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Notebooks. The Journal for Studies on Power

Abstract

This is the abstract of the contribution in English on the new online and printed Cagliari-based review "Notebooks: Journal for Studies on Power"

Keywords

Application of Gramsci; GramsciLab; Power; Hegemony; Consent; Multidisciplinarity.

Notebooks: The Journal for Studies on Power

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Notebooks: The Journal for Studies on Power' is a new Gramscian-inspired multidisciplinary academic journal. The first issue came out in December 2021 and it is published twice a year by Brill, the Dutch academic publishing house based in Leiden and Boston. It is accessible in both online and printed versions.¹ The editorial project originated from informal discussions among Gramscian researchers grouped around the academic activities (seminars, lectures, and conferences) organized by the GramsciLab (based in the University of Cagliari) and the Istituto Gramsci della Sardegna.²

The activities, and one of the main scopes of those two organizations, entail monitoring, collecting, comparing and debating the academic uses, receptions, applications and interpretations of Gramscian categories and thought across the world. The GramsciLab and the Istituto Gramsci della Sardegna became the natural receptacle of transdisciplinary academic meetings and networks which gave rise to the idea of *Notebooks*.³ The Journal can indeed be considered as the concrete realization of one of the tools through which both organizations would like to continue in pursuing their goals.

The starting point of the discussions around the idea to create a new Gramscian-inspired Journal was the concept of power, understood as a multi-faced and transdisciplinary notion, and the different methodological ways through which scholars' approach to power may influence or contribute to the construction of ideological frameworks which could either benefit the dominant classes

¹ Please use this link to access the online version and to see the information related to the printed one: <https://brill.com/view/journals/powr/powr-overview.xml?contents=latestarticles-57511>.

² For more specific information about the aims and scopes of the GramsciLab and the Istituto Gramsci della Sardegna, please consult the article in the previous issue of this journal: Perra, Sabrina and Manduchi, Patrizia, *Introduzione al volume degli Atti. Territori, senso comune e intellettuali: il racconto di un'esperienza politica*, 'International Gramsci Journal', 4(4), 2022, 9-17.

³ It is worth mentioning the inspiring discussions with Stefano Bellucci (University of Leiden); Federico Losurdo (University of Urbino), Sabrina Perra (University of Cagliari), Michela Cerimele (La Sapienza University of Rome); Pasquale Serra (University of Salento); Juan Pablo Scarfi (CONICET, Argentina), now among the members of the Editorial and Advisory Boards.

or be used as tools to challenge their hegemony.⁴ Power is thus the topic around which the Journal would like to create a lively platform for multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary research and debate. This is to promote the development and dissemination of critical approaches to the dominant conceptions of power on philosophical, political, economic, social and cultural levels. Conceptions that the contemporary neoliberal restructuring of capitalism has proliferated.

The Gramscian perspective, able to comprehend organically the development and the political function of past and current processes, reveals the deceptive dichotomies between productive structure and its ideological forms, and offers effective and innovative theoretical and methodological tools.⁵ The reference goes here to Gramsci's organic visions of state and society, politics and economics, theory and praxis which reverse liberal perspectives and radically change the ways of reading the past and the present.

The Journal's peculiarity is thus the close connection to Gramscian studies, nonetheless, it is characterised by a transdisciplinary tension and welcomes contributions that cross-pollinate with various academic disciplines. Gramsci's work represents a point of reference for the founders of the journal and there is a shared belief that Gramsci's theory and method of analysis, as well as the debates and their articulations by social movements and political organizations across continents, are of great utility to face the challenges of today.

The initial intention and perspective of this editorial project were to contribute to a particular international revival of Gramscian studies and debates that have emerged in the past few decades. Gramsci's reception has been marked by some major trends since the first dissemination of his writings. It is possible to retrace some of the most influential phases regarding the interpretations and uses of Gramsci's thought across time and space that form the historical basis of the recent revival: the crucial effort made by Palmiro Togliatti and Felice Platone with the publication of the *Quaderni del carcere*, i.e. the *Prison Notebooks* (between 1948 and 1951) that aimed at securing his thought firmly within the path of the PCI after the second world war; the approach of the New Left movement in the

⁴ Giuseppe Cospito, 'Genesi e sviluppo del concetto di egemonia nei "Quaderni del carcere"', in Angelo D'Orsi (ed.), *Egemonie* (Naples: Libreria Dante&Descartes, 2008), pp. 187–206.

⁵ Q4§38, p. 455; Q4§46, p. 472; Marcello Mustè, *Marxismo e filosofia della praxis* (Rome: Viella), 2018.

