



# THE USES AND ABUSES OF GRAMSCI

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**ABSTRACT** Antonio Gramsci is today the most translated Italian theorist. His theory has been used extensively in English language publications in cultural studies and international relations. This article examines the use, abuse and fruitful additions to Gramsci of Stuart Hall, Edward Saïd, Ranajit Guha, Robert Cox, Stephen Gill and Adam Morton. Its object is to examine their fidelity to what the mainstream Italian philology of Gramsci has written about his concepts and their order.

**KEYWORDS** Cox • Gramsci • Guha • Hall • Morton • Saïd

The theme of this paper was suggested to me by the speech that Guido Liguori made when he launched the International Gramsci Society of the Asia-Pacific. Guido noted that Gramsci is the most translated Italian author after Machiavelli and that his theory is today used worldwide, above all in 'cultural studies'. He also remarked that in Italy in the last decade there has been, rather, a close 'philological' reading of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (*QC*) to establish with precision his use of each of the terms that are now common discourse in domains as varied as sociology, literary criticism and international relations: hegemony, intellectuals, common sense and so on. Guido suggested that both areas of research could learn from the other: the philologists through recognizing and accepting that Gramsci's work would always be the starting point for further amplification and development in its application to new historical realities; and the 'applied Gramscians' through recognizing and acknowledging some limit to creative extension of his work by reference to what he really wrote about such matters as hegemony.

This set me thinking. Gramsci himself had recognized that no theory, even that of Marx, could be treated as if the author were a Messiah who had laid down a nostrum once and for all. That work would have sense made

of it by its use in later times, and here Gramsci explicitly referred to Lenin's 'revolution against Capital' by a twist in 'reading' with which we are now familiar. It is what comes after rather than what comes before that makes sense of a theory of which many people are the 'bearers'. The theory would remain barren were it not developed to cope with new problems arising from the passage of history.

So, this article is about how far and in what way it is legitimate to use or develop Gramsci's (and by implication others') thought. Maybe all that amounts to is measuring the distance a writer has gone from the source of his or her inspiration. A philologist like me is perhaps only shouting after figures who have already passed up his treasure of wisdom. But where, as Giorgio Baratta, spokesman in Italy for the use of Gramsci by cultural studies, points out that 'experience has taught us that what is "certain" in a critical edition like that of the *Notebooks* inevitably remains the patrimony, albeit precious, of the few' (Baratta, 1999: 8), I argue that we need to put together the knowledge of the keepers of the treasure and the practical uses of Gramsci. Not to do so could lead to an abuse or betrayal of the original.

I use three case studies, tackled in different registers, to suggest some of the issues and problems. It emerges that it is not only the use of discrete terms that is at stake but also the ways in which they are ordered or put together by the writer using them, and what is left out as well as what is included. It is the ordering that seems most important in our case as it could suggest that the use is also a general statement of Gramsci's theory, rather than a bit taken from that work for practical purposes.

### STUART HALL

Stuart Hall has been hailed as one of the great exponents of a use of Gramsci for our times. In dealing with his use of Gramsci, I would like to start by tracing three itineraries that cross and lead to meetings. The first is that of Hall himself; the second is that of his object of investigation, the 'British people'; and the third the 'translation' of Gramsci into the English world. They are only discussed schematically, but they may help us to understand why he used Gramsci in a particular way and made a certain sense of his work.

Out of the turmoil provoked by the revelations in 1956 about Stalin and the consequent doubt and questioning of Marxism-Leninism as a guide to action – in which Stuart was deeply involved – came the journals *The New Reasoner* and the *Universities and Left Review* of 1957. In 1960 these united as the *New Left Review* under Hall's (one-year) editorship. His and their views were stated in the first editorial:

We are convinced that politics, too narrowly conceived, has been the main cause of the decline of socialism in this country. . . . The humanist strengths of socialism must be developed in cultural and social terms. . . . The task of

socialism is to meet people where they *are*. . . . Our hope is that *NLR* will bring to life genuine dialogue between intellectual and industrial workers.

The 1960s therefore became a time of rapid search for and discovery of new theory that could unite intellectuals and workers and win ‘the people’. The mark of that decade was disunity about which theory to follow. *NLR* split by the end of the decade. Among the thinkers most discussed were the Paris-based anti-humanist structuralists Louis Althusser and then Nicos Poulantzas and, among the ‘humanists’, Antonio Gramsci. This is when Hall first met Gramsci’s work and quickly chose it in preference to that of the Frenchmen, although both are cited together in his work at first.

Selections from Gramsci’s work had been translated by the mid-1950s by Louis Marks, a member of the Communist Historians’ Group which included Hill and Hobsbawm. The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) had ensured that this was not published until 1957, despite it being an excellent translation. Hall does not cite it, to my knowledge. Other ample translations of the *Letters* appeared in the *New Edinburgh Review* (on this see generally Forgacs, 1989). In 1957, Tom Nairn, another of Hall’s colleagues at *NLR*, spent a year in Pisa learning Italian and about Gramsci. There was much to-ing and fro-ing from England to the PCI and the Gramsci Institute in Rome after the middle 1960s, which led to a semi-authorized translation by Stephen Nowell-Smith and Quintin Hoare of a *selection* from the then available parts of the *Prison Notebooks*. It finally appeared in 1971. It is this edition that Hall, who increasingly disagreed with the positions adopted at *NLR* and moved closer to the CPGB and its former members, used as his source for understanding Gramsci. It is excellently translated but from the moment of its publication was accused of partiality. In a climate in Italy where the dominant view expressed by PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti was that Gramsci was a good Leninist who privileged the Party, the Italian Einaudi edition of the *Notebooks* gave pride of place to those on the Party or *Modern Prince*. This was duplicated in the Hoare and Nowell-Smith volume. The PCI interpretation was under siege after 1967 in Italy and forced the preparation of a critical edition that was published in 1975. Hall does not appear ever to have used this edition. So he worked from sources whose ordering was already partial (on all this see Davidson, 1972).

Significantly, in 1977 Hall’s first substantial work on Gramsci – written with friends who joined him in cultural studies – states that they liked Gramsci for precisely the reasons that the *NLR* and particularly Perry Anderson criticized him. These reasons were the unsystematicity of his notes and his refusal to seek to establish general scientific theory. Consequently the 1977 Cultural Studies paper pronounces Gramsci of more use in analyzing and finding solutions to the ‘organic crisis’ that beset Great Britain than other thinkers. His ‘ideology’ – a gauntlet already cast down in the debate with the Althusserians – is ordered in this way: Gramsci gives pride of place to ‘civil society’,

the realm where the economic structures and superstructures unite and where a struggle for political dominance between ideologies is conducted. This pride of place given to civil society relegates the concept of hegemony to what is fought for and either won or lost in civil society. Hegemony, which is the mode of rule in modern states, 'involves the organisation of spontaneous consent' of the people in their own subalternity. Surprisingly, the notion of hegemony is not well developed. On the other hand, the 'intellectuals', the people who organize that consent, are discussed at length. Through them, the popular 'common sense' that results from all past history may be raised, displaced, composed and recomposed and may come into conflict with the dominant ideology. The intellectuals' fundamental activity in attaining this is by 'organising, disseminating and conserving skills and ideas associated with mental rather than manual labour'. They did this through schooling, the law, and so on. The paper concluded that the 'ruling bloc' depends on its capacity to maintain hegemony, although in the last instance it will rely on coercion to maintain its power. So the paper asserted that the state should move into second place after the struggle for control of civil society. A party that challenges the existing order must enter the mind of 'common sense' and 'open . . . up its contradiction'. When educated and purged of external contradictions, mass spontaneity would be the motor of revolution: 'At present this is a terrain occupied by the dominant class' (Hall et al., 1977: 45 ff at 48, 50, 51, 52).

