

## Introductory explanation about the paper by Koichi Ohara (IGS-Japan)

Hegemony: Explorations into Consensus, Coercion and Culture  
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Allow me to briefly explain some points of our paper as well as the reason why we take up this subject: the process of innovation and expansion of Gramsci's concept of hegemony.

It has often been said that Gramsci's concept of hegemony has a certain similarity to Max Weber's notion of legitimate power as well as Michel Foucault's concept of power.

As far as Foucault's is concerned, one of the important characteristics is shown by the fact that he attempted to grasp a mechanism of power not as a negative instance having nothing more than a function of repression, but positively as a productive network spread over the whole of social body.<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, his observation implies criticism of the viewpoint of simplifying power as a mechanism of class domination in advanced capitalist countries, namely the traditional Marxist theory lacking any internal analysis of mechanism of the power.

As is well known, Edward Said too, pays a great attention to Gramsci's concept of hegemony as well as Foucault's notion of power.

E. Said does not consider the power or authority only as something negative or oppressive, but he recognizes that the central reality of power or authority is the presence of the State. So he emphasizes that «culture, cultural formations and intellectuals [...] exist and are made possible by virtue of a very interesting network of relationships with the power of State.» He takes note of implications of the word “elaboration” Gramsci utilized in one of his notes (Notebook 11, Paragraph 12) and he evaluates the importance of Gramsci's concept of hegemony, because «Gramsci's insight is to have recognized that subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding are all necessary aspects of elaboration»<sup>2</sup>.

The purpose of our paper is to analyze the significance of Gramsci's innovation and expansion of hegemony in the *Prison Notebooks*, namely to explain how the analysis of hegemony relates to the complex analysis of power (state formation, the state, civil society, the economy, intellectuals, social groups, etc. etc.) and attempt to uncover the complexity of the Gramscian concept of hegemony.

Firstly., as will be pointed out in our paper, for Gramsci the State is «hegemony protected by the armour of coercion»<sup>3</sup>, and at the same time «the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules»<sup>4</sup>. And he defines the civil society a complex network of so-called private apparatus with which and in which one exercises ethic-cultural leadership or hegemony, and which produce active consent. It is clear that Gramsci intended to critically supersede an old State theory, according to which the State is defined as a simple instrument or apparatus of class domination and oppression.

Secondly, Gramsci did not only intended to innovate and expand his concept of hegemony by articulating the two opposing moments, that is to say, the dichotomy between dominance-coercion and direction-consent, respectively inherent to power, but also to pay attention to the process of transforming, in the consciousness of ruled groups, these two moments into hegemony through their interiorization and their capillary penetration. This process might be said equivalent to the process of “elaboration” as Said noticed.

In the first paragraph of Notebook 13 (the so-called Notebook on the politics of Machiavelli), Gramsci analyzes the function of “modern Prince”, a symbol of the collective will, performs in the process. For Gramsci, the “modern Prince” could be studied as an historical exemplification of a political ideology expressed by a creation of concrete fantasy which acts on a dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organize its collective will. And «the modern Prince, as it develops, revolutionizes the whole system of intellectual and moral relation» and thus «in men's consciences,’ said Gramsci, ‘the Prince takes the place of the divinity or the categorical imperative»<sup>5</sup>.

Then, according to Gramsci, what is the process in which a dispersed and shattered people wake up and organize a collective will? In his view:

«Critical understanding of self takes place [...] through a struggle of political “hegemonies” and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one’s own conception of reality. Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage toward a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one»<sup>6</sup>.

To show the relation to what Said is saying, in other words the connection between hegemony, consciousness, theory, and practice, we want to note that he quotes Notebook 11, §12 in *Orientalism* (p.25). He quotes this part:

«The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is “knowing thyself” as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. The first thing to do is to make such an inventory.»<sup>7</sup>

Thirdly, the intellectual will be involved in every phase of a long and complex historical process of the intellectual and moral reformation, and thus a dialectic intellectual-mass relationship<sup>8</sup> could be born. It is possible, therefore, to define this dialectic relationship as a complex process in which both of the intellectual and mass people (subaltern groups in particular) could become actually autonomous and independent, in other words, a real and organic collaboration between both of them could be formed. For the intellectual as well as for the mass-subaltern, this signifies a process of struggle for both of them to be free from principles imposed, but not spontaneously proposed or accepted, and to achieve an autonomous historical consciousness<sup>9</sup>.

