emerged triumphant after the fall of the Berlin Wall and hegemonized by the United States.

Neoliberalism has tended to become articulated with postmodernism as an ideological-cultural principle of representation of the subject’s reality and action in the world that views it as a (multiple) reality(ies) in constant change and that is fragmentary (without interrelation among its constituent parts), which does not follow a line of continuity with the past, breaking, therefore, with the idea of (historical) progress. It involves, therefore, an indefinite reality in which every all-encompassing philosophy that pursues a change in reality as a whole is unviable and open to criticism, with specific individual or group praxis being the only variant possible, strongly determined by local contexts and of a necessarily pragmatic character (Harvey, 1990: 39-65).

In the framework of the “American” system of states’ hegemony, neoliberalism has coexisted with two major categories of experiences of an alternative superstructural nature. Even when they had some features in common, of a much more limited scope, they have tended to be articulated in their ideological-cultural dimension with postmodernism, and in them the hegemonic function has been used, alternatively and predominantly, either in its consensual dimension, such as in the Scandinavian countries, or in its coercive facet, such as in Southeast Asia, with some exceptions.

The specificity of the Scandinavian countries at the present time consists of having reconciled their integration in globalization and the development of knowledge capitalism, which has translated into growth that is above the average for the Eurozone and OECD nations, with the continued and permanent existence of the “welfare state”, albeit reformed to adapt to the new economic reality in the following terms: 1) deregulation of the financial markets; 2) decentralization of the tripartite negotiation (government, business, unions) toward the regional and local level; 3) orientating unemployment compensation toward the promotion of training and labor mobility, with an active policy in the labor market being one of the main instruments of state interventionism; and 4) introduction of market mechanisms in government enterprises and the privatization of some firms (Stephens, 1995: 24-26).

This is a group of countries that have managed to catch up in the international division of labor based on knowledge (Ordóñez, 2009A: 394-405), underpinned by a re-adjustment of their historical postwar bloc toward integration in globalization and the development of knowledge capitalism, based on an important process of the development of civil society, social inclusion in the knowledge processes, broad social protection for the subaltern groups and classes, and a series of experiences in which the most important case is that of Finland, due to its character as a late comer and its rapid rise.

On the other extreme are the Southeast Asian countries, which have taken advantage of the legacy of authoritarian states with strong government intervention in the economy and control over civil society, to promote the formation of development-oriented states that have managed to channel, through the use of coercion, social energy for the processes of innovation, technological learning, and production of knowledge, creating selective mechanisms of social protection simultaneously for specific groups. In this perspective, the most important cases are those of South Korea and Taiwan, since after the 1997-1998 crisis, which functioned as a catalyst for processes that had been initiated previously, the mechanisms of social protection were extended from workers employed by large firms to broad and disadvantaged social groups, in a dual dynamic that combines the increased use of processes more intensive in knowledge and added value, and, therefore less dependent on industrial labor costs, with the social effects of the crisis as such and the subsequent growth in relocating production, particularly in the case of Taiwan (Huck-ju Kwon, 2005: 12). Finally, there are other groups of countries such as the Eastern European nations, whose capacity for state-institutional efforts at social welfare policies are significantly reduced in relation to the preceding experiences, resulting from the processes of democratization, privatization, and political breakup that followed the fall of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, or the Latin American countries, which in actively adhering to the neoliberal project have only been able to form regional social blocs for innovation, which have led to the emergence of local industrial complexes and very specific activities of successful integration in globalization and the development of knowledge capitalism, but always inscribed in a pronounced process of social exclusion.

The main limitation of neoliberalism in providing historical viability to the new phase of development has been the lack of a process of passive revolution as a



foundation of a new hegemony, as well as international integration processes inclusive of the developing countries. This has translated into an intensification of the socio-economic inequalities between the dominant classes and the subaltern groups and classes, and between regions, within countries, as well as between states on an international level (with the exception of the Asian countries), a problem that has been coupled with the recurring eruption of financial-productive crisis, among which the current crisis has reached global dimensions never seen previously (Ordóñez, 2009: 68).