Overall, Gramsci is typified as believing that 'ideologies' are neither true nor false. Rather, they are arenas where contending groups struggle to obtain a coherence of thought necessary for effective hegemony. Gramsci's real virtue lies in the value of his categories for struggle in a particular historical conjuncture. Althusser's use of Gramsci in his theory of ideological state apparatuses fails to recognize that Gramsci's main distinction is that between the public and the private, as well as his assertion that hegemony is attained in the second as much or more than in the first. Summing up this first foray into Gramsci, Hall says that his concepts

exist . . . in order to examine specific historical conjunctures, or to put it more politically, to analyse the balance of forces within specific conjunctures. They are therefore concepts of historical materialism. Consequently it is not surprising that Gramsci is more concerned with specific ideologies than with the concept of ideology in general. (Hall et al., 1977: 71)

It is noteworthy that the authors of the essay conclude by admitting that they had not read Perry Anderson's 'Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci' (1976–7). In that and his earlier *Considerations on Western Marxism* (1976), Anderson had considered Gramsci's 'historical materialism' a defect due to its looseness and lack of scientific cohesion. This, he maintained in both essays, ultimately made Gramsci the least offending element of a Western Marxism whose main weakness was its lack of contact with real working-class struggle and emphasis

on ideological and cultural work. While admitting that he was not a historical facts man, Hall was choosing Gramsci precisely because of those 'defects'. It is because Gramsci sees 'science' as the product of a struggle that Hall and his cultural studies group see him as superior to the Althusser that their interlocutors preferred (Hall et al., 1977: 64).

Ten years later, in 'Gramsci and Us' (Hall, 1988 [1987]: 161–75), Hall applied Gramsci to the 'specific conjuncture', i.e. the Thatcherism that remained his main interest into the 1990s. He began this article by denying that Gramsci was a 'key' but maintained that his work as a theoretician of a workers' movement in defeat was of great utility. He considered the conditions in Britain as 'strikingly similar' to those in Italy when fascism had defeated the workers' movement in a struggle for ideological dominance. But rather than asking what Gramsci would have said about Thatcherism, he suggested that Gramsci's view of 'difference' meant that his concepts should be used to understand the British conjuncture. Hall argued that the conjuncture for this struggle for a new 'common sense' was the 'organic crisis' of the British economy and society owing to the oil crisis, massive debt and consequent inability to pay for the welfare state. Hall sees a 'crisis of authority' or hegemony in the British state, taking forms that indicate that electoral politics are no longer enough. Appealing to Gramsci, Hall puts on the political agenda the questions of moral and intellectual leadership, the educative and formative role of the modern state, the 'trenches' and 'fortifications' of civil society, the crucial issue of the 'consent' of the masses, and the creation of a new type or level of 'civilization', a new culture.

The political project is, thus, clear. Before capturing the state, all the spaces of 'civil society', not just the economic spaces, should be occupied to secure the transformation of 'common sense' into 'good sense', developing the former into participation of the people in national life. No return to Keynesianism and the welfare state was possible. Lessons could be learnt from Thatcherism. Even before winning the state, Thatcherism had sought to win the British people, 'corrupted' by the Keynesianism and the welfare state that had become expressions of British 'common sense', over to a new 'common sense'. Thatcherism's struggle for hegemony proposed a 'regressive modernism . . . an image of what modernity would be like for our people' that harked back to old values in the 'common sense' of what it was to be British: 'she speaks to something else deep in the English psyche: its masochism. The need which the British seem to have to be ticked off by Nanny and sent to bed without a pudding. . . . The Dunkirk spirit – the worse off we are, the better we behave' (Hall, 1988 [1987]: 164, 166). (These claims about the British psyche recur frequently in his work.)

Hall's 'applied Gramsci' was clearly conditioned by the success of Thatcherism in the 1980s; the way he 'used' Gramsci was conditioned by his desire to win 'the people' back. Hall had noted in the late 1970s and early 1980s that the post-war consensus based on Keynesianism and the welfare state was in 'organic crisis', allowing the construction of a new hegemony.

He argued that what Thatcher sought to do in the previous decades was to build a new 'historic bloc' of allied classes on the basis of real popular experience of the 'crisis'. Her anti-collectivism was in fact an appeal to a national project to pull 'our' country out of the hole. It was no 'con', no baseless ideology arguing against reality. It used facts to create a new consensus. In the organic crisis there was always the possibility of such a 'passive revolution', although other forces could also seek to build in an alternative direction. The struggle, whether by the Left or Right, involved a process of 'transformism' where whole sections of uncommitted people 'in the middle' were won to one side or the other. If neither side could win preponderance a 'Caesarist' solution was possible: a political compromise would be struck between the dominant view and others. Hall intimated that the middle ground in Britain, that of the 'little Caesars', was occupied by the new Social-Democrats and Liberals, who had started to emerge in the crisis (Hall, 1988 [1981]: 57ff).

By 1985 Mrs Thatcher was having success in creating a new 'common sense' in favour of neo-liberalism, having established a form of rule that Hall and others called 'authoritarian- popular'. In that system, there was popular consensus for a strong authoritarian rule masquerading as democracy. The experience of the decade of Left defeat pushed Hall to elaborate further on his understanding of Gramsci. The latter was, he asserted, against any economic determinism; politics takes place in the realm where the structures and the superstructures meet. The 'organic crisis' of 'incurable contradictions' with which political forces struggle at a particular 'conjuncture' necessitated, he said, citing Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 'a series of ideological, religious, philosophical, political and juridical polemics, whose correctness can be established to the extent to which they are convincing, and shift the existing disposition of social forces' (Hall, 1988 [1980]: 123ff at 131). His Gramsci was decidedly 'political', his work being used for 'politics'.

In a couple of passages, Hall then ordered what Gramsci meant for him, citing him continually. According to this order, the British crisis had to be related to the 'war of position' through which society is totally reorganized. The 'war' is affected by three factors: (1) the increasing complexity of state organization both internally and externally; (2) the shift from a 'forty-eightist' struggle, or permanent revolution, to a struggle for 'civil hegemony'; and (3) the massive complexity of the organizations of modern democracy at both the level of the state and civil society – the 'trenches' and 'fortifications' of the state in the 'war of position'. If, in this war, the Left fails to distinguish correctly between what is 'conjunctural' and what is 'organic' about the crisis, it will fall into the errors of either economism or ideologism. The next point bears citing in full as it so important:

The nature of 'success' in a war of position has to be thoroughly reworked. Victory does not consist of the appearance, newly minted, of some total 'world view' or of some wholly evolved alternative 'social order', which has been

slowly maturing, like a good cheese, in the vaults of the left, to be brought out at the right moment and propelled on to the field of struggle. It can only be understood as working on the already-given disposition of social forces, through a wide series of 'polemics'. The aim is to shift the balance of the relations of force into a new disposition; and thereby to begin to constitute a new result: Gramsci's 'new reality'. These 'polemics' must take the given situation, the present disposition of social forces, as their starting point, the strategic field of their operations: an ever-changing terrain for the intervention of the working-class. (Hall, 1988: 131–2)

The object is not to know how and why things stand still 'but what are the prevailing tendencies of the forms of reform/resolution which are beginning to win support'. Non-revolutionary forces will attempt to conduct a 'passive revolution', through all the strategies designed 'to put through reforms in order to avoid revolution'. One main strategy is that of 'transformism', a politics designed to end molecularly differences between any pre-existing antagonists.