This process could absolutely not be separated with Gramscian project of social change or transformation, neither with the problem of subject to be condemned to realize this project. With further development of a “national-popular collective will” and of the “intellectual and moral reformation”, this project could be extended towards such a project of constructing the *società regolata* (regulated society).

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<sup>1</sup> See «Intervista a Michel Foucault» ( «Entretien avec Michel Foucault» réalisé par A.Fontana e P. Pasquino, en juin 1976, trad. C. Lazzeri) in Fontana(A.) et Pasquino (P.), ed., *Microfisica del potere : interventi politici*, Turin, Einaudi, 1977. Michel Foucault «DTS ET ECRITS» III (1976-1979), Gallimard, pp.148-149. «Or il me semble que la notion de répression est tout à fait

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inadéquate pour rendre compte de ce qu'il y a justement de producteur dans le pouvoir. Quand on définit les effets de pouvoir par la répression, on se donne une conception purement juridique de ce même pouvoir; on identifie le pouvoir à une loi qui dit non; il aurait surtout la puissance de l'interdit. Or je crois que c'est là une conception toute négative, étroite, squelettique du pouvoir qui a été curieusement partagée. Si le pouvoir n'était jamais que répressif, s'il ne faisait jamais rien d'autre que de dire non, est-ce que vous croyez vraiment qu'on arriverait à lui obéir? Ce qui fait que le pouvoir tient, qu'on l'accepte, mais tout simplement qu'il ne pèse pas seulement comme une puissance qui dit non, mais qu'en fait il traverse, il produit les choses, il induit du plaisir, il forme du savoir, il produit du discours; il faut le considérer comme un réseau productif qui passe à travers tout le corps social beaucoup plus que comme une instance négative qui a pour fonction de réprimer.))

<sup>2</sup> See Edward E. Said, *Reflections on Recent American "Left" Literary Criticism*, *Boundary 2*, Volume 8, Issue 1, *The Problems Reading in Contemporary American Criticism: A symposium* (Autumn, 1979), 11-30, Duke University Press. pp.21-23

<sup>3</sup> Notebook 6 § 88, *Gendarme-nightwatchman State, etc.*.SPN. p.532.

<sup>4</sup> Notebook15 § 10, Machiavelli. *Sociology and Political Science*, SPN. p.504.

<sup>5</sup> Notebook13 § 1, SPN. p.316-330.

<sup>6</sup> Notebook11 § 12,SPN.p.641-642. In this case it should be noted that for Gramsci an organic unity between theory and practice means an ideological unity between the "simple" and the intellectual.

<sup>7</sup> Notebook11 § 12 SPN. p.628.

<sup>8</sup> Notebook11 § 12,SPN.p.643-644. «Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an elite of intellectuals. A human mass does not "distinguish" itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organizing itself; and there is no organization without intellectuals, that is without organizers and leaders, in other words, without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of people "specialized" in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas. But the process of creating intellectuals is long, difficult, full of contradictions, advances and retreats, dispersals and regroupings, in which the loyalty of the masses is often sorely tried. (And one must not forget that at this early stage loyalty and discipline are the ways in which the masses participate and collaborate in the development of the cultural movement as a whole.) The process of development is tied to a dialectic between the intellectuals and the mass. The intellectual stratum develops both quantitatively and qualitatively, but every leap forward towards a new breadth and complexity of the intellectual stratum is tied to an analogous movement on the part of the mass of the "simple", who raise themselves to higher levels of culture and at the same time extend their circle of influence towards the stratum of specialized intellectuals, producing outstanding individuals and groups of greater or less importance. In the process, however, there continually recur moments in which a gap develops between the mass and the intellectuals (at any rate between some of them, or a group of them), a loss of contact, and thus the impression that theory is an "accessory", a "complement" and something subordinate.))

<sup>9</sup> Notebook16 § 12. *Natural, Counter-natural, artificial, etc, EC*. p.1875.

