

Urban Culture as Passive Revolution

A Gramscian Sketch of the Uneven and Combined Transitional Development of Rural and Urban Modern Culture in Europe and Egypt

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[Gramsci and the Fourth Wave](#)

Some scholars and observers were quick to herald the Egyptian mass uprising of 2011 as the beginning of a ‘fourth wave of democratization’ (e.g. Gershman 2011). This followed Samuel Huntington’s culturalist-ethnic temporalization of modernity’s democratic process into three consequent waves. Since the advent of Western colonialism, the countries in the region appeared to have been continuously on the road to modernity, without ever really getting there. The fourth wave would finally liberate the MENA region from the burden of ‘persistent authoritarianism’ and Islamic cultural ‘backwardness’.

Models of linear modernization only deal with the Other as an isolated and diachronic entity. There is no actually shared space-time: as an observer of ‘traditional’ societies one can only look back and urge them to ‘catch up’ with the predetermined course of history, i.e. capitalist democracy. Against the backdrop of the Other’s particularism and exceptionalism, one’s own historical trajectory becomes differentiated, homogenized and normalized. In this chapter we criticize the linear and non-contradictory conception of modernization and modern culture through a dialogue with the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. We distinguish between the logic of capitalism and its real, fractured history. In order to understand the dialectic of the universalization of commodity production and the concreteness of capitalist

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transition we compare the historical trajectory of Western Europe with that of Egypt. The totality of modernity is characterized by unevenness and combination, not only of economic, but also of political and cultural forces. Gramsci's Italy functions hereby as a microcosm of the uneven and combined nature of modernity. The formation of modern European urban culture is discovered as an exceptional and immanent process, rather than the teleological outcome of capital accumulation. The Jacobin moment – i.e. the bourgeoisie's 'pure' ethico-political project, historically expressed in the French Revolution – is quickly subsumed under the realities of combined class interests and alliances. Instead of classical bourgeois hegemony, a series of passive revolutions become the primary determinants of modernity. Precapitalist relations of power and practices of discipline are not replaced by European bourgeois leadership, but chiefly integrated into capitalist social formations by Bonapartist coercion and the social-technological prestige of American monopoly capitalism.

We show how the case of the Egyptian Mahalla al-Kubra textile manufactures exemplifies the notable differences and similarities between European and Egyptian transitional temporalities. The modernist form of the first indigenous industries obscured their precapitalist substance: an extension of absolutist, commercial, landed, and colonial interests and social structures. Conversely, the Nasserite intervention reinforced and developed concepts and practices of modern urban culture and nationhood, uniting the logical 'Jacobin' and 'Bonapartist' moments, and mobilizing them against (and in accordance with) the historical forces of colonialism and imperialism of its time.

The Uneven and Combined Development of Economic and Cultural Forces: Spatial and
Temporal Configurations

A Marxist analysis of different capitalist cultures starts from the empirical and conceptual supposition that 'transition' does not mean the linear 'purification' of a social formation of all non-capitalist structures. The uneven and combined development of capitalism intensified a contradictory hierarchy of territorial-economic scales. The asynchronous spatial emergence of the capitalist mode of production and the world market posed the problem of how precapitalist societies and modes of production related to their capitalist counterparts and to the world economy as a whole.

One of Gramsci's main themes in the Prison Notebooks was the uneven and combined development of the Italian territory and of capital accumulation (Kipfer 2013: 86). Gramsci noticed a distinct difference between precapitalist central institutions and the modern state. Communal ties and a moral economy were the main characteristics of precapitalist societies. In contrast, the modern state attempted to homogenize its social and cultural territory. It abolished the particularist nature of overlapping and fragmented institutional powers based upon common law, personal networks and entitlements, despotic powers resting upon tradition and the corporatist organisation of economic interests. In European capitalism, cities were no longer structured by extra-economic stratified relations, but by the demands of production (Morton 2013: 58). The breakthrough of the capitalist mode of production, however, is not a simple narrative of immediate successes. In Hegelian terms, the dialectic of capital and the universalization of commodity production express a logical becoming, but only a historicist analysis can give an overview of the contradictory concreteness of this becoming.

Contrary to culturalist and post-Marxist interpretations – i.e. subalternity as a purely cultural concept or politics-qua-politics, Gramsci emphasised the importance of economic processes in the formation of the cultural and invested much time and energy to understand Marxist and bourgeois economics (e.g. Krätke and Thomas 2011). Gramsci's immanent

critique of the present pushed forward an often misunderstood historicist research agenda that aimed to integrate cultural, political and economic phenomena. For example, Henri Lefebvre described his notebooks as a political statist critique of the bourgeois state (Kipfer 2008: 196). Postmodern superstructuralism not only renders every practice autonomous, but also refuses to properly deal with Gramsci's strategic questions regarding the global social processes of emancipation by political means. After Mouffe's plea for a radicalisation of bourgeois democracy, a new generation of post-Marxist and autonomists avoided the state debate altogether.

Regarding the capitalist state, the ideal of a complete Jacobine transformation of a national territory contradicts with the concrete different cultural and political temporalities of the historical incomplete bourgeois hegemony – a never-ending attempt to create a spatial hegemony in order to homogenize time. These uneven and combined spatio-temporal aspects of hegemony produce unique articulations of economic structures (capital accumulation) and cultural practices (the formation of the identities of capital and labour) (Jessop 2005: 424). European modernity is not a homogenous cultural complex in which capitalism came to existence.