Ultimately, this struggle between revolution and restoration ends in a new hegemony, described as 'the formation of equilibria and the process of compromises'. Hegemony is never a final state. Nor is it simply a matter of 'ideological consent'. Rather, it is 'ceaseless work to constitute social authority' so that a 'moment of economic, political, intellectual and moral unity may be secured, sufficient to raise the level of the state to a more general plane'. Not only does this mean the continuation of 'ceaseless polemics' but also that compromises be made between all the group interests involved. A Left that does not occupy the strategic positions by offensive measures is condemned to defending positions that had already been overrun (Hall, 1988 [1980]: 131–5). It is at this juncture that we see, in the same article, Hall's concern to win 'the people' start to have a reflexive effect on what he stresses in Gramsci.

Hall argued that the object of the non-revolutionary forces is to 'construct' the 'popular' and the 'people' 'into the crisis of the State'. Social democratic policies – those of 'natural governors' – Keynesianism and welfarism had long undermined the role of working-class struggle to correct the problems of their lives. Instead, they had created a natural constituency in favour of a law and order solution to the lived contradictions of the crisis and thus also created a popular constituency for an 'authoritarian' state to solve what was seen as the 'problem' of selfish partial interests (like the trade unions) holding the 'nation' to ransom. This consensus in the need for an 'authoritarian solution marked the detachment of the popular masses from the state'.

The themes of crime and social delinquency, articulated through the discourses of popular morality, touch the direct experience, the anxieties and uncertainties of ordinary people. This has led to the dovetailing of the 'cry for discipline' from below into the call for an enforced restoration of social order and authority 'from above'. (Hall, 1988 [1980]: 137)

Upon this popular ideology it is possible to build a new kind of 'common sense'. In this connection, Hall interprets Gramsci's phrase 'making "critical" an already existing activity' as a reference to 'the ideological interventions of the left'. This is the first time that Hall makes common sense the key concept in his Gramsci. But he then draws on Ernesto Laclau's work to add 'sophistication' to the 'rudimentary schemas we earlier derived from Gramsci's work on the "national popular" and "common sense"'. Despite some reservations about Laclau's use of the Althusserian notion that subject identities are constituted by 'interpellations', in particular his failure to acknowledge the force of long conservative traditions and forces, Laclau is respected because he extends analysis from capital and labour to the 'people and the power bloc'.

Stuart Hall argues that Thatcherism built on popular ideologies to portray both social democracy and reliance on the state as negative categories. Bureaucracy, socialism and collectivism denied individuals their popular vitality and capacity to solve problems. In the face of this, social-democracy had compromised with the 'most traditional and conservative elements in popular morality', failing to educate the common sense into a new 'good sense' on a higher plane.

But Thatcherism, with its refined populist instinct, has made no such strategic error. Indeed, it has the force of history – that is, the secured correspondences between the 'people' and the 'traditional wisdom of the nation' – to rely on: a field of popular conceptions, in which it has made a series of strategically effective interventions. These representations of 'the people', of 'the nation', of 'our culture and way of life', of 'the instincts of the ordinary British people' etc., which it ideologically constructs, it can claim not to have forged through ideological intervention, but simply to have 'rediscovered,' awakened from their deep national slumber.

The point about popular morality is that it is the most practical material-ideological force amongst the popular classes – the language of which, without benefit of training, education, coherent philosophizing, erudition or learning, touches the direct and immediate experience of the class, and has the power to map out the world of problematic social reality in clear and unambiguous moral polarities. It thus has a real concrete grasp on the popular experiences of a class. In periods of social upheaval and change, it provides a moral reference point, which organizes experience and sorts it into its evaluative categories. Under the right conditions, 'the people' in their traditionalist representations can be condensed as a set of interpellations in discourses which systematically displace political issues into conventional moral absolutes. (Hall, 1988 [1980]: 143; see also Hall and Schwarz, 1988 [1985]: 95–121)

Hall's itinerary with the concept of the people was summed up in his 'The Battle of Socialist Ideas in the 80s', whose theme is that it is a *struggle* to establish socialism through a battle of *ideas* based on 'good sense' or 'class consciousness' in a crisis for which many rival solutions are being advanced.



It is a battle of ideas and words (here he cites Althusser). What is interesting is his argument about how a counter-hegemonic struggle might be fought. Previously, this had only been touched on when he focused on Thatcherite passive revolution.

I am talking about *root* ideas on which the socialist programme or socialist policies must be based. Let me, for instance, talk about the idea of the nation, the people, the British people. No political counter has proved so effective, such a guarantee of popular mobilisation as being able to say 'the people think . . .'. Conjuring yourself through 'the people' is the true ventriloquism of populist politics . . . 'the people' out there are, of course, varied . . . the politics of *populism* is to construct all of them into a composite political identity so that the divisions of class and interest, or the divisions of role and person, count less than the unity . . . of the 'people'. Then you must perform a second ideological trick: which is to project 'the people' back as far as they can go, in a bid for the history of the British people. 'The people', you will find, have always existed since at least Anglo-Saxon times, or Magna Carta, and perhaps before that these reactionary ideas constitute the essence of 'Englishness' . . . God made them like that . . . with an instinct for possessive individualism, private property, a respect for authority, the constitution, the law and the nuclear family. The truth is that traditionalist ideas, the ideas of social and moral *respectability*, have penetrated so deep inside socialist consciousness, that it is quite common to find people committed to a radical political programme underpinned by wholly traditional feelings and sentiments. (Hall, 1988 [1985a]: 191–4).

To counter this tradition of 'deference to authority', socialists must evoke the tradition of struggle for rights and democracy that goes back to the egalitarianism of the English Civil War. Rights and democracy did not fall like manna from Heaven, but had been won by popular struggle. Socialists must 'penetrate to the ground . . . where radical *social* ideas can be brought into connection with traditional institutions of the labour movement and transform them into a new kind of politics' (Hall, 1988 [1985a]: 195). Following Gramsci's precept that reality must be faced head on, 'the task of getting socialist ideas rolling again' is difficult. But if working people stay committed to old ideas, socialism is doomed to defeat.

Unless socialists understand the *strategic* role of this level of struggle – the struggle to command the common sense of the age in order to educate and transform it, to make common sense, the ordinary everyday thoughts of the majority . . . move in a socialist rather than a reactionary direction [then we will fail]. (Hall, 1988 [1985a]: 195)

This seems a good place to start summing up Hall's use of Gramsci. It is only fair to acknowledge the extraordinarily able use he makes of Gramsci, especially given his use of a source that focused on the role of the Party and not on civil society. Taking each concept that he uses discretely, we can see little that would be challenged by the recent Italian 'philology' on Gramsci. Moreover, Hall recognizes, as Italian scholarship has, that the *Prison*

*Notebooks* are about a socialist defeat and the establishment of a bourgeois hegemony in a new form; that this hegemony comes through the reaction using the 'common sense' of 'the people' in an 'organic crisis'; that 'common sense' can never be the source for a socialist hegemony as it is for bourgeois hegemony. So, as a source for understanding Thatcherism's success, Hall used the *Notebooks* easily and convincingly.

The main problem in his use of Gramsci lies in his express belief that one can mine Gramsci for concepts to be used in a political struggle without adhering to or consideration of the order Gramsci gave to those concepts. When we place his quotations from Gramsci in the context of the *Notes* themselves we can see how eclectic he was: they nearly all come from the notes on Machiavelli, which are expressly about Party work in constituting hegemony and not on struggle within civil society considered as a separate realm from the state. This part of Gramsci tends rather to support the Althusserian notion that hegemony is achieved through ideological state apparatuses and not through 'private' organizations and practices.