# **The process of innovation and expansion of Gramsci's concept of hegemony and the present world**

**A Paper presented at the  
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(1) Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony has important significance for the interpretation of the integral relationship which has developed in various fields of the present world, such as politics, the economy, social life, culture and custom, the media, etc.

Gramsci's linguistic study of the conception of hegemony during his youth occupied an important position in his theoretical edifice and later became one of the key notions in his Prison Notebooks. In the course of his long and critical reflections, he addresses two main currents of thought: the first current of thought was represented by mechanistic materialism and its tendency towards economic determinism and a class-reductionist standpoint (the so-called "Marxism-Leninism" as a doctrine officially recognized by the Communist International), and the second by the positivism and anti-positivism (Georges Sorel and Benedetto Croce) which had remarkably influenced the former.

It is important, therefore, to bring to light the complex process of Gramsci's elaboration of the concept of hegemony with relation to the main study topics he had attempted to cope with in his prison writings, respectively in the first, second and third periods of his incarceration and his writing in prison.

Even after the publication of the critical edition of the Prison Notebooks (1975), the Gramscian notion of hegemony has often been focused upon the "Turi Special Notebooks" of the second period, in particular Notebook 13 (Brief Notes on Machiavelli's politics). If truth be known, Gramsci's efforts of complex reflection and elaboration in the "Formia Special Notebooks" of the third period (Notebooks 16-29) have so far been fairly minimized.

Let's take for example the conception of "Americanism" as a type of

hegemony (Notebook 22) and the concept of hegemony of subaltern groups (Notebook 25). The concept of “Americanism” was taken up and put forward in early 1980’s by the Regulationist scholars as a Fordist type of hegemony, and the concept of subaltern social groups was taken in the 1980s by the Subaltern Studies Group with regard to the question of hegemony among marginalized social groups. These study groups, as well as many Gramscian scholars, have made significant contributions to the question of hegemony, giving momentum to the research and the further elaboration of the Gramscian concept.

(2) Before his incarceration, Gramsci utilized the concept of hegemony in relation to the task of forming the political leadership of the working class, capable of creating the “system of class alliance”. He pointed out : «The proletariat can become the leading [*dirigente* ] and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of class alliance which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State.»<sup>1</sup> At that time Gramsci almost identified hegemony with the level of leadership of working class. Such a way of seizing hegemony was related to the bitter experiences Gramsci had in the 1920s: the collapse of the revolutionary process in Western countries, the rise of fascist forces, and the establishment of a fascist regime in Italy, etc.. In other words, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony – based on Leninist ideas and mediated by the polemic on the policy of “united front” which took place after the death of Lenin within the Communist International – was focused on the construction of revolutionary subjects in European countries, including Italy.

The conception of hegemony, however, begins to show remarkable change from the very first notebook in prison, namely in Notebook 1 Gramsci begins a process innovating and expanding the concept of the hegemony. This process is characterized by a shift in analysis from the hegemony as a strategic concept before Gramsci’s incarceration, to that as a more universal “concept of historical analysis”. As a matter of fact, Gramsci proceeds to analyze the process of historical formation of hegemony after the French Revolution and in the process of formation of an unified Italy as a nation-state in the Risorgimento. He investigates the hegemonic problems related to these processes, and he develops his analysis in order to dynamically grasp the relationship among the state, the political forces ( political parties, etc.) and social groups, without falling into schematic, determinist or class reductionist viewpoint. For Gramsci the “intellectual and moral leadership” implies a crucial moment of hegemony. «The supremacy of a social group,’ writes Gramsci, ‘manifests itself in two ways, as

“domination” and as “intellectual and moral leadership”. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to “liquidate”, or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise “leadership” before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to “lead” as well.》<sup>2</sup> And Gramsci emphasizes the importance and the prevalence of the moment of leadership and consent: «There can, and indeed must, be hegemonic activity even before the rise to power, and that one should not count only on the material force which power gives in order to exercise an effective leadership.》<sup>3</sup>

(3) The innovation of conception of hegemony Gramsci intends to undertake, is deeply connected with his original and creative interpretation of *The Preface to a Critique of Political Economy*\* by Karl Marx. For Gramsci the passage from a social formation (equivalent to “historical bloc” in Gramscian terminology) to the other social formation does not mean a coercive rupture by “force” nor a lightning process by leap, but a continuity and qualitative re-organization of the precedent society.\*\* It is nothing but a process of the sustainable social transformation characterized by the process of a “war of position”. This process also means a process of continuous re-absorption of the political society (the state) by the civil society as well as the long-term process towards the formation of a “società regolata” (a regulated society).