Therefore, the current global financial crisis reflects the exhaustion of neoliberalism and its resolution passes through the transition to a second stage of the unfolding of knowledge capitalism dominated by productive capital, which will tend to imply deep-going political-institutional reforms, which, inevitably, will tend to raise the question of the passive revolution as a foundation for a new hegemony over subaltern classes and groups, as well as integration projects inclusive of the developing countries in the international sphere, in the broader context of a relative weakening of the economic-political and military hegemony of the United States in favor of multi-polarity, with Asia being the most important emergent region, but with a new greater specific weight of other emerging economies in the world. Consequently, based on the structural changes in process, the historical-social space is open to superstructural-hegemonic projects that come not only from the dominant groups and classes, but also from the subaltern groups and classes, and thus to processes of alternative hegemony that represent the basis of a second dimension of Gramsci's (historical) revenge, as will be seen in the later section of this article.

### **3. Toward an inclusive and participatory knowledge society?**

Within the organic movements that are alternatives to the current course of the development of knowledge capitalism, directed by subaltern groups and with the aim of providing an inclusive and participatory character to the new emerging superstructure, there is the production of free software and to a certain extent open-source software, in its part based on the community of developers. This is so in the sense that both consist of a higher historical-social form of production and circulation of knowledge without a valorisation process of it –in the case of open-source software without its immediate valorisation- that, therefore, resolves the essential contradiction of capitalism, and, specifically, of its current phase of development, between the social nature of production and the social-accumulative character of knowledge, on the one hand, and the private character of their appropriation, on the other, because in this form of production, to the social nature of production and the social-accumulative character of knowledge corresponds a social character of the appropriation of the (social) product, limited exclusively by the necessary knowledge to access it.

This also involves a social form of production and organization that implies a social economy of use value and abundance, contrary to an economy of value change and scarcity, to the extent that software, as a form of the existence of knowledge, is not produced because of its abstract nature as undifferentiated knowledge -as proprietary software is-, but due to its concrete usefulness, whose costs of reproduction are, furthermore, infinitesimal, thus it is abundant; which translates into a situation in

which the programmer-user provides the community with a copy of his or her product that can be reproduced innumerable times at minimum costs, with multiple copies resulting, in exchange for a copy of other pieces of software in order to introduce new modifications to the code, or perhaps for its use based on modifications made by others.

Furthermore, worldwide free/open source software investment is bigger than proprietary software (the former representing around 20% of the whole software investment versus 17% of the latter), and is clearly growing faster since 2000, which goes hand in hand with the increasing importance of Internet as a mediating space for social reproduction, Internet consisting mainly of free/open source software, and with its technical and social advantages comparing to proprietary software, consisting of a major rate of innovation, shorter reacting times, greater stability as operating system and less vulnerability to viruses attacks, inferior buying, maintenance and support costs, greater productivity by firms using it as an input, etc (UNU-MERIT, 2006).

What follows is a detailed explanation of these revolutionary aspects of the production of free software and partially of open-source software, which in their currently developed form consists of a worldwide virtual factory, interconnected by the Internet, in which groups of self-designated workers, among whom there is an informal relationship, but are tight together by a cultural framework oriented towards carefully doing and interaction, work in parallel fashion -and not in unison- in separate copies of the code and they send proposals for its modification to a central assembly point, in which strict quality control is applied. The self-organized nature of production coincides, therefore, with a strict hierarchical discipline, a relationship in which the commitment voluntarily assumed by the programmers to introduce innovations into a software product, which will contribute resolving own problems, brings together the individual objectives with the general production goals as a whole, while the constant revision on the part of the peer-to-peer groups (work groups that operate in parallel fashion that are in charge of the development of other software pieces, with the idea that piece A can be integrated in order to perform an integral complex functionality) ensures maximum performance and quality (Chopra and Dexter, undated: 8-11).

Contrary to products intensive in knowledge or of the immaterial part of social production that enters into the knowledge valorisation circuit, the following aspects are specific to the production of free software: 1) it is undertaken by (live) complex intellectual labor that is not subject to a salary relationship; 2) the product is not earmarked for exchange, but rather is produced as a use value; and 3) the product is not subject to the regime of intellectual property or ownership rights, or rather it is submitted to a General Public License, which is intended to be the opposite of a copyright regime (a copyleft one), as it assures a never ending social domain over the product. In becoming a model of social organization and production existing in the confines between the production of knowledge for its immediate use and production for the purpose of generating value, that is, between the community of self-organized developers and production for the market, open-source software is governed by the same principles previously described in the part of the form of

organization sustained in the community of software developers, but by opposite principles in the part that is based on the market, that is: 1) it is undertaken by (live) complex intellectual labor that is subject to a salary relationship; 2) the product is immediately earmarked for sale; and 3) the product is subject to some regime of intellectual property or ownership rights, as will be immediately explained.