Hall's express eclecticism is nowhere more clear than in his reply to his critics, who point out that despite disclaimers, such use leads willy-nilly to a general theory and can be criticized for incoherence. For example, Bob Jessop and others criticized his overall 'Gramscian' [my term] analysis of the crisis, on the grounds that it was idealist and historicist; that this led him to neglect contradiction and, ultimately, that he and his mentor, Gramsci, had not developed an adequate general theory of the state, which had led Hall to slide into inadequate 'culturalist' politics (Bonnet et al., 1984: 150). Hall defended himself and his eclecticism hotly and, I think, justifiably, against some of these charges. As we have seen, he stressed a struggle for ideological hegemony within the context of an organic objective crisis, although he never allowed the facts of the latter to determine what happened in the realm of the struggle for minds. He had never allowed his analysis to collapse into discourse theory like Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Hall, 1988 [1985b]: 150–5).

An eclectic use can be defended on the basis that the user is not using the original theory but creating one of his own. In that case, Hall's use of Gramsci constitutes a new theory: Hallism. This is a quite defensible position. If it is not stated explicitly then the danger is that the use is confused with the theory of the source. So his work could be confused with that of Gramsci when it is not. For example, an eclectic use for political purposes contradicts Gramsci's explicit statement that his work on hegemony is ofgnoseological value: good at any place at any time (Gramsci, 2001, xxxiii: 1249–50). It is thus expressly a general theory *contra* Hall. To be called Gramscian, any author would have to begin by establishing what theory there is in Gramsci (if only implicitly) and then use that theory as a coherent whole – as the 'key' to the understanding of the objects she studies. Clearly, Hall does not do that. Instead, he imports from other sources concepts to make his arguments coherent. He tends to borrow these concepts, notably from

Althusser and Laclau, who may have developed the Gramscian notion fruitfully, but that is an argument that we leave for discussion. It is not difficult to see that his use of terms like interpellation and discourse could lead the inexperienced reader to confuse Gramsci's ideas with those of other major thinkers on social issues. Eclecticism thus can mean the omission or wrong weighting of concepts.

Hall's most striking omission is his failure to develop or explain adequately the Gramscian notion of 'discourse'. To be frank, I do not think that we can find in the *Prison Notebooks* a clear theory of the creation of 'good sense' out of 'common sense', although this is essential to the part of Hall's theory that discusses a socialist hegemony. The problem is that the *Notes* do not address at length how good sense is created out of common sense, while making abundantly clear that the imprisoned Gramsci increasingly regarded the latter in a completely negative way. If Gramsci ever believed in the 'popular creative mind', he certainly did not when he was writing about the concepts that Hall uses. So, neither in the critical edition nor in the Hoare and Nowell-Smith selections could he ever have found direct ammunition for the political project of making a socialist revolution. He would always have to extrapolate from what Gramsci wrote in order to develop a new notion of discourse, which may explain the drift to the use of Althusser and Laclau when he attempted to discuss how a socialist hegemony is achieved.

Thus, my problem with Hall's use of Gramsci is the failure to address adequately the problem of the nature of the new discourse required for a socialist revolution and whether it is different from that required in a passive revolution where the existing traditional ideas are merely reordered and represented. This lack of discussion of discourse, even as a 'What is to be done?' in an explicitly political use, is a crucial omission which, I would argue, removes his use of Gramsci from that implicit in the *Notes* themselves. Remember that Hall makes bringing 'unity' or 'order' out of 'incoherence' in some practice the key aspect of the creation of a socialist hegemony. In his work, the creation of a socialist hegemony (that is by definition 'non-passive') involves a long labour of rational/political persuasion (the war of position) within civil society; which, once won, leads to the capture of the state. This results in a tendency in Hall's work, obvious in the article on socialist ideas in the 1980s, to conflate analysis and description of the creation of bourgeois hegemony with analysis of the creation of a socialist hegemony, as if the process of a 'passive revolution' were simply mirror-reversed in the socialist project.

We could perhaps add to or strengthen what Hall writes by considering how Gramsci, a linguistic theorist, thought that discourse works to create a subject identity. Our object would be to discover if Gramsci's argument goes beyond the notion of a subject choosing a language among many vying languages, or of a being constituted out of already existing discourses, as in the Althusserian notion of interpellation, as Hall argues.

## SAÏD AND GUHA

Edward Saïd shares with Hall many sources of inspiration other than Gramsci: Williams, Hobsbawm, Althusser and Foucault. In time, he chose Gramsci as his methodological and theoretical guide, giving up some of the others, for many of the same reasons as his Jamaican-British contemporary: Gramsci was more *useful* because of the unsystematic nature of his thought and because, unlike the apparently similar French theorists, his theory allowed a resolution to real contradictions where the Frenchmen had ‘no exit’ implicitly or explicitly built into their theory. Saïd tells us, ‘you see, what I am interested in is people who are unsystematic. You cannot derive a systematic theory from Gramsci . . . he never wrote anything completely. They were just fragments’ (Singh and Johnson, 2004: 101, 131). In *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (2001: xviii, 244–5), Saïd adds:

even if we leave aside the complexities of Gramsci’s philosophy and the political organisation it entails . . . there is the theoretical insistence, against Foucault, of a guaranteed insufficiency in the dominant culture against which it is possible to mount an attack. [In Foucault] there is never any doubt that power is going to win out in the end. So the whole idea of resistance is really essentially defeated from the start. (Saïd, 1983: 222)

But, in fundamental ways, his use of Gramsci differed from that of Hall, not only in his purposes and objects, but even before that in his explicitly philological approach to Gramsci. This was owed to his knowledge of the Italian language and European theory more generally. For although, like Hall, Saïd was educated in a colony and was trained to be an imitation Englishman, as were most of the rich middle-class Arabs who lived in exile in Egypt, he was a linguist and a scholar of comparative literature. This meant that he could take a critical distance from sources like Hoare and Nowell-Smith and was able to use the Italian critical edition as his source.

When I gave a series of lectures on Gramsci . . . I felt that it was necessary to do a kind of philological analysis of the different ways in which he uses the word ‘hegemony’, for instance, or the different ways in which he uses the word ‘intellectual’. All the key words – ‘war of position’, ‘war of manouvre’ [sic], and others – are constantly shifting and constantly changing because of the way in which he wrote and because of the condition of his notebooks. Most of the readers of Gramsci have read him only in that one volume compendium, which is full of mistakes, by the way. I have corrected some . . . there are passages in it which I quote in *Orientalism*, in a footnote, I believe . . . but the four volumes of *The Prison Notebooks* had just come in the middle ’70s, and I noticed that what they [Hoare and Nowell-Smith] had the tendency to do was to lop off bits of Gramsci. (Singh and Johnson, 2004: 153)

More than that, Saïd’s knowledge of Gramsci extends and encapsulates earlier writings than the *QC*, like *Ordine Nuovo*. This enables him to theorize better the issue of constructing a socialist hegemony than does Hall, above

all by focusing attention on the meanings of *discourse* in Gramsci and crucially on what it is to *e-laborate* from intellectual work to a mass belief.