Gramsci attaches importance to the “private organizations of the civil society” – what one calls associations, because he defines them not only as a “terrain” for creating a counter-hegemony to the State, but also a core for the said re-absorption and the “società regolata”(self-regulated society). When he was young, Gramsci pointed out that a future society should have been based on the “minimum coercion and maximum freedom”. Now it could be said that Gramsci could broaden a new theoretical horizon towards the possibility of “re-absorption” and the realization of a “società regolata”, by paraphrasing and further developing in a original way what Marx intended to explain in his writing “*Preface*”.

As is well known, even during the second post-war period, the so-called vulgar Marxists insisted on some kind of utopian or class determinist illusion such as “extinction of state” or “society without class”, and they never succeeded in theoretically developing original Marxian ideas. But on the contrary, 70 years ago, Antonio Gramsci, by interpreting and further developing Marxian ideas in his own way, had reached to his original point in the matter of relationship between the passage of the

social formation (order) and what he called the hegemony.

Always in this theoretical context, many sorts of social movements (trade-union movements, cooperative movements, etc.), associated movements (NPOs, NGOs New Social Movements, etc.) and other civil movements for renovated local governments or for referendum, have been playing an increasing role in the contemporary world. It becomes necessary and indispensable, therefore, not merely to foster and continuously develop their counter-hegemony to the State, but also their self-governing capacity, namely, their own social and cultural hegemony.

In this way the Gramscian outlook of hegemony is a self-referential and self-reflective conception *par excellence*. Today political parties can be viewed as associations born in civil society with components of political society. In particular, the present situation requires political parties to be associations, vividly conscious of the self-referential and self-reflective moment of hegemony, in order that they could exercise a function of organic and hegemonic apparatus in both of the domains of political and civil society.

The dramatic break-down of East European socialist states in 1989 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 have clearly shown the fact that any regime, socialist or not, based on the principle of the “minimum freedom, the maximum coercion”, contrary to the Gramscian idea, is condemned to become a “political society in which the civil society is oppressed”, due to the lack of any self-referential moment of hegemony.

(4) Secondly, the Gramsci's conception of hegemony has been innovated and amplified through his critical analysis of the concept of “permanent revolution”, closely related to his criticism of so-called “economism” (economic determinism). As is well known, economic determinism constitutes an un-scientific precondition for many sorts of erroneous views, such as the simple and gross outlook of linear deepening of capitalist crisis (the so-called “general crisis”), the auto-collapse of capitalism, the catastrophic outlook and so on. Such economic or deterministic viewpoints prevent the recognition of the «necessary and vital nexus [that] exists between the structure and superstructure»<sup>4</sup>, namely from getting to the compound understanding of social formation (historical bloc).

Such erroneous views fail to seize the complex dynamism of political processes, minimize the significance of the “superstructure,” in particular the active function of ideology and politics, and overlook the proper significance of the “State” as “hegemony protected by the armour of coercion”. So Gramsci made a severe criticism

of the negative influences of the “Economism.” He pointed out that economism had lost «a great part»<sup>5</sup> of the intellectual and cultural capacity, proper to Marxian ideas, due to a lack of the theoretical moment (the reality of ideology and its active implication, etc.), and it had «consequently reacted negatively on the prestige body of ideas»<sup>6</sup>

«It is therefore necessary,’ said Gramsci, ‘to combat economism not only in the theory of historiography, but also and especially in the theory and practice of politics,» and «the struggle can and must be carried on by developing the concept of hegemony»<sup>7</sup> In this sense the “innovation and expansion of the concept of hegemony” as a corollary to the criticism of “economic determinism” should be organically linked with the “innovation and expansion of the concept of State”.