1960s and the publications of Gramsci's article from *L'Ordine Nuovo* in the *New Left Review* that were aimed at promoting in the international left Gramsci's image as a heterodox Marxist; the attempt of the PCI in the 1970s to frame his thought within the political strategy of Eurocommunism; Gerratana's remarkable contribution with the accurate and rigorous 1975 publication of the *Prison Notebooks* in Italian that provided a new essential source to study Gramsci's writings beyond the limitations of the former editorial projects. In the 1980s and 1990s, in the framework of the downturn of historical communist experiences and the rise of new social movements promoting struggles beyond workplaces, emerged a use of Gramsci's writings to support theories that were moving beyond the traditional framework of class struggle, for instance, in the widely debated work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe; the influential academic field of cultural studies, where one of its main figures, Stuart Hall, rearticulated and promoted a particular approach to Gramsci, focusing on his attention to culture and also to aspects such as race and racism. Subaltern studies was also another important field of investigation in the 1980s, with the work of the Indian historian Ranajit Guha, who drew on Gramsci and on a particular interpretation of the category of the subaltern, sparking debates about the relation between the condition of subalternity as externally directed with the autonomy and potential of political action of the oppressed groups. These are only some of the most influential receptions and trends of Gramsci's thought that characterise the historical background on which the more recent revival is built on.

Studies in the past few decades, in both Italian and English, have advanced, promoted and facilitated an accurate and detailed analysis of Gramsci's writings. They moved away from the limitations of highly important and influential interventions such as, among others, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, published in 1971 (still widely used in the Anglophone world today), and Perry Anderson's 'antinomies' (despite its recent re-publications, Italian studies have long since disentangled flaws of analysis making Anderson's interpretations rather outdated). A particular mention should be placed on Joseph Buttigieg's generous contribution with the accurate translation of the first eight *Prison Notebooks* of Gerratana's critical edition. This

work has recently been enhanced by the translation of Notebook 25 (*On the Margins of History. The History of Subaltern Social Groups*) edited conjointly with Marcus Green. The Italian literature over the past few decades has seen numerous philological studies and contributions that have advanced the analysis and the interpretations of Gramsci's thought, an effort that includes a comprehensive national edition, a project that started in the 1990s and is continuing to the present. These contributions have facilitated a more accurate understanding of Gramsci's writings and a clearer insight into their complexity. Thanks to the work of a few dedicated scholars and activists, together with the activities of organizations such as the *International Gramsci Society*, the advance made in the Italian literature and analysis have been made available to the wider Anglophone world.

The initiative to establish this journal builds upon their work and is also based on the recognition of the importance of strengthening connections. The journal aims to promote more rigorous, and at the same time, useful debates across continents and disciplines by building bridges between often separated communities such as: Gramscian philologists; intellectuals who apply Gramscian categories to interpret social, economic and political conjunctures across the world; activists of social movements; and artists engaged in social change. The interpretative and analytical value of the Gramscian approach, in combination with his praxis-oriented dialectical method, can emerge to its fullest potential from a direct and constructive dialogue between these three different types of Gramscian interpreters. The underlying hope is that these connections, framed with debates about the role and analysis of power, can promote, facilitate, and contribute to the ongoing revitalization of studies and offer accurate tools for the articulation of Gramsci's thought in relation to tactics and strategies of collective action by movements across the world.

The Journal is structured into 5 sections. Authors are encouraged to submit, through the Journal online platform (<https://www.editorialmanager.com/powr/default2.aspx>), Research Articles (7,000 to 9,000 words); Philological Articles (7,000 to 9,000 words); commentaries or interviews for the "philosophy of praxis in motion" section (2,000 to 4,000 words); Review Articles and Book Reviews.

The section “philosophy of praxis in motion” represents an important and distinctive aspect of the journal. The section is a direct reference to the philosophy of praxis articulated in the *Prison Notebooks* and to the wider field of methodological approaches that envisage a dialectic relation between the theoretical scientific development with the practical experiences. It welcomes contributions in various forms from movement leaders and activists who are keen to articulate their visions on power and also their engagement with Gramsci’s categories and praxis in their everyday social, political, environmental and workers’ struggles. In the first two issues, members of the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement and former members of the Italian Communist Party shared their reflections and experiences. The circulation of the uses and developments of Gramsci’s legacy across the world demonstrates the extent to which it can be considered today a living thought. The liveliness that emerges from these widespread engagements, from Brazil to Italy passing through South Africa, carries a specific understanding of the role of knowledge production, in line with Gramsci’s reflection on the connection between theoretical development and social practices. His thought is kept alive, renovated and developed through solid and careful studies but also by social and political actors seeking in his method and perspective strategic visions for transformative processes.

The ambition of ‘Notebooks’ is to function as a space for encounter and debate among all these critical voices on the assumption that, from their lively confrontation, innovative and critical ideas may emerge, alternative conceptions of the world and paths to challenge the current social, political and environmental crises.