Thought is produced so that actions can be accomplished, that it is diffused in order to be effective, persuasive, forceful, and that a great deal of thought elaborates on what is a relatively small number of principal, directive ideas. The concept of elaboration is crucial here. By elaboration Gramsci means the seemingly contradictory but actually complementary things. First – elaborate means to refine, to work out (*e-laborare*) some prior or more powerful idea, to perpetuate a world vision. Second, to elaborate means something more qualitatively positive, the proposition that culture itself or thought or art is a highly complex and quasi-autonomous extension of political reality and given the extraordinary importance attached by Gramsci to intellectuals, culture and philosophy, it has a density, complexity and historical-semantic value that is so strong as to make politics possible. Elaboration is the ensemble of patterns making it feasible for society to maintain itself. . . . Gramsci's insight is to have recognised that subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing, as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding, are all necessary aspects of *elaboration*. (Saïd, 1983: 170–1)

Here I would like to note what may explain why Saïd's focus will be different from Hall's. Like Hall, Saïd was an 'intellectual' with a 'vocation' to resist but he fought his battle from the periphery (in all senses) of Palestine (1978: 25–6), while Hall's main focus was on the national struggle for the British working class. Putting it too strongly, until the 1990s, Hall played out his allotted black 'British' role while Saïd always remained torn between New York and Palestine. Saïd shifted from his early diasporic view of the importance of being an exile to the later one where he privileged the pariah more and more (compare Saïd, 2001: 173–87 with Parry, 1992: 19–47). In a conversation with Raymond Williams, Saïd stated:

Here is really the theme of my work, its main 'figure' if you want to give it a poetic equivalent, the figure of crossing over. . . . The fact of migration is extraordinarily impressive to me: the movement from the concreteness of one form of life transmuted or imported into the other. . . . I think culture has to be seen as not only excluding but also *exported*.; there is this tradition that you are required to understand and learn and so on, but you cannot really be *of* it . . . and that to me is a deeply interesting question and needs more study because no exclusionary practice can maintain itself for very long. Then you get the crossings over . . . and then of course the whole problematic of *exile* and *immigration* enters into it, the people who simply don't belong in any culture; that is the great modern or, if you like, post-modern fact, the standing outside of cultures. (cited by Williams, 1989: 87–8, 196)

I will discuss later why this seems important, but I note here that it gave him a slant that focuses attention on different aspects of the Gramscian corpus.

Saïd was mainly concerned with the reasons for defeat of what I will call loosely the subaltern voices in the 'Orient' by *orientalism*. The main source

remained for him the *QC*, and their theory of the establishment of a new hegemony through a passive revolution. In the Introduction to *Orientalism* (1978: 7), he used the Gramscian concept of hegemony to explain the object of his research: 'it is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives orientalism the durability and strength that I have been speaking about so far'. His typification of hegemony at this date assumes that it takes place in 'civil society', through the complex of educational practices and institutions whose object is to create mass consent to a particular world view.

Saïd made explicit his intention to use Gramsci on the basis of a creative extension of the original theory: 'I think that this kind of superceding [sic] is always true' (Wicke and Sprinker, 1992: 262–3). What interested him, as the passage cited above intimates (as does *Orientalism* and the debate around it in the 1980s), is how discourses open up and close down the different lived experiences that they seek to express or explain. In Gramsci, he identifies at least six major conceptual notions that he finds useful for his express notion that an intellectual vocation like his own is, or includes, the attempt to win masses of people to an understanding that can galvanize into action for progressive change (see 'On Defiance and Taking Positions' in Saïd, 2001: 500–6).

Where 'discourses, interpretative communities, and paradigms of research are produced by intellectuals . . . either religious or secular' (Saïd, 2001: 128–9) and it is the secular intellectual 'who lives without religion' who is progressive, Saïd was necessarily a secular individual and saw everything in the world, including 'truth', as created by humans in a struggle. In a piece entitled 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community', he says:

To adapt from a statement Gramsci makes in the *Modern Prince*, reality (and hence cultural reality) is a product of the application of human will to the society of things; and since also everything is political, even philosophy and philosophies, we are to understand that in the realm of culture and of thought each production exists not only to earn a place for itself, but to displace, win out over, others. All ideas, philosophies, views, and texts aspire to the consent of their consumers, and here Gramsci is more percipient than most in recognising that there is a set of characteristics unique to civil society in which texts – embodying ideas, philosophies and so forth – acquire power through what Gramsci describes as diffusion, dissemination into and hegemony over the world of 'common sense'. Since all history cannot be known, the intellectual must necessarily aspire to be 'divine' in sympathy, without ever finding a single explanation or source in history for the present. (Saïd, 2001: 130–1)

But what, concretely, should a progressive intellectual do beyond the obvious preaching against the orthodoxies and counsels of despair? Saïd recognizes, of course, the trite reality that 'public intellectuals' of a progressive sort are shut down and shut up by the dominant intellectual coterie who use any tactic to ensure that progressive messages do not become common

knowledge. Almost all of the first half of *The Word, the Text and the Critic* is devoted to the problems this poses for an intellectual in the United States (Saïd, 1983: 168–9; Singh and Johnson, 2004: 56). Indeed, the commodification of knowledge has made any openings ever more ‘slender’.

But his focus on discourse is not ended by the near-impossibility of organic or collective intellectual activity in a society like the United States. He still asserts the possibility of elaborating good sense from the common sense of subaltern groups. This must be stressed because Saïd has been accused of underemphasizing the voice from below (compare Brennan, 1992: 74ff). His literary criticism is often portrayed as highbrow because he was restricted in his contacts with the popular struggle inside the United States. We counter these accusations by pointing out that the distinction is dubious. An author who, expressly following Gramsci, writes *Orientalism*, whose theme is the creation of a new object through discourse that slowly gets further away from its sources as it becomes more elaborate, is concerned with the constitution not of another ‘lower or higher discourse’ but rather a metropolitan discourse related to lived common sense other than that of the United States.

Here, we return to what Saïd thinks is distinctive about Gramsci’s theory of a discourse which leads to self-definition and thus to an identity functional to this or that hegemonic system. His Gramsci is distinctive because, Saïd tells us, he complements temporal notions of the way unity comes from ‘disaggregation’ with spatial or geographic notions. Where Georg Lukacs (and probably Hall) see the creation of a socialist ideology from the disaggregation that is typical of an organic crisis, according to the mode of a unifying order given to a single common sense within one nation-state, Saïd argues contrarily that Gramsci sees that unifying order as coming from multiple common senses, all running parallel or overlapping each other. So orientalism, as a western unifying device, presumes many Others. Saïd writes: ‘I am concerned with Gramsci . . . as . . . the producer of a certain type of critical consciousness that I believe is geographical and spatial in its fundamental co-ordinates’ (Saïd, 2001: 468). Society and culture are productive activities that occur on territories and slide or refer to other spaces and oppositions which make all identities unstable and provisional. This

has had very important consequences for literary history and criticism. In the first place, it has been far more responsive to the real material texture of socio-political change from the point of view not of what Adorno calls identitarian thought, but of fractures and disjunctions that are healed or knitted up temporarily as a matter of contingency. (Saïd, 2001: 468)

So, in Saïd there is a use of Gramsci in which the notion of multiple discourses takes place in a world whose unity is simultaneously the reproduction of disaggregation and fracture. Gramsci is not writing, despite his western focus, about only a single social disaggregation being unified hege- monically, but about multiple sites which are in contradiction and struggle,

and where the almost 100 per cent hegemony in one place may rest on a much less hegemonized common sense in another historical conjuncture. In a world of imperialism, which Saïd discusses in a later book, the implication is that subalterns can speak in their idiom, though not always to the exclusion of the dominant world view. As such a person, both subaltern as a Palestinian and not as an educated Western intellectual, he could see from a different perspective, one that escaped all metropolitan hegemonies and attempted counter-hegemonies. As he explained to an audience that was partly Arab:

[It was worth the effort] to study the history and literature of England by highlighting problematizers, emphasising the outsiders' perspective we bring to it by virtue of the fact that we *are* outsiders . . . this entails, I believe, stressing not the mainstream, but resistance to it. . . . Two years ago I was particularly impressed by Gabour Asfour's essay in *Alif* on the rhetoric of the oppressed in Arabic literature in which he reads texts for dissimulation, allusion, and oppositional strategies instead of for those affirmations of cultural identity furnished by the establishment, which tends to drive all underground and subversive activities to the margins. (Saïd, 2001: 472–3)

So if we look at the articles that Saïd himself said were important to critical thought, we can see that his object is to have the 'silenced' speak in their idiom. Why should we consider this more than another 'passive revolution'? The answer is that it could be, but that once the voices are heard, a struggle for the good sense of the repressed can finally take place.