Gramsci, Modernity, and the False Dichotomy between Urbanity and Rurality in Europe

One of the principal characteristics of Gramsci's Prison Notebooks is the connection between modern culture and state formation. The fascist rise to power exposed the weaknesses of the liberal agenda of political hegemony. Throughout the nineteenth century the liberal elite of the northern cities and the incumbent politicians in the central government relied heavily on the willingness of the bourgeois landowners. They decided whether the state bureaucracy could rely on local cooperation in order to exercise the official rule of law. The preservation

of the mutual interests of the northern industrialists and the southern landowners was based upon the social and spatial separation between the two regions (Gramsci 1982 [1929]: 228). The North did not only underdevelop the South by restricting infrastructural investments. The rural bourgeoisie wished to maintain the status quo between the two regions and of the rural social relations within their region. For Gramsci, the Risorgimento created a deficient modern Italian state. He articulated the uneven situation of the social formation with the Italian temporal and spatial position in the world market, because

the late entrance of peripheral European societies into capitalist relations meant that state forms were “less efficient” in creating ideological mechanisms to defer the immediate consequences of economic crisis, so that the form of state transformations in such cases was circumscribed by prevailing conditions with the international capitalist system.

(Morton 2013: 58)

The social configuration of society could not be mobilized into a national-popular force to encompass the complete national space, which reflected in the narrow scope of the political discourse of the Italian Moderates. The instable political and economic features of the unification were both the inheritance and the further reproduction of a relative backwardness of the South with respect to the North (Davis 1979). It did not come as a surprise that fascism, notwithstanding their Southern petit bourgeois patriarchal attitude, was able to advance itself as the necessary force for an all-encompassing modernization of society. Its techno-scientific productivism expressed a desire to overcome the standstill of liberal political society.

Gramsci's emphasis on the inheritance and reproduction of backwardness, in order to understand modern statehood and political phenomena such as fascism, was related to his peculiar perspective of modernity. For Gramsci, modernity entailed the universalization of the capitalist mode of production and at the same time the unevenness of this universalization. Capitalist modernity expresses, as Massimiliano Tomba has aptly put, a 'historical-epochal break' with the past, because the new social relations are shaped by a 'historical condition that comprises a universal history' (Tomba 2013: 115-20). Nonetheless, this historical-epochal break is not a once and for all clear cut between pre-capitalist social relations, practices and institutions, and modernity. Capitalist culture in the core countries based upon wage labour, contractual obligations, the factory system and the division of labour, and the formal political equality of citizenship could not thrive without the integration and co-existence of numerous practices of the past. The present forms a historical repetition of the same as a necessary basis for new phenomena. Gramsci's stance towards modernity entails a critique of the present state of things from a historical perspective. There is always a 'non-identity with itself' of the present, the 'non-contemporaneity of the present' (Thomas 2009: 282). The homogenous smooth representation of capitalist modernity tends to forget the dialectical process, the process of becoming and sublation, between the apparent dead past and the living present. This is the theoretical and practical site of critical research and political struggle. Gramsci's historicism consists of a reciprocal relation between his historical materialist analysis of the capitalist social formation and his philosophy of praxis, in which he finds himself as 'an element of the contradiction and elevates this element to a principle of knowledge and therefore of action' (Gramsci 1971: 405). Hegemony became a key concept in the historical understanding of the rise and degeneration of the bourgeois state, modernity and the political practice of elites and subaltern classes (Frosini 2003: 153). Gramsci deployed the concept of hegemony in order to rupture, in a historical and logical

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sense, the self-referentiality and linearity of modernity as the bourgeois epoch: 'Together with the transformation of the state, the labour process, household structures, and workers' subjectivities, urbanization was key to what Gramsci saw as a positive if contradictory rationalization of social life' (Kipfer 2013: 90). Therefore, Gramsci can be used to overcome the restrictions of classical Durkheimian sociology and its evolutionary point of view regarding the contradictions of the processes of political centralization and civil mentality in the economic sphere (Badie and Birnbaum 1983: 12-14). The conceptual deployment of hegemony consists of an immanent critique of the present and the representation of modernity linked to a laboratory of political practice outside the demarcations of liberal modernity itself.

In order to understand capitalist culture, the Gramscian perspective does not propose ~~not~~ a Habermasian ethical opposition between liberal modernity and fascism, nor does it simply underscore the post-war Adornian idea of the inherent potentiality of self-destructivity of modern society and its mythical roots. Furthermore, it is not sufficient to merely note the difference between representation and the critique of its evolutionary narrative. This limited form of critique can be noted as deconstructive, constituting modernity as a system 'which inscribes its otherness within its interiority'. The ideological and theoretical problematic will be reduced to a 'strategic skirmish ~~---~~[...]' at the level of the mind than at the level of political forces'. (Eagleton 1996: 7). Nor can a postmodern and post-colonial alterity as absolute distinction from modernity or the intransparent subjectivity be of any clarification for the historical development of capitalism (Hartley 2003: 239). Hegemony is thus a necessary tool to analyse the political and cultural forces of modernity.