The work that gives rise to free software and the part based on the community of developers of open-source software is highly skilled complex intellectual labor that does not have an antagonistic relationship with their means of production (computer equipment, specialized software, etc.) but rather possess them, as well as the deployed labor force. Specifically, open-source software is based on this type of labor and, in addition, can be sustained by salaried labor in an antagonistic relationship with its means of production such as in the case of open-source software firms, in which the figure of the developer can assume two basic social hybrid modalities: a) the “traditional” developer with tasks in the community; and b) community developer with a salary. The former writes software, participates in the firm’s relationship with the market and contributes to community forums, having a system of control of the source code, which is periodically made public to the community. Meanwhile, the latter is a full-time community programmer that the firm ends up hiring, a situation in which the source code is placed at the disposal in a public server in real time (Dixon, 2007: 27). This working modality could be understood as a new form of work at home in which the community programmer is subsumed by capital.

Concerning the product, in free software it is produced as use value, that is, the objective of production is determined by the usefulness that the product can provide to the user-developer. This implies that its value is not measured by the (abstract) labor-knowledge contained in it, but by the useful capacity inherent to its concrete characteristics for resolving a computer problem involving functionality or application. This implies that production is immediately for consumption -without the intermediation of the market-, and that the circulation of the product is only limited by the knowledge to access and use it, with this taking place preferably over the Internet, even when its entry into the value circuit is possible through its being marketed by firms that distribute it and provide specialized and customer support services.

In the case of open-source software, production is geared for the market but also immediately for consumption. This implies that the software can enter the value circuit through its customization and sale to the end user by a firm (the firm that, in addition, can provide technical specialized and support services). Another possibility in this regard is a software program produced in the community of developers to be subsequently integrated as a module in the development of a broader proprietary software -which, therefore, has been produced under a salary relationship- and as a result it enters the knowledge valorisation circuit through the sale of the integrated product in the market. This translates into the generation of a profit for the owner of the integrated software, that is, the open-source software firm. That is why firms such as IBM and Sun Microsystems provide considerable resources for the development of the Linux operating system (through 2006, IBM had invested

US\$100 million or 20% of the estimated cost of developing Linux) in order to, based on the proprietary software schema, develop specific tools and applications based on that platform, mainly for the corporate software and ISP market (IBM, 2006)

Finally, free software is subject to a reverse of any regime of intellectual property rights, to the extent that its production, distribution, and use are governed by a General Public License which stipulates that the product is in the public domain for perpetuity, that is, the developed software can be freely used, copied, modified through manipulating its source code, and new versions must be freely distributed for the whole society.

Meanwhile, open-source software is regulated by Open Source Definition, which allows the software to be redistributed in the terms of the General Public License without doing so being obligatory (Weber, 2000: 10), thus opening up the possibility that a piece of software produced by the community of developers can be incorporated in a broader integrated proprietary software that is, in fact, governed by intellectual property rights and that, therefore, results in a monopolistic profit linked to its distribution through exclusive use licenses. There are other licenses such as the Berkeley Standard Distribution in which a programmer is authorized to introduce modifications to an open code and subsequently to sell it as a closed code, without the original “proprietor” having access to the closed code or being able to modify it (Chopra and Dexter, undated: 11).

The cultural principle of conceiving reality and acting upon it corresponding to this form of production and social organization consists of gift culture, which creates a specific identity that solidifies the community around values based on carefully doing, reciprocity and interaction. This is based on the principle that the development of the abilities and means of production of others increases the community’s capacity to return what has been provided by the donating individual (Hyde, 1983). Therefore, social status depends more on what is given than on what one possesses, which is sustained in the idea of property as a “possession” of what is being worked on and not as a property of the product of that activity (Weber, 2000: 23).

This knowledge production and circulation form has become the productive, organizational and ideological-cultural referent and “model” of the broad free knowledge creation and circulation online social movement, including, very importantly, the free artistic movement, which is being produced and circulated under the Free Art License and the Creative Commons License Systems (Miranda y Wolf [2010] y Pagola [2010]). This is too the inspiring source of the broad “apps” model of social online participation into creating new software applications for cellphones, which is extending to the hardware industry, mainly the telecommunication network industry and computing.