This is a useful point to *segue* into Ranajit Guha's views, which Saïd tended to endorse. Indeed, we can almost claim a symbiosis in both thinkers' use of Gramsci. Guha's uses of him are spread throughout *Subaltern Studies* but we can find their synthesis in his *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*. This book uses hegemony as its interpretative device, with explicit reference to Gramsci, though it re-defines the concept to open it up:

Hegemony stands for a condition of Dominance (D), such that, in the organic composition of (D), persuasion (P) outweighs coercion (C). Defined in these terms, hegemony operates as a dynamic concept and keeps even the most persuasive structure of Dominance always and necessarily open to Resistance. At the same time, it avoids the Gramscian juxtaposition of Dominance and hegemony (a term sometimes used in the *Prison Notebooks* synonymously with leadership) as antinomies. This has, alas, provided too often a theoretical pretext for the fabrication of a liberal absurdity – the absurdity of the idea of an un-coercive state – in spite of the basic drive of Gramsci's own work to the contrary. . . . Since hegemony, as we understand it, is a particular condition of D and the latter is constituted by C and P, it follows that there can be no hegemonic system under which P outweighs C to the point of reducing it to a nullity. Were that to happen, there would be no Dominance, hence no hegemony. In short, hegemony, deduced thus from Dominance, offers us the double advantage of pre-empting a slide towards a liberal-utopian conceptualisation



of the state and of representing power as concrete historical relation informed necessarily and irreducibly both by force and consent. (Guha, 1997: 19–24, see esp. 23–4)

We might quibble about nuances by a comparison with a philological Gramsci but, overall, the statement is loyal to the original and helps complete Saïd's views. The real interest in Guha is that he repeats Saïd's proposition that Gramsci is a geographical or 'spatial' thinker who sees multiple 'common senses' co-existing, *and* through the concrete historical example of India, he illustrates how this happens and what is required to create a counter-hegemony in a world where imperial relationships are foregrounded. In India, resistance to the dominant Raj's world view, which it and its collaborators sought to make hegemonic, arose outside or beside it, in an area never hegemomized by the rulers. These were the India(s) that continued to exist and understand themselves outside or without reference to the ordering ideas of the dominant hegemony.

D, as a term of the central relation of power in the subcontinent, meant dominance without hegemony . . . the exercise of authority in realms far from metropolitan Europe came to rely on fear rather than consent. (Guha, 1997: 65)

In sum, the effort to persuade the Indian masses that the Raj was for their benefit, and thus win their consent to its rule, failed. Local traditions could not and did not become functional to Dominance. This could be read as an addition to Gramsci's few comments on rule in India, China and Japan, or on colonialism more generally, and we will touch on that next time. But it is in fact novel, and so this use of hegemony brings us onto the terrain of a new theory that we will call 'Guha-ism'.

Guha shows how the universalizing project of the imperial passive revolution could not win sufficient consent among the mass it sought to hegemonize. In Saïd's example, orientalism did enjoy widespread support among its destination audience scholars of 'the Orient'. The British in India did create collaborators for the order if not the content of its ideas (including the Indian National Congress, who sought to create sufficient mass support for itself and for anti-Raj ideas but accepted the terrain for hegemonic struggle set by the ruling ideas of the Raj). But the 'mob' (Gandhi's typification) continued to remain outside any hegemony, still thinking in old terms 'incomprehensible' to both rulers and the opposing nationalists. For the latter, this was problematic since their claim to speak for the Indian people – to be their organic intellectuals – against the Raj's demands for their loyalty rested on a prior claim to have the right to do so, to have the right to interpret the Indian masses' past. So both the Raj and the National Congress struggled to win the fight for control of the agreed history that would give identity to the contemporary mass.

Neither could do this without learning the subaltern language, and so they attempted to bridge the gaps, notably by learning the languages of the

Others that they faced and translating them into a national-popular 'story'. Nationalists learnt English and used it to acquire the same prestige as the whites. More significantly, the Raj and the collaborators learnt the languages of the subalterns. Guha discusses the Fort William College at some length. The learning of local languages by the rulers was not typical in other empires. This policy is very important for reconstructing a Gramscian notion of counter-hegemony. If he does not pay much attention to counter-hegemony in the *Notes*, Gramsci makes clear that an active revolution, as distinct from a passive one, requires learning the languages of the mass, understood in the wide sense as discourses.

The object of learning the languages was to have access to the traditions of folk memory and history of the people and from that inherited common sense to raise it to that of a movement for national independence. It clearly formed part of a hegemonic project and was crucial in attaching Indian leaders to the order of the dominant world view. It was also counter-hegemonic, as the latter sought to write a history from a subaltern point of view. The Raj got the better of the fight for hegemony, at least in the 19th century.

Thanks to a colonialist education, English had . . . become constitutive of thought itself for the educated. It cut them off from their own tradition. By the same token, it also made their own past inaccessible to them as a history, since the contemporary mode of historicizing the past was an aspect of post-Enlightenment European thought made available to Indians solely by 'Anglo-Indian education' and English. They did not know how to think in any way other than their rulers. (Guha, 1997: 175)

Even nationalist history then could not express the popular common sense, which remained untranslated into the enlightened nationalist historiography that the dominant groups needed, whether they were for or against the Raj (Guha, 1997: 154–9, 175). The remaining traces of local culture in early Indian historians of the Raj could be quickly dismissed as inauthentic or 'bad' history.

The basic problem was that, in order to win the people to a counter hegemony, the leading groups used the tools of their enemies. The people they sought to render active had traditions that Guha describes at length and we will characterize as those of rule as coercion-breeding or countered by a common sense of dissimulation and passivity. The object was to win them to an ersatz European-inspired nationalist project, to that national 'language' or discourse.

This raises the question of what it is to learn the language of the Other. In a discussion that relies heavily on V. N. Volosinov, one of Saïd's favoured authors, Guha makes clear that Indians learned English by translating its lexicon but not by acquiring its 'grammar' (Guha, 1997: 191–2), whereas in order to learn a language a person should be learning the latter. What counts

in a struggle over control of discourse is a struggle over the order of concepts, not over the concepts taken one by one. If historians wrote in Bangla as they came from the oppressed, they were evoking another world and thus giving a different meaning to the same story or events because of the lived and passionate experience that lay behind, or was carried by, the word association.

In other words, collective intellectuals, whose authority rests on the convincing nature of their national story, had to re-appropriate not the history but the historiography of the people (Guha, 1997: 194). In the Indian case, this meant a refusal of the canons of the Enlightenment (like that of the Cambridge school of historians of India). What was being fought over were not truths and counter-truths but how to make sense of them – in different registers (p. 201). The apparently chaotic ‘mob’ of 1920–2 escaped the attempts at hegemony of the ruling class and its opponents. It is outside hegemony, but in what sense?

In his discussion of Gandhi’s initial disapproval of the unruly mob’s common sense, ‘from below’ (although he did end up compromising), Guha notes that the common sense took on symbolic and ritualistic forms. It was the view of a people ‘with’ its leaders but expressing a different set of normative references (Guha, 1997: 137–40). These referred back to the history from which its leaders had been severed by the dominant hegemony. Guha does not cite Georges Sorel, where Gramsci does because he considers the role of historical myth to be very important as a galvanizing force.