Within the Gramscian notion of hegemony and its non-contemporaneity it is possible to overcome the false modern dichotomy between city and countryside in classical sociological and political thought (Kipfer 2013: 92). Looking closer, the representation of two mutually exclusive lifeworlds had its roots in medieval times. First, medieval and early

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modern politico-economic and moral tractates – as in Aristotle’s antiquity these subjects were not differentiated into separated discursive formations of knowledge – were written on behest of dominant elites. The image of the perceived peasant subjectivity was created to serve an ideological instrumentalisation of the elites ‘as a means toward inverse self-definition’ (Lis and Soly 2012: 159). Second, the discursive content and processes of signification of instrumentalisation depended on the concrete relations of force and subject dispositions. Structural relations and political events together forged the image of the farmer as either a virtuous toiler, or an inferior being. The gentry relied on the patriarchal, but at the same time uneven, reciprocal commitments and entitlements – i.e. the moral economy. These landowners emphasised the passivity of the peasant, glorifying the hardship of rural labour, combined with his own imagined benevolence. But peasant revolts were a constant feature in feudal times. Landlords accused peasants to be short-sighted in their illiteracy and being a force of disruption in the natural order of things. With the introduction of capitalist money-rent with a purely monetary and contractual character, peasants were perceived as an obstacle to the production of a surplus and growth. A new school of agronomists argued against the underlying moral ties in the countryside and ‘formulated a new set of values to substantiate the rise agriculture. ... [they] labelled customary methods of self-sufficient smallholders as impediments to progress’ (Lis and Soly: 2012: 203). Capitalist landowners, thriving upon the spread of leasehold contracts, ~~did not~~ longer defined their interests according to the values of the moral economy. Third, a distinction has to be made between the ideological image of the peasant and the discursive evaluation of the countryside as a source of wealth. In all precapitalist societies the predominance of agricultural output and employment, combined with the umbra of famine caused by a failed harvest, determined philosophical and utopian thought. At the same time, the agricultural feudal characteristics created the specific corporatist legal and cultural framework of cities. These cities were not bourgeois islands in

direct opposition of landlord interests. The old bourgeoisie aligned themselves with aristocratic power because their commercial networks relied on political and military support. In times of medieval revolt of the subaltern strata, the bourgeoisie failed to overcome their corporatist interests and in some cases even supported repression. These corporatist interests were expressed in the self-enclosed burgesses' culture in associations and literary guilds (Morris 1983; Heller 2011: 31-2). The success of the commercialization model of early modern Europe was the economic result of the particular class configuration and the reciprocal restrictions of political action between landed property and urban bourgeoisie which lasted several centuries (Dobb 1976: 73-67). [A revolution could change the articulation of the modes of production](#) Only when a historic bloc of the bourgeoisie and subaltern classes politically disturbed the balance of forces, [in combination](#) with a secular rural crisis, ~~could a revolution change the articulation of the modes of production~~ (Gramsci 1996 [1930]: 97).

Early modern tractates lacked a profound interrelatedness between cities and countryside from the point of production (e.g. the mercantilist William Petty Roncaglia 1985: 51). It was the body politic that resembled the conceptual focal point of the integration of socio-spatial differences. In the eighteenth century, the Physiocrats, the direct forerunners of modern economic thought and a main source of inspiration for Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, expressed the transition towards capitalism as a multi-layered process. Albeit firmly rooted in the Enlightenment tradition, they defended, especially François Quesnay, a despotic regime of aristocrats with very limited representation (Fox-Genovese 1976). For them, agricultural output, as written before, was the only source of limited growth. Cities and its inhabitants were considered as the sterile non-productive part of the national state. Nonetheless, they defended the modern bourgeois idea of free-trade and the further centralization of state institutions and the spatio-judicial homogenisation of the nation. In

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other words, they proposed some incipient ideas about modern bourgeois rule, albeit directly defending their own interests and thus lacking insights about ideological consent and the importance of national-popular cultural leadership. But these bourgeois elements were nothing more than a remedy for absolutist politics, therefore they culturally represented the height of absolutism and its continuous hegemonic crisis. This was, because, on the one hand, ‘the expansion of production and exchange relations meant that feudal serfdom could no longer be politically supported by parceled manorial authority [...], which required a centralized authority’; and, on the other hand, ‘absolutism arose in a transitional period when the monarch could play off emerging bourgeoisie and traditional nobility against each other’ (Mann 1986: 476-77).

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The French Revolution signified the definite break with feudalism. The creation of the bourgeois state eliminated the moral economy and its particularist cultural and political practises and identities. The sphere of civil society was torn from political society, and man as a private individual with particular interests was separated from man as a citizen of the universal community. Modern society ‘divorced economic practices from their diffuse symbolic valences’ (Goux 1990: 122). Yet again, this epochal-historical break consisted of many temporalities. It was Marx who wrote the history of the French post-revolutionary bourgeois epoch – especially in his ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’. Marx sketched as much the making of the French working class as the becoming of a political equilibrium between the different factions of capital. In the initial post-Napoleonic years of depression the conservative side of the bourgeoisie, the rural bourgeoisie enriched by rent-seeking opportunities, only supported the central government in its ability to establish a political Restoration. The most striking feature was the relative absence of industrial capital. The early Jacobine state removed institutional and judicial barriers for the bourgeoisie in order to accommodate accumulation, for example the abolition of guilds and common law

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entitlements, but soon it became clear that the republican loyalists in the ranks of the middle and lower bourgeoisie opted for traditional economic activities such as money-lending, and the buying and selling of land property (Kriedte 1983: 154-55; Versieren 2013). Between 1830 and 1848 concentrated money-capital used the July Monarchy as a 'a joint stock company for the exploitation of France's national wealth' (Marx 1978 [1850]: 52). As long as credit was available for the rural bourgeoisie mutual agreements were possible. But underinvestment, lack of industrial productive growth and political instability forced these elites to take recourse to a Bonapartist regime, which led to the gradual economic integration of commercial, industrial and money-capital. But this Bonapartist regime meant the gradual dissolution and sublation of the Jacobine bourgeois hegemonic project and the moral-intellectual content of the integral class-state 'vis-à-vis civil society – the organic unity of the class-as-nation (Mann 1986: 472). The passivity of the subaltern classes and its cultural-political alienation from the dominant class led the Bonapartist regime to its inevitable downfall. The bourgeois project encountered its organic crisis, politically and ideologically, as 'the working classes' revolt ~~...~~[...] demanding instead political forms adequate to their own emergent class project ~~...~~[...] then began an epoch of passive revolution' (Thomas 2009: 145-46). The passive revolution consisted of a series of small-scale economic reforms that initiated molecular transformations, and which were based on the partial hegemony of one or more class fractions over the other ruling and subaltern social layers. 'Passive revolution' is Gramsci's interpretation of '~~...~~the persistent capacity of initiative of the bourgeoisie which succeeds, even in the historical phase in which it has ceased to be a properly revolutionary class, to produce socio-political transformations, sometimes of significance, conserving securely in its own hands power, initiative and hegemony, and leaving the working classes in their condition of subalternity' (Losurdo, in Thomas 2009: 197). The intensified class struggle and ideological oppositions need to be contained and