Therefore, this form of production and social organization presupposes, in terms of the Marxist theory of socialism, a state of development in which men begin to dominate their conditions of production and their products, instead of being

dominated by them, and, potentially, this facilitates the transition to a historical situation with two unprecedented characteristics in mankind's history, that is: 1) the development of the productive forces of society becoming an end in itself, beyond its character as a necessity, identifying it as the "epitome of freedom" (Marx, 1894: 958-959); and 2) control of the social conditions of life by the "collective intellect" and transformation of these social conditions in accordance with it. (Marx, 1857-1858, Volume II: 227-241)

In this historical perspective, the production of free software represents a seed within capitalism, and, specifically, in its current phase of development, of a higher communist society whose possibilities of development go hand-in-hand with current technological development, in the sense that the content in knowledge of social production tends to increase, which presupposes the growing use of software, as a new form of existence of knowledge, as an input in social production as a whole.

However, this seed of communism tends to be contained by the development of open-source software, in the sense that indirectly it incorporates the community of developers in the knowledge valorisation circuit and transforms it into a (post) modern form of work at home -in which the software developers inserted in a post-capitalist form of production are subsumed by capital, under different modalities-, but, paradoxically, with it, open-source software simultaneously nurtures the very development of the community of developers, and, consequently, the form of social organization that sustains free software.

This points to a historical crossroad in the entrails of knowledge capitalism at the dawn of the global financial crisis, in which its neoliberal predominant modality of development based on proprietary software has been exhausted by the crises, giving rise to a new open socio-historical situation characterized by the emergence of a seed of a modality of alternative and postcapitalist social development based on free software form of economic and social organization, which tends to be simultaneously contained and stimulated by the rising of a new capitalistic modality with greater social participation overcoming neoliberalism, represented by open-source software form of economic and social organisation.

It is an open question if free software form of production and social organization might be adopted by subaltern groups and classes as their autonomous way of incorporating to the social production and circulation of knowledge -both on and offline- required by countries competition in knowledge capitalism. But its possible achievement would imply Gramsci's historical revenge, not only by providing a theoretical framework to understand the current historical change from a marxian perspective -which is already taking place as this article states it-, but by inspiring the political strategy to drive that change in an alternative hegemony prospective of subaltern groups and classes.

## REFERENCES

Arthur, B.W. 1996. "Increasing Returns and the New World of Business", Harvard Business Review, July-August, pp. 1-11

