



BRILL

NOTEBOOKS: THE JOURNAL FOR STUDIES ON POWER
2 (2022) 5–10

NOTEBOOKS
*The Journal for
Studies on Power*
brill.com/powr

Editorial



Gramsci and the Theory–Praxis Nexus: Creating Spaces for Intellectual and Political Elaboration

Among the journal's objectives, two are of particular significance to us. The first is to offer a space for encountering and critically reflecting on social and political phenomena by engaging with Antonio Gramsci's analytical categories and method. The second aim is to highlight the importance of the connection between the theory and praxis of political action, recognising that the potential of actualisation in the latter can offer significant developments for Gramscian epistemological frameworks.

The epistemological and heuristic potential of Gramsci's method, a knowledge process capable of providing pathways for the interpretation of society, is not invalidated by the transformations of the processes of accumulation that have found new spheres and modes of realisation, and the systems of social stratification that characterise contemporary society, none of which could not have been known to Gramsci. The historical-philosophical framework of his method, including its comparative orientation, makes it particularly fruitful in a wide range of studies. A Gramscian lens offers a unique perspective on interpretations of space and time, since it pursues a chronological development of events together with the identification of processes that can then be transposed to other social contexts or other historical phases. Gramsci's categories are not elaborated in the mere ideal sphere and later dropped into an empirical study; but, rather, they are derived by abstraction from observed historical contingencies. In this process, the categories are reinforced and defined, as shown in Gramsci's writings, in which the continuous process of intellectual elaboration clearly emerges in the light of specific socio-historical experiences. The creative and innovative capacity of the Gramscian method also makes it particularly fruitful in the field of political contestation, social antagonism, and movements. Gramsci's thought is often used as a toolbox to facilitate the

clustering of protest and resistance actions that develop in opposition to dominant political organisations, particularly authoritarian and violent ones. It is in this perspective that Gramsci remains alive and his thought develops its potential: its continuous elaboration in experiences articulated in political action places Gramsci's thought as a living element in socio-historical phenomena, not as an icon, but as an inspiration for political praxis.

It is not easy to define what the Gramscian method is. Its essence emanates from all Gramsci's contributions, from the underlying logic of the writing of the *Prison Notebooks*, and their subsequent use by researchers, activists and trade unionists. The Gramscian method, like the Marxian method to which it is directly connected and of which it retains the main categories, is characterised by an exceptional interpretative capacity, being aimed at the identification of the prevailing socio-historical processes in each specific space–time context. It is this feature, the study of socio-historical processes, that forms the core of Gramsci's analysis and method, the fundamental element for uniting events – considered as the expression of the balance of forces between social classes – with political praxis aimed at directly changing the mode of production and the political organisation of the state. Although distinguishable on the analytical level, in this method theory and praxis merge and feed on each other without an internal hierarchisation, but through a dialectical relationship between the two spheres, a relationship that is always political. In this approach, the conceptual elaboration of analytical categories based on the identification of processes, actors and outcomes feeds and is fed by practical experience. The reception and 'use' of Gramsci's thought itself contributes to this cycle: its elaboration and translation into the sphere of mobilisation by political actors is of fundamental value to its development. It is in these dynamics that one can observe the construction of political identities – of collective intellectuals, in many cases organic intellectuals, in a few others of *modern prince*.¹ These are processes of individual and collective political subjectivation that play a fundamental role in the critique of the dominant hegemony and the possible development of new hegemonies, starting with pathways of organisation within civil society. Organising, for Gramsci, is at least as vital as conceptually elaborating the political and revolutionary programme. The two plans cannot be separated and, above all, cannot be arranged in a temporal sequence because they are political actions that develop dialectically and have to be merged into a unified approach.

¹ The reference is to the *modern prince*; see for instance Q8, §21 of the *Prison Notebooks*.

The ways in which these processes of subjectivation can take place are a result of historical-social contexts and the activities of organic and collective intellectuals as well as these intellectuals' capacity to dialectically promote political projects capable of building new hegemonies.

In the current context, we can identify various attempts that set this type of process in motion, and in which Gramsci acts as a point of reference for political action and the life of movements, trade unions and antagonist political parties. For this reason, *Notebooks* has reinforced its editorial choice of combining theoretical reflection with experiences of political praxis by collecting in each issue articles, commentaries and interviews reporting on the activities of social and political actors. In this way, the journal aims to contribute to the debate as an *ἀγορά* of intellectual and political elaboration.

Contents of This Issue

The aims expressed earlier are among the reasons that inspired the creation of the journal, yet they have been strengthened as a result of the contributions received and thanks to the solicitations of scholars, activists and trade unionists who have identified in *Notebooks* a space for debate and an instrument of knowledge, not only regarding Gramscian thought but also its circulation in the contemporary world. There is, in fact, a vast debate that, in addition to valuable philological analysis, develops within the socio-historical sciences engaging systematically with the political practices and theories of collective actors working for the construction of alternative hegemonies, oriented towards the construction of independent political communities capable of building processes of social change.