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articulated by the integral state, thus a passive revolution aims to restructure the coherence of a social formation and its state power within a further process of uneven and combined socio-geographical development (Morton 2013: 59).

Gramsci and the Passive Revolution of Social and Cultural Sciences: Rurality, Urbanity and Americanism

The period of passive revolution until World War One ignited a proliferation of social, cultural and economic theories about the modern condition and its hegemonic aspirations. Bourgeois theorists struggled with the attempt to reconcile the Jacobine discursive formation about individualism and autonomy with the collective character of mass politics. In economics, a moral-intellectual conservatism took place. The ‘marginalist revolution’ in economics aimed to discipline the labour market by both erasing the concept of class and claiming that the struggle for a higher value of labour power equated to the complete disruption of the economy. In social theory individualist rationality was linked to intentional functionalism and value-free descriptive realism. But the lack of legitimacy of bourgeois values could not be remedied by a simple acceptance and formal endorsement of the state of facts. Durkheim invented a moderate communitarian model of individual freedom of civil subjects together with a range of social responsibilities stemming from tradition and informal social control. In his analysis of the social collective consciousness Durkheim affirmed his a-social individualist and realist concept of ideology, failing to answer the question ‘by means of what concepts are [...] institutions and practices demonstrated to be the object of the science of sociology?’ (Hirst 1975: 100). Durkheim’s methodological inability to render ideology in its proper conceptual terms can be tracked in his point of view regarding urban and rural life. In a country with almost half of the population in the rural sectors – the

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impoverished farmers trying to meet ends with putting-out textile production – and a significant niche craft-production by small-scale industry, the ideal image of modernity conflicted with everyday economic life (Kemp 1971; Liu 1994). Throughout Durkheim's writings on modern phenomena a classical tension can be detected between a rather nostalgic evaluation of precapitalist communal ties in rural villages and the experienced anomie of modern city life. But his call for a vague form of solidarity to combat the disintegrative tendencies of urban mentality and the social division of labour lacked any dialectical analysis of the relations of force and ideological processes that tied urban life and countryside together. For example, he practically dismissed any qualitative difference between communal identities and the modern proletarian political struggle. For him, 'the traditional community has enshrined class-conscious working-class values and some conception of shared collective responsibility and, as well, shares a collective memory with venerated historical events and personages' (Chorney 1990: 76). Compared to the Gramscian or Thompsonian historicist examples of the qualitative jump from a corporatist to a class-based struggle of the proletariat, Durkheim eliminated the ideological shifts of counter-hegemonic movements. The same can be noted about Max Weber in Germany, but in a different form. Weber mediated his seemingly a-ideological individualism with the aspirations of the conservative nationalist *réveil* in a young nation, calling forth the cultural ideals of democratic bourgeois elitism (Mommsen 1974: 22-46; Scott 2000: 40-42). Yet again, his unblinking support for bourgeois modernization of the economic sphere and his condemnation of the rural and urban moral economy did not resolve the pressing agrarian question and the ensuing fact of unevenness between the industrial West and the Junker-dominated rural East.

Gramsci succeeded to surpass and exceed the ideological and conceptual limitation of classical bourgeois social and cultural thinkers. In order to understand the new dialectical

unity between city and countryside and the related question of hegemony, he underscored the importance of changing spatial scales (Morton 2013). Whilst in precapitalist times the cities relied on the hinterland in order to thrive and to gain regional or international dominance of some niche production or long-distance trade, most output was being consumed locally or regionally. The emergence of the economies of scale within the capitalist world market developed in interaction with the constellation of modern nation-states. The city became the most important nexus of production, a new social and cultural-symbolic territory, fuelled by a stream of landless farmers. Early on, the novelty of urban culture as a set of ‘new principles’ of living – the social costs of the new labour process – was already recorded by scientists and governmental institutions (e.g. Fielden 1834; Cooke Taylor 1844). Gramsci and Marx, discussing the French and Italian transition towards capitalist modernity, attempted to redefine the class content of the relation between city and countryside. The most important question is how urban culture, expressing new forms of class solidarity, became ideologically self-conscious about its socio-spatial impact on the social formation as a whole:

Gramsci saw modern(ist) urbanization as key to the demographic reordering of the ‘terrain’ of hegemony ---[...] and interpreted urban space ---[...] as key ‘ideological material’ for bourgeois rule ---[...] he was unambiguous about the positive role urban transformations could play in multiscalar, spatially and temporally differentiated wars of position ---[...] Gramsci hoped that industrial action and political self-organization in Turin would join up with the land occupations that swept through northern and southern agricultural zones ---[...] and thus lay the basis for a final war of movement – the takeover of the heights of bourgeois power in Milan and Rome.

(Kipfer 2013: 90-91).