In addition, Gramsci’s criticism of the concept of “permanent revolution”, which was theoretically based upon “economism”, was among the other things indispensable for the innovation and amplification of the concept of hegemony. «The formula belongs to an historical period in which the great mass political parties and the great economic trade unions did not yet exist, and society was still, so to speak, in a state of fluidity from many points of view»<sup>8</sup>. The social and historical elements of “permanent revolution” were composed of a greater backwardness of the countryside, and almost complete monopoly of political power by a few main cities (like Paris in the case of France); a relatively rudimentary State apparatus, and greater autonomy of civil society from State activity; a specific system of military forces and of national armed services; greater autonomy of the national economies from the economic relations of the world market, etc. But in the period after 1870, all these elements changed. «The internal and international organizational relations of the State become more complex and massive, and the Forty-Eightist formula of the “Permanent Revolution” is expanded and transcended in political science by the formula of “civil hegemony”»<sup>9</sup>. «The massive structures of the modern democracies, both as State organizations, and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were the “trenches” and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position»<sup>10</sup>

(5) As for the “innovation and expansion of the concept of State”, in one of his letters from Prison, Gramsci writes: «the State is usually understood as a political Society (or dictatorship, or coercive apparatus meant to mold the popular mass in

accordance with the type of production and economy at a given moment) and not as balance between the political Society and the civil Society (or the hegemony of a social group over the entire national society, exercised through the so-called private organizations, such as the Church, the unions, the schools, etc.)»<sup>11</sup>. The content of this letter corresponds to the following note of Prison Notebooks. «It should be remarked that the general notion of State includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say that State=political society +civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion)»<sup>12</sup>

In this paragraph, Gramsci intends to “innovate and expand the concept of State” in a dual sense. Firstly, linked with the above mentioned innovation and expansion of the concept of hegemony, Gramsci does not reduce the State to its coercive and dominant apparatus but understands it as the complex political, intellectual and moral leadership of a ruling social group based upon the bureaucratic and coercive organism. This understanding dynamically seizes the double moments of the integral notion of the State: Political Society (State in a narrow sense) = coercive domination and subordination; and Civil Society (State in a large sense) = leadership and consent (persuasion). It is clearly shown in the following paragraph: «the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules»<sup>13</sup> Secondly, it will make theoretically possible a “re-absorption of the Political Society by the Civil Society”. Namely it will lead to the outlook of State, according to which «the coercive element of the State withering away by degrees, as ever-more conspicuous elements of regulated society ( or ethical State or civil society ) make their appearance»<sup>14</sup> by superseding the theory on the “extinction of the State”. This viewpoint was indispensable for his theoretical elaboration, because he intended not only to restore the intellectual originality of Marx – in this regard Gramsci points out that only after the coming of a regulated society and the re-absorption of the political society by the civil society will the conception of the world of Marx be «superseded»<sup>15</sup> – and to criticize the liberal outlook of State as well as totalitarian outlook of Fascism, but also to supersede the sterile conception of State advocated by the 3<sup>rd</sup> International. In other words, it is a theoretical articulation of the question of “re-absorption” and that of the formation of the “regulated society” that constituted a new horizon of “innovation and expansion of the concept of State” to which Gramsci had arrived in his elaboration of the Prison Notebooks. That is why Gramsci

emphasized: «In a doctrine of the State which conceives the latter (the State) as tendentiously capable of withering away and of being subsumed into regulated society», the formula of the State =political society +civil society is «a fundamental one»<sup>16</sup>

Thus, linked with the innovation and amplification of the notion of hegemony, the elaboration of Gramsci in prison reached his profound innovation and expansion of the notion of State ( State =political society +civil society ), as a reverse of the theory of extinction of State, paving the way to a theoretical perspective of the “regulated society” (la società regolata).

It is now clear that this kind of Gramscian elaboration was connected with his interpretation and elaboration of the *Preface to a contribution to the critique of political economy* (1859) by Marx and especially with the passage of the social formation (the historical bloc with Gramscian terminology) and Gramscian innovation of concept of hegemony. This operation of innovation had been developed into the study of the subaltern and its hegemony, by passing through the examination of topics such as Americanism and so on.