- Arthur, B.W. 1994. *Increasing Returns and the Path Dependence in the Economy*, The University of Michigan Press, United States.
- Buci-Glucksmann, Cristine. 1975. *Gramsci et l'état: pour une théorie matérialiste de la philosophie*, Fayard., Paris, France.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1977. "Sui problemi politici de la transizione: classe operaia e rivoluzione pasiva", *Politica e storia in Gramsci*, Riuniti-Istituto Gramsci, Rome, pages non available.
- Bueno-Hansen, P. Undated. "Approaches to comparative politics: a cultural politics critique", *Field Statement: Politics Department*.
- Chopra, S; Dexter, S. Undated. "The Political Economy of Open Source Software", *The International Journal of Technology, Knowledge and Society*, Volume 1, Issue 7, pp. 127-134.
- Coriat, B. 1991. *Penser à l'envers*, Christian Bourgeois, Paris.
- Cox, R.W. 1987. "Gramsci, hegemony and international relations", *Millenium*, no. 12, London.
- Dabat, A; Ordóñez, S. 2009. *Revolución informática, nuevo ciclo industrial e industria electrónica en México*, IIEc-UNAM, Juan Pablos, México.
- De Felice F. 1977. "Rivoluzione passiva, fascismo, americanismo in Gramsci", *Politica e storia in Gramsci*, Riuniti-Istituto Gramsci, Rome, pages non available.
- Dixon, J. 2007. "The bee Keeper. Crossing the chasm between the cathedral and the bazaar. A description of professional open source business model", *Pentaho. Open Source Business intelligence*, Available: <http://www.pentaho.com/> (Date of access: august 2007)
- Dosi, Giovanni. 1998. "Exploring the Unknown. On Entrepreneurship, Coordination and Innovation - Driven Growth", in Lesourne, J; Orlean, A. (eds), *Advances in Self-Organization and Evolutionary Economics*, Paris, Economics, pages non available.
- Foray, D. 2000. *L'économie de la connaissance*, La Découverte, Paris.
- Freeman C; Pérez, C. 1998. *Structural Crises of Adjustment: Business Cycles and Investment Behaviour*, in Dosi, et al., op cit, pp. 38-66.
- Gramsci, A. 1975. *Quaderni del carcere (1929-1935)*, a cura di Valentino Gerratana, Einaudi-Istituto Gramsci, Turin.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1981. *Noterelle sulla politica del Machiavelli*, introduzione e note di Donzelli, C; Einaudi, Torino.
- Harvey, David. 1990. *The condition of postmodernity*, Blackwell-Cambridge MA-Oxford UK; Massachusetts, United States.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005. *Breve historia del neoliberalismo*, Akal; Madrid, Spain.
- Huck-Ju Kwon. 2005. "Transforming the Developmental Welfare State in East Asia", in *Social Policy and Development Programme*, paper # 22, United Nations. Pp. 15.
- Hyde L. 1983. *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic life of Property*, Vintage Books.
- IBM. 2006. Available: <http://www-03.ibm.com/linux/> (Date of access: 28 April 2006)
- Marx, K. 1984. *Contribución a la crítica de la economía política. (1859)*, Quinto Sol; Mexico City.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1978. *El Capital (1867)*, Tomo I, Siglo XXI, Mexico City.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1978. *El Capital (1885)*, Tomo II, Siglo XXI, Mexico City.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1981. *El Capital (1894)*, Tomo III, Siglo XXI, Mexico City.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1857-1858. Elementos Fundamentales para la Crítica de la Economía Política (Grundrisse), Vol. 2, Siglo XXI.
- Miranda A. y Wolf G. 2010, "Factores de motivación y elementos de reconocimiento", Seminario Construcción Colaborativa del Conocimiento, IIEC-UNAM.
- OECD. 2001. Basic Science and Technology Statistics.
- Ordóñez Sergio. 2009. "La crisis global actual y el sector electrónico-informático", Problemas del desarrollo, Vol. 40, No 158, July-September, pp. 55-90.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009[A]. "El capitalismo del conocimiento. La nueva división internacional del trabajo y México" in Dabat, A; Rodríguez, J (coord.), Globalización, conocimiento y desarrollo. La nueva economía global del conocimiento. Estructura y Problemas, Tomo I, iiec-unam, el crim-unam, la fe-unam, Mexico City, pp. 383-416.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007 "Nueva fase de desarrollo, hegemonía e instituciones: Retorno al futuro en Gramsci", Economía Informa, No.348 September-October, pp. 26-47
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004 "Nueva fase de desarrollo y capitalismo del conocimiento: elementos teóricos", Comercio Exterior, vol. 54, No. 1, January, pp. 4-17.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996 "Cambio histórico mundial contemporáneo y pensamiento social. Transformaciones del capitalismo: la revancha de Gramsci", Iztapalapa, UAM-I, # 40, July-December, pp. 207-230
- Portelli H. 1972. Gramsci e il blocco storico, Laterza, Tempi nuovi, Rome-Bari.
- Pagola L. 2010, "Esquemas premisivos de licenciamiento en la creación artística", Seminario Construcción Colaborativa del Conocimiento, IIEC-UNAM.
- Roberts, V. 2003. Restricciones en la difusión de tecnologías abiertas. La difusión del software libre en la Argentina, Masters Thesis, General Sarmiento National University, Argentina.
- Sereni E. 1972. "Blocco storico e iniziativa politica nell'elaborazione gramsciana e nella politica del PCI", Critica marxista, quaderno 5, Rome, pages non available.
- Shumpeter, J. A. 1939. Business Cycles: A Theoretical, Historical and Statistical Analysis of the Capitalist Process, 2 volumes, McGraw Hill, New York.
- Unu-Merit. 2006. Economic impact of open source software on innovation and the competitiveness of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) sector in the EU, Netherlands, November 20.
- Wikipedia. 2007. "Gift economy", es.wikipedia.org, available: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gift\\_economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gift_economy) (Date of access: 20 October 2007)
- Weber, S. 2000. "The political economy of open source software", BRIE Working Papers Series no. 140, University of Berkeley, California, pp. 41.
- World Economic Forum (WEF). 2005. "Global Information Technology Report, 2004-2005", pp. 293.
- Williamson, John. 2003. "From Reform Agenda: A Short History of the Washington Consensus and Suggestions for What to Do Next," Finance & Development, September, pp. 10-13.