Thus, ~~both-neither~~ the deficient bourgeois rule ~~and-nor~~ its proletarian contender had ~~not~~ the decisive hegemonic upper hand when they ~~only~~ exerted the urban war of position. The spatial differentiations need to be tied together in order to fully understand the non-contemporaneity of hegemonic practices. At the right, combined with the wartime experiences of the total mobilisation of national resources, the technician and technocratic fetish of Americanism attracted both liberals, conservatives as nationalists. The United States, not 'burdened' by the past of feudalism and communal forms of living, exported a renewed bourgeois scientific culture of Taylorism. It brought the promise of the eradication of backwardness in the exponential intensity of the social division of labour in the production process. The pure form of bourgeois modernity in the ideological images of Americanism mirrored the 'imperfections' of the European origins and development of the capitalist mode of production (Gramsci 1982 [1929]: 167, 188-89, 220-23).

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The spread of Americanism under monopoly capitalism happened at different economic scales. Monopoly capitalism increased labour and capital productivity, the final real subsumption of labour, which increased the spatial integration of the social units of the world market and the importance thereof (Massey 1984: 46-53). Within factory walls, it became clear that the early European capitalist process still relied on a combination of premodern and capitalist disciplinary practices, which shaped modern property relations and relations of force: the daily selection of the unskilled labour force at the factory gate, monopolising knowledge of skills of former independent artisans by contractual obligations, the promulgation of rules and monetary penalties, spatial compartmentalization, the system of overseers and the enhancement of vertical hierarchy by bringing in domestic relations. This strategy of microphysical power was highly problematic in terms of pure economic efficiency – surplus extraction. For example, 'at a time when manufacturing still depended on

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craft knowledge or on the secret know-how of the overlookers and foremen, graded monetary sanctions gave owners the only feasible check on, and evaluation of, the overlookers' loyalty and efficiency' (Biernacki 1995: 195). In addition, loyalty could be procured by playing the communal card of kinship and ethnicity: the hiring of families of workers and overseers outside the locality (e.g. Lis & Soly 1987: 75-76). The factory owners legitimised their disciplinary practices through a heterodox discursive strategy. First there was a patriarchal call for obedience and the conceptualisation of the factory floor as a natural chain of command. Second, the individual prudence and sense of duty of both capitalist and worker was mobilized. The labourer had the contractual duty to deliver a certain amount of commodities to the capitalist, whose profits relied on a standardised method of sale. Third, it was argued that both wage and profit depended on the competitiveness of all 'participants' of production in a free-trade economic society. Fourth there was an appeal to [Christian](#)-virtuous [Christian](#) work regarding diligence and piety (Versieren 2013). Taylorism used the principle of the division of labour to atomize and disarm the potential resistance of proletarian and communal subjectivity of the worker. In other words, its spatial division is not a matter of just measuring the expanding size of the company, because Taylorism established the economic and cultural form of the social nature of property relations within the political framework of a passive revolution (e.g. Massey 1984: 27). The transformed microphysics of power on the factory floor reflected the changing ideological determination of the labour market. In the centuries before early capitalism state coercion and local authorities had been the most important source of regulation of labour practices and its role in commercial and productive activities (Mann 1986: 461; Biernacki 1995: 214-45). No culture existed which promoted the creation of an exchange market for labour power. Monopoly capitalism, unleashing the productive powers through the dissemination of Americanism as the pure ideological representation and cultural practice, showed a remarkable resemblance with the political logic

of the integral state (Gramsci 2007 [1930]: 11). The top-down hierarchy of overseers and the culture of master and servant gradually mutated into a layered system of molecular co-optation of workers into the daily management of the production process. A 'passive revolution' in the factory was necessary because its formerly direct forms of discipline contradicted the exponential growth of the division of labour. This situation thus 'aggravates control problems and potentially puts the power of the ruler into further jeopardy ... [.] Those in power become dependent on experts who are much harder to control than those whose work is open to common-sense evaluation' (Rueschemeyer 1984: 54). The exercise of power became more and more anonymous, in which the concrete diffusion of individual ownership, absentee ownership, blended with collusive management of administration and engineers (Veblen 1997 [1923]: 210-14). Nonetheless, in both early liberal capitalism and monopoly capitalism status according to the position in the production process could not be divorced from cultural and political transformations. The social evaluation of skills cannot be reduced to a technical point of view. On a macro-scale, political struggle brought an urban proletarian culture into existence. The organization of the national economy, especially the socio-spatial relationships between the different class factions of capitalists vis-à-vis the subaltern forces, is itself the object of the very same struggle (Massey 1984: 41-43). Fordism expressed the cultural and political reconfiguration of labour under the expanding role of the integral state. It integrated class struggle, which became a structural element of cyclical capitalist crisis.

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Gramsci in Egypt: The Making of Modern Culture and the Spectres of Colonialism and Feudalism

The case of the Mahalla al-Kubra textile manufactures exemplifies the notable differences and similarities between European and Egyptian transitional temporalities. It cannot be considered as the inevitable making of capitalist culture on micro-scale, but rather the 'further innovation and perfection of artisanal weaving process' (Hammad 2009: 36). From Muhammed Ali until Nasser the early manufactures and urban corporatist structures resembled some of the key characteristics of the commercialization model of early modern Europe. Thus the thesis that merchant capitalism in Ottoman times or the emergence of manufacturing under Muhammed Ali directly led to modern capitalism lacks evidence and coherence (Abdel-Malek 1983: 122; Khafaji 2004: 43). As in Europe, this commercialization of society reached its apex in a precapitalist cultural context. A few manufactures, additional rural 'proto-industrial' production, conflicts between merchants and craftsmen, subcontracting between and within guilds, all these phenomena were intricately linked to a predominant tributary mode of production with its own history of succeeding phases of centralization and decentralization of surplus extraction by the Ottoman sultanate, the Mamluk dynasty and local landlords – a rhythm, that only ended with the decolonization of Egypt.