( 6 ) The notion of “civil society”, linked with what we have already mentioned, will be “expanded”. “Civil society,” where associations such as Church, schools, unions etc. are located, is not only a place for the struggle for hegemony, between domination and subordination, between leadership and consent, but also a place for creating forces to be engaged in the re-absorption of political society. At the same time, it is a place where the elements for a future “regulated society”, for a “self-government opposed to government by functionaries”, and for a society of “political equality based upon economic equality” will be born. And in civil society, «the individual can govern himself without his self-government thereby entering into conflict with political society – but rather becoming its normal continuation, its organic complement»<sup>17</sup>. In Gramsci, the innovation of the notions of hegemony and State simultaneously involve a renewed outlook of civil society..

All these arguments have also been drawn from his acute reflections on objective and subjective reasons for the interruption and defeat of revolutionary process in Western European countries, which caused a great deal of sacrifices. «In the East,’ said Gramsci, ‘the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State

trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks»<sup>18</sup> It is not correct, therefore, to simplify the notion of State and reduce it to only an apparatus of coercive domination. It is important to consider that the “innovation and expansion of the concept of hegemony” should be internally connected with the idea of “innovation and expansion of the notion of State, capable of articulating the concept of State apparatus of hegemony (the system of parliament, separation of the three powers, public education, etc..) and the idea of “trenches and fortifications embodied by the elements of civil society”, namely that of “hegemonic apparatus of civil society” (Church, schools, unions, associations, mass-media, political parties, enterprises, etc..). And the concept of hegemony or hegemonic apparatus will be mediated by the innovation and amplification of the notion of State, and it will be further enriched with research on various topics (intellectuals, political parties, mass-media, popular culture and common sense and so on).

Thus, the process of “innovation and expansion of the Gramscian notion of hegemony could be traced by deepening and developing it from the political dimension to the dimension of civil society and that of culture. It is the process in which various sorts of topics will repeatedly be articulated and linked, and through this process the notion of political hegemony will be enriched with self-referential and self-innovative characters of hegemony or with the recovery of the dialectical outlook of hegemony in particular. The amplification and deepening of the concept of hegemony itself could be further clarified through the process.

Especially in the series of special notebooks composed in period at Formia, Gramsci developed his concept of hegemony around topics such Americanism, Journalism, Folklore, etc... Now let us take up and examine Notebook 25 (the so-called “Subaltern” notebook), one of the more important special notebooks of the Formia period. .

( 7 ) We would first like to call your attention to a report on the “Gramscian category of the subaltern”, which Professor Joseph A. Buttigieg presented to a Naples conference organized by the IGS (International Gramsci Society) in 1997. As far as we know, this essay was an active reply from one of Gramscian scholars to the increased interest in and request of studying the “subaltern”. This report would have been helpful to strongly impress Gramscian scholars from different countries about the discrepancy between the development of research on Gramscian ideas and the delay of study of the so-called “Subaltern notebook” (Notebook 25) in the research of Gramsci as a whole. It

is true that the “Subaltern notebook” has for a long time been “marginalized” in the history of studying Gramsci’s work.

After Buttigieg’s essay, a monograph by Marcus Green recently appeared entitled “Gramsci Cannot Speak” (*Rethinking Marxism*, 2002). This study has brought to light the interest in and necessity for further developing the research of Gramscian concept of the subaltern. In this article M. Green, emphasizing that Gramsci’s notion of the subaltern is internally connected with his other important key-notions, points out: «In many ways, Gramsci’s definition and understanding of “subalternity” is directly linked with his conceptions of hegemony and state and civil society»<sup>19</sup>

How can the subaltern group form its autonomous and independent relation of hegemony, by surpassing and renovating existing hegemonic relations? In order to answer this question, it is indispensable for us to study a series of problems, such as the question of creating an organic relationship between the subaltern and intellectuals (development of “common sense” and “good sense” in the subaltern), the correlation between civil society and the subaltern, the presence of the subaltern in political society, the question of the subaltern in the period of formation in a nation-state, the relation between the “philosophy of praxis and the subaltern, etc.. It was all these arguments that after his “special Notebooks of Turi” Gramsci attempted to address and reflect on. So in order to read and interpret the “Subaltern Notebook”, it is necessary to make clear a correlation with the key-concepts such as hegemony, State, civil society and so on.