Our first impression is that Guha is making a virtue of the bizarre notions that Gramsci condemned as spontaneous and ‘anarchic’ expressions by the Italian people, whom he sometimes called the *Bandarlog*. But Guha has, in fact, changed the terms by taking as his starting-point the lack of hegemony over a conquered foreign society whose traditions had not emerged out of the same matrix as occurs in a single nation-state space. In the Indian case, the results of different histories, those of Britain and India, cross-cut, complicating the picture but making the terms on the two sides not referable entirely to each other. Obviously, the complexity grows the more difference or geographical spaces we factor into the history. In India, the terms religion, folklore and even irrationality could be seen as the common sense from which could be extracted or developed a good sense that does not correspond to western rationality or universality or the progress of the world towards one great Fordist and Americanist globe.

This runs counter to at least one reading of the *Notes*. I have argued something similar to Guha by extrapolating from Gramsci’s considerations of folklore (Davidson, 1999: 57–68). Such a ‘creative’ use of Gramsci would, however, be as far from Gramsci as he was from Marx, his undoubted starting-point: a revolution against the *Notebooks*. It is perhaps worthwhile to sketch very briefly what some of the implications are. Saïd’s and Guha’s argument can be reduced to an answer to this question: where does a progressive

intellectual start looking for the areas that have not been hegemonized and from which any counter-hegemonic project would have to start to create a mass political opposition?

Both Saïd and Guha know, because they live in the most successful hegemonies, that the spaces for such oppositional thought are very slender in advanced societies. We might say that capitalist hegemony is almost total. But their answer starts within the context of imperialism and globalization that Gramsci did not consider *in extenso* as he remained primarily concerned with the national struggle (a particular terrain within an overall global perspective). Their answer starts from the reality of their experience as exiles, outsiders and pariahs, the victims of the global project. Therefore, they can see that the differentiated levels of capitalist development and exploitation have left a lot of people in the colonial empires or the subaltern peoples subject to direct coercive rule like that which Gramsci said typified Russia, but which, when viewed from the advanced Europe and USA, was a past reality. The colonial peoples are outside any hegemony and do not give their consent to the system except by passivity and evasion. We might say that they are absent and – I remind Saïd’s critics – part of their resistance lies in their dumb silence or incomprehension. The image that comes to mind is that of Herzen’s Russian peasant before the court. Now, Gramsci certainly discussed these phenomena of coercion and passivity in discussing the Italian South – sometimes described as a European China at the time he was writing. He saw the importance of the multiple versions of resistance – ‘the unofficial view of the world’ – expressed in folklore and music and thought that a counter-hegemony would have to build on those views. He explicitly proposed winning over the leaders of progressive groups that expressed them. He was not hostile to folklore or religion as world views – or put another way, science had only a quantitatively different status from such world views as it also was the product of human understanding at a particular historical conjuncture. But his assumption appears to have been that the languages of the collective intellectuals and the oppressed outsiders were commensurate, translatable and could be raised in a national popular struggle. What Saïd and Guha add is the impossibility of bringing, e.g. the Indian masses, into some great national programme of development, be it called westernization, civilization or anything else, through the translation of such common sense. Their common sense was born of imperial relations of brutal dominance, where the higher values are lived and relived as hypocrisy. Thus we have, in those who could and would not ‘understand’, a starting-point for a critique of metropolitan hegemonic values, of its order of explanation for the world. Counter-hegemony begins in such peripheries.

While this might seem just a new version of Third Worldism, it is much more. It is not simply that the colonial and post-colonial oppressed know where the shoe pinches and once their voice is heard another story about their worlds and the world can be written. That is certainly in Saïd and Guha,

and students can ignore at their peril their strictures about learning the languages. But what they add is that the periphery is on the move. It migrates; it arrives as exile; it intrudes the bulk of the world's cultures into a complacent intellectual self-referential minority view built on a limited western experience in the metropolises themselves. Then it is authorized to speak, as Saïd and Guha were, and to start shouting about other ways of seeing and doing that resonate or have the potential to do so with interminable masses of Others. It remains to show how those masses will hear the resonating claims or whether a synthesis of multiple cultures will ensue (multiculturalism). And that brings us to a discussion of the view of the pariahs, touched on by Saïd but elaborated elsewhere from Arendt to Agamben. How many are they? What do they think the world is about? Can the ruling hegemonies incorporate them into the good life quickly enough to defuse them and rid them of 'magic', like thinking that the world should be in the image of God or some such silly, out-of date view?

### **COX, GILL AND MORTON**

Until the recent work of Adam Morton, the use of Gramsci by English-language International Relations (IR) specialists departed so far from the close philological reading that it sometimes bordered on abuse. Emblematic of the approach adopted up to the 1990s was that of Robert Cox, who stated many times that his work 'does not purport to be a critical study of Gramsci's political theory but merely a derivation from it of some ideas useful for a revision of current international relations theory' (Cox, 1996 [1983]: 124). As late as 1998, Cox expressed similar views: 'It makes no sense to establish a fixed definition of Gramsci's concepts through making an exegesis of his texts' (Cox, 1998: 129). Stephen Gill used Gramsci in much the same way (Gill, 1993, 1998: 157).

It is only fair to note that Cox remained close to Gramsci's explicit view of hegemony and other key categories when related to international relations in the *Notebooks*. So Cox's simple and naïve reading could do little else than replicate the order of Gramsci's analysis. He simply took what Gramsci said about how international relations worked in his time and applied it to the problems of our own. This reified the theory in a way that Hall and Saïd did not. Gramsci insisted that even if the context was global and the end-point of all Marxist revolutionaries was the 'international', practically, the starting-point for analysis must be 'national'. This explains why he focused on the establishment of hegemonies within states.

It seems that the problem of the IR specialists' use of Gramsci arose because they used him for intellectual analyses without emphasizing – as Hall and Saïd had done – Gramsci's theory as a guide to action, or a political ideology. They do not use Gramsci for practical purposes, to make politics, and this allows them to drift much further away than Hall from his views,

in a way that sometimes borders on abuse. This is particularly the case among those who succeeded Cox and Gill. If we do not assume that the 'everybody's Gramsci' of IR has lost its philological roots, it is difficult to understand the contradictory positions of Cox and William Robinson, or even the highly diverse claims made by Cox and Gill (see, e.g. Robinson, 1996, 2004, 2006; Rupert, 1995). Where Cox affirms that Gramsci's view of international relations means that 'we must shift the problem of changing world order back from international institutions to national societies' (Gill, 1983: 140), Robinson retorts: 'I want to call for expunging *nation-state centrism* from the discussion of hegemony. This would allow us to see *transnational social forces* not necessarily tied to any one nation-state behind contests over hegemony and other global political dynamics' (Morton and Bieler, 2006: 167; emphasis in original). Both claim authority in Gramsci.

So the problems of their use lie not so much in reliance on the 1971 English translations, as they also used later, more reliable and extensive translations allowing a philological approach; nor do they come from the fact that Gramsci did not consider international relations much in the *Notebooks*, focusing rather on developments within national borders. They come from an insufficiently political reading of his theory, as theory.

As philologists of Gramsci have noted again and again, Gramsci's assertion about the starting-point of politics being national cannot override his insistence that his theoretical categories were applicable at all times and in all places (Davidson, 2005; Vacca, 1991). His approach was spatial and geographical as well as historical and linear. On the other hand, the use of such categories would only tell researchers where to look, not what they would find there. Indeed, only once they were clothed in a real historical account would their concrete meaning be established. For example, even in 'ancient' societies there could be hegemonic rule, just as there could be rule by coercion in 'contemporary' societies. Yet the assertion that in the Russia of 1917 rule was by force rather than consensus only attained meaning in the writing of the history of this or that event, in Gramsci's case that of the Russian revolution.