Under Mamluk and Ottoman The surplus product of rural households was extracted through taxation – the multazim gentry bought the right to collect taxes and brought the tax in kind to the urban market - and extra labour was expropriated through sharecropping, corvée and informal wage labour (Beinin 2001: 25; Tucker 2005 [1979]: 230). Surpluses were not reinvested in agricultural production, but flowed directly to the cities which became rich centres of trade, guild handicrafts, and state administration within the framework of a decentralised command economy (Hanna 2011: 37). In the cities Mamluk military rulers or the Ottoman administration supported a policy of provisionism – the control of the food markets in order to prevent urban riots – but neglected the necessary protectionist measures to

support handicraft production (Parthasarathi 2011). Egyptian merchants invested in political networks, architectural imagery of opulence and above all in the secured return of tax farms. In the middle of the seventeenth century the upward economic cycle presented new opportunities for the urban populace (Raymond 2002). Until that time, the guilds had an egalitarian institutional culture, and possessed real political influence. Later Ottoman rule demoted the political strength and autonomy of guilds as an important source of taxation. In comparison with their European counterparts Egyptian cities could not draw 'upon any concept of juridic or corporate personality to counteract the Islamic doctrine of oneness' and remained 'vulnerable to government interference' (Ayubi 1995: 165). Nonetheless, guilds continued to play the pivotal role in the urban moral economy. When urban production expanded, the internal egalitarian organisation slowly slipped into an oligopoly of a few master craftsmen, whose income and status rose because of their intense involvement with rich merchants and having different systems of subcontracting (Hanna 2011: 100-2). The moral economy of urban culture did not break down, but rather became verticalised (Khafaji 1984: 111).

Muhammad Ali's 'modern' centralized mercantilist policies were primarily oriented towards the needs of a military bureaucracy, relying on the new feudal landlords and traditional elites in provincial towns, and curtailing the power of urban guilds and merchant capital. He attempted to control handicraft production, commercial exchange and the input of raw agricultural material. This closely resembled the political economy of European absolutism and created internal obstructions towards the development of an indigenous industrial capitalism (Khafaji 2004: 42; Abbas and El-Dessouky 2011: 60-63). Muhammed Ali resorted to violence to force peasants into the system of cash- and sharecropping, which was met with local revolts, but eventually led to the crisis of the old family-patriarchal household economy (Sayyid-Marsot 1984: 152-57; Khafaji 2004: 31; Abbas and El-

Dessouky 2011: 12). Feudal private property rights undermined the rural household economy. In response to feudalisation, the village elite strengthened the stratification of everyday life (Habib 1985: 47).

At the third quarter of the nineteenth century British colonialism fully integrated Egypt into the world market. Nonetheless, at the scale of the social formation a profound articulated unevenness and combination existed between feudal rural communal life and its output in the form of sharecropping for export purposes, handicraft production in cities and rural villages alongside the proletarianization of labour in transport and intermediary commercial activities, and capitalist rentier activities of banks and credit companies of both Egyptian and foreign ownership (Versieren and De Smet 2014). As time passed ~~by~~, the lack of political and ideological hegemony of and the unity between the royal elite, feudal landowners and colonial forces surfaced in times of intense political crisis. Power relations were still based upon local and ethnical clientilism.

Within this framework, ~~the~~ Mahalla al-Kubra manufacturing ~~inges~~ appeared ~~to be as a~~ completely peripheral, with regards both ~~to~~ output and relative importance. Foreign capitalists politically and economically defended this articulation of precapitalist and capitalist modes of productions, which effectively blocked economic development. Culturally, foreign companies imported new bookkeeping, engineering and state administration techniques. This incentive promoted the technical education of provincial state employees, being who were an intermediate class, but the mismatch between the amount of hiring and the available group of new intellectuals created a growing frustration about the limitation of social mobility (Podeh and Winckler 2004: 8). Communal ties remained strong between these intellectuals, 'effendiyya', and the provincial background, because for high-ranking positions the state opted for employing foreigners. At the same time, notwithstanding the import of the aforementioned techniques, the British colonial administration in concert

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with the rural and merchant elites tried to contain the dissemination of a modern intellectual culture. These intellectuals, mainly gathered in the liberal nationalist Wafd Party, were under the patronage of Egyptian big landowners and merchants and shared some common images about the 'ignorant peasantry', which, when having government responsibilities, limited their capabilities to articulate an hegemonic national-popular programme (Ayubi 1995: 107; Abbas and El-Dessouky 2011: 192). The disillusion about the decisions of Wafd in interwar years created an autonomous political subaltern force with nationalist sentiments, albeit ideologically divided. Even though everyday cultural communal ties between the new stratum of intellectuals and the subaltern classes existed, both sides attracted and repulsed each other according to growing cultural differences and political events. The middle-class intellectuals adopted the Enlightenment ideas of sovereignty, liberal civic values and economic modernisation. But until Nasser the articulation of modernization, equality and the communal discourse of the common good had not been made successfully. New marriage strategies brought the elites of foreign descent and Egyptians closer, but at the same time they further alienated themselves from their farmer-tenants because of an exuberant urban lifestyle, and, because of an increased socio-spatial separation, as they moved to the metropole. The repertoire of oppositional groups addressed the elite's failure ~~toof~~ ~~promoteing~~ the common good, but also demanded that they ~~would~~ invest in the modernisation of the economy and in the education of the Egyptian people (Hammad 2009: 31; Abbas and El-Dessouky 2011: 82; 187). This elitist culture expressed the uneven relation between the resident metropole and the hinterland, an important feudal phenomenon similar to European feudalization when the immediate ties of personalistic loyalty loosened (Mann 1973). In the eyes of provincial towns and villages the metropole was parasitic and thrived upon residential expansion, consumption of luxury goods and commercial market networks. In major cities the blossoming world trade realized large profits for the rural elites, stimulating a new urban financial sphere of credit,