Gramsci was, said M. Green, conscious of the question of the subaltern in the “Theory of history and of historiography”, one of his first and main topics he planned to address in his notebooks and listed on the first page of Notebook 1, and it was clearly shown in Notebook 3 § 90 in which Gramsci laid out his “Methodical Criteria” for the historical research of the subaltern. Green argues that the creation of Notebook 25 clearly indicates Gramsci’s further research and expansion of the concept. Therefore, Green argues that ‘one should attempt to understand Gramsci’s concept of the subaltern within the totality of the prison notebooks and general trajectory of his thought.’ However, we would like to emphasize the importance of studying Notebook 25 in relation to the other Formia period Notebooks. Such research has the potential to expand and deepen the concept of hegemony and link the concept of the subaltern with other concepts and analyses.

( 8 ) As is already pointed out, a delay in the study of the subaltern as well as the other topics relating the former is serious indeed. Taking for example the theme of

“the civil society and the subaltern”, no one can speak about civil society without the subaltern nor about the subaltern lacking any “organic relation” with the civil society. As for this “organic relation”, Buttigieg tried to clarify it to a certain degree in his report we mentioned. Even in the precedent study of the subaltern, we cannot help but say regrettably that the viewpoint of addressing at the same time the two concepts, namely the subaltern and the civil society, combining one with the other, is very rare and diluted as a whole. We consider it possible to enrich and deepen each of the two concepts only when they are not separately addressed but in a united form.

In the last chapter of his essay Green talks about “Gramsci’s revolutionary project for subaltern liberation”. It is very important to elaborate and clarify the concept of revolutionary change on the basis of Gramscian notions of the subaltern and hegemony, because the elaboration and the clarification of this concept imply a perspective for further developing and deepening the study of Gramscian thoughts as well as the research of contemporary concepts of revolutionary transformation, which have been put forward in the historical conditions of a dramatic collapse of the model of Soviet-type of socialism. It is noteworthy that Green has drawn attention to this question.

M. Green concluded his essay as follows: «Gramsci’s concept of the subaltern does not only create a new terrain of struggle but also a methodological criterion for formulating such a struggle founded upon the integral analysis of the economic, historical, cultural, and ideological roots of everyday life.»<sup>20</sup> But he did not refer to “political science”, namely the theoretical importance of revolutionary change, which Gramsci elaborated in Notebook 13 (Notebook on Machiavelli) and other related notebooks. Hopefully Green could deepen the importance of the combination of the problem of subaltern liberation with that of revolutionary transformation in his further research.

The elaboration and reflection of the problem of re-absorption of the political society (State) by the civil society and that of “constitution of a regulated society (*società regolata*) deeply depends on degree or level to which the subaltern could develop its autonomy or independence. It is quite important to elucidate this question, since it is deeply related with the necessary analysis of Gramsci’s fundamental and theoretical position of criticizing Stalinism and Comintern doctrine, which have played a very negative role in the development of the concept of revolutionary change and practice after the Russian revolution. It must be an important task not only for M. Green but for all of Gramscian scholars as well to cope with and investigate this problem.

In this regard, we would like to call your attention to the fact that a study of the

concept of political change – as exceedingly focused upon on the theory of “socialism in one country” – undertaken only on the level of State will not today be enough to construct a project of social change proper to the “philosophy of praxis”. For this it is needed for us to elaborate a project of social and cultural change from the point of view of deepening a concept of social formation (historical bloc). As is known, while in prison, Gramsci continued to pursue this very subject, to theoretically synthesize the two projects of political and cultural change. We know that Gramsci managed to develop and deepen his political and theoretical criticism of the Comintern concept of change from various viewpoints. He was consistent in his analysis to fundamentally and acutely criticize any tendency toward separating, from mechanistic and deterministic standpoint, the project of political change at the level of State and that of social and cultural change at the level of social formation or historical bloc.

For Gramsci the “philosophy of praxis”, with as a core his conception of hegemony, is nothing but the «expression» of the subaltern groups who want to educate themselves in the «art of government»<sup>21</sup>

To conclude, we want to emphasize that further research of the “Subaltern notebook” will not merely be important for us to seize the significance of Gramsci’s elaboration of concept of hegemony and its attainment, but also to place a theoretical basis for contemporary studies of the subaltern all over the world.