The contributions collected in this issue provide an account of the uses and potential of Gramscian thought. In particular, the authors describe and interpret social facts and contemporary historical-social-political realities that directly or indirectly recall the Gramscian method. Many of the contributions are thus an example of how theory and praxis are inextricably linked in Gramscian analysis.

The issue begins with Marcos Del Roio's essay dedicated to one of Gramsci's most important elaborations: the modern prince. This figure has opened up major exegetical debates on its identification in every context and historical period, but also on how this category was elaborated by Gramsci within the *Prison Notebooks*. Del Roio uses the expedient of the modern prince to undertake an examination of Gramsci's political elaboration, particularly in its continuity from the Lyons theses to the reflections in the *Prison Notebooks*,

focusing on the role of the political party as proposed in the writings prior to his imprisonment. To accomplish this analysis, Del Roio applies the methodological perspective of 'social contextualism'. According to Del Roio, this methodology offers a systematic outlook on the significance of the political theory text, its specifics, its social nexuses, the process of interpretation and the adoption of a consistent theoretical framework for the contextualisation of the text. The article sheds light on Gramscian writings and categories using a methodology that combines the analysis of the text with the elaboration of the social-historical context in which it is produced. The author stresses the importance of considering Gramsci as a historically and socially situated thinker and argues that contemporary political phenomena are not always interpretable by his writings. His living strength is in the tools and method of his system of thought.

Federico Losurdo's article is based on a legal and constitutionalist perspective and builds on the category of 'organic crisis' in the forms it has taken in Europe and Latin America in the transition from authoritarian to democratic systems. In particular, the author interprets the reappearance of forms of neo-fascism as the result of the collapse of the Keynesian social pact, due to the ascension of neoliberal rationality, which is based on the dogmas of financial stability and hyper-competitiveness. The radicalisation of this rationality in the political structure of states and the inadequacy of the ruling classes have gradually erased the welfare state systems and, with it, all the policies against social inequality that capitalism systematically produces. The most recent evidence of this process can be observed in the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, which the author defines as an organic neoliberal crisis.

The contribution by Diego Gullotta and Lili Lin, although it does not engage with a specific Gramscian analytical category, examines the practice of an experimental Chinese theatre production committed to the development of workers' awareness of their conditions and to building and sharing a collective identity among fellow workers. In this case, the theatre is presented as a method of cultural elaboration that allows the deconstruction of individuals' subjectivity through the reappropriation of their own bodies and the connections they have with others in the same social space. The method proposed is a metaphor, in Stuart Hall's terms, for developing what Gullotta and Lin refer to as possible counter-hegemonic elements, which opens the horizons of the possible. It offers a way to dislocate culture through reflections on the powers currently operating in Chinese society.

The focus of Maurizio Atzeni's commentary on the Argentine contingency is the rise of class consciousness, and particularly the ways in which individuals are oriented toward the construction of 'class for itself' from the sharing of the same position in the production system. From the perspective of labour process theory and from the vantage point of the Global South, the author interprets the contemporary political and social situation through an analysis of forms of working-class organization. This unfolds along two intersecting lines. First, we have trade unions representing workers in the formal sector, which accounts for about half of the country's working population. In the second, we have social movements, based both in urban and rural spaces, representing poor and informal workers. The two lines capture one of the polarisation effects induced by the current processes of capital accumulation and the impacts these can have in the Global South.

To offer an insight into the experience of social movements, the issue includes an interview (conducted also by Atzeni), with 'Pocho', one of the main organisers of the Union de Trabajadores de la Tierra, which highlights the relevance of the economic struggle in the organizing strategies of social movements, especially in a high inflation country. It also shows how in the last two decades, actions have gone beyond the realm of the workplace and have been directed to create access to primary needs such as land, housing, water and sanitation.

The last section of the issue is dedicated to book reviews. The first review by Dennis Arnold investigates the contribution of a recent Gramsci biography. The author highlights the significance of *To Live Is To Resist* by Jean-Yves Frégné and its value for understanding Gramsci's life commitment to the communist cause in Italy, situating it within the wider international Communist movement. The second review, by Alessandra Marchi, considers *You Have Not Yet Been Defeated*, a collection of texts by Alaa Abd el-Fattah, an intellectual, political activist currently detained in an Egyptian prison. The works provide evidence that forms of repression that Gramsci suffered almost a century ago have by no means disappeared in contemporary societies and still fail to prevent forms of critical thinking from continuing to work. Isabella Soi's review of David Moore's *Mugabe's Legacy: Coups, Conspiracies and the Conceits of Power in Zimbabwe* – a fascinating account of recent Zimbabwean history – reflects on Moore's engagement with Gramscian categories to finely interpret social and political processes in Zimbabwe.

We are thrilled to bring together these pieces which collectively demonstrate the profound relevance of Gramsci to political theory and praxis across the world today.

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