loans and banking around landed property (Richards and Waterbury 2008: 38–40). This new commercial domain gave rise to a renewed merchant class in the cities, and intensified the economic ties between feudal rurality and the rentier metropole. Smaller cities functioned as satellite intermediaries between rural villages, and Cairo and Alexandria. As in Europe, they were imbedded in the rural countryside with local production and small-scale specialization. A few could benefit from their strategic position along transportation routes or functioning as agricultural hubs (Hammad 2009: 38-9). The urban culture of smaller cities was based upon spatial separation: a profound social differentiation linked to a provincial mentality of local elites.

The establishment of **new textile manufactures** in the interwar years did not produce a definite historical-epochal break with the precapitalist past. It was as much the final success of the feudal-absolutist commercialisation model as a first step to industrial capitalism.

Similar to early modern Europe ‘rural and domestic handicrafts did not simply disappear in the face of the development of manufacture ...[...] they coexisted with and were reorganized by manufacture, ...[...] always rested on the handicrafts of towns and the domestic subsidiary industries of rural districts, over time destroying these in one form and resurrecting them in another’ (Heller 2011: 182). Contrary to the European countries the profits derived from the new rural-urban ‘proto-industrial’ networks did not flow to the richest layer of master craftsmen or merchants – the old and new bourgeoisie (Mann 1986: 465). Instead, feudal landlords integrated these commercial networks into their rural rentier interests fuelled by easy credit and higher money rents (Abbas and El-Dessouky 2011: 53). Guild members, stripped of their former institutional corporate rights, refused to work in **the manufacturinges** and slowly joined the ranks of the proletarianised urban workforce. In addition, before the First World War **fierce local labour strikes took place at colonial companies and the public**

sector ~~in collocation~~ collaborated with the guilds in protest (Toledano 1990). Only after the

Opmerking [BF12]: modes of textile manufacturing? The word ‘manufactures’ as a noun is awkward.

Opmerking [BF13]: has the meaning been changed? I reworded for clarity.

war did a proletarian culture began to develop organically with the communal-corporate ethics of the dwindling guilds and neighbourhood solidarities, resulting in a co-existence of both vertical class and horizontal communal relations.

After the Europeans built the first ginning factories, the Egyptian landlord owners of the Mahalla al-Kubra manufacturings channelled the surplus labour of their estates through the factory gates with the help of well-educated effendiyya-management and illiterate community-based violent foremen (Abu-Lughod 1984: 102; Hammad 2009: 46). These landowners wanted to diversify their investments, but at the same time they extended their already existing influence in the agricultural sector (Khafaji 2004: 53-54; Abbas and El-Dessouky 2011: 92). Malhalla al-Kubra cannot be understood as an industrial novelty, but rather as the integration of agricultural monocropping output and derivative textile activities (Hammad 2009: 40). Land labourers and peasants were preferable as a cheap labour source because of their communal rural ties – the importation of rural cultural and social relations of production. The basic ‘labour unit’ was not the individual worker, but the extended family. Kinship and the proximity of ethnical ties primarily defined their cultural life-world, and its hierarchical component was exploited by administration and overseers in order to keep discipline and to negate the divided authority in a preliminary process of the division of labour (Rueschemeyer 1984: 56-61). Both foreign and Egyptian industrial textile activities changed as much the outlook of the city as they reaffirmed the divided communal lines of cultural demarcation and segregation. With the help of state finances, landlords and foreigners built new residential quarters with parks and modern public buildings. Slumps, housing seasonal factory workers and recreating the original rural village environment, were added to the narrow streets of the old medieval silk centre. As the manufactures expanded, so did the demand for services in the rich quarters. In this transitional city life cultural and spatial divisions were being crossed, which created a vague sense of class distinctions

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(Hammad 2009: 26-52). Slowly and after years of fierce conflict, the initial hostility of urban dwellers towards the workers began to change into a sense of shared interests. Factory management, understanding that coercion did not suffice, tried to contain the disgruntled workers with the rent of their own factory houses as a renewed effort to procure obedience and docility. This measure was part of a disciplinary repertoire that enabled management to supervise and control the everyday life – and thus resistance – of the workers, which resembled closely the practices of the first generations of European patriarchal factory owners. Factory housing also limited the mobility of seasonal workers: losing a job implied the loss of housing. These means of control made the workers adapt to ‘the industrial life and choose when to imitate and when to differ from the model of a modern worker-subject as it was imposed upon them by the Company and the state’ (Hammad 2009: 62). In the end, the burden of patriarchal culture with no regard to efficient productivity or skill acquirement – the introduction of the factory clock or apprenticeship had only a coercive function – drove down the rate of profit, provoked Luddite destruction of machinery and ultimately expressed the inability to mediate new social relations of production. This culture prevented a smooth exchange of technology and knowledge and the accumulation of additional increments of established useful knowledge (Scott 2006: 113-14; Storper 2013: 55).