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\* Gramsci translated into the Italian language at least two times an extract from the *Preface to a contribution to a critique to Political Economy* (1859) of Karl Marx. During his stay in Moscow in 1923, he translated it from the Russian text of the extract Lenin had quoted from original German text for his essay “Karl Marx” (1914), and his translation was entitled “Marx and his doctrine” and published in the *L’Ordine Nuovo*. When he translated it into Italian, he omitted two passages as Lenin did in his article. But when he tried to translate the same extract into Italian during his incarceration, he recovered the passages he omitted at his precedent translation. We know that Gramsci proceeded in interpreting and analyzing the two passages in his original way so as to develop his interpretation and elaboration as very important propositions for the construction of his project of social change and his concept of historical bloc. Following are the passages of the Preface Lenin omitted and Gramsci latter restored:

“No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed, and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the

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womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation”.

\*\* With regard to the expression “historical bloc”, Derek Boothman provides an instructive explanation: “The expression deals prevalently with a bloc between structure and superstructure or with a social totality. Such a bloc is not merely static as in a ‘snapshot-like depiction, but is rendered dynamic through the introduction of the aspect of hegemony and thus the inclusion of the direction in which a society is moving. Seen in this light the historical bloc represents Gramsci’s attempt to transcend the limitations inherent in Marx’s description of a complex reality by a means of a two-dimensional base-superstructure metaphor”.(Derek Boothman, “A note on the translation,” in Antonio Gramsci, *Further Selections from Prison Notebooks*, London 1995)

<sup>1</sup> *Some aspects of the southern question*, Political Writings 1921-1926, translated and edited by Quentin Hoare, *ElecBook*, London 1999. p.598.

<sup>2</sup> Notebook 19 § 24, The problem of the political leadership in the formation and development of the nation and the modern state in Italy, EC. p.2010. SPN, pp.212-213.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, EC.p.2011, SPN.p.215

<sup>4</sup> Notebook 10, § 41xii, EC. p.1321., FSPN. Philosophy of Croce, p.550.

<sup>5</sup> Notebook 13 § 18, Some theoretical and practical aspects of the “economism”, EC. p.1595., SPN, p.378.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*.EC.p.1595, SPN.p.379.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*.EC.p1595, SPN. p.379.

<sup>8</sup> Notebook 13 § 7, EC. p.1566, State and Civil Society, SPN. p.502.

<sup>9</sup> *ibis*. EC. p.1566, *ibid*. SPN. p. 503.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*. EC. p.1567, *ibid*. SPN. p.503.

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Tatiana dated on September 7, 1931. Letters from Prison Vol.II. edited by Frank Rosengarten, Columbia University Press. New York p.67.

<sup>12</sup> Notebook 6 § 88, Gendarme-nightwatchman State, etc..EC. p.763-764, SPN. p.532.

<sup>13</sup> Notebook 15 § 10, Machiavelli. Sociology and political science, EC. p.1765, SPN. p.504.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*. Notebook 6 § 88, EC. p.764., SPN. p.532.

<sup>15</sup> Notebook 7 § 33, Position of question, EC.p.882, SPN. Problems of Marxism, p.713.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*. Notebook 6 § 88, EC. p.764., SPN. p.532..

<sup>17</sup> Notebook 8 § 130, EC. p. 1020., SPN. Statolatry. p.543.

<sup>18</sup> Notebook 7 § 16, EC. p.866, SPN. State and Civil Society, p.494.

<sup>19</sup> Marcus Green, *Gramsci cannot speak, Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci’s Concept of the Subaltern*, Rethinking Marxism, February 2002.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>21</sup> Notebook 10-II § 41xii, EC. p.1320., FSPN. Philosophy of Croce, p.549.

#### **Abbreviations:**

SPN *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quentin Hoare and Jeffrey Nowell Smith, London 1971. *ElecBook*, London 1999.

FSPN *Further Selections from Prison Notebooks*, translated and edited by Derek Boothman, London 1995. *ElecBook*, London 1999.

EC Edizione Critica dei Quaderni del carcere a cura di Valentino Gerratana, 4 volumi, Einaidi Torino 1975.