Once we admit that Gramsci's categories only make sense when they are clothed in the reality of the object to which they are applied (so that, for example, how hegemony works concretely is only revealed by detailed historical study), then it is the specific historical reality that becomes central to the ordering of his categories. Gramsci's own views about international relations in his time and space cannot be applied *holus bolus* to a reality that he did not even envisage. So, according to Robinson, the approach should be via the question, if Gramsci had examined the international world of today would he have stuck to the 'thin' view he advanced in the *Quaderni*, whose starting-point was the level and degree of national hegemonomies, how they extended to regional spaces and ended up with one state being hegemonic over the rest? This is roughly the use made by Arrighi and

Silver (1999), for whom the USA is hegemonic. Might he not have changed his order and approach if he had studied the global space of capitalism not as context for another domain but as the prime object of study?

Not surprisingly, the claim is often made in IR that Gramscian theory finds its limits as an explicative approach when faced with a reality that he never considered. Or, if the starting-point could still be in Gramsci, then once we consider global politics we need to go beyond him to develop (a) new theory for international relations. This would be akin to the 'Hallism' we suggested above. But while such limitations have been affirmed, they are not discussed closely and IR theorists do not reconsider Gramsci's own corpus to discover whether there is more in it than a theory of the primacy of the national that cannot cope with the reality of a new global world (Robinson, 2006: 169). More seriously, given Gramsci's own strictures about how Marx (or any theory) should be read, when they do go beyond Gramsci, as Gill does, they supplement or elide his theory with that of thinkers like Braudel or Polanyi (see Gill, 1998).

So Morton's reconsideration of international relations *after* a careful philological re-reading of Gramsci's concepts and the order of his exposition of those concepts is a welcome rejoinder to a discourse that to a Gramsci philologist seemed rather *à la derive*, no matter what the intentions of the authors. Of course, even after that re-reading, we still can end where Morton does: that Gramsci cannot provide a complete answer to the new realities of international relations today. Then, we are faced with the elementary truth of Marx' historical materialism (Vacca, 1991): that it is better to know what happens in history than to see through it.

Morton uses English translations of Gramsci to make a preliminary 'double' re-reading of his theory. This reliance on English translations does not lay him open to the criticism that we made of Hall's use of sources, because today there are excellent translations available which do not suffer from the defects of omission of the early Hoare and Nowell-Smith translation of 1971. Morton's object in his first reading is to grasp Gramsci in the 'rhythm of his thought' rather than his discrete propositions, seeking to internalize his method and thus the order of use of his concepts (Morton, 2007: 35). The object of the second reading is to arrive at a 'practical canon of historical study' for IR. The historicizing of Gramsci's thought enables Morton to identify, in the footsteps of Saïd and Guha (though he does not cite the latter), the centrality of spatiality in Gramsci's theoretical ordering rather than a simple teleological linear use of categories. He argues that this makes it possible to use Gramsci as a 'point of departure to deal with similar problematics of our time whilst also critically appreciating the need to move *beyond* Gramsci as a necessary reflection on present political conditions' (Morton, 2007: 36).

In a preliminary historical reading, Morton carefully traces Gramsci's exposition of the development of hegemony in Italy and elsewhere, i.e. the

national starting-point. This 'history' is used to show Gramsci's method at work and, simultaneously because it is specifically historical, that to be true to his theory we must take our distance from it. Neither Cox, nor Gill, when looking at Gramsci's own histor(ies), emphasized the need to distance ourselves from the philology by comprehending the reflexive nature of such history on the order given to the theoretical concepts within hegemony. In Morton, we see the study of the North/South relation in Gramsci used in order not just to show his concepts at work but also to establish the spatial nature of his thinking. The importance of this was highlighted in the discussion of Saïd, above. It leads Morton to emphasize the importance of the synchronic as well as the diachronic in Gramsci. The unhegemonized areas of the world are seen as co-present with the hegemonized areas, not simply outside it, as they are in the linear schema (Morton, 2007: 69). World capitalism as uneven development is something present in Gramsci's theory and not extraneous to it.

Hence Morton is able to come up with a fruitful use of passive revolution, which becomes the central concept for understanding global capitalism in uneven development, where there is both national and international in all realities. He states that passive revolution is definitely a revolution by an elite that leads to the creation of a state power consonant with existing capitalist relations. This activity requires the establishment of a historical bloc of allied classes through a hegemonic process. This is the organization of consent to the system of rule through the myriad levels and instances of private or civil society. Morton argues that through these instances all inter-subjective relations are understood and they ultimately end up as a 'national/popular' project (Morton, 2007: 97). By foregrounding politics-as-passive-revolution as the key to understanding the international system today, his argument keeps present the political transformative content of Gramsci's applied work and avoids sliding off into discourse theory like that of Laclau and Mouffe. Yet, if there is still a 'class struggle' in the Marxist sense, its terms have changed, he says (p. 100). History should be sought at the margins of the subaltern class struggle.

Morton thus approaches his subject in a dual fashion: First, he admits that Gramsci stated that the dominant hegemonic states would decide the history of 'subaltern states' but, second, he also notes that the closed or 'complete' nature of a dominant hegemony, even that of the United States, was never total. The nation-state becomes 'nodal' rather than 'dominant' in international relations. This view accords with the state of philological studies of Gramsci. Gramsci's historical practical starting-point in the 'national' was not the same as his theoretical starting-point in the 'international'. If it is as a result of international relations that the nation-state is 'nodal', then the latter's place slowly shifts: 'it is argued here that the internationalisation of production has profoundly reconstructed – but not eroded – the role of the state' (Morton, 2007: 125). Thus his conclusions go beyond Cox, because he



considers carefully the way the order of concepts is reformulated in application to the novelties of globalization. Morton also reduces Gill's claim that a new international order has emerged as hegemonic to historical rather than theoretical status.

Following his geographical-spatial use of Gramsci's categories, Morton sees that, *contra* Robinson, globalization both homogenizes the state system and exacerbates contradictions between and within states (Morton, 2007: 144). He elaborates this process using the key notion of 'passive revolution' (p. 149). But 'passive revolution' cannot be understood in the way Gramsci used it for the Risorgimento or fascism. States rather than classes become central as 'modern' states are created in an endless race to catch up. These bastard forms exist contemporaneously with fully modernized states (p. 152). Only a comparative study of such effects can lead to an adequate notion of passive revolution for international relations. Morton uses Mexico as an illustration. There, neo-liberalism required a state capable of facilitating its insertion into the global economy in the face of internal contradiction. The result is not homogeneity but diversity and difference.

Like all the authors we have considered who adhere closely to Gramsci, Morton is least convincing when he considers what counter-hegemony might be, as this is a topic that Gramsci himself barely touches on. He knows that the mature Gramsci is a theoretician of defeat of socialism and that that is the perspective through which a student must view his work. This perspective is useful where globalization is theorized in its different forms but less useful when discussing counter-hegemonic forces in international relations. Morton illustrates counter-hegemony by the Zapatistas. But while such resistance to neo-liberal hegemony exists, to me, it is important to theory because it is so marginal, as evidence of the almost 100 per cent success of the international global hegemony. The international support for sub-comandante Marcos is more defensive than aggressive.

If Morton is rather unsatisfying on this notion, he makes a valuable self-criticism in his discussion of the limits to Gramsci's use to global politics today. His Gramsci is neither utopia nor a handbook and, taking 'Gramsci's steer', he argues that 'interpretations of the past, when one seeks the deficiencies and the errors . . . from the past itself, are not 'history' but present day politics *in nuce*' (Q15: 52). Gramsci's emphasis on the leading role of the Party is 'undoubtedly misplaced' in a global world and should be replaced by the wider sense of 'party' as social forces and institutions. Gramsci's politics of creating unity are no longer relevant: the world does and will reproduce itself as difference. Whether social movements are the answer is left moot.

In sum, writing about counter-hegemony for today may well oblige us to go beyond Gramsci. To be faithful to him philologically requires consideration not only of his insights but of his limitations.

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