Until the Second World War the different generations of manufacturers expressed the fixed and stalled transitional temporalities of the Egyptian social formation: outdated technology, inefficient discipline culture, mix of traditional and modern trade networks, communal particularism, crowding out of handicraft products by import of western commodities, and precapitalist solidarities combined with an incipient proletarian class consciousness. Political and social groups lacked a self-defined sense of identity vis-à-vis a conceptualised form of social totality. The Second World War as an economic and political event broke down the instable configuration of dominant forces. Less than a decade later, the

Nasserite regime, Bonapartist and Caesarist in essence (see De Smet 2014), gradually replaced the old feudal landowner class by rich semi-capitalist farmers and initiated a state capitalist industrial project.

In political and cultural terms, Nasser radically differed from his long line of predecessors. He adopted the anti-feudal modernization discourse of liberal and socialist movements and the nationalist sentiments of the subaltern classes in order to break with the feudal-absolutist-colonial deadlock. Nasser reconfigured the relationship between urbanity and rurality. He improved the living conditions of the urban workers and initiated a planned reorganisation of the city scape. In an effort to turn itself into a top-down hegemonic force, the regime superseded the political strategy of communists, socialists and liberals in forging a link between factory floor and local and national party headquarters. Other political contenders never succeeded in connecting the metropole with the struggle in provincial towns. Land reforms and rural cooperatives served a twofold purpose: winning over the goodwill of mainly the middle farmer and a surplus syphoning for industrial investment goals (Versieren and De Smet 2014).

With the spread of mass propaganda and the instalment of educational and cultural initiatives the Nasserite state created a novel, explicitly national and modern civil culture. The old corporatism was overcome through the forceful establishment of a new, state-driven corporatism. Although the 'popular classes' became the protagonists of the national play, it was the regime that wrote the script of their mobilization. The bureaucratic nature of the political hegemony was inherently fragile because it could not supersede the people/power bloc contradiction. On the one hand, the Nasserite intervention strongly interpellated a political and cultural people-nation, forging a new hegemonic bloc that temporarily displaced existing social contradictions. On the other hand, the regime tended to reduce the problem of modernity and hegemony to the technical question of industrialisation, raising productivity,

and the technicality of a division of labour (see Laclau 1977). Thus the new regime faced the insurmountable problem of creating a modern class project that could articulate the still fluid and transitory social relations. The authoritarian nature of the Nasserite state and its ‘overdevelopment’ was an inadequate response to manage social conflicts, in which ‘the intermediate strata come to achieve an inordinate importance as a social base of state— [..these strata] are often in a state of flux and transition, and as the entire class map is quite fluid and uncertain —[..these strata] switch and reverse their ideological and political allegiance practically overnight’ (Ayubi 1995: 182). The downfall of Nasserism signalled the end of the Egyptian Jacobin moment, leading to an instable cycle of passive revolutions, embedded within neoliberal and rentier logics, from Sadat over Mubarak to the current regime (De Smet 2014). The Egyptian case of different cultural and social temporalities could not be articulated successfully, which thus leading to a rather permanent state of organic crisis. There remained few routes to a socio-spatial escape from the past to create new localizations of industry, which prevented the emergence of a modern urban culture according to production (Storper 1991: 68; Storper and Walker 1989: 71-72).

Opmerking [BF15]: This sentence reads awkwardly starting at the point that reads ‘to create’... pls reword.

Waves of Passive Revolution

Returning to Huntington’s ‘waves of democratization’, we conclude that we cannot simply look back and urge the Other, who is presumed to follow in our footsteps, to ‘catch up’. The universalization of commodity production went hand in hand with a generalization of a shared space-time. However, particular social structures were not simply assimilated into the universalist capitalist project; sometimes they resisted transformations, allied with capitalist forms, or even subjugated those forms to their interests. We have shown that the early European capitalist process still relied on a combination of premodern and capitalist

disciplinary practices, which shaped modern property relations and relations of force. Similarly, the colonial and independent industries of Egypt until the Second World War were incorporated into absolutist, landed, and commercial capitalist structures. They did not produce a definite historical-epochal rupture with the precapitalist past. It was as much the final success of the feudal-absolutist commercialisation model as a first step to industrial capitalism. ~~However, B~~because of the shared space-time, ~~however,~~ Egypt did not simply replicate ~~in isolation~~ the European process ~~in isolation~~, but its diachronic development as a part of capitalism was intersected by its synchronic existence within the whole of the capitalist world market and the modern nation state system.

In Europe, industry created the bourgeoisie as a ruling class, just as it created the worker as a proletarian, whereas in Egypt, industry was created by an already existing hybrid of landed, commercial, and colonial capital as an expansion of their rentier income. Despite its modernist features, the Egyptian factory reproduced precapitalist kinship, religious and ethnical social relations, and cultural hierarchies. The profit motive was burdened with patriarchal principles of discipline and violence to keep the workforce in check. Despite the social space of the workplace, a modern working class culture began to emerge organically, arising from struggles in the workplace and the shared and contested spaces of the city. In the political field, immanent working class subjectivities were primarily articulated along nationalist and anti-imperialist lines, and after the Second World War the workers' movement played a fundamental role in the resistance against British influence. Urban proletarian culture became one of the pillars of a modern, Egyptian, national culture in the years leading up to the Free Officers' coup in 1952.

This immanent urban culture was subsumed under the Nasserite project of 'Arab socialism', which united both the 'Jacobin' and 'Bonapartist' moments of Egypt's modernity, in the sense that the mass protests and the coup of 1952 rendered revolution and restoration

logically and historically contemporaneous. Just as in the Italian case, the rupture with the precapitalist era was not realized by classical bourgeois democracy, but by an authoritarian state. Passive revolution, rather than bourgeois democracy, appears as the more correct criterion [through which](#) to interpret the cultural trajectory of [urban](#) modernity, both in the West and in Egypt.

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